

London College of Beauty Therapy

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

London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT) was founded in 1995 and since 2004 it has held its own contracts for further education (FE) funded provision and work-based learning provision. LCBT has two sites, both close to Oxford Street, in Central London, with three commercial salons. The college offers a range of short courses and qualifications in beauty therapy, complementary therapies and nail services. Apprenticeship programmes are offered in beauty retail and beauty therapy.

At the last inspection in June 2009, LCBT's overall effectiveness was judged to be good, with good capacity to improve. The subject areas of hairdressing and beauty therapy and customer services were both good. Low success rates within expected timeframes for Train to Gain learners prompted a focused monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has the provider made in its self-assessment and quality improvement planning to drive improvements since the last inspection?	Reasonable progress
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LCBT has successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified during the last inspection. The nail service extraction facilities were installed shortly after the inspection, and sharing of good practice and resources has increased. Overall success rates and success rates within expected timeframes have improved; staff have received training in equality and diversity and better use is made of data. Significant improvements have been made to the virtual learning environment (VLE), allowing learners to access good quality learning materials and quizzes. Learners also benefit from the availability of online testing facilities. Other improvements have been made to the sharing of information between the business support unit and retail programmes.

The college continues to make and plan improvements across the provision and departments. However, the self-assessment process is not a strong feature of the improvement planning process. The self-assessment report is out of date and is being reviewed. The recently produced departmental self-assessment reports are insufficiently self-critical and not all make clear judgements on what is good or needs improving. Several reports are too descriptive; many contain statements on activities that are normal practice, and judgments do not state the impact on learners.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made to ensure Train to Gain learners and apprentices achieve their qualifications within the timeframes expected?

Significant progress

The college has made significant progress in ensuring that learners in Train to Gain and apprenticeships achieve within the timeframes expected. The college recognised that the original expected end dates had been unrealistic and adjusted the duration of the programme to better meet the needs of employers and learners. Train to Gain performance data show an improving trend in the period from 2007/08 to 2009/10, and that last year, the proportion of learners achieving their qualification within the planned timeframes was at the national average. For apprentices, success rates for achievement within expected end dates show a trend of improvement and performance was well above average in 2009/10. Current data for 2010/11 show that this performance is being maintained.

What progress has been made to maintain the high success rates on learner responsive provision?

Reasonable progress

LCBT has made reasonable progress in maintaining high success rates on learner responsive provision. At level 2, which accounts for the majority of learners, success rates improved in 2008/09 compared to the previous year. At level 3, success rates remained high for adult learners but fell to the national average for learners aged 16 to 18, with weaker performance in both retention and pass rates. In 2009/10, success rates were at or above the national average except at level 2 for learners aged 16 to 18, where low retention contributed to low success rates. In-year provider data for retention show much improved performance for the 2010/11 year, with significant improvements in retention for both learners aged 16 to 18 and adults.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving success rates for all, and the knowledge and awareness of staff and learners of equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

Comprehensive staff training has been effective at improving staff knowledge and awareness of different aspects relating to equality and diversity. Tutors and assessors' confidence has increased and they now feel able to explore different equality matters with learners. LCBT has developed a good range of interesting scenario-based case studies which ensure learners discuss a wide range of equality and diversity situations. However, these case studies are not routinely used with apprentices. Assessors are starting to encourage apprentices to make better use of the learning materials and resources on the VLE, but the current resource pack for apprentices contains out-of-date information on equalities legislation.

Learners value the fact that groups are made up of people from diverse backgrounds, which ensure they become familiar with dealing with different skin types and cultures. Several learners choose to get involved in events and industry talks which bring them into contact with a wide range of people from different backgrounds, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Senior managers are aware that there are differences in performance between some groups of learners, such as Black Caribbean, but have not been able to identify any underpinning reasons. Programme managers are not routinely reviewing the performance of different groups as part of the programme reviews or self-assessment process.

How effectively are managers now using data to identify areas for improvement?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, managers had access to an extensive range of information systems but were making insufficient routine use of data to monitor and challenge in-year performance trends at each level by specific groups. The provider has improved further the availability and timeliness of management information and the cohesiveness of systems to provide it. It has made significant progress in the extent to which managers make regular and thorough use of data to analyse and evaluate the performance of learners and to plan improvements to the provision.

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