

# RNN Group

Monitoring visit report – subcontracted provision

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**Unique reference number:** 130527  
**Name of lead inspector:** Chris Jones, HMI  
**Inspection dates:** 20–21 February 2018  
**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:**  
Eastwood Building  
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## **Subcontractors:**

Community Training Services Limited  
Higher Rhythm Limited  
Huddersfield Community Trust  
Intertrain UK Limited  
Linden Management (UK) Limited  
Meadowhall Training Limited  
Mears Learning Limited  
Nottinghamshire Combined Fire & Rescue Authority  
Prospect Training (Yorkshire) Limited  
Rotherham Borough Council  
Rotherham United Community Sports Trust  
Serenity (South Yorkshire) Community Interest Company  
Ways 2 Work (Doncaster) Limited  
Xtol Development Services Limited

## **Previous subcontractors that are now subsidiary companies of the RNN Group:**

Aston Recruitment and Training Limited  
Charnwood Training Group Limited  
Create Skills Limited



## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

On 6 February 2018, Ofsted's Deputy Director for Further Education and Skills informed providers that Ofsted would increase its focus and reporting on the quality of subcontracted provision. The letter stated that Ofsted would carry out a series of monitoring visits to a sample of providers. Three inspectors carried out this monitoring visit to review the management and quality of subcontracted provision.

In 2016/17, RNN Group (the group) had 2,569 apprentices and 14,860 learners. The group subcontracted 22% of its apprenticeship provision and 4% of its classroom-based learning. Additionally, the group funded three wholly owned subsidiaries through subcontracts delivering a further 46% of apprenticeship provision and 11% of classroom-based learning. The subsidiary companies are Aston Recruitment and Training Limited, Charnwood Training Group Limited and Create Skills Limited. At the time of the monitoring visit, the proportion of subcontracted provision had reduced to 10% for apprenticeships and 3% for classroom-based learning.

The group provides apprenticeships in health and social care, business administration, financial services, customer service, light vehicle maintenance, management and team leading, hairdressing and barbering, hospitality and catering, rail engineering, sales and marketing, and horticulture and environmental conservation. Most apprenticeships are at intermediate and advanced level. The group delivers a small, but growing, number of higher-level apprenticeships in management. Subcontracted work in adult learning includes courses in preparation for work, security, health and social care, hospitality and catering, first aid, English and mathematics. Higher Rhythm Limited delivers specialised study programmes in music at levels 2 and 3. Huddersfield Community Trust and Rotherham United Community Sports Trust offer study programmes in sport at levels 2 and 3.

### Themes

#### **Are leaders and managers managing subcontracted provision effectively?**

#### **Insufficient progress**

During a period in which senior leaders and managers oversaw two college mergers, their management of all subcontractors and subsidiary companies was not good enough. Senior leaders and managers focused adequately on these providers' compliance with contractual and quality requirements and processes. However, in their review of the quality of provision at the end of the 2016/17 academic year, they did not evaluate accurately enough the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment that caused too few learners and apprentices to achieve. Consequently, on apprenticeship programmes delivered by Babington Business College, Darnall Education Centre, J T Development Solutions, Prevista Limited, Rotherham United and SLIC Training, the quality of provision was poor and achievement rates were

low. The proportion of learners on adult learning programmes and study programmes at subcontractors who achieved their qualifications varied markedly from one subcontractor to another. At a small number of subcontractors, such as Babington Business College and Higher Rhythm Limited, very few learners achieved, while at others, including Create Skills Limited, Nottinghamshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority and SLIC Training, almost all did so.

Governors and senior leaders have reviewed subcontracting arrangements and have considered carefully with which providers, and in which subject areas and geographical locations, they wish to continue working. They have developed, in a short space of time, a coherent strategy to work with subcontractors to provide programmes that complement the existing college-based curriculum. This strategy aims to provide education and training to learners who may not wish to attend college, to improve the employment prospects of learners in deprived communities, and to meet the needs of employers within the local, regional and sub-regional area.

In order to raise standards, managers put in place a stringent re-tendering process for subcontractors and subsidiary companies. Based on the information that was provided through this process, they made firm decisions about which providers would receive an offer of a new contract and which they would cease working with. As a result, the number of providers that managers subcontract with has nearly halved. Underperforming providers, and those who did not meet the requirements for re-tendering, did not receive new contracts, including Babington Business College, Darnall Education Centre, JT Development Solutions, Prevista Limited, and SLIC Training.

Since the summer of 2017, governors have taken positive steps to increase their oversight of subcontracted work and to provide more targeted challenge and support to managers. They have gained a good understanding of the challenges facing the group, particularly the weak focus on the quality of teaching and learning. They have contributed effectively to improvement actions; for example, they have used their expertise to provide training to staff. Members of the recently formed quality and standards committee receive reports from managers that give them a good picture of the actions taken to improve the quality of provision. Currently, they do not receive precise enough information to measure the impact of actions on learners' and apprentices' outcomes or experiences.

In their quality improvement plans, managers do not identify clearly enough the measures that they will use to evaluate the impact of their improvement actions. Too often, they record as completed or achieved the actions that they said they would implement without evaluating whether these have had a positive impact. Consequently, managers are over-optimistic when evaluating the progress that they are making in bringing about improvements. The performance targets that managers have set for their current subcontractors and subsidiary companies are not precise enough. As a result, some subcontractors have targets that are either too challenging or not challenging enough, given their historical performance.

**Are leaders and managers ensuring that learners and apprentices in subcontracted provision benefit from high-quality training and education that leads to good or better outcomes? Reasonable progress**

Since September 2017, leaders and managers have changed their approach to the training that they provide to staff at all subcontractors and subsidiary companies. They make good use of the outcomes from their observations of lessons, assessments and reviews to plan staff training that focuses on the most urgent areas for development in teaching skills. These include teachers' and assessors' use of targets and short-term action plans with learners and apprentices, the quality of feedback that teachers and assessors provide to learners and apprentices on their work, and the use of questions to check learning and to encourage learners and apprentices to deepen their understanding of topics taught. Managers make good use of further observations of learning to evaluate the impact of the training. Their analysis indicates that this is making a positive difference to the quality of learning and the pace at which apprentices in the three subsidiary companies and all current subcontractors complete their work.

Too often, apprentices have been unable to show that they have developed new skills, improved existing skills and gained new knowledge. This is beginning to change for the better, as staff development for tutors and assessors at all subcontractors and subsidiary companies focuses on improving teaching, learning and assessment. This is resulting in improving outcomes for apprentices in each subsidiary company and subcontractor.

More rigorous performance management, that includes weekly progress reviews with tutors, and improved teaching and learning are leading to higher numbers of apprentices at all subcontractors and subsidiary companies staying on programmes. Leaders and managers are providing additional resources to ensure that apprentices who have not completed on time, or those identified as at risk of falling behind, get the support that they need to catch up.

**Are leaders and managers ensuring that safeguarding arrangements in subcontracted provision are effective? Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have suitable safeguarding policies and procedures for programmes taught by subcontractors and subsidiary companies. Through their due diligence process and through regular performance reviews, they ensure that managers at each provider fulfil their obligation to safeguard learners. Managers keep appropriate records of the suitability of staff to work with learners and of their training. They maintain up-to-date information about local risks and hazards facing learners in the different settings in which they learn, and provide appropriate and relevant training for staff. At Higher Rhythm Limited, Charnwood Training Group Limited, Create Skills Limited, Aston Recruitment and Training Limited and Rotherham United Community Sports Trust, learners and apprentices show a very

good awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including in relation to the risk of radicalisation, and in maintaining a positive social media profile. They are able to discuss contemporary issues, such as dealing with overt and unwanted sexual advances and the impact of mass shootings on legislation, thoughtfully and with maturity.

Managers have a good overview of any safeguarding issues and concerns. They use a suitable committee and management group structure to share information and to provide reports to governors. These reports contain a summary of safeguarding issues or concerns for the whole RNN Group. Managers do not monitor trends in the subcontractors and subsidiary companies, or within other component parts of the group, such as the three separate colleges. Managers have also not considered any extra safeguarding checks or processes that might benefit learners in potentially higher-risk environments. These include, for example, potential risks at the football clubs linked to Rotherham United Community Sports Trust and Huddersfield Community Trust to which they subcontract education and training, and issues such as the sexual exploitation of girls in the locality.

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