

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: DART Ltd
Date of visit: 26 June 2008

Context

Dales Agriculture & Rural Training was established in 1999 and it became DART Limited (DART) in 2008. It was created to provide work-based learning in the East Midlands area, primarily for the land-based sector. DART's main business activity is a contract with Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council to provide apprenticeship programmes in agriculture, amenity horticulture, animal care, arboriculture, fencing and veterinary nursing. Employed adults undertake NVQs at Level 2 under the Train to Gain programme. DART also provides training for a small number of Entry to Employment (E2E) learners and for 14 to 16 year old school students through the government's agenda for vocational training. A small amount of commercially funded training is also carried out for adult workers and employers.

Most training is carried out on-the-job. In agriculture, horticulture, arboriculture and veterinary nursing, off-the-job training is offered. DART provides some dedicated specialist training such as additional skills-based and emergency first aid qualifications. It uses hired venues for off-the-job training at Bakewell, Chesterfield, Etwell, Burton-on-Trent and Derby. All veterinary nurses have regular weekly off-the-job training provided by mostly Bottle Green Training and other subcontractors. DART also provides assessment and verification training for employers in the workplace. There is a requirement for all veterinary practices providing training in veterinary nursing to have at least one qualified assessor for every two learners.

At the time of the monitoring visit, DART had 166 learners on their government funded programmes. Including 114 apprentices and 45 advanced apprentices across the several agriculture, horticulture and animal care programmes. There are a further seven learners on an E2E programme.

At the previous inspection, the provider's overall effectiveness was satisfactory. Leadership and management, quality improvement and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. The subject sector area of agriculture, horticulture and animal care was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve and maintain overall success rates?	Significant progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, overall framework success rates for work-based learning were high and significantly above the national rate. Since the previous inspection DART has made significant progress in this area.

Overall framework success rates for advanced apprentices at the time of the previous inspection were high at 79% and well above the national rate. However, in 2006/07 the rate decreased to 68%, although remaining well above the national rate. Data from the LSC for 2007/08 indicates that success rates have increased substantially to 86%. Timely success rates for advanced apprentices at the time of the previous inspection were low at 44% but above the low national rate. In 2006/07, they decreased slightly to 41% and were just above the national rate. Data from the LSC indicates that in 2007/08 timely success rates increased substantially to 69%.

Framework success rates overall for apprentices at the time of the previous inspection were 66%, well above the national rate. In 2006/07, they increased substantially to 77% and were significantly above the national rate. Data from the LSC indicates that in 2007/08 success rates remained high at 78%. Apprentice timely success rates at the time of the previous inspection were extremely poor at 5% and well below the national rate. In 2006/07, they increased significantly to 41% just below the national rate. In 2007/08, timely success rates have continued to increase to a current rate of 56%.

The proportion of E2E learners in 2006/07 that progressed to education, training or employment and achieved the objectives of their programme of study was high at 77%. In 2007/08, the provider continues to have high levels of progression to employment, education and training and achievement of programme objectives for E2E learners.

Quality of provision

What actions have been taken to develop the provision of key skills?	Significant progress
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At the previous inspection, arrangements for key skills qualifications were insufficiently developed. The provider has made significant progress in resolving this issue.

Key skills tuition is now an integrated feature of teaching sessions and links clearly and effectively to each of the different subject areas. Trainers make good use of topics from the subject areas for key skills tuition. They explain key skills thoroughly to employers at the start of learners' training and they make further checks at progress visits to ensure employers maintain their understanding of this area.

Employers work well with trainers to ensure key skills projects are relevant and interesting. Staff development has improved trainers' understanding of key skills. Trainers have all taken or are working towards key skills qualifications. Staff development events are particularly effectively in reviewing key skills issues. Staff are now more carefully monitoring learners' progress with key skills. When issues arise with learners' progress, learners receive additional specialist support to help them complete their key skills qualifications.

Success rates for key skills in 2006/7 were high and data from the LSC indicates the rates have increased further to substantially above the national rate in 2007/08.

Leadership and management

What has been done to improve operational management?	Significant progress
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A weakness at the previous inspection was the insufficiently structured operational management. The provider has made significant progress in addressing this problem.

DART now has a clear and particularly effective operational management structure. These new arrangements have been influential in supporting improvements in the quality of provision and success rates. All managers have a clear and specific remit and they are now supported by very detailed and clear job descriptions.

Managers and staff all have realistic and meaningful targets that are closely monitored. Including targets for the success rates of their learners and for staff development through attendance at courses and the achievement of further qualifications.

What progress has been made to improve the quality improvement arrangements?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection this was recognised as a weakness. The quality improvement arrangements were found to be insufficiently systematic. DART has made reasonable progress in improving its quality improvement arrangements.

A quality improvement group was formed after the previous inspection to review quality improvement issues on a regular basis. Policies containing DART's standard operating procedures have now been created. To help improve consistency and compliance staff now have access to all the necessary documentation via their website. The teaching and learning observation process has been extended to include the observation of assessment practice and the work of DART's subcontractors. DART has increased its internal verification capacity and appointed a lead verifier. Standardisation meetings that monitor the consistency of assessment practices amongst assessors now take place every six months. DART has established a more structured approach to sharing best practice through these meetings.

The provider now monitors the quality of the learners' progress reviews and data is being analysed by different programmes to monitor timely achievement.

What progress has been made to better integrate and promote equality of opportunity?	Significant progress
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During the previous inspection, the provider's integration of equality of opportunity issues into learning was judged to be weak. DART has made significant progress on promoting equality of opportunity topics to their learners.

Learners now receive a detailed and comprehensive training session on equality of opportunities during their induction period. Case study workbooks have been developed on diversity, discrimination and bullying with validating questions to test the learners' knowledge. All staff have achieved a recognised equality and diversity qualification at Level 2 and some are developing their knowledge further by studying towards a Level 3 qualification.

Equality of opportunity topics are discussed during the off-the-job training and progress reviews. Discussions are appropriately contextualised within the sector the learner works in. Learner and employer questionnaires now aim at capturing best practice with reference to the delivery of equality and diversity in the workplace.

What has been done to improve the self-assessment process and the post inspection plan?	Significant progress
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After the previous inspection, the provider had appropriate arrangements in place to involve all staff in the self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements. The quality improvement plan contained specific and measurable actions that were implemented by different members of the organisation. The plan also clearly stated the progress made on each prioritised weakness. DART has made significant progress in its inclusion of all key partners in the self-assessment process and has developed a very effective approach to action planning for improvement.

The self-assessment process is now a routine and integral feature of the quality improvement cycle. It now accounts for learner, employer and other stakeholder feedback to support the evidence for its judgements. This process leads to the preparation of a very detailed improvement plan. The plan has clear, prioritised action points and staff contribute fully in resolving any issues identified in the report.