

Inspire to Independence

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Inspire to Independence (i2i) is a private training provider founded in 2004 and based in York. The workforce development arm of the business holds five regional Learning and Skills Council contracts to provide Train to Gain programmes at levels 2 and 3 in Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West, the North East, the East Midlands and the West Midlands. i2i offers National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in retail skills, customer service, team leading, warehousing and storage, and business administration. Management skills at level 3 are offered as are adult literacy and numeracy up to level 2. i2i workforce development has 43 staff and currently 1,198 learners are enrolled.

i2i was inspected in December 2008. The effectiveness of provision, achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were judged to be inadequate. The two sector subject areas, retail and commercial enterprise, and business administration and law, were also inadequate. Capacity to improve was 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

What progress has i2i made in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process to bring about improvements? Reasonable progress

The previous inspection identified significant weaknesses in the self-assessment process. Self-assessment was ineffective, strengths were overstated and there were insufficient contributions from staff, learners and employers. Quality improvement plans were poor. Self-assessment is now thorough and well managed. The most recent self-assessment report is clear, evaluative and critical, with judgements based on good evidence. Staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process. Staff development has supported staff in making a valuable and informed contribution to self-assessment. Learner and employer views have been used to inform the judgements in the self-assessment report. Key employers have not yet been consulted on the final draft of the self-assessment report, although this is planned.

The post-inspection action plan is detailed, with clear action points and targets and clearly identified staff responsibilities. Progress against actions has been regularly and well monitored. A detailed new draft quality improvement plan is in the final stages of preparation. Appropriate actions have been carried forward from the post-inspection action plan and other identified actions have been informed by the areas for improvement identified in the new self-assessment report.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has i2i made in improving the overall and timely success rates for learners? Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection overall and timely success rates were low. Learners were making slow progress towards their qualification. i2i has improved its systems for monitoring learners' progress and setting targets for staff to improve the overall and timely success rates. Arrangements for performance management, target setting and monitoring performance against targets are now good. Staff understand the data. There have been recent significant improvements in overall and timely success rates. The company's own data from May to the date of the monitoring visit show overall success rates are satisfactory at 75% and timely success rates good at 67%. Learners are now making faster progress towards their qualification. The percentage of learners on programme after their planned end date has reduced from 10% in August 2008 to 4% in July 2009. Learners enjoy their learning; they improve their confidence and develop a good range of work-related skills. Data are now collected on the performance of different learners by gender, disability and additional learning needs. However, these data are not yet used sufficiently to analyse the performance of different types of learners or to set targets.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the planning and coordination of learning? Reasonable progress

The judgement made at the previous inspection was that the planning and coordination of learning was poor. Individual learning plans are now used more effectively and they are updated regularly by assessors rather than by other members of i2i staff. They are also more individualised, identify appropriate NVQs for learners and take into account literacy and numeracy support needs. Training has taken place to support staff in developing more challenging targets, diverse methods of delivery and coaching, and more focused assessment planning. Observations of staff carrying out training and assessment activities are used well to promote examples of good practice. Assessor workloads have been adjusted to allow more time for assessment visits to workplaces. Many of these actions are having a positive impact on improving overall and timely success rates and reducing the number of withdrawals. Staff acknowledge further improvements have yet to be made; for example, through a more planned approach to target setting and the delivery of training, better use of the results of the learning style questionnaire in individual learning plans, and recording new skills and knowledge gained by learners in progress reviews.

What progress has been made in improving the involvement of employers in the planning, scheduling and monitoring of learners' training and assessments? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection employer involvement was insufficient to support learning and assessment. Over the last nine months several positive actions have been taken

to improve the participation of employers. i2i staff now effectively promote the benefits of Train to Gain to employers and employees. Employer training resources are being mapped effectively by assessors against appropriate NVQ units across the different sector subject areas. Staff training is focusing on improving employer engagement and encouraging assessors to develop more direct contact with employers and managers. Staff meetings and individual one-to-one meetings with managers and assessors have a clear focus on employer issues. Feedback from learners is particularly positive about the support they receive from staff in the workplace. Increasingly, more managers working for employers are completing NVQ qualifications themselves and so becoming more knowledgeable about NVQ requirements. The full impact of these actions is not yet clear, although an improving trend in overall and timely success rates is evident. A number of improvements identified by staff have yet to be implemented. These include encouraging more commitment from employers and managers at varying levels within employers, supporting assessors to spend more time exchanging information with employers, and putting additional information (such as the timeframe for completing an NVQ) in the employer pack.

What progress has been made in improving arrangements to support learners who have literacy and numeracy needs? Reasonable progress

The last inspection judged support for literacy and numeracy to be inadequate. Very recent actions by i2i staff, supplemented by the work of external consultants, have been introduced to improve the quality of support provided. These actions include the development and implementation of a skills for life strategy and action plan, and raising the awareness of staff about learners' different support needs. All staff are supported to achieve appropriate literacy and numeracy qualifications and to embed Skills for Life activities into NVQ units. It is too early to judge the impact of these actions. Several other initiatives identified by staff have yet to be developed and implemented. These include the further embedding of Skills for Life activities and the continued development of the skills and confidence of staff to deliver support for literacy and numeracy. i2i have yet to explore e-learning resources for use in the workplace. It is planned to improve the new management information system to provide data that can be used more effectively to analyse the performance of learners who are provided with literacy and numeracy support.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving quality improvement arrangements and the use of management information to drive quality improvement? Reasonable progress

At the time of the last inspection, quality assurance and improvement arrangements were ineffective and not fit for purpose. The use of management information to evaluate performance and analyse trends was insufficiently thorough. i2i had no process to monitor learners' progress towards their qualification. Many positive actions have been taken to improve arrangements for quality improvement. A new quality policy and strategy are being implemented. New quality processes, covering key training processes, are being written and implemented. However, there are

insufficient arrangements for auditing the processes, such as target setting in reviews of learners' progress. New guidance documents for staff have been written, including assessor and internal verification handbooks and guidelines for the observation of teaching and learning. These are thorough and encompass observing the completion of individual learning plans, on- and off-the-job training, coaching, and learners' progress reviews. The observation process has been piloted and will soon be introduced throughout the provision. i2i plans to improve the observation process by introducing the observation of initial assessment and induction. Joint observations are being introduced to strengthen the moderation of the observation process.

What progress has i2i made in improving the promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity? Reasonable progress

Equality of opportunity was inadequate at the time of the last inspection. Policies and procedures were satisfactory but the promotion, monitoring and reinforcement of equality and diversity were inadequate. Following the inspection, an equality and diversity action plan was developed. The plan identified appropriate actions, all of which are being progressed, but many actions have not been achieved within the planned timeframe. Actions such as the appointment of equality champions in each region and the establishment of an equality and diversity peer working group are successfully improving learner and staff understanding of equality. Staff have benefited from professional development on equality and diversity and resources for staff and learners have been devised. Two staff equality questionnaires indicate that staff are more confident dealing with equality and diversity. Equality and diversity is now a fixed agenda item at national and regional meetings. The management information system is now producing data that can be used for equality monitoring and target setting but insufficient work has been done on this. Targets have not yet been set although a quick analysis of data has already highlighted some interesting trends such as learners of Indian origin being more likely to leave the programme early. i2i has identified that the coverage of equality and diversity at induction and reinforcement during learners' progress reviews require more work.

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