

Lomax Training Services 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

Lomax Training Services Ltd (LTS) provides work-based training to new entrants and the existing workforce in the energy industry. It is a private company owned by the managing director and is based near Newcastle upon Tyne. The employers are located throughout the UK and vary in size from major utility companies to sole traders in the domestic sector. The company offers training towards National Vocational Qualifications at levels 2 and 3 on the Train to Gain programme and as part of apprenticeships. All learners have off-the-job training at one of the training centres. LTS has nine Train to Gain learners and five apprentices as well as learners whose training is subcontracted to LTS by other providers. Around half of its business is in government-funded training and half is provided commercially.

LTS was inspected in August 2009. The overall effectiveness was satisfactory, as was the capacity to improve. Achievement and standards were good. The quality of provision, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity were all 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 been made in the use of self-assessment and improvement planning? | Reasonable progress |
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The self-assessment process was judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection, although staff were not sufficiently involved. The most recent self-assessment report has involved all staff. It has also taken into account the views of learners. Employers' views are not systematically collected and used. Judgements in the self-assessment report are clear but the grades are higher than the evidence indicates. LTS has received detailed feedback on its self-assessment process from a local further education college which subcontracts training to LTS. The company has used the feedback to improve the self-assessment report and the quality-improvement plan.

The quality-improvement plan is used as a working document and is regularly reviewed by managers. It now contains specific target dates. Previously, many of the actions were described as ongoing. The improvement plan focuses on improving existing strengths but not sufficiently on converting satisfactory aspects of the provision into strengths. Many of the actions are not defined in sufficient detail. Staff are aware of the individual steps they plan to take but the quality improvement plan is not used to monitor progress against these intermediate steps.

Outcomes for learners

To what extent have outcomes for learners been maintained and improved? Reasonable progress

LTS is making reasonable progress in maintaining and improving outcomes for learners. At the time of the previous inspection, success rates on Train to Gain were judged to be satisfactory. They had declined to 64% in 2007/08. In the most recent complete year, 2009/10, the overall and timely success rates are both 88%. This is significantly higher than the national timely success rate of 70%. The progress of learners in the current year indicates the success rate is being maintained. None of the apprentices are due to complete their programme yet. The retention rate is 70% of the apprentices who started.

Learners continue to develop good practical skills and technical knowledge. Health and safety are given a very high priority as the needs of the industry demand. Portfolios are good and contain a wide range of evidence which is accurately cross-referenced to the units. The training contributes to the economic well-being of learners and the communities in which they work.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving learners' progress reviews? Insufficient progress

LTS has made slow progress in addressing the weak reviews identified as a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. Very recently, a new individual learning plan and a new progress review form have been developed and introduced. Many of the sections on the individual learning plans are not completed. The reviews now reflect learners' progress towards achieving the different parts of their programme by capturing the percentage progress towards achieving each unit. However, the progress reviews do not always make an overall judgement on the rate of progress being made by the learner. Many progress reviews still do not have specific or measurable targets. Employers are often insufficiently involved in the progress reviews and do not agree targets for their contributions to the learners' programme. LTS has identified these as areas for further improvement in the self-assessment report. The use of questions during the reviews to check and reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity is an improvement but the questions are too vague and general to promote discussion and understanding.

To what extent has the provision of literacy and numeracy support improved? Insufficient progress

LTS has made insufficient progress in improving the literacy and numeracy support for learners, which was identified as a key area for improvement at the previous inspection. A Skills for Life strategy has only recently been introduced and is not yet fully implemented. Since the previous inspection, initial assessment of literacy and

numeracy has been implemented for all learners. Individual learning plans record the assessment results but they do include a plan for meeting individual needs. Trainers continue to provide informal support but they still do not have literacy or numeracy qualifications. Three members of staff are working towards level 3 qualifications so that they can support learners in the future. The key skills sections of the apprenticeship individual learning plans are not completed and learners are unaware when or how their key skills training will be delivered. The key skills aspect of apprenticeships is not planned to start until the second year of the programmes. LTS has plans for integrating key skills learning into the second year project work but the process for preparing learners for external tests is not well developed.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the use of data to manage the provision? **Reasonable progress**

At the time of the previous inspection, data were not readily accessible to managers and staff. They were not systematically used to manage the provision. A new management information system had been installed. The same system is in operation and is now accessible to all managers and staff. They routinely use it to look at learners' records and to check the progress of individual learners. Data are used to produce reports which show learners' progress and achievement sorted by a wide range of criteria, such as gender, ethnicity and disability. They are used to compare the performance of individual trainers. The number of learners is currently sufficiently small to allow managers to analyse the lists of learners manually. Data are not routinely used to produce summary reports or, for example, to calculate percentage success rates. LTS has not identified a standard set of reports that managers and staff need to manage the provision. Data are not used routinely at management meetings to identify areas of concern or to make decisions.

What progress has been made in implementing an effective system of observation of teaching and learning? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection the system for observing teaching and learning was not effective. Since the inspection, an observation plan has been introduced. All staff are observed annually, either internally or by staff from a local college. The procedure for resolving areas for improvement from observations has been clarified and strengthened. The grades and outcomes from observations are now systematically analysed and reported to senior managers quarterly. The moderation of observations has been strengthened and includes the use of observations carried out by external training providers. Observation records now better support the judgements and grades awarded. Senior managers have set clear standards for teaching and have implemented a systematic approach to developing the teaching skills of trainers, leading to external qualifications. As at the previous inspection, the observation process does not include other aspects of the learners' experience, such as progress reviews or induction.

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