

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Barchester Healthcare
Date of visit: 30 July 2009

Context

Barchester Healthcare (Barchester) is a privately owned independent healthcare company. It provides nursing and residential services across the UK and Ireland, through its 16,000 staff who look after over 12,000 people. Its original focus was on older people in care homes but it has now developed other specialist services.

Barchester offers training programmes in: health, public services and care; business, administration and law; learning and development, and hospitality and catering. There are 457 care learners, of whom 327 are apprentices, 112 are advanced apprentices, and 18 on Train to Gain programmes. Of 30 learners in non-care areas, 17 follow apprenticeships in administration and 13 in hospitality and catering. Over 300 apprenticeship learners are privately-funded. Approximately 18% of the training delivered by Barchester Healthcare is funded by the Learning and Skills Council.

The central learning and development team works across Barchester to deliver, support and facilitate all learning activities throughout the company. An NVQ academy manager reports to the director of learning and development. Assessment is carried out by 119 assessors and 15 co-ordinators. A learning and development quality manager, three regional quality and development managers and a national apprenticeship manager report to the NVQ academy manager.

At the time of the previous inspection in July 2008 inspectors judged all aspects of the provision as satisfactory. It has since restructured its learning and development directorate, and its main apprenticeship programme has grown by over 50%.

Achievement and standards

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| What improvements have been made to learners' achievements and standards since the previous inspection? What has been done to reduce the achievement gap for male learners? | Significant progress |
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Since the previous inspection, improvements put in place to the design and management of the programme have been followed by significant improvements in learners' success rates. Apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship overall success

rates have improved substantially in the first nine months of the current year to 80%. Timely success rates have improved consistently from a low of 19% in 2006/07 to 36% in 2007/08, below the national average of 42%, and to 63% in the current year. Train to Gain learners' overall success rates have risen in the current year to 70%. Barchester now encourages learners to take on apprenticeships rather than the less demanding Train to Gain programme.

Since the previous inspection when male learners were achieving more slowly, Barchester has established effective systems for monitoring the progress of different groups of learners. Male learners now achieve at least as fast as female learners, and there are no significant differences between the achievement rates of other groups of learners.

Staff retention is significantly better among learners' than that for Barchester staff overall and considerably better than in the care sector nationally. Staff turnover in the industry nationally is 40%, at Barchester it is 23% overall, and for those on learning programmes it is only 13%.

Quality of provision

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| How effective has the company been at improving and monitoring the progress of all learners? | Significant progress |
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Barchester has made significant progress in improving and monitoring the progress of all learners, an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Apprentices now benefit from a restructured programme which allows most of them to achieve their framework in six months. Barchester has broken the programme into small, manageable steps so that learners can see that they are making good progress and remain motivated. Most level 2 learners complete technical certificates and communication key skills by the first twelve-weekly review. They can see clearly where they are on their programme, and what they still have left to do. Frequent assessment observations, workplace mentors, and audits of reviews ensure that assessment is no longer interrupted by any staff changes. Improvements in the staffing structure have resulted in a smaller number of work-based assessors, the employment of more peripatetic assessors and the appointment of regional co-ordinators. The regional co-ordinators effectively use a 'traffic light' system to ensure that achievements are timely, and also to provide additional support for assessors or learners if required.

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| How effective has the company been at improving the use of individual learning plans? | Reasonable progress |
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Barchester has introduced new and more effective individual learning plans since the previous inspection where they were an area for improvement. They incorporate clearer target-setting and are linked to the 12-weekly reviews. The review document

prompts assessors to amend the individual learning plans clearly and update targets appropriately. Targets now include other training needs, and any additional support needs, as well as assessment activities. Following the restructuring of the programme since the previous inspection, the first 12-week review enables learners to have a better understanding of the progress they have made towards their qualifications. The review document is now well established and assessors are confident in using it. Staff have received useful training in using the new individual learning plans and have a sound understanding of them. They routinely use them with newly recruited learners, but not with learners already on the programmes. .

Leadership and management

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| How effective has the company been at improving the setting and monitoring of targets, both for learners' programmes and for business and development plans? | Significant progress |
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The company has made significant progress in improving how targets are set and monitored in reviews, an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Staff training has supported the introduction of more detailed documentation which emphasises the setting of specific measurable targets with clear timescales for completion. Managers audit reviews and take follow-up action if necessary, including further development work on target-setting. The targets in reviews act as a prompt for action by care home managers, and contribute to an integrated approach to training. For example, if a learner misses important in-house training, or their appraisal is overdue, the targets include these.

The company now has specific and measurable targets in its business and development plans, which have already contributed to improving learners' overall and timely success rates. Directorate level targets are communicated to individual assessors, who know what they need to do and which learners they need to focus on, and when, to achieve their targets. The directorate reports to the Board, which also sets targets for learners' recruitment and completion.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

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| How successful are the self-assessment and improvement planning processes at securing and maintaining measured improvements? | Significant progress |
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Since the previous inspection, Barchester has taken a number of good initiatives to secure measured improvement. These include an organisational restructuring, increased internal verification activity and the redesign of the training programmes. The Learning and Development Directorate has thoroughly cross-referenced its scheme for observing teaching and learning both to Key Skills and to the learning

and development NVQ standards at level 3 to improve the evidence they provide for appraisals.

Close monitoring of a subcontractor offering skills for life training and assessment for Train to Gain learners quickly identified poor performance. Barchester terminated the contract and appointed a new subcontractor. Skills for life achievement and learners' satisfaction are now much higher.

Learner and manager feedback for self-assessment is now more rigorously sought and used than at the time of the previous inspection. Following feedback from learners, Barchester redesigned the workbooks learners use.

Internal verifiers now visit care homes regularly to give face-to-face feedback to learners and assessors following the internal verification process.

The company has devised an effective incentive scheme to protect learners' study time. Care home managers now receive a proportion of the LSC funding to improve training within the home. Following the introduction of the scheme, care homes have bought extra computers, books and other resources and sent more staff on training courses.