

BCTG Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

4–7 October 2016

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Senior managers, including those in a governance function at BCTG, have been slow to respond to recommendations made at the previous inspection; consequently, the quality of provision has deteriorated.
- Senior leaders focus on contract compliance and do not hold subcontractors to account for the delivery of high-quality learning and outcomes.
- Leaders and managers do not use management information sufficiently well to analyse the main issues and set demanding targets to secure rapid improvements.
- Staff do not make use of the information on the starting points of learners sufficiently to plan individual learning and progress effectively.
- A minority of apprentices make slow progress and do not achieve their qualifications in the planned period.
- Staff do not promote ongoing development of English and mathematics among learners beyond the minimum requirements of qualifications.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not ambitious enough; sessions lack pace, depth and challenge to ensure that all learners develop to their potential and apply their learning well to their work situations.
- Staff do not ensure that apprentices receive sufficient progress reviews and assessment, including support and challenge for the most able apprentices; as a result, too many apprentices do not make the progress they are capable of.
- Feedback to learners on their marked work is not useful in helping them to improve.
- Apprentices' understanding of British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism is not sufficiently thorough.

The provider has the following strengths

- Workplace supervisors provide good coaching, training and support that help apprentices develop good levels of technical skills.
- Apprentices develop good skills and make a valuable contribution to the employers' businesses.
- Almost all apprentices secure permanent employment with their employers.
- Through successful partnerships with subcontractors, BCTG managers have prepared well for the forthcoming changes to the apprenticeship provision.

Full report

Information about the provider

- BCTG Limited is a not-for-profit organisation which was established in 2001 as a limited company. Based in Oldbury, BCTG is one of the largest training consortia operating in the West Midlands, currently working with 26 subcontractors who provide work-based learning. BCTG consortium members are located mainly in the West Midlands, with some provision in the North West.
- At the previous inspection in 2012, most of the BCTG provision was in Train to Gain, with a small number of apprentices. Currently 90% of the provision is made up of apprenticeships in various subject sector areas. BCTG also offers study programmes, traineeships, and training for unemployed adults. At the time of inspection, a total of 5,431 learners were on programmes. Of these 5,086 were apprentices; 199 were on a study programme or traineeships; and 131 unemployed adults were attending a range of short adult learning programmes along with 94 learners on advanced learning loans programmes.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Swiftly implement a management information system that allows BCTG to gather routinely and systematically the appropriate data with regard to the current progress made by learners on each element of their learning programme.
- Improve the target-setting for subcontractors with regard to outcomes for learners, ensuring that all subcontractors are sufficiently but realistically challenged to raise learners' achievement.
- Strengthen the quality improvement processes by including observations of assessment, becoming more decisive and challenging when evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Ensure that quality improvement planning is appropriately geared towards addressing the areas for improvement that have the greatest impact on the learners' experience and the outcomes they obtain.
- Establish an effective governance function that provides the necessary scrutiny and challenge to ensure the quality of provision reaches consistently high standards for learners.
- Ensure that apprentices are well prepared for modern British society and are able to deal confidently with a diverse client base through
 - enhancing and consolidating apprentices' understanding of fundamental British values and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation
 - ensuring that apprentices can apply this knowledge and understanding in practical situations in their daily lives
 - incorporating British values in lessons, assessments and progress reviews so that these are seen as a part of core learning rather than add-on topics.
- Conduct thorough initial and diagnostic tests on learners to identify their starting points and gaps in their learning accurately; ensure that staff make good use of the findings to

plan learning and provide support to meet the individual needs of learners, including the most able.

- Improve the pace of learning in sessions so that all learners progress through lessons quickly to the best of their ability, by:
 - ensuring that staff set high expectations of all learners
 - enhancing the staff expertise, skills and knowledge to challenge learners to think critically how the knowledge gained in theory lessons can be used to deepen and broaden their understanding of the world of work.
- Equip staff with the skills of providing feedback so that they provide detailed written feedback to learners so that they fully understand what they have done well and what they need to improve, so that they sharpen their skills of critical evaluation to produce excellent standards of work.
- Conduct progress reviews more frequently so that learners remain on task and complete their qualifications within the planned period and set, monitor and review targets for learners that are specific and measurable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The management of the performance of subcontractors in relation to outcomes for learners and the quality improvement of the provision is ineffective. Target-setting is too limited in scope to be fully effective; it is mostly focused on overall and timely achievement of qualifications, and insufficiently tailored to each subcontractor. They all receive the same targets, regardless of their actual performance. This means that in some cases, where the subcontractors are already performing well, this target is not sufficiently challenging and for other underperforming subcontractors the target is not realistically achievable.
- The management intervention with the few poor-performing subcontractors is not sufficiently prompt. In these few cases, managers have not been quick and decisive enough to hold subcontractors to account for providing higher levels of outcomes for learners. Managers focus strongly on extensive contract-compliance issues rather than on taking clear actions for performance management. The support they offer to the subcontractors in these instances is too superficial to have a substantial impact and not directed towards improving the provision.
- Leaders and managers do not collect and use management information and data to evaluate the very broad-ranging programmes delivered by many subcontractors. Managers have not dealt with this weakness which was identified at the previous inspection. Leaders and managers use data mainly for monitoring purposes. They have not fully appreciated the complexities of the provision and their operational and strategic responsibilities and accountabilities for it. Leaders and managers do not identify swiftly the areas for improvement and do not take action promptly to rectify them. They have no overall view of the progress made by learners on the different elements of their programmes. Much of the performance management action happens too late, once learners have passed the expected end date for their programme or qualification. Leaders and managers are currently commissioning a management information system to deal with this issue but during the inspection week, inspectors experienced difficulties obtaining the necessary information to judge outcomes for learners. This demonstrates clearly the deficiencies in the provider's management information systems.
- Leaders and managers take into consideration the views of subcontractors, learners and employers to produce an annual self-assessment report. However, the report does not focus well on highlighting the impact that the identified strengths and weaknesses have on learning. The limited amount of information available with regard to learners' outcomes has a negative impact on the provider's ability to self-assess the provision fully. Inspectors graded the provision lower than the provider's self-assessment claimed.
- During observations of teaching and learning, observers are not specific enough in their findings of the strengths and areas for improvements. They do not challenge staff enough to do better or provide guidance to improve their skills further. Managers do not measure sufficiently the impact of these quality assurance activities. Managers do not assure the quality of assessment practice and rely instead on the compliance audits carried out by awarding bodies. Quality improvement planning is not sufficiently detailed and rigorous to tackle weaknesses and facilitate the improvement of outcomes or quality of the provision.

- Managers at all levels at BCTG make good efforts to support the development of the subcontractors' teaching staff. They have organised numerous professional development events for subcontractors to support them with the development of areas, such as the improved delivery of English and mathematics, but these are not always well attended.
- In the last year, a well-qualified learning coach employed by BCTG has provided targeted and specialist support to several subcontractors' staff. This has helped staff to improve further aspects of their practice identified by the contract managers and observers. As only one of the subcontractors holds their own contract to deliver government-funded programmes, the support and development they receive have become one of the key benefits of working in partnership with BCTG.
- Leaders at BCTG have set a clear strategy that all managers and staff understand well. They provide learning and progression pathways that meet well the diverse needs of learners with different levels of ability. Working closely with the subcontractors, learners and employers, the leaders make a good contribution towards economic development in the Black Country and in the West Midlands.
- Leaders are particularly well informed about the skills shortages, priorities for the region and the reforms and changes affecting the learning programmes delivered. They use this knowledge well to plan proactively and secure the continuity and viability of the provision. As a result, the programmes respond to and meet well the priorities of the local enterprise partnerships in the specific regions where BCTG operates. Since the previous inspection, leaders have increased considerably the provision offered through their subcontractors.
- Over the years, leaders and managers at BCTG have built successful partnerships with subcontractors in the region that deliver the training on their behalf. Subcontractors undergo stringent checks when they first begin working with BCTG. By doing so they ensure that all contractors they engage with are meeting the required entry standards. Subcontractors are well informed about the impending changes to apprenticeship provision.

The governance of the provider

- The scrutiny and challenge provided by those who exercise governance on BCTG is not well established and requires further improvement.
- The level of independent scrutiny and challenge to reflect on the expansion into new employment sectors or geographical areas, identified priorities and objectives is not evident.
- There has been little sharing of best practice to shift the culture of the provider from Train to Gain provision to becoming a major provider of apprenticeships through the consortium; nor to understand fully the context of the new common inspection framework in guiding the continuous improvement of the provision to a good standard of performance. As a result, the overall effectiveness of the provision has declined from good at the previous inspection to requiring improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers at all levels have developed a particularly vigilant culture of safeguarding with their subcontractors. Staff use this knowledge and high levels of

awareness to devise protocols which support the protection and safeguarding of learners well.

- The very experienced and knowledgeable senior manager with responsibility for safeguarding supports directly the necessary improvement of these procedures among subcontractors.
- Subcontractors undertake comprehensive and regular safeguarding audits to support well BCTG managers to fulfil their duties as the contract holder. Contract managers routinely check safeguarding at each review.
- Subcontractors' staff have accessed training and conferences on several safeguarding topics such as female genital mutilation and counter-terrorism. Staff at subcontractors are alert and well informed about the 'Prevent' duty.
- Learners have a good understanding of health and safety and know how to protect themselves online; however, their understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation is not sufficiently thorough.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Tutors do not have consistently high expectations of what learners can achieve and the speed at which they can progress. The teaching of theory provides insufficient challenge and does not effectively link theory to practice in a minority of cases.
- Too many assessors set targets that focus only on achieving units of a qualification, rather than setting ambitious targets for the development and consolidation of specific skills. A minority of apprentices have not made sufficient progress and are unlikely to complete their qualifications in the planned period.
- Tutors and assessors do not make sufficient use of the information gained from initial assessment to plan learning that meets learners' individual needs and capabilities. This means that the most able learners are not stretched to do better.
- In a minority of cases, the feedback of assessed work provided by assessors does not clearly detail what apprentices need to do to improve. Verbal feedback is often more helpful than the written feedback, which is often minimal. A minority of unemployed adult learners who are unsuccessful at securing employment do not receive feedback about the reasons for their lack of success and how they can prepare better for subsequent interviews.
- Tutors place insufficient emphasis on the ongoing development of learners' mathematics and English skills. This applies to learners who already have the minimum qualification in these subjects or have achieved these during the course. As a result, too few learners are sufficiently well prepared for their next steps in their careers or learning.
- Assessors and employers use their knowledge and industry experience well to provide good individual coaching in the workplace to the apprentices. This develops their skills and motivates apprentices further. For example, business administration apprentices use information technology skills well to run a payroll system and to manage data to produce reports. Assessors coach warehouse apprentices in improving their forklift driving skills well.
- Assessors use probing questions in the workplace to check learners' depth of

understanding, and they do this particularly well to check learners' understanding of safe working practices. Assessors test and validate apprentices' competence by making good use of a broad range of evidence, such as direct observation, digital recordings of professional discussions, and witness testimonies.

- Tutors provide good support to help learners on study programmes to complete their programmes and support learners with additional needs particularly well. Assessors are very flexible and make out-of-hours visits to accommodate their apprentices' shift patterns and weekend working, to ensure that they can undertake assessments of work practice.
- Assessors have good relationships with employers and they keep them well informed about the progress of their apprentices. Employers value highly the contribution that their apprentices are making to their businesses. For example, apprentices in care homes and early years settings assist their managers well by undertaking roles with greater responsibility. Customer satisfaction rates in a warehouse have improved due to the positive impact that polite and customer-care-trained apprentices are making.
- Assessors are skilful at helping learners to develop a good understanding of the diverse communities in which they live and work. They use the requirements of the workplace to explore apprentices' perceptions and help overcome prejudices. For example, an assessor helps a learner effectively to ensure that care plans for elderly residents in a care home meet the residents' diverse needs and respect their dignity and freedom. However, tutors do not consistently develop learners' understanding of British values to a high enough level.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Learners do not develop quickly enough the English and mathematics skills they require for employment, promotion or higher levels of study. Study programme learners do not attend often enough, and this slows the progress they are making with these qualifications. Too few apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills beyond the minimum requirement of their programme.
- Tutors and assessors do not routinely ensure that the quality of learners' and apprentices' written work is of a sufficiently high standard, with too many examples of poor spelling and punctuation in learners' written work. Learners do not know how they can improve their writing skills.
- Most learners are punctual and are well prepared for their learning. Attendance is good in most vocational lessons but it is too low in English lessons on study programmes, and on adult learning programmes for the unemployed.
- The development of learners' understanding of life in modern Britain is insufficiently developed. They have a basic awareness of the British values, but tutors and assessors do not apply this topic in lessons and do not reinforce it fully during progress reviews to deepen their understanding.
- The majority of apprentices and learners have insufficient understanding of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism or how this is relevant to their own situation. Assessors do not routinely use apprentices' social and work experiences to encourage discussion, or to extend their understanding during progress reviews.

- The large majority of learners on the recently introduced short study programmes benefit from external work experience with a range of local and national employers. As a result, learners gain valuable, relevant industry experience and make good gains in confidence and team-working skills.
- The standard of learners' practical work is good. Most apprentices develop vocationally relevant skills that their employers value, enabling most to successfully secure permanent employment at the end of their apprenticeship. Apprentices on hairdressing and barbering programmes cut clients' hair with precision in commercial salons, using a range of tools skilfully. Motor vehicle apprentices work safely and competently to change brake-pads on customers' cars. Administration apprentices use specialist software efficiently to support their employers' payroll function.
- Most study programme learners benefit from additional enrichment activities, developing their personal and social skills well. For example, learners worked in the local community to erect a stile gate and to build steps in a recreational area at a local park.
- Learners benefit from impartial careers guidance enabling them to make informed choices about their future work and study options. As a result, most learners are clear about their progression pathways.
- Learners report that they feel safe and know whom to contact should they have any concerns. Learners work safely and have a good understanding of safe working practices. Apprentices and learners have a good understanding of online safety including the appropriate use of social media.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Qualification achievement rates for intermediate apprentices who make up 44% of all apprentices remain low and have not improved sufficiently. The achievement rates for advanced apprentices, the second largest cohort, have declined.
- The achievement of qualifications for apprentices in the planned period overall has improved and is currently above the low national averages. The pace of improvement has not been as swift as expected.
- For apprentices on programmes such as motor vehicle, manufacturing technology, transport operations and maintenance, retail, warehousing and distribution the rates of achievement of qualifications are low. Apprentices on these programmes make slow progress as they do not complete their qualifications in the planned timescale. In construction, apprentices' achievement is particularly poor. Apprentices in three of the subcontractors with very substantial numbers of apprentices make slow progress and achieve less well.
- It is difficult to measure trends in the performance of apprentices in many subject areas, as BCTG leaders tend to terminate the contracts of subcontractors or stop delivering learning where the performance is poor. Some of the examples are the scaling down of apprenticeships in shortage areas such as construction, child development and well-being, and sports activity leadership.
- On study programmes, the qualification achievement rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have declined significantly over the past three years. On longer programmes, many of the learners left their learning without achieving their core aims. At two subcontractors with

significant numbers of learners, most were unemployed at the end of their programme. The newly introduced study programmes of six-week duration engage learners well, and they achieve their core aims.

- The job outcomes for unemployed adults are low and fluctuated over the past three years. These are highest in the security industry at 48%, but are still low considering the skill shortages in the sector. Managers do not set ambitious targets for the employment of learners as they benchmark themselves against the low-performing 'work programme'.
- The rates of achievement of qualifications in functional skills of mathematics and English are low. The number of learners on study programmes and adult learning programmes undertaking such qualifications has vastly reduced in the current year.
- The number of learners who enrol and stay on traineeship programmes remains low. Leaders and managers are reviewing the planning and delivery of the programme.
- BCTG managers are aware of the relatively poor achievement of male learners as compared to females. They do not have a strategic action plan to narrow the achievement gap. Senior managers have combined all minority ethnic groups into one group and they are unable to identify the gaps in performance between different minority ethnic groups of learners. BCTG leaders are unable to provide a clear picture of the achievement of learners who fund their learning through 24+ advanced learning loans.
- Most apprentices gain permanent employment with their employers after completing their apprenticeship. The majority of the apprentices interviewed confirmed that they had secured enhanced responsibilities at work. The progression of apprentices from intermediate to advanced level is in accordance with the sector norms, with a rapidly increasing cohort.
- The rates of achievement of qualifications by apprentices, including higher apprentices, are high in business administration and management: the area with the highest number of apprentices. The achievement rates for apprentices in the second largest subject area of health and social care are also high.
- The higher apprentices continue to achieve their qualifications within the planned period and the rates have improved well over the past three years. However, the rates of improvement in the achievement of qualifications have not been as strong for intermediate apprentices and have declined for advanced apprentices, including timely achievement.
- Unemployed adults on adult learning programmes achieve short qualifications well. This enhances their confidence substantially as well as their chances of applying for and confidently securing at least an interview. These qualifications cover sectors that have skills shortages such as door supervisors, preparing to work in adult social care, and construction. The qualifications such as emergency first aid enhance their employability and help to make them well aware of what the employers are looking for in an employee.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Study programmes at entry level and level 1 make up less than 10% of the total provision offered by five subcontractor partners of BCTG. Some 199 learners are currently studying

at entry level in employability and level 1 in childcare and engineering.

- The study programmes that run over longer durations are ineffective as too few learners stay on the programme or achieve their core aims. However, on the recently introduced short study programmes that last six weeks, higher proportions of learners stay on the programmes with most achieving their main qualifications.
- Tutors do not make best use of results of initial assessments to plan activities or set more challenging tasks to help the most able learners to progress quickly. All learners work in groups on the same topics and at the same pace. As a result, too often the most able learners are waiting for other learners to complete tasks before they can move on, and this slows their progress.
- Learners' development of English skills is weak as demonstrated by the low achievements of English qualifications, which have further declined since the previous year. Tutors do not develop learners' English skills sufficiently well in lessons or when marking assessed work.
- Learners receive a wide range of useful careers advice at different points throughout their stay on the programme. As a result, learners make informed choices about their next steps. The BCTG careers officer provides good support to prepare learners for employment through preparation for interviews and conducting mock interviews. However, despite positive progression rates increasing, learner numbers have reduced and a number of learners do not obtain work on finishing their study programme. Nearly half of them are unemployed after leaving their study programme with two of the subcontractors.
- Work experience for learners is well organised and matched closely to their career goals, their personal preferences and, where necessary, adapted to suit their needs, such as for learners with complex needs. More learners now benefit from relevant external work experience than in the previous year, with the majority now completing a placement that is linked to their career goals. It provides a route into an apprenticeship at a higher level. A small number of learners are offered employment with their work experience provider, enabling them to progress onto apprenticeships.
- Attendance rates across subcontractors are good and learners understand the importance of punctuality and attendance in securing future jobs when they progress onto apprenticeships.
- Enrichment activities are varied and from them learners improve their personal, social and moral development, giving them a sense of social responsibility in contributing to their communities.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- BCTG Limited provides apprenticeships in health and social care, engineering, construction, information and communications technology (ICT), retail and commercial enterprises, and business administration and management. Business administration and management is the largest subject sector area closely followed by health and social care. Of the 5,056 apprentices currently in learning, 44% are on intermediate apprenticeships, 29% on advanced and 27% of apprentices are following higher-level programmes.
- A minority of apprentices' programmes have been poorly planned and apprentices are not

expected to complete their qualifications in the planned time. Assessors make infrequent visits to support these apprentices and do not provide sufficient off-the-job theory teaching. As a result, apprentices have gaps in their knowledge and do not complete their functional skills qualifications in the planned period. Managers at BCTG are too slow to intervene to get these apprentices back on track. The remaining apprentices met during inspection make expected progress.

- Assessors do not sufficiently support apprentices to improve their mathematics and English skills beyond the minimum level required. Information about learners' starting points is not always used to help them improve the specific skills with which they struggle. Assessors do not consistently ensure that all apprentices are able to use their English skills to produce high-quality written work.
- For a few intermediate and advanced apprentices, too little feedback is given to enable them to improve their work. Too many of the most able apprentices are insufficiently challenged to develop their knowledge to the highest level to improve their effectiveness in the workplace or prepare them to study at a higher level.
- Assessors provide training to raise apprentices' awareness of life in modern Britain; however, this is too narrow and apprentices do not develop an in-depth and strong enough understanding of the relevant topics. A minority of apprentices are well supported to understand, for example, the link between democracy and their own workplace, but most have so far received only a brief overview.
- Apprentices benefit from the vocational skills and knowledge they gain in becoming more effective and confident at work. For example, business administration apprentices are able to use computer packages to produce high-quality documents that improve customer feedback to their companies.
- Employers value highly the contribution their apprentices make in the workplace and often give them additional responsibilities. For example, one young intermediate childcare apprentice took lead responsibility for nine children in his workplace. Almost all apprentices gain permanent employment when they complete their programmes. BCTG's programmes meet the requirements of an apprenticeship.
- The large majority of assessors plan and deliver good-quality workplace training and learning activities that help apprentices improve their knowledge and link it to their job roles. Assessors' supportive coaching enables apprentices to improve their knowledge while becoming more motivated and confident. For example, one apprentice learned how to practise spelling difficult words which greatly increased his confidence in completing written records at work.
- Most apprentices produce good vocational work that demonstrates the high-quality skills and knowledge they develop. For example, higher-level management apprentices produce good, reflective accounts of how they apply communication strategies to improve the effectiveness of their teams. Most assessors help apprentices improve their knowledge and skills well through effective questioning. Assessors promote well professional standards and behaviours in the workplace which help apprentices quickly become valuable members of their teams. Apprentices gain a good understanding of safe working practices and they put these into practice at work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50729
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	8,064
CEO	Mr Chris Luty
Telephone number	0121 544 6455
Website	www.BCTG.org.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	144	39	20	56	2	24	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	369	1,864	135	1,372	3	1,343		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	15		15		30			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Sutton Coldfield Training Impact Training Solutions Eurosource Solutions Limited Plato Training Limited Further Training Limited GTG Training Limited Sandwell Community Care Trust Watertrain Limited							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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