

L.I.T.S. Limited

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

L.I.T.S. Limited (LITS) was founded in 1981. The company operates nationally, providing training and assessment services to over 100 engineering related organisations, predominantly in the lift industry. Approximately 50% of the company's income is from public funding. It holds a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) contract for advanced apprenticeships in engineering and also a Train to Gain (TtG) contract for adults. There are 181 Train to Gain learners and 126 learners following advanced apprenticeships. Most learners are in engineering maintenance. The majority are in London and the South East.

LITS training advisors visit learners in the workplace to carry out regular progress reviews, assessments and coaching. Training for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 and the technical certificate is provided by further education colleges. The NVQ at level 3 is delivered in the workplace, with employers providing the necessary workplace skill development.

At the last inspection in July 2008, all main aspects of provision were graded as satisfactory. 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

What progress has been made in improving the scope, consistency and application of quality assurance processes? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, LITS has continued to refine its quality assurance processes, both raising standards and establishing greater consistency across the company. The 15 regional training advisors, who are all experienced engineers, play a pivotal role in maintaining and improving the quality of the company's work with learners. Regular informal communication amongst this group and routine visits by a lead 'roving' internal verifier have contributed to greater standardisation of quality processes. In addition, a twice-yearly meeting of the whole team provides a useful arena in which to discuss current and emerging issues, as well as to share good practice. Feedback from employers and learners indicates a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the work undertaken by LITS. One employer interviewed emphasised the importance of the continuity provided by LITS over many years, against a national backdrop of many changes in qualifications and training programmes.

The self-assessment report is honest in identifying what LITS considers to be its strengths and areas for development. However, it is not used sufficiently to drive quality improvements. Judgements and grades, although realistic, are not informed by systematic analysis of success data or extensive consultation with employers and learners. The evidence provided indicates that areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been, or are being, addressed.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving learners' success since the last inspection? Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection, advanced apprenticeship framework success rates have improved significantly as LITS has continued to implement effectively its quality improvement strategies. The success rates were 75% in 2008/09 and 78% for the first two months of the 2009/10 contract year. NVQ success rates for Train to Gain learners are now high, having improved to 83% in 2008/09 and 93% so far in 2009/10. Timely success rates are high for Train to Gain learners, at 100% for 2008/09. In contrast, timely success rates for apprentices have not improved since the last inspection. They were 38.5% in 2007/08 and fell to 29% in 2008/09. LITS are doing all they can to improve timely success, but they are not responsible for the delivery of the off the job training, the duration of which often precludes timely success. Timely success rates show signs of improvement in 2009/10. Key skills success rates for apprentices are high, at 95%.

As at the last inspection, learners continue to achieve a wide range of additional qualifications and skills development in the workplace is good. Some learners continue to higher education. Learners comment very positively about the opportunities they have to develop their skills and the contribution that their training makes to progress in employment. Employers comment positively about the contribution that LITS makes to the success of learners and the good progress learners make in the development of their skills.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the poorer aspects of workplace assessment which were noted at the last inspection? Reasonable progress

Workplace assessment by direct observation, especially for learners in the lift industry, was insufficient at the last inspection. Additionally, arrangements for assessment by expert witnesses in the workplace were insufficiently thorough.

LITS understands the priority to improve the extent of direct observation. The lead internal verifier and training advisors are alert to making the most of any direct observation opportunities that may present themselves, but the nature of the lift industry and the varied site based environments at which learners work make it very difficult to plan or carry out work-based assessment. LITS is beginning to replicate practical activities for assessment at two of its training locations to try to partially address this issue. In spite of all this, assessment practices are sound.

Arrangements for assessment by expert witnesses in the workplace are now thorough. Each learner portfolio now contains an approved and 'signed off' list of expert witnesses. The lead internal verifier checks these lists. Training advisors know the expert witnesses and their competencies. The quality of the range of evidence, including the role of expert witnesses is discussed at the bi-annual assessor standardisation/moderation meetings. The meetings

ensure that learners benefit from consistent assessment practice. An expert witness training programme is offered by LITS, but there is little take-up.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in using management information to improve quality systems and to raise standards? Reasonable progress

The use of management information was identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection. Since then, much time and effort has been allocated to creating and piloting a new bespoke electronic central database. The new system has been field tested with one training advisor and is due to be implemented fully at the end of the year. All relevant information about employers and learners is now easily accessible to the field and office staff.

Staff now have a better understanding of the progress and next steps for their learners and standards have been raised. The system enables training advisors to input learners' reviews and email them directly to the relevant employer and to LITS head office. For each review meeting, learners' progress is categorised as 'ahead', 'behind' or 'on target'. With this new system in place, LITS is able to identify more easily the frequency and outcomes of reviews across the regions, review trends and also to produce a range of summary reports on different aspects of their work.

What progress has been made in improving learners' and employers' understanding of equality of opportunity and in the consistent application of equality of opportunity policies and procedures? Insufficient progress

Arrangements to secure equality of opportunity were satisfactory at the last inspection. LITS has a clearly written equal opportunities policy that identifies and explains the most common grounds of discrimination and also summarises key aspects of relevant legislation. The policy sets out what actions LITS takes to raise awareness of the policy with staff, learners and their employers. However, there are no associated action plans or any formal evaluation of the impact of the policy or the consistency of its application.

Learners are informed about equality of opportunity policies and procedures during their induction. All learners complete a useful self-study pack on equality of opportunity, as well as a guide for apprentices on employment responsibilities and rights. Learners are also required to demonstrate their understanding of equality of opportunity when visited by training advisors.

Responsibility for the recruitment of learners is with employers, although LITS staff have some input when they attend recruitment interviews. However, there are no female learners

and a very low number of trainees from Black or minority ethnic groups. LITS does not routinely undertake analysis of success data by ethnicity or gender.

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