

Inspection of B-Skill Limited

Inspection dates:

7 to 10 February 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Education programmes for young people

Requires improvement

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Information about this provider

B-Skill Limited is an independent learning provider that provides adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and education programmes for young people. Most of the provider's training centres are in the north of England. Leaders work with three subcontractors, one of which is on a wind-down contract and only has one apprentice remaining on programme. At the time of the inspection, there were 88 apprentices on a range of programmes from level 2 to level 6. There were 473 adult learners, of whom 238 were studying distance-learning courses or short employability programmes. Adult learning programmes are offered in beauty therapy, hairdressing, retail, customer services, construction, health and social care. Traineeships account for 83 adult learners and 33 learners aged 16 to 18.

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

Most learners and apprentices enjoy their programmes, demonstrate positive attitudes and are motivated to learn. They take pride in their work and value their new knowledge and skills. For example, adult learners on nail technician courses develop industry-standard skills in well-equipped training centres.

Learners and apprentices behave well in training and in the workplace. Tutors set clear expectations of behaviour at the start of the programme, and learners and apprentices respond positively. Most learners and apprentices demonstrate professional behaviours and conduct and develop valuable qualities that prepare them well for employment, career progression or further learning.

Tutors plan training and activities that successfully develop learners' and apprentices' confidence and resilience. They provide effective support for learners to help them overcome barriers to learning and life, including those who speak English as an additional language. Adult learners who are refugees are supported to understand the British education system so that they are able to choose and apply for school placements for their children.

Most learners and apprentices value their training, attend sessions well and are punctual. However, in a few instances, such as on traineeship programmes, learners' attendance is sporadic, which slows the progress that learners make in developing new knowledge and skills. Too many learners on traineeships are beyond their planned end date, without a clear action plan to help them to catch up and move on to their next steps.

Learners and apprentices do not get access to consistently effective careers education, information, advice and guidance. Most adult learners gain helpful advice about further learning and support for finding work. However, apprentices and young people are not provided with an appropriate level of impartial advice or guidance to enable them to understand better the industry in which they work or the broader opportunities available to them to start or to develop their career.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns. Staff provide helpful monthly newsletters and an online well-being portal that signposts learners and apprentices to specialist agencies and support materials. However, the small number of learners aged 16 to 18 years have a limited understanding of the risks posed by county line gangs, despite living in seaside towns where these activities are a particular risk.

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

Leaders and managers have not developed an ambitious enough curriculum for young people or for adult learners. They have not designed an effective traineeship programme or ensured that adult learners on hairdressing courses benefit from a

well-structured curriculum with sufficient time to practise and refine their skills. Managers do not involve employers well enough in the planning and design of the curriculum to enable learners on traineeships to benefit from suitable work placements or work-related learning.

Leaders and managers have been slow to address the improvements needed in traineeship programmes. Traineeship managers and quality assurance staff do not visit delivery sites frequently enough to evaluate the quality of education provided to learners. Leaders and managers have not ensured that traineeship programmes are structured well enough to provide learners with a good-quality experience that supports them to progress to positive destinations. Consequently, too many trainees have left early or not moved into employment or apprenticeship roles.

Tutors do not provide a well-planned or coherent curriculum that enables learners on traineeship programmes to develop in a timely manner the essential skills required for work. They are yet to plan and organise work placements for adult trainees on early years and administration pathways who are nearing the end of their programme. Staff shortages have resulted in the cancellation of too many classes, and managers and tutors have been too slow to commence functional skills lessons. As a result, traineeship learners become demotivated and do not make sufficient progress in developing essential skills for training or work.

Leaders and managers offer a broad range of employability programmes for adults from disadvantaged areas, adults who are long-term unemployed, those who have recently arrived in the United Kingdom as refugees, and those with additional support needs. They use temporary premises and their small network of subcontractors to deliver programmes near to where the learners live. As a result, adults are able to access the skills training that they need in their local area.

Tutors use assessment well in adult employability lessons. They use the information from assessment activities successfully to plan further training. On short construction skills training programmes, tutors quickly determine what learners know and have yet to learn. However, tutors' assessment on traineeship programmes is too slow, and feedback on learners' work is often absent or not precise enough to help learners improve. As a result, too many learners on traineeships do not make sufficient progress in developing new knowledge and skills that future employers will require.

Most tutors use effective teaching strategies to help learners and apprentices develop and remember vocational knowledge. For example, tutors have developed a reflective journal for learners on mental health awareness courses, which enables them to revisit learning and remember important support strategies. Consequently, learners develop a deeper understanding of mental health topics, such as recognising the links between eating disorders and poor mental health.

Staff collaborate well with employers and partners to deliver programmes that enable most adult learners on short courses to develop their employability skills. They have established positive links with employers, who will guarantee an interview

for learners when they complete their course, including learners gaining their construction skills certification scheme accreditation. As a result, most adult learners who complete short courses achieve their qualifications and gain interviews for jobs.

Leaders and managers have successfully improved their apprenticeship provision. They took swift and effective action to reduce and refine the apprenticeship offer and delivery method following the last inspection. They ensure that both apprentices and their employers attend frequent reviews. Apprentices are held to account by learning and development coaches (LDCs) and workplace supervisors, and they are supported well to develop skills that enable them to take on additional responsibilities at work. Most apprentices remain on programme, and the small number of those who have completed their programme recently have passed their end-point assessment.

Apprenticeship LDCs sequence the curriculum well to allow apprentices to build their knowledge between sessions. They correctly identify important concepts and successfully teach apprentices how to apply these in the workplace to make them more effective in their job roles. For example, LDCs on the youth support worker apprenticeship teach apprentices how to plan and design groupwork sessions. Apprentices become more effective at developing professional relationships and upholding boundaries, and they take on more responsibility by delivering sessions unsupervised and managing their own caseload.

Leaders and managers have successfully reduced their reliance on subcontracting and have implemented an effective approach to subcontractor management. They focus effectively on the quality of teaching and meet frequently with providers to review the programme and learners' progress. As a result, the quality of education provided by subcontractors has improved, and learners gain substantial new knowledge and skills that help them to progress in their job roles, such as the ability to administer medicine correctly in the care sector.

Leaders and the non-executive board have recently developed the management and reporting structure at executive level. They have strengthened the leadership team by appointing senior managers for operations and quality. Senior managers provide detailed reports that focus on the quality of education. Leaders and board members now have a clear overview of the current strengths and weaknesses of the provision, but it is too early to measure the impact of this new management approach.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers are supportive of staff well-being and workload. They ensure that any concerns are fully dealt with and help staff to get healthcare support. Leaders and managers offer appropriate opportunities for staff to develop their safeguarding knowledge through induction and refresher training, such as recent courses on consent and child sexual exploitation. They provide frequent guidance,

resources and sample training materials for staff to use in sessions with learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have effective safeguarding policies and procedures in place. They keep detailed records and conduct appropriate recruitment checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with learners and apprentices. Leaders have set up an extensive and appropriately trained safeguarding team to support learners, apprentices and staff across all provision types.

Designated safeguarding leaders work effectively with local agencies to provide helpful guidance and support to learners and apprentices who need it. They make immediate referrals to ensure that learners and apprentices quickly get help. For example, learners who present as homeless are supported with access to food banks and emergency accommodation through local charities and housing schemes.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Develop the planning, design and teaching of traineeship and adult hairdressing programmes to enable learners to benefit from high-quality education that includes effective work placements or work-related learning.
- Take swift and effective action to improve the quality of education on traineeship programmes to increase the number of learners successfully completing their programme and progressing to positive destinations.
- Ensure that managers and quality assurance staff frequently visit delivery locations to evaluate accurately the quality of education provided to learners at satellite sites.
- Ensure that all learners benefit from high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance that allows them to understand career development opportunities in the sector in which they work and the broader options available to help them progress in training or work.
- Ensure that learners aged 16 to 18 have a thorough understanding of the risks posed by county lines gangs and know how to protect themselves from these risks.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50585
Address	YBN Delta Bank Road Gateshead NE11 9DJ
Contact number	0333 9000690
Website	www.b-skill.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Paul Wileman
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	18 to 21 February 2020
Main subcontractors	Winnovation Blackpool FC Community Trust Arden University

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head 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 visiting 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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