

Buzz Learning Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58163

Name of lead inspector: Margaret Hobson HMI

Last day of inspection: 19 July 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Buzz Learning Limited (Buzz) is a private training provider, established in 2004 and based in Ashington, Northumberland. Buzz has a contract with the Education Funding Agency (EFA) to deliver foundation learning and works mainly with young people in the NEET category (not in education, employment or training). It also has a subcontract to deliver a jointly funded programme for NEET learners. Buzz works with the local authority and schools to deliver an alternative education programme for pupils who are at risk of exclusion. In partnership with Northumberland County Council, Buzz has recently introduced a pilot programme for young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of the 56 current learners, 14% have an identified additional learning need and 46% are female. No learners are from minority ethnic communities. Buzz recruits learners from south-east Northumberland.
2. Buzz employs 13 people who work across the two centres. A senior team, comprising a managing director and a curriculum manager, share responsibility for running the company, providing strategic and operational management. An information, advice and guidance officer and an administrative officer support them. A team of two full-time trainers, an employability officer, a vocational supervisor and two part-time tutors deliver the foundation learning programme with two additional tutors working for Buzz through a subcontracting agreement. Since 2010 Buzz has carried out two restructures and has lost five members of staff due to funding changes.
3. The provider delivers training on behalf of the following organisation:
 - Igen
4. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the provider:
 - NECC Training and Assessment Centre Limited

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	16 part-time learners 81 full-time learners 20 full-time learners

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas

Preparation for life and work	3
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Overall effectiveness

5. Learners gain good employability skills, much improved confidence and increased vocational skills. They feel very safe at Buzz. The proportion of learners that progresses to further training, education or employment has improved significantly since 2010/11 and is now satisfactory. Achievement on short courses is high. Functional skills success rates are low. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but in a minority of sessions activities do not meet the needs of individual learners sufficiently. Staff use the results of initial assessment effectively to develop learners' vocational programmes, but do not use them effectively to plan functional skills development. Progress reviews are supportive but do not involve learners sufficiently in setting challenging targets. The range of provision meets learners' individual needs particularly successfully. Partnership working is strong and good links with local providers and colleges have increased the progression routes open to learners. Buzz works with a good range of support agencies to meet learners' needs in a flexible and highly individualised manner but does not plan or deliver information, advice and guidance systematically.
6. Buzz has a clear strategic direction but its functional skills strategy remains underdeveloped. Operational management and communications are effective. However, foundation learning meetings are not recorded consistently and staff meetings produce too many actions to manage and prioritise efficiently. While safeguarding is satisfactory overall, the safeguarding section of the work-placement risk assessment is not sufficiently specific to young learners. Staff

challenge learners' discriminatory attitudes and promote equality and diversity successfully. Buzz implements its strengthened quality improvement cycle satisfactorily. It has an appropriate focus on improving learner outcomes and the key learning processes. The use of data to monitor learner outcomes is now more systematic. The session observation process focuses too much on teaching rather than on the quality of learning.

Main findings

- Learner outcomes are satisfactory. Progression into further training, education or employment is satisfactory and the trend is improving. The number of learners achieving key objectives is good. Achievement on short courses is high. Success rates on functional skills are low.
- Learners develop good employability skills. They demonstrate much improved confidence and increased practical vocational skills. They enjoy their learning and their participation in sessions is good. Attendance is good overall. Programmes increase learners' knowledge of different job roles and the range of vocational employment choices available to them.
- Learners feel very safe at Buzz. Staff reinforce health and safety very effectively and learners demonstrate good awareness of safe working practices. Staff and learners show high levels of mutual respect. Learners understand correct behaviour for the workplace. They have a good understanding of internet safety and their rights and responsibilities. Health and well-being are promoted satisfactorily. Learners are involved effectively with projects to help local communities.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory and learners enjoy and engage in a range of creative activities. Tutors provide good opportunities for learners to develop and practise vocational skills. They promote equality and diversity successfully in sessions. In a minority of sessions, tutors do not plan activities to meet learners' individual needs effectively.
- Staff make good use of the results of initial assessment to plan learning except in functional skills where they place a minority of learners on courses at too high a level. At progress reviews, while tutors give learners detailed feedback on their progress which motivates and encourages them, they do not involve them sufficiently in setting their targets. Targets set at reviews lack challenge.
- The provision meets learners' individual needs and interests particularly well. Learners choose from a good range of units and vocational tasters; they benefit from highly individualised programmes which help them make decisions about progression routes.
- Partnerships with the local authority and schools are highly productive and provide alternative opportunities for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for learners at risk of exclusion. Good links with local providers and colleges increase learners' progression routes.
- Care, guidance and support are effective. Buzz works with a good range of support agencies to meet learners' needs in a flexible and highly individualised manner. The company provides incentives to improve attendance and rewards

good behaviour and attitudes through a points system. Information, advice and guidance are available as required but lack systematic planning.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Strategic planning provides a clear direction for the future. Managers develop good strategic partnerships to engage a wider range of disadvantaged learners. The effective communication in meetings is not always recorded and actions are not prioritised sufficiently. Management of the curriculum is satisfactory. However, the functional skills strategy is not sufficiently developed.
- Safeguarding is satisfactory. Buzz promotes a zero tolerance approach to bullying and learners feel very safe and confident in reporting issues to staff. Buzz works closely with appropriate external agencies to provide effective and sensitive support. Staff training is thorough. The promotion of e-learning is good. While work experience risk assessments are comprehensive, the safeguarding section is not sufficiently specific to young learners.
- Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Most learners achieve an equality and diversity module and take part in cultural events to increase their understanding of diversity issues. Staff challenge learners' discriminatory attitudes appropriately. Buzz promotes non-traditional courses successfully to male and female learners. However, observations of teaching and learning focus insufficiently on improving the promotion of equality and diversity.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive of staff views. Buzz makes effective use of learners' views to promote improvement. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but it did not highlight the underdeveloped functional skills strategy sufficiently. While the quality improvement cycle has been strengthened, the observation process lacks focus on evaluating and improving the quality of learning in sessions.

What does Buzz Learning Limited need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of learners who successfully achieve their functional skills awards and make progress by improving the use of initial assessment results and placing learners on the appropriate level of programme.
- Ensure that tutors plan all sessions effectively and differentiate the range and level of tasks to meet individual learners' needs better.
- Ensure that learners are fully involved in progress reviews and the setting of their targets. Improve targets set in reviews so that they are challenging, measurable and better support learners' progress and long-term goals.
- Improve the timeliness and rigour of information, advice and guidance by ensuring a more systematic approach that supports individual learners' goals and progression routes more effectively.
- Improve the effectiveness of communication by consistently recording all decisions and key actions from meetings. Prioritise actions and monitor them systematically to promote continuous improvement better.

- Develop a coherent strategy and action plan to implement functional skills effectively across the provision and provide clear guidance to staff which will increase their understanding.
- As a priority, improve the wording of the safeguarding section of the work-experience risk assessment to ensure that all aspects relate clearly to young learners and appropriately highlight safeguarding to providers.
- Increase the rigour of teaching and learning observations to ensure a stronger focus on continuously improving the quality of learning and the promotion of equality and diversity.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly and supportive staff
- being treated with respect
- the range of opportunities to gain qualifications and experience
- the opportunities to get work experience
- the absence of bullying
- the individual support they receive from tutors.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the resources and accommodation at the drill hall
- access to sports activities
- the disruption in sessions from some learners
- the changes to the timetable that affect their weekly money
- a wider range of snacks available to buy.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very helpful staff at Buzz
- good and regular communications.

What employers would like to see improved:

No areas for improvement were identified.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

7. Buzz has maintained satisfactory capacity to make and sustain improvement since the last inspection. Staff have made an effective transition from previous programmes to the new foundation learning programme. Learner outcomes continue to improve in most areas but remain low for functional skills. Current data indicate significant improvements in progression into education, training or employment over the last two years. Achievement of key objectives was low at the last inspection but is now good. Leadership is satisfactory and Buzz has a clear strategy for the future through strong partnerships. The strategy to develop and implement functional skills remains underdeveloped. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and involves staff in a more structured way through the quality improvement cycle. Quality improvement processes were incomplete at the last inspection; a coherent cycle is now in place and is implemented effectively. Buzz now uses data effectively to monitor learner outcomes. It routinely collects the views of learners through quarterly feedback forums and uses them effectively to promote improvement. Staff are well qualified, experienced and receive relevant training and development. Observations of teaching and learning are systematic but do not focus sufficiently on evaluating learning.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

8. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since 2010/11, progression rates into further training, education or employment for foundation learners show significant improvements and are now satisfactory. The number of learners who achieve their key objectives has improved and is now good. Qualification success rates vary. On short courses they are high. However, achievement of functional skills is low and has decreased slightly in the current year.
9. Learners develop a good range of employability skills. They demonstrate much improved confidence and team-building skills. Knowledge of vocational choices and of different job roles is also much improved. Learners' participation is good and they enjoy applying their increased vocational skills. Attendance is good and the trend is improving.
10. Learners feel very safe. Good levels of mutual respect exist between learners and staff. Learners willingly seek advice from staff. The reinforcement of health and safety is good. Learners agree ground rules at all sessions. They demonstrate good awareness of safe working practices and their behaviour is good.
11. Buzz promotes health and well-being satisfactorily. External agencies deliver an appropriate range of sessions including sexual health, drug and alcohol awareness, and smoking cessation.

12. Learners engage effectively in a range of local community-based activities. Special celebratory days at the centre serve as a basis for inviting local people and their families to enjoy activities arranged by the learners. Learners are involved satisfactorily in fund-raising activities.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most activities engage learners and promote stimulating discussion. Where relevant, sessions relate closely to a work context. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively. Most tutors provide good opportunities for learners to develop and practise vocational skills. Less effective sessions do not have clear learning objectives or activities planned sufficiently to meet learners' individual needs. Staff use initial assessment satisfactorily to develop learning plans. However, they do not use the results of functional skills initial assessment effectively. Learners have the opportunity to practice their functional skills in sessions. However, most are making slow progress towards their qualification and some are on qualifications at too high a level. Learners receive encouraging feedback in progress reviews. However, staff do not involve them sufficiently in setting their progress targets. Targets are not sufficiently challenging or specific and mainly relate to completing parts of a qualification.
14. The curriculum meets the needs and interests of learners particularly well. A good range of additional units in the progression award enables the design of highly individualised learning programmes. Learners choose from a wide range of tasters and accredited options to gain skills in vocational areas. Buzz has widened the range of vocational tasters available to learners helping them to make informed decisions prior to committing to longer qualifications. The main training centre provides a central and accessible venue for learners. A small number of learners participate in work placements and Buzz has plans to extend placement use. However, staff do not routinely update placement documentation in a timely manner.
15. Buzz has strong partnerships with the local authority and two local schools to provide additional learning opportunities for young adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and to offer alternative education for pupils at risk of exclusion. A good partnership with a subcontracted provider widens the curriculum effectively to include childcare programmes and functional skills at higher levels. Good links with local providers and colleges provide increased progression routes for learners.
16. Care, guidance and support are effective. Staff work hard and persevere with learners who experience many challenging barriers. Buzz works with a good range of support agencies to meet learners' needs in a flexible and highly individualised manner. Staff are very caring and do everything they can for learners. However, at times, this affects learners' development of independence and responsibility. The new induction programme has a good structure and engages learners, informing and advising them of vocational options. Buzz provides appropriate incentives to improve attendance and reward good

behaviour through a points system. Learners gain financial vouchers and have the options of external visits as rewards. Information, advice and guidance are available as the need arises but not in a sufficiently systematic or planned manner at key points in the learners' programmes.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Buzz has been through a period of funding changes and staffing restructure. It has managed recent staff losses effectively. The business plan provides a clear vision for the future with appropriately challenging targets. Buzz has developed good strategic links with the local authority, schools and providers to broaden provision, widen participation and develop progression routes.
18. Communications through regular staff meetings are effective. However, although foundation learning meetings take place, they are not always recorded. Staff meetings are regular but the large number of recorded actions is difficult to manage. Curriculum management is satisfactory overall, but the functional skills strategy is underdeveloped. The management and use of data are satisfactory and improving. Weekly updates to progress and achievement data on the information system enable managers to monitor them more effectively.
19. The safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The policy and procedures provide clear and detailed guidance for staff. Buzz promotes an effective zero tolerance approach to bullying. Learners feel very safe and confident in reporting issues to staff. Buzz works closely with appropriate agencies to ensure effective and sensitive support for individual learners. All staff have completed appropriate training on safeguarding; some have completed the higher-level training. Risk assessments for activities in the vocational training centre are thorough. The promotion of e-learning safety is good. However, while work experience risk assessments are comprehensive, the safeguarding section is more relevant to adults than to young learners.
20. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The company implements and monitors an appropriate equality and diversity plan effectively. Most learners achieve an equality and diversity module to raise their awareness of diversity issues. Buzz effectively widens participation to disadvantaged groups. Promotion of equality and diversity in the curriculum, through the celebration of cultural events, is satisfactory. Staff challenge racist and discriminatory attitudes appropriately. They promote non-traditional subjects successfully to male and female learners. Inspectors observed good reinforcement of equality and diversity in progress reviews. However, the records of teaching and learning observations indicate an insufficient focus on evaluating and improving the promotion of equality and diversity. Staff participate in a satisfactory range of equality and diversity training. Buzz analyses data in relation to variations in achievement between different groups of learners but there are no significant differences.

21. Buzz has a coherent and responsive learner-engagement process. It captures learners' views through quarterly forum meetings and uses this information effectively to develop the provision. Three learner representatives have recently been selected to improve learner feedback. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of this action.
22. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and inclusive. The self-assessment report is satisfactory. Inspectors agreed with many of the key judgements in the report, but it failed to highlight the underdeveloped functional skills strategy sufficiently. Some aspects were overgraded. The strengthened quality improvement cycle is effective and engages staff. It covers all aspects of the provision and focuses satisfactorily on improving learner outcomes, the key learning processes and documentation. Internal verification is effective. A schedule of observations of key processes is in place. However, session observation records indicate too much focus on teaching rather than on evaluating the quality of learning. In most instances, the recorded evidence does not support the grade given.
23. Buzz provides satisfactory value for money. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory and include the development of good employability skills. Learning resources and accommodation are satisfactory. Access to computers is good. Staff are well qualified, appropriately experienced and participate in a range of relevant staff development activities.

Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director, 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, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
25. 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.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Buzz Learning Limited

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	16-18 Learner responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	56	56
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
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?	2	
<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	
Quality of provision	3	3
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?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<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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