

ITEC North East Ltd

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

ITEC North East Ltd (ITEC) is a not-for-profit independent training provider with registered charitable status. Established in 1986, ITEC operates from training centres in Newton Aycliffe, Middlesbrough and Gateshead. The company contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to deliver a range of apprenticeship programmes, including young apprenticeships, apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and adult apprenticeships. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 319 learners.

ITEC was inspected in October 2009. The overall effectiveness and main aspects of provision were judged to be satisfactory, as was the provision in each of the subject areas inspected.

Since the previous inspection, ITEC has undergone a management restructure, increased the range of vocational areas offered, and relocated to different premises in Newton Aycliffe. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in developing the use of self-assessment and quality improvement action planning to benefit learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, ITEC's use of self-assessment to improve quality was judged to be satisfactory. However, inspectors noted that the observation of teaching and learning process was not sufficient to bring about improvement.

The following year, the provider's self-assessment report was more closely aligned with the criteria of the Common Inspection Framework. Moderation through a peer review network provided a useful challenge to ITEC over the judgements made and the balance between descriptive and evaluative content. The quality manager involved all staff in the process. The self-assessment report led to action for improvement that benefited learners.

In the current year, more robust quality procedures, including the better use of the observation of teaching and learning process, has provided a stronger evidence base for the self-assessment process that ITEC is currently undertaking. This places an appropriate emphasis on different stages of the learners' experience during their programme. Staff are fully and more constructively engaged in identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for all groups of learners? **Significant progress**

At the time of the previous inspection too many learners were making slow progress, although the position was improving. These improvements have been sustained and timely success rates are above national averages. More significantly, the gap between overall and timely success rates has closed, although ITEC has yet to reach the challenging targets set for timely completion. Overall success rates have continued to improve and are above national averages.

Staff now record and monitor very closely learners' progress each month, using a highly effective tracking system on ITEC's intranet. Trainers give learners making slow progress or who are in danger of not completing their qualification additional attention and support. Staff analyse the reasons for slow progress to ensure that the action taken is appropriate to bring learners back on target. Assessors are held more to account for the progress of their learners and for the achievement of completion targets. This approach has been a major factor in the continued improvement in success rates. Variations in these rates remain across some different groups of learners but these are not significant. The introduction of a wider suite of qualifications at higher levels that meet the needs of both learners and employers has increased progression opportunities.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made towards identifying the reasons for and addressing the variable performance of different groups of learners? **Reasonable progress**

Changes to the organisation since the last inspection and the introduction of more effective methods of monitoring learners' progress and assessors' performance have had a very positive impact on ITEC's improved capacity to identify the reasons why variable performance existed between some groups of learners. For example, at the last inspection success rates for learners with a disability and those from a minority ethnic background were lower than for other learners but were improving. This trend has continued to the point where success rates for these learners are broadly in line with those of other groups.

ITEC has also recognised that learners following qualifications in information and communication technology were performing less well than in other occupational areas. It successfully identified the causes and took effective action and, as a result, success rates in this area have improved. Learners aged 25+ achieve significantly better than other learners and ITEC has accurately identified the reasons for this.

What progress has been made in developing the awareness and involvement of employers in the assessment and reviewing of learners' progress?

Reasonable progress

At the time of the previous inspection some employers were insufficiently aware of learners' progress and were not always involved in reviews. ITEC has since made improvements in the way reviews and the outcomes of reviews are communicated to employers. Employers are now more involved in the review process and better informed of the progress being made. They support their learners well and are aware of the work they are required to do in order to meet their targets for completion. However, some employers remain less involved.

ITEC visits employers to seek their views but although the records confirm that employers' involvement has increased this is not universally the case. Employer feedback is not yet collated routinely and evaluated centrally. Improved contact and higher visibility of ITEC's staff has, however, contributed to the increases in timely and overall success rates.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the management and coordination of provision?

Significant progress

At the time of the previous inspection, ITEC had plans to introduce a new management structure. These changes were completed in January 2010 following the formation of a new management team and the appointment of additional staff to support the introduction of functional skills and new occupational areas. More centralised management roles have improved consistency in the way training is delivered and monitored across the three centres of operation. Staff from different centres now work much more effectively within and across teams. The appointment of new staff with good recent and relevant experience has strengthened the organisation's capacity to improve the quality and breadth of provision. Communication has improved. The company has supported assessors very well to work flexibly both from home and while travelling by providing laptops and mobile phones. This enables them to respond quickly to learners' or employers' needs. Better sharing of management information through the intranet and through well-focused meetings have increased accountability for performance and speed of response to any issues of concern, such as the progress of individual learners. ITEC has strengthened further the performance management of staff through a revised appraisal system, the more systematic use of one-to-one meetings with managers, and through observations.

What progress has been made towards strengthening quality procedures to drive improvement?	Significant progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, quality improvement procedures were not sufficiently well used to strengthen provision. Since then the quality manager has introduced a more coherent strategy and set of procedures. Quarterly quality meetings draw together very effectively the findings from quality processes such as observation and portfolio sampling, identifying and subsequently monitoring actions for improvement that directly benefit the learner. For example, these have led to improvements in the induction and initial assessment procedures. The quality team has introduced the systematic use of observations that lead to graded assessments and actions for improvement. This year ITEC has gathered learners' and employers' views through structured face-to-face interviews instead of through written questionnaires. Although this change has led to better quality feedback that has more effectively led to actions for improvement, there has not been time to gather views from more than about one sixth of learners and employers.

ITEC uses its quality procedures very effectively to improve provision and promote a strong culture of continuous improvement among staff. However, the outcomes are not collated and analysed to give an overview of the quality of provision in a form that can be used easily to inform annual self-assessment.

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