



Skills for Life Quality Initiative

Prospect Training Organisations Ltd: Leading Skills for Life in Work-based Learning

Prospect Training Organisations Ltd is a work-based training provider with centres in Hull and neighbouring Beverley. The company delivers private training and a substantial programme of 14–16 learning for local schools in addition to its LSC contract. There are just under 200 LSC learners at any one time following apprenticeship programmes in hairdressing and hospitality and catering and foundation programmes in E2E. All LSC-funded programmes offer learners the opportunity to gain *Skills for Life* qualifications. The company was inspected in 2005 and was judged to have an outstanding foundation offer and good leadership and management with no significant weaknesses. The management of continuous improvement was reported as a key strength.

Strategy and ethos

90% of Prospect's learners are under 19. The company's Managing Director, Pamela Stephenson, has a background in youth work and established the company almost two decades ago to tackle enduring local problems of youth unemployment. Her Associate



Managing Director, Pamela Stephenson

Director and E2E Manager, Nigel Nichols, joined the company after 17 years in the armed forces and was originally recruited to support young people preparing for the uniformed services. Despite these very different backgrounds they share a holistic approach to learning and learners, high expectations of what learners can achieve and faith in the benefits of a shared learning experience. They also have a common conviction that *Skills for Life* must be embedded in vocational and real-life tasks in order to be meaningful to learners and to successfully extend their language and number skills. These values inform the way the company works.

The leadership style is open, participative and reflective. The MD is concerned that her experience and length of service should not become a barrier to change. She is also very aware of the varied routes into management taken by her senior team – some have run their own businesses – and the different insights and strengths they bring. Questionnaires and discussion based on the Management Charter Initiative competencies¹ are used to reflect on and develop personal leadership styles and organisational management capacity. However, this exercise extends beyond the two directors and three associate directors who make up the senior team. All members of staff were asked to consider their values around leadership and their own contribution to leadership and management.

The planning process is anchored in an assessment of company resources – people, premises, finance – and of local learning and market needs. An analysis of opportunities and threats informs decisions about growth. The company is alert to local and national priorities but very clear that it can say no. Pamela will

¹ Leadership and management competencies and behaviours

Skills for Life Quality Initiative

not proceed with any new development without the explicit support of relevant managers. Prospect will not offer learning in any area where it does not have the capacity to ensure quality provision. Successful childcare programmes were closed when the company was unable to replace valued staff. Given the company's size, it recognises that it is a niche provider and works through local partnerships to raise wider standards through formal training and skill sharing. The various planning processes are well integrated and reference one another. The Business Plan is the key planning document and specifies links to the Three-Year Development Plan and the Quality Action Plan².

The company has a clear and well-established commitment to challenge educational inequalities for the young people it serves. Almost 50% of its work is now with schools and targets the most disengaged and vulnerable. There are strong links with local pupil referral units and with Connexions. E2E programmes, in particular, tend to recruit those who are not clear about the opportunities open to them. There is a very simple equality and diversity strategy³ which frames some challenging targets to address gender imbalance in vocational areas and increase participation from black and minority ethnic learners⁴. These targets are clearly referenced to the business and quality improvement plans and performance against target is rigorously monitored through the analysis of learner activity from application onward, learner and staff feedback and employer contact. This company sets and monitors challenging improvement targets across its provision.

Delivering Skills for Life

The company structure is relatively flat and all *Skills for Life* activity is led through a second-tier, Associate Director post⁵. Staff are expected to work flexibly to meet company and learner needs and most enjoy the variety and challenge. The Marketing Coordinator, for example, also delivers pre-vocational programmes. Administrative staff are valued as highly as those with direct responsibility for learning delivery and are included in relevant training. Prospect invests in developing and updating its staff⁶. The E2E team and vocational representatives have all received core curriculum training, for example, and plans to extend



Associate Director and E2E Manager, Nigel Nichols

this training to all teachers also include reception staff. One member of the E2E team has a specialist level 4 qualification in numeracy and another is CELTA qualified. All members of the team have the *Skills for Life* level 2 qualification and several have completed shorter *Skills for Life* and key skills support programmes.

Prospect operates a consistent and comprehensive initial assessment process. The Initial Assessment Policy⁷ sets out the scope, process, feedback and QA arrangements. Self-assessment is an essential part of the process⁸. The *Skills for Life* element of this process is specified in the Learner Support flowchart⁹. The company uses Target Skills as an initial assessment tool and the *Skills for Life* diagnostic assessment package. Very few of the hospitality and hairdressing apprentices start their training with proxy qualifications but the great majority achieve their literacy level 2 national test during their time with the company. The first six weeks of the E2E programme are entirely focused on initial assessment¹⁰ and there is a new intake of 4–8 learners about every six weeks. All programmes take a very holistic approach to initial assessment and language and number skills are firmly understood within the broader context of each learner's experience, interests, aspirations, aptitudes and preferred ways of working. Prospect has well-developed systems to review and continuously improve initial assessment¹¹ and these are shared with partners and external learners.

² Business Plan extract identifying cross-reference to Quality Action Plan and Three Year Development Plan

³ Equal Opportunities and Diversity Strategy

⁴ Equality and Diversity Targets 2004–2005

⁵ Organisation Chart

⁶ Staff Development Policy

⁷ Initial Assessment Policy

⁸ What are you like?

⁹ Learner Support flowchart

¹⁰ E2E Initial Assessment scheme of work

¹¹ Improving Initial Assessment Checklist

Skills for Life Quality Initiative

E2E learners have a wide range of target *Skills for Life* qualifications from E2 to L2 and may qualify at more than one level during their time with Prospect. They stay on programme from 12 weeks with an average of 22 weeks. The first hour of every day is devoted to brain gym¹²: game-based activities designed to focus and engage young people who find it hard to settle down and concentrate. The programme is also designed to deliver early and regular achievements. Within a few weeks most E2E learners will have certificates in health and safety and emergency first aid. Those who have completed their induction often act as mentors to colleagues joining the E2E programme.

Each learner's ILP¹³ reflects the initial rounded assessment of need. Targets about the use of capital letters for proper names may sit alongside those about reducing daily beer consumption from ten cans to six. Following initial assessment, there is a focus on individual literacy and numeracy targets one day each week when learners work with the specialists at Prospect and colleagues from the local college. There are opportunities to work one-to-one, online or practicing for national tests. Most of the learning, however, is very active, game-based and collaborative. Learners are encouraged to work together and learn from each other using approaches such as peer observation¹⁴. Tutors design skill development around real-life tasks wherever possible and very little relies on worksheets or exercises. E2E attendance is over 80%, nearly 90% of learners complete and even more achieve at least one qualification during their time with Prospect. Progression into work or further training is higher than on any other E2E programme in the Humberside area.

The hairdressing and hospitality apprenticeship programmes also begin with intensive initial assessment and make use of the core curricula to support literacy and numeracy development¹⁵. Vocational teams deliver key skills with the support of the Key Skills Coordinator. A small proportion of learners start out with proxy qualifications but the great majority gain the relevant national certificates while on programme. The company identified late key

skill achievement as an area for improvement on some vocational programmes and revised its delivery model to deal with this¹⁶. Vocational teams now have targets for literacy and numeracy success. Nigel, the Associate Director, has trained vocational staff to use Target Skills, Move On materials and the *Skills for Life* embedded learning resources. Prospect has developed its own exemplar key skill portfolios and holds regular key skill assignment workshops for staff. Individual targets are identified on the ILP and there are opportunities for one-to-one or small-group support. Every learner has a four-weekly review where progress is assessed and ILP targets are updated. Framework achievement on the apprenticeship programmes is currently 54%.

Quality improvement

Prospect takes pride in its focus on quality and has supported a range of partners, including the LEA, to develop their quality systems and practice. A detailed Quality Calendar¹⁷ sets out the focus and activities for every month. The system is easy to understand and staff know exactly what will happen and when. The calendar gives a shared focus on quality and keeps it at the forefront of the way people work. Quality audits look at all ILPs, lesson plans, schemes of work and learner files. Learner induction and learning support outcomes are evaluated and there are regular surveys to collate the views of learners and employers. This information is used to update the SAR and Quality Action Plan.

The company makes very effective use of performance data to support programme review and drive improvement. Data is reliable and trusted and is presented in ways that all members of staff find accessible and easy to understand¹⁸. Data is integrated well, through end-of-programme reviews showing what happened to the learners and the team evaluation showing why each outcome occurred. This provides a clear and agreed basis for planning improvements.

There are regular observations of interviews and initial assessments as well as of learning delivery¹⁹. All forms of interaction with learners, such as coaching

12 Brain Gym lesson plan: see also Excalibur case study and videos

13 E2E/Key Skills ILP

14 Peer Observation checklist

15 *Skills for Life* Strategy

16 Extract from Post Inspection Action Plan

17 Quality Calendar

18 E2E programme review

19 Observation of Learning: policy and procedure

Skills for Life Quality Initiative

sessions²⁰, are observed and evaluated. Prospect sees this primarily as a development opportunity and improvement actions are recorded and checked at the next observation. Each observed lesson is graded and the outcomes and recommendations feed into staff appraisal. Peer observations also provide teachers with feedback and suggestions for making their practice more effective. The full staff team is actively engaged in quality monitoring and improvement. All staff are trained to carry out quality audits and there is a cross-company audit team. There is a clear sense of how well each team is performing, what the improvement priorities across the organisation are and how these will be addressed.

Future focus

The company sees future growth in e-learning as an integrated form of delivery and has agreed an e-learning strategy²¹ to frame and prioritise developments. It also plan further growth in its work with schools²². Prospect believes its model of active, vocational learning has been proved to re-engage those young people who find most classroom activities sterile but who can be hooked in to tackling real-life tasks. The essential outcome of Prospect's work with these young people is to motivate them to continue learning and to demonstrate new progression opportunities. The company also hopes to work with partner schools to offer *Skills for Life* qualifications to develop and evidence functional skills. Prospect is clear that a rigorous focus on *Skills for Life*, clearly related to tasks and purposes that make good sense to the individual, can turn around life chances for young people in Hull.



Kristi

20 Checklist for Observing Coaching Sessions

21 E-learning strategy

22 Sample contract with school