

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: North Bar Training
Date of visit: 18 June 2007

Context

North Bar Training is the successor learning provider to Nortec Training Ltd, which stopped operating towards the end of 2006. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) transferred contracts for work-based learning from Nortec Training Ltd to North Bar Training.

This monitoring visit follows the inspection of Nortec Training Ltd in April 2006. At that inspection, leadership and management and the provider's arrangements for quality improvement were satisfactory. Equality of opportunity was good. Provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies, including the contributory area of transportation apprenticeships for young people, was satisfactory. Overall, provision in business, administration and law was good. The contributory area of business management apprenticeships for young people was unsatisfactory while the other government-funded training in business management was outstanding. The contributory grade for customer service apprenticeships for young people was unsatisfactory.

At the previous inspection Nortec Training Ltd had a contract with Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire LSC to provide apprenticeships, and a contract for other work-based learners co-financed through the European Social Fund (ESF). At the monitoring visit, North Bar Training had a contract with the Thames Valley LSC for work-based learning for advanced apprenticeships and apprentices in business administration, customer service, management, retailing, transportation and warehousing. At the monitoring visit the provider had 41 apprentices and 27 advanced apprentices. Of these, 45 were men and three were from minority ethnic groups. North Bar Training is a lead for a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in business and management with Milton Keynes College and partner with the college for a logistics and freight transport CoVE.

Achievement and standards

Are work-based learning framework success rates increasing and high?	Insufficient progress
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North Bar Training is making insufficient progress in ensuring work-based learning framework success rates are improving to a high rate since the inspection. Although

framework success rates increased significantly between 2004-05 and 2005-06 and those for transportation were at the national average, the overall framework success rates were well below the average in both those years. Data for the first six months of 2006-07 indicates that the provider is maintaining the increase in framework success rates but the rates remain below the national average. The national vocational qualification (NVO) success rates for work-based learners in 2004-05 and 2005-06 were well below the national average. However, for the first six months of 2006-07 success rates for NVOs show that rates have increased significantly and are at the national average.

Quality of provision

In customer service, has the provider sustained the good formal training support for apprentices?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, inspectors found that formal training support for learners was good in customer service. North Bar Training has made reasonable progress in maintaining this strength. Assessors and training officers still provide good training support to learners with strong prior knowledge and skills so they can extend quickly their job competences to a high standard ready for assessment. For those with less prior knowledge and understanding, who find learning challenging or have gaps in their understanding and skills, assessors and training officers continue to provide strong support to help them develop their job competences to industry standards.

Has employer guidance and engagement improved?	Reasonable progress
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A key challenge at the inspection was to improve employer guidance and engagement. The provider has made reasonable progress in improving this area. Assessors and training officers now visit employers at the beginning of and during learners' programmes to provide guidance and explanations on what the employer needs to do to support the learners' training. Employers receive documents to support training including copies of the national standards and frameworks. At reviews of learners' progress, employers are now involved in reviewing the learners' training with assessors and training officers. The provider regularly checks to ensure employers have an understanding of work-based learning. Surveys of employers' views indicate overall that they consider North Bar Training provides good training for their employees.

Leadership and management

Has North Bar Training ensured staffing improvements in transportation are completed and maintained?	Reasonable progress
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North Bar Training has made reasonable progress towards the key challenge from the inspection, that staffing improvements in transportation are completed and maintained. This has been a difficult area for the provider. Straight after the

inspection, progress was slow with this issue. The provider recruited additional staff with good industrial experience and trained them in providing learning and assessment, but new recruits left, leaving existing staff continuing with significant numbers of learners to train, assess and internally verify. However, the provider has now resolved this issue through employing subcontractors to provide additional assessment and training support for learners and to assist existing staff. Learners' assessment and progress are now timely and on target. The provider has mostly effective quality assurance arrangements to ensure that the subcontractors provide effective assessment, use documents appropriately and provide training support for learners.

What action has taken place to develop and implement further strategies to improve performance?	Reasonable progress
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North Bar Training has made reasonable progress towards implementing further strategies to improve performance. Due to significant changes resulting from the closure of Nortec Training Ltd, the number of staff has decreased from 30 to seven. Good staff development has enabled the provider to manage this change effectively. North Bar Training continues to provide a varied range of good staff development activities to improve performance. These include training to increase staff skills, knowledge and understanding of their subject, safety, equality and diversity, data management, assessment and business improvement. This has allowed staff to take on new roles and responsibilities effectively and support the continued raising of standards. Managers carry on maintaining close links with quality improvement networks. These links help staff to keep up to date to with developments and good practice in work-based learning. Managers make good use of the regular staff meetings to review learners' progress and performance and to take action to remedy any issues. These have included provision of additional key skills workshops for transportation, which have led to better provision and success rates for learners, and the use of e-learning software to improve the recording and presenting of evidence for assessment.

Are quality assurance arrangements completed?	Reasonable progress
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North Bar Training has made reasonable progress in completing quality assurance arrangements, a key challenge at the inspection. Since then, quality assurance arrangements have been adapted to meet the changed needs of the provider. North Bar Training continues to maintain and update its quality assurance manual. Revised procedures include significant strengthening of the arrangements for employers' involvement at enrolment and reviews. Assessment and internal verification remain effective. The provider has improved the monitoring of learners' progress. Reviews are now systematic and take place more frequently. The regular, effective auditing of learners' files and surveys of learners' and employers' views continues. Managers regularly check all feedback and comments from learners and employers to seek ways to improve standards. Although there is regular observation of assessment, the provider does not formally observe training provided by subcontractors.

How adequate and effective is the self-assessment process and development plan?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, inspectors judged that the self-assessment was an inclusive process and they had some confidence in its reliability. However, the self-assessment report did not identify low work-based learning success rates for management and customer service learners. North Bar Training has made reasonable progress in ensuring the self-assessment process and development plan are adequate and effective. Self-assessment for 2005-06 maintains its inclusiveness with the involvement of all staff and the good use of the views of learners, employers and external agencies to make judgements. Self-assessment has a clear focus on strengths and weaknesses. Managers and staff regularly review strengths and weaknesses. The 2006 self-assessment report is informative and judgemental, and takes some account of learners' success rates. The development plan clearly indicates weakness, actions, measurable outcome, timescales, responsibilities, costs and progress. Managers and staff regularly refer to the development plan and use it to monitor progress on actions to improve provision.