

B-Skill Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 50585

Name of lead inspector: June Cramman HMI

Last day of inspection: 2 March 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Suite A15
Milburn House
Dean Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 1LE

Telephone number: 0191 230 6690

FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

B-Skill Ltd (B-Skill) was established in 2000 to provide vocational courses in Tyne and Wear. It specialises in courses for adults in cleaning and support services and in pre-vocational courses for young people. Following a period of rapid expansion, B-Skill underwent significant re-structuring as the government funding available for training fell. The company now has offices in Newcastle upon Tyne and Droitwich, and training centres in Blyth and South Shields. Some staff have been made redundant and others have new responsibilities. The company is now managed by two directors and a team of managers. One manager is responsible for adult training in cleaning and support services and another is responsible for the pre-vocational training. There is also a financial manager and a new business improvement manager.

At the previous inspection overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, leadership and management, and provision in health, public services and care were all found to be inadequate. All other aspects of provision, including provision for foundation learners, were judged satisfactory. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has B-Skill made in strengthening the effectiveness of the self-assessment and quality improvement arrangements to secure and sustain improvements?

Significant progress

At the previous inspection although the self-assessment process was satisfactory the capacity to improve was inadequate. Since the inspection the company has greatly strengthened self-assessment and developed clear arrangements for quality improvement. A quality calendar focuses on key aspects of the provision. Regular audits and evaluations take place to improve the quality of learners' and assessors' work. Staff use detailed quality reports effectively to review and update plans for improvement.

Managers have improved the internal verification process. B-Skill has implemented a clear strategy and internal verification now takes place throughout the period of learning rather than at the end. In addition to planned sampling of learners' work, managers frequently take random samples to evaluate the quality of assessors' work. Managers grade assessors in terms of risk of poor practice and give increased support and monitoring where the risk is considered to be high.

B-Skill has a clear self-assessment process that it uses effectively to improve the quality of provision. Managers use feedback from subcontractors, employers and learners very well. Since the previous inspection, effective staff development has taken place to ensure staff have a good understanding of the process. Thorough external moderation of the self-assessment report now takes place.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has B-Skill made in maintaining or improving the outcomes for learners including those for foundation learning? **Reasonable progress**

In the last inspection, outcomes for learners were judged satisfactory. B-Skill has now completely re-structured and has undergone many changes to remedy the issues identified. B-Skill has maintained a clear focus on outcomes throughout this period of change.

The overall progression rate to further training and employment for learners at foundation level in 2009/10 remained satisfactory at 55%, slightly higher than the previous year. Although B-Skill records achievement data, managers do not yet use them as a measure of success.

In Train to Gain provision, B-Skill has made some good improvements in the success rates for those who complete within the planned time. These have risen from 45% in 2007/08, to 68% in 2008/09 and to 76% in 2009/10, matching the national average. Overall success rates have made steady progress, rising to 84% in 2009/10, three percentage points below the national average, but slightly above sector averages. Learners continue to gain confidence and update their skills in health and safety practices, and improve their knowledge of chemicals and machine operation. They develop their time management, increasing their efficiency and productivity at work.

B-Skill is improving its use of data to identify underperformance both across subcontractors and within groups such as learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Managers are starting to take appropriate actions to deal with issues and share good practice, particularly across subcontractors offering foundation level provision.

Quality of provision

What progress has B-Skill made to improve the monitoring of learners' progress? Is there any improvement in target-setting and the review process? **Reasonable progress**

Managers of Train to Gain have improved internal verification and good use is made of assessment to track learners' progress. They monitor their progress effectively in one-to-one meetings with assessors. B-Skill has also developed a more structured

programme in cleaning and support services which includes regular reviews and assessments monitored by the new processes. Managers give employers regular formal progress reports. The new programme is effective where it is fully implemented but not all learners are benefiting from it. Targets in files still show unacceptable inconsistency. B-Skill is aware of this and continues to implement measures to audit files, observe practice and train staff.

Learners at foundation level now have a highly structured programme with many group activities for which targets are set for all in the group. Learners have effective reviews every four weeks. Staff monitor and record progress although achievement data are not always effectively collated centrally. While staff have been trained to help them improve target-setting and recording has been changed, there are still problems in the use of learning plans, particularly where tutors use multiple plans for different parts of learners' programmes.

What progress has been made to improve the planning of learning and assessment in health, public services and care?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection the provider has appointed a national business manager who has a clear focus on the planning and development of learning. The manager has reduced assessors' caseloads to a manageable level. Staff development to improve planning is good. Schemes of work and lesson plans are now in place and B-Skill is planning more staff development to improve these further. An assessment strategy has been developed and implemented. Managers monitor learners' assessments and a colour-coded system identifies learners who fall behind. Data available for reviewing the performance of tutors and assessors have improved. Communication is better and staff are clear about the progress they make against targets for learners' success.

B-Skill is introducing a more structured programme for Train to Gain across the provision. This has a much-improved emphasis on health and safety, safeguarding and the promotion of equality and diversity. B-Skill has piloted this with six employers and initial feedback is positive. However, this revised programme is not yet fully implemented or available to all employers and learners.

Communication with employers is generally good although they are not all actively involved in the planning of learning with assessors.

What progress has B-Skill made to improve the arrangements for the support of learners with literacy, numeracy or language needs?

Reasonable progress

B-Skill has improved procedures for the initial and diagnostic assessments of learners' need for literacy and numeracy support on programmes at foundation level. They now receive these assessments within the first six weeks. Appropriate support

is then built into the more structured programme. B-Skill now uses a partner with specialist expertise to assess learners' spoken language needs. B-Skill has provided good support and development for staff to help them meet the requirements of functional skills. B-Skill has a revised observation process that makes good use of subject-specialist consultants to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in functional skills.

In Train to Gain, the initial assessment of learners' skills in literacy, numeracy or language is inconsistent. Staff assess around 70% of learners. They offer support but few take it up. B-Skill is putting in place systems to record better and quantify take up of initial assessment and subsequent support. Assessors are highly supportive and help learners achieve their qualification despite their need for support. In the newly structured programme, staff implement initial assessment more systematically. However, it is too early to say whether participation will improve.

Staff work well together and share good practice regularly on the development of functional skills. Managers have written a detailed framework for the development of provision across the company.

Leadership and management

What progress have managers made to address the issues arising from the last inspection with regard to placing a clearer focus on the quality of the learner experience and on financial security over business expansion?

Significant progress

Since the last inspection, B-Skill has continued to make significant changes in the structure of the provision. The relocation of the head office has improved financial security. A financial manager is in place to monitor budgets and advise the company. Directors have streamlined the management structure. A key focus for them during this period of turbulent change has been to ensure that the learners' experience continues to be of high quality and outcomes for learners improve. The three-year strategic development plan has a strong focus on quality improvement.

B-Skill has been active in seeking external advice on ways to improve and develop the company. Directors now have external scrutiny and challenge to the decision-making process. The new company structure is more flexible and more able to deal with changes to funding and qualifications. Communication between all levels of staff has improved and staff have a clear view of the progress they and the company are making. The senior management team has developed a more open style of management and staff morale has improved. The new management structure is clear and staff understand their role in helping the company improve.

<p>What progress has B-Skill made to improve partnership arrangements, including the implementation, monitoring and management of service-level agreements?</p>	<p>Significant progress</p>
--	------------------------------------

Since the previous inspection, B-Skill has made significant improvements to the monitoring of subcontracted provision. Staff make regular visits to subcontractors to evaluate critically learners' files and subcontractors' internal observations of teaching and learning. They also conduct searching interviews with learners. They produce a detailed report that identifies strengths and areas for improvement which they review at the next meeting. They use performance data to judge the effectiveness of providers at monthly meetings. A higher degree of confidence and better levels of trust now exist between B-Skill and its subcontractors. B-Skill has worked closely with employers to develop an improved employer information pack that has been recently introduced. Employers now receive clear information and guidance on their responsibilities to learners. A system to monitor assessment in the workplace forms part of the new agreement and B-Skill is now starting to provide reports for employers on the progress their learners are making. Managers have made some effective improvements to the monitoring of B-Skill staff working at a distance on employers' premises.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011