

Professional Business and Training Solutions Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Richard Beynon HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 19 Blackfen Parade
Blackfen Road
Sidcup
DA15 9LU

Telephone number: 02083 014930

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Professional Business and Training Solutions (PBTS) was registered as a private limited company in 2000 and is based in Sidcup, south London. The company trains a range of learners mainly working in hospitals or school laboratories across Greater London. The Skills Funding Agency, through the Train to Gain programme, fund National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Laboratory and Associated Technical Activities (LATA) at levels 2, 3 and 4.

At the time of the monitoring visit PBTS had 26 learners taking LATA qualifications. Training and assessment takes place in the workplace, or at a commercial laboratory facility at the company's Sidcup base. Eleven learners will take additional literacy training and ten will take numeracy courses. The company has two full-time and two part-time employees and uses additional part-time assessors as necessary. NVQ training accounts for the majority of PBTS's business, but there are other commercial activities including point of care pathology testing and specialist medical training.

The company's previous inspection was in December 2008. Grades were satisfactory in all areas, except for quality of provision which was good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What is the provider's capacity to self-assess and make and sustain improvements?	Significant progress
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PBTS has taken very effective steps to review and improve self-assessment procedures and documentation since the previous inspection. The updated self-assessment process now focuses closely on reliable data reports of outcomes for learners, and on reports concerning levels of learner success and satisfaction throughout training. Managers and staff have a good understanding of the new process.

The new self-assessment report is suitably self-critical, adheres closely and productively to headings of the *Common Inspection Framework*, and has at its centre the experiences of learners. Learners' views are gathered through an appropriately thorough formal process towards the end of training, supplemented by plentiful informal feedback gathered throughout training. Action plans have taken very good account of areas for improvement from the previous inspection, but now need some updating to ensure that the company continues to make rapid and effective improvement.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has PBTS made in raising achievements and outcomes for learners?

Significant progress

PBTS has made significant improvements in success rates over the past three years for all learners. Skills for Life success rates have improved from 40% in 2007/08 to 88% in 2009/10, two percentage points above national average. Timely success rates have also improved from 32% in 2007/08 to 87% in 2009/10, 12 percentage points above the national average. Overall level 2 success rates are equally high, rising from 32% in 2007/08 to an excellent 91% in 2009/10. Timely success rates have made a significant improvement from 20% in 2007/08 to 89% in 2009/10, which is 19 percentage points above the national averages. Level 3 learners' success rates improved from a low 38% in 2007/08 to an excellent 91% in 2009/10 and timely success rates also improved from 33% in 2007/08, to 90% in 2009/10, a very high 25 percentage points above national averages. Success rates for different groups of learners are also high, with women performing particularly well to 23 percentage points above the national average. Black African and Caribbean learners also do particularly well, achieving success rates of between 90 and 100%. Black British learners do not perform as well as other Black learners and success rates dropped from 97% in 2007/08 to 77% in 2009/10. White learners perform well, with overall success rates just above the national average of 85%, while timely success rates improved to 89%, 18 percentage points above the national average.

The standard of learners' work is at least satisfactory. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of the technical laboratory processes. Assessment of learners' practical work is satisfactory with clear accounts of their competencies. Assessors ask appropriate questions to determine learners' knowledge and understanding of theory. Learners enjoy their training, particularly the practical laboratory work. Learners are well aware of the significance of health and safety requirements of the area, and practices are clearly understood and closely observed.

Quality of provision

What progress has PBTS made in improving target setting and the quality of individual learning plans?

Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in improving the quality of individual learning plans (ILPs) and target setting. PBTS revised the format for ILPs, to include clearer targets for NVQ unit completion, with reviews of progress when each target is reached. Learners comment on their progress and achievement, highlighting areas of concern. A satisfactory initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is carried out and the results recorded on their ILPs. Literacy and numeracy skills are embedded fully into the vocational qualification, and those learners who need further practice complete work books and practice tests to consolidate learning. Learners complete a skills scan which identifies levels of vocational knowledge and

understanding and highlights the learners' areas for specific development. However, the outcomes of this are not adequately reflected in ILPs.

Attention to health and safety is good and an occupational health questionnaire is completed to ensure learners are fit and able to learn and work in the field. Learners benefit from an advice and guidance interview towards the end of their programme to highlight the progression and employment opportunities. Most learners progress from level 2 to level 3 and all move into employment or further training. Approximately 20% of learners progress into higher education and related professions such as nursing.

Leadership and management

What progress has PBTS made in improving the effectiveness and use of management information systems? Reasonable progress

PBTS has made reasonable progress in developing useful and effective management information systems. Since the previous inspection, the company experimented with commercial software applications, but found none that suited business needs. The company managing director eventually developed a bespoke database linked to a spreadsheet programme which provides clear and easily analysable data reports. Staff in the company understand the system well and, with ease, are able to access useful information about learners' progress.

Managers examine the progress of individual learners on a weekly basis. Good use is made of an appropriate range of charts and other visual and numerical data to analyse both individual and cohort progress and performance. PBTS has an effective system for identifying and alerting managers to slow progress or to learners whose employment, training or personal situations place them at risk of falling behind in the qualification. Data are also well used to generate the company's annual self-assessment report.

What progress has PBTS made in widening participation of learners from under-represented groups? Significant progress

Participation by learners from groups under-represented in this area has increased significantly. Managers make very good use of a wide range of specialist contacts within the pathology, phlebotomy and laboratory areas to offer training to learners from minority ethnic and other under-represented groups. Learners are drawn from a very wide range of hospital, clinical and laboratory settings across Greater London, including from the Health Protection Agency at Colindale and the National Blood Service. PBTS provides volunteering opportunities for jobseekers, and has taken volunteers into customer service, laboratory technician and other training routes. Managers have written and obtained validation for training programmes specifically designed for groups whose needs were not well met by existing qualifications frameworks. For example, the company designed a conversion course to provide

essential practical laboratory training for clinical sciences graduates wishing to pursue careers in hospital and medical laboratories.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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