

Blue Training UK Ltd

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

Blue Training UK Ltd (Blue) is an independent training organisation located in Salford Quays, Manchester. Blue holds a direct contract with Greater Manchester Skills Funding Agency to deliver apprenticeships and Train to Gain funded programmes in healthcare, retail, warehousing, hospitality and catering, service enterprises, Skills for Life, and business administration. Approximately 745 learners are on programmes in the East of England, London, the North West, the South East, the South West, the Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside. Blue employs a managing director, an operations manager, and 34 staff.

Blue was inspected in February 2008. The overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, the quality of provision and leadership and management were judged to be good. Outcomes for learners was judged to be satisfactory, and equality of opportunity was inadequate. In the subject areas, retailing and wholesaling was judged to be good; public services, and hospitality and catering were judged to be satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made to improve the self-assessment and the implementation of quality improvement processes?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, self-assessment was judged as not particularly critical or evaluative. The current self-assessment report of October 2009 uses data well to critically inform its judgements. The report is current for three years. This extended time frame does not allow the provider to annually review and reflect on performance or to respond to business or sector changes.

The good quality improvement procedures identified at the last inspection are being further refined. The provider is developing an electronic system to measure the quality of key aspects of the learner journey. The observation of key processes and supporting documentation are scored against a clear quality criteria framework. Outcomes of the process are planned to more precisely inform the grades and judgements in the next self-assessment report.

The quality team has recently been extended. The training needs of assessors are identified well through the observation of key processes. Assessors receive good individual and group training to help them improve performance.

The development plan satisfactorily focuses on improvements identified in the self-assessment report. Outcomes are measurable, however, numerical targets are not

used sufficiently well to enable the provider to measure progress and some achievement dates are insufficiently challenging.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made to improve success rates, particularly timely success rates on Train to Gain programmes?	Reasonable progress
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At the last inspection, outcomes were good for learners in retail and wholesaling but it was too early in the programme to make judgements on outcomes for hospitality learners. In 2008/09, overall success rates on apprenticeship programmes are above, and some significantly above, national average in all subject areas. Success rates by the planned end date are satisfactory.

On Train to Gain programmes, overall success rates in 2008/09 are high. Success rates in the agreed time are low and well below national average in four subject areas. Good management action has significantly reduced the amount of learners who finish after their planned end date. Managers meet monthly with assessors to review the performance and progress of individual learners. Data systems give very good information, by learner, on achievement of units against targets; overall progress is compared with where learners should be at that time in their programme. In December 2009, 50 learners had gone beyond their planned end dates and this has been reduced to four learners in June 2010.

The provider has worked well with a national company who went into receivership. They took over the training contract and worked proactively with learners to complete their programmes. Approximately 70% completed their programme.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made to improve the observation process of assessors in the workplace?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection, observations of assessors in the workplace were insufficient. Since the last inspection, Blue has taken effective action to identify underperformance. A systematic quality audit of records and assessment practices, increased observations in the workplace and specifically focused training have remedied an over assessment of NVQs and a reluctance by assessors to assess key skills and technical certificates. The quality team has increased the frequency of observations in the workplace to at least five a year for all staff, to include observations of induction, progress reviews, training and assessment. Staff value the feedback and supportive approach of the quality team. Observation records are sufficiently analytical, and actions to improve performance are clear. Improvement targets are sufficiently detailed but there is insufficient guidance on the support, training, or other opportunities available to assessors to support improvements.

Learners' views are collected during observation visits but some of the questions used are superficial and add little quality to the observation process.

What progress has been made to improve learners' access to, and the management of, e-portfolios? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the monitoring of learners' access to electronic portfolios was insufficient. Blue has completed a comprehensive audit to assess the barriers preventing learners' access to their e-portfolio. Considerable investment has replaced the original software with a more accessible system. Blue has set a sufficiently challenging target that requires 65% of learners to actively manage their electronic portfolios. However, the monitoring of the number of learners accessing their portfolios against the target is insufficient. Assessors support learners well in developing the skills needed to use the system. Learners are further supported by useful guidance material in the induction handbook.

Assessors have excellent resources to support electronic assessment evidence collection that include laptops, a digital pad and audio, photographic and video equipment. Learners and employers value the wide and diverse assessment methods that are not reliant on paper-based evidence. The recruitment of a technical developer is supporting the development of a virtual learning environment. Blue is recognised as an exemplar provider by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA), who cites Blue's wide range of assessment methods and e-portfolios as good practice. In partnership with other exemplar providers, Blue is developing a virtual discussion board to provide learners with an occupational communication forum.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made to ensure learners are safeguarded? Insufficient progress

Blue identified safeguarding as an area for improvement in their self-assessment report. It has made some progress in implementing improvements in response to the requirements of the Common Inspection Framework 2009. Learners receive personal safety at work guidance during induction. A workplace hazard questionnaire and individual risk-assessment identifies any training requirements to reduce potential risks. Assessors complete health and safety appraisals on all employer premises. Staff effectively reinforce working safely through relevant questions asked during individual learner reviews.

Wider safeguarding aspects are less well embedded. Blue are currently centralising staff information. Criminal Record Bureau checks are completed on all assessors working with learners aged 16 to 18. Learners' personal files include contact details for parents or guardians. Blue's safeguarding policy does not sufficiently focus on learners' personal safety and does not include guidance on the safe use of the

internet. Staff training in safeguarding is planned. A senior staff member is responsible for safeguarding but not all staff know who this is, or are familiar with the safeguarding policy. Links with Local Safeguarding Children Boards are underdeveloped. Blue is currently completing risk-assessments to identify the most vulnerable learners and any potential risk they may incur.

What progress has been made to improve the promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, the promotion of equality of opportunity was inadequate. Since the inspection, all staff have completed training to improve the promotion of equality and diversity. Equality of opportunity is introduced to learners at induction. Information in the learner induction handbook on equality and diversity has been extended. However, there are too few positive examples of good practice or details of the company's commitment to equality and diversity or their expectations of learner behaviour. The much improved range and breadth of questions posed during individual learner progress reviews provides good reinforcement and recorded responses evidence learners' good understanding of equity and diversity topics. The establishment of an equality champion provides staff with a point of contact to clarify equality queries and receive guidance but the role is not yet developed fully. Blue provides good support for non-English speaking learners by providing interpreters and written questions in both English and the learner's native language. Blue uses equality data well to identify underrepresented groups participating in training within the companies they work with. In partnership with a large employer, Blue are developing a young peoples' academy to recruit more 16 to 18 year old learners.

What progress has been made in using data for quality improvement purposes? Significant progress

At the previous inspection, the management information system was judged as particularly effective. Since then Blue has further improved the process by introducing a new management information system that provides a wide range of reports that better meets its business needs. A wide range of very useful reports are provided for senior managers, managers and assessors that give accurate and timely information on performance. Data are used very well to inform management decisions. Weekly performance reports against company targets are shared with senior managers, who identify underperformance and take effective improvement actions. Monthly reports on learners whose progress is slow allows prompt action to be taken to affect improvements. Aspirational and challenging success rate targets for each programme are monitored and reviewed monthly.

The performance of different groups, by ethnicity, age and gender is analysed effectively. The performance of assessors and the overall performance of different regions is analysed and identified underperformance is addressed.

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