

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR LIFESKILLS SOLUTIONS LTD

Page	Description
3	Key Information
3	Conclusion
5	Introduction to Lifeskills Solutions Ltd
5	Executive summary
6	Strengths of Lifeskills Solutions Ltd
7	Position against the liP Framework
15	Appendix 1 Continuous Improvement Plan
16	Appendix 2 Evidence matrix

Key Information

Assessment Type	Initial Assessment / Assessment
Investors in People Specialist Name	Allan Churchman
Visit Date	21 st – 25 th July 2014
Assessment Enquiry Number	ENQ – 93871-PMQ87Y

Conclusion

Lifeskills Solutions has registered for a full Gold review having achieved Gold in **June 2010** and having had a Strategic Review in June 2013. The themes selected give them a total of 175 Evidence Requirements to be assessed against.

Lifeskills Solutions has high expectations with many innovative, creative and outstanding features. People think this is “*a great place to work*”. With 6 locations the team work as one to achieve excellent results for their learners.

Having conducted the assessment in accordance with Investors in People and Investors in People Central England’s guidelines, I am pleased to confirm Lifeskills Solutions meets the requirements of the Investor in People Gold Standard.

Keith and I would like to extend our thanks to all those who took part in the assessment for their open and honest feedback about their experience within Lifeskills Solutions. Special thanks to Divya and Chevon and all staff involved in the assessment for their hospitality.

Lifeskills Solutions maintain their positive status as a learning provider with:

- Ofsted grade 2 accreditation
- Matrix accreditation
- Close relationships with Borough Councils, Job Centres and Youth Organisations
- Providing significant charity support
- Investors in People Gold
- Membership of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers

The Mandatory 18-month Interaction

All organisations meeting the requirements of the Investors in People standard are now required to undertake an Interaction with their Specialist within 18-months of the formal accreditation date, therefore establishing an interim interaction, which will add value to the continued use of the framework as an organisational improvement tool:

The scale of the activity can range from:

- Participation in a network or learning forum
- Bespoke intervention, training or discussion
- A discussion with senior managers(s) on progress against current people management strategy
- A review of the recommendations/action plan identified following the last assessment
- Maintaining Gold Standard.

Allan Churchman, your specialist has established your requirements are individual and therefore will make contact with you to discuss your needs nearer the time this is required to take place. You are also welcome to create intervals of interaction to suit your business needs and therefore establish continued contact with Allan to help and support your business needs related to people management practice.

Milestone Dates

Review of Continuous Improvement Plan	July 2017
Date of Next Full Assessment	January 2016

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Introduction to the Lifeskills Solutions Ltd (Lifeskills) assessment

Prior to this assessment Lifeskills had opted for a strategic review after 3 years of their Gold level accreditation rather than a full assessment. They have used the strategic assessment as a tool to drive/support continuous improvement. In conjunction with the review Lifeskills has used internal staff surveys, internal reviews and external reviews to identify potential areas for improvement. Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) exercises have been commonplace to challenge performance and to drive innovation and change.

This assessment was planned to include people from all locations within Lifeskills. This entailed the planned visits by 2 assessors to conduct face to face interviews alongside Google Hangout interviews where assessors were able to speak face to face with representatives throughout Lifeskills.

Both Keith and I worked closely to select people for interview and to help the client select appropriate themes for the assessment. We planned to share our views post assessment to give a fair judgement on their level of achievement.

Assessment and Client Objectives

The purpose of the assessment is:

- To establish whether Lifeskills Solutions Ltd continues to meet the core evidence requirements of the Standard, with a report format agreed by strengths and potential areas for development
- To identify good practice and make recommendations for future development
- To assess against an additional 136 number of Evidence Requirement to see if they meet and retain the Gold level of accreditation.

Assessment Methodology

A sample size of 30 people was chosen representing 27% of the organisation which has a total of 89 people. The majority of interviews conducted on a one to one basis. Representatives contributed to the assessment through both formal and informal conversations.

The following methods were used to gather evidence:

One-to-one interviews
 Site visits
 Small group interviews
 Goggle Hangout interviews
 Informal discussions whilst on site
 Site tours

Impromptu meetings

Observation of paper evidence including:

Strategic Plan
 Staff Survey document and results
 Ofsted report
 Job descriptions

Staff learning records
 Personal Development Plans
 Observation and performance documents
 Staff appraisal documentation
 Interview process flowchart
 Managers and Directors guides
 Employee Handbook

Strengths of Lifeskills Solutions Ltd

- ✓ High performing culture embedded
- ✓ Clear and regular communication enabling the sharing of good practice
- ✓ Positive examples of leadership and management
- ✓ Variety of learning opportunities i.e. training, mentoring, coaching, shadowing
- ✓ Managers are receptive to ideas
- ✓ Learning activities have clear objectives
- ✓ Spotting talent and using individual skills to evolve learning opportunities
- ✓ Learning and development strategy to ensure all people have equal encouragement and opportunity to learn
- ✓ Identification of people management roles (KPI Performance, Leadership and Behaviour)
- ✓ Celebrating success
- ✓ People ownership and engagement
- ✓ A well received and reported on recruitment and induction programme
- ✓ Inspirational leadership
- ✓ Excellent probationary and induction policies
- ✓ Management plan of support including tutor expectations
- ✓ Employee benefits - all wellbeing initiatives developed well beyond minimum statutory requirements
- ✓ Working days changed enabling early finish on Fridays –work life balance welcomed by staff
- ✓ Oftsed expert brought in to support development
- ✓ People at all levels are committed to the team work, customer satisfaction, business success and personal development (The 4 values of Lifeskills).
- ✓ People are not afraid of hard work and are encouraged to innovate and improve effectiveness
- ✓ There is a talented and inclusive workforce
- ✓ People and learners have very clear learning objectives
- ✓ Strategic Plans accessible by all
- ✓ Intranet, website, assessment weeks, new target tracker
- ✓ Staff levels of illness, absence very low –highly motivated workforce
- ✓ Excellent leadership –well equipped management team –high standards
- ✓ Utilisation of people strengths, building capacity, cross skilling and up-skilling with several internal promotions
- ✓ Observations linked to teaching standards
- ✓ People feel “*well informed*” through a range of cascade and team meetings
- ✓ Senior managers are very good at recognising and thanking support as well as teaching staff
- ✓ Very much a learning organisation where learning is an everyday activity, e.g. staff are involved with recruitment
- ✓ There is a good gender balance
- ✓ Appraisal training for all line managers
- ✓ Training plans are comprehensive

Feedback against the clients preferred themes:

Values and social responsibility

There are 4 values shown in the Staff handbook, relating to Teamwork, Customer Satisfaction, Business Success and Personal Development. Few people, including managers, could relate directly to these, but the way in which they responded to questions clearly demonstrated everyone lived, breathed and conducted themselves in accordance with what the values represent.

The Vision/Mission is shown on the website, in the Strategic Plan and in the Handbook. The Handbook also lists a number of Positive behaviours required of people and also Negative behaviours to avoid.

There were good examples presented of how social responsibility is delivered, e.g. every person has 2 days paid leave each year to contribute their time to a local charity, the business sponsors and supports local sports clubs and carries out school visits to help with career advice and guidance. A group of people will do a 10k run for charity fundraising.

People development

Capabilities and standards are set out in Job Descriptions and L&D is targeted to help people achieve their potential. The impact of the L&D on performance is discussed with managers on a daily basis, at 121s and at Appraisals.

“We give staff best opportunities to reach the required standard”

“The Admin staff gets similar training to the Tutors, so they can support where necessary”

“The Autism and Asperger training has helped me when interviewing potential learners”

People described discussions with line managers, monthly 121s and annual appraisals as means of identifying their individual L&D needs. Managers and people were less able to demonstrate they were formally involved with identifying team L&D needs, though these things are discussed at team meetings.

Everyone I spoke with was able to confirm L&D is made freely available – most of it directed at improving job-related knowledge, skills and abilities. But much of the learning is also available to those not directly involved in the job, e.g. training for tutors also given to administrators so they are better able to assist learners with their queries; management training available to non-managers. The first £500 of any L&D leading to a qualification is paid for by the company; any remaining fees are lent to the candidate, to be paid back over time out of salary.

L&D is seen as an everyday activity, where people are involved with informal coaching and mentoring – not just from managers, but also within peer groups. The culture described by people is certainly one where all learning is valued and people are encouraged and supported to undertake L&D.

“They are keen to develop everyone”

“Personal development is a feature of the business”

“I’ve had more training since I joined than in all the years in my previous job”

People gave examples of how L&D is valued and celebrated, for individuals, teams and the business as a whole. Achievements are discussed at 121s and appraisals, at team meetings and noted in the Newsletter. Social media – Facebook and Twitter – are also used to celebrate. There is an Employee of the Month award and individual reward packages for achievement and people receive personal emails from management.

“When you’ve done well, you’re told you’ve done well”

“We are praised quite often”

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People involvement

Staff feedback questionnaires are used regularly. The range of improvement activities are impressive and wide ranging. Resources are deployed effectively and productivity is at an all time high. They have developed a cohesive, distributive leadership style using personal strengths and developing high performance teams.

Regular coaching, observations, audits, mentoring, network meetings, assessments, learning walks, SMT delivered development sessions, performance management, support grids, CPD questionnaires, book audits, working groups all help to ensure Lifeskills keeps moving forward.

There is a clear ethos of accountability at all levels for teaching and learning, and also a feeling of collective responsibility. Senior managers believe good teams are stronger than good individuals and are seeking to build even better teams, and to build more capacity.

The vast majority of those interviewed confirmed they are allowed to take full ownership of their targets, presenting solutions and recommendations, which in most cases are implemented.

The appointment of an HR manager demonstrates the commitment to ensuring the organisation policies and practices go beyond what is required legally.

Leadership and Management

Managers Job descriptions note the skills needed for managers to be able to do their job properly and Centre managers have 121s with the Operations Director, otherwise I was not able to find specific evidence of the capabilities being defined. However, people spoke of receiving lots of support, encouragement, coaching, mentoring, feedback and appreciation from managers at all levels who are visible, approachable, listening and, in many instances, inspirational.

“We are expected to achieve high standards”
“People in management roles have worked their way through the system”

Managers gave examples of how their L&D is designed to help them lead, manage and develop the people they are responsible for. NVQ level 5 is planned for all managers and will be delivered in-house. As the business grows, people at all levels who show potential are encouraged and supported to take on more responsibilities, e.g. supervisory roles, mentoring new people.

Managers can say how they aspire to lead by example, to inspire confidence and trust in the leadership and management in the business and how they try to maintain an openness in their relationships with people at all levels. This starts at the induction of new people, with frequent 121s, continues with 121s and appraisals as people develop within the business and includes coaching, mentoring, support for L&D, thanks and praise, seeking people's views, opinions and ideas, listening and taking appropriate action. People confirmed they experience all these attributes and behaviours and they trust the managers and have confidence in them.

Senior people are looked up to as inspiring people to do better.

“We are always being asked for our ideas and opinions”
“We're run more like a family”

“People enjoy coming to work; it’s a very open place”
“Managers listen to ideas, take them on board and give feedback”
“The managers are trusted and respected”

Recognition

People described ways in which success is celebrated. Also, each year the company holds an annual staff event, where everyone is invited to attend and people’s travel and hotel expenses are paid by the company. There is also a Christmas party.

There is a staff social fund of £10 credited bi-monthly to individuals, to be spent on social and team building events. People’s achievements are recognised, e.g. most of the administration team at Rotherham started as Apprentices on a training programme and have progressed to become fully employed.

The company provides a Health scheme with telephone counselling and access to massages, etc. Everyone is granted a day off for their birthday (if it falls on a weekend then people can take the next Monday off) and cards and flowers are sent from Directors to people on other special occasions. People have an extra 2 days paid leave every year to use for charitable support. The company celebrates long service. Childcare vouchers and flexible working arrangements are made available.

“People are proud of the company and what we do”
“I love it here; it’s like a family”
“This is one of the best companies I’ve worked for”
“People who work here care about what they do”
“You feel you’ve got ownership of your own workload”
“It’s a brilliant culture”
“It’s a great place to work”

Continuous improvement

Plans are refined and reviewed, the Strategic Plan is comprehensive and describes the many assessments, strategies, monitoring, continuous improvement and what they could do better.

The SMT has been developed and strengthened and staff described leaders as role models inspire confidence. Management effectiveness is high and Lifeskills is well placed to provide internal support to provide consistency of good practice. Senior managers were very clear about the overall investment in learning and development. The whole provision is carefully planned and costed.

The MD believes the investment in staff development has not just enabled the achievement of targets but has developed a highly skilled workforce, which has resulted in staff going for jobs at a higher level. He believes this will contribute to the achievement of ever increasing and challenging national targets.

Managers have clear targets at all levels. Examples given include professional development, e.g. flexible learning, using new teaching and learning strategies, target tracking and assessments, collecting performance data, area monitoring, accountability cycles, etc. Anecdotal feedback from staff interviewed was very positive. They clearly think this is a great place to work.

Excellent leadership, collective contributions means Lifeskills punches well above its weight. A lot of energy and effort has gone into achieving its current status, providing additional resources and building capability within Lifeskills to progress into new and exciting areas. Plans are widely shared and targets exist at all levels, e.g. organisational, team and individual levels.

The management team work extremely well together, introducing departmental leaders and functional experts. The management team has grown in size and support with an extended team of 10 with leadership responsibilities.

Their plans include responsibilities, structure charts, accountability, cycles, and values, KPIs for key stages, objectives, actions, evidence and costs. The planning events and collection of data ensure people are involved and aware of overall performance.

Lifeskills has capacity not only to sustain levels of performance, but also to improve even further. It has significantly improved provision, which has contributed to the rapid improvement in results over the past two years. Lifeskills has open and transparent monitoring and evaluation strategies, which ensure all people are held to account for their performance.

People understand fully what Lifeskills is trying to achieve and are enthusiastically committed to working towards accomplishing their goals. This is demonstrated by:

- Stakeholders involved in recruitment of staff
- Staff talk openly about what can be done better – a can do attitude prevails
- Social responsibilities include working in the community and charity activities
- Strategic Plan
- Mission statement
- Student progress data, performance management
- Performance management meetings then review planning meetings, phase meetings
- All staff are treated the same way
- All staff have job descriptions
- Discussion during performance management
- Induction
- Giving time out to key workers during the day to complete assessment
- Birthday day off
- Most managers have their own reward methods within their groups
- Core values of Teamwork, Customer Satisfaction, Business Success and Personal Development
- Teaching and learning policy – well developed
- First Aid training
- Policies are in place concerning equality and human rights, working conditions, dignity at work
- Employment welfare, fair recruitment and procurement practices
- Staff meetings; ideas and opinions can be added to meeting agendas
- Vision sessions Inset where all staff had input into ideas for development
- Working as a team sharing ideas, e.g. phase meetings
- Being part of a team, e.g. basic skills
- Behaviour management

- One of the roles of the HR manager is to develop the existing training and development programme and performance management policy and practice for all staff. This will enhance their existing practice and ensure Lifeskills is capable of delivering its vision
- Supported observations
- Student progress data assessments
- Mentoring
- Team building
- Paired work
- Shared learning
- Feedback from courses
- Observations of work
- Feedback from observations
- Team teaching
- Model sessions
- NVQ training
- Performance management being set targets and working towards them
- Team staff meeting minutes kept and all staff kept up to date with information
- Newsletters
- All given the chance to take careers forward through performance management
- Line managers trust their team members and vice versa
- Lifeskills are an independent company employing their own staff. They have enhanced staffing, ensured non-teaching staff have equal pay and conditions of service, increased leadership posts and pay and offered additional leadership opportunities and pay to teaching staff who are mentoring and training the next generation of teachers
- Observations, feedback to staff, MLT and SLT meetings
- Review meetings
- Subject leader development

The HR Manager reports to directors regularly on the effectiveness of ongoing training and development of Lifeskills. All staff take part in the annual development events regardless of status and are paid to attend this vital and important whole business activity.

Training, support and personal development is built into performance management and is evaluated by senior leaders. The large training and development budget is monitored and assessed by the directors.

Senior managers firmly believe Lifeskills biggest asset is the people and is therefore structured to support, enhance and challenge staff to achieve outstanding results. *“Outstanding results can only be ever attained and maintained by skilled, committed professionals at all levels of the business”*. Work life strategies and mechanisms are therefore crucial to the success of the organisation. *“Consistent improvement can only be sustained with people who are well supported, rewarded, and motivated to continue sustained high level performance”*.

Evidenced by the assessors

- Leadership opportunities
- Openness in meetings
- Leaders have had an extensive training
- Shared information through meetings and performance management
- Address performance problems directly
- Encouraging staff to solve problems when and where they occur
- This is a listening organisation
- During performance management 'coached rather than told'
- People are involved in consultation rather than through team, phase and staff development meetings, appointments of staff, questionnaires and performance management
- Days off for extra working
- Open praise in staff meetings
- Verbal recognition, written thank you's
- Informal observations, e.g. support staff
- Staff are encouraged to set their own targets
- Meetings for various groups – joint working
- Job share
- Open door policy
- Regular performance management reviews are in place with targets set for discussions with the team member. These are reviewed midyear. In the performance management process the team member is encouraged to request any training they might need to develop and improve
- NQT programme and accreditation
- NVQs
- The current learning strategy has been designed and implemented thoroughly to build skill capability.
- The current framework of learning includes; development of leaders, coaching, working outside of Lifeskills, mentoring, job shadowing and mini secondments
- People *believe* there is a culture of continuous learning which they believe to be "*fundamental to the continued success of Lifeskills*"
- Internal strategies for assessing individual and team performance include discussions and agreement of learning needs.
- Individuals are firmly aware whilst Lifeskills has demonstrated a high commitment to staff development it remains their individual responsibility to take ownership of their own developmental needs.
- Learning has resulted in people achieving national accredited awards, internal and external promotions.
- People feel their learning "has always been encouraged and supported"
- There are many positive examples of people being developed for both Lifeskills and their personal needs.
- Post learning and development there is a strategy to ensure people have an opportunity to feedback on the value of the learning they have undertaken.
- Learning is regularly shared with the team via brief presentations at appropriate team meetings
- There is evidence of a 360 degree review strategy to feedback on management performance
- People feel engaged in decisions appropriate to their role and position within Lifeskills

- There are a range of internal meetings (Phase meetings, team meetings, mid-year reviews, representative group meetings) where there is *“open and constructive debate leading to decisions and actions plans”*
- There is good evidence of people sharing new skills and good practice across Lifeskills
- People demonstrate a commitment and desire for Lifeskills to succeed and prosper
- Continuous improvement would appear to be the fundamental culture of Lifeskills where all of those involved in the assessment gave examples of improvement they had been involved in
- People enjoy working at Lifeskills and have a great sense of pride in their own and the success of Lifeskills. The following describes what people enjoy about being part of Lifeskills:

“I enjoy the confidence I now have”

“It’s a productive and relaxed environment”

“I am really close to my colleagues; we are always there to support each other”

“I really look forward to and enjoy coming into work”

“I enjoy the recognition we get. I often hear a thank you from managers and colleagues”

“I have a lot of responsibility but I know I will always be supported in my decisions”

“This is a fantastic place to work”

“This is a busy and friendly place to work”

“We never stand still. We are always looking to move on and improve on what we do”

“I feel comfortable with the pace at which we are growing”

“It’s a fun place to work”

“The pace here is very fast which I thoroughly enjoy”

“We all get on and help each other. We are a true team”

“I couldn’t imagine working anywhere else”

“It’s a great place to work”

Appendix 1 – Continuous Improvement Plan

Business Issue - What	Suggested Actions - How	Potential Benefit - Why	Priority - When	Solutions/Support Available - Who
Clarification of values	Mention at team meetings, appraisals and 1:1's.	There is an opportunity to support the business in involving the people to create a set of core values more aligned to the positive culture they enjoy and less 'process' driven than the current values.	High	This can be conducted in house
Social responsibility	The Directors could be asked to consider offering financial support to small schools and local charities so they could afford to work with IIP and benefit from continuous improvement.	To create closer working relationships in key areas	Low	This can be conducted in house
People inclusion in planning activities	Consider ways in which people can be more directly involved in upward planning.	Further staff engagement and ownership of KPI's	High	We discussed this at the feedback meeting. I would be in a positive position to offer support in this area

Using your Investors in People Specialist as a Consultant

Investors in People Specialists offer you a wealth of resources and expertise in continuous improvement and I would like to take the opportunity to support you in the progression of the areas for development noted. I truly believe I can support your own internal resource to further improve the impact these improvements will make. Just as an example, I commonly work with organisations to support programmes of development including leadership and management development, culture change and change management programmes and developing support frameworks meet organisational values.

Appendix 2 – Assessment results summary

The Investors in People Framework

The Evidence Requirements

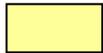
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10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓														

The number of evidence requirements met is 169

Key:



The Core Investors in People Standard



Your Choice from the Investors in People Framework



Not part of the Investors in People Framework