

NCT Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Established in 2004, Northern Care Training Ltd initially provided training and assessment in health and social care. It has since expanded into other areas and now delivers the following: national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in health and social care; customer service; information, advice and guidance; business administration and management; cleaning and support services; and management and assessors' awards. Northern Care Training Ltd added apprenticeships to the company's portfolio in 2008.

Northern Care Training Ltd rebranded in 2008 and is now known as NCT Ltd to enable it to expand its provision beyond health and social care.

The company employs 19 staff, comprising two directors; one team manager; one contracts manager; two part-time information, advice and guidance advisers; one part-time internal verifier; seven NVQ assessors; one associate Skills for Life tutor; three administrators; and one marketing assistant.

The company has expanded its provision since the last inspection and currently there are 145 learners on Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes, of whom 21% are male and 5% are from a minority ethnic group. There are 99 learners on European Social Fund (ESF) programmes of whom 44% are male and 3% are from a minority ethnic group. These demographics broadly reflect those of the local area.

At the last inspection, in January 2009, the overall effectiveness of NCT Ltd (NCT) was good, as was its capacity to improve. Outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and leadership and management were all good. Equality of opportunity was satisfactory. Provision in health and social care was good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| What progress has NCT made in improving self-assessment and post-inspection action planning? | Reasonable progress |
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Self-assessment was judged as satisfactory at the last inspection. Capacity to improve was judged as good with good plans to diversify areas of delivery. Since then the company has had to face a number of challenges, including the reduction of staff from 25 to 19. However, staff remain remarkably positive in challenging circumstances. The focus continues to be on the learners. NCT is using a much wider range of data more consistently, across the organisation, to monitor performance. The company has now an integrated quality improvement plan and an operational business plan. Staff discuss these plans at their monthly meetings. Being a small company, each member of staff has clearly identified actions. NCT uses complaints more effectively to bring about improvements. Feedback from learners and

employers indicates high rates of satisfaction. The company introduced a new data collection and reporting system but progress has been slow in its effective use. Many of the areas identified for improvement in the self-assessment report are the same as those identified at the last inspection. While the self-assessment is rather lengthy, it continues to be a useful tool for the company and is generally accurate and self-critical.

Outcomes for learners

What actions has NCT taken to improve success rates?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, overall success rates on Train to Gain show a mixed picture. For example, programmes rose steadily then declined to 79.6% in 2009/10, below the national average. Timely success rates on Train to Gain programmes increased slightly, but still lag behind the 75.7% national average. Success rates and timely success rates for health and social care programmes, the company's main subject area, have remained consistently good since the last inspection and remain above the national average at all levels. NCT has introduced more detailed monitoring of individual learner progress leading to prioritised individual actions to improve timely achievement. In-year data show that the number of withdrawals has significantly reduced and timely achievement has improved in 2010/11. The number of out-of-funding learners has reduced from 30 in 2009/10 to only six so far, in 2010/11. More work needs to be done to improve success rates and timely success rates on Skills for Life programmes, which significantly lag behind national rates. Learners and employers report increased workplace skills and increases in confidence, leading to better performance in the workplace.

Leadership and management

What actions has NCT taken in improving its safeguarding arrangements?

Significant progress

Safeguarding arrangements were not graded separately at the last inspection. NCT was judged to be meeting government requirements. Since then, safeguarding has featured strongly on the quality improvement plan with appropriately identified actions, including monitoring that learners feel safe from abuse, bullying and harassment. All staff undergo the statutory checks and safeguarding is prioritised across the organisation. NCT staff are very clear about their roles and responsibilities and very good reporting procedures are in place. Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures. The company has undertaken all key actions on the safeguarding plan. These include; training for staff and the designated officer responsible for safeguarding, and training for directors on safer recruitment. NCT has made useful contacts with all the local safeguarding boards. The company thoroughly monitors all learner placements for health and safety, and service level agreements with employers now include safeguarding arrangements. NCT has dealt appropriately and promptly with all reported safeguarding incidents. NCT provides useful contact numbers for learners and employers on its website. Learners have a good understanding of e-safety and the staff code of conduct is extremely thorough.

What actions has NCT taken to improve the promotion of equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, inspectors judged equal opportunities as satisfactory. The changes to reviews, to improve learner understanding, were newly in place. NCT did not effectively monitor outcomes for different learners. Since then, NCT has worked well in developing both staff and learner confidence, and understanding of equality and diversity. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and are regularly reviewed and updated. All staff have completed equality and diversity training. The company ensures staff are regularly updated through a newsletter and at team meetings. All staff and learners are required to complete successfully, an equality and diversity workbook. Analysis of data is now routine and confirms that there are few differences in outcomes for different learner groups. NCT works effectively with employers to recruit, proactively, learners from under represented groups in all its programmes. Current recruitment reflects local demographics. The company effectively promotes equality and diversity to employers and learners through a quarterly newsletter. NCT has been successful in winning a North East equalities award for good practice and is currently completing the equality and diversity standard

What progress has NCT made in improving the quality-improvement arrangements?

Reasonable progress

NCT has introduced new quality initiatives to secure improvement. All staff now hold relevant teaching qualifications and some are working towards higher level qualifications, to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Observations of other key learner processes have been introduced, including initial advice and guidance. Observation paperwork has been improved to include learners' attainment. Observations are generally well recorded and clearly identify strengths and areas for development but the level of detail varies. The teaching observation form contains recommendations but does not identify clear actions and timescales to drive improvements in teaching and learning. The joint observation process is useful in developing observers but is not effective in standardising grades between observers. Monitoring of subcontractors has been improved to include observations of key learner processes on work carried out by subcontractors. The company monitors more closely, the performance of subcontractors in terms of learners' progress and outcomes. Management meetings are well minuted with actions and responsibilities clearly identified. NCT now uses data more effectively, but does not sufficiently utilise data returns on learner outcomes to identify trends or priorities for improvement.

What progress has NCT made in developing further its strategy to engage with learners and employers to support and promote improvement?

Reasonable progress

NCT has improved its collection and use of learners' and employers' views since the last inspection. Feedback from formal questionnaires, completed by learners, is collected quarterly for NVQs and Skills for Life qualifications. NCT similarly distributes employer questionnaires focusing on 'pre-delivery' and 'delivery' aspects but

response rates are very low. However, the company has significantly improved the response rates to its most recent questionnaire by piloting an innovative incentive scheme. This consists of a draw for a free place on one of its training schemes. The views of employers and learners are suitably analysed and summarised. They are used to inform self-assessment. However, there are insufficiently clear actions directly driven by employers' and learners' views. When actions have been taken they are reported through the newsletters. Most employers and learners are very positive about the training. Any instances of dissatisfaction are promptly investigated by NCT and resolved. Monthly newsletters, circulated to employers and learners, include the collection of views on possible new courses of interest, to help NCT shape its curriculum offer, to meet local needs as fully as possible. Joint celebrations are planned in conjunction with employers. The company works closely with employers to benefit learners. NCT has started to work closely with other providers to secure funding and offer courses to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. The company is establishing links with two local schools.

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