

Skills for Health Academy

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

Skills for Health Academy (SfHA) is the training arm of Skills for Health, the sector skills council for health. SfHA has three academies offering programmes for young people and adults located in London, Liverpool and Newcastle. The company has contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to offer young apprenticeships, apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in the North West, London and the North East. All adult training in London and the North West is provided through subcontracting agreements with 31 other providers, the majority of whom are National Health Service Trusts.

SfHA was inspected for the first time in April 2010. The inspection judged overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity as satisfactory. Health, care and public services; and business, administration and law were also judged as satisfactory. Safeguarding was judged good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>How effectively has SfHA further developed and implemented its quality improvement processes, particularly those to improve the teaching and learning and self-assessment processes?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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The new quality meetings structure is providing a firm foundation for monitoring and reviewing progress against all aspects of the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. SfHA now collects the views of learners and employers systematically, which contributes to the self-assessment process. SfHA has established an effective process for engaging with learners to ensure their views contribute to the process. It recognises there is more to do to reflect fully the views of partners and employers. The self-assessment report insufficiently reflects the impact of some of the identified strengths, particularly within the subject areas.

SfHA is making reasonable progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning through staff development, better resources and quality assurance systems. Learners now enjoy attractive, well presented and professional handouts and learning materials. Tutors from different vocational areas work well together sharing good practice. Feedback from observations of teaching and learning is clear and SfHA is working hard to use learner outcomes to improve practice across the organisation. SfHA acknowledges that it needs to establish a comprehensive moderation process to ensure thoroughness and accuracy in identifying issues and implementing improvements.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving success rates, particularly the progress learners make in achieving their qualifications within their planned training targets?

Reasonable progress

The last inspection reported on SfHA's trend of improving success rates on its Train to Gain programmes. This trend of improvement continues, bringing the headline success rate close to the national average. Although the headline Train to Gain success rate is much improved, the rate of success for advanced learners is still below the national average, as is the success rate for those learners working in the North West. The high success rate on the young apprenticeship provision has improved further and is now excellent.

SfHA has implemented a wide range of strategies to support learners in completing before their planned end date. Performance management is much improved. The more frequent evaluation of accurate data provides exception reports identifying those learners close to or beyond their planned training date. They have reduced the number of learners who exceed their planned end date from 200 to 23.

Subcontractors refer to the improved programme structure and increased contact with SfHA as contributory factors to learners achieving more quickly. They value the guidance available through the more frequent provider forums and the informative quality assurance visits completed by SfHA staff. The SfHA website provides easy access to clear guidance on all aspects of provision.

Quality of provision

How effectively has SfHA improved the frequency of assessment and ensured that learners' progress reviews include clear, measurable targets to which learners and employers can commit?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection SfHA is more thorough in auditing the frequency of learners' assessment and progress reviews. The frequency of assessments has improved through better planning and targeted assessments. Learners are fully conversant with assessment processes and practice. The frequency of progress reviews has also improved. Providers electronically supply the dates of completed reviews, with more consistent follow up of learners not attending reviews. SfHA has introduced new individual learning plans and review documentation.

SfHA's quality assurance staff have completed a thorough analysis of review practice and the completion of documentation. A summary report identifying recurring areas for improvement has formed the basis of focused training at subcontractor forums. Learners value the rich and comprehensive discussion during reviews and reviewers take full advantage of other professional discussions and assessment planning to reflect on progress. However, SfHA recognises that the recording of clear, measurable learning targets is still insufficient.

What progress has been made in ensuring that stakeholders and other interested parties have a clear understanding of the SfHA offer and progression routes in order to provide learners with good, accurate advice and guidance? **Reasonable progress**

A range of well-presented information booklets is now available for learners, schools and subcontractors. A website supported by SfHA provides good information, advice and guidance for learners and stakeholders. The site has good links to learning resources and other related websites. Clear explanations and resources help learners who are starting or progressing through their training but there is limited information on progression routes to help those learners completing their programme.

Learners now benefit from assessors who are better informed, as very relevant updates are included in the four monthly provider forums. All learners have good understanding of how to progress their learning, most have advanced to the next level and some have high aspirational long term goals.

SfHA is committed to building on staff skills with plans to accredit staff in information, advice and guidance qualifications. SfHA has recently achieved Matrix accreditation in the North West and intends to extend this across the whole Academy.

To improve its evaluation of the learner experience, SfHA has introduced a more structured process to capture the views of learners and to analyse the success of new information, advice and guidance processes. SfHA also evaluates advice and guidance as part of its quality observation process.

Leadership and management

How significantly has SfHA further improved its strategic objectives, and organisational and individual targets, and how effectively are data now used to monitor progress against targets and identify emerging trends? **Reasonable progress**

The establishment of new ways of working has improved the cohesiveness of the organisation across the country. The executive director and academy director make frequent visits to all regions. Lines of responsibility and communication are now clear and are supporting more effective communication through well-minuted weekly and monthly meetings. The role of the board in monitoring data and quality improvement is thorough with frequent reports from senior managers highlighting the performance of their areas of responsibility. Future developments are based on careful budgetary analysis and a clear understanding of local and national priorities. Improved use of the organisation's management information system, supported by a thorough annual appraisal process and performance review meetings, is ensuring more regular and comprehensive monitoring of staff activity against targets. The use of data to support judgements is now more secure because managers understand data better. Targets are generally more specific, less onerous and more meaningful to staff. SfHA recognises that further work is required to record and monitor learner progress for

those on subcontractor programmes, and to identify and eliminate the reasons for variations in performance across regions and subject areas.

How effectively has the appointment of equality and diversity strategic leads promoted best practice and improved learners' understanding of diversity and related issues?

**Reasonable
progress**

The strategic leads have been instrumental in improving equality and diversity practice. Data analysis, evaluation and target setting in this area of the organisation are now established. Thorough reporting ensures that senior managers and board members are well informed of any gaps in participation and achievement, and appropriate targets set to resolve these issues. SfHA carefully monitors the progress made by different groups of learners, taking action where appropriate.

Training for all staff is ensuring that equality and diversity are at the heart of the organisation. Well-planned learning meets different needs and preferences. For example, sessions are reorganised to enable learners to participate in Eid celebrations. Following an analysis of key issues affecting progress, a 'hidden disabilities' tool has been developed and is used very effectively to identify potential barriers to learning and for establishing strategies to enable learners to progress and achieve.

Teaching staff are developing learners' understanding of diversity through reflection on their work roles. However, there is insufficient identification of strengths and areas for improvement during the observation of teaching and learning. Learning ambassadors effectively engage and promote learning opportunities to local communities in the wider health sector.

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