

MAXIMUS Employment and Training UK - Workstep

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

MAXIMUS Employment and Training Ltd UK (MAXIMUS) acquired Westcountry Training and Consultancy Services (WTCS) in August 2008. MAXIMUS holds a number of contracts with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), many of which have changed since the inspection of Workstep provision in December 2008. The current Workstep contact covers two areas, Somerset and the West of England, as at the previous inspection, and is still for 65 places.

All inspection grades at the inspection of Workstep provision in December 2008 were satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has MAXIMUS made in improving the effectiveness of the self-assessment process and improvement planning? Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection the self-assessment process was satisfactory. It included a detailed internal inspection of the provision. However, the final report was not sufficiently self-critical and many of the strengths identified were normal practice. The resulting improvement plan did not fully identify the actions taken to address areas for improvement or evaluate their effectiveness. The current self-assessment report and improvement plan use the same format, they focus on contractual matters rather than on improving the quality of provision.

The post-inspection action plan correctly identified the full range of issues for MAXIMUS to address as a result of inspection. However, it did not lead to sufficient action to ensure effective and sustained improvements to the provision. A new quality manager is in post and is introducing a more self-critical approach to self-assessment. This includes team feedback on each aspect of the Common Inspection Framework. The quality manager has also introduced a more detailed quality manual to ensure continuous improvement of provision. However, it is too early for these changes to impact on the Workstep provision. To date, MAXIMUS has made insufficient progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has MAXIMUS made in improving rates of sustained open employment? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection progression rates into open employment had varied over time with no clear improvement trend. MAXIMUS did not identify which participants were capable of planned progression into open employment.

Shortly after inspection MAXIMUS has introduced significant changes in the recruitment of participants to the programme. Participants now expect to progress into open employment six months after the start of their programme. Employment consultants and employers work well together to support participants in developing appropriate employability skills. Most participants recruited since the introduction of these changes progress into open employment with the same employer.

Although MAXIMUS has improved its management information system since the inspection, it has not developed it sufficiently to monitor progression into sustained open employment effectively. A few participants have been on the programme for longer than six months, some for much longer. Although MAXIMUS provides information on the numbers of participants who have progressed, it does not identify how long they had been on programme, or when they were expected to progress into sustained open employment.

Quality of provision

What progress has MAXIMUS made in ensuring that target setting for participants is specific? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection target setting in development plans and reviews was insufficiently specific. Some participants were not fully aware of their long-term goals. Targets often focused solely on one aspect of personal development and did not take account of wider training needs, including basic skills development. Participants did not always remember their targets, and did not always receive a copy of the review form for reference.

Employment consultants review participants' progress at intervals suitable to their learning and support needs. They generally take place at fortnightly or monthly intervals. Relationships between employment consultants and participants are good. Reviews are supportive, and participants are able to discuss their progress and concerns. Targets are now specific and written in clear language to ensure that participants understand them. Time frames for the achievement of targets are agreed, but not always recorded on the review forms. Verbal agreement during reviews assumes that target completion dates are for the next meeting, unless specified otherwise. Participants now receive a photocopy of the review documentation and are aware of the agreed targets.

What progress has MAXIMUM made in improving participants' literacy, language and numeracy skills in the workplace? Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection initial assessment was not systematic. Many participants did not understand the importance of literacy, language and numeracy skills in work situations. Many were reluctant to undertake training and thought it irrelevant to their current employment. Employers were not always aware of the value of naturally-occurring opportunities in the workplace to use and extend basic skills. Staff had insufficient literacy and numeracy qualifications to support appropriate skills development.

A new initial assessment process has been developed and implemented since March 2010. It is a significant improvement on previous processes, but it is too early to identify the impact on provision. Before this change, MAXIMUS did not take action if participants stated that they did not want to develop identified skills needs and referred participants who wanted to develop their skills to local providers. Employment consultants and employers support participants to develop basic skills in the workplace and encourage them to recognise the benefits of basic skills development to their work. However, employment consultants have not received relevant training to ensure the effectiveness of their interventions. MAXIMUS has recently appointed an employment consultant with basic skills qualifications. This appointment is too recent to impact on participants' experience.

Equality of opportunity

What progress has MAXIMUS made in improving participants' understanding of equality of opportunity matters? Insufficient progress

The previous inspection identified that participants had limited understanding of equality of opportunity matters. Participants did not always understand their responsibilities in promoting equality of opportunity in the workplace, and did not receive sufficient training from employment consultants on relevant legislation. Reviews did not always include discussion of relevant issues.

Materials presented to participants at the beginning of the programme still do not clearly outline equality legislation, the potential causes of discrimination or participants' responsibilities for promoting equality of opportunity in the workplace. MAXIMUS does not ensure the development of their understanding of such issues systematically throughout their programme. MAXIMUS has updated the review documentation to include a prompt to discuss equality of opportunity during reviews. Employment consultants do not record the content of the discussions. It is not clear whether participants have an improved understanding of relevant matters.

Leadership and management

What progress has MAXIMUS made in ensuring the safeguarding of vulnerable adults? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection procedures for safeguarding participants met current government requirements. MAXIMUS carried out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for all staff. MAXIMUS was in the process of reviewing the policy for safeguarding vulnerable adults and planning a programme of staff training on safeguarding.

MAXIMUS has made reasonable progress in developing its safeguarding arrangements. MAXIMUS keeps and updates a central list of CRB checks for all staff with direct contact with vulnerable adults. All staff working directly with Workstep participants have received enhanced CRB checks. The current designated senior manager for safeguarding vulnerable adults has been in post for four months and has received appropriate training. Each local office has a representative for safeguarding matters. Training for business managers on safeguarding legislation

and the effective operation of relevant safeguarding procedures took place in March 2010. MAXIMUS expects all staff to complete relevant online training to level 2 by the end of March 2010. The updated safeguarding policy and procedures are included in the new quality assurance manual. Safeguarding is now included on the agendas of team meetings. MAXIMUS plans to include the checking of safeguarding matters in reviews in the near future.

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