

Rathbone Training

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Rathbone Training (Rathbone) is an educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. The head office is situated in Manchester and the company has around 60 education and training centres across the UK. Its main activity is to provide training and support to disadvantaged people, working mainly with the unemployed to improve their quality of life. Each year over 17,000 young people join Rathbone's training programmes, approximately half of whom leave school without achieving any formal qualifications. The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) fund the training programmes in England. The Welsh Assembly Government funds the Skillbuild provision in Wales.

Rathbone was inspected in August 2010. The overall effectiveness and main aspects of the provision were judged to be satisfactory as was provision in child development and well-being, retailing and warehousing, and preparation for life and work. Equality and diversity and safeguarding were judged to be good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit, which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Rathbone made in involving employers in self-assessment and implementing a challenging and effective moderation of the self-assessment report? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, self-assessment appropriately involved staff at all levels but did not take sufficient account of the views of employers and the moderation process was not sufficiently challenging.

Since the previous inspection, the process of self-assessment has changed significantly. Staff continue to be involved in the process and are well supported by effective guidance and training. Data are now used successfully at all levels to contribute to judgements. Managers effectively moderate and challenge local reports resulting in clearer and more consistent judgements. The final report is concise and self-critical and it leads to clear and precise targets for improvement.

In the latest self-assessment report, Rathbone used the results of an external survey and information gathered by centre managers to represent the views of employers. This involved employers in the self-assessment process but Rathbone recognises that it did not provide a sufficiently consistent or systematic approach. Rathbone has developed an employer survey to capture the views of employers for the next report but this has yet to be implemented.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Rathbone made in improving overall success rates and reducing the significant variation in success rates across subject areas and geographical regions?

Reasonable progress

The overall success rate for apprentices continues to improve, but in 2009/10 remained below the national average. In-year data for 2010/11 show that this improvement is continuing and the overall success rate is now around the national average. However, the success rate for the relatively small number of advanced apprentices has declined since 2008/09 and is low.

Rathbone has been successful in reducing the significant regional variation in apprenticeship success rates although the variation between the highest and lowest is still 21 percentage points. The variation in success rates between subject areas is slightly higher than in 2008/09. The performance gap between men and women has consistently reduced from 22 percentage points in 2008/09 to just 7 percentage points this year.

The proportion of Entry to Employment (E2E) learners progressing to employment, further education or training has consistently improved since 2008/09 and is currently high at 70%. Rathbone has made satisfactory progress in implementing foundation learning, the successor to the E2E programme. However, progression rates for learners on foundation learning are lower than those for the E2E programme and vary regionally by up to 20 percentage points. Rathbone recognises that qualification success rates for the Foundation Learning programme are low and is introducing actions to improve them.

Quality of provision

What progress has Rathbone made in improving assessment practice, particularly in childcare, increasing the range of assessment methods, and setting measurable targets for learners to enable assessment of practical competence as well as theoretical knowledge?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, although satisfactory overall, assessment practice varied considerably across the organisation and was inadequate in childcare. Learners had limited understanding of the process, it was not planned to meet individual needs and target setting was weak.

Rathbone has successfully remedied most of the weaker aspects of assessment identified during the previous inspection. Staff and learners now have a clearer understanding of the process. Extensive staff development and team working have led to substantial improvements in target setting for learners across the whole provision. Staff now use a much broader range of assessment methods and make good use of technology to gather evidence.

Assessment practice in childcare has improved significantly. Rathbone has employed more assessors in childcare. Learners now take greater responsibility for their own progress, gathering a broad range of evidence and are better able to link theory and practice. Internal verification processes have improved and are now an integral part of the quality improvement arrangements.

What progress has Rathbone made in increasing the availability of work experience and work placements for learners?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, Rathbone did not provide sufficient opportunities for work placements for learners on the E2E programme. Many centres did not have sufficient links with employers.

Rathbone has made reasonable progress in increasing the number of learners who benefit from work experience and work placements. The proportion of learners who have taken part in a substantial work placement has doubled since the previous inspection but remains low at just 7%. Rathbone has established a new national employer engagement team of nine staff to secure work placements and employment opportunities for young people. This team is making effective use of Rathbone's database of employers to establish links and increase the range of opportunities for learners. It has established strong working relationships with some of the larger employers to help provide work and work experience for disadvantaged young people. Work experience and preparation for work now have a higher priority, with learners engaged in work preparation activities for eight to twelve weeks of their programme.

What progress has Rathbone made in improving the quality of teaching and learning by identifying and correcting poor practice and sharing good practice?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, although satisfactory overall, there was considerable variation in the quality of teaching and learning. Systems to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning, including the observation programme, were insufficiently thorough.

Rathbone has made reasonable progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning through staff development, investing in better resources and strengthening quality assurance systems. It has invested significantly in learning resources, including computer suites in all of its centres. Learners now enjoy attractive and well-presented, professional, quality handouts and learning materials. Tutors benefit from a good variety of training, peer and mentor support and coaching. Around 75% of tutors are now either qualified or working towards a teaching qualification. Tutors from different vocational areas work well together sharing good practice. The

organisation is making satisfactory progress towards establishing a virtual learning environment to improve learner and staff access to learning resources.

The arrangements to observe teaching and learning have been refined and now place a greater emphasis on learners' experiences. All staff have been observed to establish a benchmark for the organisation. However, Rathbone acknowledges that observers still do not comment sufficiently on learning and that too many lessons are over-graded. Actions to rectify this have been developed and are being implemented.

Leadership and management

What progress has Rathbone made in improving the use of data, particularly at centre level, to monitor the performance of different groups of learners and to inform target setting and actions for improvement?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, Rathbone did not sufficiently analyse data at centre and subject level to inform target setting. Targets for different groups of learners were not sufficiently established.

The use of data has improved significantly. A new central data team now produce comprehensive and very useful monthly reports for managers and staff. Centre staff and sector leaders now have reliable and comprehensive data that they use well to analyse performance and to contribute to target setting and discussions with staff. The improved use of data has led to changes in the range of programmes offered in some regions in order to provide opportunities that are more balanced for men and women. The performance of different groups is monitored centrally, regionally and by centre managers. Analysis of the progression rate of different groups from foundation learning is now routine. However, analysis is not yet possible for qualification success rates. Managers monitor the participation and performance of different groups nationally. Actions to encourage learners into non-traditional roles are carried out but Rathbone does not routinely analyse the impact of these actions. The error rate in Rathbone's data has reduced significantly and is now well below the national average.

What progress has Rathbone made in maintaining good arrangements to safeguard its learners?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, arrangements to safeguard learners were judged as good.

Rathbone continues to meet its legislative requirements. A central register of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for all staff is maintained and these are renewed every three years. Safeguarding continues to have a high priority in Rathbone's work. Good information about safeguarding is provided to learners and staff, who are supported by regional designated officers and a national coordinator. Complaints, concerns and other instances relating to safeguarding are well recorded and appropriately investigated. Where necessary, Rathbone meets its duty to refer employees and ex-employees to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Reports on all safeguarding issues are routinely provided to managers and to the trustees.

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