

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Omega Training Services Limited
Date of visit: 19 March 2009

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in January 2008 at which Omega Training Service's overall effectiveness, leadership and management, equality of opportunity and capacity to improve were judged to be satisfactory. The provision in health, public services and care, and preparation for life and work, were also judged to be satisfactory. Omega Training Services Limited (Omega) was established in 1996 and provides work-based learning for the care sector, specialising in the care of the elderly in the West Midlands. The senior management team consists of two directors. Omega employs 15 staff including the two directors.

Omega contracts with Birmingham & Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It has increased the range of its provision in the last year. The company offers apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) at levels 2, 3 and 4 through Train to Gain programmes. Skills for Life qualifications are also offered through Train to Gain. Omega offers NVQs in health and social care, business and administration, retail skills and children's services learning and development. At the time of the monitoring visit there were eight learners on advanced apprenticeships and 21 on apprenticeships. On Train to Gain programmes, 169 learners are working towards NVQs at level 2, 77 at level 3, two at level 4 and 50 are on Skills for Life programmes. Omega also offers assessor training on a commercial basis. The company currently works with 45 employers and all learners are employed.

Achievement and standards

What progress has Omega made in maintaining and further improving success rates for apprenticeships?	Insufficient progress
--	-----------------------

Omega has made insufficient progress in improving success rates. At the time of the previous inspection, the overall success rate for all apprenticeships was 67%, some eight per cent above the national average. Since then the overall success rate has fallen and at 63% it is now in line with, but not above, the national average. At the time of the previous inspection, the overall success rate for advanced apprentices was 41%, 15% below the national average. For 2007/08 the success rate has increased substantially to 60%, only three per cent below the national average. However, progress in improving timely success rates has been slow. Since the

previous inspection the timely success rate has only increased by a further two per cent and is 19% below the national average.

At the time of the previous inspection the overall success rate for apprentices was high at 83%, significantly above the national average. In 2007/08 the overall success rate declined to 64%, in line with the national average. The timely success rate for apprentices has fallen by 10% to 62%, but remains above the national average.

Leadership and Management

What progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of the promotion of independent learning on Train to Gain?	Significant progress
---	----------------------

Omega has made significant progress in promoting independent learning. At the time of the previous inspection Omega staff did not promote independent learning actively enough as part of the Train to Gain programme for health and social care. Access to resources was limited, learners made little use of information communication technology and few attended off-the-job training workshops.

Since then Omega has invested in a very effective e-portfolio system for some of its NVQ and apprenticeship programmes. The package enables speedy and flexible communication between learners and assessors on practical issues and more regular assessment and feedback on progress. Learners regularly complete assignments at home or independently in the workplace. Internet-enabled laptops are available for learners to use for research if their workplace does not have adequate resources. Learners on health and social care programmes access an internet-based resource to increase their background knowledge for their NVQ. Learners gain valuable incidental skills in using computers and in managing their own learning. Attendance at a range of weekly workshops for first aid, manual handling, equality and diversity, are now satisfactory.

What progress has been made in the use of management information to measure learners' performance?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

During the previous inspection Omega made insufficient use of management information to measure learners' progress and the performance of the different programmes. Omega collected data through the assessors' feedback, but data on learners' progress was not collated or analysed centrally. Managers did not have an accurate assessment of learners' progress and were unable to obtain overall information on learners' performance to inform their decisions about quality improvement. Omega has made significant progress with this area. A comprehensive system which managers use effectively to monitor learners' progress throughout their programme is now in place. All assessors have access to the management

information on a daily basis. A manager is responsible for overseeing and maintaining the data and taking actions to ensure learners at risk of not achieving are identified and supported.

Has the strength of good progression for learners been maintained?	Strength maintained
--	---------------------

At the time of the previous inspection learners following programmes for literacy, numeracy and key skills were progressing well towards qualifications at different levels and were demonstrating good work related skills. Omega has maintained this strength. Achievement rates are still high and most learners work on qualifications for both literacy and numeracy at level 1 or level 2, however, relatively few progress to a higher level, as was identified in the previous inspection report.

Omega encourages all of its learners to aspire to progress onto higher levels. The company gives advice and guidance to employers and employees on identifying individual and organisational needs. It makes the most of changes to Train to Gain funding to take learners through NVOs at levels 2 and 3 and, ultimately to progress to further and higher education.

What progress has been made to further develop quality improvement arrangements?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

At the previous inspection, Omega's arrangements for quality improvement were incomplete. The company did not have a quality policy and procedures manual. Omega has made reasonable progress in developing new systems. Most key policy statements are now in place and Omega's operational manager has compiled a file of documents plus a calendar of reviews and quality checks. Within the team of managers and administrators there is a clearer focus on roles related to quality assurance, with internal audit activity taking place regularly.

Omega has devised new systems for assessment and monitoring of learners' progress and achievement. Changes to the system for reviews have made it easier to identify when learners are struggling with an aspect of their programme and to provide additional support more quickly. The company has invested in a new management information system that makes it easier to monitor learners' progress and identify any difficulties. Omega collects the views of learners and employers at key points in their programme. It uses the data from these evaluations to focus on change and improvement.

Omega has increased the range of its provision significantly in the last year, but has taken care to ensure that quality standards are maintained, making the most of staff expertise, advice from external verifiers and consultancy support.

Omega identified a problem with the observation of teaching, training and learning. In the year since the previous inspection, it stopped using formal, graded observation, relying instead on shadowing of new staff and internal verification checks on assessment practice. The company has commissioned training and consultancy on a new system to be implemented in April 2009.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in developing and implementing an effective post inspection action plan?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

All staff were involved in drawing up the post inspection action plan. The plan is clearly linked to outcomes of the previous inspection and the areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. It is comprehensive and effective with a good focus on continuous quality improvement. The plan contains specific and measurable actions that are clearly allocated to different members of staff to implement. Omega has made at least reasonable progress on most areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Omega's self-assessment is inclusive and uses learners and employers feedback well. However, the report is insufficiently evaluative and its use of data is limited.