

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Canto Limited
Date of visit: 3 July 2007

Context

Canto Limited (Canto) is a not-for-profit limited company based in Northampton, founded in 1992 to provide employment programme for the local chamber of commerce. Since the previous inspection in May 2006, the provider has acquired a second training centre in Rushden, East Northampton.

Canto provides training for learners with moderate to severe learning difficulties or other severe mental or physical disadvantages. Programmes consist of activities designed to improve learners' life skills, increase their social integration and support their personal development and career progression.

Canto is managed by a project director and a general manager, who are supported by a personnel director and three programme managers. There is a skills for life co-ordinator and seven full-time and two part-time tutors. A team of volunteers occasionally supports the company's work with the learners.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 51 learners in learning. Seventeen learners aged 16 to 24 were on an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme. Canto was also delivering a similar programme for 22 adult learners funded by the local authority and seven learners funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). The provider was also running preparation programmes for five learners aged 14 to 16.

At the previous inspection, the overall effectiveness of the provision was satisfactory. Leadership and management were satisfactory, as were equality of opportunity and the provider's arrangements for quality improvement. The sector subject area of preparation for life and work was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How effectively has the provider improved learners' achievements?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection in 2006, the achievement of positive outcomes for learners on the E2E programmes was poor. The provider has made significant progress to improve learners' achievement since the previous inspection.

The achievement of positive outcomes is now satisfactory. In the current year, 50% of the learners have entered further education or training after leaving the programme. Learners' prior attainment and achievements are very poor. Most learners suffer from a range of disabilities and learning difficulties, including severe long-term medical conditions such as brain injuries.

Learners continue to develop a good range of personal skills. They are well-engaged in learning and adhere well to the routine of attending training regularly and punctually. They develop confidence to a very good degree and have considerably enhanced self-esteem.

Learners develop good literacy and numeracy skills. Nearly all of them progress by at least one level in their numeracy and literacy during their stay on the programme. Canto does not keep records of ongoing progress of the learners and does not register them for external qualifications.

Learners' progression into employment

What developments has the provider made to increase learners' progression into employment?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, learners' work skills were not sufficiently developed to support their progression into employment. The provider has made significant progress to rectify this weakness.

Learners are well supported to develop a good range of work skills. Target-setting is now effective. Staff measure learners' progress in work skills on a regular basis. This information contributes towards their overall progress review every 12 weeks. Targets are specific and measurable and followed through at each review.

All learners take part in work placements as soon as the tutor establishes that they are ready. The range of employers and placement providers is greater now and reflects the job opportunities available in the local area. Learners can also work on a range of commercial work opportunities established by their provider in their own premises in sectors such as mailing, packing and assembly work. The standard of work produced by learners is good. They learn to work effectively in teams and produce good-quality items while meeting deadlines.

Since the previous inspection, the number of learners gaining employment has increased. The remaining learners on programme continue to make good progress towards entry to employment.

Management of the curriculum area

What actions have been implemented to strengthen the management of the curriculum?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, the management of the curriculum area was judged to be insufficient. Canto has made reasonable progress in developing effective management arrangements.

Staff meetings take place every fortnight to discuss issues affecting learners' performance. Staff work effectively to find solutions to highlighted problems and share new ideas. Some of the areas where noticeable improvements have been made are literacy and numeracy, soft skills and work skills.

Staff vacancies have been addressed imaginatively by developing the skills and confidence of existing tutors. Managers offer good support to tutors on improving the learners' experience. All tutors have produced satisfactory aims and objectives for their programmes. Support for learners remains good but Canto does not have the capacity to provide specific support such as for dyscalculia and dyslexia.

Development of programme delivery

How has the provider further developed the programme delivery themes?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection Canto was judged to have well-designed programmes that met the learners' needs and interests well. The provider has made reasonable progress in further developing the programme delivery themes.

Canto has improved on the range of programmes by extending the curriculum. It now includes arts and media, sports, music and information technology (IT) to meet the needs and interest of learners. Music and IT themes areas are particularly well developed.

Quality improvement

What actions have been carried out to develop the quality improvement arrangements?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection quality improvement arrangements were identified as a weakness. Canto has made reasonable progress in developing specific quality improvement arrangements. The quality policy and procedures have been reviewed. The teaching and learning observation system has improved and a programme of observations has been planned for this year. Observations now focus clearly on

assessing whether learning is taking place. Feedback from observations is shared with all tutors. However, areas for improvement are not always identified or discussed with tutors. Tutors with identified development needs receive effective informal coaching and attend targeted training events.

Equality of opportunity

What actions have been taken to improve the monitoring and promotion of equality of opportunity?	Insufficient progress
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During the previous inspection, Canto was judged to monitor and promote equality of opportunity insufficiently. The provider has made insufficient progress to resolve this weakness. Canto has begun to collect and use data on learners' characteristics but has not yet formally analysed the information or set targets for improvement, such as the recruitment of learners from under-represented groups. Canto has no learners from local minority ethnic communities and has only very recently begun to promote its programmes to these groups.

Canto has created leaflets to advertise courses. Information materials are translated into Vietnamese and there are also plans to translate them into Urdu. Marketing materials do not make effective use of positive images and role modelling.

The self-assessment process

What actions have been taken to improve the reliability of the self-assessment process?	Insufficient progress
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At the previous inspection, the inspection team highlighted that staff were insufficiently involved in the self-assessment process and the self-assessment report was found to be insufficiently critical.

Canto has made insufficient progress in improving the reliability of the self-assessment process. Staff have taken part in the process in 2007 and the provider has also begun to grade to each of the five key questions in the Common Inspection Framework. However, some of the judgements in the report are still not critical enough and do not always clearly focus on the effect on the learners' experience. Some of the report's strengths are incorrect, such as good achievement on non-accredited learning goals. Some key strengths, such as the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills, are missing. The 2006 development plan was not updated after the inspection to reflect the weaknesses highlighted at the time.