

Steadfast Training Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 58277

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Last day of inspection: 28 August 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Steadfast Training operates from premises in Spalding, Lincolnshire. Two directors jointly own and run the company, supported by 10 office-based staff. Since starting in 2005, it has grown rapidly from a commercial training background specialising in the care sector. Steadfast Training contracts with the Skills Funding Agency and the National Apprenticeship Service for the provision of Train to Gain programmes and apprenticeship training. Government-funded training accounts for 90% of the company's business.

Steadfast Training currently offers training in health and social care, leadership and management, business administration and information technology. Most training is delivered in the workplace.

The majority of the provision is in the health and social care sector, particularly in Midlands and East of England regions. The company employs 10 assessors and five internal verifiers. Four freelance assessors also work for the company.

The number of learners has more than doubled since the last inspection. Of the 451 learners currently on a Train to Gain programme, 357 are working towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in health and social care, 64 are following a business administration programme and 11 are studying for an NVQ in information technology. The provider subcontracts NVQ training for 19 learners in food manufacturing to Workforce Training and Development. Forty learners are on apprenticeship programmes in health and social care and in business administration.

At the last inspection in August 2008 outcomes for learners were judged to be good. The health and social care programmes, leadership and management, the quality of the provision and the arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory, while the provider's capacity to make improvements was inadequate.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in ensuring that self-assessment and development planning support improvements in provision?	Reasonable progress
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Steadfast Training has reviewed its self-assessment process and it is now satisfactory. The previous inspection judged the company's self-assessment to be over-generous in its grades and insufficiently inclusive. The company's quality improvement plan focused too much on the growth of the business rather than on improving quality. The self-assessment report for 2009/10 is a more critical document. Judgments are well-supported by a range of evidence and appropriately

linked to the Common Inspection Framework. However, the process remains insufficiently inclusive. Though many judgments are accurate, the text is sometimes insufficiently evaluative. The operations manager has revised the self-assessment procedure for 2010/11 to make it more inclusive and rigorous, but this process is yet to be completed. The quality improvement plan is detailed and addresses the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection. It contains appropriate actions with clear timescales. The company understands its strengths and areas for improvement well.

Outcomes for learners

How much progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in improving outcomes for learners?

Reasonable progress

Overall success rates and the number of health and social care learners completing in the allotted time are lower than at the previous inspection. However, considerable improvements in overall success rates are evident from in-year data for 2009/10. The number of learners completing in the allotted time remains low. Soon after the previous inspection, the company appointed an operations director and a lead internal verifier to manage the Train to Gain provision. The quality of provision deteriorated seriously during this period and the company's directors recognised the problems early in 2009. The company reduced its recruitment of new learners in order to concentrate its efforts on the large numbers of learners who had exceeded their planned period of study. In July 2009, the number of learners in this category was 311. This figure has now been reduced to 122. Eighty-eight of these learners have already submitted their portfolios of evidence for final verification. The remaining 34 are on target to complete at the end of August 2010. A new procedure for assessors introduced recently has successfully improved success rates for learners who started the programme after April 2010. Overall and timely success rates for learners on Skills for Life programmes, introduced in August 2009, are very good at 97% and 85% respectively.

Use of management information

How much progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in improving the accuracy and use of data?

Significant progress

Steadfast Training now has accurate performance data which it uses well to identify improvement actions. Managers use data imaginatively and confidently to monitor all aspects of the company's performance. After the previous inspection, the company purchased new software to help it manage its data requirements. Staff have received training in the use of this software. They now have a much improved understanding of how they can use data to make improvements. For example, the company has identified regional differences in success rates and implemented strategies to reduce

them. However, it is too early to judge their impact. Managers also use data to identify differences in performance between different assessors. The operations manager meets each assessor every month in order to check that learners are on target to achieve and to take any remedial actions. Managers are able to analyse data in order to understand the performance of different groups. For example, by using the data, managers have identified higher performance for learners from minority ethnic groups and some under-performance for white females on health and social care programmes. Actions to reduce these differences have not yet had an affect.

Management of assessment

What progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in improving the monitoring and management of assessment practice? **Insufficient progress**

At the time of the last inspection some assessment practice on NVQ programmes was poor and had not been recognised by the existing internal verification arrangements. The business restructuring included changes in design and management of internal verification systems. The new lead internal verifier has made some progress in improving the provider's internal verification strategy and developed useful systems for recording internal verification actions. Sampling of learner's work is no longer planned to be concentrated at the end of their training. However, not all planned activities have been carried out and records are incomplete. The arrangements for internal verification vary across the subject areas. Records of feedback to assessors contain insufficient detail to identify trends in the performance of individual assessors. The current level of sampling of learner's work does not support the certification of individual NVQ units, if the learner leaves before the end of their programme. Senior managers have not taken sufficient interest in this aspect of the provision to monitor the application and effectiveness of the strategy.

Support for literacy and numeracy skills

How much progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in improving support for learner's literacy and numeracy needs? **Significant progress**

Support for learner's literacy and numeracy needs was satisfactory at the last inspection. In 2009 Steadfast Training received an additional Train to Gain contract to provide literacy and numeracy qualifications. The provider recruited a qualified teacher to support learners working towards literacy and numeracy, NVQ and apprenticeship awards. All learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Those with low literacy or numeracy skills are referred to the Skills for Life tutor and advised to complete an appropriate literacy or numeracy qualification before starting any other programme of training. These learners then complete a further diagnostic assessment of their skills and receive well-focused,

frequent support visits in their workplace. The Skills for Life tutor also provides useful additional support to a small number of NVQ Train to Gain learners who have low confidence in their literacy skills. These learners make satisfactory, or better, progress with their main qualifications. Success rates for literacy and numeracy qualifications are very high.

Observations of teaching and learning

What progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in ensuring that its arrangements are effective in improving the quality of teaching and coaching?

Insufficient progress

At the last inspection the provider's systems for observing teaching and learning were incomplete and inconsistently applied. Too little emphasis has been placed on this area for improvement and insufficient progress has been made. The lead internal verifier with the support of an external consultant has recently developed a system for carrying out formal observations of off-the-job training sessions and coaching in the workplace. However, very few observations have been carried out in the two years since the last inspection. The judgements do not focus sufficiently on the quality of learning taking place and grades awarded are over-generous. The records of those observations which have been carried out contain insufficient detail to allow accurate identification of good practice and effective moderation of outcomes. A number of the statements recorded contradict the overall judgements. No formal procedure, sampling strategy or grade criteria have been agreed and shared with tutor/assessors to ensure consistency of judgements between observers. The results of observations have yet to be used to plan staff development and support performance appraisals.

Capacity to make further improvements

How much progress has Steadfast Training Ltd made in developing its capacity to make improvements?

Reasonable progress

The quality of the company's provision deteriorated seriously after the previous inspection, and especially during 2008/09. When the company's directors identified this deterioration, they took radical action to reverse the decline and made one senior manager redundant and did not renew the contract for the Head of Care. The two directors assumed personal responsibility for strategic and operational management. The directors then carried out a significant reorganisation and appointed a new operations manager and a lead internal verifier. The new senior management team provide clear strategic direction. The company terminated its contracts with two under-performing subcontractors. It no longer offers provision in regions which have performed poorly. In order to manage more effectively the quality of provision, the company replaced its large team of freelance assessors with

four assessors directly employed by Steadfast. The company's purchase of new software to improve its use of data for performance management has been successful. The company took many of these actions in the 12 months before this monitoring visit and it is too soon to judge the full impact on current learners.

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