

Expedient Training Services Limited

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

Expedient Training Services Limited (ETS) provides training in construction, plant utilities, health and safety and first aid to businesses across the North East. ETS contracts with the Skills Funding Agency to deliver Train to Gain programmes in construction. The majority of programmes delivered by the organisation are funded directly by businesses. Off-the-job training is provided at the ETS training centre. Training in the workplace is delivered by employers, supported by ETS assessors. Learners following Train to Gain programmes receive all of their training and assessment in the workplace. Currently 140 learners are enrolled on Train to Gain programmes.

The most recent inspection report was published in February 2009. At this inspection, the overall effectiveness of provision and ETS's capacity to improve were judged to be satisfactory, as were leadership and management, quality of provision and equality of opportunity. Outcomes for learners were judged to be good. Provision in construction and the built environment was judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| What progress has ETS made in improving self-assessment and development planning to strengthen provision? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection in February 2009, the inspection team judged that the arrangements for self-assessment were satisfactory. Since this inspection, improvements have been made to the self-assessment process. The current report makes better use of information from subcontractors through the use of their own self-assessment reports. A new management information system collects and analyses learners' views effectively, leading to prompt improvements. For example, furnishings and projection equipment have recently been upgraded. However, feedback is not sufficiently analysed to identify ongoing issues, and actions taken to improve provision are not effectively conveyed to learners. ETS is currently improving arrangements to collect employers' views through the development of an online questionnaire to collect and analyse feedback more effectively.

Communication between managers and staff is good, and feedback from learners and staff is used effectively for self-assessment purposes. However, there is insufficient formal consultation with all staff to ensure that they all contribute fully to the self-assessment report. The quality improvement plan is detailed and includes a range of actions to ensure improvements, each with clear timescales and responsible officers. It includes actions to improve standards continuously and to monitor quality. It also includes actions to strengthen the monitoring of subcontractors and

associates. ETS has made progress in addressing many of the key issues identified at the previous inspection.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has ETS made in continuing to improve overall success rates and success rates within planned timescales?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, achievement and standards were judged to be good. Overall success rates were high and above national rates at all levels. Current data for 2010/11 show a continued trend of improvement. Overall success rates for level 2 learners in 2009/10 were 5% above national rates and, at 100%, were 16% above national rates for level 3 learners. The rate of achievement for level 2 learners within the planned duration of the programme has improved significantly since 2008/09 when it was some 50% below the national rate. In 2009/10, it improved by 50% bringing it broadly in line with the national rate. For level 3 learners it remained at 100%, a significant 32% above the national rate.

Outcomes are carefully monitored and specific actions implemented to ensure that different groups of learners make progress as good as similar learners from other providers. Senior managers have a very good understanding of the variation in success rates across different groups of learners and understand the reasons for these variations. As a result of this understanding, they are able to respond rapidly to any decline in performance.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the promotion and uptake of work-related literacy and numeracy support?

Reasonable progress

All learners receive a useful assessment of their levels of literacy and numeracy. Assessors now make better use of these assessment results, in addition to outcomes from initial assessment and induction, when planning assessments and training. Where a support need is identified, learners are now supported through more targeted arrangements provided by the assessor in the workplace. Most learners continue to receive good individual support and coaching at work that is helping them to complete their qualification within the planned time. Learners who wish to develop their literacy and numeracy skills further now have access to a specialist provider. However, despite careful signposting by ETS, uptake of this provision is low. Newly introduced preparation for employment courses are providing learners with good support, both in the classroom and in the workplace, enabling them to improve their literacy and numeracy and to progress onto recognised qualifications in construction and allied areas. ETS continues to provide translation and language support for learners whose first language is not English.

What progress has been made in ensuring that learners' progress reviews take place on a planned and regular basis, and are used to monitor progress and reinforce information?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, clear guidance has been developed to ensure that progress reviews are planned into learners' programmes. Formal reviews are now regular, and targets are generally challenging and tailored to the learning and development needs of specific learners. These changes are ensuring that learners make good progress towards completing their qualification within the planned timescale. Learners and employers receive useful information on the progress being made through both progress reviews and end-of-assessment reviews. A useful training needs analysis provides employers and learners with helpful information about which further skills need developing. Assessors maintain frequent and regular contact with learners and employers, acting as both mentors and motivators. Learners now have good access to a wide range of additional courses to enable them to develop their workplace skills. Feedback to learners on their level of performance is generally good, although for a few learners there is insufficient detail about actions needed to ensure improvements. Uses of alternative approaches to initial and ongoing assessment are improving, for example with the use of technology to record learners' skills and progress.

What progress has been made to ensure that learners are better informed of progression opportunities to higher levels of training?

Reasonable progress

ETS continues to offer a wide range of specialist training to meet learners' and employers' needs effectively. These courses are carefully planned in consultation with local employers to ensure that the requirements of their business are met. Since the previous inspection, a useful course portfolio has been further developed, providing employers and learners with details of progression routes, alternative and complementary courses, and detailed information on the content of these courses. ETS makes significant investments in staff training. Since the last inspection, many staff have now gained a level 3 qualification in initial advice and guidance which is proving useful in ensuring that learners receive high-quality information about training and progression opportunities. A newly developed 'NVQ and beyond' booklet contains details of progression opportunities available through other training providers, reinforcing the information provided by ETS staff. An entry-level programme now provides a pathway into the construction industry for the long-term unemployed.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made towards implementing planned improvements to the quality improvement systems through observations of key learner processes?

Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection, quality assurance processes were judged to be incomplete; the observation process was being developed. Currently, although some changes have been made to the observation process, developments remain at an early stage. Observations of key learning processes are beginning to take place, although they do not currently cover all aspects of learners' programmes. A new internal verifier is ensuring that standardisation meetings are leading to improvements in paperwork and the structure of portfolios. Assessments and assessment planning are regularly observed, providing assessors with useful information about the quality and impact of assessments, but there are no formal action plans to drive improvement.

ETS requires subcontractors to carry out observations of teaching and learning. However, the quality of these observations is not monitored and there are no arrangements to ensure consistency across the organisations. Outcomes from these observations and the observations of ETS staff are not clearly linked to the quality improvement plan. An appropriate quality assurance system contributes to improvements in achievement and standards although ETS recognises, within its most recent self-assessment report and quality improvement plan, that more needs to be done to improve the monitoring of quality across the organisation.

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