SSP (Select Service Partners)

First re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first re-inspection monitoring visit to SSP following publication of the inspection report on 7 May 2014, which found the provider to be inadequate overall. Outcomes for learners were inadequate, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the effectiveness of leadership and management required improvement. The report sets out the main themes derived from the areas for improvement in the recently published inspection report. It provides an overview of the steps taken since the inspection and the priorities for further improvement.

Themes

What progress is SSP making to improve recruitment, retention and completions?

Following restrictions placed on SSP by the Skills Funding Agency and the outcomes of inspection, the business put on hold recruitment of all new apprentices. However, a review of business needs relating to future managers across the large number of outlets where SSP operates has resulted in the development of a talent plan. SSP has successfully changed its focus from increasing the number of employees on apprenticeship programmes to a more selective approach. In the last few weeks a group of advanced apprentices for core selected sites completed a new, and more in-depth, selection process and induction. The apprenticeship team will be closely monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of this new process over the coming months.

The operations teams and the apprenticeship team have identified core sites that are suitable for apprentices and the number of places available. Analysis of staff turnover has resulted in a decision to offer apprenticeships only after new employees have been in post at least eight weeks. Potential apprentices will be required to demonstrate commitment to the programme before starting. The new processes are to be piloted in the next few months to ensure only suitable employees are signed up to apprenticeship programmes.

Following the inspection, the apprenticeship team changed its focus, and that of the operations teams, to ensure current apprentices successfully complete their programmes. Clear targets have been set for the operations directors and support assessors. Revised management reporting systems and tracking documents allow the teams to manage current learners more effectively. The support assessors are now prioritising those learners who have passed their expected end dates and are motivated to complete, and those with expected end dates of September 2014 or earlier. Support assessors are reviewing, and removing from the programme, several apprentices who started the apprenticeship with little commitment to achieving their qualifications. These apprentices, along with those who have left the business, continue to have a negative impact on current qualification success rates.

Priorities for improvement

- Understand the impact that inappropriate starts and low retention rates will have on potential success rates for 2013−14 and 2014−15. Overall and timely qualification success rates will continue to be low and SSP needs to understand the potential consequences to ensure that it achieves the required minimum levels of performance.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the revised recruitment and induction process on retention for advanced apprentices by comparing retention rates over time with previous groups.

- Develop revised recruitment processes for all apprentices and pilot the new model over the next few months.

What progress is SSP making to supporting and monitoring apprentices' progress more effectively?

Following the inspection, the apprenticeship team took the opportunity to review and discuss the inconsistency in apprentices' training, assessments and support currently provided by the unit managers. A new strategy is being developed to deliver the apprenticeship programme through a different model, beginning in October 2014, at the start of SSP's financial year. SSP has consulted with another large employer provider and taken advice from a specialist to ensure the revised model it is developing is based on tried and tested processes. Each member of the apprenticeship team is taking responsibility for developing a particular aspect of the new model. However, work on developing suitable resources and approaches to developing apprentices' appreciation and understanding of equality and diversity has not yet started.

In the meantime, support assessors are focusing their efforts on providing additional support and guidance to those apprentices who have exceeded their expected end dates or are due to complete this year. The previous tracking report is no longer used, and support assessors are using effectively a revised report to plan visits to apprentices and unit managers. Clear action plans are agreed and shared with the operations managers. Good use is made of emails and the online systems to share information and ensure apprentices complete outstanding tasks and unit managers assess apprentices' work. Support assessors reschedule visits if there is insufficient progress.

As more apprentices complete, or leave SSP, the caseload for support assessors is becoming more manageable. Plans are in place to ensure the workloads for support assessors in the new model are appropriate to meet apprentices' and business needs.

Priorities for improvement

- Ensure the new tracking reports allow support assessors and operational staff to reduce the proportion of learners who have exceeded their expected end dates and to provide prompt support to apprentices who are making slow progress.

- Ensure the new delivery model allows apprentices time for off-the-job training and access to online resources.

- Develop suitable scenario-based case studies for unit managers and assessors to use with apprentices when developing their awareness and understanding of equality and diversity.

To what extent has SSP improved apprentices' English, mathematics and ICT skills?

All apprentices who need to complete functional skills should have completed a diagnostic assessment. The apprenticeship team still needs to check if this has happened. It is unclear how many apprentices are actually using the online training materials and resources suggested in their individual development plans.

The apprenticeship team has analysed the first time pass rates for functional skills tests and established that they are particularly low for information and communication technology (ICT). Although the first time pass rate for mathematics is higher than for ICT, it is still too low. Support assessors are starting to incorporate checks on apprentices' progress in English, mathematics and ICT as part of their visits. Support assessors have the necessary resources and plan time for learners to complete on-line learning programmes during their visits where they do not have regular access to computers.

All support assessors have completed or are working towards training qualifications and qualifications to increase their confidence in working with apprentices for whom English is not their first language.

Priorities for improvement

- Investigate how many apprentices are using the online training resources to develop their English, mathematics and ICT skills and set targets to increase the number of apprentices doing so and the time they spend developing their skills.

- Ensure apprentices are well prepared for functional skills tests to increase the first-time pass rates.

- Ensure the new delivery model provides apprentices with support and access to materials which reinforce the use of good English and mathematics within their job roles.

What progress has SSP made in developing a robust quality improvement plan, quality assurance arrangements and self-assessment?

SSP developed a quality improvement plan to address many of the areas for improvement identified during inspection. However, the current plan is not sufficiently explicit as to how SSP is improving specific aspects of the provision such as English and mathematics, promoting equality and diversity and the quality assurance systems. The quality improvement plan does not reflect all of the improvement activities that SSP is already undertaking, such as the review of the training model to meet more effectively the needs of apprentices and the business.

SSP has reviewed the data held about apprentices to ensure they are accurate and up to date. New reports have been created to ensure the apprenticeship team and operational staff are more aware of apprentices' completion dates and their current progress. The apprenticeship team is developing systems to record apprentices' progression and destinations on leaving the programme.

Priorities for improvement

- Redraft the quality improvement plan to capture all of the improvement activities being undertaken and ensure it explicitly addresses all the recommendations made in the inspection report.

- The improvement plan must include clear timescales for implementing proposed actions and what evidence and data will be used to judge progress.

- Use the available data and management information to monitor the trends to ensure the improvements are having the desired impact and to help identify further areas for improvement.

- As SSP develop the new delivery model, arrangements to quality assure the new processes must be developed and used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact on apprentices and the business of the changes.