

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Learning Concepts Ltd
Date of visit: 29 May 2008

Context

Learning Concepts Ltd was inspected in July 2007. The overall effectiveness of the provision was satisfactory. Leadership and management, information and communication technology (ICT) for users, and literacy and numeracy were satisfactory. Equality of opportunity was inadequate. The company delivers learndirect programmes from two centres in the North East learndirect region; one in Sunderland and the other in South Shields. An additional centre, in Bishop Auckland, is planned to open in June 2008. Both centres are open on weekdays from 9.00 until 17.00. Currently 130 learners are enrolled on literacy courses, 88 on numeracy courses and 51 on ICT courses, 60 of whom are remote learners. Learning Concepts Ltd employs 13 staff, nine of whom are employed full time. A further three staff are due to start in June 2008. The company does not provide any other Government-funded learning.

Sunderland, including Washington and Houghton-le-Spring, has an unemployment rate of 5.6%, compared with 2.9% nationally. Approximately 43% of learners at Learning Concepts Ltd are unemployed.

Achievement and standards

Have the good success and withdrawal rates been maintained or improved since inspection?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

At the previous inspection, the achievement and standard of learners' work were good. Success rates in literacy and numeracy were good and significantly above regional and national averages. For ICT, the success rate was 66%, well above the regional average of 46%, and the national average of 49%. In Quarter 3 of 2007/08, success rates in literacy and numeracy continue to be high at 79%. In ICT, the success rate remains at 66%. The regional and national averages have increased and the rate is now broadly in line with them. Withdrawal rates continue to be low and better than the sector averages. The provider analyses performance of different groups of learners well. Timed-out rates are too high. The provider has carried out a full analysis of individual learners' records, identified reasons for the high rates and taken appropriate action to improve them. Early indications are that these actions are starting to affect improvement.

Quality of provision

Has the learners' progress review process improved?	Insufficient progress
---	-----------------------

Learners' progress reviews were identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Learners set their own session objectives but the targets agreed with learners are often insufficiently detailed and not systematically recorded. Learners' comments on their progress are recorded but are insufficiently evaluative or specific. Learning Concepts Ltd has developed a new system to improve the process. It includes new documents to record the reviews and better target setting for learners during the training sessions in the centres. This process is at an early stage of development and remains an area for improvement. The provider acknowledges that it needs to further develop and implement a more thorough progress review procedure.

Leadership and management

What action has been taken to promote equality of opportunity?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

Since the previous inspection, significant progress has been made in promoting equality of opportunity. A director is now responsible for the development and implementation of equality of opportunity and diversity. Most staff have attended relevant accredited courses and the remaining staff are scheduled to attend soon. During team meetings, equality of opportunity matters are discussed and areas for further development are agreed, for example to organise multi-faith celebrations. Learners now receive a handbook explaining their rights and responsibilities.

The provider works particularly well with a wide range of organisations to promote learning to vulnerable groups which are not engaged in work or education. It has been particularly successful in attracting learners who are unemployed, are lone parents, have experienced long-term health issues leading to unemployment or have learning difficulties. It works well with young learners who are not in employment, education or training, some of whom have challenging behaviour. The Sunderland centre operates from a listed building and has some arrangements for wheelchair users, but they are not satisfactory.

Are arrangements to use feedback leading to improvements?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Learning Concepts Ltd has made reasonable progress in improving systems for using learners' feedback. The provider now routinely uses discussion with groups of learners to identify areas for improvements. Learners have been consulted particularly well in the design of feedback forms. Feedback from learners is analysed satisfactorily and areas for improvements are identified and rectified. For example, at

the learners' request, new adjustable chairs have been purchased for the computer workstations.

How effective is the self-assessment process?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

At the previous inspection, self-assessment was broadly satisfactory. The provider accurately identified some strengths and areas for improvement but failed to identify others. The most recent self-assessment report uses data well to determine judgements in achievement and standards. The judgements and grades of the provision in the self-assessment report were based exclusively on those in the inspection report. Little other evidence contributed to the judgements. For example, no grades or judgements were used from the internal observation of teaching and learning. The post-inspection action plan is monitored well and progress is regularly reviewed. Many of the actions in the plan have been achieved. In a minority of areas, progress has been delayed due to staff changes, such as improvements to the process for learners' progress review.

How effective is the observation of teaching and learning and other quality measures in bringing about improvements?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

The observation of teaching and learning is underdeveloped. A number of informal and unplanned observations are carried out, but the results are not recorded. Since September 2007, seven formal, planned observations have been carried out on induction sessions. No observations have been carried out on the quality of training and support that the learners receive in learning sessions. No formal record exists for use in self-assessment or quality improvement.

Data is used well to analyse trends and set improvement targets for recruitment and enrolment. However, no formal monitoring system exists to show learners' progress relative to their start date and to give managers an overview of timely achievements, particularly on the skills for life programmes.

A quality assurance policy outlines the approach to ensuring the quality of the provision. No plan is in place to show how the various aspects of the policy are monitored and measured. The business is expanding rapidly and the current quality systems are insufficiently thorough to ensure that the quality of the provision is maintained and improved during the expansion.