

# Lifeskills Solutions

## Inspection Report

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Unique reference number: 53025

Name of lead inspector: Jai Sharda HMI

Last day of inspection: 25 September 2009

Type of provider: Independent Learning Provider

Address: Lifeskills Solutions  
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## Information about the provider

1. Lifeskills Solutions Ltd (LS) is a private limited company based in Islington, London. The managing director and a non-executive director own the company. LS employ around 80 staff across its centres in Basildon, Bethnal Green, Leeds, Lowestoft, and Peckham.
2. It has a direct contract with Suffolk Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and with London East LSC for Train to Gain and apprenticeship training. Approximately 46% of learners are male and 30% of all learners are from a minority ethnic group. All of LS' business is government funded. Provision subcontracted from the Future Pathways Partnership was not inspected.
3. The company has grown considerably in size since the previous inspection. It now offers more directly delivered provision and it employs many more staff. Programmes are offered in health and public services, construction, retail and commercial enterprise, education and training, preparation for life and work, and business, administration and law.
4. LS provides training on behalf of the following providers:
  - NOVA Partnership (Train to Gain, apprenticeships and E2E)
  - Central Training Group (E2E)
  - Future Pathways Partnership (E2E).

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2007/08
Young learner provision: 14-16	151 learners
Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	183 full-time learners 373 learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	97 learners
Apprenticeships	31 apprentices

## Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 1
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	1
Subject areas	Grade
Employability training	2
Business, administration and law	2

## Overall effectiveness

5. The overall effectiveness of LS' provision is good. Directors and senior managers provide outstanding leadership and have managed the expansion of the provision effectively. LS has implemented significant improvements since the previous inspection. Success rates for apprentices and for Train to Gain learners have improved. Most learners complete their programme well within the planned period of study. Teaching and learning are good, though in weaker sessions, teachers give insufficient attention to individual needs. The extent to which the company meets learners' needs and interests is outstanding. Guidance and support arrangements are good. Arrangements to safeguard learners are good. Learners say they feel safe and protected from abuse. LS' promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The company has taken very effective measures to narrow the achievement gap between different groups of learners. LS' work with disaffected young learners in deprived parts of east and south London contribute to the promotion of social inclusion and to combating gang culture.

## Main findings

- Success rates on apprenticeships have improved over the last three years and are now good at 79% in 2008/09. The proportion of Train to Gain learners who complete within the planned period of study is outstanding at 92% in 2008/09.
- Learners develop vocational skills that help them to perform their work role more effectively. Train to Gain learners develop a better understanding of the theory behind the work they do and many learn new skills or extend existing ones. E2E learners develop a range of skills that enable them to compete effectively in the employment market.
- Learners receive good information and advice about drugs and alcohol misuse and sexual health awareness. Learners feel safe. They understand health and safety procedures at work.
- Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons are fun and interesting. However, in a small number of cases, teachers do not give sufficient attention to planning for the needs of individual learners.
- Resources are good. Most staff have an appropriate teaching qualification, with a few working towards one. All are experienced in the vocational area that they teach. However, few staff have a specialist qualification for the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Information and learning technology resources are satisfactory, although not all staff make sufficient use of them in learning sessions.
- The extent to which programmes and courses meet learners' needs and interests is outstanding. The company works with a very wide range of employers to meet learners' needs. Directors are exceptionally proactive in identifying and meeting local training needs such as in construction and in retail and distribution.
- Partnership working is outstanding. LS has been particularly active in sharing its expertise with other members of the NOVA partnership and with employers to

promote safeguarding for young learners and vulnerable adults. The company makes good use of its relationships with employers to develop work placements that meet the individual needs of E2E learners effectively.

- LS provide particularly effective personalised support for learners to overcome barriers to learning. Pastoral support is very good, especially for those learners with a wide range of challenging circumstances. LS staff are particularly knowledgeable about outside agencies and sources of support for learners who need specific help, for example with housing, drug or alcohol misuse.
- The planning of learning, the assessment of some learners and the targets set for them do not take sufficient account of the outcomes of initial assessments or of learners' ability to make rapid progress through their programmes.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. All staff receive a Criminal Records Bureau check. A central register is maintained and regularly updated. Two senior staff are identified as having responsibilities for safeguarding. Staff have received comprehensive safeguarding training. The company works well with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board.
- Senior managers provide outstanding strategic leadership. They have taken decisive and successful actions to improve all aspects of the provision. Staff receive clear direction from senior managers and they understand their roles and responsibilities. Managers are open and consultative. Managers at all levels work hard to raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The staff and learner profile reflects the communities that LS serves. Many staff are former learners and they present good role models. Managers monitor carefully and tackle any disparities in success rates between different groups.
- Self-assessment is a highly effective process. All staff are consulted and the views of learners and stakeholders effectively incorporated. Self-assessment is an established, thorough and accurate process. The company understands its provision well.

### What does Lifeskills Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Make better and more consistent use of information and learning technology to make theory lessons more lively and inspiring.
- Use outcomes of initial assessment and reviews of learners' previous skills and experience more effectively to plan and review individual learning and set challenging targets.
- Improve the skill level of staff to support the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills.

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

### What learners like:

- That LS staff listen to their views
- The safe learning environment
- The ability to gain recognised qualifications while working
- The helpful and supportive tutors
- That programmes boost their confidence
- Researching topics for key skills that they would normally not know anything about
- The frequent assessor contact
- Increasing their level of skill
- The involvement of their managers.

### What learners would like to see improved:

- The opportunities to use the internet
- The connectivity speeds of the computer systems
- More and newer construction tools
- To make sure all the theory lessons are interesting
- The level of paperwork involved – there is too much.

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

### What employers like:

- That LS responds to their needs
- That the programmes improve the attitude of the workforce
- Improved team working
- The knowledgeable assessors
- The consideration given to the operating needs of the business
- The good level of communication with LS.

### What employers would like to see improved:

- None identified.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

6. LS demonstrate an outstanding capacity to improve. The company has grown considerably in size since the previous inspection but it continues to maintain and improve its already high standards. Most of the strengths found in the previous inspection have been maintained and new ones identified. Weaknesses have been resolved successfully. Success rates are good and rising. The proportion of learners who complete within the planned period of study is particularly good, especially for Train to Gain learners. No significant differences in performance exist between the company's centres. Inspectors judged LS' leadership and management and its arrangements for equality and diversity to be outstanding.
7. LS have a well-established and rigorous self-assessment process. All staff contribute to it. Managers take into account the views of learners and other stakeholders when reaching judgements. Good use is made of data to support judgements about success rates. All staff meet monthly to review the company's quality improvement plan and to record improvements made. The plan clearly identifies timescales and responsibilities. Challenging improvement targets are set. Directors monitor carefully the achievement of the company's targets.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Overall success rates on apprenticeship programmes have improved over the last three years and were good in 2008/09 at 79%. The proportion of apprentices who completed their framework within the planned period of study was also high and well above national rates. The proportion of Train to Gain learners who completed within the planned period of study is outstanding at 92% in 2008/09. In 2007/08, the proportion of E2E learners who progressed into further education, training or employment was good at 73%. This is considerably higher than the national rate.
9. Learners make good progress in developing personal and social skills. E2E learners develop confidence in dealing with everyday tasks such as travelling independently and working with others. Apprentices gain increased ability to deal with customers and colleagues in their workplace. Learners develop vocational skills that help them to perform their work role more effectively. Train to Gain learners develop a better understanding of the theory behind the work they do and many learn new skills or extend existing ones. E2E learners develop a range of skills that enable them to compete effectively in the employment market.
10. Learners clearly understand their rights and responsibilities at work. They demonstrate safe working practices and they understand the health and safety procedures at work and on their training programmes. Learners on E2E programmes feel safe and protected from harassment and bullying. LS has a very well established culture of tackling bullying and harassment. Learners on E2E and apprenticeships demonstrate an improved awareness of health-related

issues. Learners receive helpful and sensitively delivered sessions on drug and alcohol misuse and sexual health.

## The quality of provision

## Grade 2

11. The quality of provision is good, as is teaching and learning. The best sessions are well-managed, planned and prepared. Learners participate enthusiastically in sessions. Tutors use a wide range of teaching methods that sustain learners' interest and participation. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessors visit apprentices and Train to Gain learners frequently, taking account of learners' shift patterns where necessary, to meet their needs and those of their employer. They also visit E2E learners while they are on work placement. Assessors make good use of each visit to check learners' progress, develop their skills and to set targets. Assessors do not always record these activities in enough detail to enable managers to quality assure this process. The planning of learning and assessment for some learners and the targets set do not take sufficient account of the outcomes of initial assessment or of learners' ability to make rapid progress through their programmes. Assessors make insufficient use of technology to gather or assess portfolio evidence for apprentices.
12. Resources are good. Most staff have an appropriate teaching qualification, with the remainder working towards one. All staff are experienced in their vocational area. Information technology equipment is up-to-date and often used to add variety to learning sessions. Some learners do not have ready access to printed materials to support their development or awareness of wider employment rights and responsibilities. Some construction learners have had to share tools when broken equipment has not been replaced.
13. The extent to which provision meets the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. LS works with a diverse range of employers in its Train to Gain programme, and regularly adds new occupational sectors to meet demand. The company has been particularly proactive in identifying the need for new occupational routes on the E2E programme. It has responded quickly to introduce new opportunities and recruit learners. The wider range of occupational options now offered enables the company to cater for young people seeking a career in the construction industry or in retail and distribution.
14. Partnership working is outstanding. LS is a leading member of the 15-strong NOVA consortium that manages all the work-based learning in south Essex. LS have been particularly active in promoting safeguarding for young learners and vulnerable adults and in sharing its expertise with other consortium members and employers. The company uses its good relationships with a wide range of employers to develop work placements that are well tailored to the needs of E2E learners. Some of these placements have led to permanent employment.
15. Care, guidance and support are good. Information, advice and guidance arrangements are also good. The company has developed close working links with several Connexions services. Pastoral support is very good, especially for those learners with a wide range of challenging circumstances. LS staff are



particularly knowledgeable about outside agencies and sources of support for learners who need specific help, for example with housing, drug or alcohol misuse or other health matters. Many learners come from some of the most disadvantaged areas in inner London, and LS staff understand very well the barriers that many of these learners face. Vocational support for work-based learners is good. Assessors visit them at work every two weeks to carry out assessment, provide off-the-job coaching or training, and set targets for the next two weeks. Employers strongly support the overall aims of LS' work-based learning programme.

## Leadership and management

Grade 1

16. Senior managers provide outstanding strategic leadership. The company's strategic plan is a consultative document that demonstrates a sound understanding of the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the business. Senior managers have taken decisive and successful actions to improve all aspects of the provision. A recent restructuring process was managed very effectively, with minimal disruption to learning. Staff receive clear direction from senior managers and they understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. Managers are open and consultative. Curriculum planning is carefully aligned to regional LSC priorities and responds effectively to identify employer and community needs. Managers at all levels work hard to raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners. They work well with employers to identify opportunities for establishing new programmes to meet local needs. They know their provision well and have a clear understanding of what they have to do to make improvements.
17. The company provides good value for money. Resources are well-managed. All teachers and assessors have an appropriate teaching or assessor qualification or are working towards one. The company provides a range of opportunities for staff to develop their skills, which they value. All teaching staff have registered with the Institute for Learning (IfL). They carefully maintain a record of their continuing professional development to meet the requirements of the IfL.
18. Self-assessment is a highly effective process. All staff are consulted and the views of learners and stakeholders effectively incorporated. Self-assessment is an established, thorough and accurate process. Managers make good use of data to reach accurate judgements about the company's performance. LS makes good use of subcontractors' own self-assessment reports to support the company-wide self-assessment. Inspectors gave the same grades as those in the self-assessment for most aspects of provision.
19. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. In addition to meeting government requirements, LS has a clear strategy for safeguarding its most vulnerable learners, the progress and implementation of which is checked frequently by managers. All staff, including those providing administrative and support services, have completed a Criminal Records Bureau check. Two senior staff are identified as the company's safeguarding officers. The company's policy on safeguarding ensures that learners are safe at work. All training advisers and

assessors have a thorough understanding of their role in implementing the policy and make good use of workplace visits to ensure learners' safety. Accidents, incidents and 'near misses' are recorded carefully and considered at management meetings. Actions to minimise risk and to ensure learners' safety are effective. Staff have received training in Local Safeguarding Children Board requirements in safeguarding learners and they use this training effectively in their work with vulnerable learners. Learners receive a thorough introduction to the company's stance on bullying and harassment. They know who to approach if they feel unsafe or if they are bullied. The company has made very good progress in preparing to implement fully the Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting and Barring requirements in 2010.

20. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Directors and senior managers demonstrate a personal commitment to challenging discrimination and disadvantage. Staff understand the needs and aspirations of their learners and work tirelessly to help them to achieve. Many staff are former learners and they present good role models. The company's staff and learner profile reflects the communities that it serves. Discriminatory behaviour is routinely challenged. Public posters and displays encourage learners to consider the impact of their actions and behaviour on others. Young learners on E2E programmes in east and south London who have become involved in gang culture receive support and encouragement to help them integrate with their community through the development of vocational and social skills. LS actively contributes to promoting community cohesion through its work with these disadvantaged learners in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. LS monitors success rates between different groups of learners and it works effectively to reduce the achievement gap between these groups. The company recently implemented a successful initiative to recruit more male learners into business administration programmes.
21. Learners' success is positively celebrated. Staff are regularly encouraged to identify a 'Learner of the Month' so that individual successes and achievements can be publicly celebrated. Promotion of equal opportunities through the company's marketing and publicity materials is good. Equalities issues are well-covered during induction for staff and learners. Staff record equal opportunities issues on individual learning plans, reviews, observations of teaching and learning paperwork and on lesson plans and schemes of work.

## Subject areas

### Employability training

Grade 2

#### Context

22. LS deliver an E2E programme for 373 learners at centres in Basildon, Bethnal Green, Leeds, Lowestoft and Peckham. A generic E2E programme is offered at Lowestoft and Leeds. Vocational options in hairdressing, retail, administration, nail technology, construction and childcare are offered at the other sites. All learners have the opportunity to study for literacy and numeracy qualifications. Some work towards a vocational option in addition to health and safety and employability qualifications. The director of operations manages the E2E programme, supported by the centre managers.

#### Key findings

- The outcomes for learners are good. In 2007/08, 73% of learners progressed to employment or further training. Although progression rates have declined slightly in the current year, they remain well above national rates. Success is celebrated in the centres by displaying learners' work and profiling their progress and achievements.
- Learners feel safe and enjoy attending their centres. They feel protected from bullying and harassment. They learn about their rights and responsibilities. Learners develop a good understanding of stereotyping and discrimination. They increase their knowledge of healthy eating and safe health practices. They gain fitness through sports activities. Most improve their behaviour and treat others with respect.
- Learners develop good personal, social and employability skills. They increase their confidence in working as part of a team and relating to others from widely differing backgrounds. They enjoy the challenge of learning new skills. Many start to take responsibility for their own learning. They develop new interests and gain great benefits from work experience placements.
- Learners participate in a wide range of activities to support their local communities. These include construction projects for the elderly, work with a children's charity and work with local ecological projects and community groups to renovate local schools.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers work effectively with learners to provide good individual, practical training in vocational subjects. They have good occupational expertise and are proficient in breaking down skills into manageable steps for learners to gain confidence and achieve early success. However, some theory sessions are dull and uninspiring and pay insufficient attention to learners' individual needs.
- Learners receive regular and thorough reviews of progress. The best reviews are well prepared beforehand using the feedback from other tutors so that a full discussion can take place with the learner. Learners' achievements of short-

term targets are carefully monitored. Good opportunities are provided for learners to evaluate their own progress and to discuss concerns.

- Teachers and review officers place insufficient emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Learners are assessed at the start of their programmes. However, this information does not contribute effectively to short-term targets for literacy and numeracy. Direct teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is limited. Teaching staff lack specialist training and qualifications in developing these skills and they over-rely on online programmes.
- The E2E programme responds well to national priorities, local employment opportunities and to the needs of learners. Construction programmes have been developed in two centres to respond to local gaps in training provision. Development of a retail vocational programme is planned for a further centre in response to local needs.
- Learners receive very good support to overcome a range of barriers to learning. They have good opportunities for work experience in community organisations. They receive financial support for travel and appropriate referrals to other agencies for counselling for drug and alcohol misuse. Enrichment activities such as football, with teams consisting of learners from rival gangs and racial groups, promote community cohesion.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers have taken decisive and successful actions to improve all aspects of the provision. They provide clear direction for staff. All staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Managers are open and consultative. Curriculum planning responds effectively to identify community needs.

What does Lifeskills Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Set clearer and measurable literacy and numeracy targets at induction and during progress reviews to help learners know what they are expected to achieve between progress reviews.
- Broaden the range of resources available to learners to enhance the quality and variety of the learners' experience.
- Continue to expand the range of occupational options for learners to enhance their employment opportunities and meet the needs and interests of a wider range of learners and local employers.
- Encourage more staff to gain a specialist qualification and expertise in literacy and numeracy teaching so that they can better meet the individual needs of learners.

## Business, administration and law

## Grade 2

### Context

23. LS contracts with the NOVA partnership in Essex for the provision of Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes for 284 learners. The company also has a contract in its own right with London East LSC for apprenticeship training for 67 learners. About half of all learners are apprentices and the remainder are on Train to Gain programmes. All learners are employed in companies based in Essex. All training and assessment is carried out in the workplace.

### Key findings

- Success rates are outstanding in 2008/09. The overall success rate for business administration apprentices and advanced apprentices was 100%. For customer service apprentices the overall success rate was 73% and 100% for advanced apprentices. The overall success rate for Train to Gain learners in business administration was 96% and for customer service, 97%. Most learners complete their training programmes well within the planned period of study.
- Most of the current learners are making very good progress. Learners enjoy their learning programmes and are particularly well motivated to succeed.
- Learners benefit from increases in their self-confidence and self-esteem. They gain a much better understanding of working practices and routines. Apprenticeship learners develop a good range of occupational skills and knowledge.
- LS promote health and safety well. Train to Gain learners have a very good understanding of health and safety and demonstrate a sound knowledge of safe working practices.
- Assessors provide good support to Train to Gain learners. They work very effectively with the learners to provide individual support in the workplace. Learners speak highly of the support that they receive which motivates them to succeed. Assessors spend time in the employers' premises to gain an understanding of the work routines of the company; many participate in the employers' in-house training.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory. Learners are clear about what the assessment visit will cover. However, a few assessment plans lack detail and do not identify sufficiently clearly what the learner needs to do between visits. Assessors do not always sufficiently distinguish the assessment of learners' existing skills from the development or consolidation of new skills. Assessors do not make sufficient use of information and learning technology in learning and assessment activities.
- Assessors do not sufficiently plan learning for apprentices so that individual needs are met. They do not take sufficient account of learners' initial assessment results and previous work experience to set individualised targets.

- The range of programmes is wide and particularly responsive to employers and learners' needs. Learners have good opportunities to progress between levels and NVOs. Employers see improvements in their business performance.
- LS works particularly well with a wide range of employers. Many employers regard LS as their preferred training provider. Optional units are selected carefully to meet employer needs and to assist learners in the development of their job role. Learners make good use of key skills projects to develop employment-based assignments.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance. They receive timely support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. LS have improved its initial assessment process for apprentices since the previous inspection. However, staff do not record the level and type of support apprentices require to improve their literacy and numeracy in sufficient detail.
- The internal verifiers use the management information system well to monitor assessor targets, which they review in individual monthly meetings. Learners who are at risk of not achieving within the planned timescales receive extra support.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers work hard to raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners. Success rates have improved significantly over the last three years and are now outstanding. Managers work well with local communities to establish new programmes to meet local needs. They know their provision well and have a clear understanding of what they have to do to make improvements.

What does Lifeskills Solutions need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of individual learning plans and reviews to provide learners with more detailed information on their learning programme, and on what they need to do to achieve their learning targets.
- Set challenging but achievable targets for apprenticeship learners on completion of all aspects of their programme taking individual learner needs and abilities into account.

## Information about the inspection

24. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's director of operations 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, Framework for Excellence indicators, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visit and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gather the views of learners. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had completed on behalf of the provider. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offers.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## Lifeskills solutions Ltd

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 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	789	348	24	358
Part-time learners	59	0	0	0
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	1			
A. Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2			
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2			
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2			
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2			
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2			
A4. Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2			
A5. How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2			
B. Quality of provision	2	2	2	2
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1			
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1			
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2			
C. Leadership and management	1	2	2	1
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1			
C2. How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	n/a			
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2			
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	1			
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2			
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1			
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2			

\*where applicable to the type of provision



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