

# LDR Squared Limited

Focused monitoring visit report

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Unique reference number: 52942

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Last day of inspection: 20 January 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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## FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

LDR Squared Limited (LDR2) is a privately owned work-based learning provider which was formed in 2001. They provide training and consultancy to organisations in the north east of England. During 2008/09 LDR2 was awarded its first direct Train to Gain contract through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) North East. All of the learners are with one employer, Merck Sharp and Dohme, a pharmaceuticals company. LDR2 delivers national vocational qualifications (NVQ) at level 2 in business improvement techniques and level 3 learning and development. To date there have been 118 learners start on the programme. Currently there are three learners still in training. LDR2 also has a European Social Fund (ESF) LSC co-financed contract to deliver 'Enhanced Train to Gain' which was not included in this monitoring visit.

LDR2 was last inspected in August 2006. Grades awarded were overall effectiveness grade 3, leadership and management grade 3, equality of opportunity grade 3, quality improvement grade 4, engineering and manufacturing technology grade 3 and business, administration and law grade 3. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

### Themes

Is the self-assessment process rigorous and inclusive? Are judgements in the self-assessment report well supported by evidence? Are actions plans leading to improvements? Reasonable progress

Staff are sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process. A good self-assessment tool has been developed which is used effectively to decide on overall grades and identify appropriate areas for improvement. All staff have copies of the self-assessment report and are familiar with the findings. Learners and the employer are involved through feedback arrangements. Self-assessment reports have not been produced in each year since the last inspection but there have been periods when LDR2 had no publicly funded learners.

The self-assessment report is supported by good labour market information. Progress is well plotted since the last inspection. The report makes no reference to the ESF co-financed Train to Gain provision. Appropriate strengths and areas for improvement are identified in the text but the report lacks thorough evaluation. All Common Inspection Framework aspect statements are graded and appropriately commented upon. The grades awarded are realistic and are supported by the evidence but they have improved little since the last inspection. A satisfactory grade for outcomes for learners appears low given the high overall success rates. A development plan identifies areas for improvement but progress towards addressing these is not sufficiently reviewed or formally recorded.

What are the overall and timely success rates for the LDR2's direct contract for Train to Gain? Are current learners making good progress and improving their skills? Significant progress

Success rates at the last inspection were good in engineering and satisfactory in business administration. Currently almost all learners who start on the programme achieve their qualifications. Since the beginning of LDR2's direct Train to Gain contract in August 2009 106 learners have achieved giving a very high overall success rate of 92%. However, only 32% of learners have achieved within their planned period of study. Following LDR2 agreeing planned end dates with learners, the production priorities of Merck Sharp and Dohme changed which reduced the time learners spent on training. This had a negative impact on timely achievement rates. The achievement of different groups is similar.

Learners' employability skills have significantly increased and their economic and social well-being has improved. Learners' confidence has improved greatly, for example a group of learners gave a presentation on in-company training to the president of the corporation while he was on a visit from the United States. A number of learners routinely use their newly gained skills in training other employees. Learners enjoy their training and many are keen to take further training and develop new skills. According to the employer the training has improved staff morale, communication and team working and inspectors agreed with this view.

How effective is the initial assessment of learners? Does it accurately identify learners' literacy and numeracy support needs? How well does it inform the delivery of individual learners' programmes? Reasonable progress

Initial assessment was judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Since then LDR2 has reviewed the arrangements. This has resulted in new and more effective arrangements which ensure that all learners receive initial assessment and, where necessary, support for literacy and numeracy by qualified tutors.

All learners work for a single large employer. The nature of the work demands a high standard of literacy and numeracy. All employees have completed an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills prior to joining the company. Consequently very few learners are found to need support following initial assessment. In the current Train to Gain contract only two learners were identified as needing support and appropriate support was provided for both.

Improvements since the last inspection are highly effective in meeting the needs of the very small number of learners with literacy and support needs. LDR2 has a good working relationship with the specialist sub-contractor who provides the support.

Assessors and support staff meet frequently to review the support and learners' progress.

How well have LDR2 developed their data systems since the last inspection? How well does it inform managers and staff about learners' performance and progress? How effectively do managers use data to monitor the provision and bring about improvements? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection LDR2 did not make sufficient use of data to manage the provision. There was no data management system and data provided for the inspection team were not reliable. Since then LDR2 has refined its spreadsheets and developed a new database management system. The use of data to manage the provision is now satisfactory and meets the current needs of the organisation. The data produced are accurate and reliable but do not give a sufficiently clear record of success rates including those completed within the agreed timescale.

The database management system is ambitious but unfinished. Staff are able to manage routine administrative information with ease. The system has the potential to provide much more detailed and useful data on learners' progress and outcomes. However, there are insufficient data in the system to operate the software and test the accuracy of the information and reports produced. LDR2 staff continue to develop the system and enter learner information but the system is not fully operational. Staff use the available data well to monitor the provision and to inform their decisions.

Are LDR2's quality improvement arrangements effective? How well are they embedded and what impact have they had on the quality of provision? Insufficient progress

LDR2's arrangements for quality improvement were judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Although fit for purpose because of the very small team the quality improvement arrangements are too informal. Internal verification is well planned, very thorough and well recorded. The quality assurance manual contains a good range of policies which are frequently updated. A recently developed quality calendar identifies when quality assurance activities will be carried out over the year. Prior to this most of the activities were merely discussed and recorded on management team minutes.

The current development plan is the first which has been produced since the post inspection action plan. Although appropriate areas for improvement are identified with accountabilities and timescales, no progress has yet been recorded. The observation of teaching and learning is in place but no observations have been

carried out during the current Train to Gain contract and only 12 since 2006/07. Observations are not graded; records are mainly descriptive and have too few judgements. User feedback is gathered at learner reviews and employer contract meetings but these are not formally recorded. Learner and employer surveys are not used consistently. Feedback is not used effectively to confirm the quality of provision or bring about improvements.

How well do LDR2 promote equality of opportunity and diversity? What impact is this having on learners' and staff understanding?

Reasonable progress

The arrangements for managing equality of opportunity and diversity have improved following the recent appointment of an equality and diversity co-ordinator. The policy has been reviewed and an appropriate action plan is now in place. The provider now has a statement of how current practices on equality and diversity for learners and staff will be improved. Key staff have had formal training in equality and diversity. Most associate trainer/assessors have yet to receive this training. Managers are aware of the importance of safeguarding learners and are making appropriate arrangements for meeting current and future requirements.

Equality of opportunity and diversity is well promoted to learners and the employer. The training in equality and diversity provided by LDR2 is effectively supplemented by company training on equal opportunities. Most learners and staff have a good understanding of equality and diversity. LDR2 is developing appropriate learning resources to deliver equality and diversity more effectively in the training. The first of these is a well produced and thoughtful learners' handbook containing some good interactive materials.

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