

Black Country Training Group Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 50729

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Last day of inspection: 6 October 2010

Type of provider: Independent leaning provider

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MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Black Country Training Group Limited (BCTG) was established in November 2001. It has one training site at Oldbury in the West Midlands and provides Train to Gain programmes to employed adults through a consortium of 29 subcontracted training providers. It provides training in health, public services and care, engineering and manufacturing technologies, construction, planning and the built environment, information and communication technology, retail and commercial enterprise, education and training, preparation for life and work and business, administration and law. Currently 4,529 learners are on Train to Gain programmes, and 153 are on European Social Fund (ESF) programmes. The number of learners on Train to Gain programmes has declined from 5,145 since the previous inspection. ESF programmes were not inspected.

BCTG was inspected in September 2008. The overall effectiveness, capacity to improve and leadership and management of the provision were judged to be satisfactory, as were the overall quality of provision, equality and diversity and the provision in information and communication technology, retail and commercial enterprise, preparation for life and work and business administration and law. BCTG's achievement and standards were judged to be good as was its provision in health, public services and care, engineering and manufacturing technologies and construction, planning and the built environment.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit, which include the two mandatory themes of outcomes for learners and self-assessment and improvement planning.

Themes

Outcomes for learners

What progress has BCTG made in improving the achievement by learners?	Reasonable progress
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At the previous inspection the achievement and standards of Train to Gain learners were judged to be good. However, slow progress for some learners was identified as an area for improvement. BCTG has developed a clear strategy and focus on improving the success rates for learners completing within agreed timescales for all its subcontractors. Individual contracts within its consortium are reviewed systematically, performance issues clearly identified and appropriate actions agreed. Consortium members have clear individual targets for improving success rates within agreed timescales. Revised management processes and procedures makes good use of a comprehensive risk banding and risk management process that is used effectively to assess and monitor progress against agreed targets for all subcontractors.

The changes introduced since the previous inspection have been effective in maintaining the overall success rate above the national rate for the last two years. The overall success rate for 2009/10 is currently six percentage points above the national rate as is the success rate for learners completing within agreed timescales.

Quality of Provision

What progress has BCTG made in improving Skills for Life assessment and support?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection BCTG's Skills for Life strategy was insufficiently well developed. The capacity to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills was inadequate with just one subcontractor delivering most of the provision.

The consortium's capacity to provide literacy and numeracy support to learners has improved significantly. Over half of the current subcontractors now offer Skills for Life provision directly to their learners. The others either refer learners to BCTG or to another local provider. One consortium member now offers English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision. Good support is provided to the consortium to help them to develop their capacity by providing a range of training events and support from external consultants. Subcontractors that have Skills for Life strategies are monitored regularly.

Achievement rates for Skills for Life programmes across the consortium are satisfactory and range from around 60% to 100%. The take-up of provision is very high with 94% of those identified as having a need taking a qualification.

BCTG's Skills for Life strategy remains underdeveloped. It clearly sets out the organisations' aims to extend the capacity of the consortium and to ensure that provision is available to all learners. It does not yet set out the quality and standard of provision that learners should expect from the consortium.

What progress has BCTG made in improving progress reviews and monitoring learner progress?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection progress reviews were ineffective. Reviews did not sufficiently identify the learning and development needed and did not reinforce learners' knowledge of equality and diversity.

BCTG has worked well with its subcontractors to develop minimum standards for progress reviews and has provided training and development to support this. Subcontractors' progress reviews are observed systematically and all relevant documentation is checked for completeness. Observations are comprehensive and result in clear development areas for staff. Where development needs have been identified these have been met effectively. Records of recent progress reviews show a clear improvement in the range and quality of information recorded, although some target setting remains underdeveloped.

BCTG staff demonstrate a clear understanding of a good progress review, the impact it should have, its value in helping learners to progress and achieve and are focused on implementing this across the consortium. Equality and diversity is monitored appropriately in most cases.

Leadership and management

What progress has BCTG made in improving its quality improvement systems?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection BCTG has successfully embedded its quality assurance systems and processes. Key aspects of the learner journey are observed effectively by members of the quality team and findings are shared constructively with consortium training staff. Observations are undertaken systematically for each subcontractor and are graded and risk assessed. Independent support from a range of independent consultants, provided by BCTG, is available for contractors who obtain low grades and is used well to improve performance. Improvement actions are identified effectively and are included in the overall improvement plan for each subcontractor that is shared constructively during the subcontractor review process. Data are used well within BCTG and with its subcontractors to identify areas for improvement and to analyse performance. The sharing of good practice within the consortium is well established and peer assessment has been introduced.

BCTG has been particularly successful in identifying useful quality improvement resources that are available through the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and sharing them with consortium members. Staff meetings are planned effectively and records show action points and completion dates on quality improvement plans.

What progress has BCTG made in improving its self-assessment and action-planning processes?

Reasonable progress

Although the self-assessment process was judged to be satisfactory at the September 2008 inspection, inspectors found that the feedback questionnaires used to collect learners' and employers' views did not focus on the quality aspects of the learners experience. BCTG has made reasonable progress in improving this process. Quantitative data from users and stakeholders are gathered systematically by a marketing company and are used effectively to inform the self-assessment process. Qualitative feedback is gathered from learners and employers through a series of independent reviews which is used well to improve the provision.

The post inspection action plan has been integrated well into the overall quality improvement plan which is regularly monitored and risk rated at monthly meetings of the quality team. All subcontractors have access to independent support and guidance to produce their self-assessment report which is based on a common

process and template. BCTG staff benefit from an 'away day' where they can contribute to the self-assessment process and report.

What progress has BCTG made in developing effective safeguarding arrangements?

Reasonable progress

BCTG continues to meet the government's requirements for safeguarding vulnerable groups. Since the previous inspection it has continued to improve its safeguarding arrangements and those of the consortium. BCTG has clear and comprehensive policies for safeguarding its learners and places clear responsibilities on consortium members through the subcontracting arrangements.

Within BCTG responsibilities for safeguarding its learners are clear and it has provided staff with comprehensive guidance and training. It also has good links with local safeguarding boards.

Support for subcontractors within the consortium is good. BCTG has provided relevant training events and individual support for consortium members. It has developed a useful toolkit to help each subcontractor to assess its own arrangements for safeguarding. BCTG uses the outcomes of these assessments effectively to produce action plans for each subcontractor and for the consortium as a whole. Action plans are clear and comprehensive and are reviewed regularly.

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