

Prospects Services

National Careers Service contractor

Inspection dates		17–21 June 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Customers develop a good understanding from the advice they receive of their current skills, of the options available to them and of the steps they need to take to realise their goals.
- Advisers help customers effectively to improve their confidence, self-awareness, self-belief and motivation to take action independently.
- Customers receive good support in their sessions, become more confident and improve their motivation to achieve their goals.
- Customers make good progress in improving their knowledge and develop better independent learning skills.
- Advisers manage sessions well and meet customers' individual needs effectively.
- The training that is provided by Prospects to all staff to develop better practice in delivering advice and guidance to customers is highly effective and recognised as good by all partners.
- The organisation has established a rich portfolio of expertise that matches the wide range of customers' needs in many locations throughout London.
- The performance management of advisers, including those who provide advice through subcontractors, is consistent, effective and well understood across the organisation.
- The promotion of equality and diversity by staff is good and permeates across a wide range of venues.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Insufficient numbers of customers having received advice subsequently enrol on a course or find employment.
- In a minority of sessions, aspects of planning with customers for their future are ineffective.
- In a minority of sessions, advisers do not sufficiently promote the development of customers' language and English skills.
- Observations of advice sessions are insufficiently evaluative to provide a useful overview of the quality of provision.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of customers progressing into learning or employment. Focus on making sure that more return for subsequent advice sessions.
- Improve the consistency in aspects of action planning so that action plans better involve and provide customers with clear direction, particularly in their long term goals.
- Further develop, in sessions where customers demonstrate a need, their understanding of the importance of developing their language or English skills for employment.
- Improve the quality of information in observation records and ensure that the grades awarded match the written text. Ensure observers can better identify the impact and record subtleties in transactions of advice and guidance between advisers and customers.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customers generally attend sessions punctually, participate well and make good progress in their advice sessions. They become clearer and more realistic about their life goals and develop good insights into their current skills and knowledge, and their self-awareness and self-belief improves. ▪ Customers, having received advice, have a better understanding about the options available to them and have good information to help them realise their aspirations and ambitions. Following their sessions, customers are much more confident and motivated to take action to pursue different options. For example, one customer with qualifications in beauty therapy became more realistic about her ambition to become self-employed, and more confident that it was the right decision for her. She left her advice session with good information on the steps to take to research her business idea and on how she might obtain additional support for her project. ▪ Attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is usually good; but at a small number of Jobcentre Plus venues it is low. Prospects' managers are working with Jobcentre Plus managers to try to rectify this. ▪ The proportion of women gaining employment has increased and now matches that of men more closely. There are no significant disparities in the performance of the different and diverse ethnic groups served by Prospects; neither are there significant disparities in the performance of people from different age groups or those with disabilities. ▪ During their sessions, customers gain good information on strategies for overcoming barriers to employment, such as local childcare options or alternative travel routes to help widen their job opportunities. The majority learn how to research careers and courses independently and are effectively encouraged to do so. However, a minority of customers does not always gain sufficient understanding of the importance of good standards in English or the English language for work or progressing in learning. ▪ Insufficient numbers of customers progress to learning or employment. The most recent quarterly data held by the provider indicate a satisfactory proportion of customers gained positive outcomes. Prospects has effective arrangements for following up customers to increase progression rates and staff are successful in contacting a high proportion of the customers. The large majority of these customers are unemployed and this proportion has grown steadily during the past year. At the previous inspection, the proportion of unemployed customers who progressed to employment was consistently low. Prospects has successfully improved its advisers' skills in promoting routes to employment and the proportion of customers who now 	

progress has increased. However, only one third of customers take up the option of a second or subsequent advice session.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and better than the grade for outcomes would suggest. The quality of advice in most sessions is good. The majority of current customers are making good progress towards achieving their goals.
- Customers receive good support in their advice sessions. They become more confident and are motivated to achieve their goals. Advisers show high levels of empathy and engage skilfully with customers. They have good communication skills and use listening and questioning techniques very effectively. They are good at explaining and breaking information down so that customers understand what they have to do. Advisers empower and inspire customers who become more self-aware and enjoy their sessions.
- Advisers are highly experienced and hold, or are working towards, appropriate formal qualifications. All have good expertise in employability or careers guidance. Accommodation is mostly good, although a few venues are too noisy and lack facilities for sufficient privacy.
- The large majority of advisers manage sessions well and meet customers' individual needs effectively. Advisers generally maintain a good pace in sessions. They provide effective coaching to improve the quality of customers' employability prospects by, for example, supporting the development of their curricula vitae and interview skills. Generally, advisers make sure that customers engage in negotiating good realistic short- and long-term goals. Most advisers make good use of the resources available on the National Careers Service website to help customers evaluate their current skills and what they need to do to move towards employment and training. For example, a customer seeking a job in transport logistics was effectively introduced to relevant job profiles and opportunities.
- In a minority of sessions, aspects of planning for customers' next steps are ineffective. Customers are not always sufficiently involved in negotiating actions, which are sometimes either too challenging or not challenging enough. In a small minority of instances, customers leave without a clear record of the agreed actions. Although action planning for short-term goals is generally effective, insufficient actions to support long-term goals are recorded. A small minority of advisers lack the necessary skills and strategies to constructively engage with customers whilst using the electronic customer database for the completion of action plans.
- Customers make good progress in improving their knowledge and independent learning skills. Most customers achieve a good understanding of what they need to do to progress. The majority take effective responsibility for their action plans and become much more aware of wider options and opportunities that are available to them. For example, customers become better equipped to do their own very effective independent job search, including the use of a variety of websites. A few customers, attending less effective sessions, do not make sufficient progress in understanding what to do following the session.
- In a minority of sessions advisers pay insufficient attention to promoting the development of customers' language or English skills. When customers clearly confirm their low skills level and indicate a need to improve their English or language skills, advisers do not always recognise this as a priority or include sufficiently precise actions to address the identified barrier. In small minority of sessions, however, advisers do take effective action.
- Customers receive good quality initial information and advice on their entitlement to the service. In the large majority of cases, good links exist with Jobcentre Plus advisers and with other external agencies to support customers to achieve their goals.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff demonstrate a good culture of respect and non-judgemental approach with customers at all centres. Advisers reinforce customer awareness of data protection well. Timings of sessions are flexible, for example with lunchtime and twilight or Saturday morning sessions. Advisers provide good quality information for people with learning

and physical disabilities, and are sensitive to individual needs. For example, a Muslim customer, preparing for interview, had some concerns over how best to approach greeting a potential employer when attending an interview. The adviser gave good advice on the matter, particularly strategies for addressing people from different cultures.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The key strategic aims of the organisation are well understood by Prospects' staff; plans devised by senior managers are ambitious, contain challenging delivery targets and priorities, and set a purposeful direction for the company. Targets for the quality that it is expected the organisation as a whole will strive to match are monitored carefully. Subcontractors understand well their responsibility to meet the expectations of Prospects and the needs of customers. All staff, including those working under the aegis of Prospects such as subcontractors and partners from different organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, communicate professionally with each other and enjoy good working relationships.
- Advisers and managers are suitably qualified. The majority have achieved advanced, undergraduate or post-graduate equivalent qualifications in management or advice and guidance, and the remainder are working towards advanced qualifications in advice and guidance. The organisation has high expectations of the quality of service it expects from advisers.
- Managers implement effective systems for managing performance. Performance is regularly reported and reviewed by managers and overall at the most senior level in the organisation. The monitoring of action planning has improved the quality of recording in action plans for customers, although further improvement is necessary. Managers have identified good strategies through self-assessment, for example, to improve the quality of subcontracted services by using a greater range of criteria, in a consolidated framework, with which to assess performance. Productive dialogue and feedback are provided to advisers to help them improve.
- Underperformance is tackled and provision is managed consistently across London, including subcontracted provision. Effective action is taken by senior managers where performance does not meet expectations. Observations to check the quality of advice sessions are established and systematic throughout the directly delivered and subcontracted provision. However, the information available, recorded by observers about the quality of sessions, is insufficiently useful to provide an overview of the quality of advice and guidance across the organisation.
- The training provided by Prospects to develop better practice is highly effective. A number of useful learning programmes, on topics such as equality and diversity, management and action planning, have resulted in better practice and awareness in advisers' work with the diverse range of customers they encounter daily. Training is well received and adds value to subcontracted delivery. Resources across the provision are generally good. A few spaces for conducting advice sessions are inappropriate.
- The provider's self-assessment process is thorough and takes into consideration views and information provided by key stakeholders. Managers identify key strengths and areas for improvement well. The self-assessment report is sufficiently evaluative, although at times too descriptive. The final report is the result of a range of evaluations such as customer feedback. Subcontractors also provide their own assessments of provision. Leaders have identified salient areas for improvement which are being implemented. Almost all areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been addressed.
- The organisation has a rich portfolio of expertise that matches a wide range of customers' needs. Provision is delivered in all London boroughs, including a variety of subcontracted provision providing services for disadvantaged and diverse community groups. Managers have a good knowledge of local labour markets and they work with a range of employer and trade associations. Advisers generally have good up-to-date local knowledge of the job market, as well as of external providers. They use this knowledge well to signpost customers, for example, to

access information for information technology training, business advice, drugs and alcohol support, dyslexia, dyspraxia, funds for childcare, homelessness and advice for ex-offenders.

- Managers demonstrate a good awareness of equality and diversity and seek to improve understanding across the organisation. A key focus, for example, has been in supporting and training staff to be able to respond to, and identify, equality and diversity matters where they occur during advice sessions. Staff are respectful and sensitive to customers. Advisers are skilled at working with customers from a range of backgrounds who they meet for the first time. The organisation's partners have a wealth of experience in working with people from diverse backgrounds and needs. Managers collect data on customers and their progression and analyse them carefully to determine the participation and achievement of different groups. For example, when an analysis showed that the proportion of women entering employment was lower than that of men, training was provided for advisers to ensure that advice sessions for women were not biased towards learning rather than employment.
- All customers attending sessions at Prospects are adults. However, the organisation implements well considered safeguarding procedures. These include training for all staff, checks of advisers' suitability and a risk register. A useful guide provides good information about safeguarding for staff. Partners provide safe environments for customers to receive advice and guidance.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Prospects Services Ltd

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	National Careers Service
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Provider details

Prospects Services Ltd	
Type of provider	National Careers Service contractor
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all customers over the previous full contract year	118,392
Director of Training and Employment	Mrs Brenda Cabras
Date of previous inspection	February 2010
Website address	www.prospects.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Part-time	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of customers	2850							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Global Solutions Service ■ JGA Group ■ Babcock Enterprise (London) ■ Maze 8 ■ Best Computer Training (London) Ltd ■ LPT ■ GGT Solutions ■ Chelmer Training ■ Right Angle Consultancy Ltd/Anchor Conzult ■ Lifeline 							

Additional socio-economic information

Prospects Services holds a prime contract to deliver National Careers Service provision in all 33 London boroughs. In addition to provision the company directly delivers, Prospects also works in partnership with 42 subcontractors. Provision where Prospects is a subcontractor was out of scope for this inspection.

All customers are adults and include females and males in approximately equal measure. The large majority are aged 25 to 49. They are from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnic heritages. A small minority have a declared disability. A very small minority are ex-offenders.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Steven Stanley HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Regional 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 customers' progression rates to employment and learning to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, and telephone calls to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed advice sessions. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded all of the national careers service provision.

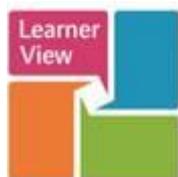
What inspection judgements mean

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>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



Learner View is a new website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and provider inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013