

Paragon Education & Skills Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 106538

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Last day of inspection: 16 September 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider
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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Paragon Education & Skills Ltd (Paragon) is an independent training provider based in Bournemouth, with Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contracts to deliver apprenticeships, Train to Gain and Entry to Employment (E2E). Paragon also contracts with local authorities to deliver young apprenticeships. Paragon leads on the retail and engineering diplomas in Chesil, Bournemouth and Poole and is wholly owned by Sovereign Equity. Paragon covers the south west and Hampshire, with increased numbers of learners from the financial services sector across the United Kingdom. Paragon was inspected in December 2006 and has increased in size significantly, with approximately 4000 learners in work-based learning. Overall effectiveness and main aspects of the provision were judged to be satisfactory, as was the provision in each of the subject areas, apart from business, administration and law which was judged to be good. The provider demonstrated that it had sufficient capacity to make improvements. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has been made in making the self assessment process sufficiently self critical leading to quality improvement?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Paragon has improved its quality improvement processes and has made reasonable progress in making the self-assessment process sufficiently self critical leading to quality improvement. At the previous inspection self-assessment was judged satisfactory. The process itself is now more effective in improving the experience of the learners. For example, Paragon has used a recent rigorous internal review very effectively to improve many aspects of provision. Paragon also makes good use of learner and employer feedback, for example introducing a much improved learner information pack and a more informative induction as a result of learner feedback. The improved management information system is supporting quality improvement more effectively with all staff now involved constructively in self-assessment and quality improvement. The 2009 process is regarded as a significant improvement by most staff. The previous inspection found the self-assessment report insufficiently self critical. Whilst the 2008 self-assessment report is an improvement on the previous report it is still insufficiently self critical and it does not capture the full detail of the quality improvement process.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving the success rates of learners in both apprenticeships and Train to Gain? Reasonable progress

Paragon has made reasonable progress in improving the success rates of learners in both apprenticeships and Train to Gain. Overall success rates for apprentices are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection to be in line with national averages with a rate of 69% in period 12 of 2008 to 2009. This comprises 62% for apprentices and 74% for advanced apprentices. Success rates for some smaller areas of apprenticeship training are too low, for example in customer service level 2 with a success rate of 50%. Overall, timely success rates are in line with national averages. However, whilst timely success rates for advanced apprenticeship are nearly 60%, timely success rates for apprenticeship are low at 39%. Appropriate data is made available to staff, who now recognise the importance of timely completion. Since the previous inspection Paragon has expanded its delivery to offer Train to Gain programmes. Success rates are good in most areas for 2008/09 at an average 84%. During 2008 to 2009, 89% of young apprentices successfully completed their qualification and a high proportion progressed into further education or training.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in implementing mechanisms for improving teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

Paragon has made reasonable progress in developing their observation of teaching and learning. Paragon's scheme for the observation of training was not sufficiently developed at the previous inspection and identified as an area for improvement. The observation scheme is now more effective. Consultant support and the recent rigorous internal review have indicated where improvement is needed. Action has been swift. Effective cluster teams train lead internal verifiers to observe sessions and increase the focus on the quality of teaching and learning. They moderate judgements to ensure greater consistency across all sectors and centres. The performance of all staff is risk assessed and support is put in place where required. A good range of staff development and training supports the improvement of teaching and learning, including mentoring. External partners conduct peer assessments. Trainers value the feedback provided and make improvements to their performance as a result. Learners confirm improvements in the quality of training. In two joint observations during the monitoring visit the feedback given was in line with inspector judgements. Areas for improvement are explained clearly and inform the organisations training plan.

What progress has been made in improving the review of learners' progress? Reasonable progress

Paragon has made reasonable progress in improving the review of learners' progress. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Learners' targets in individual learning plans contained insufficient detail. Following detailed analysis and

consultant support, reviews are improved and carried out more frequently where a risk assessment indicates that a learner requires support. Initial assessment of individual learner need is now improved. Targets relate to the results of assessments. Learners are clear about the progress they are making through their qualification and in the development of their skills. Employers sign the review document to indicate they have received the information, but some have insufficient involvement in the review process. Trainers record the progress learners make in literacy and numeracy in their learning plans and learners update their learning logs in every session. However, this information is not integrated within the workplace review.

What progress has been made in developing productive links with employers and external specialist agencies? Significant progress

Paragon has made significant progress in further developing productive links with employers and external specialist agencies. At the previous inspection Paragon's partnership working, which benefited learners and employers, was good. Paragon has built on this strength and is continuing to develop close working relationships with many key local employers and linked organisations. Paragon collaborates extensively with local schools to develop the provision for young apprentices and is leading on the retail and engineering diploma development. These close and effective partnerships are highly valued by schools and employers. Paragon works constructively at regional and national level with Sector Skills Councils and awarding bodies to develop learning programmes relevant to employer needs. Paragon has an appropriate strategy to manage its customer relations successfully, for example setting challenging targets to ensure the speed of its response to customer enquiries, and holds regular meetings with referral agencies to ensure agency clients are well looked after. Paragon plans to formalise the management of customer relationships with a new customer relations management system.

What progress has been made in the development of safeguarding procedures? Significant progress

Paragon has made significant progress in developing procedures for safeguarding learners. Paragon meets its obligations under the relevant government legislation and has clear policies and procedures to ensure the safety of learners. It has a clear policy with technical safeguards to monitor internet use. All staff in contact with learners have enhanced checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. Paragon has appointed a dedicated manager for safeguarding and learner welfare. Paragon has increased the focus by all staff on safeguarding, both in meetings and by internal training sessions. The induction of new staff includes a session for safeguarding learners. Learners receive a comprehensive induction pack which informs them of how Paragon protects and supports them. Learners feel safe and know who to approach with any concerns. Learner representatives are encouraged to explore the issues learners may face and learner feedback indicates that Paragon responds promptly to any aspect discussed.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the development and reinforcement of equality and diversity?

Significant progress

Paragon has made significant progress and improvements in the development and reinforcement of equality of opportunity and diversity. This was an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Paragon has built its Train to Gain programme effectively to widen participation of under-represented groups in training. Paragon's use of information has improved to enable the analysis of the recruitment and performance of different groups. Access to training for learners from minority ethnic groups has increased considerably from 11 learners registered in 2006–07 to 126 in 2007–08. Of current learners, 344 are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Paragon provides dedicated support for its pre-apprentices and young apprentices, its E2E learners and those learners with disabilities. New staff attend a well-planned induction session and existing staff regularly participate in workshops to increase their knowledge and confidence in reinforcing and promoting equality and diversity. An effective working group of staff from across the centres meets to update, improve and to share good practice. Posters, messages and notice boards are placed throughout the training centres to reinforce awareness. However, whilst equality and diversity are discussed in all learner reviews, the recording in review documentation is sometimes insufficiently detailed.

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