

# Inspection of B-Skill Limited

Inspection dates: 18–21 February 2020

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

B-Skill Limited is an independent learning provider that was founded in 2000. It provides adult learning programmes and apprenticeship training across England. It has main centres in Newcastle and Bootle. In 2019, B-Skill Limited secured devolved adult education funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Tees Valley Combined Authority.

At the time of the inspection, there were 274 learners on adult learning programmes. Of these, 176 had advanced learner loans for study towards hairdressing and beauty therapy qualifications. There were 423 apprentices. Over a third of apprentices were studying hairdressing apprenticeships with a subcontractor, and around a further quarter were studying a team leader/supervisor standards-based apprenticeship at level 3. Most of the remainder were studying standards-based apprenticeships in large goods vehicle driver at level 3, operations/department manager at level 5, and supply chain warehouse operative at level 2.

## **What is it like to be a learner with this provider?**

Learners and apprentices demonstrate a keenness to learn and take pride in their work. They develop their confidence and self-esteem well. Adult learners are highly committed to their courses and develop their vocationally relevant skills well as a result. Apprentices who remain on their programmes to the end show high levels of personal resilience to overcome challenges in their education. Most apprentices do a good job at work and their employers value them highly.

Most adult learners develop substantial new knowledge and skills through courses that meet their needs. Adult learners who take out advanced learning loans to pay for their study make consistently good progress from their starting points. Adult learners who study English, mathematics and employability courses develop skills that better prepare them for employment. Most adult learners enjoy their studies and want to do well in their courses. Many have clear and ambitious plans for their futures.

Too many apprentices do not make the progress expected of them based on their starting points and the length of time they have been on their programme, particularly the large number on the team leader/supervisor standards-based apprenticeships. Apprentices with subcontractors generally make good progress from their starting points.

## **What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders and managers have been slow to address the weak management of the apprenticeship provision identified at the previous inspection. Although they have recently instigated changes to address this weakness, such as developing more productive relationships with employers and employing more, better qualified staff, these have not prevented too many apprentices who were due to complete their programmes in the current year from withdrawing early.

Too many apprentices, particularly those on team leader/supervisor standards-based apprenticeships, do not receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training. Leaders are aware of this and are working closely with their levy-paying employers to overcome the issues that cause it. However, too often, operational demands take precedence over apprentices' off-the-job training. As a result, too many apprentices see their opportunities for off-the-job training being restricted, and this impacts on the progress that they can make.

Although adult learners receive appropriate pre-course guidance that ensures that they start courses that link to their future ambitions, too often they do not receive helpful advice during their course. As a result, too few adult learners know about the full range of opportunities available to them when they have finished their course.

Leaders do not understand well enough what learners and apprentices do after they have finished their course. They do not collect and evaluate enough information on

what learners and apprentices do when they complete programmes. As a result, leaders do not know how studying at B-Skill Limited influences the future careers and aspirations of their learners and apprentices.

Leaders have a well-developed strategic intent for the adult learning programmes and apprenticeships that make up their curriculum. They have developed a range of adult learning programmes in beauty therapy, hairdressing and engineering that enable adults with few qualifications to develop valuable new skills. Adult learning programmes funded through devolved adult learning budgets in the Liverpool City Region and the Tees Valley are carefully designed to meet local needs. The apprenticeship offer is appropriately designed to meet the needs of large, levy-paying employers and adapted for each company that leaders work with.

Leaders and managers ensure that current staff are suitably qualified and vocationally experienced to teach the programmes that they offer. They have high expectations for the delivery of their staff and use performance management effectively to replace those staff who do not meet these expectations. This results in improvements in the learning experience of current adult learners and apprentices.

On adult learning programmes, tutors use effective teaching methods and provide helpful feedback to learners to help them improve. For example, hairdressing learners improve their understanding of how to position a client to carry out a certain cut. On the better performing apprenticeship programmes, trainers plan and deliver learning well. They plan apprentices' learning logically so that apprentices learn key concepts early in the programme. For example, apprentices who are training to drive large goods vehicles learn the theory of steering and reversing large vehicles before they undertake any driving.

Leaders have recently revised their approach to subcontracting and now have effective subcontractor management arrangements. They have stopped working with underperforming subcontractors. They now carefully select the subcontractors that they are going to work with. Leaders closely monitor subcontractors for compliance and quality purposes. As a result, they know that adult learners and apprentices with subcontractors make good progress from their starting points.

Learners and apprentices are respectful to their peers, co-workers and the general public. Relationships between them and with staff are very good. Learners and apprentices adopt safe working practices in practical environments that ensure they do not put themselves or anyone else at risk. Most attend learning sessions well. When operational demands prevent apprentices from attending their off-the-job training, they communicate well with staff to rearrange their learning activities.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a culture where staff at all levels place high importance on keeping their learners and apprentices safe. The designated

safeguarding officer (DSO) and deputy DSOs are appropriately trained. All staff undertake appropriate training about safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have a detailed Prevent action plan that is well supported by local risk assessments and action plans that reflects the local risks and challenges that are present in each of their delivery areas. However, too few learners and apprentices understand the local risks and threats associated with radicalisation and extremism.

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

- Leaders should ensure that the pace of improvements in apprenticeship provision accelerates so that a much higher proportion of apprentices successfully complete their programme in the planned time.
- Leaders, managers and employers need to ensure that all apprentices receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training.
- Leaders need to improve the quality and effectiveness of ongoing careers advice that learners receive so that they are fully informed about future career options.
- Leaders should collect and evaluate more thoroughly information on what learners and apprentices do when they complete their programmes, so they are clear about the impact that these programmes have in enabling learners and apprentices to achieve their career aspirations.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	50585
<b>Address</b>	Suite A15, Milburn House Dean Street Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 1LE
<b>Contact number</b>	0333 9000690
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.b-skill.com">www.b-skill.com</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Paul Wileman
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1–4 December 2015
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Arden University Limited BL Training Limited Hartwell Training Academy Limited J and K Training Limited Merlin Supply Chain Solutions Picasso Nail Studio Limited Triage Central Limited

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality and compliance, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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