

Inter Training Services Limited

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Inter Training Services Limited (ITS) has been in business since 1996. It specialises in delivering apprenticeship programmes in hairdressing for businesses in Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire. All training delivery takes place on employers' premises. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 71 apprentices and 21 advanced apprentices on courses with ITS. Around 70% of ITS learners receive additional learning support.

At the most recent inspection, in July 2010, ITS's overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate. All aspects of the provision were graded as satisfactory except for outcomes, which were inadequate. The main concern was low qualification achievement and low rates for apprentices completing within their planned time..

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in ensuring that quality improvement activities have contributed to the implementation of recommendations identified at the previous inspection?

Significant progress

The previous inspection judged ITS' self-assessment process as thorough, comprehensive and inclusive. That standard has been maintained, but significant progress has been made in ensuring that self-assessment and other systems focus on driving forward improvements identified at the previous inspection. The current self-assessment report properly reflects the problems identified at the inspection. The detailed post-inspection plan sets out clear actions and addresses learners' and employers' views alongside key findings. The majority of those actions, which are regularly reviewed, have been promptly achieved. Extensive consultancy support, well managed by ITS, resulted in further suggestions for improvement and these have been integrated into the plan and are being satisfactorily completed. A quality improvement plan, which reflects routine concerns and challenges, has been improved since the previous inspection. All departments are now involved in the plan but with actions assigned to individuals rather than just managers, as appropriate for the size of this organisation. Again, actions are properly monitored and are leading to a range of improvements. This significant improvement in processes is now beginning to have a positive impact on learners as shown in the other themes.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates for learners since the previous inspection?

Reasonable progress

Overall achievement and rates for learners completing within their planned time were the main area of concern at the previous inspection. Published data only cover a

three-month period after that inspection; they show small improvements for both apprentice success rates, to near national averages for hairdressing, and for apprentice timely rates to three points above hairdressing averages. Advanced apprenticeship success and rates for learners completing within their planned time have increased by around five percentage points, but this minority part of the provision remains well below national averages.

Because a large number of leavers left their programme very early before the previous inspection, published rates are unlikely to improve significantly for another 12 months. However, ITS has carried out substantial work since the previous inspection to improve the performance of current learners. It has greatly improved the monitoring of individual learners' progress and the frequency of assessors' visits. It more effectively identifies learners who need additional encouragement, and promptly puts into action helpful learner intervention plans. Retention has improved and there have been no early leavers in the six months since the previous inspection. Current learners are progressing well. Compared to a similar period before the previous inspection, progression from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships has improved significantly from 30% to a good 45%.

Quality of Provision

What progress has been made in making sure that targets set in progress reviews are clear and measurable, that partner salon managers are fully involved in reviews and that learners know what they need to do to progress?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, progress reviews and target setting for learners were judged as inadequate. ITS has made reasonable progress in improving this aspect. Learners are generally seen every month when short-term assessment targets are set; then they have a quarterly review of progress that includes employers and identifies longer-term targets. Employers help make judgements about learners' progress and performance and they feel integral to the setting of targets. The targets set are now much clearer and help learners to progress in a timely way. The two reviews focus mainly on assessment, with insufficient recording of targets to improve personal skills.

ITS monitors learners' progress effectively and assessors use an immediately generated graphical representation of progress which learners find helpful. Review meetings are driven by ITS staff. Learners and employers are at times taking too passive a role. All ITS assessors recently completed 'SMART' target training, although it is too soon to see the impact. Promotion of learners' understanding of equality and diversity at reviews is not sufficiently recorded. Quality assurance arrangements to monitor the effectiveness of learners' reviews and target setting have not been sufficiently rigorous. However, planned job role changes are intended to rectify this.

What progress has been made in strengthening the systems for evaluating and monitoring the quality of teaching, learning, progress reviews and assessment?**Significant progress**

Both the previous inspection and the providers' self-assessment at that time recognised a need to make observations of teaching more critical and effective. Progress in strengthening systems has been significant, and the revised approach is beginning to have a positive impact on staff and learners. A new member of staff, filling the role of a 'professional tutor', has been recruited to lead in this area. This individual's previous experience is particularly appropriate for the role. Systems have been fully revised, and now include a potentially very helpful approach of an annual cycle of both supportive and then graded observations. The initial round of observations has led to particularly good records, where learning and the needs of the learner are to the fore. Along with supportive comments there are a good range of suggestions for improvement. The observations lead to clear and satisfactorily monitored action plans. Staff teaching and development sessions have been successfully held and individual support for improvement is provided where appropriate. The systems are now being extended to ensure that internal verification observations are complementary to this approach. After appropriate consultation with employers, the approach is rightly due to be extended to assessors employed by salons.

Leadership and Management**What progress has been made in better using data to set and monitor trends for assessors and differing groups of learners?****Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, ITS has made reasonable progress in the use of data to monitor trends and progress. A range of new recording and analysis systems have been developed and the results are well presented in a timely way in a shared electronic format. They provide all staff and managers with opportunities to review learner, assessor and salon performance against clear completion targets. Performance is now being monitored in a timely manner. Learners' progress is risk assessed and the results are used effectively to inform learners, employers and ITS staff of progress to date. For those learners making slow progress, support plans with clear targets are quickly established and endorsed and subsequently reviewed by managers. However, whilst there are signs of improved retention and progress by learners within the time allocation, it is too early to judge the full impact of these systems on improving success and rates for learners achieving within their planned time..

Further developments are in the process of being implemented. For example, the record of each learner's assessment plan and targets has been redesigned to set much clearer and detailed qualification completion targets. Learners and employers should be able to use this more readily to track individual learner progress throughout their programme.

What progress has been made in improving learner and employer understanding of safeguarding?**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, employer and in-salon assessors had insufficient awareness of their responsibilities for safeguarding. Since then, ITS has made reasonable progress in raising the awareness of safeguarding learners. ITS has developed and introduced interactive safeguarding handbooks that effectively inform learners of this topic at induction and re-affirm this information at a later stage in the learners' programme. Upon completion of this work, learners receive in-house certificates, although the central recording of this activity is not sufficiently clear. Learners' progress reviews are used appropriately to confirm the safety of learners.

At a recent well-attended assessors' meeting, ITS effectively raised the awareness of safeguarding learners through an interactive presentation. Attendees were set related tasks that were actively discussed by all. Assessors were able to relate the content of the presentation to some issues that they had encountered with learners. Subsequently, two learners with potential problems were identified to ITS and they were effectively and sensitively supported. A record of this session and an ITS magazine that included basic safeguarding advice and guidance were sent to employers who did not attend the meeting. However, ITS has yet to assure itself that all employers have sufficient understanding of how to safeguard learners.

What progress has been made in building on the good delivery of key skills, with the eventual change to functional skills in mind?**Reasonable progress**

Key skills training was judged as particularly good at the previous inspection. Despite rightly focusing on other weaker areas, ITS has continued to make reasonable progress in building on this aspect. It is also preparing very well for the introduction of functional skills and is better placed than many similar providers to eventually include them in its programmes. For key skills a specialist, rather than an administrator, now completes initial learner registration, resulting in fuller initial diagnosis of needs and better planning of course duration. Key skills visit records are now available through ITS's on-line systems so that assessors are more aware of learners' additional work. A more proportionate approach to key skills internal verification has been adopted, reducing possible delays in certification. ITS has invested significant effort in preparing for functional skills. Appropriate and regular staff briefings have taken place. Some staff are undergoing functional skills training themselves to allow them to better deliver the programmes. A well-presented and logical record of each 'individual learner's journey' clearly links routine hairdressing activities with opportunities to reinforce functional skills. The long-term planning for such things as timetabling of practice and real examinations is satisfactory. ITS staff are preparing their own support material in a timely way.

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