

Positive Outcomes Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Nigel Bragg HMI

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Address: 2 Maisies Way
South Normanton
Alfreton
DE55 2DS

Telephone number: 0845 6435566

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Positive Outcomes Ltd (PO) is an independent training provider established in 1997. The company contracts directly with the Skills Funding Agency and offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in information and communication technology (ICT), retailing, commercial and enterprise and business, administration and law. This provision represents 95% of its training income. Since the previous inspection the head office and administration functions have moved to South Normanton, Derbyshire.

The most recent inspection report was published in August 2010. The provider was graded as satisfactory for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, the quality of provision, leadership and management, safeguarding and equality and diversity. Two subject areas, namely: retailing and wholesaling and business, administration and law were judged as satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has PO made in implementing inclusive self-assessment and quality improvement processes that lead to improvements in the quality of provision?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Since the previous inspection, PO has formalised both the gathering and utilisation of user views to support the self-assessment process effectively. Managers now review and analyse information gained from learners prior to programme completion, as well as employers, to identify development issues. The introduction of an organisation cultural survey, and the establishment of an annual general meeting, now provides staff with addition feedback that informs the quality improvement process and self-assessment report.

The provider has appointed new staff to reinforce and clarify accountability for training, development and quality assurance. PO have enhanced internal verification arrangements by the introduction of internal quality assurance roles that have been instrumental in providing staff and managers with a clearer focus on the quality of provision. All staff have an improved awareness of their performance through the introduction of appropriately monitored key performance indicators. However, PO has been slow to introduce some key initiatives. The development of quality improvement through the observations of teaching and learning remains underdeveloped. PO does not comprehensively and systematically monitor performance that leads to action planning for improvement.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has PO made in improving the success rates for learners within planned timescales? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, PO has given a higher priority to ensuring all learners achieve within their planned timescales. The success rates for apprentices completing by their due end date has significantly improved in the most recent complete year, though they are slightly below the national average. Overall success rates for the 2010/11 period have also improved and are at the national average. Different groups tend to complete their programmes at a rate which reflect the national average. However, too few intermediate business administration learners aged over 25 years complete their programme by the planned end date. In 2010/11, Train to Gain learners' overall success rates and completion within the planned timescale significantly improved to just below the national average. However, success rates at intermediate level in this period remained significantly below the national average. Quality improvement through the use of target setting has improved since the previous inspection and is now appropriately linked to staff's job roles and responsibilities. However, PO has yet to fully use learner progress data to inform effective performance monitoring across all the provision.

Quality of provision

What progress has PO made in improving the formal review of learners' progress? **Insufficient progress**

The provider has very recently piloted arrangements for the formal review of learners' progress that appropriately address the shortfalls identified at the previous inspection and reflect best practice. However, PO recognises the implementation of a consistently effective review process for all its programmes has been slow. The company has plans to use its quality assurance processes to assess the impact on learners of proposed and recently introduced improvements. In addition, it has developed a strategy to support all staff in the use of the new progress review process. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these developments.

What progress has PO made in improving arrangements for vetting and risk assessing placements for young apprentices? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, PO has improved its placement vetting and risk assessment for young apprentices through the introduction of a more comprehensive process that covers the full learning journey. Appropriate checks of work placements are carried out by learning advisors who have received relevant accredited health and safety training. Members of the engagement team telephone learners to obtain their views on a range of issues including welfare and health and safety. This feedback is now appropriately used by PO to inform ongoing risk assessment of work placements. In addition, the provider keeps a central record that it uses to monitor

actions carried out in response to matters of concern raised by learners. However, the implementation of improvements to vetting and risk assessment is relatively new. As identified by the provider, the new processes remain to be embedded fully in its wider quality assurance processes. It is too early to evaluate the full impact on learners of the new improvement initiatives.

Leadership and management

What progress has PO made in the monitoring and analysis of different groups' outcomes to ensure that all learners achieve their potential? **Insufficient progress**

At the previous inspection PO had not addressed sufficiently the identification of gaps in the achievement between males, females and minority ethnic groups. Since then the provider has established a useful equality and diversity monitoring process. PO has also carried out a considerable amount of work to provide managers with a good awareness of the performance of different learner groups. However, comprehensive analysis of this data to inform actions for improvement is not yet fully in place. An operational manager team meeting has started to consider more effectively the identification of under achievement of different and poorly represented groups. However, PO recognises it has been slow to develop successful strategies and initiatives that address identified issues of concern. The provider has implemented an advertising strategy to encourage under-represented groups to apply for apprenticeship programmes. However, a planned appraisal of the strategies effectiveness has yet to be fully implemented.

What progress has PO made in ensuring all staff effectively promote learners awareness of equality, diversity and safeguarding at progress reviews? **Insufficient progress**

At the previous inspection the promotion of equality, diversity and safeguarding at progress reviews was not consistently effective. Equality, diversity and safeguarding now have a higher priority within the organisation and are agenda items at senior manager and operational team meetings. Staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training. The corporate training team have prepared a comprehensive equality and diversity training programme that is planned to be delivered shortly to all staff. PO provides learners with a current and comprehensive equality and diversity training resource. In addition, learners are starting to benefit from a very recently revised review process that includes clearer emphasis on equality, diversity and safeguarding. However, as identified by the provider, progress in implementing improvements has been very slow and it is too soon to judge the impact of current developments. In addition, the current strategy to extend learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues during progress reviews is not effective.

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