

Central Training Group

Focused monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Central Training Group (CTG) offers work-based learning in hairdressing, information and communication technology (ICT), business and Foundation Learning. Training is offered in London and Essex. CTG works with a range of partners which include a college and schools, employers and other work-based training providers. At the time of the visit, 1,238 learners were enrolled through either a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency or through subcontracted-in or subcontracted-out provision.

The most recent inspection report was published in May 2010. CTG was graded good in overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management. The subject area inspected, commercial services, was graded good. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

What is the provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, CTG's capacity to improve was judged as good. Since then, significant progress has been made in all of the key areas for improvement as identified in the inspection report. CTG has a very clear understanding of the progress made since the previous inspection and what needs to be improved further. Staff are particularly clear about the organisation's future challenges and continue to be actively involved with initiating and managing quality improvements.

Since the previous inspection, apprenticeship success rates have improved and success rates for recently introduced provision are very high. CTG has further improved initial assessment and the recognition of learners' skills and personal circumstances to inform programme planning and support arrangements. Previously, completion of the apprenticeship programme within the allocated time was generally low, but it has improved and overall is now above the national average for similar provision. Data systems have been further improved to give greater clarity about learners' progress.

CTG has effectively maintained very close and well-established partnership arrangements and continues to share best practice and offer valuable support to new partners.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving apprenticeship success rates?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, apprenticeship success rates were judged satisfactory. Since then, CTG has made significant improvements to the overall apprenticeship success rate in 2010/11. The success rate for recently introduced ICT provision is very high. Success rates for business apprenticeship provision, which has doubled since the previous inspection, are now very high. ICT and business success rates for 2010/11 are significantly above the sector national average for 2009/10. Hairdressing success rates have improved well and faster than the sector average. Overall they are now above the national average for similar provision.

What progress has been made in improving learners' attendance?

Reasonable progress

The latest CTG self-assessment recognised the need to improve learners' attendance. CTG has followed through with a range of attendance improvement plans, for example the introduction of a financial reward scheme for learners with excellent attendance, and improved recognition and support for learners with particular needs or circumstances that may indicate that good attendance may be an issue. CTG has revised attendance guidance and continues to apply disciplinary procedures actively and promptly. Based upon feedback from recently introduced learner focus groups, CTG has planned more breaks and interactive teaching in theory lessons to improve attendance. However, financial incentives favour learners who are more capable of attending well and are not sufficiently geared towards those whose full attendance is unlikely to be achievable. Targets set in action plans applied to learners with low attendance are not always sufficiently clear. It is too early, as yet, to judge the full impact of initiatives to improve attendance.

The quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the planning of assessments to keep pace with learners' skills development?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, assessments did not always keep pace with learners' skills development. Since then, CTG has introduced a number of initiatives to support more timely assessment planning. For example, improvements to assessment planning at the start of a learner's programme now ensure that learners and employers have greater clarity about what assessments are expected and their timing. CTG has introduced well-attended training and assessment 'drop-in' sessions. A revised management information system now tracks learners' achievement in greater detail. Learners now have greater control of their assessment planning. They and employers are positive about the changes and the progress learners make.

With the endorsement of employers, CTG has much improved the arrangements for offering a customer service qualification to some hairdressers prior to starting their hairdressing qualification. Part of the customer service qualification is accredited to the hairdressing qualification and this has resulted in a speedier completion of the hairdressing qualification.

CTG assessors have been issued with internet-enabled phones to access the learner tracking system. When visiting work placements they can accurately inform employers and learners of current progress. Learners report that they know exactly where they are in their qualification and know exactly what they have yet to complete.

What progress has been made in developing learners' long-term personal targets and enabling them to plan their own progression?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, the setting of long-term targets to enable learners to plan their own progression was not always used effectively and learners were not sufficiently involved in the setting of targets. Since then, significant progress has been made. Redesigned paperwork now allows learners the opportunity to record their own targets and negotiate the pace of progress to suit their needs. The assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills has much improved and now results in clear and accurate identification of learners' support needs.

Learners report much improved awareness of their targets. Improvements to the coordination of on- and off-the-job training have resulted in learners and employers gaining a greater understanding of the progress made. The recent introduction of a level 3 hairdressing programme has given many learners the opportunity to plan long-term targets that now include a higher qualification. CTG has continued to forge particularly good links with industry to motivate learners and this actively supports career planning. The recent introduction of a financial reward and in-house recognition incentive scheme has improved motivation for many learners.

Since the previous inspection, completion rates within agreed timescales have improved greatly for a significant group of CTG learners in hairdressing.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring that the 'effective systems' to improve the quality of teaching and learning have been maintained or improved?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection, teaching and learning were judged to be good. Recent initiatives have continued to improve the quality of teaching and learning. All staff are now teacher qualified or in the process of completing a teaching qualification. More experienced teachers offer effective support through internal peer observations. Significant improvements have been made to CTG's teaching and learning grade profile. In 2009/10, 65% of teaching and learning was graded as good or better. By the end of the 2010/11 academic year, this has risen to 89% with no inadequate grades recorded. The process for the internal observation of teaching and learning remains robust.

Particularly good use is made of new learning and social media technologies. Learners report that these are very beneficial in improving their learning and

planning their programme. For example, they discuss course concerns online, share experiences, find out about the content of training workshops, are signposted to exhibitions and shows, become aware of learners' achievements and celebrate success. Links between on- and off-the-job training remain strong. Learners are very positive about the recent introduction of learning 'drop-in' sessions in other settings with opportunities to observe high-quality demonstrations.

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