

Harrogate Training Services

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 52135

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Last day of inspection: 24 May 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Harrogate Training Services (HTS) is a private training provider located very close to Harrogate town centre. It holds contracts with System Training Group for apprenticeship training programmes and with the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) for the foundation learning programme. HTS has eight members of staff and also works with two self-employed assessors. There are nine learners on the foundation learning programme and 30 learners on apprenticeship programmes in children's care, learning and development.

At the last inspection in July 2010, the overall effectiveness of provision was judged to be satisfactory, with satisfactory capacity to improve. Outcomes for learners were good. Quality of provision, and leadership and management were satisfactory. Safeguarding was good and equality and diversity were satisfactory. Children's care, learning and development was also satisfactory.

All of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report have been incorporated in the themes for this monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in developing further the self-assessment and quality improvement procedures?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection recognised that self-assessment formed an integral part of the quality assurance process with the quality improvement plan linked to strategic objectives. HTS continues to develop quality assurance and all staff, led by the senior managers, work effectively as a team. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and evaluative. The quality improvement plan is clear and accessible. It is updated very frequently and is linked to business needs, although it does not cover issues such as slow progress in sufficient depth. Staff are proactive in putting forward ideas for improvement and share responsibility for following up on actions and suggestions.

HTS has strengthened self-assessment procedures by taking more account of learners' and employers' views. These are collected formally and informally during workplace visits to learners and employers or through employer forum meetings. Appropriate action has been taken to introduce improvements. For example, employers requested more information about what learners were learning during off-the-job training sessions. In some cases, this has enabled them to link more closely off-the-job training with work-based activities.

The new subcontracting arrangements have not yet had any impact on self-assessment or on the development of quality improvement as HTS is still developing these areas independently.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made towards improving learners' outcomes? Insufficient progress

Overall outcomes for learners were good at the last inspection and higher than the national average but the number of learners who completed their qualifications within the planned time was low. However, the improving trend in overall success rates has not continued. Although remaining at around the national average, in 2010/11 there was a significant dip in overall success. Outcomes for the current year show an improvement to well above the national average but still below the provider's 2008/09 level. Action taken to address slow progress on apprenticeships has been ineffective, hindered somewhat by the transition to functional skills to replace key skills and the introduction of a new apprenticeship framework.

Attendance at off-the-job training sessions has improved. Flexible measures have been successful in ensuring that most learners can attend training at times that do not conflict with their work commitments. HTS also carries out training at employers' premises where necessary.

Learners on the foundation learning programme make good progress. In 2010/11, 81% completed their learning goals and 71% progressed into a positive outcome, and these rates are being maintained. The number and range of qualifications achieved is good and has improved over the last two years.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made towards improving training and assessment on apprenticeships and on the foundation learning programme? Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection, teaching and learning were satisfactory. However, the teaching methods used lacked sufficient variety. Support for literacy and numeracy was underdeveloped.

Changes to the use of training accommodation have created a better learning environment. The main training area is now located on the top floor of the centre to avoid classroom interruptions. The addition of an interactive whiteboard adds variety to learning activities. However, the room is too small to accommodate tables or desks easily. Observation records show that staff use a range of teaching and learning activities in the classroom.

HTS has improved learners' access to off-the-job training and functional skills workshops in the training centre. New training materials for apprentices help learners understand better the standards they are required to meet by explaining specialist terms. HTS has developed the use of guided discussion to help learners understand the theory and apply it to their own workplace practice. HTS has developed functional skills training packs to support learners and taken positive steps to strengthen the qualifications and training of staff supporting functional skills.

What progress has been made towards improving progress reviews?	Significant progress
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At the time of the last inspection, inspectors found that although assessors provided clear evidence of learners' performance, their feedback to learners was too descriptive and did not fully identify competencies achieved or how to improve. Many learners found it difficult to link theory with practice.

Since then, the scope of the twelve-weekly progress reviews has broadened to support learners' development more effectively. They now include more meaningful discussions of health and safety, equality and diversity, and any barriers or issues affecting learners' work or training. Learners and assessors make better use of technology, such as video and audio recordings, to provide evidence. The use of a digital recording pen has made the gathering of written evidence more efficient. Employers are better informed about the content of the training programme and more involved in the review process. Assessors routinely ask for their views on learners' performance and keep employers updated on how the learner is progressing. This strengthened liaison has led to a clearer understanding by learners of the link between theory and practice. Assessors have improved the quality of feedback they give to learners on their work and make effective use of emails to respond swiftly.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made towards strengthening employer engagement in learners' training?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the last inspection, although there were some examples of good employer engagement, in most cases, their involvement was insufficient. Contractual arrangements did not specify clearly what was expected of employers, especially with regard to releasing learners for training. HTS has introduced a more flexible approach which better accommodates employers' business needs and still ensures that learners have regular planned access to off-the-job training, either at their workplace or at the training centre.

Employers are more aware of their contractual obligations and work with HTS to ensure these are met for the benefit of their learners. Employers are fully informed by email of learners' progress, attitudes and attendance after each off-the-job

training session. As a result of their increased awareness of learners' progress, some employers adjust learners' work to fit in with the topics covered during off-the-job training.

Employers report that their views on how the programme could be improved are sought and they particularly value the more frequent and productive dialogue that now exists between them and HTS. Where learners have problems or are not making sufficient progress, employers and HTS work together to resolve them.

What progress has been made in continuing initiatives to widen the recruitment of different groups, including the recruitment of male learners on to childcare courses?

Significant progress

At the time of the last inspection, HTS had introduced strategies to increase the number of male learners in childcare. However, these strategies had not made an impact.

Since then HTS has strengthened its initiatives to recruit more male learners. It promotes opportunities in childcare very well through positive male role models, using a male guest speaker to talk to learners on the foundation learning programme and increasing the participation of male apprentices in off-the-job training sessions. A male assessor from HTS attends events at local secondary schools to inform young people about the training available, emphasising the career pathways that training in childcare can open up, such as teaching in schools. These strategies have been very successful in increasing the number of male learners; three of the 30 apprentices are male and three more are about to join the programme.

HTS has approached various organisations to encourage referrals from a wider range of learners, including those with additional support needs. It has improved the support it can give, making better use of initial assessment to identify and meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs, strengthening the delivery of mathematics training through group training sessions and recruiting volunteers to work with individual learners.

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