

DART Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 51468

Name of lead inspector: Judy Birkenhead HMI

Last day of inspection: 28 January 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Manor Farm House
London Road
Shardlow
Derbyshire
DE72 2GR

Telephone number: 01332 794610

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Dales Agriculture & Rural Training based in Shardlow Derbyshire was established in 1999 and became DART Limited (DART) in 2008. It provides work-based learning in the East Midlands for 214 learners on government funded programmes. DART contracts with Derbyshire Learning and Skills Council to provide an apprenticeship programme in agriculture, horticulture and animal care and an Entry to Employment (E2E) programme. Over 30% of learners have a specific learning need or disability. DART is subcontracted through The Derbyshire Network to provide Train to Gain for adults in employment. It provides vocational learning for young people in local schools and delivers a small amount of commercially funded training.

DART Ltd was inspected in 2006. Effectiveness of provision, leadership and management, quality improvement and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. The subject area of agriculture, horticulture and animal care was judged to be good. Five out of six themes at the monitoring visit in 2008 were judged as making significant progress. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit. In addition inspectors reported on safeguarding.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to ensure self-assessment covers all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework and improvement planning is effective? Significant progress

At the previous inspection learners and employers views were not taken into account and improvement planning was inadequate. DART has continued to make excellent progress in developing effective arrangements for self-assessment and improvement planning. Stakeholder consultation and involvement in the self-assessment process has significantly improved as recognised in the previous monitoring visit. The timing of the self-assessment process in the quality cycle has been reviewed and subsequently refocused to make more effective use of stakeholder consultation.

The quality improvement plan, as identified at the previous monitoring visit, is focused well on maintaining strengths and addressing areas for improvement. This has been further strengthened by a clear process to identify tasks at operational level and these are effectively communicated to staff. DART has used learner and employer views well to accurately identify areas that have yet to improve further. It has made very good use of external consultancy to ensure the latest self-assessment report reflects the revised Common Inspection Framework, Framework for Excellence and Every Child Matters.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has the provider made to improve and maintain overall success rates? Significant progress

Following the previous inspection in 2006, for advanced apprentices the high overall success rates are maintained and timely framework success rates improved. In 2008/09 overall and timely success rates at 81% and 54% respectively are well above the national rate.

Overall framework success rates for apprentices maintained at 80% in 2007/08 dipped to 67% in 2008/09. This is explained by the numbers of young women learners who have taken extended breaks due to pregnancy and personal reasons. DART is now fully aware of how future agreed breaks in training should be recorded and submitted to the funding body. Timely success rates have significantly improved since the previous inspection from a low 5% to above the national rate.

Success rates for E2E learners are excellent. The proportion of E2E learners in 2008/09 that progress to education training and employment at 93% has improved significantly since 2006/07. In the same period 87% of learners achieved an NVQ level 1 and 60% progressed to the apprenticeship programme.

Success rates in 2008/09 for learners with a disability or specific learning need is higher than their peers. Data is used well to monitor any variance in achievements and targets are set to narrow the gap.

Quality of provision

What progress has taken place to ensure learners develop appropriate key skills and literacy and numeracy skills? Significant progress

At the previous inspection, significant numbers of learners were not completing their apprenticeship framework due to a lack of key skills achievements. DART had no strategy for the development of learners literacy and numeracy skills beyond initial assessment. This is no longer the case and significant progress has been made to improve these aspects. DART has established appropriate policies and procedures for the provision of skills for life which are coordinated effectively. A skills for life coordinator with relevant qualifications and experience coordinates the provision. Managers oversee the learning support process and monitor learners' progress. More staff are now qualified in key skills. Learners benefit from better integration of key skill learning with their job skill development. Learners make better progress.

A strategy is now in place for literacy and numeracy support arrangements. Appropriate procedures to enable assessors to plan for additional support and identify additional learning and review time are systematically used. Learners that require specialist expertise to support achievement of learning goals are referred to The Derbyshire Network. DART has further identified the need for staff with the

appropriate level of literacy and numeracy teaching qualifications. It is working with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to achieve this.

What progress has been made in establishing good arrangements to support learner’s understanding of equality and diversity? Significant progress

At the previous inspection learners had limited opportunity to improve their understanding of equality and diversity. DART continues to make significant progress in establishing good arrangements to integrate equality and diversity in the curriculum. The previous monitoring visit recognised the investment in staff training and the development of learning resources. The provider continues to promote and engage learners’ interest in equality and diversity with a range of interactive learning activities.

The use of the case study work books and the monthly themed topics for assessor and learner discussion are now well established. Their use is discussed at team meetings and monitored through the audit of progress reviews and the observations of teaching and learning. DART has further plans to sample and evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

New work books include the themes of illegal drugs and bullying. All learners complete a diversity project as part of their key skills. They are encouraged to think more widely about diversity and its meaning both in relation to themselves and other minority groups.

Learner’s welfare issues are better supported through the introduction of new procedures. Problems such as bullying are effectively resolved with employers through a negotiated and well documented process.

Leadership and management

What progress taken place to ensure the observation process is systematic and contributes to improvement? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection the observation process was not linked to continuous improvement. DART is making reasonable progress in implementing a systematic observation process for teaching, training and learning although it is in its early stages of application. A formal process of observing and improving off-the -job sessions was introduced in 2009 and is in the first cycle of application. Appropriate planning tools, criteria and records are used which are fit for purpose although they currently lack sufficient focus on learning. One member of the management team oversees the process and two subject learning coaches and heads of sections carry out observations. Other aspects of learners experience such as start up, initial assessment, induction, reviews, additional support and coaching are included. Assessments are observed as part of internal verification.

Although it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes some improvements have been successfully dealt with in the short term. For example the introduction of thorough lesson plans, improved schemes of work and increased practical activities in off-the-job sessions. Approaches to learning sessions are more structured by applying, for example, codes of conduct and improved punctuality.

What progress has the provider made in ensuring quality improvement arrangements are systematic? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection quality improvement arrangements were insufficiently systematic. The provider has made reasonable progress in embedding new arrangements to support improvements in this area. It has introduced a quality policy for its programmes which describes specific processes with measurable outcomes that support actions to improve the quality of service and user satisfaction. This includes action plans in relation to user satisfaction surveys; observation of teaching and learning; benchmarking; assessment; internal verification and response to external verification reports.

The Quality Improvement (QI) group meets each month. Sector heads act as channels to promote good practice at team level. The QI group monitors the performance of DART and reviews the effectiveness of its improvement strategies.

DART recognises that further development is required of its quality arrangements and has identified that use of data to set improvement targets and that embedding the new system for accountability at all levels remain areas for improvement.

What progress has been made in establishing safeguarding arrangements? Significant progress

Safeguarding was not reported in the previous inspection. DART's progress to meet the independent safeguarding authority (ISA) requirements is good. Management responsibilities are clear. It has detailed policies and procedure in place to safeguard young people and vulnerable adults. A designated person has responsibility for safeguarding and staff training. All staff directly involved with learners have completed safeguarding training and further training is planned to include both new and administrative staff. DART works closely with the safeguarding team of Nottinghamshire City Council and Derbyshire County Council in order to support all learners. Staff are subject to enhanced criminal records bureau checks. The recruitment and selection policy has a strong emphasis on the importance of these checks. Risk assessments are extremely thorough and carried out for venue, learning activity, home and lone working.

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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