

# CfBT Next Step North East

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 58864

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**Last day of inspection:** 29 June 2011

**Type of provider:** Next Step contract

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## **FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

CfBT is the prime contractor for the face-to-face Next Step service in the North East. The North East region includes Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Wearside, County Durham and the Tees Valley. The region is characterised by considerable variation in affluence, diversity and employment.

CfBT's head office is in Reading. A regional manager and two assistant managers are based in Gateshead and are responsible for provision in the North East. They are supported by seven coordinators and administrative staff also based in the North East. CfBT provides the majority of the service directly, using advisers employed by the company. The remainder of the service is provided by 19 subcontractors. The service is provided in 500 venues across the region. These include Jobcentres and other outreach venues.

CfBT's nextstep service was inspected in February 2010, when all key aspects of its provision were judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| <b>What progress has CfBT made in devising and implementing quality assurance processes that inform self-assessment?</b> | <b>Reasonable progress</b> |
| <b>What progress has it made in implementing any resulting plans for improvement?</b>                                    |                            |

At the previous inspection, arrangements for monitoring performance were satisfactory. However, subcontractors' quarterly reviews were insufficiently rigorous and CfBT's session observation programme did not contribute effectively to improving provision. Since then, CfBT has changed a number of quality management and co-ordinating roles and these are beginning to impact beneficially on provision. CfBT's re-structured self-assessment process is more inclusive and makes better use of the views of all stakeholders. A quality co-ordinator now ensures that regular and thorough audits to monitor the quality of skills action plans are carried out and action is taken to improve if necessary. CfBT has improved its observation programme and the information it provides. A partnership co-ordinator now oversees and monitors the quality of all subcontractors' work. Subcontractors report that their quarterly reviews are now more thorough and challenging. A member of staff has recently been appointed to provide labour market information (LMI). She has quickly established an LMI focus group and protocols for providing advisers with regular and informative bulletins on employment opportunities. Customers benefit from advisers'

improved knowledge of the labour market. The latest draft self-assessment report includes clear actions for improvements. However, it does not yet link to a separate quality improvement plan.

## Outcomes for learners

### **What progress has CfBT made in gathering information on progression outcomes and using it to make decisions about provision?**

### **Significant progress**

At the previous inspection, the number of customers contacted to determine their progression outcomes was very low. Since then, managers have taken very effective action to follow up customers to obtain information on their progression outcomes. Their research and evaluation of a range of methods for gathering this information was thorough, and they have been successful in making significant increases in the number of customers successfully contacted. Between August and October 2010, 2,348 customers, or one third of all those seen during that period, were successfully contacted. Managers analyse data on outcomes carefully and use it particularly well to help shape delivery of the service and extend advisers' knowledge of local employment or training opportunities. As a result, CfBT has provided targeted workshops to help customers gain jobs in specific sectors and has improved its links with employers to help facilitate customers' progression to employment. However, in its most recent draft self-assessment report, CfBT has not yet made sufficient use of data on outcomes to measure the impact of its activities on the quality of provision.

### **What progress has CfBT made to develop procedures to improve attendance at face-to-face sessions?**

### **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, attendance was low and although advisers tried to contact customers to ensure their attendance, this had not had a significant impact on attendance levels. Since then, CfBT has taken a number of suitable steps to improve attendance. Advisers regularly contact their customers to remind them of their session. They follow up non-attendance with customers or the Jobcentre Plus staff who have made referrals. Customers are given appointment cards and information about the service prior to their appointment. CfBT has held guidance sessions for Jobcentre Plus staff to improve their knowledge of the Next Step service. Managers deploy advisers carefully to ensure that they are available in Jobcentres on claimants' signing-on days or at venues where there is high demand for the service. Attendance at some venues has improved, but it remains low, particularly at some Jobcentres. Advisers are working with staff there to help them understand the service so that customers are more motivated to attend their booked sessions.

## Quality of provision

### **What progress has CfBT made in developing and implementing an observation programme to monitor and develop advisers' practice?**

### **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, observation reports were insufficiently evaluative, were not moderated effectively and action plans for developing advisers were not detailed enough. CfBT has revised its arrangements for observation of sessions and these are now effective. It has provided beneficial training for a team of observers and provides clear guidelines on observation processes. Moderation of observation reports is more thorough. CfBT's observation plan is clear and includes all directly employed staff and a suitable sample of subcontractor staff. However, there has been slippage in implementing the plan and some planned observations have been delayed. Most observations now result in appropriate action plans for individual advisers' improvement. However, in a minority of cases, observers' feedback is insufficiently detailed and does not provide enough guidance for advisers on how to improve. Observation records are satisfactory, but some observers overstate what advisers do well. CfBT is aware that this remains an area for further improvement.

Managers at CfBT analyse observation reports effectively to identify good practice and plan a suitable development programme. They provide appropriate professional development and are effective in encouraging the sharing of good practice among advisers to improve their performance.

### **What progress has CfBT made in developing advisers' confidence and understanding of Skills for Life so that they promote these more effectively in sessions?**

### **Significant progress**

At the previous inspection, advisers lacked confidence in discussing Skills for Life topics with customers. CfBT has made significant progress in improving advisers' ability to promote Skills for Life during advice sessions. Advisers have participated in a wide range of well-planned training activities. Team meetings and professional development days ensure advisers gain up-to-date knowledge and share good practice. A recent professional development day included a workshop on how to record discussions and actions relating to customers' Skills for Life needs in their action plans. CfBT has detailed Skills for Life plan with clear actions; managers monitor its implementation carefully. Session observation records now include judgements on how well advisers tackle Skills for Life discussions during their interviews with customers. One part of the region has trialled an assessment of all advisers' literacy and numeracy skills. This has increased these advisers' awareness of the content of the tests and successfully identified gaps in their skills. As a result, advisers have benefitted from specific Skills for Life support and they can now promote Skills for Life more confidently to customers. CfBT is planning to expand this experience and opportunity to all staff.

**What progress has CfBT made to improve privacy for customers' sessions?****Significant progress**

At the previous inspection, a few sessions took place in open plan settings that did not ensure sufficient privacy for customers. Since then, CfBT has made significant improvements to the accommodation it uses, with the establishment of three specialist offices for Next Step. These venues are welcoming, with good security and ample confidential interview space. The new offices are conveniently located and are easily accessible. CfBT works well with its partner organisations to provide customers with adequate privacy. For example, at Jobcentres, CfBT has negotiated increased use of separate rooms or desks in open plan offices that offer more privacy. If sessions take place in open plan areas, advisers use a good range of strategies to ensure sensitive discussions are kept confidential. Managers have allocated funds to enable staff to hire private rooms for interviews if necessary. All venues are checked to ensure customers have access to suitable environments for their interviews. Feedback from customers indicates that an overwhelming number are highly satisfied with the venues for their sessions.

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