

Lifeskills Solutions Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		12–16 November 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Foundation learners do not attend regularly enough, and overall qualification achievement rates are only satisfactory.
- Many foundation learning teachers fail to take account of learners' individual needs when planning lessons, and not enough of their teaching is good or better.
- The teaching of English and mathematics does not show learners exactly what they need to achieve, or how well they are doing against clearly set improvement targets.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is not always effective enough, as action points from observations do not always lead to sufficient and sustained improvement.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Apprenticeship learners achieve very well. Success rates are very high across all programmes and learners develop good employment skills.
- Many learners progress well into further training or work, and apprenticeship learners into roles of responsibility.
- Apprenticeship learners benefit from good training, and have a very clear understanding of the progress they make and how they can improve it further.
- Foundation learners benefit from good personal support, and effective links with local support agencies help those with more complex personal and social needs.
- All staff fully support the strategic direction of the organisation. They work actively and effectively with senior managers in meeting the needs of learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, as is the safeguarding of learners.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Raise attendance rates for foundation learners, so they achieve more qualifications and overall qualification achievement rates are much higher.
- Make sure that teachers’ planning of foundation learning lessons takes account of all learners’ individual learning needs, and those needs are met, and includes a broad range of interesting teaching activities that motivate and encourage learning.
- Develop much better planning, teaching, assessing and monitoring of foundation learners’ progress in English and mathematics, so that more learners achieve qualifications that are appropriate to their future needs.
- Set very specific targets at foundation learners’ progress reviews that are clearly based upon the learner’s starting point and their progress during the programme, and recognise any personal barriers that may have an impact on their future aspirations.
- Refine and introduce a thorough process of performance management for all teaching staff that ensures they consistently and effectively improve the quality of teaching and learning to at least a good standard.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Apprenticeship success rates and rates for the completion of programmes in the agreed time have steadily improved over recent years. They are now very high, and significantly above the national average for similar work-related provision. Variations in these rates between regions, programme levels and age groups are minimal.
- The proportion of learners who progress from the foundation learning programme into further training or work is good. Overall foundation learning achievement rates have improved from the previous year and are now satisfactory. However, learners make slow progress in English and mathematics and this is reflected in achievement rates that vary too much between courses and programme levels.
- Apprentices develop good work-related and employability skills. Employers are impressed with learners and how they quickly become effective members of staff. Many learners progress well onto higher levels of training and take on more responsible job roles.
- Many foundation learners develop good personal and social skills, even though some have been seriously disaffected by poor experiences of education and/or troubled backgrounds. Many develop much confidence and belief in their own ability to succeed. This is particularly the case for learners on sports courses, who improve their personal reliability, take pride in their achievements and form good relationships with their peers.
- Most learners enjoy their training at Lifeskills and many are highly motivated. However, too many do not attend regularly enough and attendance rates between centres vary considerably.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently or sufficiently good across all centres, programmes or subject areas. Achievement rates match closely to the standard of teaching and learning.
- All but one of the sessions observed by inspectors involving business administration apprentices and subcontracted sports provision were judged good or better. However, none of the foundation learning sessions observed involving Lifeskills’ own staff were outstanding, not

enough were good and a few were inadequate. Common weaknesses were identified across most lessons observed.

- In the better lessons observed, teachers often made very good use of interactive teaching and learning resources, coaching and mentoring were highly developmental, questioning was used perceptively to check learning, feedback was constructive, and all or most learners were challenged successfully to meet their teachers' high expectations. In many lessons, English and mathematics are integrated well into the work-related context of the lesson.
- However, the less successful lessons lacked any real variety in teaching approaches to motivate learners, and too often the pace was slow or erratic. More-able learners were not sufficiently challenged, and were being allowed to work at a level that did not stretch or develop their skills. Some teachers made excessive use of worksheets. In too many cases teachers did not pay enough attention to planning to meet the often widely varying needs of individual learners.
- Teachers and support staff from both Lifeskills and the subcontractors provide effective personal support to help learners overcome multiple barriers to learning, remain on their programmes and achieve their qualifications. In the case of some sports learners, the level of personal support is often very positive and transformational. The standard of academic support given to apprentices is good. However, for foundation learners it does not focus enough on how they can improve their work-related subject knowledge or skills in mathematics and English.
- Many of the Lifeskills foundation learning teachers have recently acquired basic teaching qualifications, and do not have extensive experience in classroom-based teaching. A significant minority of staff teaching mathematics and English are not sufficiently qualified, and those who are have not been given enough chance to update their training at an appropriate level.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well in communal areas and classroom displays, and are generally incorporated adequately in taught sessions. However, teachers do not always take advantage of opportunities that arise during the course of a session to discuss and extend learners' understanding.

Sport

Good

- Good training, coaching and learning are reflected directly in the good progress and achievements made by learners during their sport programmes. Teachers lead well-planned on- and off-the-job training which is motivating, interactive, participative and frequently physically and emotionally challenging. Learners treat teachers and peers with respect, and poor behaviour and bad language are managed well. All learners enjoy their practical sessions, even though not all of them are talented performers in sport.
- Learners develop good team-working skills in practical sessions and display reasonable levels of attention in theory sessions. Practical sessions develop learners' skills effectively and successfully combine theory and practice. Learners have good opportunities to learn and develop appropriate coaching techniques. Learning support materials are organised and presented well. Some sports centres offer learners additional opportunities to extend their sport practice and knowledge further.
- Teachers' high expectations of their learners are promoted and reinforced very well in each training centre. Teaching and centre staff are enthusiastic and very well motivated, demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting learners well. Many teachers are appropriately qualified and hold relevant coaching awards, and those who do not are working towards gaining them. Assessment practice and target setting are appropriate.
- Induction is good and extensive, and learners are encouraged to participate in club activities to gain on-the-job experience. The initial and diagnostic testing of mathematics and English is thorough. However, the teaching of mathematics and English is not sufficiently well planned. The introduction of functional skills has been slow at most centres, and mathematics and English are not sufficiently well integrated into the vocational training.

- Learners have a good understanding of health and safety practice and demonstrate this well in practical lessons. Learners feel safe in their classes and appreciate the importance of healthy eating and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- Progress reviews are effective at helping learners understand how to improve. They benefit from particularly effective care, advice and guidance. They speak very highly of the staff, who empathise and support them well in achieving their learning goals and, for some, turning around troubled lives. Tutors frequently lead effective discussions on learners' personal aspirations, providing useful guidance on further learning and job opportunities.
- Teaching staff promote key aspects of equality and diversity well. They check and reinforce learners' understanding during training, and ensure that current and topical news stories are fully discussed and displayed in the classroom.
- Overall, accommodation and learning resources are good. Many of the facilities are based in recently-built stadiums with purpose-built education blocks. Bright and airy classrooms, generously equipped with modern technology, provide a good environment for many learners.

Foundation Learning

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, and this is reflected in learners' achievements. Lessons do not consistently stretch and challenge learners so the more able achieve their best. Poor attendance and punctuality have a significant impact on the learners' ability to achieve vocational and employability qualifications.
- In the more effective lessons teachers use a range of active learning strategies and practical, relevant activities to engage and motivate learners. They explain lesson aims and objectives clearly, make effective use of open and directed questioning techniques, and know their learners well. They use resources effectively to engage and interest learners. In one innovative session, learners responded well to good use of the interactive whiteboard to demonstrate salt content of various foods and practical estimations of the recommended daily allowance. They gained a much improved understanding of weight and volume.
- However, too often teachers do not plan lessons in sufficient detail to fully address individual learners' needs. They rely too much on whole-group activities or pairing learners of differing abilities to support each other, and use a limited range of techniques to check that learning has been effective.
- In some cases, teachers integrate English, mathematics, and information and communication technology into vocational and employability lessons effectively. However, too many teachers lack the skills and expertise to support learners in developing their literacy and numeracy skills fully. For example, detailed assessment information is not used enough to plan and improve the weaker aspects of learners' skills in English and mathematics.
- Tutors make satisfactory use of tutorials and progress reviews to support individuals through their negotiated learning programmes. In a minority of cases they provide good individual coaching and set challenging targets for progress. However, too often, targets are not sufficiently clear or specific or broken down into small steps so learners know what they need to do to improve. Learners are not sufficiently involved in reviewing their own progress to help them develop ownership and direction of their learning and skill development.
- Learners receive good advice, guidance and support to address personal issues such as homelessness, self-harm and drug abuse. Information, advice and guidance officers develop good links with local agencies and voluntary bodies and community groups to provide an effective network of support for learners.
- Initial testing of learners' skills is thorough and detailed, and clearly identifies developmental needs in English and mathematics as well as learners' aspirations and barriers to learning. However, prior experience and existing employability skills are not explored enough to give learners a clear understanding of the full range of relevant skills they need to develop.

- Equality and diversity are promoted well through posters and wall displays in classrooms and communal areas in most centres. Learners' behaviour is managed very effectively and inappropriate language, behaviour and stereotypical thinking are challenged robustly. However, in many lessons, teachers miss opportunities to develop learners' awareness and understanding of the wider world.
- The curriculum is planned well to enable learners to gain a range of qualifications. However, it is not sufficiently flexible for those learners who progress into employment quickly to complete planned qualifications. Learners do not have opportunities for work experience. This limits the development of their employability skills as they have few opportunities to apply their skills in appropriate contexts or develop a wider awareness of the world of work.

Business studies

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this is reflected in the consistently high success rates achieved by apprentices. Teachers are passionate about the success of their learners and motivate them to make good connections between their learning and their job roles.
- On-the-job training is good and off-the-job training activities are carefully planned to match the needs of the learner to those of their employer. For example, course option units are carefully chosen to maximise the learner's employment ambitions. Teachers use their extensive knowledge and experience of business well to develop learners' skills and help learners to succeed to the best of their ability.
- Independent learning is encouraged well throughout the programme, with innovative use of the electronic portfolio and digital evidence to support learners' progress. Learners' work is of a good standard and feedback from teachers ensures that learners reflect on ways to improve their skills. Learners' progress is regularly celebrated, for example good test results or the completion of elements of the technical certificate.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is integrated well into vocational training and ranges from good to outstanding. Teachers make mathematics relevant to the learner's work. For example, learners at a charitable organisation developed good skills when using fractions and percentages to calculate the value of credits earned by volunteers.
- Teachers are good at developing learners' communication skills. They analyse learners' business emails, letters and reports for appropriate content and presentation styles, observe learners at work and discuss ways to improve verbal communication in business settings. Generally, teachers mark learners' work carefully, although they sometimes miss incorrect use of grammar.
- Good use of the electronic portfolio system gives learners and employers timely progress information, although the range of methods used to assess learners' competence is too narrow.
- The initial testing of learners' skills links well to the development of individual learning plans and the setting of clear goals for the learner. However, as the programme progresses, the revision of short-term targets is not always sufficiently clear or specific, and not enough time is allocated to develop detailed actions plans to further challenge and develop learners' knowledge and skills. Few employers are actively involved in the review and setting of learners' targets.
- Learners enjoy the learning and value the opportunity of combining business theory with practice in the workplace. Care, guidance and support are good and focused well on learners improving their career aspirations and personal development.
- Equality and diversity are promoted well, both in the workplace and in lessons, and naturally occurring opportunities are used well. For example, informed discussion of working time rules and how they apply to different age groups helps employees who have a supervisory role. All learners complete a comprehensive employees' rights and responsibilities booklet as part of their induction. This reinforces equality and diversity knowledge that applies to their workplace.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The senior management team has communicated the strategic direction of Lifeskills particularly well. Strategic planning is good, highly realistic and succinct. All staff are particularly positive and ambitious and have a very clear understanding of the organisation's determination to be a high-quality training provider that is strongly focused on meeting learners' needs. The recent restructuring of management has increased the provider's efficiency through much clearer lines of communication and accountability.
- Staff speak very highly of the effectiveness of the senior management team. They very much appreciate the regular opportunities to share their views on how to improve provision, and feel particularly well valued. The management of subcontracted provision is effective. Demanding targets are set to improve performance and the provider has improved achievement rates well over the past year. However, at the time of the inspection these improvements had not been consistent enough to fulfil Lifeskills' vision.
- The provider recognises that teaching and learning are not yet good enough in some aspects of its provision. The internal teaching and learning observation process is detailed and teachers are observed frequently. However, the focus on learning is not always sufficiently clear. The resulting action plans to improve teaching and learning are detailed, and centre managers have recently started to monitor their teachers' action plans to add greater support to the process of improvement. Teaching and learning are improving overall, but the extent of improvement by foundation learning teachers is variable. A few receive more or less identical grades and substantial areas for improvement in successive observations.
- Teachers have good opportunities to gain professional teaching qualifications. Staff within programme areas share best practice and resources well, and time is allocated each week for this to take place. However, the sharing of outstanding practice across programmes is not sufficiently well developed, particularly in mathematics.
- Quality improvement arrangements are well established and vigorously pursued. The provider has a good understanding of the quality of its provision and managers are open and frank about specific aspects that fail to meet the required standards. Lifeskills takes appropriate account of learners' views and the concerns raised are resolved well. However, employers' views do not inform the self-assessment process so well. Overall, the monitoring of performance through use and analysis of learner data is good.
- The self-assessment report is evaluative and broadly accurate. Some grades are overgenerous, and tend to reflect the level of recent progress rather than being based on fuller data.
- The curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of employers and most learners. It includes a broad range of vocational subjects, and many learners progress from foundation learning to advanced apprenticeship programmes. Staff at Lifeskills are good at ensuring learners are on the correct course. Employers speak highly of the standard of training provided for apprentices. However, foundation learners do not have enough practical opportunities to extend their employability knowledge.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Lifeskills is an inclusive provider and actively promotes its provision to under-represented groups and learners who have significant barriers to learning. The introduction of a mobile vocational training centre in Peckham ensures that learners who are unable to attend the local centre can still access training. Lifeskills has successfully recognised gaps in achievements between learner groups at training centre level, and action plans are closely monitored for impact. However, there is no overall review of achievement gaps that are not so evident, for example different success rates for those who have a declared disability.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff have received appropriate training and the provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. All staff are regularly checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. Learners feel safe and links with appropriate agencies are good.

Any disclosures by learners are dealt with effectively and sensitively. However, records are not always clear enough in showing how such cases have been appropriately closed.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Lifeskills Solutions Ltd

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	Apprenticeships	Foundation Learning
Overall effectiveness	3	2	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	2	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Sport	2
Foundation Learning	3
Business Studies	2

Provider details

Lifeskills Solutions Ltd	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1173
	Part-time: 854
Principal/CEO	Spencer Fearn, Managing Director
Date of previous inspection	September 2009
Website address	learnaliving.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection						
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below					
	Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+			
Full-time	355	100				
Part-time	-	-				
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	156	68	111	108	0	0
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (ESA) and Skills Funding Agency (FSA)					
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coldwell Fearn Sport ■ Progressions UK ■ Sheffield Wednesday Football Club ■ Huddersfield Football Club ■ Rotherham United Community Sports Trust 					

Additional socio-economic information

LifeSkills Solutions Limited operates from six main learning centres in Rotherham, Leeds, Lowestoft, Basildon and London. In 2011/12, around 60% of learners were recruited onto foundation learning programmes. The majority of sub-contracted provision is in sport.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Richard Beaumont HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the deputy managing director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

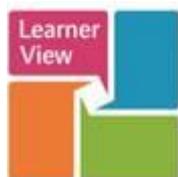
What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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