

Careers Yorkshire and The Humber Limited (Next Step)

Focused monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Victor Shafiee HMI

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Address: Careers Yorkshire and The Humber Limited
c/o igen Ltd
1 Eastgate
Leeds
West Yorkshire
LS2 7LY

Telephone number: 0113 225 9000

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

The prime contractor for Next Step Yorkshire and The Humber is Careers Yorkshire and The Humber Limited (CYH). CYH is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It has five members: Calderdale and Kirklees Careers; Aspire-i; igen; Prospects Services Limited; and Babcock Enterprise. The board of directors provides strategic leadership. There are seven unpaid non-executive directors, one from each of the five members, one from Union Learn and an independent board member. The regional manager of CYH reports to the board.

CYH has a network of 23 subcontractors across the Yorkshire and Humber region. The five main subcontractors are Calderdale and Kirklees Careers; Aspire-i; igen; Prospects Services Limited; and Babcock Enterprise.

At its previous inspection in October 2009, all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework were judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored by inspectors during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| What progress has CYH made in improving self-assessment and quality monitoring, and what impact do these have on customers' experiences? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, self-assessment was judged to be good. The use of customer and stakeholder views has improved and is now more effective. Regular quality audits focus well on the customers' experience. Managers make good use of a wide range of quality assurance mechanisms to identify areas for improvement. The current self-assessment report is comprehensive and good use is made of it to secure improvements. Arrangements to share good practice have improved. Subcontractor meetings are used effectively to disseminate good practice between partner organisations. The arrangements for evaluating and monitoring performance at subcontractor level are appropriate. Managers regularly monitor subcontractors' progress against an appropriate range of targets. However, a few targets for the high-performing subcontractors are not sufficiently challenging.

The vast majority of subcontractors are sufficiently involved in the process of evaluating the provider's work. Using comprehensive criteria, subcontractors complete an annual review of CYH's performance. However, a few reviews are insufficiently thorough. Action plans to raise standards continue to be effective, focus sharply on key areas for improvement and have led to clear improvements in customer attendance, observation of guidance sessions and improvements in the arrangements for the identification of customers' literacy and numeracy needs.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has CYH made in the collection and use of data to ensure continued improvement in customer progression outcomes?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the arrangements for contacting customers to establish if they had progressed into employment, education or training were insufficiently thorough but have improved and are now satisfactory. Managers have worked hard to establish a central focus on improving successful outcomes for customers. Data provided by CYH indicate that, although the rates of successful outcomes have fluctuated and remain below contract targets, the overall trend is one of improvement with a significant increase in the proportion of customers entering employment.

Following the previous inspection, CYH took prompt action to ensure customers were contacted in a timely fashion. However, following contractual changes in August 2010 CYH's arrangements for collecting customer progression data suffered from a significant setback. Since April 2011, CYH has effectively reviewed and revised its arrangements. Customer progression data are now collected and analysed fully using detailed records and thorough systems.

At the previous inspection, target setting for subcontractors was insufficient. All subcontractors now have clear targets for customer progression. The monitoring of subcontractors' performance against such targets is thorough. Managers are aware of inconsistencies in subcontractors' performance and work closely with subcontractors to improve their overall performance.

What progress has CYH made in developing systems and procedures to improve attendance and to reduce waiting times for appointments at face-to-face guidance sessions?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, customer non-attendance rates and waiting times were too high and CYH did not have systems to monitor them. Following the inspection, CYH took swift action and worked well with subcontractors to establish strategies to monitor and reduce customer non-attendance rates and waiting times. The collection, analysis and reporting of customer attendance rates, waiting times for appointments, and late appointments are well established. Since the previous inspection, attendance rates have improved and are now very high at a number of subcontractors. The proportion of customers seen within five working days has improved significantly. All subcontractors have challenging targets to improve further customer attendance rates and to reduce waiting times. Managers use good monthly information reports to monitor carefully the performance of each subcontractor. Reasons for not meeting targets are identified clearly and analysed rigorously. CYH works closely with subcontractors' staff to disseminate good practice and to help them identify effective ways of reducing waiting times and improving attendance.

Feedback from customers is used effectively to minimise waiting times and to monitor performance in this area.

Quality of provision

What progress has CYH made to improve action planning for customers? Significant progress

CYH has made significant progress in improving action planning for customers. Action plans are now detailed. All staff have attended mandatory training in action planning. Advisers are skilful at using action planning to guide customers to meet their agreed targets. Action plans focus directly on the needs of the customer and accurately record key activities. Advisers encourage customers to take responsibility for their own progress and effectively help customers to agree, prioritise and review their job-seeking and other targets.

CYH has good systems for evaluating and monitoring the quality of action plans. CYH's observation programme now includes careful evaluation of customers' action plans. Regular quality improvement activities evaluate a suitable sample of customers' action plans and results indicate that the quality of action plans has improved considerably.

CYH staff work very closely with subcontractors to improve customer action plans. Subcontractors now have quality improvement targets for the consistency of action plans. Subcontractors' operational managers have been trained in evaluating the quality of their customers' action plans and take swift action to tackle underperformance. These developments have resulted in greater consistency at subcontractor level. CYH has produced a good practice guide that provides good guidance and support for advisers.

What progress has CYH made in taking action to improve the quality of sessions? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the observation process for guidance sessions was not fully implemented. This has improved and is now effective. Senior managers have taken effective actions to increase the number of observers by recruiting and training individuals who have relevant experience and qualifications. Eighty per cent of subcontractors now have a trained observer. The smaller subcontractors work with observers from partner organisations. Thorough monitoring arrangements ensure all relevant staff are observed. Clear grading criteria assist observers in making appropriate judgements. Observers grade sessions accurately and feedback to advisers is helpful. In the cases of an unsatisfactory grade, advisers receive effective follow-up support and further observations take place, usually within a month.

Findings from observations are used well to inform training both for individuals and at subcontractor level. A clearly defined system of moderation ensures appropriate consistency of grades and effective sharing of good practice. Advisers receive a wide

range of training activities, some of which are mandatory, to improve their practice. Increasingly, training is provided online to enable greater access. The annual quality review of each subcontractor takes full account of outcomes from the observation process. Observation documents have been updated and are now used more effectively.

Leadership and management

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| What progress has CYH made in implementing a Skills for Life strategy so that advisers offer appropriate guidance and referrals in sessions? | Reasonable progress |
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At the previous inspection, CYH had a draft Skills for Life strategy and action plan which had still to be finalised and implemented. Since the previous inspection, managers have successfully made improvements in the development of customers' literacy, numeracy and language skills. There is now an appropriate Skills for Life strategy. A high priority is given to ensuring that customers' literacy, numeracy or language needs are identified early. Advisers have a good awareness of the need to identify and support these customers. Effective plans have ensured that the vast majority of advisers have the necessary expertise or training to enable them to identify customers' literacy, numeracy and language skills more effectively. Advisers are now more confident in identifying customers' literacy, numeracy and language skills and have good strategies to refer customers to appropriate training and resources. However, a few session observation records do not include clear judgements on how well advisers identify customers' literacy, numeracy and language needs.

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