

Smart Training and Recruitment Ltd

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Reinspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Smart Training and Recruitment (Smart) is a large independent provider of work-based learning with 10 training centres across England and its headquarters in Newport on the Isle of Wight. Smart holds a national Skills Funding Agency contract for intermediate and advanced apprenticeships, a small contract for National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) only training and a small Education Funding Agency contract for Foundation Learning. Most of Smart's income is from government-funded training. Smart provides training at both intermediate and advanced levels in sales, retail, hospitality and catering, cleaning and support, business administration, customer service, management, information and communication technology and Foundation Learning.

At the inspection in February 2012, overall apprenticeship framework success rates had been low for three years. Overall effectiveness was inadequate, as was capacity to improve. Outcomes for learners and leadership and management were inadequate; however, quality of provision, safeguarding and equality and diversity were satisfactory. Hospitality and catering and Foundation Learning were satisfactory, but business administration and law was inadequate. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Smart made in its self-assessment and quality improvement planning to drive improvements?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, self-assessment was inadequate. The analysis of performance data to inform the self-assessment report was weak. Grading was inaccurate and over generous. Action planning for improvement was insufficient to develop quality effectively. The report made no reference to low achievement rates. Targets for improving success rates for learners were not sufficiently ambitious to bring about significant improvement in overall performance. Managers now set ambitious targets for increasing success rates and these are leading to measurable improvement. Action planning has improved and has already had a beneficial impact on developing quality improvement processes. The analysis of performance data has improved significantly and contributes very effectively to staff understanding of quality and performance. Managers have a good understanding of those improvement actions which require further development and those which are too recent to have measurable impact on performance, for example the new system for observing teaching and learning. The company has not yet completed its 2011/12 self-assessment reporting process but has appropriate plans in place to ensure it is sufficiently accurate, inclusive and covers all centres and subject areas. For example,

Smart has developed self-assessment reports for each centre and has improved the quality and analysis of learner and employer feedback.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Smart made in improving success rates? Significant progress

Success rates were low at the previous inspection. Overall success rates for apprentices were low at 68% and well below the national average. The overall success rate for 16- to 18-year-olds was particularly low at 60%, significantly below the national average. The proportion of learners who completed within planned timescales in the last year of the Train to Gain programme was low, as was the achievement rate for functional skills qualifications. According to the provider's own figures, almost at the end of 2011/12, success rates for apprentices have improved significantly to 81%, which is above the national rate. NVQ only programmes have also improved significantly, with a success rate of 93% and with 83% of learners completing within their planned end date. The overall success rate for 16- to 18-year-olds has improved to the national average. The success rate for apprentices from minority groups has increased from 55% to 80%, and 79% have achieved their key objectives in Foundation Learning, which has improved significantly from 60%. However, managers are aware that within this overall improvement there are still centres, areas of learning and specific groups where, although success rates may have increased, many significantly, they are still too low.

Quality of provision

What progress has Smart made in improving the quality and relevance of teaching in order to meet the needs of learners more effectively? Significant progress

At the previous inspection, trainers did not make the most of individual learning plans or use technology well to promote interactive and exciting sessions. Since then, Smart has employed new staff and put them through a more thorough induction and initial training programme. Support for tutors has improved significantly with more focus on improving how they work with learners and how they can make better use of resources while further improving their training skills. Tutors and learners plan training and assessment together very well and make best use of training and assessment opportunities in the workplace. Managers hold regular and frequent meetings with tutors to challenge them to account for any learners who are underperforming or not progressing at a sufficiently fast pace. Smart has significantly improved its online learning resource, AskSmart, and this provides very good quality and useful resources to support and extend learning sessions. Smart has improved specific training facilities, including computer suites and training kitchens, which trainers use effectively to run group training sessions, often with the help of outside

specialists. Most learners are making better progress and more are completing their programmes successfully.

What progress has Smart made in providing appropriate additional learning support for 16- to 18-year-old learners? **Significant progress**

The overall success rate for 16- to 18-year-olds was particularly low at the previous inspection and this has improved significantly from 60% to 75%. Smart now recruits learners more carefully and tutors complete effective initial assessment on each learner to ensure they are on the correct programme at the right level. In Foundation Learning the sessions are better planned to meet their individual needs. Learners are stretched and challenged, developing skills in cookery, physical education, healthy living and completing research tasks. Smart has improved learning resources with, for example, the addition of electronic whiteboards and tablet computers. Better trained staff encourage young learners to work independently and offer very effective support. Staff and learners make good use of the AskSmart online training resource. Staff also use it well to provide diagnostic assessments which they and learners use to assess progress. Work is currently underway to produce an application to give access to AskSmart through learners' personal communication technology. Tutors have undertaken extensive training to help them understand the needs and interests of younger learners. Staff identify more quickly those who are at risk of leaving their programme early and provide prompt and appropriate support to help them complete successfully.

Leadership and management

What progress has Smart made in improving its scheme for observation to help improve teaching and learning? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection the quality of the observations of teaching and learning lacked rigour and the action planning was insufficiently effective in promoting improvement across the different types of training delivery. Since the inspection, observations have continued with a significant increase in the numbers completed, with a greater focus on learning. Smart has established a revised observation of teaching and learning methodology but it is still in its early stages. The company has developed an impressive set of policies and supportive procedures, but these are yet to be rolled out to staff. Clear performance criteria allow tutors and assessors to differentiate effectively between individual coaching and group training sessions to identify learning in the different environments. Managers have planned a series of meetings to inform tutors and train their assessors in how to use the new process. The revised quality cycle includes a much sharper focus on monitoring subject area observations to share good practice and identify common areas for development. Smart has established a moderation group to provide standardisation across the ten training centres and across the different training sectors.

What progress has Smart made in ensuring better use of data to help improve the quality of provision?**Significant progress**

At the previous inspection the analysis of performance data to inform the self-assessment report was weak. Management and staff understanding of success rate data and what constituted challenging targets required further development by improving their understanding of current performance data, external benchmarks and by using data more rigorously and accurately in self-assessment. Smart has worked very effectively to improve the accuracy, presentation and use of data. A wide range of well-presented reports is now available to all staff, who use these very effectively to drive improvement. The reporting timetable is well planned, giving frequent and timely analysis in reports which staff use well. Managers set stretching performance targets against which performance is measured. Managers collate and analyse data for all aspects of company performance, across centres, programmes and individual training advisers. The range of data ensures that managers have appropriate tools to manage performance, and staff are more aware of their own performance. Data are accurate, give a clear picture of the whole company, and managers value the way in which the information is presented. Senior managers have realistic plans in place to increase even further the sophistication of data analysis.

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