

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: South West Durham Training Ltd
Date of visit: 4 June 2008

Context

South West Durham Training Limited (SWDT) is a group training association with charitable status. SWDT initially offered training in engineering and manufacturing, it has since diversified and now offers administration; warehouse and distribution; customer service; management and lift-truck training. The company also offers a range of commercial training to meet the needs of local companies. More recently SWDT has established a 14–19 centre and works closely with local primary and secondary schools offering vocational qualifications to pupils. Operating from a single site in New Aycliffe, the company employs 50 staff and has approximately 300 apprentices at any one time in different occupational areas.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving overall success rates?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

Overall success rates on engineering advanced apprenticeships have improved steadily since the previous inspection and are now 3% above the national average. Success rates for engineering apprentices show a similar steady improvement and for 2006/07 were just above the national average at 64%. SWDT anticipates success rates of 69% for 2007/08. Success rates for those learners on the advanced apprenticeship in business administration, while showing an increase since the previous inspection, remain low at 55%, which is 11% below the national average. Success rates for apprentices on business administration and law programmes have improved since the previous inspection but remain 8% below national averages. Numbers on both these programmes are small. Timely success rates across all programmes are low; however they are above the national average. The company has set an overall success rate target of 75% for all programmes. Since the previous inspection SWDT has continued to implement a number of strategies to improve the overall success rates for all their learners. These include close monitoring of learners' progress against agreed completion targets, early completion of key skills and technical certificates and close monitoring of learners' attendance. In addition changes have been made to the engineering programme to increase the opportunities for integration of on- and off-the-job components. The analysis and use of collected data has improved. SWDT has developed a more easily used data system for staff to help improve the monitoring of learners' progress. This is now used daily with learners. Teaching methods in the workshop and classroom have been changed

to include more focused, shorter learning activities to better engage and retain learners' attention and improve success at assessment.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving target setting and learner reviews?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At the previous inspection it was identified that targets were too broad, insufficiently focused and not specific or time bound. Targets did not encourage learners to progress in a timely manner. SWDT's assessors did not set specific targets during assessment planning. Although frequent, progress reviews were not formally planned and recorded, and targets still remained very broad.

SWDT has made significant progress in improving target-setting and progress reviews for learners. Modified review forms have been introduced, which are clear and easier for learners and employers to understand. Staff have improved their skills in questioning learners and setting and recording clear short-term targets. Graphical examples of the progress made against the plan are given to learners at each review. A section of helpful questions has been incorporated to check learners' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity. Reviews now focus more clearly on progress and achievements. Assessors are now setting specific targets during assessment planning. The assessment documentation has been re-designed to include a section on action planning and target-setting. Assessment visits for those learners falling behind are more frequent. The introduction of the traffic light system for progress measurement effectively highlights learners in danger of falling behind. The monthly case conference reviews include progress monitoring. Use of email has improved communication and progress monitoring of learners attending college. Training officers have access to more detailed college information on progress and are able to discuss this with employers.

What progress has been made in ensuring effective support for learners and measuring its impact?	Reasonable progress
--	---------------------

Very good learner support was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. Reasonable progress has been made in consolidating and building upon this strength. This includes providing personal support for a wide range of social, financial and relationship difficulties. At the previous inspection the use of the mentoring group was highlighted as an area that required improvement. The morning mentoring session for learners on engineering programmes was previously an unfocused tutorial. It is now more structured, helps learners to better prepare for the day and includes a discussion of what is going to be covered in each of the teaching sessions. All learners receive an initial assessment and where necessary further diagnostic testing for literacy, numeracy and dyslexia. Where needed, support is tailored to suit the learner. This can include individual support, group workshops or support in the workplace. Increasing numbers of learners are being identified with attention deficiency hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and staff are being trained appropriately to ensure they use learning strategies best suited to these learners. A behaviour coach is now available to support staff. More learning support staff have been employed and increasingly their focus is to work along side and train the vocational staff in

supporting all learners. SWDT has rightly identified that more work is needed to measure the impact of the various support strategies that are in place. However, for those learners identified and receiving support for dyslexia in 2006, 75% were successful and in 2007, 100% of learners were successful.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in implementing equality and diversity measures including safeguarding vulnerable and or younger learners?	Significant progress
--	----------------------

At the previous inspection equality of opportunity was satisfactory. Whilst a number of new initiatives had been introduced it was too early to assess the effectiveness of these measures. Widening participation onto engineering courses was not identified as a priority on the post-inspection action plan. Since that time SWDT has put in place a range of strategies to improve recruitment to engineering courses for women and for those learners from minority groups. SWDT continues to work effectively with a wide range of partners including the Connexions service, local schools and voluntary agencies. A comprehensive staff handbook has been developed resolving many aspects of equal opportunities. All staff and learners undergo specific training on equality and diversity and learners' understanding continues to be reviewed throughout the training programme. Transport is made available to learners, including use of the mini bus and financial support for taxi fares. A female recruitment co-ordinator is now employed to recruit learners to engineering programmes. Women engineers, who were previous learners, are involved in talking to new learners about engineering training and career opportunities. These new measures are beginning to have an impact and numbers of female learners on engineering programmes has increased from 2% to 5% over the last year. Data on equality and diversity is now consistently available and used more effectively to target minority groups. For example SWDT has successfully increased the number of Polish learners accessing their Train to Gain programmes.

The company has good safeguarding arrangements in place and all trainers working directly with learners under the age of 18 have enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance. SWDT is well informed regarding the new wider safeguarding requirements for both its younger learners and vulnerable adults. SWDT intends to review all its procedures and policies to ensure its safeguarding arrangements are thorough and continue to meet legislative requirements including risk management, health and safety and protection of children and vulnerable adults.

What progress has been made in ensuring self-assessment is thorough and accurately reflects the views of learners, employers and staff?	Reasonable progress
---	---------------------

At the previous inspection, the inspection team were broadly confident in the self-assessment process. However, SWDT did not directly involve any of its external partners in the self-assessment process. The executive council were not involved in producing or moderating the report and the low success rates were not identified as an area for improvement.

SWDT has made reasonable progress in ensuring self-assessment is thorough and accurately reflects the views of learners, employers and staff. It has continued to demonstrate that the process is inclusive and is an integral part of quality improvement. Feedback from learners, employers and other stakeholders now contributes effectively to the self-assessment process. Involvement of external partners is more direct, for example through monthly meetings with colleges and local schools and the introduction of the 'school for skills' initiative. Staff and learners contribute through working groups which include an employee council and learner council. A shared intranet site has been introduced and both learner and employee councils feature regularly on the site. Data from the provider gateway is distributed to all staff through the intranet system and issued to executive council members at board meetings. As part of the quality improvement plan a very useful and effective quality calendar has been implemented to monitor quality assurance and improvement.

Staff teams and managers discuss self-assessment findings more thoroughly than they did previously. Judgements are challenged and the result is a more critical process. Staff feel much more aware of the improvements that are required and their part in achieving them. The post-inspection improvement plan is detailed and identifies clearly where improvements have been made and where further action is necessary. However the self-assessment report does not always describe the impact of the strengths and areas for improvement on the learners' experience. Learners do not fully understand the purpose of the report. No clear description exists of how the executive council are involved in writing and moderating the report. Developments in the management information system are still relatively new, although the use and quality of management data has improved since the previous inspection.