

# B-Skill Limited

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	50585
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Cath Jackson, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Visit dates:</b>	3 to 4 December 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Address:</b>	Suite A15, Milburn House Dean Street Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1LE

## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

### Information about the 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 upon Tyne 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 interim visit, there were 686 learners on adult learning programmes. Of these, 248 had advanced learner loans for study towards hairdressing and beauty therapy qualifications. There were 215 apprentices. Of these, around a quarter were studying a team leader/supervisor standards-based apprenticeship at level 3, with a further fifth studying hairdressing apprenticeships with a subcontractor. 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 actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders closed their offices and delivery centres in March 2020 to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. They suspended classroom delivery and redeployed teaching staff into different roles and duties, including the delivery of distance learning. Teaching and learning for apprentices and adults in receipt of learning loans continued remotely.

Managers consider that the COVID-19 pandemic created a positive opportunity to adapt the curriculum for adult learners and apprentices through moving teaching and

learning to an online platform. Leaders purchased a suite of resources to deliver online learning, which allowed adult learners to resume their learning quickly without face-to-face contact.

Managers believe that arrangements for remote working are efficient. Learning development coaches spend less time travelling to different locations, meaning that they have more time to work online with their apprentices. Coaches support apprentices to adapt to new ways of working and to use technology safely.

Leaders monitor the quality of teaching. They explained how they observe online lessons and use the online learning platform to check that teachers assess their learners appropriately. Managers monitor learners' progress and discuss any concerns with tutors during one-to-one meetings. Managers and staff said that they appreciate the benefits and flexibility of remote working.

Leaders described how they focus on staff well-being and morale. They communicate with staff through regular calls, newsletters and staff briefings. Staff receive mental health advice and tips for positive home working, and managers work with staff across the business to support with remote teaching and assessment.

Employers told us that they appreciate learning coaches' flexible approaches. They feel that remote methods of working have helped apprentice managers working in care homes to keep up with their studies. Subcontractors described how demand for digital and employability skills training has increased hugely due to rising unemployment. They said that teachers use digital resources in the classrooms to help learners develop and use these skills.

### **What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Managers and tutors have adapted the curriculum for apprentices and adults, including for those with additional support needs. Tutors described using a blend of approaches to suit learners' circumstances. For example, in beauty therapy subjects, tutors prioritised face-to-face training in nail treatments as soon as national and local restrictions eased. Tutors use remote means of learning at other times, such as providing dummy hands for learners to practise nail treatments at home.

Staff gather information about learners and apprentices at enrolment and provide careers advice and guidance to direct them to the correct programme for their needs. Managers recognise the impact of the pandemic on employment. They have developed a level 2 employability programme for adults who have recently become unemployed to help them find alternative work.

Tutors teach lessons using video conferencing platforms that enable their learners to participate. They believe that most learners and apprentices have adapted well to online learning and that, for some, their participation has increased. Leaders have

purchased a bank of computer resources, such as tablets and laptops, that they can loan to adult learners who do not have access to equipment. Where learners have no internet access, staff provide mobile internet dongles.

Tutors recognise that, for many learners and apprentices, progress in developing new knowledge and skills slowed during the first lockdown. When restrictions eased, tutors used skills scans to identify gaps in learning. They described how they use online learning resources to monitor learners' progress in building knowledge and skills.

Leaders and tutors consider that attendance has remained high across all types of provision. They recognise that some adults have lost time in learning due to family circumstances. Leaders and tutors believe that introducing more flexibility through online teaching methods has allowed learners to join lessons remotely and catch up in their own time.

### **How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

Leaders have provided guidance to enable staff and learners to stay safe when they return to learning in centres. Measures include following local risk assessments, regular sanitisation of desks and work stations, and use of one-way systems.

Staff recognise the risks that learners may be exposed to when spending a lot more time online. Tutors help learners to stay safe by providing passwords for online meetings, ensuring that only invited participants attend.

Safeguarding staff explained that they ensure all staff undertake 'Prevent' duty and safeguarding training. Staff support learners and apprentices who were identified as vulnerable or at risk before lockdown, including support relating to mental health issues arising during the pandemic.

Learners and apprentices know who to contact if they have any safeguarding concerns. They learn about safeguarding and well-being topics such as looking after mental health, staying safe online, radicalisation and extremism, county lines and grooming. They consider that this helps them understand a range of safeguarding risks.

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