

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: The Skills Partnership Ltd  
Date of visit: 3 April 2008

### Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in February 2007, at which The Skills Partnership Limited (TSP) was graded as satisfactory for overall effectiveness, leadership and management, and for its arrangements for equality of opportunity. The arrangements for quality improvement were inadequate. Provision was judged to be satisfactory in sport, leisure and recreation. TSP is privately owned and led by the chief executive and the business development director. There is a senior management team which consists of the directors, the senior tutor and the data manager. Since 2005, TSP has had a national contract with Surrey Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver apprenticeship programmes for learners employed in fitness centres, gymnasiums and similar leisure and recreational outlets. TSP continues to have a contract for apprenticeships and has started to offer customer service and business administration in the present contract year, 2007/08. It has a new contract for Train to Gain which includes all the vocational areas in the apprenticeship programme plus Cleaning & Support Services at NVQ level 2. There has been internal restructuring of the staff team since the previous inspection.

### Achievement and standards

What improvements have taken place to support an increase in the very low success rates for apprenticeship frameworks?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made in increasing the very low success rates. Very poor success rates were identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. Apprenticeship success rates have increased significantly from 34% at the previous inspection to 59% for 2006/07. Advanced apprenticeships have increased from 0% to 18% over the same period. Retention of advanced apprentices has increased significantly and they now make good progress. The timely success rate for apprenticeships has increased substantially from 22% at the previous inspection to 53% for 2006/07, which is 13 percentage points higher than the national framework rate. The timely success rate for advanced apprenticeships has increased from 0% to 18% over the same period. These improvements have been maintained for 2007/08. Apprenticeship success rates are now satisfactory but the advanced apprenticeship success rates are still below the national framework rate.

Initial assessment has improved and now includes all learners. Where additional support needs are identified this is well planned and carried out and supports learners in achieving their targets. A partnership was formed with the company's commercial division to improve achievement of the technical aspects of the frameworks. Learners are on courses with commercial clients and they find this motivating. This has led to improved overall success.

## Quality of provision

How much progress has been made to improve assessment practice?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in the improvement of assessment practice, which was a weakness at the previous inspection. Planning for assessment has improved and portfolios now contain sufficient evidence to support the completion of units. TSP now has a lead internal verifier and a team of four internal verifiers. The sampling plan is now comprehensive but planned verifications do not always take place at the planned date.

The new electronic Skillwise e-portfolio system has improved communications between learners, tutors and internal verifiers. This is especially important because of the national dispersal of learners and the remote working of tutors. Progress can be monitored very accurately by senior managers, learners and tutors and information to enable remote internal verification can be easily accessed. This system went live in October 2007 and not all learners are yet on-line.

What steps have been taken to ensure that the monitoring of individual learning is consistent and effective?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in improving the monitoring of individual learning. The monitoring of individual learners was inconsistent at the previous inspection and many individual learning plans and progress review documents were incomplete. The individual learning plan is now being fully completed. Initial assessment results are now recorded for all learners and the outcomes of diagnostic testing are included where appropriate. Progress review documents are now completed and targets set for learners. However, the recording on some progress review documents is brief.

Initial advice and guidance has improved learners' understanding and helped to ensure that they are more involved in monitoring their own progress. The Skillwise e-portfolio system enables both tutors and learners to monitor individual learning to very specific levels. This includes not just units completed, but performance criteria and range within each unit. This information can be accessed very quickly and easily. Hard copies of the individual learning plan are not always updated in line with the plan on Skillwise.

What developments have taken place to improve the literacy and numeracy support for learners?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to improve the literacy and numeracy support for learners. This was identified as satisfactory at the previous inspection but the tutors did not have the required qualifications and there was inconsistent recording of initial assessment results and support needs on individual learning plans. Although literacy and numeracy were not mentioned in the post-inspection action plan or the self-assessment report, development work has taken place. An additional learning support manager was appointed with the appropriate teaching qualification at level 4 for teaching literacy. All learners now have a literacy and numeracy screening assessment when they start the programme. Support material, linked to the questions in the screening, is available for the tutors to use with their learners. Learners identified as requiring additional support receive a diagnostic assessment and an individual learning programme delivered by the additional learning support manager. Learners who have received this support have successfully completed their full apprenticeship framework. Results from the assessments and actions are now clearly recorded on the individual learning plans.

#### Leadership and management

How effective are the actions that have taken place to ensure ongoing improvement in equality of opportunity?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to ensure ongoing improvement in equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity was satisfactory at the previous inspection but reference was made to the low number of women on the programme and to the narrow scope of questions asked at progress reviews. All staff have attended an awareness raising training event and another event is planned for May on age discrimination. A new on-line data system has been implemented. The improved data collection and analysis have been used to improve recruitment targeting and analysis of success rates and retention for gender. This has yet to be fully extended to other groups. The equality and diversity development plan is comprehensive and implemented with targets set and achieved. The recruitment of women has improved and is now comparable with the industry percentages. The next area of development is to encourage more learners from minority ethnic groups and TSP has applied for funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) to increase its work in this area.

The equality and diversity induction material has been revised to make it even clearer and more interesting to learners. TSP worked with a group of providers and has produced a clear well laid out information sheet about equality and diversity. This includes information on discrimination, harassment and bullying plus a series of questions to see if behaviour constitutes harassment or bullying. The questions used to promote discussion in reviews has been extended and are now wide-ranging. Recording of the discussions is poor.

## Self-assessment and improvement planning

What developments have taken place to ensure the quality improvement process is comprehensive and effective?	Significant progress
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Significant progress has been made to ensure the quality improvement process is comprehensive and effective. Quality improvement was inadequate at the previous inspection. The quality improvement processes were incomplete and were more heavily focused on quality assurance rather than quality improvement. A number of initiatives had taken place involving the leadership and management of the organisation. A performance management study led to the restructuring of the organisation and the recruiting of a number of key staff with subject specific experience. A new data manager was appointed to improve both data collection and analysis and use of data. These improvements were recognised at the previous inspection but it was too early to measure how successful they were.

Since the previous inspection, TSP has reviewed all of its processes and has developed systems to improve many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Significant areas of development include the on-line data collection system and the Skillwise e-portfolio. Many developments have impacted significantly on achievement and standards and the quality of provision.

The new quality improvement cycle is comprehensive. It focuses on using the new data analysis and information collected to improve all aspects of contract delivery. The new quality management team meets monthly and has a detailed quality improvement action plan. The senior management team monitors the quality improvement cycle and uses information from it to inform its action plan. The development of key learner processes has given more structure to the work with learners and enables better monitoring by managers. The teaching and learning observation system has improved and now also uses an external consultant to enable standardisation. All tutors now have a level 3 teaching qualification. Successful actions have been taken to increase success rates, internal verification processes have improved and there is more support for new assessors and a better consistency in assessment practice. Employer and learner feedback is now collected and analysed and is included as part of the on-line data collection system. The self-assessment process has improved and makes use of the improved data analysis. The latest self-assessment report focuses on quality improvement and includes critical judgements.