

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: TBG Learning Limited
Date of visit: 4 December 2008

Context

TBG Learning Limited (TBG) is a wholly owned subsidiary company of the Rehab Group, an independent not-for-profit organisation offering training for employed and unemployed young people and adults. All of TBG's training is publicly funded.

TBG is the prime contractor for New Deal in Derbyshire. It manages the New Deal contract from its offices in Derby. It has held the contract with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) since July 2006. It leads a partnership that includes nine other New Deal providers. TBG directly delivers between 35% and 40% of the provision and subcontracts the remainder to its partners. TBG's prime contract learning centres are in Derby, Chesterfield, Alfreton, Glossop, Swadlincote and New Mills. A total of 518 participants currently follow the New Deal programmes.

TBG also has a Ufl contract for Derbyshire. It provides learndirect predominantly on its own premises in Derby, with 90 learners currently following Skills for Life programmes.

A Regional manager, reporting directly to the operations director on performance and quality of delivery, manages TBG's prime contract for Derbyshire and learndirect provision.

At the previous inspection in September 2007, TBG's overall effectiveness, achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity were satisfactory, as were preparation for life and work and literacy and numeracy. Its capacity to improve was good.

What measures have TBG Learning Ltd developed to improve achievement and standards?	Significant progress
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TBG has made significant progress in developing effective strategies to support improvements in achievement and standards on the DWP programme. At the previous inspection, achievement and standards on DWP programmes were satisfactory and learning aim success rates were good. However, job entry rates were poor. TBG has made excellent progress in establishing a very wide range of effective measures to support improvements in this area which include significantly improved subcontract monitoring arrangements, more precise target-setting, staff training on the new systems and events to increase employer understanding of the programme.

Improvements in success rates are steady and sustained over a two year period. Initial data for 2008/09 indicate a positive and continuing trend in improvement. From 2006/07 to 2007/08, job outcome rates on New Deal for Young People have improved from 22% to 26% and on New Deal 25+ they have improved from 20% to 25%. As recognised in the self-assessment report, these success rates are still too low.

In the same period, rates of success for achievement of learning aims for New Deal for Young People have improved from 69% to 74% and for New Deal 25+ from 61% to 69% and initial data for 2008/09 shows further improvement to 80% and 83% respectively which is very good. Stronger quality systems contribute effectively to the increase in learner success and achievement. Monitoring of subcontractor targets and performance is thorough. Monthly meetings with the provider centre manager provide appropriate challenge to subcontractors and contribute significantly to improvement.

Has TBG Learning Ltd continued to improve achievement and standards in learndirect?	Insufficient progress
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TBG has not made sufficient progress in improving achievement and standards on the learndirect programme. At the previous inspection, achievement and standards in learndirect were satisfactory but success rates at 63% were below the national rate. The pass rate for national tests in literacy and numeracy in 2006/07 was satisfactory at 83%. However, too many learners did not complete their courses in time and attendance was poor. Progress in improving these aspects is not sufficient.

Complete data for 2007/08 shows that learner success rates, the number of withdrawals and the number of learners not completing by their planned end date remain broadly the same as the previous inspection. Attendance has improved following the introduction of a learners' timetable of scheduled attendance and follow up phone calls.

What systems are now in place to ensure consistency with the quality of printed materials on DWP programmes?	Reasonable progress
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TBG has made reasonable progress to improve systems to check the accuracy and quality of printed materials and participants' curriculum vitae, an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Some teaching resources were out of date and the extranet contained errors. TBG's intranet now indicates when shared lesson materials have been checked for accuracy. Monthly reviews and sample checks ensure lesson plans and teaching materials are free from errors. Administrative staff remove inappropriate or outdated materials. Weekly emails alert staff to recently added resource materials.

The process for checking participant's curriculum vitae has improved. Tutors use a clear, useful template and set of guidance notes. Managers carry out random checks on participants' postal applications for work and regularly audit their curriculum vitae. Brief written feedback to tutors supports prompt action to correct errors and improve curriculum vitae content. Recording the checks that take place is planned for the future. Monitoring of the quality of subcontractors' printed materials is effective.

What progress has TBG made in improving the management of learning in learndirect?	Reasonable Progress
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The provider has made reasonable progress to improve the planning and monitoring of learning, an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Operational management was weak and the pattern of attendance was not sufficiently managed and recorded. Operational management of learning has improved. Tutors use a well designed spreadsheet to help them manage learndirect courses. The spreadsheet provides a pictorial overview of individual learners' programmes and progress. Effective colour coding makes it easy to identify slow progress and to group learners together for additional taught, support sessions. A recent pilot project to improve learners' awareness of their programme is to continue. It involves a simple learning plan to help learners better understand how long courses take and how many assignments they must complete. Staff now agree, record and review clear, short term session targets with learners, as well achievements and progress overall. A booking system, as well as drop-in provision, helps learners better plan their learning time. Identification and action over non-attendance are prompt.

Leadership and management

What steps have TBG taken to improve the inadequate reinforcement of equality and diversity?	Significant progress
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TBG has significantly improved processes to systematically reinforce and monitor equality and diversity with their subcontractors, an area for improvement at the previous inspection. All staff have taken part in equality and diversity training in the past year and 24 subcontract staff received an award in disability awareness.

TBG widely distributes equality and diversity promotional materials to subcontractors. Every month email is used effectively to reinforce equality with subcontractors and to circulate lesson plans and resources. Subcontractors use these to improve learners' awareness of their rights and responsibilities. A clear and well produced audit of the accessibility of all partnership premises highlights those with facilities for disabled learners and has contributed to improvements in directing participants to premises that meet their needs. At the previous inspection, 44% of subcontractors were not routinely carrying out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. All subcontract partners are now carrying out CRB checks. TBG's monitoring and recording of this is good. TBG has revised their monthly and quarterly partner meeting agendas to include equality and diversity. Participation data is monitored and is an area for improvement included in the subcontractor action plans.

What action has been taken to improve aspects of quality assurance of learndirect?	Reasonable progress
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TBG is making reasonable progress in improving some aspects of the quality assurance of learndirect provision, judged incomplete at the previous inspection. The provider has taken prompt and effective action to provide a more comprehensive and thorough system. Observation of teaching and learning extends to all aspects of the learning process including induction, initial assessment and support. Observations effectively focus on learning and attainment. Feedback to tutors is supportive, identifies clear strengths and areas for improvement and provides clear judgements and grades. Development needs identified in action plans are detailed and reflected clearly in staff development and training. Performance management, although new, is much improved. Performance targets are planned to meet company strategic objectives and to improve learner success. TBG systematically collects progression data. For 2008 it shows the number of learners on learndirect who progress into full time employment is twice the national average. TBG uses participant feedback well to support improvement. Wall charts in training rooms inform learners of the changes TBG has put in place.

How thorough is self-assessment and development planning for the prime contract?	Significant progress
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Self-assessment and development planning for the prime contract is thorough and contributes significantly to improving all aspects of the provision. The self-assessment process for DWP provision is very good. This was identified at the previous inspection. All subcontractors contribute to the annual process and produce their own self-assessment and development plans. TBG continues to monitor individual action plans thoroughly. It bases judgements on appropriate evidence including observations, feedback, data analysis and file audits. The development plan contains actions to sustain and improve areas of strength. TBG takes prompt action to manage failing subcontractors. It continuously collects participant feedback and uses it effectively to make changes and improvements. The development plan accurately identifies areas for improvement. Actions have an effect on the quality of learner experience. TBG has dealt with most areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection promptly and effectively, recording improvements made and their subsequent impact.

How thorough is self-assessment and development planning for learndirect?	Reasonable progress
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The learndirect self-assessment process has improved over the last year and is more thorough, it is making reasonable progress in improving the provision. The self-assessment process is inclusive. The self-assessment report makes good use of data, particularly to analyse performance of different groups of learners. The development plan is more thorough and detailed than previous plans and has clearly focused actions with clear timescales, lines of responsibility and records of progress. It contains targets above those required by its contract with DWP to improve learner success rates and pass rates on national tests, to reduce the numbers of learners who do not complete their course in time and to improve overall targets for recruitment, retention and achievement. Many improvements are new and it is too early to assess overall impact.