

INSPECTION REPORT

Lifeskills Solutions

12 May 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

Lifeskills Solutions

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Lifeskills Solutions comprises two separate companies, Lifeskills Solutions (London) Limited and Lifeskills Solutions (UK) Limited. Both are owned by the managing director and the other, non-executive director. Since April 2001, Lifeskills Solutions (London) Limited has contracted with Central Training Group to provide the foundation programme Entry to Employment (E2E) in east London. This work was inspected in November 2002 and found to be unsatisfactory. It was reinspected in November 2003, when it was graded good. Lifeskills Solutions (UK) Limited contracts with the Nova partnership in Essex to provide E2E and retailing and customer service training. In October 2004, after it won a contract with Future Pathways IGEN, it started providing E2E in Leeds. A centre manager is in charge at each site, and 21 other people are employed full time by the two companies. There are no part-time staff.

2. All 62 retailing and customer service learners are employed in Essex, mainly in retail businesses. Seven are apprentices in customer service. The other 55 are on apprenticeships in retailing, 20 of them at advanced level. Many were with another training provider until August 2004. At the time of inspection, there were 127 E2E learners, 54 in London, 48 in Basildon and 25 in Leeds. Lifeskills Solutions contracts with Trident to secure work placements for its E2E learners in Basildon.

3. Demographically, the three areas differ markedly. In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, for example, more than three-quarters of 16 to 19 year olds are from minority ethnic groups, compared with fewer than 4 per cent in Basildon. In all three areas, most E2E learners left school before they were 16 or with few qualifications.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision at Lifeskills Solutions is good.** Lifeskills Solutions is well led and managed and provides good retailing and customer service training. Its foundation provision is satisfactory.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** All staff were involved in self-assessment, which was appropriately self-critical and formed an integral part of the quality improvement arrangements. Self-assessment led to an action plan which was closely followed. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, and noted that some reported weaknesses had been put right by the time of the inspection.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** It has good systems for identifying action for improvements, and monitors progress closely. Work on some of the weaknesses had already started before the inspection. Arrangements to share good practice between teaching staff have recently improved.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR LIFESKILLS SOLUTIONS:

- develop literacy and numeracy provision
- integrate the technical certificate into the retailing training programme
- improve the work-placement strategy
- develop a more thorough quality improvement system
- maintain and build on strengths

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Retailing, customer service & transportation			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Retailing Apprenticeships for young people	55	2	
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	7	2	

Foundation programmes			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Employability/employment training Entry to Employment	127	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. Both areas of learning offered by Lifeskills Solutions were reported on and graded. No separate contributory grade was given for customer service. All evidence for inspection was gathered over four days in May 2005, by a team of four inspectors. Between them, they visited the Leeds, London and Basildon sites, three work placements for E2E learners and nine retailing businesses across Essex. They observed eight E2E learning sessions. They also spoke with 44 learners on foundation or retailing programmes, 21 staff and 11 workplace supervisors and managers.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	44
Number of staff interviewed	21
Number of employers interviewed	11
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	15
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Learners in retailing attain a particularly high standard of retail skills and achieve a good knowledge of the industry in general and of the particular products they sell.** Since Lifeskills Solutions took over the management of retailing training in August 2004, achievement rates have been satisfactory. About half of the 17 learners who have left the programme are waiting for confirmation from the awarding body that they have satisfactorily completed all components of their apprenticeship.

9. **Many E2E learners move on to jobs or full-time learning after they leave Lifeskills Solutions.** About three-fifths of the E2E learners who started in 2003-04 gained a job or took up a full-time education or training course on leaving. This is a good rate of progression to learning and employment.

10. **Nearly all E2E learners rapidly acquire a good ability to use a digital music program and a computer graphics program.** By their second week, they have mastered most of the basic functions.

11. **Retention rates for E2E are satisfactory.** Most E2E learners attend for the full 19 weeks of the E2E programme or leave early to go on to jobs or education.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Foundation programmes	0	4	4	0	8
Total	0	4	4	0	8

12. **Apprentices in retailing and customer service develop good skills at work.** Their employers are in well-established businesses and help plan their development. Learners gain a detailed knowledge of their employers' products, the retail industry in general and the particular sector that they work in.

13. **Staff from Lifeskills Solutions visit learners frequently in their workplaces, and help them focus on what they need to learn.** Learners in retailing and customer service value the skills they gain from doing a national vocational qualification (NVQ). They recognise

that their skills are enhanced by doing an NVQ and see that the NVQ does more than accredit the skills they have gained in their day-to-day work.

14. In retailing and customer service, qualified assessors use a suitably wide range of methods to assess learners' competence. Suitably qualified staff carry out internal verification, which is satisfactory.

15. The technical component of the apprenticeship is not well planned or taught. Learners are confused about what they need to learn and how they will be assessed.

16. Initial assessment is ineffective in helping plan individual programmes in retailing. Although some learners in retailing need to learn more mathematics to achieve the key skills qualification, they have not had any extra mathematics tuition. Some learners have waited over six months for help in improving their numeracy skills.

17. Learners on E2E programmes like the digital music sequencing and computer graphics lessons. These lessons are well structured. Learners concentrate in lessons and rapidly learn to use the software. As they develop their skills, their behaviour and self-esteem improves.

18. Learners develop better communication and teamwork skills through a range of activities, including outdoor pursuits courses. They become more self-confident, and help each other and learn from each other in lessons.

19. Literacy and numeracy teaching focuses too narrowly on the precise requirements of the qualification learners are taking next. Too many lessons concentrate on practice test papers. Lessons do not sufficiently focus on the work or day-to-day literacy and numeracy needs of the learners. There are few good books for learners. E2E learners are not set enough specific targets during progress reviews.

20. In Leeds and London, most learners who are placed in local companies for work experience develop rapidly in confidence and acquire vocational skills. In Essex, however, too few learners are given work experience. There are long delays in arranging work placements.

Leadership and management

21. Lifeskills Solutions is well led and well managed. Managers ensure staff are clear about their roles. Managers and staff work well together as a team. They share a similar approach to dealing with learners and expect the same standards of attendance and behaviour. Learners in both areas of learning find the staff helpful and approachable. Paperwork and learners' files and records are kept tidily, and staff are clear about procedures and policies. Managers check key training processes and regularly check learners' progress. They ensure compliance with their funding contracts. Management information, including data on learners' achievements, is accurately kept and satisfactorily analysed.

22. Managers and staff create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. They help learners understand and meet appropriate standards of language and behaviour. E2E learners' attendance is satisfactory, and they improve their behaviour while in training. The retail manager ensures that assessors have enough time to give learners strong support and help

less confident learners achieve their qualifications.

23. **Self-assessment is effective.** All staff are involved in self-assessment, and the report is appropriately self-critical. Action plans are clear and are updated regularly as action is taken to put right weaknesses.

24. **Lifeskills Solutions has good links with a wide range of organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.** Staff have good working relationships with the managers and supervisors in the retail businesses where the learners work. In London and Leeds, staff have good links with the work-placement providers, which include large national companies as well as small businesses and charities. Managers have built good links with local councils and statutory bodies. They have arranged for sexual health specialists and community police officers to speak to learners. Managers and staff know other learning providers well. They advise E2E learners about moving on to those providers.

25. **Learners in retailing were transferred smoothly from their previous training provider.** They experienced little disruption, despite the change of awarding body. Managers recognised the strengths in the retailing staff and recruited them. They have since expanded and developed the retailing programme.

26. **Communication across Lifeskills Solutions is generally good.** Staff are increasingly sharing ideas and putting into practice ideas which have been tested elsewhere. They make effective use of video conferencing for staff meetings. Recent developments include meetings of smaller national teams, for example teachers of literacy and numeracy.

27. **Resources are generally adequate.** Lifeskills Solutions has enough qualified staff to run a good retailing programme. The premises are accessible, adequately furnished and close to public transport routes. Computer software for the specialist music and graphics courses is good and up to date, but the computers crash too often. E2E learners do not have enough resources, such as suitable books, for literacy and numeracy work.

28. **The E2E programme is satisfactorily managed.** Managers regularly consider how to improve the provision and act to put right weaknesses. Recent improvements include improving understanding of dyslexia among staff and arranging more work placements in London.

29. **Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.** Policies and procedures are clear. Learners know their rights and responsibilities, and have an appropriate understanding of relevant legislation. Their understanding is regularly checked and reinforced. Data on learners' ethnicity, gender and disabilities is analysed to see whether any groups of learners are under-represented or have lower rates of achievement.

30. Activities to improve quality are satisfactory. Managers review each learner's progress monthly. They also check learners' progress against their learning plans and update the plans each month. Managers conduct regular audits to check that staff are following procedures appropriately. These focus on the correct completion of paperwork. Managers ensure that they comply with all aspects of their contracts.

31. **Arrangements to improve the teaching skills of staff are insufficiently thorough.** Lifeskills Solutions recently revised its system for members of staff to observe each other's

LIFESKILLS SOLUTIONS

teaching and make suggestions for improvement. The observations of teaching and learning do not focus sufficiently on the extent of learning. Some teaching staff are not qualified teachers and lack some basic teaching techniques. Some teachers of literacy or numeracy do not have specialist qualifications. Although Lifeskills Solutions has recognised their need for training, it has been slow to arrange suitable courses.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good day-to-day management
- good promotion of appropriate behaviour by learners
- good links with other organisations
- good communication among staff

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing teaching skills of staff

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- good workplace learning
- good individual support for learners
- well-managed transition from the previous learning provider

Weaknesses

- late introduction of the technical certificate
- insufficient initial assessment

Foundation programmes

Employability/employment training

Grade 3

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- innovative, well-planned specialist courses
- good rates of progression to learning and employment

Weaknesses

- insufficient work experience in Essex
- insufficient specific targets recorded during progress reviews
- inadequate planning for literacy and numeracy

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT LIFESKILLS SOLUTIONS:

- the staff
- being treated with respect
- getting qualifications
- the music and graphics classes
- the frequent visits to their workplaces
- what they learn from doing the apprenticeship

WHAT LEARNERS THINK LIFESKILLS SOLUTIONS COULD IMPROVE:

- the literacy and numeracy lessons - they could be more interesting
- the amount of help with mathematics
- the computers - they crash too often
- arrangements for work placements - waiting times could be shorter
- the water dispensers - there could be more of them

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good day-to-day management
- good promotion of appropriate behaviour by learners
- good links with other organisations
- good communication among staff

Weaknesses

- slow progress in developing teaching skills of staff

32. Lifeskills Solutions is well led and managed. At each site, managers know the learners well and review their progress monthly. Managers support their staff appropriately and resolve any difficulties quickly. They set well-focused, realistic action plans, and adhere to them. Systems and procedures operate smoothly, and documents are well kept.

33. Managers and staff have a shared approach to their work. They are all clear that the main aim of their work is to encourage learning. They also appreciate the importance of helping E2E learners meet the standards of attendance, punctuality, language and behaviour set by employers and training providers. Managers have achieved the right balance between setting rules on attendance and appreciating the difficulties many learners have in becoming accustomed to attending punctually. Many learners were poor school attenders and some have serious domestic and personal difficulties that affect their attendance. Staff always start their lessons promptly and always ask learners why they are late. All staff follow the same approach towards attendance and punctuality. Most learners' attendance and punctuality improve. Managers and staff are respectful but friendly towards learners. They discourage swearing and other inappropriate language or behaviour. Learners know what is expected of them and appreciate the respectful but friendly manner in which they are addressed. Most learners' self-esteem and behaviour rapidly improve.

34. Lifeskills Solutions has good links with other organisations. Managers and staff liaise with specialist organisations, which regularly send speakers. Community police officers speak to groups of learners at the east London site, which helps the learners revise their often negative attitudes towards the police. These meetings also help learners to improve their communication skills. Learners also benefit from visits by sexual health specialists from local authorities. Managers and staff have good contacts with statutory and voluntary organisations to help learners with particular difficulties such as housing or drug misuse. Lifeskills Solutions has good relationships with retail businesses in Essex. It has also developed some good work placements for E2E learners elsewhere in a broad range of work, including garage work, retailing, childcare and administration. Work-placement officers offer E2E learners work experience in well-known stores. Managers and staff are familiar with the work of other local training providers and often know their staff personally. This enables them to give good advice to learners who are considering moving on to those providers. In Leeds, teaching staff share expertise with similar staff in other organisations.

35. All learning sessions were at least satisfactory and were enhanced by good technical equipment and software which appealed to the learners' interests. However, some staff lack some basic teaching skills. Some give learners instructions without realising that learners do not understand them or cannot do the task set. Too often, staff tell learners precisely what to do, rather than encouraging them to think. They may ask learners to put a word into a search engine, without realising that learners are unable to spell the word correctly. They do not check learners' understanding enough. When they mark work or give feedback, some staff do not help learners understand how they can improve. Their handouts often include complex language which the learners do not understand. Managers have identified that some staff need to take a course in teaching and that others need specialist courses for teaching literacy or numeracy, but they have been slow to arrange this.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

36. Learners are treated fairly and respectfully. Managers and staff have created a mature but relaxed working environment where inappropriate behaviour and language are dealt with in an adult way. Learners learn how they should treat other people in a working environment. They are also made aware of their rights, including their right to complain. Both the E2E learners and the learners in retailing have the confidence to make a complaint. The few serious complaints made have been dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

37. During their induction, learners are taught about different aspects of equality of opportunity, for example harassment or sex discrimination. This learning is reinforced, although somewhat haphazardly. For example, a question on the progress review sheet asks learners whether they have experienced any problems relating to equality of opportunity, but does not suggest any aspects of equality of opportunity to prompt learners. Nor does the question check learners' awareness of issues. In most records of progress reviews, the section is left blank.

38. Work-placement officers brief workplace staff appropriately about their responsibilities towards learners. The contract between Lifeskills Solutions and work-placement providers clearly describes these responsibilities.

39. Although no learning materials contain inappropriate images, few contain images that counteract stereotypes. The learners' handbook, and displays of extracts from the equal opportunities policies, contain many long and unfamiliar words. Although teaching staff explain these to learners during their induction, some learners find the language hard to understand.

40. Managers record the gender and ethnicity of the learners, which broadly reflect the local population of young people, and the greater number of men than women on E2E programmes nationally. Managers have begun to analyse achievement and progression rates by gender and ethnic group. However, this analysis is not regular, and has not led to any action. Managers use many different ethnic categories with small numbers in each category.

41. Literacy and numeracy tutors seek to avoid stigmatising learners who have a background of failure at school. They convince learners of the need to improve their literacy and numeracy. In some learning sessions, however, teachers wrongly assume that learners understand their instructions or handouts.

Quality improvement**Contributory grade 3**

42. Managers ensure good communication between staff across the three sites, despite their distance apart. A monthly newsletter tells staff of developments. The managing director works closely with the managers of each site, and with the retailing programme manager. Although managers follow the same systems and procedures at all sites, they are encouraged to develop new ideas and approaches. Good practice is shared at meetings of different groups of staff from the various sites. Some of these use video conferencing. When new developments work well, they are introduced at other sites. For example, sessions on nutrition have been included in the E2E curriculum and free fruit is now provided to learners at all sites.

43. Almost all staff are involved in self-assessment. All staff have received a copy of the third yearly self-assessment report and action plan prepared in January 2005. Actions resulting from self-assessment are thoroughly monitored to ensure they are completed. This is done through an effective structure of meetings, which includes individual meetings of each manager with the managing director. Each training centre contributed to its own self-assessment, with separate assessment of the retailing programme. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report lacks a summary bringing together conclusions that apply to the organisation as a whole.

44. Staff have a satisfactory awareness of national initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Individual staff have recently been given targets covering performance measures such as the retention and achievement of their learners. Each training centre prepares a weekly report on performance for the managing director. The reports are discussed at regular meetings between the managing director and individual centre managers.

45. Quality improvement activities do not cover all aspects of training. Managers issue each staff member with a quality procedures file when they join the company. This file contains learner and staff handbooks, document checklists, and evaluation and review forms. However, managers do not use the procedures to improve provision for learners. Their audits concentrate on the presence of completed documents rather than their usefulness. Reports following observations of learning sessions give insufficient emphasis to improving teaching and learning. There is no overall plan showing when observations will be done or record of the observations that have been done.

46. Learners' views are gathered regularly. The feedback is collated, trends established, results discussed with managers and any needed action taken. However, feedback is not gathered on all aspects of the training. For example, E2E learners are not asked about their work placements or activity visits. There is no system for gathering the views of employers and other partners on the quality of the training programme. Some feedback is obtained from employers of learners in retailing, but this is not fully analysed or acted upon.

47. Internal verification in retailing is satisfactory. Although arrangements exist for internal verification of literacy and numeracy qualifications, the verifier left just before the inspection. A replacement is being appointed.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing Apprenticeships for young people	55	2
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	7	2

48. There are 20 advanced apprentices and 35 apprentices in retailing. A further seven apprentices are working towards the customer service award. All learners are employed. Most work in shops such as department stores and fashion outlets. A few learners work in reception areas of hotels and other locations. All learners receive an induction and initial assessment followed by on-the-job training. The staff comprise one retail manager, who is also the internal verifier, and two assessors, one of whom is working towards the assessor's qualification. One other member of staff is responsible for marketing and for recruiting new learners and employers. Assessors visit learners every two weeks to assess and teach them and help them set new targets. They review learners' progress every three months.

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- good workplace learning
- good individual support for learners
- well-managed transition from the previous learning provider

Weaknesses

- late introduction of the technical certificate
- insufficient initial assessment

Achievement and standards

49. Learners develop good skills and knowledge and show good retailing and customer service skills when dealing with customers. Learners use workbooks to provide good evidence for their qualifications. Employers and learners value the skills and knowledge learners gain through the apprenticeship. Learners learn important details of relevant legislation, health and safety, security, customer service and merchandising. Advanced apprentices report that the programme helps them understand and acquire the skills to manage and supervise staff. Learners make satisfactory progress in their NVQ and in key skills, but slow progress towards completing the technical certificate.

50. Retention and achievement rates are satisfactory. Since Lifeskills Solutions started running retailing and customer service programmes in August 2004, 17 learners have left. Of these, eight have submitted their assessed work to the awarding body and are waiting for confirmation that they have satisfactorily completed their full apprenticeship, including the technical certificate. A further two completed part of the apprenticeship. Of the

remaining seven, four went on to further education in other areas of learning.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	24	100															
Retained*	2	8															
Successfully completed	0	0															
Still in learning	20	83															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	54	100															
Retained*	7	13															
Successfully completed	0	0															
Still in learning	42	100															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

51. Workplace learning is good. Employers set high standards and have effective systems and procedures to maintain these. Most learners are employed in companies with structured staff training programmes. These are organised to meet the job requirements and help the learners acquire the skills they need for their qualification. Learners use this training to provide some of the evidence required for their NVQ. Line managers and supervisors provide effective on-the-job training and supervision for the learners. They are also supportive of the learners' programme and provide written statements of learners' competence. The workplaces provide the opportunity for learners to gain a range of skills that meets and exceeds the requirements of their qualification. Learners are encouraged to take on more responsibility and show initiative. Employers value their work and competence. For example, a learner recently designed a checklist that was adopted across the learner's company. Some learners start on work placements and become employed. Others have been promoted.

52. Individual support for learners is good. Assessors make frequent visits to learners. These are normally fortnightly and last up to two hours. Assessors visit more frequently if required. One workplace is closing shortly, so the assessor is making weekly visits to help a learner complete the apprenticeship before it closes. Learners appreciate these visits and are well motivated. Relationships are good between learners, assessors and employers. When learners have changed jobs, assessors have contacted the new employer and ensured that training continued with minimum interruption. Assessors provide good pastoral support. They show empathy towards learners with particular difficulties such as

low confidence, and provide effective support.

53. Assessment is satisfactory. Portfolios are well presented and contain a good variety of evidence. Assessors use a range of assessment methods and make effective use of their visits for short-term planning. Key skills assessment is well integrated with NVQ assessment. However, some learners do not fully understand their assessment. Assessors are too involved in building learners' portfolios for them, in particular in referencing the evidence and in completing the evidence index. Although learners understand the work they are producing and know what units it is for, some do not sufficiently understand how to reference it.

54. Although assessors set effective short-term targets, the three-monthly progress reviews are less effective. Employers are not invited to join the progress review. Instead, they are seen afterwards to discuss progress and asked to add a comment. Few comments from employers or learners are included in records of progress reviews, although comments are sometimes recorded on assessors' visit records. Reviews have a narrow focus, covering the same aspects as the fortnightly assessors' visits, rather than focusing on wider aspects of training or support. At reviews, assessors effectively check and reinforce learners' understanding of health and safety and equality of opportunity.

55. The programmes meet the needs of learners and employers. Most learners are recruited from employers who want them to develop their vocational skills and achieve a qualification. The apprenticeship programme is suitable for the learners.

56. Training towards the technical certificate has not been adequately integrated with learners' other training. Learners have a poor understanding of the certificate and how they will achieve it. Some learners who have been on the programme for nearly a year, and have completed or nearly completed their NVQ, have yet to start work for their technical certificate. Assessors lack confidence in the delivery of the technical certificate. When the learners transferred from another provider, they had to register with another awarding body, which contributed to delays. Some learners are waiting for their completed work to be moderated by the awarding body. Lifeskills Solutions has identified the weakness in its technical certificate training, and has begun to take action. It has registered staff to work towards their own technical certificate to help improve their understanding.

57. Initial assessment is ineffective in helping plan individual learning programmes. Learners tick boxes on a form to indicate the NVQ units in which they think they are competent. Insufficient detail is recorded to check this competence. The process does not record any needs for training or development, even for learners new to retailing. Employers are not sufficiently involved in assessing learners' competence or training needs. Although procedures indicate that a learning styles questionnaire should be completed at initial assessment, this is rarely done. Initial assessment does not result in additional support. One learner's numeracy difficulties were identified at initial assessment six months ago, but the learner has not yet had any numeracy tuition or support.

Leadership and management

58. The transition of learners from the previous training provider was well managed. Managers interviewed and recruited the previous provider's staff, who told the learners what was happening and maintained effective relationships with their employers. Within a month, nearly all learners were continuing their programme with Lifeskills Solutions.

59. Resources are sufficient to meet the needs of staff and learners. Assessors have good vocational experience and training qualifications. Learning materials are good. Staff use laptop computers in the workplaces to test learners' key skills. Too much of their time is, however, taken up with administration. There is little administrative support.

60. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and of issues that might affect them, including discrimination and harassment. Staff check learners' understanding during progress reviews. However, staff do not record on the progress review forms whether the learners answered the questions appropriately. Learners feel confident about discussing any problems that might arise such as harassment. Young men are slightly under-represented on the programmes. Lifeskills Solutions is aware of this and has analysed data to confirm the pattern. However, it has not taken any action to recruit more men, such as promoting its programmes to employers or other groups.

61. The retailing and customer service team members work closely and effectively together. They monitor learners' progress effectively using a good system. New staff are well supported and receive a good induction and training. The retailing team members work to achieve continuous improvement and were all involved in self-assessment, which was generally accurate. The action plan had clear, specific targets. The targets have been reviewed regularly and progress has been noted. Internal verification is thorough with sufficient sampling of assessment decisions and observation of assessors. Staff interview learners and employers to assess their understanding of the programme and level of satisfaction.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability/employment training</i>		3
Entry to Employment	127	3

62. There are 127 learners on E2E programmes, 25 in Leeds, 48 in Essex and 54 in London. Learners are referred to the programmes by their Connexions personal adviser and by personal recommendation. They receive an initial assessment and induction when they start their programme. This includes an assessment of literacy and numeracy, an introduction to health and safety and equality of opportunity and information about the training provider. Most learners attend courses in graphics and sequenced digital music. All learners receive support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners work through a programme which includes social awareness, drug awareness, sexual health and outdoor pursuits. Learners can gain accreditation in basic computing and in literacy and numeracy. Learners attend for 16 hours each week. Their progress is reviewed every four weeks.

Employability/employment training**Grade 3***Strengths*

- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- innovative, well-planned specialist courses
- good rates of progression to learning and employment

Weaknesses

- insufficient work experience in Essex
- insufficient specific targets recorded during progress reviews
- inadequate planning for literacy and numeracy

Achievement and standards

63. A good proportion of learners achieve certificates or move on to jobs or further training. Retention rates are good. In 2003-04, 76 per cent of learners completed their programme. In the same year, 59 per cent of learners moved on to jobs or to other education and training providers. Fifty-two learners have passed national literacy or numeracy tests at level 1 and five have passed an online test of their computing skills. Learners use their work in graphics to gain units of a basic computing skills qualification. Learners gain a great sense of achievement from completing their qualifications. Attendance rates are satisfactory. The centres' rules for behaviour are explained at induction. They are understood and respected by learners. Learners' work in music and graphics is satisfactory. However, most learners' folders contain little evidence of completed literacy and numeracy work and this work is often poor.

64. Learners develop their skills and confidence through regular participation in group and individual projects. There is a strong emphasis on teamwork and mutual support and

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encouragement in all aspects of the programme. The personal development programmes at all three training centres are satisfactory. Outdoor activities successfully promote teamwork, self-awareness and communication skills.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Entry to Employment	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	230		229	100													
Progression ¹	39		135	59													
Achieved objectives ²	81		175	76													
Still in learning	127		0	0													

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

The quality of provision

65. All three training centres offer innovative and well-planned specialist courses in music technology and graphic design. The tutors have relevant experience in the music industry and are skilled in working with disaffected young people. The courses are carefully structured to enable learners to progress to increasingly sophisticated functions of the software. Learners work on a series of projects that engage their interest and sustain their attention. Demonstration and group discussion are used frequently to generate ideas and reinforce learning. Learners are encouraged to contribute their own ideas to create individual projects and display high levels of self-confidence. The enthusiasm generated by these courses motivates learners to attend regularly and to complete their programmes. Learners develop computing, time management and research skills that they recognise will be valuable in many occupations and in further training.

66. Teaching in the personal development sessions is satisfactory. Resources are satisfactory. The graphic design and music technology software allows learners to create good music and graphic projects. Learners can use a sound recording studio in Bethnal Green. Classrooms and information and communications technology are generally satisfactory. The main room for literacy and numeracy training in Leeds does not have computer links. This makes it difficult to use computers routinely in learning sessions. Some training centres do not have enough simple reference books and non-fiction reading materials. Lifeskills Solutions knows that this is unsatisfactory. Speakers with expert knowledge of drug misuse and sexual health lead regular sessions at the centres. Staff have a range of qualifications, skills and experience. Several do not have a teaching qualification. Some literacy and numeracy staff do not have specialist literacy and numeracy qualifications.

67. Insufficient specific targets are recorded during progress reviews. All tutors provide information on learners' progress to the centre managers, who use this to discuss personal goals and general progress during monthly reviews. Learners understand what is expected of them day to day through the regular verbal feedback they get from staff. Progress review documents identify general areas for development such as attendance, time keeping,

jobsearch skills and spelling but do not record detailed targets. Progress is rarely recorded effectively. The general comments that are recorded do not give learners enough information to monitor and evaluate their own progress effectively.

68. There are too few work placements in Essex. The subcontractor charged with securing suitable opportunities has difficulty in finding work placements for Lifeskills Solutions learners. Many learners identified as being ready to go on a placement have not been matched with suitable employers. There are also delays in placing learners in Leeds but this is slowly improving. These learners do not benefit fully from the experience of being in employment and working with others that placements offer. Some learners are gaining jobs as a result of their experience in work placements.

69. The company has recently replaced a key skills programme with regular teaching of literacy and numeracy for individuals or small groups. The learning and development manager has been raising awareness among staff of the need to support learners with dyslexia but the provision of dyslexia support is patchy. Some learners identified as needing support are not receiving it and support is not as frequent as learners need in some centres. There are insufficient specialist resources to support learners with dyslexia. Lifeskills Solutions is committed to integrating literacy and numeracy on the specialist courses and on the personal development programmes but this is at an early stage. Poor literacy and numeracy skills are preventing learners from using the internet effectively to carry out research. This problem has not been recognised. The needs of learners with poor literacy and numeracy are not taken into account when planning and choosing resources for group sessions. Some learners are not able to participate fully or to work at an appropriate level. Tutors rarely plan activities for learners to practise and reinforce their skills. Learners receive little written comment on their work to help them evaluate their own progress.

Leadership and management

70. Day-to-day management of the E2E programmes is satisfactory. Communications between tutors are good. Regular meetings are held to improve the provision. The training centres have good links with local agencies and other training providers. This helps learners to move on to jobs and further education and training and enables the centres to direct learners to specialist support. The organisation plans to continue to develop the main components of the E2E programme. Some staff do not have qualifications in teaching and some literacy and numeracy tutors do not have specialist qualifications. The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths identified by inspectors and some of the weaknesses. Action is taken promptly when problems are identified. Equality of opportunity is discussed during learners' induction and reinforced during sessions on stereotyping and diversity. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity, and staff and learners show respect for each other.

