

In Touch Care Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Tim Gardner HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: St David's House
Drake Business Park
11 Drake House Crescent
Sheffield
South Yorkshire
S20 7HT

Telephone number: 0114 263 3880

Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

In Touch Care Ltd (ITC) is a privately owned training provider based in Sheffield. The executive director is the company's joint owner, working in partnership with her husband. ITC primarily offers health and social care, and children and young people's workforce programmes. It also offers dental nursing programmes. ITC delivers programmes nationally, although the largest numbers of learners come from the Sheffield area.

The last inspection in November 2009 indicated that ITC was a good provider overall, with some outstanding features. Outcomes for learners and the quality of provision were good; leadership and management was outstanding. Provision for 14–16 year old learners was also judged to be outstanding. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self assessment and improvement planning

What progress has ITC made in using the self-assessment process to improve provision for learners?

Insufficient progress

At the last inspection, inspectors judged that ITC's self-assessment report was broadly accurate but too long and descriptive, with unnecessary content more suited to strategic and business plans. ITC has made insufficient progress to resolve these issues fully. ITC has improved its staff awareness of the self-assessment process through effective training and development. It has introduced new staff roles to ensure there is now more ongoing challenge around the performance of each programme. ITC has also started to use peer review feedback to support self-assessment judgements. However, ITC's self-assessment report still does not focus sufficiently on identifying and evaluating key areas for improvement, such as poor success rates within planned times, in some programmes. The report is still overly descriptive and too focused on business and strategy. ITC does not make effective use of data in the report nor does it gauge the impact of its work with learners sufficiently to plan further improvements.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has ITC made in improving outcomes for learners since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, ITC has made reasonable progress to improve the outcomes for learners. Overall success rates have improved steadily, apart from a

small decline in 2009/10, and are now in line with the national average of 76%. Success rates within planned times, although improving, remain significantly below the national average. Success rates have improved on both intermediate and advanced level programmes. For dental nursing advanced programmes, success rates improved significantly to 93% in 2010/11 and are now excellent. Health and social care success rates improved to 73% and are now in line with the national average. Success rates on children and young people's workforce programmes improved last year to 82% and are now 7% above the national average. Completion within planned times on both the dental nursing and health and social care programmes remains low, and well below national averages. However, completion within planned time for the children and young people's workforce programmes has improved to just above the national average at 67%.

ITC has changed its management information system (MIS) to a combined MIS and e-portfolio platform. Although many aspects of its use are still under development, performance analysis and reporting identify learners' and/or employers' issues earlier. Tutors have developed some innovative online delivery methods to meet distance learners' needs.

Quality of provision

What progress has ITC made to develop a more detailed and accurate monitoring system to ensure that all learners progress and achieve their qualification in a timely manner?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, inspectors identified that ITC did not have a system for monitoring learners' progress in sufficient detail. The company has made significant progress in addressing this issue. It now makes extensive use of a wide range of 'traffic lights' systems to analyse and rate learners' progress through their programmes. Managers hold more meetings with assessors to monitor their activity and to identify, as early as possible, any learner in danger of becoming 'at risk' using colour coded sector reports. Sector leads develop and agree clear targets for each assessor, which the operations manager reviews regularly. Sector leads provide good support to assessors, promoting the culture of 'smarter' assessment practice, to ensure learners progress as speedily as possible. They also carry out assessments to support assessors when required. Sector leads and other managers use reports produced by the MIS effectively at management meetings as well as during performance management and annual staff appraisals.

What progress has ITC made to make effective use of progress reviews to provide learners and employers with more detailed information on specific, measurable and achievable targets?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the team judged that learners' progress reviews were ineffective. Staff maintained insufficiently detailed records of the reviews and failed to monitor progress against previously agreed actions. ITC has made reasonable progress to improve its review arrangements. It has introduced new documentation and provided staff training to make the review process more effective. Reviews are now more detailed and show clearly the progress that learners make. ITC has introduced a new handbook to help learners understand their role during reviews. Monitoring by staff and managers of the clearer targets set during reviews is good. Assessors engage employers better in the review process and inform them more effectively about their employees' progress. ITC is aware of the need to challenge those employers who are not sufficiently involved in supporting learners' progress through the review process. There has been a moderate improvement in the number of learners completing their programme within agreed timeframes but it is too early to judge the overall effectiveness of many of the new review arrangements for ITC's current learners.

Has ITC maintained the excellent use of partners to support the provision for learners? Has ITC added more partners since the last inspection?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, the team judged that ITC's partnership arrangements were outstanding. Since the inspection, ITC has significantly improved these arrangements. ITC's partnership working has supported the development of local and national care provision very effectively, opening up new apprenticeship training opportunities to learners across the country. ITC has been influential in its work to develop care-sector qualifications with awarding bodies and sector skills councils for the benefit of learners. ITC is the lead organisation working with other training providers to develop and establish a 'social enterprise' training centre for learners in North East Derbyshire. ITC is supporting and mentoring a number of new training providers as they develop their own apprenticeship provision in care. The company has secured a large national training contract in dental nurse training and has developed an online training and learning facility to support the delivery of dental nursing qualifications. This ensures that learners can access learning and tutor support remotely at a time to suit their, and their employers', needs.

Leadership and management

What progress has ITC made to devise systems to ensure that employers who provide feedback or respond to questionnaires receive information on actions taken in response to improve the provision?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, inspectors identified that although ITC collects the views of all key stakeholders, including employers, it did not have a system to provide them with feedback on actions taken in response to their comments. ITC has made reasonable progress in addressing this issue. ITC's strengthened employer-engagement process now includes the completion of a detailed organisational needs analysis at the initial visit to an employer. The analysis identifies the overall targets and programme aims from the employer's perspective, which ITC staff revisit at regular employer review meetings. These meetings cover a range of issues and provide a good opportunity to inform employers about actions taken following their feedback. New sector leads are more involved in working with employers, providing an effective communication channel. ITC still organises a range of forums and meetings that allow good networking opportunities for staff and employers. Visual displays around ITC's premises display responses to previously obtained feedback. ITC now makes good use of its regular newsletters and website to illustrate changes the company has introduced. ITC is updating its employer handbook to provide more information about responsibilities and expectations of employers as well as detailing the communication systems available.

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