

B-Skill Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		14–18 January 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- In 2011/12, the vast majority of learners were workplace learners and the proportion who completed their qualifications within the planned time requires improvement.
- Not all assessors plan assessments sufficiently and assessment practices are too varied. Some assessors use a narrow range of assessment practices to allow learners to demonstrate their skills.
- Trainers do not always extend learners' skills in English and mathematics. Learners do not benefit from detailed feedback on their written work, for example, trainers do not correct learners' English and mathematics in written work.
- Leaders and managers have improved some aspects of the provision since the last inspection. However, they have not improved the quality of training, learning and assessment fast enough, and the arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of training and assessment require improvement.

This provider has the following strengths:

- In 2011/12, the proportion of learners who eventually achieved their qualifications improved and was high.
- Learners develop good cleaning techniques, increase their confidence and enhance their team-working skills. Some progress to other courses such as customer services.
- Learners gain a good understanding of health and safety and apply this knowledge well in their job roles.
- Learners benefit from good on-the-job training that includes specific relevant extra courses such as first aid and buffer cleaning.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all learners complete their courses successfully within the planned time, by rigorous and regular monitoring of their progress; take swift action to remove any issues causing delays in successful completion of learners' qualifications within the planned time.
- Ensure all assessors have the skills to use a wide range of assessment practices through good planning of assessments and sharing of good practice. Ensure assessors provide clear written feedback to learners on their performance so that they understand what they should do to improve.
- Extend the knowledge and skills of trainers and assessors through effective staff development so that they can support learners' development of English and mathematics skills.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all observers of training activities focus and report on the quality of learning as well as teaching. Ensure the records of observations include accurate and evaluative judgements and the action plans following each observation are accurate, detailed and implemented well.
- Develop a robust and accurate information system that allows managers to collect, record and monitor all aspects of learners' training and assessment activities. Use this system effectively to identify practices in different geographic regions which impact on the progress of different groups of learners; implement an action plan to ensure learners in all regions achieve well.
- Increase the speed of improvement by ensuring all managers have the capacity to develop and implement effective systems, through high quality staff development and performance management.
- Extend learners' knowledge of equality and diversity by questioning on these topics during progress reviews and discuss relevant examples when learners show insufficient understanding.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for learners at B-Skill require improvement. Since the last inspection, overall success rates and success rates within the planned time for learners on the previous Train to Gain programme have been satisfactory. In 2011/12, the overall success rates for workplace learners were high; however, their success rates within the planned time require improvement. Most current learners, including the apprentices who started on their programmes recently, make satisfactory progress towards completing their learning programme. ▪ The standard of most learners' written work is satisfactory. Learners enjoy their courses and the skills that they develop. They are very motivated. Workplace learners develop good skills and improve their practices, such as in cleaning laboratories and hospitals, and meet employers' expectations well. They improve their confidence in dealing with staff in their work settings. ▪ In 2011/12, there were no significant differences in success rates within the planned time between male and female learners. Success rates within the planned time for minority ethnic learners were significantly lower than learners overall, as were the success rates within the planned time for learners with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities. Learners in some geographical regions do not achieve as well as learners overall. ▪ The majority of learners acquire or have sufficient English and mathematics skills to complete their qualifications. The majority apply these skills to their job roles, for example, in reading instructions for industrial cleaning machines. A small number of learners, because of their difficulties in English and mathematics, rely too much on trainers or assessors to collect the evidence of their skills, for example, by assessors using voice recorders excessively rather than 	

learners writing. Trainers and assessors fail to extend learners' English and mathematics skills beyond the level required by the qualifications.

- Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They have a good understanding of health and safety at work; for example, learners on cleaning programmes take good precautions when mixing chemicals for cleaning tasks. However, not all learners have a good enough understanding of relevant equality and diversity issues.
- A few learners gain additional responsibility and promotion in the workplace. Some learners progress to advanced customer service programmes. B-Skill does not routinely collect information on learners' promotion or when they progress to other courses to evaluate fully the progression of all learners.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement; this has contributed to outcomes for learners, which require improvement. On-the-job training is good, which results in learners who develop good cleaning techniques, such as polishing floors in hazardous and complex chemical laboratories.
- Most learners benefit from very effective on-the-job training. They work in a wide range of settings, such as in hospitals or laboratories where they practise and develop their skills and apply their understanding of National Vocational Qualification background knowledge to their job roles. Learners benefit from specific on-the-job training which includes training on first aid, using hazardous materials, manual handling and buffer cleaning.
- In the better training and coaching sessions, trainers plan learning well and make good use of questions to test learners' knowledge and understanding. Assessors are skilful in making learning relevant to a range of cleaning contexts, for example, one assessor adapted questions to a particular work environment that helped the learner to understand better the relevance of topics discussed. When learning is planned well, assessors work closely with employers to provide good opportunities for learners to develop additional skills in the workplace, for example, communication skills and assertiveness.
- In the weaker training and coaching sessions, trainers do not plan sufficiently for learning and they miss many opportunities to develop learning points. In these sessions, trainers fail to link on- and off-the-job training and develop learners' knowledge. Some learners are highly proficient in cleaning techniques for different locations. However, far too often trainers recognise merely learners' existing skills rather than planning to develop learners' skills to a higher level; this fails to provide sufficient challenge for learners that are more able.
- Trainers and assessors support learners well and encourage them to continue on their courses, especially when learners' work patterns change radically. They know their learners well and help them very effectively to overcome their personal and learning needs. B-Skill celebrates the success of learners well, for example, when learners are promoted or have gained qualifications. This enhances the self-esteem of learners and encourages them and employers to value and prioritise training activities.
- Trainers and assessors are appropriately qualified and have relevant occupational experience. Some are able to contextualise learning well for learners with the use of examples to enhance learning and understanding. For example, a trainer demonstrated a very good and efficient technique of cleaning a school desktop, which the learner immediately adopted.
- Assessment practices vary considerably between assessors and overall require improvement. Some assessment is well planned and learners understand what they will be assessed on and when. Apprentices benefit from a wide range of assessment activities that helps them make appropriate progress. However, some assessors use a narrow range of assessment approaches that fail to allow learners to demonstrate their cleaning skills in different work settings. Feedback to learners following assessment recognises mostly learners' good work but does not always provide timely advice in sufficient detail of how learners can improve.

- Trainers and assessors do not use sufficiently information from learners' initial assessment to plan and record their individual learning needs. Learners do not benefit from being given clearly defined targets that tell them exactly what they need to achieve and by when, and therefore they do not progress towards completing their qualifications well. Although learners develop good team working and communication skills, this is not recorded.
- Learners undertake appropriate initial assessments of their skills level of English and mathematics. Very few workplace learners receive extra support to improve their use of English and mathematics further than required by their qualifications. Trainers do not always provide sufficient extra support for apprentices to improve further their functional skills beyond the level required by their courses. Assessors do not routinely correct learners' written work for grammatical and spelling errors. Some trainers and assessors lack sufficient confidence to support learners to develop further their English and mathematics skills.
- Advice and guidance for most learners are timely and appropriate. Trainers inform learners well about their rights and responsibilities. Trainers advise learners on career options and encourage them to progress. For example, one learner working for a European law firm has been encouraged to study French, as this will provide greater progression opportunities within the profession.
- Most trainers and assessors discuss equality and diversity issues satisfactorily through teaching and learning. However, not all assessors monitor, challenge and extend learners' knowledge of equality and diversity, for example, during progress reviews.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The overall quality of leadership and management requires improvement. Directors and managers have a clear vision and strategy to improve the quality of provision. Since the last inspection, B-Skill has experienced a period of significant change and has implemented a number of actions to improve the quality of the provision, such as the introduction of a new staff structure. The actions have contributed well to high overall success rates for workplace learners in 2011/12. Despite improvements, some weaknesses identified at the last inspection have not been rectified fully.
- The management of trainers and assessors is effective and uses regular individual meetings to determine their level of performance. The company provides a wide range of staff development activities through external specialists. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is variable and too few sessions are good or better. Arrangements to monitor and develop the capacity of the managers to implement improvements effectively and at a good pace are not systematic.
- The most recent self-assessment report is not sufficiently critical and overstates the quality of most aspects of the provision. The quality improvement plan does not relate sufficiently to the improvements required in teaching, learning and assessment, and focuses mainly on business improvement. Although some aspects of the provision have improved, overall, the grades awarded at this inspection are the same as those awarded at the last inspection.
- Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are insufficient to bring about sustained improvement to the provision. The written records of observation of teaching sessions focus too much on teaching and too little on learning. The records are insufficiently evaluative and do not always support the grades which the sessions are awarded. In a small minority of the records of the observations, there is good attention to learning, grades are accurate and action plans are relevant and clear. This good practice is not shared to improve the quality of the observation of teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Since the last inspection, B-Skill has improved the arrangements to collect and use learners' views, through a range of methods including surveys and forums, to develop and improve the provision. The introduction of user feedback has contributed well to the development of the self-

assessment report. However, learners are unaware of how their feedback has influenced improvements.

- Arrangements to collect, manage and use data to monitor learners' training activities and progress, and take effective action to improve the pace of learners' progress are insufficient. Managers regularly and thoroughly monitor individual learners' progress in discussions with trainers and assessors. However, despite identifying learners who make slow progress, insufficient use is made of this information to develop actions to support learners at risk. There is no robust central management information system to record, monitor and analyse learners' training activities and their progress. Managers rely excessively on individual trainers and assessors' records.
- B-Skill's approach to equality and diversity has improved since the last inspection, although it remains satisfactory. B-Skill has introduced a range of measures to improve the confidence of trainers and assessors and improve their approach to extending learners' understanding of equality and diversity. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment including progress reviews requires improvement. Trainers and assessors use a set of questions to test learners' knowledge and extend their understanding of equality and diversity. However, they do not correct and record sufficiently learners' inaccurate responses.
- Managers analyse and use data satisfactorily to identify and monitor achievement gaps. Achievement gaps have narrowed further this year between different ethnic groups, and also between those with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities and those without. There are no significant differences between the success rate of learners for gender and ethnicity. For completion within the planned time some minority ethnic learners make slow progress. The small number of the current learners with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities is achieving less well with a significant achievement gap. The performance of learners in different geographic areas is not analysed fully in order to indicate any areas that require improvement or to share good practice if identified.
- B-Skill meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding. Learners feel safe and have a sound awareness of what to do if they need to report any issues. Trainers and assessors effectively stress the importance of health and safety in the workplace to learners. However, trainers and assessors do not always discuss with cleaning learners their personal safety arrangements when working in isolation.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

B-Skill Limited			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships	Other work-based learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Service enterprises	3

Provider details

B-Skill Limited	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0
	Part-time: 741
Chief Executive	Paul Wileman
Date of previous inspection	July 2011
Website address	www.b-skill.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Part-time	0	0	0	171	1	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	4	117	1	13	0	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16	27							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ None							

Additional socio-economic information

B-Skill Limited's head office is in Newcastle upon Tyne and offers courses nationally and mainly for adults in cleaning services. The company offered Train to Gain provision until 2009/10, and since 2010/11 has provided workplace learning. In November 2012, B-Skill expanded its provision and recruited apprentices. The company has a subcontract from The Conservation Volunteers to offer foundation learning to 11 learners and at the time of the inspection offered vocational training to 27 school pupils from four local schools. A chief executive who is supported by two executives, one of whom is a director, leads B-Skill. Three managers are responsible for a team of 12 trainers and assessors of whom five are full-time and seven have short-term contracts.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Shahram Safavi HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the chief executive as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject area listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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