

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of Provider: Prospects Services Ltd (London South nextstep)

Date of visit: 3 April 2008

Context

This monitoring visit follows the inspection in October 2006 at which Prospects London South nextstep was graded as satisfactory for leadership and management and for its arrangements for equality of opportunity. It was judged inadequate for quality improvement. Provision was judged to be satisfactory for the nextstep provision. At the previous inspection, Prospects London South nextstep held a contract with the London South Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and this contract remains. The London South nextstep network covers the six south London boroughs of Bromley, Croydon, Sutton, Merton, Kingston upon Thames and Richmond. Prospects London South nextstep contracts with eight subcontractors. Its overall target for advice sessions in 2006/07 was 10,300, of which 8,436 were achieved.

Achievement and standards

What progress has been made in improving positive outcomes for clients?	Reasonable progress
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Prospects London South nextstep has made reasonable progress in improving positive outcomes for clients. The percentage of clients achieving a positive outcome has remained consistently above 55% since the inspection in October 2006, and is at 60% for the period February to July 2007. The strategy for increasing the number of contacts with past clients for follow-ups has been reasonably successful and the percentage of past clients contacted has increased from 3% to 13%. The proportion of clients entering learning has risen from 13% to 33%. The proportion of unemployed clients who subsequently enter employment has risen steadily from 38% to 44%.

Quality of provision

How well has action planning for clients improved?	Reasonable progress
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Prospects London South nextstep has made reasonable progress in improving the consistency of clients' action plans since the previous inspection. Prospects' 2007 annual conference provided a useful range of training and staff development

opportunities. Other training has included improving the quality of client action plans. Advisers are encouraged to produce a time bound five-point action plan for each client at the end of an advice session, but not all are doing so. The new quality manager now formally reviews samples of clients' action plans and produces a clear record of findings and recommended actions for each individual adviser. A few advisers have been further encouraged to adopt the five-point action plan and another to write more clearly. In most action plans reviewed during the monitoring visit, specific actions had been recorded adequately with actions clearly focused on the client and not the adviser. A formal system for observing advice sessions contains a section for judging the quality of action planning. Comments recorded tend to focus on the process of action planning through the session, with too few judgements about the quality of completed client action plans.

What progress has been made in recording the details of and exploring clients' wider opportunities and barriers?	Reasonable progress
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Reasonable progress has been made in recording details about clients' barriers to learning and employment and in the exploration of wider opportunities. Issues identified at the previous inspection have been tackled through staff development and training events. Action plans are formally monitored and those viewed during the monitoring visit showed positive examples of barriers being identified and appropriate actions recorded. For example, clients with low self-esteem and stress are referred on to a range of relevant events and training.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in the promotion of equality of opportunity with clients?	Reasonable progress
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Prospects London South nextstep has made reasonable progress in ensuring that equality of opportunity is promoted appropriately to clients. This was a key weakness at the previous inspection. All subcontractors sent representatives to training events focusing on aspects of promoting equality of opportunity to clients. Information and good practice is shared through regular staff meetings and Prospects' corporate publication 'Equalities News'. A new client welcome leaflet has been developed and contains details about how to make a complaint but it is not sufficiently clear whom they should contact. Action plans are regularly monitored for comments or appropriate actions reflecting equality and diversity matters. Clients, for example, with concerns about age discrimination were given specific referral details for the 'age positive campaign'; others, for example, were given specific and appropriate information about disability organisations. Comparisons of action plans pre- and post-training have been analysed recently, but it is too early for the results to impact fully on planning for future developments.

Quality improvement was inadequate at the previous inspection. What is the progress and impact of strategies to implement effective quality improvement procedures?	Reasonable progress
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Prospects London South nextstep has made reasonable progress toward implementing effective quality improvement procedures. A continuous quality improvement group comprises quality champions selected from subcontractors and Prospects. This group was formed recently, has met once, and its impact is too soon to be evaluated. Overall contact with and close monitoring of subcontractors is now scheduled on a regular basis. Two detailed reviews take place annually, together with sampling of specific aspects to gauge any improvement over time.

A new quality manager has been appointed since the previous inspection. This manager has a clear understanding of some of the actions required for improvement, such as raising the quality and consistency of action planning, and some well targeted quality improvement actions have been undertaken. This manager has had insufficient in-house training, support or access to good practice in the creation and implementation of a wider quality framework. There is still no over-arching annual plan or strategy for an all-pervasive quality improvement cycle covering all aspects of the provision, as identified at the previous inspection.

A comprehensive company-wide observation framework has now been implemented. All staff carrying out observations have now received relevant training. Observations of advice sessions are mostly undertaken by line managers in subcontractors and are subsequently moderated by Prospects. The moderation process is reasonably efficient and effective. However, the text in the original observation reports do not fully support or explain the judgements and grade awarded.

Self-assessment was judged as insufficiently thorough at the previous inspection. What improvements have been made in the self-assessment process and reporting?	Insufficient progress
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Prospects London South nextstep has made insufficient progress in improving the self-assessment process and reporting. Consultation with and involvement of subcontractors in the self-assessment process has been extensive and is much improved. Each subcontractor is now required to prepare a mini self-assessment report but their input is hard to determine from the text of the final report. The report's format has not changed since the inspection in 2006. It is too descriptive and lacks focused, evaluative judgements. Many strengths identified are normal practice. The content of many sections of the most recent report of February 2007 are identical to the report produced in June 2007. In the most recent self-assessment report the grades awarded have risen to good overall from satisfactory

but there is an inadequate range of additional evidence to support this rise. The self-assessment report and quality improvement plan are neither linked nor integrated and it is not always clear how a quality improvement action is derived from any judgement in the self-assessment report. Measures of success within the quality improvement plan are neither specific, measurable nor time bound.

Corporately, Prospects Services does not routinely identify or share any good practice from within the wider organisation relating to the SAR process or reporting.