

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## **B-Skill Limited Reinspection**

**19 September 2003**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## B-SKILL LIMITED REINSPECTION

### Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

| SEVEN-POINT SCALE | FIVE-POINT SCALE |
|-------------------|------------------|
| grade 1           | grade 1          |
| grade 2           |                  |
| grade 3           | grade 2          |
| grade 4           | grade 3          |
| grade 5           | grade 4          |
| grade 6           | grade 5          |
| grade 7           |                  |

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

# **REINSPECTION REPORT**

## **B-Skill Limited Reinspection**

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## REINSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. B-Skill Limited (B-Skill) was established in 2000 to provide learning in vocational and prevocational courses in South Tyneside, Gateshead, North Tyneside and Newcastle. The company is owned by the management team which consists of a managing director and two directors. B-Skill's head office is in Newcastle and the company has two training centres in South Shields and Gateshead. Gateshead is used mostly for induction and jobsearch. Most off-the-job training is delivered on the South Shields site. B-Skill provides training for learners who are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in retailing, warehousing and distribution; health, social care and public services, and business administration, management and professional. There were too few learners in business administration for this area to be inspected. There is also training for learners in Life Skills. B-Skill became managing agent for the Entry to Employment (E2E) initiative in South Tyneside six weeks before the final reinspection visit. B-Skill funds most of its core training through Tyne and Wear Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with some learners from Jobcentre Plus across Tyneside. The health, social care and public service provision is a pilot cleaning programme which is funded by the LSC's national office.

2. The senior management team share responsibility for strategic management. The managing director is directly responsible for commercial and employed adult training as well as for the financial management of the company. One director manages programmes for unemployed adults as well as heading marketing, personnel and equality of opportunity. The second director is responsible for programmes for young people as well as community initiatives. He also takes a substantial role in the management of quality assurance. Each director has a team of trainers, assessors, verifiers and administration staff relevant to the role. B-Skill has 24 staff, 13 full time, five part time and six sessional. The management structure and staff roles and responsibilities have changed substantially since the previous inspection, with the addition of the new director and clearer responsibilities.

3. Tyneside is an area which has seen many changes in employment patterns. Many of the traditional industries like ship building and mining have been replaced by a growth in the service sector, such as in hotel and catering and leisure. Factors influencing the local economy include poor educational achievement, high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. In September 2001, the unemployment rate for South Tyneside was at 9.5 per cent, compared with 5.2 per cent in Tyne and Wear and 2.9 per cent nationally. In Tyne and Wear, 42 per cent of learners achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in 2001, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

## SCOPE OF PROVISION

### **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

4. There are 11 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation, all of whom are working towards NVQs at level 2. Most learners are already in employment. Learners who are not in employment at the start of their training attend an induction at one of B-Skill's training centres. The company's client liaison officer then screens appropriate employers and finds placements. There are currently six learners on Jobcentre Plus and five learners on the LSC's programmes. Learners who are already employed have their induction in the workplace with the assessor. There are training centres in Gateshead and South Shields, but nearly all training and assessment takes place in the workplace. There are two training officers who assess the learners in the workplace.

### **Health, social care & public services**

5. There are 137 learners on the cleaning and support services programme which is a pilot programme which did not exist at the previous inspection. All are working towards NVQ levels 1 and 2, and all are employed by local companies. All training, including induction, is provided in the workplace. Assessment and review visits are planned for every four weeks. All learners are assessed for literacy and numeracy needs at the start of the programme and individual support is arranged for those who need it.

### **Foundation programmes**

6. There are 49 learners on the E2E training programme, 36 of whom joined B-Skill under the Life Skills training contracts. E2E did not start until six weeks before the final reinspection. All learners are referred by a Connexions adviser who carries out some initial assessment activities and prepares an individual development plan. This is followed by a half-day induction by B-Skill, together with a more in-depth induction to help them understand how their programme works. All learners are assessed to identify literacy and numeracy support needs as part of the initial assessment process. Support is arranged individually depending on assessment results. Learners who were Life Skills learners are now funded through E2E. Their programme continues in the same way but with more choices. The 13 new learners are still in the eight weeks initial assessment phase of E2E. A Connexions adviser holds open sessions on a weekly basis at the South Shields site to support learners who need additional help. A new computer package is now being used with learners to develop individual learning plans in line with the LSC's E2E passport. This charts the learners' progress with skills like confidence-building, assertiveness and change in attitude, as well as other achievements. Its use has been endorsed by the LSC.

## ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors                               | 4  |
| Number of inspection days                          | 17 |
| Number of learner interviews                       | 25 |
| Number of staff interviews                         | 30 |
| Number of employer interviews                      | 12 |
| Number of subcontractor interviews                 | 1  |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 15 |
| Number of partner/external agency interviews       | 6  |

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. The previous inspection in February 2002 found that work-based learning for young people in retailing and customer service and Life Skills was unsatisfactory. The provider's leadership and management and quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. Arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

## GRADES

*grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak*

|                                  | Inspection | Reinspection |
|----------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Leadership and management</b> | <b>4</b>   | <b>2</b>     |
| Contributory grades:             |            |              |
| Equality of opportunity          | 3          | 2            |
| Quality assurance                | 4          | 3            |

|   | Inspection | Reinspection |
|---|------------|--------------|
| <b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b> | <b>4</b>   | <b>2</b>     |
| Contributory grades:                                    |            |              |
| Work-based learning for young people                    | 4          | 2            |

|  | Inspection | Reinspection |
|--|------------|--------------|
| <b>Health, social care &amp; public services</b> |            | <b>3</b>     |
| Contributory grades:                             |            |              |
| Other government-funded provision                |            | 3            |

## B-SKILL LIMITED REINSPECTION

|                       | Inspection | Reinspection |
|-----------------------|------------|--------------|
| Foundation programmes | 4          | 3            |
| Contributory grades:  |            |              |
| Life Skills           | 4          | 3            |

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

8. **Achievement in the cleaning pilot is good** with 84 out of 137 learners achieving NVQ level 1 and 58 being only one unit short of completion for the NVQ level 2. Most learners achieve before their expected end date. Learners in retailing, customer service and transport and E2E programmes make satisfactory progress. In retailing, customer service and transportation, of the 46 starts for this intake, 10 have achieved their qualification. Five have achieved their qualification and gained employment. Most learners have achieved basic qualifications in first aid or health and safety. In E2E, the achievement rate rose from 34 per cent in 2000-01 to 54 per cent in 2001-02. All E2E learners achieve at least a basic certificate such as retailing, customer service and transportation. All learners show an increase in confidence and employability skills. Retention rates are good or at least satisfactory across programmes at 95 per cent in the cleaning pilot, 82 per cent in E2E and 67 per cent in retailing, customer service and transportation.

9. **All learners show a marked and sustained increase in confidence and all develop job-related skills.** Their motivation and self-esteem improve and employers report an improvement in attitude and ability.

### Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

|  | Grade 1  | Grade 2  | Grade 3  | Grade 4  | Grade 5  | Grade 6  | Grade 7  | Total    |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Retailing, customer service & transportation | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        |
| Foundation programmes                        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 3        | 2        | 0        | 0        | 5        |
| <b>Total</b>                                 | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>6</b> |

Grades awarded to learning sessions

|                                       | Grade 1  | Grade 2  | Grade 3  | Grade 4  | Grade 5  | Grade 6  | Grade 7  | Total     |
|---------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Health, social care & public services | 0        | 0        | 1        | 3        | 1        | 0        | 0        | 5         |
| Foundation programmes                 | 0        | 0        | 1        | 3        | 1        | 0        | 0        | 5         |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>10</b> |

10. All learners are assessed for literacy and numeracy support needs as part of the induction and the results are talked through with learners. Individual support is arranged as needed either in the training centres or in workplaces. In E2E some integration of



literacy and numeracy with vocational or Life Skills training is being carried out. In practical do-it-yourself sessions, measurement skills are well integrated with the woodwork theme. Numeracy is taught as the practical elements demand it. For instance, learners work on mental arithmetic to calculate the measurement of a number of units in a kitchen. Specific issues are then reinforced in individual sessions. Some integration of literacy is taking place. The new Life Skills sessions are all referenced to the new curriculum and tutors can easily see how the development of literacy and numeracy skills are progressing.

**11. Learners' confidence and job skills are effectively developed.** Most learners have poor self-esteem when they join B-Skill. In the cleaning pilot and retailing, customer service and transportation, the learners' employment is often undervalued. E2E learners have multiple barriers to learning, but all learners develop confidence in themselves and in their abilities during their time with B-Skill. Staff are skilled in motivating learners. Learners are encouraged to set realistic but challenging targets and achievement is well celebrated. Staff are flexible to meet the needs of learners. Training is delivered at an appropriate level for the learner. However, in the cleaning pilot, learning it is not always sufficiently reinforced to ensure understanding.

**12. Staff provide particularly good support for learners.** This is more noticeable in retailing, customer service and transportation and E2E although learners on the cleaning programme report good working relationships with staff. Support needs are clearly assessed and recorded, and specialist literacy and numeracy support is arranged individually. Staff are flexible in approach and often arrange to meet learners during the evening or at weekends. On the E2E programme, learners are given good advice and practical help for issues like drug misuse and homelessness.

**13. There is good employer involvement on the cleaning pilot and on the retailing, customer service and transportation programmes.** Employers and supervisors are supportive to learners and give good on-the-job training. Most employers arrange assessment opportunities, although for some learners on the cleaning pilot opportunities for workplace assessment are limited. Employers value the personal and professional development they see in learners. In the E2E programme however, involvement of employers is not well developed. Most employers are very supportive to learners but there are still too few of them. Some employers are not given enough information about the needs of the learners or the type of training required.

**14. The range of learning opportunities for E2E learners is good.** All learners achieve basic certificates like first aid, health and safety, food hygiene and attendance certificates. They take part in social activities like residential weekends to develop team-building and confidence. Specific courses in assertiveness and motivation are offered. Work placements are sought to match their needs and aims. A wide range of training or educational courses offered by partners in the area are identified. While the range itself is good and very motivating to learners, there are gaps in how the programme is planned. There is no year planner to identify individual learning. While learners have a general awareness of what is on offer they are not fully aware of the component parts of their programme and how it fits together.

**15. Retailing, customer service and transportation has a very effective internal verification process** which has improved since the previous inspection. New paperwork is matched to the awarding body standards. There are regular and effective standardisation meetings. The internal verification plan is comprehensive. Clear feedback is given to assessors who then set targets and action points for the learners. However, while this process is very effective, some achievements are restricted by the learners not attending planned reviews.

### **Leadership and management**

**16. B-Skill now has a clear and effective staff-planning and deployment system.** Recruitment procedures are clearly linked to pay and reward schemes. Staff are well-qualified and experienced and job roles are developed as the individual grows into the role. Continual support is offered through a six-weekly development session with a director of the employee's choice. Appraisal and staff training ensure staff are well-suited to their job and its development. The structure of the organisation has been altered radically since the previous inspection. Roles and responsibilities are now much clearer.

**17. B-Skill has very effective strategic management.** This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection when it was poor. The company has developed a clear and detailed strategic plan covering a three-year period. Specific and measurable targets are set across an extensive range of aspects of the business. Many targets for the first year have been met or exceeded. The plan puts the learner firmly at the centre of the planning process by allocating learners' impact factors to each action. The key focus of the plan is to improve the experience of the learner. Target-setting and monitoring is very good across the provision and for individual learners, although targets are not set at individual programme level. The company has developed its structure to meet the needs of learners and has made strategic decisions to withdraw from some training rather than deliver programmes which do not fully meet the needs of learners.

**18. Technology is used effectively to manage learning.** The management information system produces monthly reports on the learners' progress which is acted on appropriately. All staff have access to the network where all company information, apart from confidential material, can be viewed. The new E2E processes are all to be held on the server with subcontractors downloading monitoring information directly. All operational staff have state-of-the-art mobile telephones which act as diary, digital camera and e-mail facility. Staff amend their diaries through the B-Skill server. Laptop and tablet computers are used with learners in the workplace. Appropriate software, especially for the development of literacy and numeracy, is used. A new computer package to monitor the progress of employability and confidence levels is starting to be used instead of paper-based learning plans.

**19. B-Skill has a comprehensive, learner-focused quality assurance system.** Learners' impact factors are again set against all quality assurance systems and processes. Actions from activities and plans are prioritised depending on their impact on the learner. Existing quality assurance frameworks are fully matched to learners' impact factors. All

key processes have relevant policies and procedures. The internal verification processes are detailed and comprehensive and good records are kept. B-Skill manages E2E in South Tyneside and has developed a quality assurance implementation plan with partners in the area. An auditing team has been in place since January 2003. However, since the audit cycle runs yearly, one third of the quality assurance system has not yet been audited. Observation of teaching is also relatively new and some aspects are not yet fully developed.

**20. There are very effective self-assessment and action-planning processes at B-Skill.** The self-assessment is critical and identifies strengths and weaknesses across the provision. All staff have been fully involved in the process. From the self-assessment, monthly detailed action plans have been produced which again focus on learners' impact factors. Actions taken are effective and dynamic.

**21. B-Skill develops effective partnerships to widen participation by learners who have barriers to learning.** The company has a history of working with partners to support learners. They work with agencies such as youth offending agencies, drug counsellors and foyer projects and projects specialising in supporting learners who have a disability. More recently, strategic initiatives have been led by B-Skill for partners in the area to bid for funding to provide a central resource for learners across the region. They are also the lead agent for E2E in South Tyneside.

**22. B-Skill takes good actions to raise awareness of equality of opportunity.** Staff training is good and includes many different aspects of equality of opportunity, from awareness of the hearing impaired, to the effects of poverty. A designated officer networks effectively to bring in comprehensive information for all staff. Information is given out in team meetings where equality of opportunity is a standing agenda item. All information can also be accessed from the server. This information is then passed to learners through induction, additional training and progress reviews. However, there is some insufficient reinforcement as some learners have good awareness and others do not. While equality of opportunity is adequately covered overall in training sessions, some aspects are not fully explored with learners.

*During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:*

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- clear and effective staff planning and deployment
- very effective strategic management
- effective use of technology to manage learning
- comprehensive learner-focused quality assurance system
- very effective self-assessment and action-planning processes
- effective partnerships to widen participation

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- good actions to raise awareness of equality of opportunity

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient quality assurance monitoring
- some insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity to learners

#### **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

##### **Strengths**

- particularly effective development of learners' confidence in job skills
- particularly supportive staff
- good involvement of employers in work-based learning
- very effective internal verification process

##### **Weaknesses**

- some unsatisfactory attendance at reviews

#### **Health, social care & public services**

##### **Strengths**

- good progress towards achievement of NVQs
- effective development of learners' confidence
- effective involvement of employers in training

##### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient reinforcement of learners' understanding
- insufficient opportunities for assessment in the workplace for some learners

#### **Foundation programmes**

##### **Strengths**

- good range of learning opportunities for learners
- particularly effective staff support for learners

##### **Weaknesses**

- some insufficient involvement by employers
- some gaps in the planning of learning

## DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 2**

*During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:*

#### **Strengths**

- clear and effective staff planning and deployment
- very effective strategic management
- effective use of technology to manage learning
- comprehensive learner-focused quality assurance system
- very effective self-assessment and action-planning processes
- effective partnerships to widen participation
- good actions to raise awareness of equality of opportunity

#### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient quality assurance monitoring
- some insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity to learners

23. The previous inspection report identified strengths in the management style and the definition of staff roles and responsibilities. Since the previous inspection, B-Skill has strongly developed how it manages and deploys its people. B-Skill has clear and effective staff recruitment policies and procedures which have also been linked to pay and reward schemes. This has led to attracting well-experienced and qualified staff. Staff turnover during the past 12 months is much lower than previously. While the organisation recruits new employees against a standard person specification and job description, each employee's job description is developed and agreed individually during their induction into the company. Individual staff training plans are drawn up on their first day and are reviewed and revised every six weeks thereafter. After new employees have been in post for six weeks they have an employee development session with a director. Staff can choose which director they would like to have their sessions with. Employee support sessions are confidential and are used to ensure that the employee is happy in their role, and it is also an opportunity for staff to share their concerns. Sessions are focused on employees and how the company can support them in their role. Appraisals take place annually by line managers and the outcomes and development plans are monitored at employee support sessions. B-Skill was accredited with the Investor in People standard in August 2001 and was reassessed two weeks before the reinspection in September 2003. The organisational structure has been changed since the previous inspection by the addition of a third director. This has enabled directors to focus on key aspects of the organisational management and responsibilities throughout the company. There is good communication with staff through weekly meetings, e-mail, sharing of documents and policies through the central server which all staff have access

to.

24. There is now very effective strategic management in B-Skills. At the previous inspection, strategic management was identified as poor. The company has developed a clear and detailed strategic plan covering a three-year period up until 2006. Three-year targets are set across an extensive range of organisational and operational aspects of the business. Many of the targets for the first year have been met and in some instances have been exceeded. The strategic plan puts learners at the centre of business through the development of learner impact factors which uses a weighting system to identify what impact priorities, actions and policies have on the learner. The key focus of the strategic plan is to impact positively on the learner which in turn will benefit the business. B-Skill has implemented strategic change in the provision, which has led to an increased focus on foundation programmes. It also achieved its financial aims during the last contractual year and increased retention and achievement rates in the provision as a whole. At the previous inspection target-setting was identified as weak. Target-setting is now strong within the strategic and business plans and includes a range of activities. The company has set targets for retention and achievement rates as a whole across its provision, but it does not set targets at individual programme level. While retention and achievement rates are generally good across the provision, some programme areas are not as good as others. The company has developed its organisational structure to meet the needs of the learners and has created a culture of respect to move people on, which is accepted and practised by staff, managers and directors. Staff have a copy of the strategic and business plans and are informed weekly at team meetings and through e-mail of any changes. All key business documents and plans are accessible by staff on the server.

25. B-Skill uses technology to support the learning process in a number of ways. Staff have access to laptop and tablet computers with specialist software to use with learners in the workplace. Software includes basic skills packages, jobsearch and exit programmes. In addition, the company is starting to use a programme which develops learning plans and monitors progress in skills such as confidence-building, motivation and assertiveness. Each member of operational staff has a state-of-the-art mobile telephone which is also a diary, digital camera and e-mail facility. This has enabled staff to download e-mail and take photographs for learners' evidence. Staff can load and amend their diaries through the server.

26. At the previous inspection, the company had one office and training centre in South Shields. Since then it has moved to an additional training centre in Gateshead and a head office in Newcastle city centre. Resources across the provision are adequate to meet the needs of the learners. Staff who do not have a teaching or training qualification are engaged in appropriate training programmes and have continuous personal development plans. Arrangements for the management of literacy and numeracy are also satisfactory. All learners are assessed appropriately for support needs and are informed of the results in a timely and confidential way. Individual support is arranged in consultation with the learner. At the beginning of the reinspection, resources were inadequate, but by the end, a number of good, relevant materials had been purchased. There are plans to purchase more resources as the E2E programme develops. Staff who

are delivering literacy and numeracy training are appropriately experienced and qualified. There are plans to recruit two new staff members, specially to support learners in the workplace. Teaching is satisfactory.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 2**

27. There are effective partnerships to widen participation. There is a well-developed strategy in the planning process to increase participation and raise awareness of equality of opportunity. Partnerships have been actively and productively developed for the support of existing and future learners. Networks have been used historically to support learners. This ranges from effective links with the youth offending team to support and encourage learners at risk of further offending, to work with the drug action team. The strategy has built on this informal approach to bring training providers together to form a genuine resource for all to share. B-Skill is playing the main role in managing this process. It is co-ordinating bids for resources for the future of the partnership to support learners across the region. It has also been instrumental in writing and developing the E2E process and has also encouraged further partnership arrangements.

28. There are some good actions to raise awareness of equality of opportunity. Staff training has a high priority and is organised so that monthly themed issues are covered. One month is given to equality of opportunity training for all staff, regardless of role or status. Issues covered in the current year range from awareness of the hearing-impaired and finger-spelling training to general equality of opportunity training. Staff have also been trained in wider issues such as the effects of poverty and multi-generational unemployment. The designated equality of opportunity officer is active in local networks and has an agenda item each week on team meetings where current equal opportunity issues are explored. These are fully minuted. B-Skill subscribes to a number of magazines and organisations so that regular relevant information is sent on an ongoing basis. This information is retained on the network and staff can access it as required. This information is then passed on to learners. Some initiatives are very new and impact on the learner is limited as yet.

29. Policies, procedures and associated documents are satisfactory. B-Skill has taken advice about the writing of the equal opportunities and disability policy. There are simplified statements of both for learners. There is an anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy. All of these adequately protect the interests of the learners. They are clearly written and cover relevant legislation.

30. Access to buildings and physical resources for learners who have a disability is satisfactory. Improvements have been made to the South Shields site and a ramp has been installed. A hearing loop is now in place. Adaptations to computer programmes are available to help learners who have visual problems. Some improvements have been made to one toilet to make it easier for disabled learners to have access. The Gateshead office is on ground level. Not all rooms are fully accessible, but alternative arrangements are in place. The main administrative office is not wheelchair accessible but there are plans to install a lift.



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31. The monitoring of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Information is collected on ethnic origin, disability and gender and is monitored on a monthly basis. Comparisons are made to national and regional representation in the general population. Targets are set for the increase of some under-represented groups. There are some early indications of over-achievement of targets of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities in provision. It is unclear whether this is due to targeting or a general increase in numbers due to the pilot cleaning programme. The new database which measures distance travelled also monitors a much wider range of diversity indicators such as criminal records, lone parenthood and drug misuse. This is not yet in place, so the impact cannot be assessed.

32. There is some insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity. Some improvements have been made in the way equality of opportunity is delivered as part of induction. Some learners have good recall and understanding of this, but others do not. The training does not always fully explore the issues with learners. A question has been added to the review form since the previous inspection, but it is sometimes not filled in beyond vague comments on equality of opportunity input at induction. New procedures have been implemented to change the review form and how equal opportunities issues are dealt with. Resources are starting to be used in a practical way to get learners thinking about relevant issues. All employers are given equal opportunities policies and procedures which include anti-bullying and anti-harassment procedures. They are required to sign a contract which sets out their responsibilities to the learner.

### Quality assurance

### Contributory grade 3

33. At the previous inspection, there was no clear quality assurance framework. Since then B-Skill has developed a comprehensive, learner-focused quality assurance system which identifies all the constituent parts in the quality assurance system. B-Skill has developed learner impact factors and has measured all processes in the system against the impact they have on the learner. Actions from activities and plans are prioritised in order of importance based on their impact on the learner. B-Skill has the ISO 9001:2000 quality assurance mark, which is an international quality assurance standard, and have monitored it against learner impact factors to ensure that the systems are focused on the learner. All key processes have a policy, which is linked to procedures for implementation. The internal verification systems are detailed and comprehensive with good records. B-Skill has been awarded the E2E management contract for South Tyneside. The company had developed an E2E quality assurance implementation plan which is being implemented as a whole on a partnership basis. Partners are committed to developing a joint quality assurance framework.

34. B-Skill has written a critical self-assessment report which has identified its strengths and weaknesses in the areas of learning and leadership and management. Staff, managers and directors have all been involved in the self-assessment process. B-Skill has produced a comprehensive action plan. Each action has been weighted against the learner impact factors, which has enabled the company to focus the actions that have the greatest impact on the learner. Since the self-assessment report was written in December 2002 the company has developed six action plans, four of which have been



written since June 2003. The previous inspection identified the self-assessment process as being insufficiently critical.

35. B-Skill has an auditing team which has been in place since January 2003. Little auditing had taken place before this because of staff turnover. While auditing has taken place and changes have been made to the parts of the system which have been tested, one-third of the system has not yet been audited as the audit cycle runs yearly. The company is unable to demonstrate quality assurance trends over time. Teaching and learning observations have only been carried out since July 2003. While there is a comprehensive range of criteria to make judgements on the teaching and learning observations and there is effective action-planning of areas identified during observations, there is little recording of the learning or attainment achieved. The teaching and learning observations use a six-point scale to make grading judgements, but there is no guidance given on how to make a grading decision. The company has not carried out any moderation activity on teaching and learning observation judgements and grading.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 2

| Programmes inspected                 | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 11                 | 2                  |

*During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:*

#### Strengths

- particularly effective development of learners' confidence in job skills
- particularly supportive staff
- good involvement of employers in work-based learning
- very effective internal verification process

#### Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory attendance at reviews

### Achievement and standards

36. Achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. Forty-six learners have started since the previous inspection. Thirty are on Jobcentre Plus funded programmes and 16 are on LSC-funded courses. Of the 46 starts, 10 learners have completed their primary learning qualification and 11 are still in learning. In addition, five learners have entered employment as well as achieving their qualification. Most learners have achieved basic qualifications in first aid or health and safety. All learners show an increase in confidence and job-related skills. Of the current learners, progress with portfolios is satisfactory. Retention rates are satisfactory at 67 per cent.

### Quality of education and training

37. B-Skill is particularly effective in the development of learners' confidence in job skills. Learners gain knowledge and understanding of their job roles and important elements such as product knowledge and consumer legislation. Staff are particularly effective at identifying key areas of concern and to help them to overcome barriers. They focus much time and energy in raising learners' self-esteem and pride in the job they are doing. Learners' confidence increases when communicating with customers and they are able to work unsupervised. Most learners are regarded by employers as valuable team members, and work-placement managers recognise their potential as permanent employees. One learner has become a full-time staff member.

38. B-Skill's staff provide particularly good support for learners. Learners have very good

working relationships with their assessors, who go out of their way to support them vocationally and personally. Individual additional support is given when learners have difficulty completing an assessment. Support needs are accurately identified and recorded, with a clear indication of how support will be given. A specialist tutor provides individual support for literacy and numeracy needs. B-Skill has effective partnerships with local employers who are very supportive of learners on work placements.

39. There is good employer involvement in work-based learning. Employers give good support through appropriate on-the job training which is relevant to the learners' vocational programmes. Learners are given relevant coaching in job skills by their supervisors, managers and experienced colleagues. Learners also benefit from full employer inductions and from relevant in-house training events.

40. A very effective internal verification process has been established since the previous inspection. New paperwork has been matched to the joint awarding body guidelines. Internal verifiers and assessors attend standardisation meetings on a quarterly basis. The internal verification plan now incorporates sampling of observed assessments. The internal verifier reports on the assessors' performance using an effective checklist and action points. Clear target dates for completion have impacted positively on the learners' achievements.

41. Assessment practices are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection. Effective use is made of progression action plans to record the planned assessment activity. Evidence recording sheets ensure that learners and assessors are clear on what has been achieved. Learners interviewed during the reinspection process understand the progress they are making and know what they have to do to achieve their qualification.

42. Resources for learners are satisfactory. There is an electronic training resources library now in place which staff can access through the intranet. Senior management are responsible for the continuing professional development of trainers. Regular development reviews are in place where trainers are encouraged to update their knowledge of new occupational standards. All training staff who do not have a teaching or training qualification are now engaged in appropriate training towards a nationally recognised qualification.

43. There is some unsatisfactory attendance at reviews. There are monthly progress reviews and progression action plans are completed for all learners where individual targets are set, and learners are informed of what is expected of them at the next visit. However, some learners miss their appointments. In these cases, learners do not achieve as quickly as those whose attendance is good.

## **Leadership and management**

44. Leadership and management of the retailing, customer service and transportation area is good. Since the previous inspection, an effective self-assessment process is now in place. A comprehensive development plan is produced which includes detailed monitoring and monthly updates on progress. Specific targets with appropriate timescales and responsibilities by named members of staff have resolved the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Clear targets are monitored and reviewed on a monthly cycle and this has significantly improved retention and achievement rates since the previous inspection.

**Health, social care & public services****Grade 3**

| Programmes inspected              | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Other government-funded provision | 137                | 3                  |

*During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:*

**Strengths**

- good progress towards achievement of NVQs
- effective development of learners' confidence
- effective involvement of employers in training

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient reinforcement of learners' understanding
- insufficient opportunities for assessment in the workplace for some learners

**Achievement and standards**

45. Learners are making good progress towards achievement of their NVQs. Of the current 137 learners, 84 have already achieved the NVQ at level 1 and 58 of these are just one unit short of achieving the NVQ at level 2. Most learners are completing their programmes well before the expected end date. Learners who have been assessed make quick progress with the NVQ part of this pilot project. Retention rates are good at 95 per cent.

46. Learners generally demonstrate good technical skills and detailed knowledge of health and safety. Employers are pleased with learners' increased motivation for the job and the pride they take in their work. Some learners have weak literacy skills, poor handwriting and bad spelling and support is organised on an individual basis. Overall, learners compile portfolios of evidence to a satisfactory standard, but find it easier to respond to oral questioning.

**Quality of education and training**

47. The provider is successful in developing learners' confidence in their skills and knowledge and in themselves. Most learners are apprehensive about their abilities at the beginning of the programme and find the NVQ language intimidating. Assessors resolve these problems individually by concentrating on the practical skills and translating the NVQ into questions that the learner can relate to their everyday tasks. This approach enables learners to complete a unit quickly. The support and guidance of the assessor are valued by the learners, in particular the flexibility of arrangements for visiting in the evenings and at weekends to fit in with their shift and work patterns. At the end of each

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visit, the assessor and the learner agree clear targets for the next assessment visit. The review of progress ensures that the learner is fully aware of their achievement to date and how much of the qualification remains. Encouragement is given to learners to plan how they might complete the programme before the expected end date. Many learners comment on their new abilities to challenge other professionals, to reconsider their career plans and to progress to an NVQ at level 3.

48. The employers' involvement in the training is effective. The commitment, support and encouragement from supervisors is good. Staff are rarely present at reviews but they are given a copy of the paperwork. They follow up the outcomes immediately with the learner, and help to facilitate any arrangements for assessment. Employers value the personal and professional development they see in their learners and some attribute a reduction in staff turnover to the training programme. The number of learners involved in the programme is increasing rapidly.

49. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills during induction are adequate. Most of the support needs are appropriately identified. Additional support in literacy is set in a vocational context. Well-considered strategies are devised to deal with the sensitivities of learners in taking up this support, including the production of more user-friendly documents. The few who have received additional support have achieved their qualification.

50. There is sufficient staff and they are appropriately qualified and experienced. Staff development is planned to meet the needs of individuals. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. Progress reviews are carried out regularly and are satisfactory overall. Equality of opportunity is covered well at induction, but is insufficiently reinforced during reviews. Internal verification procedures are sound and staff fully understand them.

51. The reinforcement of learning in some training sessions and assessments is insufficient. In one training session the tutor gave a demonstration of the health and safety involved in using electrical equipment to a learner who had missed a group session. Content was comprehensive but was delivered very rapidly. The learner asked some questions for clarification during the demonstration, but there was a lot to absorb in a short space of time. The learner's understanding and the main learning points were not reinforced. During one assessment it was clear that the learner was very nervous and had failed to prepare the equipment needed. The assessor allowed this to continue and did not intervene with questions to help the learner. In other assessments observed, the assessor had prepared the learner for what was expected. Appropriate questions during the observation enabled the learner to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and to display practical skills. Sources of evidence for portfolios are predominantly observations in the workplace and oral questioning. Less use is made of written evidence and witness testimonies.

52. There are insufficient opportunities for observation in the workplace for some learners. Some observations take place in an artificial setting which enable some of the technical skills and background knowledge to be assessed. However, it does not allow for the demonstration of competence when working, such as on a ward or in private

living accommodation.

### **Leadership and management**

53. The daily management and organisation of the programme is good. Communication with supervisors is effective and responses to problems are immediate and detailed. Links with employers are effective in promoting the programme.

54. Internal verification is sound and there is an appropriate long-term sampling plan. Verification takes place frequently and is recorded effectively. New assessors are observed and are given well-considered guidance. The internal verifier questions learners' understanding of NVQs and assessment and makes good use of their responses in feedback to individual assessors.

55. The self-assessment report is accurate and many of the judgements on strengths and weaknesses match those identified by inspectors. Staff were fully involved in the process. They are committed to the continuous improvement of the quality of their provision and actively seek learners' feedback, formally and informally. Some of the questionnaires contain too many closed questions, but these are analysed and responded to.

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### Foundation programmes

### Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Life Skills          | 49                 | 3                  |

*During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:*

#### Strengths

- good range of learning opportunities for learners
- particularly effective staff support for learners

#### Weaknesses

- some insufficient involvement by employers
- some gaps in the planning of learning

### Achievement and standards

56. Achievement in the foundation programme is satisfactory. In 2001-02 achievement was 54 per cent compared with 34 per cent in 2000-01. Current portfolios show achievement at the expected rate for the length of time on programme. All learners achieve basic certificates like first aid or health and safety. There is good development of confidence and employability skills which are monitored at reviews. They are beginning to be measured on a new computer package. Employers give instances of improvement in timekeeping and attitude. Some learners who have multiple barriers to learning, report with pride about their ability to speak in a group or concentrate for longer periods in training sessions.

### Quality of education and training

57. There is a good range of learning opportunities for learners. Most learners have no other qualifications and a range of basic certificated training is offered. The certificates are a source of pride and achievement and recognise small steps in the learning process. They vary from attendance awards to food hygiene, computer certificates and health and safety awards. Learners are encouraged to take an active part in teamworking activities like a residential weekend, go-carting and inter-provider five-a-side football. They also have access to activities which are designed to increase confidence and assertiveness. These are delivered by partners and are based around interactive and fun activities. Learners are also actively encouraged to explore talents they have and to find appropriate local partners to extend these skills. For instance, one learner who is interested in interior design is now on a part-time course in art at the local college as part of her programme. Work placements with employers are also sought. The staff work hard to find placements which match the aims of the learners.



58. Staff are very supportive to learners. They are seen as trustworthy by learners who are happy to talk about very personal issues with staff. Staff members accompany learners to court appearances if this is an issue. They provide written statements and act as character witnesses for them. They apply for a range of funds on their behalf for items of clothing and footwear. Staff liaise with parents to ensure that learners stay on their programmes. They also offer informal counselling to learners, almost on demand. Where more specialised counselling is needed, the staff have active links with partners. For instance, learners who have had problems with housing have been helped by other agencies to find accommodation. If learners have a drug problem, staff work to support them on a day-to-day basis, but also call in specialist advisers to ensure learners get as much help as possible.

59. Resources for the E2E foundation programme are satisfactory. When the reinspection first started resources were an issue, particularly for literacy and numeracy support and Life Skills materials. At the end of the reinspection, B-Skill has resources which reflect the interests and needs of the age group concerned. It has adequate materials for extending literacy and numeracy skills, including some books. In addition, some interactive computer-based materials are now in place. An advanced pocket computer has also been purchased for use in the workplace. However, it has not been used as yet. A range of materials have now been bought to develop learners' life skills. These include materials on budgeting and cooking. A new kitchen and sitting/bed rooms have been created on the premises so that learners can learn practical skills for independent living. There are some resources for the development of confidence and assertiveness. However, there is still not enough basic resources like dictionaries, thesaurus and calculators. There are still few materials to help tutors in their delivery of sessions. There are plans to buy more materials.

60. Teaching and learning overall is satisfactory. The teaching profile shows one session which is graded good, three satisfactory and one unsatisfactory. Some teaching is slow in pace and is not well suited to the needs of learners who have literacy or numeracy needs. Other teaching is well planned, is delivered at a good pace and enthuses the learners. Some sessions are better planned than others, although an improvement was seen as the inspection progressed. New schemes of work and session plans for the development of independent living skills are good. Observation of teaching as a quality assurance process began during the reinspection. No impact has yet been seen.

61. Target-setting in reviews is satisfactory. Reviews are planned and delivered each month. Targets are set in partnership with the learner and the tutor. Most targets are now specific and measurable. Reviews also record improvements in attendance, punctuality, behaviour and motivation. The tutor and learner carry out a discussion and agree where the learner's achievements lie. A new, computer-based programme is being introduced which monitors the improvements they make in skills like employability, confidence, and literacy and numeracy.

62. There is some insufficient involvement by employers. B-Skill has taken many actions to increase employers' involvement and the number of work placements has increased.

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An employers' pack has been designed and events are scheduled for employers. However, some employers report that they have had little information on the learning programmes. Some have not been fully informed of the learners' range of barriers to learning and express dissatisfaction with this arrangement. Some comments from employers are written into the review paperwork. There is little evidence of three-way planning of learning between learners, employers and the training officer.

63. There are some gaps in the planning of learning. Learning is planned each month and learners are mostly aware of their targets and take an active part in planning them. There is no overall programme into which individual planning can fit. There is no yearly planner or rolling programme to show specific training which takes place, such as health and safety, residentials and partner-delivered training like assertiveness. Some learners have little idea of the main components of their learning programme. The new E2E programme has a programme for the initial eight weeks with indications of planning for longer-term activities. Achievements of component parts also lead to the award of points towards the award of an internal certificate. This is very new and little impact can be seen as yet.

### **Leadership and management**

64. The E2E provision is managed by the skills development manager who also managed the previous Life Skills provision. All learners across B-Skill are assessed for literacy and numeracy by the skills development manager. She arranges for results to be fed back and also currently supports all learners who have literacy or numeracy needs in the workplace. Two new posts have been created to provide more support for learners who will now be part of E2E. New resources have been bought to support this wider role and there are plans to purchase more. A work-based learning development officer is now in an established role to widen employment opportunities for E2E learners. All staff have a support role with learners as they progress to other opportunities. They contact learners each month to ensure good aftercare. New E2E learners are still in the initial assessment stage, so the aftercare arrangements seen at reinspection referred to Life Skills learners who progressed onto the E2E programme.