

Ufi Ltd (North West Region)

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 the visit

Ufl Ltd (Ufl) was established as the lead consortium provider for Train to Gain in the North West region in 2006. The contract for Train to Gain is due to finish in July 2010. Ufl's main provision is learndirect, which is inspected separately. The Learning and Skills Council funds the Ufl's Train to Gain programme in the North West region under a national contract. Train to Gain and learndirect are managed by a regional team operating without a regional office. They include a regional performance director and five regional performance managers. Ufl contracts with a consortium of 12 partner providers.

At the inspection in August 2009, the overall effectiveness of the provision was satisfactory, as were capacity to improve, achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management, and equality of opportunity. Three subject areas were inspected: health, public services and care was inadequate, engineering and manufacturing technologies was satisfactory and retail and commercial enterprise was good.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How effective is self-assessment in improving the provision? Reasonable progress

At the inspection, self-assessment was judged to be satisfactory. Since the inspection, a further cycle of self-assessment has been completed covering the academic year 2008/09. The process this time was changed to facilitate greater involvement of partner providers. An event was held in which all providers brought their own self-assessment of their Train to Gain provision. Participants had access to a detailed breakdown of success rates and other data for the first time. Their judgements were subject to challenge and moderation by other providers. Ufl's self-assessment report is detailed and rich in judgements. Train to Gain is more explicitly visible in the report which also covers the larger learndirect provision. It acknowledges areas for improvement and is more realistic in the subject area grades. Self-assessment leads to a development plan which is used effectively to manage improvements.

Ufl is aware of weaknesses among its partner providers. It has taken action to reduce its dependence on a single provider in subject areas and given extensive support to help an inadequate provider to improve. It has not taken sufficient action to address dissatisfaction by employers with one partner provider. Ufl has insufficient direct access to employers' views. It relies too much on the providers passing on the views of employers.

Outcomes for learners

Have success rates improved, particularly in health and social care? Reasonable progress

At the inspection, overall success rates were satisfactory. Since then, they have improved and now stand at 87% for the first six months of the current year. Overall success rates varied significantly between subject areas and were low in health and social care. They have increased in this subject area from 60% in 2008/09 to 79% in the current year and are now satisfactory. Performance monitoring has improved. Ufl now generates management information to monitor success rates separately at each provider and for each subject area. The data are used by Ufl and the providers to target areas of weak performance. Action plans have been used effectively to improve the performance of existing providers. In addition, new providers have been brought in for health and social care training to replace some of the provision with previous low performance.

Quality of provision

Are learners making satisfactory progress, supported by effective reviews? Reasonable progress

The progress of some learners was slow at the time of the inspection, particularly in health and social care. The timely success rate in health and social care was only 39%. Inspectors identified weaknesses in learners' progress reviews in several subject areas. Progress has improved substantially. Those learners who were late in completing their qualification did so quickly. Other learners have completed within the agreed period. The timely success rate in health and social care has increased to 64% in the first six months of the current year and is now satisfactory. Target completion dates are now more carefully selected, taking into account the individual learner's initial assessment and working pattern. Assessment practices have been reviewed and improved. Learners who miss an assessment date are promptly identified and encouraged to catch up quickly. Learners' progress reviews are still of a variable standard. Some reviews, particularly in health and social care, focus too much on short-term actions rather than on setting medium- and longer-term targets linked to the learning plan and achievement of the qualification. Learners have insufficient opportunities to measure their progress against their learning plan. Records of reviews are sometimes too brief and are confused with assessment plans.

Has the planning and recording of training and assessment improved in engineering and manufacturing technologies? Reasonable progress

Ufl works with one partner to provide Train to Gain programmes leading to a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in road passenger driving for taxi drivers. Staff at the provider have now been trained by a national organisation to address concerns at the inspection about assessment practice. This has been followed by revisions to the assessment planning and recording documentation. A more thorough initial assessment of learners' skills is now used to identify each

individual's specific training needs, whereas previously this was done during the programme. Recording of prior learning has now improved. The results are used to produce an individual learning plan. Training materials have been reviewed and completed training is now recorded. UfI has worked closely with the provider to help it implement the changes and has conducted checks to ensure the new arrangements are being used effectively.

Is the promotion of Skills for Life now effective and are learners taking advantage of the provision? Reasonable progress

The promotion of Skills for Life to learners with an identified need is now good at most providers. At the time of the inspection, few learners were taking up the opportunity for support. One retail provider has established an excellent Skills for Life facility which enables almost all of its learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills even if they already have sufficient skills to complete their NVQ. Learners are keen to take advantage of the opportunity and value the skills they develop. Some providers still find it difficult to encourage learners to engage in Skills for Life training, particularly when learners lose income by taking part, such as self-employed taxi drivers. Their provider has established outreach centres, such as in a public house, to encourage participation. In health and social care few learners have an identified need for Skills for Life training. Providers have a range of strategies to encourage participation, including the use of literacy and numeracy worksheets as part of the NVQ programme and using learners' written portfolio work to improve their literacy and language skills.

Leadership and management

Has UfI developed further its safeguarding arrangements? Significant progress

At the inspection, UfI's safeguarding arrangements did no more than meet current government requirements. Since then, UfI has significantly improved its safeguarding arrangements and raised the priority of safeguarding among all of its partner providers in the consortium. They now have a good understanding of the issues. Staff of UfI and its providers attended training in safeguarding by a national organisation. This training has been further developed at consortium meetings. The annual health and safety check of providers has been updated to include a greater emphasis on safeguarding. In addition, UfI has introduced a specific health check of partner providers for safeguarding. It covers their safeguarding arrangements, the risk assessment they carry out and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks where appropriate, their own internal staff training and development, the way they promote safeguarding to learners and their arrangements for informing learners' employers of their responsibilities. A director is the designated person at UfI national level and another person is designated in the North West region. Good practice in safeguarding, which has been developed in the North West region, has subsequently been shared with other regions of UfI.

Are effective arrangements now in place to quality assure the partnership organisations which deliver the training?

Significant progress

Ufl has completely changed the relationship it has with its partner providers since the inspection. They are much more involved in the operation of the consortium. Four consortium meetings are held each year. They are used by the partner providers to share good practice, such as in observation of teaching and learning, and to discuss common issues. Previously, little communication took place between the providers and Ufl managed the consortium in a 'top-down' manner. Providers have now formed working groups to focus on specific issues, such as safeguarding. The partner providers have welcomed the change. They feel much better supported by Ufl and by other providers in the consortium. Monitoring of providers by Ufl focuses much more on their performance and the quality of their provision. Previously, it was more of an audit of compliance.

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