

# BSS

## National Careers Service contractor

<b>Inspection dates</b>		28 <sup>th</sup> October – 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2013
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

## Summary of key findings for learners

### This provider is good because:

- Customers make good progress in clarifying their short- and long-term aims. Their starting points are usually well explored and confirmed by advisers.
- Customers make good improvements in learning programme and jobsearch skills that lead to enhanced personal self-esteem and confidence.
- Most customers develop a realistic understanding of how well their English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills will support their future achievement.
- Customers' progression to a learning programme following one or more interventions is high, with a good proportion moving into new employment or promotion within their current role.
- Most information and advice sessions are at least good with advisers demonstrating good active listening, spoken and questioning skills that they use well to engage customers.
- Advisers provide a good standard and range of information that successfully helps customers to develop independently and improve their knowledge of available options.
- Leadership and management are strong and focused on raising quality for the customers.
- Performance management of staff is impressive, leading to effective service improvement.
- Staff treat customers with respect, make appropriate adaptations for any particular needs and have a good understanding of how they are required to deal with safeguarding concerns.

### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- A small minority of customers experience sessions that are not of a high enough quality to inform, guide and motivate them to achieve to their full potential.
- Managers are not fully effective in ensuring that all training and development activities and safeguarding procedures consistently meet performance levels within agreed timescales.
- Not all personal development plans are consistently effective in raising professional practice.
- The collection and evaluation of equality and diversity data for comparative purposes require improvement.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of advice sessions by ensuring all advisers:
  - always fully identify customers' starting points, particularly where individuals have complex life and employment histories
  - establish consistently effective action planning during telephone, email and webchat sessions and always, where set, review customers' previous targets to monitor progress
  - effectively identify and, where needed, provide relevant information and advice to help customers develop their English, mathematics and ICT skills.
- Ensure that training and development activities and safeguarding procedures are delivered to the expected high standards by improving the effectiveness and frequency of management scrutiny.
- Use the best practice seen in most personal development plans to make all of them a helpful tool for improvement, with clear, detailed development points that advisers understand and are specific enough to ensure that subsequent reviews can be more effective.
- Identify and correct any gaps in different groups' performance through the routine collection, analysis and evaluation of customer progression data.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advisers skilfully explore and confirm customers' personal history and current circumstances to ensure they are able to identify both the starting point and available options that realistically address barriers to success. However, in a very small number of cases, where customers have complex personal histories, investigation by advisers is not thorough enough to inform comprehensive future planning.</li> <li>▪ Customers make good gains in their appreciation of the benefits of following one or more pathways to achieve their chosen learning programme and/or employment. Advisers are good at broadening customers' knowledge of the wider opportunities available. For example, an adviser helped a customer to achieve her short-term aim of applying for a temporary job over the Christmas period and encouraged her to exploit previous work experience by successfully applying for a retail apprenticeship leading to full-time employment.</li> <li>▪ Progress made by customers during the initial intervention and subsequent in-depth guidance sessions is mostly good or better. Customers benefit from good telephone follow-up sessions that effectively re-engage those who have failed to undertake agreed actions. As a result, they become more motivated and develop a sound knowledge of the strategies they must adopt to succeed, particularly in taking personal responsibility for their actions.</li> <li>▪ Advisers use a wide range of techniques to inspire customers who demonstrate good gains in the effective identification and use of independent action to complete agreed targets. For example, an adviser encouraged a customer to reflect on her prior qualifications and experience that helped her to identify further development opportunities offered through training in drama therapy.</li> <li>▪ Customers greatly value the service they receive and consistently report very high satisfaction rates with the quality of the service that is reflected in the provider's routine exceeding of associated key performance contract targets. Customers report good improvements in job and learning programme search skills that lead to enhanced personal self-esteem and confidence in overcoming barriers to progress. Customers are able to exploit this improvement well in achieving short-term aims that improve employability.</li> </ul>	

- Customers usually develop a realistic understanding of the important contribution an appropriate standard of English, mathematics and ICT can make in securing their preferred choice. However, a small minority of advisers are not consistently effective in exploring customers' current skills levels to identify and address obstacles to the achievement of career aims.
- According to the provider's own data, the proportion of customers contacted who start a learning programme after one or more interventions is high. Similarly, customers' progression into new and sustained employment or promotion within their current role is good. BSS has no contractual requirement to collect customer progression data but has carried out limited analysis that indicates no difference between the performance of different groups.

### The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and are reflected in the good customer outcomes.
- Customers make good progress because of the very effective encouragement and support they receive from advisers. All advisers are empathetic and demonstrate a positive approach to supporting customers who subsequently report improvements in self-confidence and esteem as they take greater responsibility for achieving their objectives. Advisers effectively challenge any customer with negative attitudes and have a good understanding of customers' complex needs, such as mental health issues, and promote follow-up support sessions effectively.
- Most information and advice sessions are good. They have a clear structure that customers appreciate and can easily follow. Advisers have wide experience, as well as good active listening, spoken and questioning skills that they use well to engage customers very effectively. Advisers assess customers' starting points and barriers to progress well. However, in a few instances, advisers do not sufficiently explore more deep-rooted and personal barriers to progress.
- Advisers are particularly adept at not leading sessions, but instead act as facilitators to ensure customers take ownership of their goals and the related actions. All advisers apply these skills very effectively during email and webchat discussions. For example, in a lengthy webchat session, a customer was able to improve and apply new skills to develop detailed curriculum vitae because of the careful coaching and support from the adviser, who took care not to lead the session but rather ensure the customer reflected and came up with the customer's own suggestions.
- In a very small minority of sessions, the pace is too slow, as advisers fail to prioritise effectively. In addition, the completion of the electronic registration process is sometimes slow and results in frustration for a few customers who leave their session early, without a satisfactory conclusion.
- Action planning is effective, and where advisers produce plans, these are generally good or better. However, in a small minority of cases, action plans lack challenge, have an insufficient focus on customer aims and do not reflect the discussions in sessions. A few advisers do not always consistently review customers' previous action plans to monitor progress. In the much smaller email and webchat provision, advisers do not always sufficiently summarise and record agreed actions.
- The large majority of customers develop a good understanding of what they need to do to progress. Advisers provide clear and constructive feedback on customers' objectives, agreeing appropriate actions and encouraging customers to take responsibility to achieve their goals. However, a very small minority of customers leave their sessions without a sufficient understanding of what to do next.
- BSS uses specialist language advisers well, to support and encourage customers with low English skill and knowledge levels to improve. Advisers are usually very good at checking all customers' English, mathematics and ICT skill levels and appropriately encourage the customers to develop their competence further. However, in a few cases, advisers do not

sufficiently check customers' abilities or promote further development of these skills. In one example, where the customer clearly demonstrated insufficient ICT skills, the adviser did not explore this with the customer or promote training opportunities.

- Advisers provide a good standard of information. They use their vast experience and access to an extensive knowledge base to provide good quality information on a wide range of topics, including education loans, funding, course information, and useful websites. Advisers also signpost customers effectively to external agencies such as for mental health support, the visually impaired and those with dyslexia. Advisers effectively promote resources such as the National Careers Service website that includes job profiles and skill checks to enable customers to gain a greater understanding of their options and promote independent research. In addition, advisers ensure customers are well aware of the availability of face-to-face appointments offered through the National Careers Service.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Advisers demonstrate a strong ethos to support and meet the needs of a diverse group of customers, including those who have complex health and social needs. BSS is continuing to develop innovative methods to reach a wider audience, including the mobile website and use of social media. Good quality support is available in eight different community languages and BSS has developed a phonetic alphabet in the Gujarati dialect. Advisers effectively address any customer perception of potential barriers to progress, such as not considering a career option because of stereotyping based on gender or age.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Good

- Strong leadership and management mean that BSS meets contractual requirements but, as importantly, also ensure that the quality of the service is good and improving. Senior managers set and communicate a culture of 'doing the best for the customer' that is evident at every level of the workforce. It is heartening to see advisers, at the end of a workday, still animatedly gesticulating at their computers or phone as they make an important point or maintain a vibrant dialogue with a customer.
- Service managers have a high degree of autonomy and responsibility within BSS, and they exercise this delegated authority well. Oversight by senior staff and trustees is appropriate and challenging where needed. BSS manages its resources well, ensuring that customers receive a timely service, but also that staff have interesting and varied work and careers.
- Staff performance management is impressive leading to continual improvements, although the provider recognises that a few practices still need to be developed to the highest level. BSS has invested significantly in coaching staff, which now represent nearly 10% of the workforce. They play an important, and generally very effective, role in monitoring and improving the quality of advisers' work. Coaches work closely with line managers, who mainly deal with operational aspects of performance. This combined approach means advisers benefit from regular and constructive feedback on all aspects of their work, which effectively supports quality improvement.
- Staff development is good and reflected in the comprehensive, continually updated personal development plans. However, in a minority of cases, development points written by advisers in these plans are too broad and do not always reflect the detailed and useful advice from coaches. General training, through off-the-job sessions or online material, is good. Alongside formal qualifications that meet contract requirements, BSS has also sponsored demanding additional training such as a postgraduate certificate in telephone guidance.
- The use of customer feedback to drive quality improvement is particularly good. A very wide range of views, from customers, staff and from data, is regularly gathered, analysed and reviewed by managers who then initiate improvement actions. Most of this work is reflected in a development plan that is routinely reviewed and updated. However, actions in the plan vary between effective, prompt and clear, to a few which managers have identified late and are too general.

- A wide range of staff with specific responsibilities, generally effectively carry out quality assurance of routine training and development. However, senior managers do not have enough oversight of the many activities through, for instance, a rigorous annual self-assessment to ensure that activities are taking place as expected and to the required quality standard.
- BSS has an imaginative and increasingly successful approach to increasing the uptake of its service and adapting to meet the needs of customers. This includes using social media to identify potential customers, for instance with internet searches of the words 'job interview', leading to offers of interview guidance. Work with providers who give face-to-face guidance is effective, for example in ensuring that staff are aware of each other's offer or in dealing with problems raised by individual customers.
- Equality and diversity training, procedures and the sharing of good practice ensure that staff treat customers with respect, and make appropriate adaptations for any particular needs, such as impaired hearing. Initiatives, notably involving language specialist staff, help publicise the service to a wide-range of communities. However, the provider recognises that the collection and evaluation of equality and diversity data for comparative purposes require improvement.
- Managers and advisers have a good understanding of safeguarding concerns that may arise during interactions with customers. They respond satisfactorily to the very few safeguarding incidents, in accordance with the provider's non-intervention policy, by suggesting agencies that may assist with specific concerns. However, managers have not extended the provider's good procedures for dealing with the safeguarding of young people, to ensure a more structured response to any significant concerns identified when advisers deal with vulnerable adults. Staff are appropriately vetted through the disclosure barring service, but the few instances where clearances may not be meeting BSS's policy timescales are not always subject to effective management review and action.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### BSS

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	National Careers Service
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	2
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>2</b>	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>2</b>	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>National Careers Service</b>	<b>2</b>

### Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	National Careers Service contractor
<b>Age range of customers</b>	18+
<b>Approximate number of all customers over the previous full contract year</b>	298,647
<b>Head of Service</b>	Bernie Jordan
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	N/A
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.bss.org">www.bss.org</a>
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>	
<b>Number of customers</b>	5,637
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)

## Contextual information

BSS holds a prime contract to deliver the National Careers Service using a national contact centre that links advisers with customers who are 19 years and over, and 18-year-olds and over for Jobcentre Plus customers or those in custody. Typically, half the customer service users are aged 25 to 49, with a further 30% aged 20 to 24 years. Approximately 75% of customers have a qualification above intermediate level, with just under a quarter possessing one or more qualifications at level 6 or higher. The proportion of customers in full-time employment is around half, with approximately one third unemployed, and the remainder predominantly either economically inactive or retired. Direct referrals from Jobcentre Plus make up less than one percentage point of overall customers dealt with by BSS. At 45%, usage of the service by men is lower than for women. Where stated, some 70% of customers claim White British heritage.

Customers are able to make initial contact with advisers using a free phone telephone number. Advisers collect personal data and establish a record for all new customers or locate and use an existing record for returning customers. In addition, they provide customers with a signposting service, for example to possible learning and training provision as well as relevant funding and qualification information. Advisers refer customers requiring in-depth careers advice for further guidance, delivered through one or more telephone contact or face-to-face interviews, that includes the formulation of an agreed action plan. Customers can also access help using email and live web chats; although, at the time of the inspection, the majority of contacts were undertaken using the telephone.

Based in Leicester and Manchester, the service operates from 8.00am to 10.00pm seven days a week, excluding Christmas, Boxing and New Year's Day. A telephone information and advice service is available in a number of community languages including Punjabi, Polish, Farsi, Gujarati, Urdu, Somali and Sylheti between 9.00am and 5.00pm and between 9.00am and 8.00pm for the Punjabi and Urdu services.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Nigel Bragg HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Head of Service, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used the provider's own data about outcomes for customers to help them make judgements. Inspectors listened to telephone calls from customers and observed web chat sessions. Inspectors reviewed recording of calls and transcripts of web chat and email interactions. They also spoke to customers who had contacted the service during the week of the inspection.

## 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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