

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Intec Business Colleges plc
Date of visit: 24 June 2008

Context

Intec Business Colleges plc (Intec) was founded in 1982 as a privately owned recruitment and training organisation. In July 2002, Intec became a public limited company. Intec is a national training provider and offers work-based learning for young people and adults in retail and commercial enterprise, business administration and law, information and communications technology (ICT) and education and training.

Programmes offered include apprenticeships, Train to Gain and other government-funded programmes. Intec has approximately 1,100 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) direct contract learners, 1,400 LSC subcontracted learners and 500 privately funded learners.

Since the previous inspection in January 2007, Intec's management roles and responsibilities have been significantly restructured. Following a review of performance in 2007, Intec reduced the number of learners on programme by approximately 500 by stopping its training for some large corporate companies and some subcontractors.

Intec's head office is in Rugby town centre. Changes in 2007 reduced the regional structure to 4 areas from 6. Since November 2007, the management structure has included a managing director supported by eight senior managers instead of 15 at the previous inspection. There are four cross-organisation management posts: marketing and sales, quality and training; finance and ICT and four regional managers. Each region now has a contract manager to line-manage the contract co-ordinators and their trainer/assessor teams. The teams work with learners across all types of contract. The new quality and training manager joined the company in January 2008; all other posts were internally appointed.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve achievement and standards?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection success rates had improved on most programmes. Overall success rates for work-based learning have improved over a three year period and in 2006/07 are satisfactory and in line with national rates.

Work-based learning timely success rates are satisfactory. They have improved by 29% and in 2006/07 are slightly ahead of national rates. The exception is in retail and commercial enterprise where the timely success rates are around 13% below national rates.

Train to Gain success rates in 2006/07 were satisfactory at 62%. However, in 2007, Intec's decisions to end their subcontracting arrangements with certain employers resulted in around 500 learners leaving the programme early without achieving their qualification. This has significantly influenced overall success rates for the 2007/08 period.

Intec has started to address a number of other areas to support the improvement in pace and timeliness of success rates. Including, new and improved training resources, better progress target-setting at reviews, more frequent visits to learners including greater involvement by learners' employers in programme planning and reviewing. As these arrangements have been recently implemented, it was not possible to gauge their impact during the monitoring visit.

What has been done to improve the progress of learners while on retail and commercial enterprise programmes?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection some learners on retail programmes were making slow progress. Since then Intec has introduced a range of improvements to improve learner progress. A new progress monitoring system has been introduced to better gauge learners' progress and identify those at risk of underachieving. Timely success rates for apprentices have improved although they remain below national rates. New learners now have two or three visits in the first month of training, compared with one per month previously. These new arrangements help staff to plan and deliver training and assessment more effectively.

Assessors are now expected to more effectively manage the pace of learning and challenge more able learners to progress quicker. Learners who fall behind target dates are now more closely monitored and supported. Intec now provide learners with work-books to support their learning. A wider range of assessment methods are

used. These include the use of digital recorders to effectively capture evidence, particularly for learners in practical environments.

Business, administration and law

What has been done to improve training in business administration and law?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, Intec had an insufficiently systematic approach to providing training. A range of improvements have been made since then. Learners are now provided with learning resources to better support their development of knowledge and understanding. Assessors visit new learners more frequently and learner training and assessment programmes are now more flexible and more carefully planned to meet individual learner needs. The relationships with employers have been strengthened and programmes are now better planned to align with the needs of employers and learners. The use of electronic portfolios by learners is being trialled although it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this.

Arrangements for literacy and numeracy support

What progress has been made to identify and implement literacy and numeracy support for learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection, many learners did not receive an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language needs. Initial assessment is now routine for all learners. These new arrangements systematically identify learners' literacy and numeracy needs, which are recorded on their individual learning plans. Where required, learners are referred to specialist training providers for support. Support may involve the specialist training providers' staff visiting the learners in their workplace or learners attending colleges or providers' premises.

Literacy and numeracy support is not an integrated feature of subject learning and is not taken-up by all learners who need it. Intec has not yet developed its systems to fully record and track the trends in the numbers of learners who are identified and take up additional support

What has been done to improve self-assessment?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection there was some confidence expressed by inspectors about the reliability of the self-assessment process. Self-assessment was judged satisfactory but not sufficiently inclusive or self-critical. In the past year, Intec has changed the way it operates its business significantly. The new arrangement focuses on self-assessment as a central feature of quality improvement planning.

Employees at Intec are encouraged to be more self-critical. Intec is in the process of improving the use of learners' and employers' feedback to support self-assessment. Following some staff training and the development of new recording and feedback documentation, Intec has recently started to observe teaching and learning. A range of internal project teams, staff meetings and training sessions have begun to assess and review the way Intec carries out training with a clear focus on the learner's experience. No post-inspection action plan was in place. Intec have used their 2007/08 quality improvement plan and their company review to structure quality improvement. The 2006/07 quality improvement plan and self-assessment report had been produced just before the January 2007 ALI inspection.

What has been done to improve quality improvement arrangements?	Reasonable progress
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The previous inspection judged that the provider demonstrated sufficient capacity to make improvements but had insufficient arrangements to implement improvements. Improved arrangements for implementing quality improvement are now in place. Quality improvement is now managed across the whole organisation as part of the responsibilities of the new post of quality and training manager. Responsibility for quality improvement is now clearer. A re-constituted quality team provides a new focus for improvement. Information from regional quality teams is now used to better gauge the range of issues being identified across the organisation. Staff are involved in internal reviews and audits with clearer direction about the need for quality improvements. Sharing of good practices is taking place across the organisation. Intec identified a need to improve the standard operating procedures that staff used and a team of staff from across the organisation has started work to improve these procedures. Intec managers have a strong commitment to quality improvement and much work is now underway to develop this commitment into practice for the benefit of learners.