

# Aspire-i Limited

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 51025

Name of lead inspector: June Cramman HMI

Last day of inspection: 9 October 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Onward House  
Baptist Place  
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## Information about the provider

1. Aspire-i Limited (Aspire), formerly Careers Bradford, is the lead partner in an Entry to Employment consortium across Bradford and District formed in July 2003. It holds contracts mainly with West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) but also has some European Social Fund (ESF) projects funded through the Working Neighbourhoods Fund and the Learner Agreement Trial. It also has a small sub-contract for delivering nextstep provision as well as private contracts. This inspection focused on the Entry to Employment partnership, which currently has 19 providers.
2. Aspire delivers most of the inductions itself, guiding learners thereafter to the vocationally-relevant partner within the group. The partnership covers eight out of fifteen subject areas. It finds employer placements across a range of vocational areas for learners and some give training based in environmental and community projects.
3. The head of division (skills) manages the partnership, reporting to the chief executive officer. A training manager provides operational support to the head of division. A contract manager, a compliance adviser, a quality improvement co-ordinator and a data administrator support the lead partner. There are also two contract managers.
4. Bradford Council is the fourth largest metropolitan district in England, with a population of 467,665. According to the 2001 census, 22% of that population are from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment in the area is higher than the regional and national averages. A quarter of the population has poor literacy, numeracy and language skills. Aspire's government contracts represent 31% of its total business.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:
  - A & R Training (care, childcare and customer service)
  - Accent Community Partnerships (construction)
  - Age Concern Training (health and social care)
  - Barnardos (media, equality and diversity, citizenship, personal and social development)
  - Bradford Distributive Training Services Ltd (BDTS) (retail, business administration, customer service)
  - Bradford Foyer (media, customer service)
  - Bradford Youth Service (sport)
  - Christopher Paul Training (hairdressing and beauty therapy)
  - Forster Community College (business administration, childcare, art and design, fashion)
  - Groundwork Bradford (horticulture, construction)

- Keighley Training Group (business administration, customer service, information and communication technology, personal and social development)
- LEAP (personal and social development)
- NACRO (armed services preparation)
- PRISM City Farm (animal care)
- Rathbone Training (business administration, childcare, motor vehicle, catering)
- Shipley College (Skills for Life, catering, horticulture)
- SJK Auto Body Training (motor vehicle)
- Workable (business administration, customer service, information and communication technology)
- YMCA (construction)

| Type of provision  | Number of enrolled learners in 2007/08 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners:<br><br>Foundation learning, including<br>Entry to Employment | 957 full-time learners                 |

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

|                                    |         |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 3 |
| Capacity to improve                | Grade 3 |
|                                    | Grade   |
| Outcomes for learners              | 3       |
| Quality of provision               | 3       |
| Leadership and management          | 3       |
| Safeguarding                       | 2       |
| Equality and diversity             | 3       |
| Subject areas                      | Grade   |
| Preparation for life and work      | 3       |

## Overall effectiveness

6. The overall effectiveness of Aspire's provision is satisfactory. Aspire manages the provision satisfactorily. Staff and partners are clear about how the provision is to develop, particularly in relation to the foundation learning tier. However, Aspire insufficiently matches targets to the specific issues of each partner. Partners share practice well in network meetings. However, Aspire insufficiently uses monitoring systems or the observation of teaching and learning process to share good practice further. Progressions are satisfactory and improving year-on-year in line with national levels. Learners develop good personal and employability skills. They have a good awareness of both health and safety and equality and diversity. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Overall arrangements for the development of equality and diversity across the partnership are satisfactory. Arrangements to safeguard participants are good.

## Main findings

- Progression rates are satisfactory overall. They show a steadily improving trend. Achievement of at least one accredited outcome is satisfactory. However, there is too much variation between progression and achievement rates at different partners and within different levels of the programme.

- Learners develop their confidence and self-esteem well. Those who benefit from a work placement or taster enjoy their work and gain useful insights into the world of work. Those learners who face considerable barriers to progression improve their ability to engage with learning through supportive learning environments and good links to specialist support services.
- Learners have a good understanding of the health and safety aspects relating to their vocational areas. They feel safe and generally have a good understanding of equality and diversity. They improve their understanding of healthy eating through learning sessions that include both the preparation of food and how to budget for meals.
- The quality of training is satisfactory. Approximately half of learners improve their vocational skills in well-matched and supportive work placements. Teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. However, literacy and numeracy are not sufficiently taught within vocational or personal and social sessions by all providers across the learners' programme.
- The provision satisfactorily meets the needs and interests of learners. Aspire has widened the provider base and there is a good range of vocational options. However, learners do not always have access to all relevant choices and there are too few enrichment activities, work placements or community projects.
- Support for learners is good. There are good links to specialist support agencies that work well with the partners to help learners overcome barriers to learning. However, not all learners have sufficiently detailed guidance. They are not clear about their stage on the programme and progression opportunities.
- Aspire has planned and developed the introduction of the foundation learning tier very effectively. Partners have good information on the strategic development and work well to achieve a common aim. The provider is building a good foundation for meeting national and regional priorities.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. The provider takes strong, appropriate action to ensure that all learners are safe. Aspire meets all government legislation and works well with partners to support training and development in this area. They are leading new initiatives to strengthen procedures and practices further.
- The provider uses network meetings well to share good practice among partners. Partners benefit from joint training, productive discussion and one-to-one support for newer members.
- Over the last year the provider has not sufficiently consulted with its partners when making decisions. Communication has suffered during the restructure and there has been a significant negative impact on many partners.
- Target setting is weak. Generic targets that are too high for some partners and too low for others apply to all partners. The overall target, at only one percentage point above the progression level already achieved, is insufficiently challenging.

## What does Aspire-i Limited need to do to improve further?

- Further develop its consultation processes with partners to re-establish trust, clarify contractual issues and re-visit management procedures.
- Ensure progression and achievement rates across all providers and within all levels of the Entry to Employment programme improve. It should re-visit the generic targets that are currently in place and set specific and realistic targets with action plans that genuinely help providers to improve.
- Further improve the observation of teaching and learning process so that it becomes a more effective tool for improvement. Aspire should use the expertise within the partnership group to enhance the system further and build in moderation processes.
- Further improve the integration of literacy and numeracy across all aspects of the learners' programmes by accelerating the work it is doing on functional skills and by the sharing of practice with partners across the provision. It should ensure that reviews of learners' progress include formal sharing of information on learner progress across the full programme.
- Increase opportunities for work tasters, work placements and opportunities for learners to take part in enrichment activities and community projects by encouraging and leading joint working between and across partners.
- Ensure that the good practice across the partnership, particularly the work in safeguarding and the good examples of developing equality and diversity practice, are shared across all partners. It should be more consistent in monitoring practices and in the dissemination of information.

## Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

### What learners like:

- The clear and detailed explanations by tutors, together with the helpful feedback on completed work.
- The helpful staff, who give support and are understanding about personal issues.
- Being able to build self-confidence and gaining good skills for work as well as improving English and mathematics skills.
- The flexibility of the programme – much better than school.
- Staff responding to needs quickly and coming up with solutions to problems fast.

What learners would like to see improved:

- More arts and sports activities.
- More involvement in projects in the community.
- More and clearer information about what happens at the end of the programme, and about how to find work.
- More staff at the induction; the large group was quite intimidating.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- Most learners are work-ready.
- The additional help learners provide in their workplaces.
- Many learners being so well prepared for the work situation that they can work on their own initiative and can be trusted.

What employers would like to see improved:

- More information on the learners' programmes.
- More detail on learners' abilities – especially those with literacy, numeracy and additional learning needs.
- More regular reviews.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

7. Aspire has made steady improvements since the last inspection. Progressions and achievements for learners remain satisfactory, with a steady rising trend that is slightly above national levels. Learners develop good skills and have a high awareness of both health and safety issues and matters relating to equality and diversity. However, sudden and significant changes in the management team have had some adverse impact on the development of the provision.
8. Aspire uses self-assessment satisfactorily to identify most of the strengths and some of the weaknesses of the provision and to bring about improvement. Leaders and managers set a strong lead in the development of the foundation learning tier and enjoy the support of a very loyal and enthusiastic team. Arrangements for safeguarding are good. Aspire has a sustained record of setting and meeting targets. However, these are not always suitably ambitious or matched to the individual needs of partner companies. The governing body appraises Aspire's performance regularly and makes appropriate contributions to improvements in the provision. It has recently been re-organised and the new members better reflect the diverse population in Bradford. Aspire has had some problems with staffing while managing the change in the management team. Staff do not always sufficiently manage partners or give consistent advice or direction. The observation process does not sufficiently make improvements in provision. However, partners share practice well in network groups and have access to a broadening range of training to help them to improve. Aspire staff give good support to newer partners through the use of advanced practitioners and one-to-one advice.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. Overall, outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Progression rates are satisfactory overall. They show a steadily improving trend from 49% in 2006/07 to 56% in 2007/08, remaining slightly above national averages. Achievement of at least one accredited outcome is satisfactory. However, there is too much variation between progression and achievement rates at different partners and within different levels of the programme. For example, in the current 2008/09 contract year, progression rates for some providers are as low as 22% with others at 100%. Similarly, some providers' achievement of accreditation goals are at 22% and others are at 93%.
10. Learners develop their confidence and self-esteem well. They use their initiative in groups, take part in lively discussions and support other learners in the class well. They enjoy the group work and make good progress. Standards of work are usually good. Those who benefit from a work placement or taster enjoy their work and gain useful insights into the world of work. Those learners who



face considerable barriers to progression improve their ability to engage with learning through supportive learning environments and good links to specialist support services.

11. Learners have a good understanding of the health and safety aspects relating to their vocational areas. They confidently discuss issues to do with health and safety. They demonstrate a good understanding of wide-ranging issues related to health, such as sexual health and mental health matters, including depression and stress. They improve their understanding of healthy eating through learning sessions which include the preparation of food and the requirements of budgeting.
12. They feel safe and generally have a good understanding of equality and diversity. All groups are mixed race and gender. Learners relate well to each other and appreciate discussion of religious and cultural differences, with most showing high sensitivity to the needs of those around them, although a minority still display inappropriate behaviour and language.

### The quality of provision

### Grade 3

13. Overall, the quality of the provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Group work effectively supports learning but there is insufficient planning to meet individual learning needs. Aspire recognises this in its self-assessment report. Resources and facilities for teaching are variable across the partnership but are at least satisfactory and in some training centres good. Information and communication technology (ICT) is widely available but not always used effectively to support learning. Aspire satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity through the curriculum. Teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory; however, it is not sufficiently integrated into wider sessions such as employability sessions, vocational teaching or personal and social development sessions by all partners. A minority of partners are developing some good work with functional skills; however, the good practice arising from this is not yet being fully shared with other partners.
14. Flexible arrangements for assessment effectively meet learners' and employers' needs. Aspire has recently introduced a satisfactory centralised induction for learners across all the partners to ensure all learners have the same introduction to the programme and complete the necessary paperwork before they start with their chosen provider.
15. The Entry to Employment programme meets the needs and interests of learners satisfactorily. Learners have a wide range of placement opportunities and around half of all learners access these placements. They provide good opportunities for learners to develop employability skills in a wide range of jobs. Aspire constantly reviews the provider base and there is a good range of vocational options. However, some learners are not able to move between partners so that they can have access to all of their choices of vocational options. There are also insufficient enrichment opportunities or access to community projects.

16. Individual care and support for learners are good. There are good links to specialist support agencies that are particularly effective for learners with multiple barriers. These agencies work well with providers to give practical and emotional support to learners. However, access to impartial guidance is inconsistent. Not all learners are clear about their stage on the programme and progression opportunities.

## Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Aspire's leaders plan the future of their provision very carefully to promote and implement national and regional initiatives and to meet the needs of learners and employers. Aspire anticipated the introduction of the foundation learning tier well and is working very effectively with its partners to implement the plan. Selected partners are successfully piloting programmes so that other partners can learn from them. The provider has successfully commissioned new providers to meet the needs of the local area and to ensure that young people have sufficient opportunities to engage in foundation learning. It has discontinued its contract with some providers who have chosen not to deliver the foundation tier, while maintaining contact with them as a source of placement for young people who need additional preparation.
18. The company's board sets the mission and strategic direction of the provider satisfactorily. The provider informs the board of its performance and the board takes appropriate action to monitor performance against targets and to discuss this with the provider.
19. Aspire's approach to safeguarding is good. Its procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. Criminal Records Bureau checks are complete for all staff, including those of partners. The provider does not rely solely on this information but conducts thorough and effective research into any discrepancies found during its recruitment processes. It takes strong, immediate action when it identifies potential risks. Aspire works well with other agencies to promote safeguarding highly effectively. Its safeguarding procedures are well established, well understood and well used. The provider responds quickly and effectively to learners' welfare concerns. It takes good action to protect its learners by providing effective reporting routes. It supports and trains the staff who deal with safeguarding issues very well.
20. Aspire's approach to equality and diversity is satisfactory overall. Its board has been restructured and now has a better mix of ages, gender and ethnicity. It tackles discrimination satisfactorily. It works effectively to narrow the achievement gap. The profile of learners is representative of the wider community. The provider has analysed its learner intake by postcode and has satisfactorily planned the expansion of its provision to ensure that the most vulnerable and deprived learners can access training. It has worked hard in conjunction with its partners to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in employment, education or training and the figure has dropped from 15%

to 9% in the last year. Learners from minority ethnic groups now achieve slightly better than their White British peers. However, the provider has not sufficiently analysed the reasons for this. The provider responds positively to problems and takes effective action to ensure that learners are safe and healthy. It investigates complaints promptly. Aspire promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily, providing appropriate challenge to inappropriate behaviour, language and attitudes by some learners and employers in most cases, though not in all. Staff and partners benefit from relevant, informative training from external providers. The provider monitors its partners' policies and procedures satisfactorily. Learners have a good understanding of issues such as bullying and harassment and a satisfactory appreciation of the diversity of religion and culture. Some partners design their learning programmes very effectively to reflect best practice in equality and diversity but some have not established this practice sufficiently. In a minority of cases, tutors do not sufficiently promote equality and diversity in learning materials or in teaching sessions.

21. The provider has a very effective meetings structure that enables partners to network freely and to share good practice. Partners support each other very well through shadowing members of staff, observing processes and adapting paperwork to help them to improve their provision. Managers and practitioners attend regular meetings and benefit from joint staff training. The provider consults with learners through a new focus group and uses their feedback appropriately to improve its provision. It has effective methods for gathering feedback from partners and learners and is responsive to their comments.
22. Aspire monitors the performance of its partners satisfactorily. It provides good support to partners when it identifies weaknesses in their provision. It analyses data on performance and progress satisfactorily to improve performance. Its self-assessment report is accurate on most points and the provider's update of this accurately identifies some of its more recent problems. Its action plans clearly outline developments to benefit learners. The provider conducts observations of teaching and learning but these do not sufficiently improve teaching and learning throughout the provision.
23. Aspire does not set sufficiently individualised targets for its partners. It sets a generic target for achievement that is too low for high-achieving partners and too high for those with more extreme challenges. It monitors its partners' achievement through quarterly reviews and sets action plans based on this information. However, the plans are based on inappropriate targets. Aspire's generic target is insufficiently challenging at just one percentage point above its current performance level, which is broadly in line with the national average.
24. The new management team has encountered many problems over the last year, some inherited from previous management and some caused by external factors and national trends. During this period, the provider has not managed some aspects of its partners' work sufficiently. It has not maintained its previously good communication with its partners throughout this period well enough. It did not fully consult its partners about major decisions that later had

a deleterious effect on their financial viability. It has, however, rectified this promptly. The company's major structural changes and funding difficulties have interrupted some of its regular processes. It has not always monitored contracts sufficiently during this period and has not explained changes and responsibilities well enough to its partners.

## Information about the inspection

25. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two Additional Inspectors, assisted by the provider's Head of Skills, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at the questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from across the range of Entry to Employment partners.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## Aspire-i Limited

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

| Grades using the 4 point scale<br>1: Outstanding; 2: Good;<br>3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate                                     | Overall | 14-16 | 16-18<br>Learner<br>responsive | 19+<br>Learner<br>responsive | Employer<br>responsive |
|--|---------|-------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners  | 211     |       | 211                            |                              |                        |
| Full-time learners   | 0       |       | 0                              |                              |                        |
| Part-time learners   |         |       |                                |                              |                        |
| Overall effectiveness  | 3       |       | 3                              |                              |                        |
| Capacity to improve  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| Outcomes for learners  | 3       |       | 3                              |                              |                        |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?   | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals?  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How well do learners progress?   | 2       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?                              | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How safe do learners feel?   | 2       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| Quality of provision   | 3       |       | 3                              |                              |                        |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?   | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?                        | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?                                    | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| Leadership and management  | 3       |       | 3                              |                              |                        |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?                     | 2       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>                         | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?  | 2       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?  | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?                             | 3       |       |                                |                              |                        |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?                         | 4       |       |                                |                              |                        |

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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