

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Dimensions Training Solutions
Date of visit: 20 August 2008

Context

Dimensions Training Solutions (DTS) is a private training company which has been in operation since 1983. Its head office is located in Barnsley with four further training centres in Sheffield, Wakefield, Leeds and York. In addition to the chief executive, eight senior managers, nine trainer assessors and two skills for life tutors make up the apprenticeship staff team. A further eleven staff work with the younger learners.

DTS contracts with West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide apprenticeships in hairdressing. DTS provides training for 189 apprentices and 25 advanced apprentices. DTS also provides a level 1 qualification in hairdressing to approximately 500 younger learners in school premises in Yorkshire. All learners on apprenticeship programmes are employed.

Approximately 3% of learners are from minority ethnic groups, which broadly matches the population statistics in the local area, and 9% of the learners are male.

At the previous inspection, the effectiveness of provision was satisfactory as were capacity to improve, quality of provision and leadership and management. Equality of opportunity was also satisfactory. However, achievement and standards were inadequate.

Achievement and standards

What progress had been made in improving overall success rates?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

At the previous inspection achievement and standards were inadequate, with poor timely success rates for all learners. Data for 2007/08, although not yet validated, indicates reasonable improvements have been made for apprentices and good improvements for advanced apprentices, with success rates now at 59% and 73% respectively. Timely success has improved to 50% for all learners. DTS has developed a number of effective strategies to ensure that learners complete their programme on time. The most significant of these is a 'culture change' in both assessment practice and monitoring of learners. For example, finishing schools are now offered as a standard part of the programme, providing the opportunity for

learners to catch up or fast track through the programme. New monitoring software allows staff to monitor learners' progress and tackle issues quickly. The frequency of reviews has increased to every eight weeks. Assessment practice is more flexible and frequent. The number of assessors has increased and caseloads have decreased. The application process for advanced apprentices is more thorough and includes both diagnostic assessments and an interview. All of these strategies are now having an impact in improving success rates, particularly for advanced apprentices, and 90% of current learners are on target to complete their programme.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training?	Insufficient progress
---	-----------------------

Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training was insufficient at the previous inspection, with little involvement of employers in planning learning. A full review has taken place and new documentation is due to be introduced to employers in September. However, progress in the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training has been insufficient. DTS recognised that the amended version of the individual learning plan was not effective in pulling together training and this has been scrapped in favour of a new system. DTS are aware of the need to engage employers more effectively in the training of apprentices. Employers are encouraged to take time out to engage effectively in the review process. However, until new systems are introduced, no systematic procedure is in place to co-ordinate training. Expectations placed on employers regarding their commitment to apprentices in terms of on-the-job training are unclear. DTS does not hold employer focus groups.

What progress has been made in improving target-setting?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

At the previous inspection the setting of learner targets was weak. Learning plans did not clearly identify target completion dates. DTS has made reasonable progress in improving target-setting for learners. The individual learning plan has been reviewed and amended to allow for better recording of unit-based targets. The quality audit system now includes the checking of SMART targets when review documents are sampled. Since the previous inspection, meetings and ongoing staff training have taken place to support and guide staff in setting targets. Outcomes from the training are monitored on a quarterly basis through the quality audit system. Assessors set and agree learner targets at the review with sufficient detail to be useful and these are checked at the next review in order to monitor progress. The average expected duration for completion of the framework has been reduced. Target-setting is more effective in driving the progress made by individual learners so that timely success rates have improved. DTS recognises that staff training in target-setting should be ongoing. Some targets still remain insufficiently detailed to be helpful to learners.

Leadership and Management

What progress has been made in implementing <i>Every Child Matters</i> measures, including safeguarding vulnerable and younger learners?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At the previous inspection, DTS's approach to the themes of *Every Child Matters* was satisfactory. Since then significant progress has been made and *Every Child Matters* themes have been very effectively embedded into the curriculum. A full syllabus of learning sessions and activities, which thoroughly covers the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes throughout the year, has been prepared by the *Every Child Matters* champion. Tutors are enthusiastic about the range of activities and feedback from learners is very positive. The range of measures includes sessions on anti-smoking, anti-bullying, sexually-transmitted infections, the benefits of volunteering, careers and financial advice and promoting learner involvement.

DTS is meeting statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding its younger and more vulnerable learners. Two staff are waiting for Criminal Records Bureau clearance with suitable arrangements in place for their supervision. All other staff have enhanced Criminal Record Bureau clearance appropriately recorded on a regularly up-dated list. An identified staff member is responsible for safeguarding learners. Further safeguarding training is planned for all staff in the near future and a staff handbook has been prepared.

What progress has been made in capturing learners' views and the monitoring of learners' experiences?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

At the previous inspection the monitoring of the learners' experience was insufficient. No system is in place to monitor the quality of on-the-job training. This is under review and although observations of the teaching and learning provided by DTS staff are carried out, this still does not extend to on-the-job training. Learners' views are sought at appropriate points throughout the programme. The feedback is analysed and action is taken. Learners are able to have their say about any concerns or worries they have and their views are sought during the review. However, no system exists to monitor the learners' experience from entry to exit and this was identified as a weakness at an earlier inspection in 2003. It is not clear how issues raised by learners at reviews are actioned. A new formal quality cycle is due to be introduced in September.

<p>What progress has been made in self-assessment, including actions to resolve identified areas for improvement?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
---	----------------------------

At the previous inspection, self-assessment was accurate. However slow progress was being made in many of the areas identified for improvement. DTS has made reasonable progress in ensuring the self-assessment process is inclusive, thorough and accurately resolves identified areas for improvement.

The current self-assessment report is critical and has carefully highlighted continuing areas for improvement. A new self-assessment cycle is being introduced this year which will involve staff focus groups, feedback from young apprentices, analysis of teaching observations and more thorough systems for collecting and analysing employer and learner feedback. Quality improvement is an ongoing process which is carefully monitored by the quality improvement manager and the senior managers of the company. A useful colour coding of the quality improvement plan provides quick, visual evidence of actions that have been completed and those that remain outstanding, although the affect on learners of some actions is insufficiently detailed. DTS has made reasonable progress on most of its identified areas for improvement, including success rates, learner feedback, the use of information and learning technology, practice sessions, *Every Child Matters* outcomes, monitoring of learners, further developments in equality and diversity, internal verification improvements and more enrichment activities for learners.