

Broadcasting Support Services

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58469

Name of lead inspector: Diane Stacey HMI

Last day of inspection: 3 November 2011

Type of provider: Next Step contract
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Information about the provider

1. Broadcasting Support Services (**bss**) has managed the Careers Advice Service (formerly **learndirect**) since 1998 and was awarded a Next Step contract in August 2010. **bss** was previously inspected in February 2009.
2. **bss** provides free information and advice on courses, funding and careers, by telephone, email and web forums. The service is available to all people in England aged 19 and over. The service is also available for people who are aged 18 and over who are Jobcentre Plus customers and those in custody.
3. **bss** uses two contact centres, Manchester and Leicester, to deliver its service using dedicated managers and advisers who operate across the two sites.
4. **bss** has changed its adviser structure. Front-line advisers offer an information service, and careers coaches provide focused and personalised learning and career support. Management, quality coach and team leader roles have also been re-structured or introduced to focus on the performance of the new work structure.
5. Most calls are handled initially by one of 78 front line advisers who provide information on courses, funding, qualifications and specific campaigns. Customers who need more in-depth information are referred to one of 80 careers coaches.

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	
Next Step	2

Overall effectiveness

6. Outcomes for customers are good. A very high number of customers progress into learning and a high number enter, or progress within, employment. Customers are highly satisfied with the service they receive and increase their self-confidence and knowledge about training and careers very well. The quality of Next Step information and advice sessions is good. However, **bss** needs to ensure that all customers' action plans are of a high standard. **bss** makes particularly good use of partnerships to benefit customers. Care and guidance are good and **bss** offers good support through its minority language service. However, advisers do not sufficiently explore the literacy and numeracy needs of customers. Leadership of the Next Step service is very effective with very efficient actions taken to re-structure the service and staffing. Resource planning is good. Arrangements for safeguarding and equality and diversity are good. **bss** has a range of very useful quality monitoring processes to improve the service, but has no effective system to provide a coherent assessment of its whole service.

Main findings

- Outcomes for customers are good. Progression into learning is very high and those entering employment, or progressing within employment, is high.

Customers develop significantly increased self-confidence and the ability to identify the goals that help them progress.

- Advisers use a good range of helping skills to enable customers to make informed choices about their employment prospects, career development options and training opportunities. The quality of action plans, though, is too variable and plans do not always capture the information and advice that customers receive.
- Customers have good access to high-quality information and careers advice, including telephone, email and web-based approaches.
- Partnership working with regional Next Step providers is particularly effective in ensuring customers can access face-to-face support. National initiatives are fully supported and enthusiastically promoted.
- Support and guidance are good. However, Skills for Life are not sufficiently promoted to customers, nor are they always encouraged to consider the value of improving and accrediting their literacy and numeracy competencies.
- Leadership and management are very effective. Senior managers encourage and motivate staff, who clearly focus on the quality of the service and the success of customers. **bss** has managed organisational change well to meet challenging targets. Performance management is good and **bss** has generated good and effective partnerships with other Next Step providers.
- Resource planning and management are very efficient and effective which ensure sufficient resources to maintain a high level of service. The percentage of calls answered compared with those received is very high. Staff have very good access to a well-managed and in-depth knowledge base that is regularly updated and very relevant to the needs of customers.
- Staff management is good. Performance is carefully and thoroughly monitored leading to effective individual development plans. Staff receive good support for their professional development, are well qualified and demonstrate good professional skills.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good with clear guidelines for advisers to follow. Arrangements for meeting legislative requirements are thorough. Staff regularly receive training and updated information on safeguarding topics.
- Arrangements for equality and diversity are good. Staff are trained well to ensure that all customers, who come from very diverse backgrounds, receive a good service. **bss** encourages participation from customers for whom English is an additional language and is adept at changing its service to meet the needs of specific groups.
- Quality arrangements are generally effective. Managers make good use of users' and staff views in a detailed action plan, which leads to appropriate development. However, its impact is not effectively evaluated and it does not include all elements of the service. **bss** has not yet established an effective system to provide a coherent assessment of its whole service.

What does bss need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all customers' action plans are comprehensive and of very high quality, with detailed and challenging short- and long-term targets so that customers are fully aware of what they have agreed to do to make progress.
- Ensure advisers raise the profile of literacy and numeracy and promote training opportunities to customers so that they can enhance their employability and career prospects.
- Improve and develop quality systems to ensure complete coverage of all aspects of the provision in order to ensure consistently high quality across the whole service.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What customers like:

- the extremely helpful and knowledgeable advisers
- the top-class service that often exceeds expectations
- feeling more positive about the future and seeing a way forward
- the swift response to queries
- a service that pulls all elements of careers advice together
- advisers' ability to understand customers' concerns and recommend solutions
- the excellent range of information provided to customers.

What customers would like to see improved:

- better marketing of the service to make more people aware of what it offers
- a quicker response to simple queries without having to give all personal details
- clearer details about funding information on the website.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. **bss** has continued to improve its services, giving the vast majority of customers good information and careers advice. Performance in the key indicators is very high as is customer satisfaction. Overall management of the service is good. Staff are highly skilled and professional and staff turnover is very low. **bss** manages its resources well and forges good partnerships to benefit customers. Users' and staff views effectively influence and improve provision that reaches a very diverse customer base. Arrangements to improve the service are generally effective and controls to monitor the quality of provision are rigorous. However, managers recognise that some aspects of self-assessment and quality improvement require further strengthening.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Overall progression into learning and employment is high. A substantial number of customers progress into learning. A high number of customers enter employment or progress within their workplace, move into new employment or start voluntary work.
9. The majority of customers are highly satisfied with the information they receive which helps them to identify what they need to do to progress. Customers are encouraged to identify their own goals. They develop their self-confidence very well and increase their awareness of their current skills and the barriers they need to overcome to progress successfully.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

10. Information and advice sessions are good. Telephone calls are answered quickly and very efficiently. Advisers establish a good rapport with their customers and skilfully ascertain their requirements. Front-line advisers provide a very effective information service and careers coaches give high-quality personalised learning and careers support. Advisers use a good range of helping skills, including questioning, active listening, exploring, clarifying, challenging, recapping and summarising. Most sessions are carefully structured and appropriately paced. Advisers provide relevant information to enable customers to consider possible options. Customers are fully involved in decision-making processes.
11. Advisers confidently use the comprehensive electronic knowledge base, to obtain specific, relevant and up-to-date information for customers. Advisers are well qualified and most have significant experience of information and advice work.

12. Most customers are actively involved in the development of their action plan and in negotiating their short- and long-term targets. Where advisers have well-developed keyboard skills, action plans are quickly word processed and transmitted to customers by email or, where this is unavailable, by post. The quality of action plans is variable and information and advice given to customers are not always sufficiently summarised.
13. Customers have extremely good access to the information and advice services through telephone, email and web-based routes. A very good information service is available for customers who speak other languages and have limited, or no, English. The service provides high-quality and detailed written advice and signposting to helpful websites for customers to compose and maximise the impact of their curriculum vitae (CV) and increase their appeal to employers.
14. Partnership working is good and used efficiently to meet customers' needs. Links and joint working with face-to-face Next Step providers are particularly effective in offering a complete service to customers. Advisers refer customers to relevant external agencies, such as Age UK, health and mental health services, and Jobcentre Plus disability advisers for specific support where this is appropriate. Joint visits and collaborative training activities with other Next Step providers are improving the provision for customers. **bss** is swift to respond to local and regional developments including large-scale redundancies or major recruitment drives. National initiatives, such as the BBC First Click campaigns or the promotion of apprenticeships, are also fully supported by advisers.
15. Customers receive good support and advice to help them make decisions about career changes and improving their economic prospects. Speakers of other languages than English are well supported to access learning in their local communities. Arrangements for hearing or visually impaired customers to receive information and advice through Braille, large print, audio or minicom are satisfactory. Customers' literacy and numeracy needs are not sufficiently explored by advisers. The levels of literacy and numeracy required for some careers or for improving job prospects are not sufficiently discussed. Opportunities to assess customers' literacy and numeracy levels, for instance through incoming emails or CVs, are not maximised. Learning to improve literacy and numeracy is not sufficiently promoted.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

16. Leadership in **bss** is very effective. Senior managers encourage and motivate staff to provide a continually improving service. The organisation clearly focuses on service quality and the benefit to customers. **bss** has managed well the recent significant changes to improve the service. The organisation sets and expects the achievement of stretching targets in which it is generally successful. **bss** very effectively manages performance using a wide range of detailed reports to monitor the service against specific targets. **bss** has worked hard to foster good and effective partnerships with other Next Step providers to benefit its customers.

17. Resource planning and management are very good. Accurate forecasting of peaks and troughs in demand, using expert analysis of marketing information, ensures sufficient resources to maintain a high level of service. The percentage of calls answered compared with those received is very high. The minority language service also has a high response rate. Staff have very good access to a well-managed, up-to-date knowledge base which provides very relevant information to meet the diverse needs of customers.
18. **bss** carefully monitors and manages staff performance. Managers and quality coaches closely scrutinise information and advice sessions against both performance indicators and customer experience. Effective individual staff development plans are used well to plan and support the professional development of staff through monthly face-to-face assessments with their managers. Staff turnover is exceptionally low. All front-line advisers are qualified or gaining a level 3 certificate in advice and guidance. All careers coaches have achieved level 4 qualification in advice and guidance and approximately one third hold a post-graduate certificate in telephone guidance.
19. Arrangements for safeguarding are good, including a full range of policies and procedures. **bss** meets the requirements for vetting staff and maintains a complete central register of all staff across the two sites. Advisers and careers coaches have easy access to very useful on-line safeguarding guidance during a call. They understand procedures for referring vulnerable adults to appropriate external agencies. A good range of training has included topics linked to safeguarding including mental health awareness, interpersonal skills and recent cluster group meetings focused specifically on working with emotional customers. The **bss** knowledge base is particularly well used to brief staff about any updated information relating to the protection of vulnerable adults. Thorough checks ensure that advisers have accessed this online information. **bss** is aware that, with the introduction of the automated system, customers under the age of 18 may access the Next Step service and so include information on child protection on their intranet knowledge base.
20. Arrangements for equality and diversity are good. **bss** has a full range of policies and all staff complete equality training appropriate to a customer-service-based business. Outcomes for customers, who come from very diverse backgrounds, are good. Well-trained advisers and careers coaches work very efficiently to ensure that they meet the needs of their customers. **bss** operates an effective minority language advice service which helps widen participation to many customers who are speakers of one of eight of the most relevant community languages. **bss** promotes the language service well across England through the work of its community liaison team. **bss** is adept at changing its service to meet the needs of specific groups, for example extending opening hours or providing specifically tailored information. Information is available in Braille, on compact disc or in other languages on request. **bss** routinely captures and reports on customers' demographic information, but cannot access comparative outcomes for specific caller groups.

21. Arrangements for quality improvement are thorough and generally effective. **bss** has a wide range of processes to improve the quality of its provision. These involve significant input from staff, customers and other quality systems, for example mystery shoppers. The resulting action plan is detailed and leads to appropriate actions; however, it has insufficient scope for measuring the effectiveness of these actions. The use of customer feedback is systematic and central to quality improvement. However, evaluation does not address sufficiently all elements of the service provided. The self-assessment report is not part of the routine quality improvement process and is insufficiently evaluative. Managers acknowledge that there is no effective mechanism to provide a coherent assessment of the whole service yet.
22. **bss** offers good value for money. Outcomes are good and improving. Customer satisfaction rates are very high and many customers progress very well. Staff are well qualified and demonstrate good skills. Resources are well managed and **bss** provides a good service to its customers. **bss** promotes good environmental practices.

Information about the inspection

23. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's head of service, as 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, and data on customers and their progression into learning or employment over the period since the previous inspection.
24. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires customers had recently completed for the provider. They observed telephone information and advice sessions. Inspectors collected evidence from the Next Step service that the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Broadcasting support services Next Step

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 using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Next Step
Approximate number of enrolled learners Full-time learners Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	na	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	na	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
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?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
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>	na	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
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?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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