

Professional Business and Training Solutions

Inspection date

11 December 2008

Inspection number

320009

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. Professional Business and Training Solutions (PBTS) was registered as a private limited company in 2000. Initially it provided its own specialist courses for pathologists and phlebotomists. In 2005 it started publicly funded National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in Clinical Laboratory Support (CLS). During 2007/08, this provision was replaced by Laboratory and Associated Technical Activities (LATA) NVQs at Levels 2 and 3, and now Level 4. The provision is funded by London East Learning and Skills Council (LSC) through the Train to Gain programme. The qualifications are aimed at those working in hospital or school laboratories and are part of the engineering and manufacturing technologies sector subject area.
2. PBTS is based in an industrial estate in Erith, South London. Learners are located in a variety of settings across the London region. Six weeks prior to the inspection PBTS had 16 established learners however by the time of the inspection 38 new learners had joined giving a total of 54 learners taking LATA qualifications. Thirty three of these learners are due to take additional literacy training and 28 numeracy courses. Training and assessment is currently carried out in the workplace. A new commercial facility for laboratory training at the Erith base is to be used for additional learner training in 2008/09. The company has four full-time and two part-time employees. PBTS uses additional part-time assessors as necessary. The Train to Gain programme accounts for the majority of PBTS's overall business; there are other commercial initiatives including recruitment, photography, garment printing, point of care pathology testing and specialist medical training.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards, leadership and management and equality of opportunity are all satisfactory. The quality of provision is good. Provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies is satisfactory. PBTS has used innovative and effective ways of meeting employer and learner needs and widening participation. Performance monitoring is carried out insufficiently, using informal methods rather than planned and systematic procedures.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. PBTS's capacity to improve is satisfactory. There has not been a previous inspection, and the relatively recent and changing nature of the programme makes it difficult to identify trends in data. Inspectors identified areas for improvement in the way the self-assessment report (SAR) is prepared and the use of management information to track learners' progress. Those improvements are essentially to procedures. The provider is small enough that routine quality improvement is an accepted part of the company's work and office discussions. Staff development concentrates on improving performance, particularly in respect of training and assessment of learners. Innovative schemes are regularly launched to improve the range and effectiveness of programmes for learners. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. While the SAR does not concentrate on learner outcomes, it does cover a wide range of routine business activities, and is critical enough to identify improvements needed in over half of the performance indicators reviewed. Action planning from the SAR is not well documented, but inspectors judged that improvements linked with some of the weaker areas were actually being carried out. Data are subject to management examination, although such reviews are not systematically done. PBTS's detailed and rapid response to the pre-inspection commentary and to emerging inspection findings showed a good understanding of concerns around learner performance and a willingness to improve.

Key strengths

- Good success rates for Level 3 LATA NVQ
- Good progression
- Good workplace training and assessment
- Programmes very effectively meeting learners' and employers' needs
- Good staff support and development
- Very effective strategies to widen participation

Key areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates for Level 2 LATA NVQ in 2007/08
- Ineffective use of individual learning plans and target setting
- Insufficient formal use of management information to monitor learners' progress
- Insufficient focus on outcomes for learners in the self-assessment report

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. The LATA Level 3 NVQ success rate was good in 2007/08, at 86%. That was the first year of the programme, and it was approximately half of PBTS's learners in that year. In 2006/07 the Level 2 success rate for the CLS qualification was also good at 84%. This Level 2 rate, for the new LATA programme, fell away in 2007/08 to a satisfactory 56%.
6. Timely success rates were very good, at 84% in 2006/07, for the CLS qualification however, PBTS has changed to the LATA qualification and has opened the programme to school laboratory assistants, and there has been slow progress for learners with some employers. The overall timely success rate for 2007/08 is now 44% with the Level 2 rate at an unsatisfactory 36%. Around half of the learners recruited in 2008/09 will be trained through a new programme at PBTS's offices, but there will be at least a two month gap between recruitment and the start of the substantive programme.
7. Progression is good. Just over 50% of the learners who took a Level 2 qualification are now on a Level 3 qualification, with six having progressed through to Level 4. The standard of work in hospitals and laboratories is high, though to some extent this reflects the sector's normal requirements.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

8. Quality of provision is good. Learners receive good training in the workplace, enabling them to develop the appropriate skills for working confidently in safety critical environments. Learners in pathology departments are given an excellent understanding of the importance and relevance of their work in safeguarding patients, and the need for meticulous and accurate processing of clinical samples.
9. The arrangements for workplace assessment are good. Assessors regularly visit learners, observing them carrying out workplace activities in busy laboratories. In one pathology laboratory the laboratory manager is an assessor and learners benefit from the flexibility this provides for workplace assessment. Learners provide a good range of evidence for their NVQ. Many make particularly effective use of digital photographs to illustrate laboratory equipment and procedures. Learners make full and effective use of their prior learning and achievements in compiling evidence for assessment.
10. Additional learning needs are suitably identified at induction to the programme and basic additional learner support is provided to those who require it. Internal verification is satisfactory, with assessor's work properly reviewed at appropriate intervals throughout the programme.

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11. Learner progress reviews are conducted regularly, in the workplace, by assessors. Learners welcome the contact with their assessor, and overall the review process helps their progress. Targets set on most progress reviews are not specific enough and are of very little use in helping learners who have to rely on their recall of conversations with their assessor. An individual learning plan (ILP) is raised at the start of the programme. The ILP is difficult to interpret, does not give a full description of the learner's programme, and is not used properly to monitor or record learner progress. Some learners do not have a clear understanding of NVQ requirements; in particular learners progressing from NVQ Level 2 to Level 3 have difficulties in interpreting the wording of the qualification.
12. The programme very effectively meets the needs of learners and employers. Both value the fact that the NVQ closely matches their day-to-day work, with PBTS staff successfully guiding learners onto relevant optional units. For several learners the qualification is the first real formal recognition of the skills and competence they have developed after many years in laboratory work and many see the qualification as enhancing the status of their occupational area. Learners benefit from the clear progression route provided by the range of qualifications from NVQ Level 2 to Level 4. Employers value the way that the programme contributes to their staff development arrangements.
13. PBTS and employers continually emphasise and reinforce the importance of high standards of health and safety. Learners develop a particularly good awareness of the meticulous standards of hygiene and data recording expected when handling laboratory and clinical samples.
14. Learners benefit from the practical support and encouragement provided by their employers and PBTS staff. Employers are supportive and provide learners with good opportunities to collect evidence. Learners have a high level of motivation which is partly due to the importance that employers now give to the qualification. Learners work together successfully in the workplace gathering evidence and sharing knowledge.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

15. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff development and support are good. Staff members have good professional knowledge and experience. Induction for staff is satisfactory, and there is a helpfully long period for new members of staff to build up their understanding of their role. This includes arrangements for shadowing more experienced assessors. Staff training needs are clearly identified, and lead to appropriate programmes such as Level 4 management NVQs. PBTS adheres to the guidance on continuous professional

development issued by the Institute for Learning, and staff are embarking on further development of their teaching skills.

16. PBTS have been very effective in their strategies for widening the participation of all levels and types of learners. Despite contacts with several skills brokers PBTS has had no referrals from the service. They have put significant effort into contacting a very wide range of schools and hospitals themselves and successfully recruiting learners onto programmes which are relevant, but are new to many employers. Age and previous educational attainment are not seen as barriers to learning. In most instances PBTS recruit all the staff in a laboratory. The Level 3 course was initially an LSC sponsored women only programme, and was successful in encouraging women, many of whom had no previous relevant qualifications, into learning. PBTS believe they have satisfied the needs of many of the larger employers in the London region. In 2008/09 a major change in PBTS's strategy led to learners being recruited from a variety of backgrounds other than laboratories. Learners hope to gain skills to enable them to move into better employment. This change is being supported by the innovative use of PBTS's own laboratory facilities to provide realistic off-the-job training. This will be linked with increased literacy and numeracy provision at PBTS as initial assessment suggests this will be a significant need in the new cohort. The new programme has been designed in outline; it is too early to judge if it can be delivered in a successful and timely way.
17. Communication between members of staff is satisfactory. There is constant informal communication, and a series of well recorded staff meetings to discuss organisational matters, although the frequency of these meetings has fallen in the latter part of 2008.
18. Resources are used effectively to offer value for money. The number of staff has been reduced in 2008, and the remaining staff carry out a wide variety of tasks. Wherever possible PBTS uses its general resources to help the Train to Gain programmes. For example an IT training suite is to be used to support the increased literacy and numeracy. The two subject specialists have a significant range of responsibilities.
19. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. PBTS has clearly expressed, in policies and statements for employees and learners, its values and strategies and these are reflected in its routine work. Staff, through their interaction with learners, help promote good relations between people from different racial groups and ensure that all have the chance to achieve their potential. The innovative programmes are helping previously under-trained people get welcome qualifications and some new skills. The monitoring of performance of difference groups of learners is not systematic, but there are some examples of useful analysis including the identification of difficulties faced by putting some learners directly into a Level 3 qualification rather than progressing through the levels. While learners are clear about how they would complain if they had concerns, there is no formal complaints procedure for learners or employers. Nearly all learners are employed in public service organisations that have comprehensive equality procedures and

actively promote equality of opportunity. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. PBTS has no young learners, and does not usually have vulnerable adults on its programmes; however staff have a satisfactory understanding of safeguarding issues, and all full-time members of staff have been cleared through the criminal records bureau.

20. The formal use of management information to monitor learner progress is insufficient. Information on such things as dates of visits and progress with NVQs are maintained on various forms. Achievement data, including timely completion, is kept in detailed computer databases. PBTS has processes, such as learners at risk action planning and activity logging, which can help manage learners. This information is used or discussed on an informal basis. There is no regular systematic review to ensure that the learners are progressing well, or if there should be changes to programmes or resources to maintain quality and learner achievement.
21. The self-assessment report has insufficient focus on learners and their outcomes. PBTS has produced two reports, using a format developed by external organisations for Train to Gain providers. This assesses PBTS's performance judged against 60 indicators. However most of these are to do with such things as quality of links with employers and administrative procedures. There is no review of learner outcomes, or detailed review of the quality of provision. The many interlinked indicators do not lend themselves to easy improvement planning for a small business such as PBTS. Most improvements that are needed are routinely identified by the senior staff, and changes are put into place as and when required.

What learners like:

- The very helpful assessors
- The course is just what I need in my work place
- PBTS are a professional organisation; they get back promptly if you have any queries
- The induction was fine – still a few aspects not clear but OK to get me started
- The chance to continue further and gain more qualifications
- Getting a real qualification after all this time doing the job
- Getting on the course after seeing that it was initially for women only (male learner)

What learners think could improve:

- Information before induction, so we could have found a quiet room rather than just a corner of the busy prep room
- The advice PBTS give us on gathering evidence for our NVO
- Less complicated and ambiguous wording of units in the Level 3 qualification

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by PBTS 2006 to 2008.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain Level 2 (06/07) and Level 2 and 3 (07/08) ***	2006/07	overall	87	84%
		timely	73	84%
	2007/08	overall	78	72%
		timely	94	44%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the provider before inspection

*** Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'