

TheLightBulb

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53032

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Last day of inspection: 23 July 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. TheLightBulb (TLB) is a private limited company, established in 2003, based in Basildon, Essex. Since the previous inspection in 2006 it has undergone a change in senior management and organisation, learner numbers have grown substantially and the range of provision is now much broader. TLB offers National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes primarily to learners in Essex and the Thames Gateway, but also across the whole of the East of England.
2. The company is contracted to deliver Train to Gain and, recently, apprenticeship programmes by the Skills Funding Agency in Essex. There have been no apprenticeship completions as yet. It also offers a range of commercial full cost training packages, some of which are complementary to the government-funded provision. Funded provision constitutes around 65% of turnover.
3. In 2006 TLB offered an intermediate level NVQ in each of specialised plant operations and team leading. TLB currently offers a total of 22 NVQ programmes across the subject areas of health and social care, construction, engineering, information and communication technologies, retail and commercial enterprise, preparation for life and work and business administration. All aspects of the construction programmes are delivered by subcontractors as are some aspects of the other NVQ programmes.
4. Essex combines high density urban and agricultural rural environments. Around 62% of the population is qualified to level 2, compared with 65% nationally. Slightly over 3% of the population is claiming job seeker's allowance, compared with 3.5% nationally. In 2008/09, 50% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 gained five or more GCSEs at A* to C including English and mathematics, in line with the national average.
5. The population of Essex is predominantly White British or White Other (97%).
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of TLB:
 - Aurelia (Plant operations)
 - Construction Card Manager (Plant operations)
 - Jane Steer and Associates (Customer service and business administration)
 - Profit from Training Partnership (Engineering)*
 - Debut Hair and Beauty Training Academy*
 - Abbot Health (Health and Social Care)*

* Providers with small and/or very recent subcontracts and not included in the inspection.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Train to Gain	1,092 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Health and social care	3
Construction, planning and the built environment	2
Information and communication technology	2
Customer service	3
Business administration	2

Overall effectiveness

7. Overall effectiveness is good. The majority of learners on the Train to Gain programmes make good progress and achieve very good results. The achievement of construction learners is outstanding. All learners develop and apply good work skills to their own and employers' benefit. The majority of learners enjoy their programme and increase in their self-confidence and motivation.
8. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory overall. Learners' interests and understanding are stimulated by experienced assessors who work very closely with each learner. The amount of detail learners gain from feedback varies between assessors; target-setting is often too general and lacking in specific actions to improve.

9. Very few TLB learners need to develop their literacy and numeracy skills but those that do are signposted appropriately. Support and guidance for learners are good and reflect TLB's generally very open and supportive approach to people management and business organisation. Most of TLB's many partnerships with employers are well established and very productive.
10. TLB has developed good management and quality improvement practice over time. Staff have a good understanding of the business and support its aims. TLB is steadily improving all aspects of its provision, one clear impact of which is the high and much improved learner outcomes, together with ongoing improvement in the one subject area where outcomes have been poor. Arrangements to safeguard learners have been developed and are satisfactory. Equality and diversity arrangements are also satisfactory but data to identify differences in performance are not always accurate. The overall process of self-assessment is satisfactory. It is thorough, accurate and evaluative but lacks any assessment of the individual subject areas.

Main findings

- In all but one programme area, the rates at which learners complete their programmes in the time specified are very high. They have much improved over time to well above national rates. The outcomes for learners on construction programmes are outstanding. Outcomes for health and social care learners are poor, but current learners' progress in this programme is satisfactory.
- Learners develop and apply good social, practical and theoretical skills. They make good use of these enhanced skills to identify efficiency savings, improve productivity or help win new business. Learners state that they feel safe. The standard of learners' work in portfolios meets awarding body standards but learners are not always sufficiently challenged to achieve an even higher standard.
- There is little variance in the achievement of different learner groupings. However, TLB's data on the performance of each group are not always accurate.
- Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. The better aspects are in the longer established programmes where learners' interests and understanding are stimulated well by experienced and innovative assessors who work very closely with groups and individual learners. Assessors use a wide, but inconsistent, range of assessment methods and resources to enhance learning.
- Assessment planning and practice are satisfactory. Learner visits are scheduled according to learners' and employers' needs.
- The initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills and preferred learning styles is satisfactory. Few learners are identified with support needs but, if necessary, learners are signposted to specialist organisations, or supported informally by assessors. One recent group assessment did not meet TLB's required standard of practice.

- TLB's reviews and reporting of each learner's progress are regular and detailed. However, the targets set for learners are not specific or time bound. Assessors' feedback to learners varies in quality and detail. The planning of learning on every NVQ programme is not always good enough to extend all learners' knowledge beyond the required standard.
- TLB meets the needs of employers and learners very well through its wide range of programmes and additional specialist courses. Learners value the impact of specialist courses.
- Close partnerships with employers generate good involvement in, and support for, training, for example ensuring learners gain appropriate experience at work to meet NVQ requirements. Employers are highly supportive of the NVQ programmes.
- Learners are guided and supported well. Most assessors provide good individual care and support to learners which help to accelerate their achievement.
- Leadership and management are good. TLB's senior team sets and meets challenging performance improvement targets. Progress is thoroughly monitored. TLB has taken appropriate and decisive actions to improve health and social care provision, the impact of which is currently satisfactory. The monitoring of one subcontractor has not been rigorous enough to identify an instance of poor performance.
- TLB's arrangements to safeguard learners and raise awareness of safeguarding issues meet expected standards. Establishing appropriate safeguarding practice has been a priority for TLB in the past year. TLB staff and learners have an adequate understanding of safeguarding issues.
- The promotion and practice of equality of opportunity and diversity are satisfactory. Learners have a sound understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity in principle and practice, and some demonstrably apply these values very well in the course of their work.
- The performance of all groups of learners is analysed well for variance. The achievement of TLB learners with learning difficulties or disabilities is significantly above the national average. However, the set of data used in the most recent self-assessment report (SAR) did not identify past underperformance by a small group of learners.
- Quality improvement arrangements are good and a priority for TLB managers and staff. A continuous improvement plan is used well to identify and monitor key actions and progress towards achievement. Self-assessment is satisfactory. The self-assessment report is comprehensive, evaluative and reflects inspectors' views but does not include any subject area-specific evaluation. TLB recognises that its system for observing training and assessment is ineffective.
- TLB has very good arrangements to collect, analyse and respond to learners' and employers' views. Historically, such views are very positive, further confirmed by the range of very positive views gathered during inspection.
- TLB provides good value for money.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Better meet learners' needs through improved target setting to improve the quality of learning, and use the outcomes of initial assessment to improve individual planning for all learners.
- Improve progress towards achieving timely success rates in health and social care through closer monitoring and assessment of learners to identify any who are struggling.
- Ensure that self-assessment is extended to include a full evaluation of each subject area's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Use accurate data to identify any differences in performance between groups of learners and respond accordingly.
- Implement a new system for observing training and assessment to provide constructive development points for staff.
- Ensure that the monitoring of subcontractors who are geographically remote is sufficiently thorough to ensure consistently good delivery and experiences for all learners.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- gaining a qualification, more knowledge and confidence
- the flexibility of the programme
- the friendly, approachable assessors who explain things well and make sessions enjoyable and fun
- TLB's good facilities and being treated in a professional way.

What learners would like to see improved:

- knowing how well they are doing or when they are due to finish
- ensuring that all learners are challenged to learn as much as they can
- having to wait a long time for certificates.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that TLB is accessible, reliable, communicates well and does what it says it will do
- TLB's friendly approach, in which nothing is too much trouble
- the excellent service
- the good range of training courses.

What employers would like to see improved:

- expanding the amount of training provided during NVQ programmes
- clearer guidelines at the start of the programme so that the expectations of all parties are clear.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

11. TLB demonstrates good capacity to improve. One of the two NVQ programmes offered at the last inspection has improved from satisfactory to good. TLB has successfully expanded the range and levels of NVQ programmes offered and has substantially increased the number of learners.
12. By 2008/09 learners' achievements had improved significantly over time. Most learners achieved their qualifications in the time specified at levels which exceeded national averages by considerable margins. TLB has a good record of setting and achieving challenging targets. Staff are well supported and share a determination to continually improve the quality of the provision.
13. TLB has good arrangements for thorough quality monitoring and improvement. Data are now used very well. Self-assessment is accurate, although it focuses on the provision overall and lacks evaluation of the performance of the different subject areas. The contracts of poorly performing subcontractors in health and social care provision were terminated but learners are now making satisfactory progress with TLB.
14. TLB's user engagement strategy is effective. The views of learners and employers are acted upon and promote improvement.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

15. Outcomes for learners are very high on most programmes, significantly exceed national rates, and have improved over time. Learners' outcomes are outstanding on construction programmes.
16. Learners enjoy their learning and develop new theoretical and practical skills which they apply successfully during the course of their employment. Learners increase in self-confidence and most are motivated to succeed at work. Learners and employers can identify tangible improvements in their business through NVQ training, such as gains in efficiency and productivity, improved working practices and securing new business.
17. Learners feel safe at work and during training. They receive good instruction in safe working practices. Construction learners have a high level of confidence in health and safety arrangements and demonstrate rigorous safe working practices.
18. The standard of learners' work in portfolios meets awarding body standards but learners are not always sufficiently challenged to achieve an even higher standard. However, most learners are encouraged to attend additional specialist TLB training sessions, which they value.

19. There is little variance in the achievement of different learner groups. However, TLB's data on the performance of each group are not always accurate. They did not identify under-performance by a small number of minority ethnic learners with a subcontractor whose contract has since been terminated.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

20. The quality of provision is good. Training and assessment are satisfactory overall. All assessors are experienced and adequately qualified. The better training and coaching is on the longer-established programmes, constituting around half the overall provision. Learners' interests and understanding are stimulated well by experienced and innovative assessors working closely with groups and individual learners. Assessors use examples of current industrial practice well to add interest and context to the NVQ programme. They make good use of professional discussions and brainstorming to enhance learning. The quality and range of teaching and learning resources used are not consistent across the assessor team.
21. Assessment planning is satisfactory. Visits to learners are regular and scheduled flexibly, for example according to learners' shift patterns. Interim support to learners is also provided by email and telephone.
22. The quality and depth of feedback to learners varies between assessors; some provide formal, well-written records, but for others it is only verbal. The planning of learning is not well enough developed in customer service to provide a sufficiently individualised programme.
23. The initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills and preferred learning styles is satisfactory. All learners receive feedback on their skills level at induction. TLB has very few learners with identified support needs but, if necessary, learners are signposted to specialist organisations for further support. Informal help is provided by assessors as required. One recent group initial assessment session involved some poor practice.
24. Assessors provide sufficiently detailed reports on learners' progress to TLB on a weekly basis. However, in some cases the specific actions to achieve qualifications identified in individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed and the targets set for learners are not specific or time bound. The planning of learning is not well enough developed in customer service to provide a sufficiently individualised programme.
25. TLB meets the needs of employers and learners very well through its wide range of programmes at levels 2 and 3 and through additional specialist courses. Learners' and employers' choice has been expanded recently to include apprenticeship programmes. TLB works very closely with employers to provide programmes that reflect and augment employees' job roles.

26. Partnership working is good. Productive partnerships with many employers have been developed and sustained over several years. Most employers are actively involved in and support learners' training arrangements and they attend learners' reviews.
27. Assessors provide good individual care, guidance and support to learners which help to accelerate their achievement. Close links with employers help to ensure that learners gain appropriate experience at work to meet NVQ requirements. A programme may be suspended if need be, enabling a learner to continue at a later date. Learners receive thorough information about what the NVQ units involve, although a few customer service and ITQ learners lack complete clarity about the learning objectives of their programmes.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

28. TLB's senior team aims for high standards. It sets and achieves demanding performance targets. TLB's strong focus on improvement is underpinned by a sound knowledge of what is working well and what needs to be improved. All staff have responded well to the challenge of improving learners' outcomes and their practical and theoretical work-related skills. Performance management of the TLB-run programmes is very good and the monitoring and management of subcontractors, with one recent exception, are generally thorough.
29. Most aspects of TLB's operations, including administration, assessment processes and quality systems, have been reviewed, simplified or expanded during the past eight months and are being rolled out across the operation.
30. Learners' success rates are now very high on all but one NVQ programme. The health and social care provision was poor but TLB has taken appropriate and decisive management actions to improve it, the impact of which is currently satisfactory.
31. In the past year there has been rapid expansion of TLB's commercial training courses which have successfully expanded the range of additional options taken up by learners.
32. Internal communications are good, reflecting an inclusive and participative approach to the management and development of the business. Good use is made of regular staff and management meetings to review performance. Data are collated and analysed closely.
33. TLB's arrangements to safeguard learners and raise awareness of safeguarding issues are satisfactory. All learners interviewed stated they felt safe at work and during training. TLB and its subcontractors pay good attention to promoting health and safety to learners. TLB staff have an adequate understanding of safeguarding issues gained through internal meetings, poster displays and a presentation by an external organisation. The development of comprehensive safeguarding arrangements has been a priority for the organisation during the

past calendar year. Criminal Records Bureau checks and the central record, which includes all subcontractor staff, are complete and up to date. A designated person has been appointed and has received appropriate training. TLB works closely with learners' employers and some local organisations to safeguard learners effectively.

34. The promotion and practice of equality of opportunity and diversity are satisfactory. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and reflect current legislation, although the wording in one key document requires updating. All staff have received relevant and up-to-date training. A staff panel has been established which pays good attention to promoting and reinforcing equality and diversity within TLB and in the course of each programme. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity in principle and practice, and in some cases are applying these values very well in the course of their work. Good attention is paid to promoting aspects of equality and diversity to learners at induction, less so during reviews.
35. The performance of different groups of learners is analysed well for variance. The achievement of TLB learners with learning difficulties or disabilities is significantly above the national average. However, the set of data used in the most recent SAR did not identify past underperformance by a small number of Black or Black British-African learners with a subcontractor whose contract has since been terminated.
36. TLB has very good arrangements to collect, analyse and respond to learners' and employers' views. Such views are mainly very positive, further confirmed by the range of views gathered during inspection.
37. Self-assessment is satisfactory. Staff are appropriately involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report focuses on overall aspects of the provision. In this respect the SAR is comprehensive, accurate and evaluative. A succinct range of strengths and areas for improvement are clearly identified, most of which reflect inspectors' judgements. The main grades awarded in the SAR are the same as those awarded during inspection. However, the SAR does not include any subject-by-subject analysis of the quality of the NVQ or apprentice programmes.
38. The SAR is closely linked to a detailed continuous improvement action plan, now being used very well as a practical tool to achieve continuous improvement. The monitoring of progress towards achieving improvement is regular and thorough and the designated actions are specific and time bound.
39. TLB recognises that an area for improvement is its system for the observation of training and of assessment. While frequent observations take place, the recorded outcomes do not provide meaningful developmental outcomes for staff or general insight into what is working well and what is not.

40. TLB provides good value for money. The success rates of most learners are much improved and are very high. The resources used are fit for purpose and managed well.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 3

Context

41. Currently, 46 learners are working towards qualifications in health and social care, most at level 2. The majority of these learners are female. All learners are employed in a range of care settings which include care agencies, organisations providing care for people with learning disabilities and a women's refuge centre. Assessment is carried out in learners' workplaces by a team of freelance assessors.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are poor. In 2008/09, only 41% of level 2 learners achieved their qualifications within the time specified, although two thirds eventually completed. Only 10% of level 3 learners achieved at all. These outcomes were achieved by a subcontractor whose contract with TLB has since been terminated.
- TLB now manages the provision directly and has taken strong and decisive action to promote improvement. While no learners have yet reached their programme completion dates, all those currently on the programme are making satisfactory progress and their work is of an adequate standard. Learners are enthusiastic about their course and enjoy the training.
- Learners are developing satisfactory knowledge and skills. They build on their existing expertise by gaining a better understanding of communication, legislation and health and safety issues. Employers report that learners improve their self-confidence and become motivated to progress in their roles. However, while the required evidence is being generated for portfolios, some learners have few opportunities to extend their knowledge further.
- Learners are encouraged to take a diverse range of suitable NVO units. The programme length is set according to the needs of each learner, although some target dates are unrealistically short.
- Learners feel safe. They trust their assessors and feel comfortable with them. Learners receive good instruction on safe working practices. For learners in one care home a greater awareness of health and safety has improved their ability to risk assess activities.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessors are flexible and adjust their visits according to the individual needs of learners. They visit regularly and also provide support by email and telephone. Formally-recorded and well-written observations of learner performance take place early in the programme.
- TLB's system for monitoring learners' progress is insufficiently rigorous to identify whether any learners are falling behind. Individual learning plans do not link any previous workplace training to the learner's programme or identify any

gaps in learning. Interim dates are set for the achievement of incremental targets but reviews do not evaluate progress against these dates.

- Resources are adequate. Assessors are appropriately qualified and experienced. Textbooks are available from TLB and assessors have access to computers and digital voice recorders. Some assessors create their own resources, but TLB does not monitor or standardise the resources used.
- Internal verification is appropriately planned and executed and useful feedback is provided to assessors. Observations of assessors' performance take place but the comments recorded could be more detailed and constructive.
- Assessment and referral for literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. All learners have an initial assessment and are given feedback on their skills level. There are currently no learners with identified support needs. Extra informal help is provided by assessors if required.
- TLB meets the needs of employers and learners well through its wide range of programmes and additional courses. Over several years, TLB has developed productive partnerships with employers, many of whose employees have benefited from a number of different learning programmes.
- Support for learners is satisfactory overall. Most assessors work closely with, and provide adequate levels of advice for, learners. Links with employers help learners to gain appropriate experience at work to meet NVQ requirements.
- Employers report that communication from TLB is particularly responsive. Assessors keep employers well informed of learners' progress and any issues that arise.
- Learners have an appropriate understanding of equality and diversity issues and complete a workbook on the subject as one of their first pieces of work. Equality and diversity and health and safety are reinforced during reviews, but such discussions are not always recorded.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Improve the depth and detail of the monitoring and recording of learners' performance to give a clear picture of learner progress.
- Use individual learning plans more effectively to identify and plan learning and set realistic, interim and final targets; link the review process with the plans.
- Extend the range of resources available for learners while monitoring and standardising the resources used by freelance assessors to improve the learners' experience and extend their learning.

Construction, planning and the built environment

Grade 2

Context

42. Currently, 208 learners are working towards NVQ qualifications in construction plant operations. All learners are employed and the majority are participating in level 2 qualifications, with a small number at advanced level. Programmes are delivered in partnership with two training subcontractors who undertake all training and assessment in the workplace. Women comprise 3% of learners. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is 10%.

Key findings

- Learners' success rates are outstanding and are well above the national rates. In 2008/09, 98% of level 2 and 100% of level 3 learners achieved their qualifications within the time specified, compared with around 75% nationally. Current learners are making very good progress in their qualifications. Not enough learners progress from intermediate to advanced level.
- Learners enjoy their learning and work and confidently use their work experiences to meet the assessment requirements for their qualification. The range and type of evidence in learners' NVQ portfolios meets the standard of the awarding body, but does not show evidence that learners are being challenged to achieve more.
- Learners develop good work skills which are valued by their employers and customers. Learners are well motivated to achieve an NVQ and their Construction Plant Competence Scheme (CPCS) card to enhance their employment prospects. The programmes help employers to achieve the construction industry target for a qualified workforce.
- Construction learners feel safe. They have a high level of confidence in health and safety arrangements and they demonstrate rigorous safe working practices. All learners have a good understanding of health and safety procedures at work, which are enforced by employers and assessors throughout their learning programmes.
- The quality of training and assessment is good. Learners benefit from experienced and well-qualified assessors who share their knowledge well. They make good use of examples from current industrial practice. Effective use is made of a variety of training and assessment materials to ensure learners' needs are met effectively.
- Assessment and verification are good. Learners are fully aware of their qualifications, unit content and the standards required by awarding bodies. Assessment preparation is good. Learners are well briefed and work well in supportive environments. Assessment visits are very flexible and are arranged to meet learners' and employers' work schedules.
- Progress reviews are satisfactory. In most cases clear actions to achieve qualifications are in place. However, too many reviews are insufficiently detailed

and targets set for learners are insufficiently specific or time bound. Coverage of equality and diversity during reviews is adequate.

- TLB provides a good range of additional units within the plant operations qualification which effectively meets learners' and employers' needs. This includes specialist training in mobile telescopic crane operations which is greatly valued by learners and employers.
- There are good partnerships with numerous construction employers. TLB and its subcontractors work closely with these employers to ensure that programmes meet learners' needs for the workplace and that qualifications meet current industry requirements.
- TLB provides very effective support which helps learners to achieve. Well-qualified and highly experienced assessors provide excellent care and support to learners. Many learners significantly improve their work skills. Flexible individual support arrangements accelerate learner achievement. Although signposted well, not enough learners make use of support for literacy and numeracy from specialist organisations.
- The monitoring of subcontractors is good. A detailed service level agreement is used effectively to ensure high levels of achievement and to ensure good standards of work. Managers promote high standards in a positive and supportive culture. Rigorous internal verification ensures that awarding body standards are met. The tracking of learners' progress is good.
- A self-assessment report for construction has not been produced. There is no evaluation of this subject area or clear and relevant targets which are monitored and updated regularly.
- Resources are good and are used well to support training and assessment. There are particularly good resources for specialist plant operations.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Encourage learners to incorporate a wider and more challenging range of NVO evidence in their portfolios to enhance their learning and achievement.
- In progress reviews ensure that clear targets are set which are specific and measurable and which help learners understand what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
- Produce a critical and accurate self-assessment report which identifies clear areas for improvement for the construction programme set against a clear and measurable action plan.

Information and communication technology

Grade 2

Context

43. TLB has 69 learners working towards information technology user qualifications (ITQ). All learners work towards ITQ at level 2. Around half of all learners are female, 1% have a declared disability and 97% are White British. The courses are primarily delivered in the learners' workplaces.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are very high. In 2008/09, 86% of level 2 learners achieved their qualifications within the time specified, well above the national rate of 50%. The success rate of level 3 learners was 83%, compared to 51% nationally. Success rates improved significantly compared with 2007/08. The quality and content of portfolios are satisfactory, with insufficient challenge to achieve even higher standards.
- Learners enjoy their learning and make good progress towards completion. Learners develop good practical skills. They gain confidence in applying new ICT applications and enhance their knowledge of existing applications. Most learners have good access to additional training in word processing and spreadsheet software at their employer's site or through TLB's additional courses.
- Learners feel safe at work and during assessment. Safe working practices are promoted effectively by employers and TLB assessors throughout learners' training programmes.
- The quality of assessment is satisfactory. Trainers and assessors are appropriately experienced and qualified. Visits to learners are regular and scheduled around learners' work and shift patterns. Learners receive good feedback, although too much of it is verbal and unrecorded.
- Initial assessment is satisfactory. Adequate assessments are completed to determine whether learners have the required literacy and numeracy skills at level 1 and basic competency in ICT, and most do. However, the outcomes are not used to inform the individual training plan of each learner.
- Target setting on individual learning plans is not sufficiently specific, measurable or time bound. The planning of learning is not always well developed enough to extend all learners' knowledge beyond the specified NVQ requirements.
- The training programme is very responsive to the needs and interests of learners and employers. The provider works closely with employers to provide a programme that reflects and augments employees' job roles.
- TLB has developed productive partnerships with employers to develop the quality and range of the ITQ programmes. Employers are closely involved in training arrangements and learners' reviews.

- Information, advice and guidance are good. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their actual job roles when selecting optional units and the assessor gives them thorough information about what the units involve.
- Learners receive good support to achieve. Advice and guidance are responsive to learners' needs. Assessors are very flexible in their approaches to, and accommodation of, learners' needs. Assessors make themselves available to all learners when visiting an employer and by email or telephone between visits. Effective coaching is provided to support learners with any learning needs or who are falling behind.
- The programme is well managed. Managers provide good support and direction to staff. They engage with learners and employers to improve the provision. Communication is good. Learners are involved in the self-assessment process and comment on the quality improvement plan. The tracking and monitoring of progress are good.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of what these aspects mean in principle and practice. Learners discuss equality and diversity at induction, although they are not sufficiently promoted or reinforced during reviews.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Use the outcomes of initial assessment and reviews of learners' existing skills more effectively to plan and review each learning plan and set specific and challenging targets.
- Develop learning plans to further develop learners' knowledge and skills beyond the NVQ requirements, addressing individual needs.
- Develop staff expertise in providing all learners with constructive written feedback to help learners progress.

Customer service

Grade 3

Context

44. TLB has 108 adult learners working towards customer service qualifications. They are employed in a range of public and private organisations in the East of England. Learners work towards level 2 or level 3 qualifications. Around two thirds of learners are with one employer where the provision is managed by a subcontractor.

Key findings

- The success rate for learners is very high. In 2008/09, 88% of level 2 learners achieved their qualifications within the time specified, well above the national average (68%). The success rate is significantly higher than in 2007/08 (33%). In the current year to date, close to the end of the contract year, 85% of learners have already completed in the specified timescale.
- Learners develop a satisfactory level of customer service skills. They generally enjoy their learning, develop in self-confidence and most learn new skills. For example, learners become more focused on meeting customers' needs and resolving problems more effectively. Most learners can confidently explain how they have incorporated time management and organisational skills into their daily working practices.
- The standard of learners' work in NVQ portfolios is satisfactory. The range of relevant evidence and examples demonstrates competence and meets the requirements of the awarding body, but shows no evidence of challenge to achieve more.
- Learners feel safe in their workplaces, with TLB assessors and at TLB premises.
- Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. TLB's and the subcontractor's assessors are suitably qualified with appropriate experience. Assessment planning and assessment practice are sound. Most assessors use a wide range of assessment methods and make good use of professional discussions. Some learners attend additional training courses at TLB which they find useful.
- Initial assessment is satisfactory overall. However, for one recently recruited group of learners, the initial assessment of literacy and numeracy needs was poor. It did not pay sufficient attention to maintaining each learner's confidentiality or to the accuracy of the tests.
- The planning of learning is insufficiently individualised, clear or meaningful for learners. Employers contribute little to learner reviews. Learning plans lack detail and the targets set are too general. Review documents do not always inform individual training and development needs. There has been a long delay in the start of assessment for a significant number of current learners, with insufficiently clear communication with them about the reasons why.

- The range of choices for optional modules for the NVQ is satisfactory. TLB offers a good range of supplementary training to learners and their employers.
- TLB has a number of positive and productive relationships with high profile employers. Many use TLB as their preferred training provider. Employers value the professionalism and reliability of assessors and appreciate their friendly and helpful approach.
- Support for learners is satisfactory overall. Employers give good direct support to their learners, allowing ample time for assessments, workshops and portfolio building. They enthusiastically promote learning and development to learners. Assessors provide satisfactory support for learners. Learners' induction is satisfactory. However, at the start of the programme its structure is not explained well enough.
- The management of the subcontractor is satisfactory overall but quality improvement procedures had not identified recent poor practice in initial assessment. Internal verification processes are satisfactory.
- Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners are given a satisfactory range of information at induction on equality and diversity, which is reinforced adequately at reviews. However, review records of such reinforcement are very brief, or missing.
- The self-assessment process is general and does not make specific evaluation of the individual or relative performance of any of the NVQ subject areas.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Improve subcontractor monitoring to ensure that the initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs always pays good attention to confidentiality and accuracy.
- Develop effective planning of learning, using information from initial assessment, discussions with employers and learners, to ensure that individual learning plans include targets which are specific, measurable and time bound.
- Encourage employers to take a more active part in learners' progress reviews to ensure that on-the-job training is relevant and specific to improving each learner's performance.

Business administration

Grade 2

Context

45. Currently 43 learners are working towards business administration qualifications. Sixteen learners are on qualifications in business improvement techniques at level 2, eight are on business administration at levels 2 or 3 and the remaining nineteen are undertaking team leading at level 2. Assessment and training are carried out by 19 full and part-time TLB and associate staff. All training and coaching is carried out in learners' workplaces.

Key findings

- The success rate for learners is very high. In 2008/09, 88% of level 2 and 90% of level 3 learners completed their programmes in the specified time. Each of these rates is significantly higher than the national rates of 71% and 58% respectively. The level 2 success rate is also a substantial improvement on 2007/08 (66%). In the current year to date, close to the end of the contract year, 80% of learners have already completed in the specified time.
- Learners make good gains in self-confidence, their communication skills improve and they become better organised. Those whose first language is not English improve their technical vocabulary and are now able to contribute directly to business discussions. Learners are motivated, enjoy their programmes and many intend to progress to further courses. The content of learners' portfolios includes a good range of evidence, reflecting learners' active involvement.
- Learners' employability and promotion prospects are much improved in the course of their programme. Learners apply their enhanced occupational knowledge and experience well. For example, a group of learners revised shop floor layouts, reducing wastage and improving efficiency, and one employer identified a 20% improvement in efficiency. Some staff have been promoted. Employers identify that their staff are better qualified and retention has improved.
- Learners feel safe. Workplaces have a strong culture of health and safety, which are actively enforced. Assessors introduce equality and diversity issues satisfactorily at induction and during periodic reviews. Many learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity, including respect for different lifestyles, cultures, beliefs and disabilities. They understand what constitutes bullying and harassment, and how to report inappropriate behaviour.
- Employers provide learners with good task-related coaching and access to accredited courses. Assessors provide good individual and group teaching, although there is insufficiently detailed lesson planning to meet each individual learner's needs. Learners enjoy a wide variety of teaching and learning strategies such as discussions, brainstorming and on-site visits. Tutors use their relevant industry experience to add context and depth to learning sessions.

- Assessment is very flexible and adapted to learners' shift patterns. Learners receive detailed feedback and understand the assessment process. The content of portfolios includes a good range of evidence reflecting the active involvement of learners.
- All learners have a satisfactory initial assessment to identify their levels of literacy and numeracy. If they have any development needs, learners are signposted to specialist support and various internet-based resources. Assessors also provide informal support to learners.
- The quality of target setting during learners' reviews is poor. The targets are frequently too general to provide a structured or timely description of what each learner needs to do to improve or achieve an objective. In some cases, learners are set identical, and very general, targets.
- A good range of courses at levels 2 and 3 is available to learners. The choice has now been expanded to include apprenticeship programmes. Many learners are able to gain additional qualifications through their employers' or TLB's additional training courses
- TLB's links with employers are productive. Employers understand how the NVQs are linked to job roles. They are very committed to the programmes and work closely with assessors to support learners.
- Learners receive good personal and professional support, which they value. Assessors have a good knowledge of each learner's progress. Completion dates are varied to meet each learner's ability. If appropriate, learning breaks are negotiated. TLB has developed some good links with support agencies.
- The management of the programmes is good, and is a key factor in improving success rates. TLB is piloting various information technology initiatives, such as internet assessment, and establishing a social network for learners. Staff and learners have access to a very wide range of support and advisory material which is also available in a paper-based format.
- The self-assessment process is too general and does not make specific evaluation of the individual or relative performance of any of the NVQ subject areas.

What does TheLightBulb need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of learning by setting more detailed and time-bound targets for learners.
- Widen the scope of self-assessment and quality improvement planning through the evaluation of business administration as a discrete subject area.

Information about the inspection

46. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's operations director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of TLB's most recent self-assessment report and continuous improvement plan, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
47. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in five of the eight subject areas that TLB offers.

<p>Record of Main Findings (RMF)</p> <p>TheLightBulb</p> <p>Employer responsive: Train to Gain</p>

	Overall	Employer responsive
Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate		
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners		
Part-time learners	474	474
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	-	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	-	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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