

Bespoke Consultancy and Education Ltd

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	2556369
Name of lead inspector:	Nick Crombie, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Bespoke Consultancy and Education was inspected in July 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Bespoke Consultancy and Education Limited (BCE) is an independent learning provider. It was established in 2013 to provide training to the social care sector. BCE began offering apprenticeships to levy-paying employers in January 2018. Currently, around 200 apprentices are on the following standards-based apprenticeships: level 2 adult care worker, level 3 lead care worker, level 4 lead practitioner in adult care and level 5 leader in adult care. The great majority of apprentices are on either level 2 or level 3 programmes. A very small number of apprentices are following business and children and young people's programmes. Nearly all apprentices are over the age of 18.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in providing assessors with training which enables the assessors to become effective teachers who demonstrably provide high-quality training to their apprentices?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have rightly recognised the need to improve the quality of apprentices' learning experience by training assessors to be more effective teachers. All assessors now either hold an appropriate teaching qualification or are working towards one.

Leaders ran an effective week-long training event for assessors focused on themes identified through current quality assurance arrangements. The themes were tightly focused on specific aspects of teaching practice. They included the role, use and types of assessment to support learning, and the use of context to ensure apprentices connect their learning to their workplace experiences.

Assessors confirm that they have found their training to be of substantial value. For example, a level 3 apprentice learning about fire safety was encouraged to apply theoretical aspects to the specific environment they worked in. The assessor encouraged the apprentice to consider what additional responsibilities or expectations might be involved, given that they were likely to be one of only two members of staff on shift. Assessors are now also using an increased range of assessment methodologies, including discussions, observations and formal essays.

Leaders are developing processes which link observations of taught sessions to plans for continuing professional development. These are designed to provide information

which allows them to identify assessors' development priorities and measure consequent impact. However, these processes are not yet in place and no judgement can be made on their impact.

Despite improvement, leaders are nevertheless missing some opportunities to target staff development. For example, in sessions we visited, assessors failed to take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to deepen and check learning through effective questioning techniques. In addition, assessors were often too quick to provide information which apprentices could have been encouraged to deduce themselves. Consequently, apprentices missed opportunities to explore and deepen their knowledge using their workplace context and prior learning.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that assessors use what they know about apprentices' starting points to plan each individual's training so that it builds on what apprentices know already?

Insufficient progress

Leaders have not ensured that what they know about apprentices' starting points is used to plan training. Processes to adapt and personalise learning to build on individual apprentice's prior skills, knowledge and experience are not yet an integrated or effective part of apprentices' experience. However, leaders have started to introduce new arrangements to ensure apprentices' initial assessment and induction lead to personalised learning. However, the changes are very new, not fully realised and have had a negligible impact so far. As a result, apprentices do not receive a personalised curriculum.

More positively, leaders are now involving assessors more in the process of apprentices' initial skills scans and encouraging them to use the outcomes as a tool in reviews. In the best reviews, assessors encourage apprentices and employers to reflect on these scans and identify areas for development. Assessors then plan additional training to address gaps or respond to interests which apprentices identify, such as a focus on working with clients with dementia. However, leaders have not ensured there is a process in place to ensure a consistency of practice. As a result, the approach assessors adopt varies in quality and impact.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices receive their full training entitlement?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have implemented largely effective actions to ensure that apprentices receive their full training entitlement.

Leaders recognised that apprentices and employers were not recording the time they spent on off-the-job training accurately because they did not understand how to use the recording system. This meant that BCE leaders could not be certain how much or what type of off-the-job training was taking place. Leaders implemented a training programme for staff to ensure they knew how to make a true record. These staff subsequently cascaded the same training to all apprentices and employers. As a result, most apprentices and employers now record off-the-job hours accurately.

Assessors have been successful in encouraging employers to have a better appreciation of the value of off-the-job training generally. More specifically, most employers now appreciate the need to link and plan on- and off-the-job training. Most line managers are supportive and ensure that apprentices are able to study during working hours. This includes individualised training sessions with assessors, job shadowing, visits and opportunities to work in other departments, research and writing assignments. However, a minority of apprentices are still unable to complete their off-the-job training at work because they are supporting other staff or doing additional shifts to cover staff absence.

The training that most apprentices receive is effective. Most are now making at least expected progress. Those who initially lacked confidence or were uncertain about returning to learning have developed in confidence or can identify how they have gained and applied new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Leaders appreciate that they are not evaluating the impact of on- and off-the-job training well enough. They are currently developing new processes to ensure that the timing, content and quality of on- and off-the-job training are always fully integrated and wholly effective.

What progress have leaders made in integrating the planning and teaching of English and mathematics so that apprentices rapidly and contextually improve these skills?

Insufficient progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have made almost no progress toward integrating the planning and teaching of English and mathematics so that apprentices rapidly and contextually improve these skills. At the time of our visit, around 110 apprentices needed to pass functional skills qualifications in English and/or mathematics. However, only a very few of these had received or were receiving any direct support at all. Those who were, were mostly the small number of apprentices who were prioritised for support because they were close to their end point assessment.

Leaders had recognised that their functional skills provision was not working well. They engaged a functional skills specialist at the start of this year to review the quality and effectiveness of this provision. Consequently, they now have an accurate assessment of numerous failings in the administration and teaching of their functional skills programmes. They also have a well-considered and comprehensive improvement action plan. However, no improvement has taken place largely due to a continuing lack of specialist staff. This was similarly the case at the previous inspection. This has led to substantial periods, including currently, where apprentices have no full time functional skills teacher. Consequently, too many apprentices are at risk of making slow progress, going beyond their planned end dates, becoming out of funding or not achieving all elements of their apprenticeship.

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