

# B-Skill Ltd

## Reinspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 50585

**Name of lead inspector:** Mike White HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 29 July 2011

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** Floor A  
Milburn House  
Dean Street  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 1LE

**Telephone number:** 0191 230 3737

## Information about the provider

1. 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. The company has offices in Newcastle upon Tyne and Droitwich, and training centres in Blyth and South Shields. The company employs 34 staff and is managed by two directors and a team of managers. One manager is responsible for training in cleaning and support services and another is responsible for pre-vocational training.
2. At the time of the inspection B-Skill had 583 adult learners on Train to Gain programmes working towards level 2 qualifications, with the vast majority in cleaning and support services. The learners are employed by organisations which are mostly in the north-east of England or in the midlands. These programmes are funded by the Skills Funding Agency and by the European Social Fund. Government-funded training represents approximately 92% of the company's training income.
3. Until April 2011 B-Skill held a contract to manage a pre-vocational learning programme which included Entry to Employment provision through a number of subcontractors. Since April 2011 it has delivered directly a Foundation programme for young people through a subcontract arrangement from South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. At the time of the inspection B-Skill had 79 young people based in its Blyth and South Shields training centres. Although contributing evidence for the inspection, this subject area was not separately graded at the reinspection.
4. At the previous inspection in July 2010 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. A reinspection monitoring visit took place in March 2011. Inspectors recognised that B-Skill had made significant progress in three themes and reasonable progress in a further four themes identified for that visit.
5. The provider provides training on behalf of the following provider:
  - South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<b>Provision for young learners:</b>  Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	  295 learners (foundation learning)
<b>Employer provision:</b> Train to Gain	1,658 learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>		<b>Grade 3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>		<b>Grade 3</b>
		<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners		3
Quality of provision		3
Leadership and management		3
Safeguarding		3
Equality and diversity		3
<b>Subject Areas</b>		<b>Grade</b>
Health, public services and care		3

## Overall effectiveness

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Since the previous, inspection when B-Skill was judged inadequate, the company has worked hard to achieve its vision of high performance and the quality of its provision has improved considerably. Staff are highly motivated, well qualified and experienced. The transition from the Entry to Employment programme to foundation learning has been well managed. Outcomes are satisfactory and continue to improve. Learners develop good skills and improve their motivation and self-confidence considerably.
7. Teaching is good in supporting learning and promoting personal development. Assessment is satisfactory. Most learners make at least satisfactory progress. The recording of learners' progress and the information received by employers about learners' progress are underdeveloped. Learners need to be more involved in setting their personal targets. The programmes meet the vocational needs of learners and employers effectively. Foundation learners do not benefit from a sufficiently wide choice of work experience opportunities. Learners receive good support from their assessors and teachers. The take-up of literacy and numeracy support by Train to Gain learners is still too low and the informal support provided by assessors is not well recorded.
8. The safeguarding of learners is satisfactory. Learners feel safe and feel confident in reporting concerns. The promotion of equality and diversity is good for foundation learners and satisfactory on the Train to Gain programme.

Previous differences in the performance of some groups have been effectively narrowed. The views of learners and employers are used well to improve the quality of the provision but opportunities are missed to give them greater involvement in quality improvement activities. Many of the quality assurance and improvement processes were inadequate at the previous inspection. B-Skill has worked hard to implement better quality improvement systems. Although some aspects are still quite new, the systems are now satisfactory.

## Main findings

- A satisfactory and increasing proportion of Train to Gain learners complete their programmes within their planned timescales. In-year figures for the current year indicate continued improvement. The progression rate for E2E learners is satisfactory overall and was good in 2009/10. In-year figures for foundation learners indicate continued good progression.
- Learners develop good personal and vocational skills and improve their confidence, motivation and work effectiveness. Learners feel safe and demonstrate safe working practices. Foundation learners make appropriate choices regarding health and well-being, have a satisfactory range of sports-related activities and make a satisfactory contribution to the community.
- On the Train to Gain programme teaching is well planned to meet individual work circumstances. Assessment practice is satisfactory. It uses an appropriate range of assessment methods. Foundation learners benefit from carefully planned activities and good individual support.
- Progress reviews are used well to motivate foundation learners but learning targets are not always sufficiently specific and measurable, and some learners are insufficiently involved in setting them. Most progress reviews on the Train to Gain provision are satisfactory but there is still too much variation in the quality of target setting.
- Provision meets the vocational needs of learners and employers on the Train to Gain programme very effectively. The formal process for informing employers of employees' progress is not always effective. The Foundation programme is well planned and it successfully meets the needs of learners with complex needs. The range of work experience placements is too narrow.
- Learners on the Train to Gain and Foundation programme receive good personal support. Initial advice and guidance are effective on both programmes. However, insufficient progress has been made in improving literacy and numeracy support for Train to Gain learners where take-up of specialist support is still too low and informal support insufficiently recorded.
- Managers have taken strong and effective action to improve the provision and promote cross-organisational working. Staff are highly motivated and committed to achieving the company vision. The transition from Entry to Employment to foundation learning has been well managed. Managers monitor staff performance effectively. Staff are well qualified and experienced and benefit from good opportunities for personal and professional development.

- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. Learners feel safe, know how to report concerns and have confidence in staff sensitivity. Learners show at least an adequate understanding of safeguarding issues.
- Promotion of equality and diversity to foundation learners is good but insufficiently thorough on the Train to Gain programme. Previous variations in the performance of different groups have been narrowed and now show no major variations. Actions are being taken to improve the management of equality and diversity but the approach requires more focus and improvement targets need more clarity.
- Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Learners' and employers' views are used to inform improvement but they are not involved sufficiently in self-assessment or improvement activity. The self-assessment report is accurate. Internal verification is satisfactory.
- Value for money is satisfactory. Previous issues around financial management have been addressed and costs are closely monitored. External expertise is now used to provide support and challenge to senior management.

### **What does B-Skill need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the system for informing employers of their employees' progress are effective for all employers.
- Improve the take-up of literacy, numeracy and language support by Train to Gain learners by better promoting its benefits and more accurately recording these support activities.
- Ensure learners play a full part in agreeing their personal and vocational targets and that these targets are sufficiently specific to be useful in helping to measure learners' progress.
- Develop more links with employers and community projects to offer more opportunities for work experience to foundation learners.
- Produce a clear plan of action to draw together the current developments in equality and diversity, provide specific measures of success and ensure management arrangements are appropriately developed to enable plans to be implemented.
- Engage learners, employers and other partners more closely in self-assessment, quality improvement and other key activities to better inform decision making.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- the approachable, friendly and supportive staff
- learning new skills, including how to clean better
- a better understanding of the job role
- the support and encouragement from tutors and assessors
- learning a lot more about health and safety, including hazards

- making new friends and socialising more on the Foundation programme.

**What learners would like to see improved:**

- the advice from assessors on the progress made
- the targets set during progress reviews.

**Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors****What employers like:**

- the good oral communication from assessors to help plan the learning programme
- improved job performance of learners
- issues being swiftly resolved
- employees becoming more multi-skilled and able to work in different areas.

**What employers would like to see improved:**

- more formal feedback from B-Skill on the progress that learners make.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

### Grade 3

9. Since the last inspection, when several aspects of provision were judged to be inadequate, the provider has made some good improvements. The proportion of Train to Gain learners who complete their programmes in the planned timescales has improved year-on-year, with the proportion in the current year being close to the national benchmark. In Foundation programmes, where managers have made a very successful transition from Entry to Employment programmes to the new Foundation Learning programme, learners' progression into education, training or employment has steadily improved.
10. The introduction of external moderation has increased the rigour of the self-assessment process and inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be broadly accurate. Many of the quality assurance processes which had been judged inadequate have been improved, although some relatively recently. Most of the recommendations from the previous inspection have been implemented satisfactorily although the provision for literacy, numeracy and language support are still insufficient. Staff have a good involvement in self-assessment. Feedback from learners and employers is used satisfactorily but opportunities are missed to involve them more in the process.
11. Leaders and managers have managed a major re-structure very well. They enjoy the support of the staff, who are well motivated and enthusiastic. The new staffing structure, together with satisfactory outcomes, improvements to teaching and the quality of learning resources reflect satisfactory value for money.

### Outcomes for learners

### Grade 3

12. The proportion of Train to Gain learners completing their programmes within planned timescales has improved consistently and in the current year is similar to the national average. Progression rates for the previous Entry to Employment programme and the current Foundation Learning programme are satisfactory and are steadily improving. In the first quarter of the new Foundation Learning programme, outcomes are good, but it is too early to predict whether these can be maintained. The achievement of learners in different regions and of different groups of learners show no major differences.
13. Learners develop personal and vocational skills very well. The work of Train to Gain learners often exceeds the requirements of the cleaning qualification and the good practice they learn is adopted by their employers. For a small minority of learners progress has been slow due to insufficiently frequent assessment. Foundation learners enjoy their learning and develop vocational and personal skills well. Their attendance is satisfactory and improving.
14. Learners on Train to Gain programmes feel safe and demonstrate safe working practices. Their induction programme ensures an adequate understanding of



health and safety and they know how to report any concerns. Foundation learners also feel safe and appropriately protected.

15. Foundation learners make appropriate choices regarding health and well-being and many benefit from eating the free fruit made available and the access to a healthy breakfast. They enjoy the satisfactory range of sports-related activities and contribute to the community through voluntary work and community projects, such as litter picking.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 3**

16. Training and assessment are satisfactory. Training on the Train to Gain programme is well planned to meet individual work circumstances. Assessors provide good advice and guidance to learners, helping to extend their vocational knowledge on all aspects of cleaning and providing encouragement during training sessions. Assessors have good vocational knowledge and experience. Assessment practice is satisfactory and utilises an appropriate range of assessment methods.
17. Foundation learning sessions are well planned and make good use of the outcomes of the initial assessment of vocational, functional and personal skills to ensure they are relevant to learners' needs. The well-designed and user-friendly initial assessment not only identifies learners' skills and experience but encourages them to recognise what they may have learned from activities such as babysitting or gardening and to reflect on what they liked and disliked at school or in any work or volunteering they have done. The outcomes of initial assessment are used effectively to highlight support needs. In some cases the tutors limit the breadth of learning by teaching only to the requirements of the qualification.
18. Progress reviews are used well to encourage and motivate foundation learners but their learning targets are not always sufficiently specific and measurable and some of these learners are insufficiently involved in setting them. Most progress reviews on the Train to Gain provision are satisfactory with good discussions about training and assessment activities. However, the questioning about their understanding of equality and diversity is sometimes insufficiently detailed and there is still too much variation in the quality of their target setting.
19. Internal verification practices are satisfactory, a significant improvement since the last inspection. Internal verifiers provide clear and accurate feedback to assessors on their performance to support them in identifying areas for improvement.
20. The Train to Gain programme meets the needs of learners and employers very effectively. Employers confirm learners improve the quality of their work and their productivity in their job roles and some learners offer guidance to managers on how to improve the cleaning arrangements. However, employers do not always receive formal feedback on the progress their learners make. The

Foundation programme is well planned and it successfully meets the needs and interests of individual learners, many of whom have complex needs. The range of placements with employers and community projects is, however, too narrow. B-Skill recognises this and is currently taking action to extend the range.

21. Foundation learners receive good support and guidance, with staff effectively tackling their barriers to learning. B-Skill makes good use of specialist support agencies to give further help to these learners. Learners on cleaning programmes have an appropriate induction and initial assessment. During the programme, assessors provide good personal support and encouragement for learners. However, the support for Train to Gain learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is insufficient. Take-up of specialist support is still too low and informal support is insufficiently recorded. On completion of the Train to Gain programme there is a good focus on career progression opportunities. Information, advice and guidance are effective on both programmes.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 3**

22. The board of directors and senior managers are strongly committed to improving the quality of the provision and on developing a culture of high performance. They now provide good strategic management for improvement. Staff are committed to this vision, their morale is positive and they are strongly motivated towards its achievement. B-Skill now challenges its own performance more rigorously. A new communications strategy has been developed and channels of communication are good, enabling better cross-organisational working. The transition from the previous Entry to Employment programme to foundation learning has been managed very effectively.
23. The performance management of staff is good. Team meetings are effective in helping to improve communication and standardisation. The induction process for new staff is thorough and includes training in safeguarding, and equality and diversity. Staff are well qualified and have a broad range of vocational experience. They benefit from training which is carefully planned to meet business and individual needs.
24. Arrangements for safeguarding meet legislative requirements. A small working party of staff provides effective leadership on the development of safeguarding. Learners feel safe and appreciate the arrangements that ensure their welfare. They know how to report concerns and have confidence in the sensitivity of staff. Staff complete appropriate risk assessments. B-Skill liaises closely with appropriate agencies to help ensure it supports learners' health and well-being. All staff have completed appropriate training in safeguarding. The number of incidents and issues reported to B-Skill is small. Reporting, when required, follows the internal policy guidance. Staff introduce internet safety practices during learners' induction and throughout the programme for younger learners. Learners show at least an adequate understanding of safeguarding issues and a better understanding of health and safety issues. The designated responsible officers communicate regularly with the local safeguarding board.

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25. B-Skill prioritises staff training on equality and diversity. All staff have been trained and many now hold an intermediate qualification. Staff on the Foundation programme work well with learners with multiple barriers to learning, and the promotion of equality and diversity to these learners is good. The checking of Train to Gain learners' understanding of equality and diversity during progress reviews is insufficiently thorough. B-Skill has implemented some initiatives to increase the recruitment of learners from groups traditionally under-represented in learning with limited success. The provider has worked effectively to narrow achievement gaps both regionally and in specific groups, such as men and women. There are now no major differences.
  26. In contrast to safeguarding, there is not a working group to lead on equality and diversity. The business plan shows a commitment to developing equality and diversity, and the quality improvement plan has some relevant actions. However, these actions are written too generally and, for example, do not specify targets and deadlines sufficiently clearly.
  27. Quality improvement arrangements, including self-assessment, are satisfactory. Good use is made of learners' and employers' feedback but they are involved insufficiently in quality improvement activities. B-Skill is developing its observation practices in order to cover all aspects of the learners' programmes. The new arrangements are still being embedded and inspectors found too much variation in their implementation and in the completion of documentation. Management information is now used well to measure performance and inform quality improvement activities.
  28. Value for money is satisfactory. Success rates are satisfactory and improving year-on-year. Rationalisation of the premises provides better value for money. The previous imbalance between administrative and delivery staff has been resolved. Costs and income are now closely monitored and the financial position has improved. External expertise is used effectively to provide support and challenge to senior management. Learners are supported with a satisfactory range of resources. The recent policy for sustainable management of resources is already having a positive impact.

## Information about the inspection

29. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
30. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## B-Skill Ltd

**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	583	583
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	3	
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3	
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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