

Alliance Learning Limited

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 50387

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Last day of inspection: 10 May 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Alliance Learning Limited (Alliance) is a registered charity which provides work-based learning for employers in Bolton and the surrounding areas. Alliance receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency to provide work-based training for around 350 apprentices and advanced apprentices annually. Around 50% of learners are on engineering courses, 30% are on health and social care courses and 20% are on business administration courses. Approximately 70% of Alliance's business is government-funded training. Since March 2012, Alliance has offered dental nurse training through subcontracting arrangements with Dentrain Professionals Limited. Currently there are 10 learners in this provision.

Alliance was last inspected in August 2010. Overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management and capacity to improve were satisfactory. Provision in health and social care was good. Engineering and manufacturing technologies; business, administration and law; and preparation for life and work were satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Alliance made in ensuring that self-assessment is identifying and rectifying all areas for improvement specified at the last inspection?

Insufficient progress

The last inspection identified the need for improvements in accurately evaluating the provision and implementing the quality improvement plan. In August 2011, Alliance restructured its quality improvement team and revised their responsibilities. The team now reports directly to the Operations Executive. The new structure has improved the effectiveness of the quality improvement process by ensuring that a quicker response is made to address performance issues. The self-assessment process has been further developed to include the views of staff and stakeholders. However, the most recent self-assessment report is not sufficiently evaluative or critical. The report includes too much description and does not adequately use the information from the company's quality system. Findings from the teaching and learning observation process are not used. The self-assessment report does not consider sufficiently the impact on learners of the strengths it identifies. All actions in the quality improvement plan are drawn from the inspection report. However, the company has not implemented some important actions, for example the improvements which were needed in target setting for learners and the use of targets in learners' progress reviews. These both remain areas for improvement. The present arrangements to moderate the findings of the self-assessment report are not effective and the latest self-assessment report overstates the impact of the improvements made.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Alliance made to improve all learners' overall success rates and their success rates within the planned time?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection, overall success rates were satisfactory and improving. They have continued to improve and in 2010/11 overall success rates were eight percentage points above the national rate. During the same period, success rates within the planned time improved to 76.4% which is 11 percentage points above the national rates. Success rates for advanced apprentices aged 19–24 years improved to just above the national rate. However, within this improving trend outcomes for some groups of learners have declined. In engineering, overall success rates for apprentices aged 16–18 years declined from 81.4% in 2009/10 to 74.3% in 2010/11 which is at the national rate. During the same period, these learners' success rates within the planned time declined to 53.1%. In 2010/11, the success rates of learners aged 25 years or over in business, administration and law improved to 66.7%, although this is still low. In 2010/11, Train to Gain learners' success rates declined to 87.3% which is three percentage points below the national rate. While Train to Gain learners' success rates within the planned time improved to 77% in the same period, it remained four percentage points below the national rates. Based on provider data, current learners are making satisfactory progress.

Quality of provision

What progress has Alliance made to improve the use of initial assessment in identifying learners' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection, trainers did not sufficiently identify and set clear and measurable literacy, numeracy and ICT learning goals. Alliance has purchased new software to assess learners for their literacy and numeracy and to plan any support which they require. The results of these tests are now used effectively to provide learners, where appropriate, with additional support and detailed and specific learning plans. Tutors systematically monitor the progress learners make in improving their literacy and numeracy and take effective action when any learner requires further support. The analysis of the progress of a small sample of learners during the visit indicated that they made good progress from entry to intermediate level. Alliance's arrangement for the assessment of learners' ICT skills is currently being piloted and it is, therefore, too early to see its impact.

What progress has Alliance made in developing the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to improve the quality of teaching and training?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection the use of ILT was underdeveloped. Since the inspection, Alliance has developed a detailed ILT strategy with clear and specific aims and objectives and is making satisfactory progress towards its implementation. Alliance has been successful in seeking funds to purchase a good range of ILT equipment and software. All classrooms have interactive electronic boards to support learning. All tutors have been trained in the technology and some tutors are using it successfully to make lessons more interesting. Alliance is piloting electronic portfolios in business administration and the use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) for engineering learners. Plans are in place to extend its use across all subject areas in the next year. Alliance has now good interactive resources to support teaching and learning in automation. All tutors and learning development officers now make effective use of digital equipment such as dictaphones, laptops, mobile phones and digital cameras to gather electronic evidence of learners' competencies. During the visit, inspectors observed good use being made of ILT and the VLE in an engineering session to engage learners and promote learning.

Leadership and management

What progress has Alliance made to improve the observation of teaching and learning process? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection the observation of teaching and learning was not sufficiently effective. Since the inspection, Alliance has fully reviewed its practice to improve the consistency of its observations of teaching and learning sessions. Alliance has reduced significantly the number of observers and has developed new documents which focus on all the main aspects of teaching and learning including individual coaching, progress reviews, and advice and guidance, all of which are observed and graded. In 2011/12, most tutors were observed and areas for improvement were identified. However, not all of the records of the observations focus sufficiently on the quality of learning and some of the identified strengths are normal practices. The observation records are moderated for consistency of judgements and grades. However, not all these are accurate and many are over graded. As this is the first year of the implementation of the new process, Alliance has clear and detailed plans to review the implementation of the new observation process and improve the accuracy of its grades.

What actions has Alliance taken to increase the participation of under-represented groups in the provision? **Reasonable progress**

The last inspection identified the need to increase the participation of under-represented groups in all areas of learning and to challenge occupational stereotypes. Since the inspection, Alliance has taken a number of satisfactory measures to increase the participation of under-represented groups. Tutors and managers visit an increasing number of schools to promote engineering provision to female learners and health and social care provision to male learners. Alliance has

developed partnerships with different community groups to increase the number of learners from minority ethnic communities. Course information leaflets and the company's website satisfactorily challenge occupational stereotypes. The number of learners from under-represented groups who express an interest in the provision has increased. Alliance is working with employers to promote equality of opportunity further and to challenge occupational stereotypes. However, the number of learners in occupational areas from the under-represented groups is still low.

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