

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Skills for Security Ltd.
Date of visit: 27 November 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in July 2007, when inspectors found Skills for Security's overall effectiveness to be satisfactory, as well as its capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of improvement, leadership and management and building services. Arrangements for equality of opportunity were inadequate.

Established in 2006, Skills for Security is the skills and standards setting body for the security business sector. The company is based in Worcester and operates nationally. It currently employs 57 staff and a team of subcontracted assessors. Skills for Security contracts with London East Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in the security systems sector. It also contracts with six regional LSCs to deliver Train to Gain for the new level 2 certificate for practitioners and the NVQ in security systems at level 2. Currently, there are 270 learners on apprenticeship and 170 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Apprentices attend colleges of further education for their key skills and technical certificate training and are assessed in the workplace by Skills for Security's assessors. Train to Gain learners receive their training and assessment in the workplace.

At the previous inspection, the Train to Gain contract had only just started. It is now fully established. Since the previous inspection, the management of work-based learning has been reorganised and 10 staff are now directly involved in its management and administration.

Achievement and standards

How effective are the actions that have taken place to improve the slow progress of learners?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made reasonable progress in improving the slow progress of learners. Overall framework success rates have improved consistently over recent years and are currently at 84% for advanced apprentices and 69% for apprentices, both significantly above the national averages. However, timely success rates are much lower at 54% for advanced apprentices and 41% for apprentices for 2006/07. These rates are slightly above the national rates.

At the previous inspection, 42% of apprentices and 5% of advanced apprentices were still on programme beyond their planned end date. Current data indicates a reversal in these figures with 9% of apprentices and 30% of advanced apprentices still on programme beyond their planned end date.

The effective actions taken include a new staff role to monitor learners' progress and to identify learners at risk of not meeting their targets. Planned appropriate intervention takes place. The new quarterly meetings with assessors enable effective targeting of framework completion. New data reports clearly indicate marked reductions in the number of learners staying beyond their planned end dates. The new improved contacts with employers help them to understand their role in ensuring that learners have appropriate assessment opportunities.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the effectiveness of the learners' review process?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made reasonable progress in improving the effectiveness of the learners' progress reviews. New procedures with revised recording forms are now in place. A review of working practices has recently been completed and discussed at the new quarterly assessors' meeting. Assessors are subcontractors and work regionally. They greatly value the opportunity to meet and share their experiences of the review and assessment practices. The quality of the reviews is now systematically and thoroughly monitored with a clear focus on target-setting and learners' progress. All assessors now use the new question cards to check the learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity issues, but the recording of the discussions is still incomplete. The recording of learners' progress on their individual learning plans is still poor.

What improvements have taken place in the assessment practices in the workplace?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made significant progress in improving assessment practices in the workplace. All the practices have been reviewed and updated. Standardisation is now more thorough and two additional internal verifiers have been added to the team. Planning of assessments covering a 12-month period is much clearer and this is shared with learners and employers. Mapping of the background knowledge to the NVQ evidence collection and assessment is in progress, as is the development of guidance and revision notes for learners. The introduction of quarterly assessor meetings has formalised the sharing of good practice, standardisation and consistency of assessment, as well as continuing professional development activities. Target-setting is much more specific, adding increased pace and challenge to assessment. The assessment of each NVQ now includes an appropriate balance of assessment methods, for example, a range of diverse evidence and an observation of competence. Skills for Security

immediately addressed the concerns raised by the external verifier shortly after the previous inspection. The subsequent follow-up visit resulted in the external verifier reporting that no further actions were required and confirming Skills for Security's direct awarding status.

Leadership and management

How effective are the actions that have taken place to improve the promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made reasonable progress to improve the promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity. The company's equality and diversity policy was immediately updated and re-issued. New, specific assessors' and learners' equality and diversity policies were developed and a summary of the learners' policy is in the induction information pack for learners. All three policies are on the assessors' and the learners' websites. The company has reviewed and updated all of its procedures. Employers' equality of opportunity is now monitored and their policies reviewed. The analysis and use of data has improved, although comparisons between different groups of learners are restricted to gender, race and disability.

The new equality and diversity committee meets monthly and covers a wide range of equality-related topics. The detailed and well-laid out action plan has specific and measurable targets and focuses on the impact on the learner. The action plan is discussed at each meeting. A range of materials is now available for assessors to use at reviews including question cards. The discussion of equality of opportunity at induction is very brief and no additional support materials are used.

What progress has been made in the analysis and use of data?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made significant progress in the analysis and use of data. At the previous inspection, there was an over-reliance on informal staff knowledge. All the information from the learners' files is now on the commercial management information database. Training for staff ensures that they can produce a wide range of reports for their weekly meetings and fortnightly for the assessors, as well as additional reports as required. The use of these reports has contributed significantly to the many improvements seen during this monitoring visit.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What developments have taken place to improve the quality improvement activities?	Significant progress
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Since the previous inspection, Skills for Security has made significant progress to improve the quality improvement activities. It has completely restructured the skills and apprenticeship section to integrate it into the main company and to use the company's specialist departments such as finance and marketing. The new posts include additional staff resources and one manager with overall responsibility for the apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. The company's commitment to improve is clear at chief executive and director level.

The new processes and procedures offer a detailed and easy to use quality system. The new websites include information and updates for learners and assessors. The assessor's website has all the new processes and procedures as well as paperwork and handouts for learners. The self-assessment process now involves all individuals and includes the use of feedback from employers and learners. The report is detailed, evaluative and realistic. It makes good use of the improved data reports and focuses on the outcomes for the learner. The new quality improvement plan includes specific and measurable targets and identifies the outcomes and the impact of actions taken. It is available on the staff website and is regularly reviewed and updated.