

## Zenos

58. Zenos is based in the Cotswold village of Aynho, near Banbury. The company was founded in 2001 by its present chairman and executive director as a private limited company to provide support for IT systems and software development training. In 2008 Zenos became part of the Melorio PLC Group. Strategic and operational aspects of the company are managed through a board of directors. Day-to-day running of the company is the responsibility of a senior management team, which includes regional training managers. Starting with only 25 learners, the company is now national. Zenos has expanded rapidly over the past two years, increasing the number of its training centres (called regional academies) from 12 to 31 to give national coverage from Newcastle to Southampton. Zenos was judged satisfactory in 2003 and outstanding in June 2008.
59. At the time of the visit for this survey, Zenos had over 1,700 learners involved in ICT training on work-based and programme-led academy-based programmes, of which around 1,500 were from 16 to 18 years of age. Around 85% of learners were men and over a quarter were from minority ethnic groups. Demand for academy places is over six times the number of places available. Rather than selecting solely by academic ability, Zenos places importance on selecting learners who demonstrate the necessary interests, motivation, passion and aptitudes for working within the IT industry. A typical learner's comment was:

'When I attended college I regarded it as a progression, but Zenos provided me with a gateway to a career. Training was of high quality, providing close monitoring of my performance, progress, behaviour, and attitudes and this transformed me as a person. The training gave me a complete solution for gaining relevant qualifications and being made job-ready, and receiving advice and support into employment.'

### How work-based learning is delivered

60. Learning is provided nationally, either through Zenos's 31 academies or as work-based learning through its partnerships with a range of large corporate organisations, such as Fujitsu, Xerox and Hewlett Packard. Zenos provides learners with a full set of skills needed to establish a career within the IT industry. Training programmes contain a high level of individual learning support, including the use of specialist tutors for literacy, language and numeracy.
61. For academy learners, two annual cohorts start their training in March and September. The intensive five-month programme-led course leads to an advanced apprenticeship in IT and industry-recognised qualifications, such as Microsoft Certified Desktop Support technician. Programmes include a high element of real-work simulation as well as work placements so that learners

can gain the skills, knowledge and experience that the industry requires. Academy learners are required to conform to strict dress codes, presenting a smart appearance, and maintain regular and punctual attendance at learning sessions. Employed learners follow the same programmes, although the mode of delivery is adapted to be compatible with work commitments. They receive monthly visits by assessors at work to complete and plan assessment and receive learning support. The training programme lasts, typically, from 14 to 16 months. This includes six, one-week, off-the-job training blocks, when employed learners attend the academies.

### **The provider's view on training**

62. Zenos's rationale for the development of its work-related provision is based on the experience of its directors of working within the industry and understanding its needs. This is coupled with the analysis of skills needs in national reports such as those of the Institute of IT Training. Research by Zenos indicates that an estimated 140,000 new job roles are created within the IT industry each year; many of these are filled by overseas workers because of skills shortages in the UK workforce. Zenos's research indicated that very few young people were being employed by the major IT companies. Zenos's managing director said:

'Trainees leaving our academies are confident and industry-ready because they understand their job roles and customers' needs. Our trainees have been moulded by our training to acquire the work ethic required by the industry. They convey the right impression to customers, which is valued by employers and many IT large companies return to Zenos to employ our trainees on completion of training.'

### **What were the critical success factors in becoming outstanding?**

- The delivery of a quality training service through a clear company vision and business action plan was critical.
- The skills and attitudes of the workforce were also seen as critical. Zenos employs highly skilled, experienced and motivated staff. Good training is supported by good sales and marketing.
- Strong liaison with the IT industry is maintained through partnerships with large employers and the sector skills council. Zenos has built up a team of over 30 employment officers to support learners into jobs through liaison with over 200 prospective employers.

### **What were the challenges?**

63. A major challenge for Zenos was to establish its academy-based programmed training programme as a viable and acceptable model for training young people suited to employment within the IT industry. The academy approach

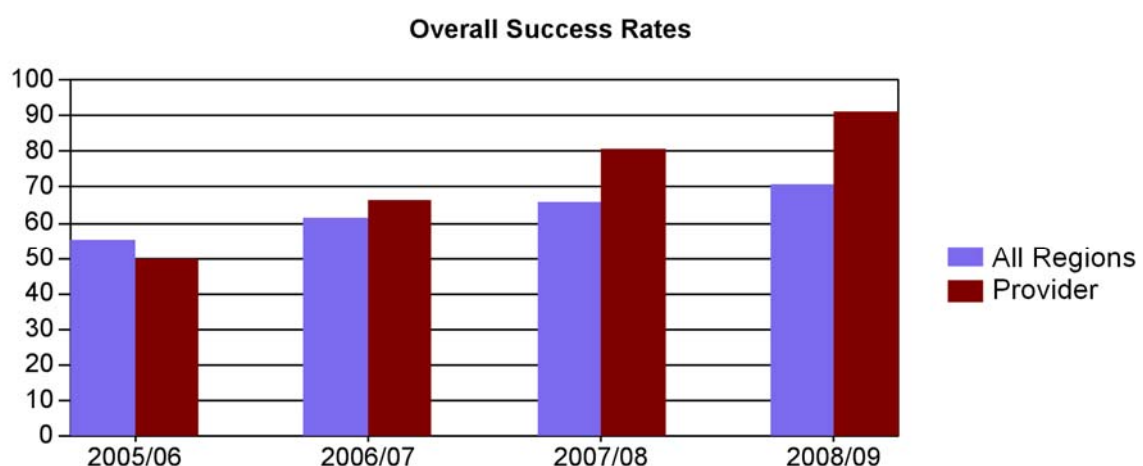
was adopted to bring training for 16–18-year-olds under its control and overcome the problems created by pressures at work causing disruption to training schedules.

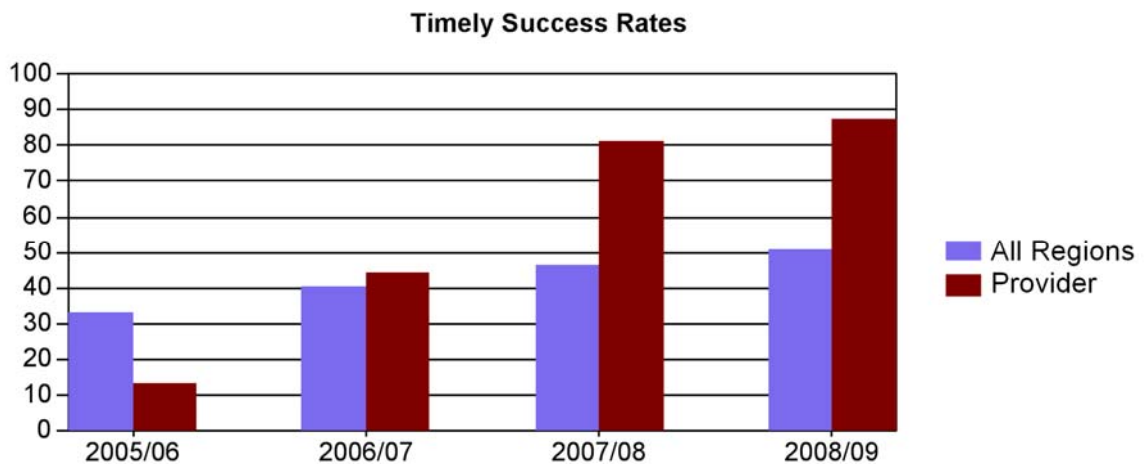
64. The early challenge of raising learners' motivation by increasing their prospects of employment at the end of training is considered another critical factor. Providing additional IT organisation-specific 'vendor' qualifications, as complements to the advanced apprenticeship, has been important in providing learners with the skills and knowledge that employers value and that lead to employment. Around 90% of academy learners during the past two years have progressed into jobs within the IT industry.

### How are high standards maintained?

- Zenos has invested in developing highly effective monitoring systems, targeting all aspects of training delivery. The progress of individual learners is monitored closely. The computerised database generates daily reports to inform all levels of management of successes and any concerns and to trigger prompt action to deal with any needs that are identified. Performance is evaluated against clearly defined expectations and objective targets.
- Quality improvement arrangements are not driven solely by targets about outcomes but also incorporate the quality of the delivery of services well. Systems for observing teaching, assessment and learning are robust; tutors and assessors are observed four times a year and supportive action is in place for staff who do not achieve good reports.

**Figure 15: How good are combined apprenticeship success rates?**





These data, provided by the Data Service, are based on revised methods of calculation, agreed with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and as such the 'All Regions' overall rates differ from historic summary data provided in DS/SFR7, 2010. Also, for illustrative purposes, the Timely 'All Region' Success Rates are shown along with the equivalent provider success rates.