

EXG Ltd (trading as Exchange Group)

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 58160

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Last day of inspection: 29 June 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

EXG Ltd (EXG), trading as Exchange Group, is a privately owned company based in Chiswick, West London. It was founded in 1992 as Input Output Centres and became EXG in 2003. The core business is through learndirect contracts. In 2008/09, several new programmes were implemented including Train to Gain programmes and apprenticeships. EXG currently has 33 delivery sites with 24 in London. The company has four directors, supported by the executive team. There are currently 171 staff.

Since September 2010, EXG has subcontracted the apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes to two private training providers: Red Kite Learning and AQT Limited, both based in London. Currently, there are 17 apprentices and 5 Train to Gain learners working towards qualifications in health and social care, and 20 Train to Gain learners working towards qualifications in foundations for learning and life.

The last inspection was in December 2008. Main grades were good in all areas except quality of provision and equality of opportunity, which were satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| What progress has been made in ensuring that quality assurance and self-assessment are identifying and rectifying all areas for improvement specified at the last inspection? | Reasonable progress |
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Since the last inspection, EXG has restructured its management and appointed two new staff to the executive team; they are responsible for improving the overall quality of provision and for managing its work-based provision. EXG has improved its quality assurance processes and implemented comprehensive management information systems to track and report on the progress of learners, as well as on key performance indicators for all of its programmes. However, it has been slow to implement these procedures with its subcontractors.

EXG has successfully rectified the key areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. EXG has improved the rigour of the moderation of its observation of teaching and learning with identification of common areas for development. These are acted upon but are not systematically monitored centrally. In its last self-assessment report, EXG correctly identified the use of users' views as an area for development. Although the provider has developed online surveys for learners, it does not yet make full use of the feedback and has not yet developed appropriate systems for the collection of employers' views. Nevertheless, EXG is fully aware of its strengths and areas for improvement.

Outcomes for learners

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| <p>What progress has been made in improving the overall success rates and rates for learners completing within their planned timescale for both work-based learning and Train to Gain?</p> | <p>Reasonable progress</p> |
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At the previous inspection, achievements for apprentices and Train to Gain learners were satisfactory, although it was too early to make a judgement on the apprenticeship success rates. Train to Gain success rates have improved and in 2009/10 were above the national average for both overall success rates and for learners completing within their planned timescale. EXG's data show that the end result for 2010/11 will be similar.

Apprenticeship success rates have been very low, with only a small improvement in 2009/10 and a significant drop in 2010/11. EXG identified that many of the young people recruited were put into inappropriate subject areas and were working at the wrong level. Due to the uncertainties in funding, EXG stopped recruitment of its apprentices, and when funding became more secure it decided to subcontract both apprenticeships and Train to Gain. Recruitment with the subcontractors began in September 2010 and EXG's data for these apprentices show a very high retention rate, with all learners on target to complete their apprenticeship within the planned end date. The new comprehensive management system enables EXG to more effectively monitor learners' progress and identify actions to support learners who are falling behind their targets.

Quality of provision

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| <p>What progress has been made in ensuring that all learners have individualised programmes and that targets are specific and time bound?</p> | <p>Reasonable progress</p> |
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At the last inspection, short-term targets were not specific enough and planning for apprentices was insufficiently individualised. Most learners now agree the targets and timescales for their programmes with their assessors on an individual basis. Assessors readily adjust target dates when necessary in response to changes in learners' circumstances, or if their progress is different from that expected. For example, learners are able to complete earlier than planned if appropriate and many do. However, for a minority of Train to Gain learners, the provider sets generic timescales and does not focus training sufficiently on the individual to enable learners to progress according to their abilities.

Assessors make themselves readily available to learners. When planned assessments cannot take place, assessors are very flexible in rearranging times to suit learners' work patterns. Assessors work well with employers to ensure that they give learners appropriate work to enable them to demonstrate their competence in all aspects of their units. The quality of learners' files varies across assessors. Long-term learning

targets are generally clear and well defined. However, short-term targets for too many learners still have insufficient detail to help the learners know what they need to do to improve.

What progress has been made in developing and implementing effective arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, EXG had insufficiently developed arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs. In November 2009, EXG started working with an external consultant to raise staff awareness. Both the sales team and assessors were involved. This resulted in a more appropriate diagnostic initial assessment, improved support for learners and the development of subject-specific resources and revision books for literacy and numeracy. The consultancy project has made these available on the internet for other providers.

The new recruitment process and initial assessment enable assessors to develop an individualised learning pathway with support from the specialist skills for life staff within EXG. This was initially piloted with Train to Gain learners and, since its introduction, outcomes for learners have improved. EXG did not then introduce this process to the apprenticeship programme as the company had decided to use subcontractors. However, the subcontractors have access to all the materials. EXG has introduced the new model and materials across other programmes in the company. In a recent survey visit by Ofsted looking at numeracy, EXG was judged as good in tackling the challenge of ensuring that learners gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in fully developing and implementing effective administrative systems for work-based learning?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, EXG did not have sufficiently established systems to monitor some aspects of work-based learning programmes. Since the inspection, due to uncertainties about funding for its work-based programmes, EXG discontinued its direct delivery and subcontracted it to two other providers. It implemented a comprehensive management information system that provides timely and accurate business information, as well as data on all operational aspects of learners' progress. All staff have been trained in analysing and using the data appropriately, enabling managers and assessors to monitor learners' performance significantly faster and more accurately. EXG also appointed a senior manager with responsibility for work-based provision and has recently developed quality assurance procedures and documentation to drive forward the improvement of EXG's subcontracted work-based provision. However, EXG is in the early stages of implementing these systems with its subcontractors and is not yet fully aware of the quality of the provision offered.

What progress has been made in improving the safeguarding procedures to ensure that they fully meet the requirements for both vulnerable children and adults?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, the arrangements to safeguard vulnerable learners were not sufficiently thorough. EXG has made significant progress in this area and they now fully meet government requirements. The policy and procedures are comprehensive and learners receive a summary that is easy to understand. All staff who either meet learners or have access to the learner databases have Criminal Records Bureau checks every three years. All staff have basic safeguarding training supplemented by online training and regular updates and information in the weekly online newsletter. Following the training, 92% of staff reported that they felt more confident in understanding safeguarding and reporting procedures.

The team of safeguarding officers across the centres ensures local access for staff and learners, and there is a dedicated email address. Safeguarding is covered at induction for learners and above every computer there is a 'Did you know?' card that includes facts on safeguarding. Safeguarding is one of the areas for checking when setting up any new subcontractors and EXG has invited the two subcontractors in London to the next safeguarding steering group meeting.

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