

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: N & B Training

Date of visit: 5 August 2008

Context

N & B Training (N & B) was established in March 1998 and is based in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey. Its catchment areas include Surrey, Hampshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and South West London. In 2008, just over 50% of learners were from Surrey and the immediate areas. Surrey is an area of relative affluence. It has a minority ethnic population of 5%, compared with 9% in England. Unemployment is 3.5% compared with 5.2% nationally

N & B was last inspected in November 2006. All aspects of the provision, except quality improvement, were found satisfactory. Quality improvement was inadequate. At the time of the monitoring visit there 90 learners in total, compared with 70 at the previous inspection. Twenty nine apprentices and 52 advanced apprentices are following level 2 and 3 programmes in children's care, learning and development programmes. Nine learners are following a level 3 programme in play work. Fourteen learners are aged 16-18. Twenty nine learners are assessed as having a moderate learning difficulty.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving success rates, particularly with regards to advanced apprentices?	Significant progress
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The provider has made significant progress in improving the success rates of learners on its health and social care programmes. At the previous inspection overall apprentice success rates had improved to around national rates from a very low base, but advanced apprentice success rates were poor.

In 2005/06 advanced apprentices' overall success rate was 24%, well under the national average. In 2006/07 this improved to 54%, 5% above the national average, and by 2007/08 the rate improved to around 75%. In 2005/06 timely success rates were 16%, but rose to 45% in 2006/07, 14% above national timely rates.

Apprenticeship success rates have further improved, rising from 23% in 2004/05 to 67% in 2006/07, 10% above national rates, and to around 77% in 2007/08. Timely success rates have improved, but are currently 1% below the 2006/07 national rate.

Over the past 18 months, N & B has paid very close attention to improving its analysis of learners' initial basic skills assessments, providing more individualised support for learners and improving the delivery of basic and key skills in learning sessions through numeracy and the application of number teaching. During 2008, staff have undergone three strands of development training run by external specialists. The strands focused on embedding skills for life teaching and improving initial assessment.

Learners' progress is now more closely monitored through regular and thorough analysis and reviews of learners' progress. Learners at risk of failing or falling behind are quickly identified and appropriate support is provided. N & B has introduced popular monthly drop-in sessions providing learners with access to the provider's facilities and staff out of normal daytime working hours.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in developing learning opportunities for learners?	Reasonable progress
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N & B has made reasonable progress in developing appropriate learning opportunities for learners.

N & B has introduced a set of monthly workshops for learners to build and consolidate their knowledge, focusing on the technical certificate and key skills. The sessions are delivered over a sufficient period to give time for reflection and skills development. Homework also promotes understanding in the workplace. Detailed workbooks and guidance notes are provided to support all sessions. Learners' analytical skills are encouraged through research tasks and group discussions

Lesson planning now includes a good range of activities to support less able learners and those with additional learning needs, but little planning does not stretch those who are more able. A buddying system has been introduced, pairing more able with less able learners to provide support, although this support is not formally recognised in the more able learner's portfolios or reviews.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in N & B's approach to self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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N & B has made reasonable progress in improving its approach to self-assessment. Inspectors had some confidence in the 2006 self-assessment process, but judged that the self-assessment report was too descriptive and lacked evaluation.

The overall report process continues to be collaborative, incorporating learners', employers' and staff views. N & B implemented a new approach to seeking and incorporating staff views for the 2008 self-assessment report. In April, staff, excluding directors, completed a questionnaire assessing and evaluating the key strengths and areas for improvement identified in the 2006 self-assessment report. Staff views frequently contradicted or challenged these judgements. Consequently, N & B undertook a wholesale re-evaluation of its approach to self-assessment, and its identification of strengths and areas for improvement.

The 2008 self-assessment report is evaluative, clearer and better structured. It was completed in May and its impact as a quality improvement tool cannot, as yet, be determined. N & B recognises that in terms of impact the 2008 report is a work in progress. While N & B has undertaken formal quality improvement and action planning for some time it is not linked to the current report.

The overall structure of the self-assessment report is now similar to an inspection report, clearly structured by the key questions of the common inspection framework. Many paragraphs in key question sections have an evaluative judgement in the first sentence, followed by supporting evidence. The writing style is clear and concise, although sometimes too detailed. Some of the strengths identified are normal practice. Some areas for improvement are subordinate aspects of strengths. Learners' achievement and standards are not evaluated in sufficient depth. The data table used does not reflect the format of inspection data tables.

What progress has been made in improving quality improvement arrangements?	Reasonable progress
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N & B has made reasonable progress in its arrangements for quality improvement. Quality improvement was judged inadequate at the previous inspection.

Following the installation of new software, a wide range of data is now used well to monitor the performance of all learners. The new software is capable of more extensive reporting than is currently being used although a member of staff has recently undergone some further training in its use.

Staff understanding of and support for quality improvement is good. A quality improvement log has been maintained over the last year to record all the improvements and suggestions that staff have made. The staff team works effectively to identify detailed aspects for improvement and individuals take ownership for completing and subsequently monitoring improvement actions. Many of the actions have focused on standardising elements of induction, observation, internal verification and assessment practice. Quality improvement and linking of key aspects within a planned and structured quality cycle is insufficient. This is recognised as a key next step by the provider, using progress to date as the foundation.

What progress has been made in further developing and improving links with employers?	Reasonable progress
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N & B has made reasonable progress to develop its links with employers. At the previous inspection it was recognised that the company had well developed links with a wide range of local employers, some of whom were trained at N & B and the training relationship was satisfactory.

The training manager's job role has been expanded to further develop and improve employer liaison, communications and their involvement in and support of training. The training manager is now a key point of contact for employers and addresses individual learner issues as they arise. Employers are increasingly involved in learners' initial assessments, inductions and reviews and learners are more closely supported in the workplace. Wherever possible one assessor is linked to an employer to provide continuity and consolidate working relationships.

An external marketing company is generating leads on potential new employers, which the training manager follows up in a business development capacity.

What progress has been made in widening participation from under-represented groups on N & B's training programmes?	Reasonable progress
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N & B has made reasonable progress in widening the participation of learners from under-represented groups. It undertook a successful marketing drive to mosques, church groups, voluntary organisations, youth groups and leisure centres and plans to continue this as a regular marketing strategy. Nine current learners (7% of the total) are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds compared with one at the previous inspection. While there were no male learners at the previous inspection there are now 12 (13% of the total learners).

An equality champion has been appointed and trained. There is now an annual equality and diversity development plan with clear objectives and action points. N & B's marketing materials are being reviewed by the equality champion to ensure contents and layouts are appropriate.

Procedures for safeguarding learners meet government requirements. Staff and learners understand the safeguarding policy and procedures. Staff training has taken place. Appropriate vetting checks have been carried out for all staff and learners.