

# TNG (Avanta) Ltd

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 50242

**Name of lead inspector:** Elizabeth Warriner HMI

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**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

TNG, part of the Avanta group, has provided skills training, jobs for unemployed people and business start-up advice for 28 years across England. Avanta Enterprise Ltd was established in 2006 to manage the merger between TNG and InBiz. It has restructured since the 2010 inspection. Since January 2012, it no longer recruits learners in some regions, principally in the east and midlands, but it is supporting existing learners to complete programmes.

Just over 1,500 learners aged between 16 and 65 are funded through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), forming 7.5% of turnover. Approximately 470 are on pre-employment training. The remainder comprise 850 apprentices and 200 Train to Gain learners. Currently, health and social care is the largest vocational area, but Avanta will cease this offer when the remaining learners complete. Avanta plans to expand its new retail apprenticeship schemes, while retaining its administration and management provision.

Three subcontractors, Valkyrie, Training Futures and Construction Skills People, support work-based learners. Another subcontractor, Express Direct, delivers employability training. Only Valkyrie held a contract during the last inspection.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**How well has Avanta implemented national quality assurance arrangements in its skills division to ensure continuous improvement?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, quality improvement arrangements were satisfactory but managers had been slow to implement quality assurance systems. The latest self-assessment report is clear and self-critical. Staff contributed well to the self-assessment process, which took account of users' views. Avanta is developing additional approaches to surveying users to gain their feedback. The quality improvement plan is appropriately derived from self-assessment and inspection findings, with specific actions for improvement. Managers review and update it regularly. Internal reports show Avanta has made good progress on every area for improvement identified, including the review of quality processes and procedures.

Managers give a high priority to quality assurance arrangements and ensure good practice is identified and shared at team meetings. Arrangements to observe teaching, learning and assessment have recently been restructured to enable regional internal verifiers to carry out observations. When staff fail to meet criteria for a good grade, managers offer appropriate support, training and development. Avanta carries out rigorous and thorough quality assurance of its subcontracts. It undertakes stringent and systematic audits, and samples learner records and files to

check compliance. Managers plan and monitor quality arrangements effectively to achieve consistency across programmes and regions.

## **Outcomes for learners**

### **What progress has been made in improving success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices?** **Insufficient progress**

The success rate for apprentices at the previous inspection was 63%, which was below the national average. Most adults were on Train to Gain programmes with high success rates. This situation is now reversed, and nearly all work-based learners are apprentices. Success rates fell steadily from 2008 to 2011. In 2010/11 they were well below average at 44%, with only 37.1% of the 278 leavers completing within the expected time.

In April 2011, through the effective use of an improved management information system by the new management structure, it was identified that a large group of learners had been mistakenly registered on apprenticeships because administrators did not fully understand recruitment procedures. Managers notified the SFA of this and took decisive action to rectify it with the SFA's agreement and support. While most learners stayed on programme, 132 of 312 leavers in 2010/11 were transferred to more appropriate courses, and Avanta implemented extra support for the many others remaining on programme. It is too soon to see the full impact of these measures. Interim data suggest that overall success rates have regained their level at the previous inspection, although the longer time taken by learners needing extra support to achieve has reduced the timely success rate significantly.

### **What progress has been made in improving qualification success rates and progression rates for learners on employability programmes?** **Reasonable progress**

Avanta has changed and improved its pre-employment training offer since the last inspection, when outcomes for clients were low. The new pre-employability programme has raised learners' achievement significantly. Since it started in October 2011, 411 of the 430 learners who left the programme (96%) have achieved an employability qualification. Nearly 90% of these have progressed into Avanta's Jobcentre Plus provision. To date, 53 have gained employment, but it is still too early to judge how successful Avanta will be in helping the rest of the group into work.

In the final year of the very small Entry to Employment (E2E) programme, success rates nearly doubled to 41%. Achievement on its successor programme, Foundation Learning, has already increased and is set to rise further because many of the qualifications are awaiting certification by awarding bodies. At present, 18 of the 33 learners (53%) have achieved all learning aims, 104 between them. When the 92 remaining certificates are awarded, only one learner will have left without gaining some or all of their aims, a marked improvement on previous E2E results.

## Quality of provision

**What progress have staff made in improving the identification of learners' medium and long term aims to set and monitor targets that help learners to maintain progress appropriate to their experience, abilities and aspirations?**

**Significant progress**

The previous inspection identified that learners had insufficiently individualised targets, which were not always monitored or adjusted appropriately. Avanta has made significant progress in implementing new systems and training assessors to use them well. Enhanced recruitment procedures now ensure that learners join a programme that best meets their needs, abilities and aspirations. Rigorous initial assessment includes systematic screening to improve the match between learners' work, prior attainment and the units learners study, and to plan an individual programme to suit them. Assessors have improved the use of diagnostic testing to identify learners' starting points and plan literacy and numeracy support.

Avanta has carried out effective training to develop assessors' understanding of target setting, and to collect and share good practice in recording learners' medium- and long-term aims. A new online system gives learners greater ownership of their programme. They use it confidently to upload work in between visits. Those spoken to were proud of their progress, and their employers noted improvements in skills and self-confidence.

**What progress has been made in improving the quality of recording in learning plans and reviews to evaluate and measure learners' progress?**

**Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, the quality of recording in learning plans and reviews was insufficiently detailed. Avanta now has a comprehensive, well-designed online system to hold this information. Every learner record is fully mapped to the qualification, defining clearly what remains to be covered and allowing all interested parties to monitor progress. Colour-coded entries indicate progress and alert assessors when learners are at risk of falling behind. Learners have very good access to learning materials and guidance about each unit. Employers can log in for a useful summary that keeps them informed of their employees' progress. Assessors record detailed commentaries for each visit on the system, but reviews are recorded on paper forms and later scanned in. This is one of a few features, such as full integration with the PICS software, which remains to be completed.

Learners' targets are generally clearer and more personalised than previously, but some reviews still contain insufficient detail about what is required to achieve them. Assessors promote safeguarding and health and safety appropriately. However, some comments recorded in reviews with respect to Every Learner Matters themes are not relevant and show a poor understanding of the focus of each theme.

**What progress has Avanta made in developing programmes to enable retail workers in small pharmacies to access training?**

**Significant progress**

Avanta has responded exceptionally well to support a group of workers otherwise unable to gain access to training. A large pharmaceutical supplier, AAH, approached Avanta in 2010 to develop this support, having recognised that small pharmacies need help to develop their staff and often lack the capacity or knowledge to do this. They have worked very productively in partnership to develop Avanta assessors' understanding of how the retail environment in chemist shops differs from others. Four fifths of workers in these businesses are women working part time, many of them from minority ethnic backgrounds. Avanta intervened particularly effectively with the national apprenticeship service to waive new working hours requirements that would have excluded them from participating. The pilot has been very successful in engaging workers from this neglected sector and will be rolled out nationwide in July.

**Leadership and management**

**How well has Avanta embedded performance management procedures to improve the quality of provision at all centres?**

**Significant progress**

At the previous inspection, Avanta's recently introduced performance measures had not been sufficiently embedded. Subsequently, the skills division has undergone a number of major changes, particularly to the management team. Current managers have established a strong focus on performance management. Well-considered key performance indicators have been introduced for all groups of staff, raising expectations of performance across all areas of the provision. The company has effectively implemented a change from regional offices to a national office, and this enables better performance management and control of systems. A comprehensive approach to performance management, using appropriate key indicators, has been introduced consistently across the provision.

Monthly assessor performance reviews are used very effectively to measure targets against actual outcomes. These reviews are thorough and include recorded consideration of every learner allocated to the assessor, mapping their progress and assessing risk against clearly defined criteria. Agreed actions for improvement are clear, with specific target dates for completion which are followed up fully at the next performance review. The implementation of these procedures is still relatively new, but early indicators show that managers are better able to control and monitor the quality of the provision, and to support staff in improving it.

**What progress has been made in developing and implementing systems to collect and analyse equality and diversity impact measures, and using them to narrow achievement gaps between different groups?**

**Reasonable progress**

Avanta had started to collate information on equality and diversity impact at the previous inspection. It has now developed much more rigorous and detailed analytical systems, and is using the information well to identify and support groups of learners needing extra help to succeed. Managers receive regular and detailed reports, which are analysed nationally and by centre. They have made particularly good use of information to target support in individual centres. Recognising that a group of Eastern European learners in one centre were not progressing as well as their peers, they provided training and development for a multilingual member of staff from the same country to become their assessor so that the learners can receive better support. Managers use indices of deprivation well in choosing where to site employability training provision, particularly in the North East, where they have a new contract.

Avanta audits subcontractors' processes to ensure that they measure, record and use equality and diversity indicators. One subcontractor responded effectively to local needs by recruiting more staff from backgrounds similar to those of learners in particular neighbourhoods where it operates. This has improved communication with existing learners and persuaded more people from minority ethnic groups to participate in learning.

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