

INSPECTION REPORT

B-Skill Limited

09 June 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

B-Skill Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. B-Skill Limited (B-Skill) was established in 2000 to provide training in vocational and pre-vocational courses in South Tyneside, Gateshead, North Tyneside and Newcastle. The provider works with schools and community organisations and offers training in cleaning and employability. B-Skill provides entry to employment (E2E) training for young people, and Train to Gain programmes for adult learners. B-Skill is a lead contractor for E2E, working in partnership with a number of local and national providers to deliver E2E in South Tyneside. The provider also works with local schools to deliver training to students aged 14 to 19 years of age.

2. B-Skill is owned by its two directors. The senior management team shares responsibility for strategic management. One director is directly responsible for the central business functions, which include the financial management of the company. The other director is responsible for all programme delivery operations, as well as community initiatives and European Social Fund (ESF) connections. This director also takes a lead role in the management of quality assurance. B-Skill has 33 full-time and nine part-time staff. A business improvement manager is responsible for quality improvement and the monitoring of subcontractors. There are also two local area managers for the north, a southern area manager, and a customer service manager.

3. The provider's head office is in Newcastle and it has training centres in South Shields, Hebburn, Leeds and a further centre in Harlow. There are currently no learners at the Harlow training centre. There are seven main E2E training delivery sites, including some subcontracted provision. Train to Gain programmes are provided in the Northeast region and the Yorkshire and Humberside region. B-Skill is expanding its activities in Leeds and is planning to expand into other regions. The provider's activities in South Shields are currently being relocated to a town centre site.

4. Many of the Tyneside's traditional industries such as shipbuilding and mining have been replaced by a growth in the service sector. Factors influencing the local economy include poor educational achievement, and high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. In March 2005, the unemployment rate for South Tyneside was 8.5 per cent, compared with 6.7 per cent in Tyne and Wear and 4.7 per cent nationally. In Tyne and Wear, 42 per cent of learners achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above in 2001, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, the provision of health, public services and care, and preparation for life and work is good. Leadership and management and quality improvement are good, and equality of opportunity arrangements are satisfactory.

6. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment**

process. Self-assessment is thorough and inclusive, and based on a wide range of evidence and information. It is critical and produces a development plan. All staff and the key partners are involved in the process. A small team of managers refines the report following staff consultations. Inspectors' findings matched the self-assessed grades and most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the provider.

7. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

The self-assessment process produces an action plan which is monitored thoroughly. The provider has changed its provision since the reinspection of 2003. Retention and achievement rates have improved significantly. Subcontractors are monitored thoroughly and good practice is shared effectively with partners. Changes are introduced quickly and inspectors were able to identify many recent improvements to the learners' experiences.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR B-SKILL LIMITED:

- continue to improve retention and progression of learners
- maintain the strong partnerships
- increase the formal recording and reporting systems
- improve resources for E2E learners
- improve the planning of training

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		2

Health, public services and care			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Cleaning		2	
Train to Gain	119	2	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Employability training		2	
Other government-funded provision	57	2	
Entry to Employment	99	2	
Train to Gain	18	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. Train to Gain and E2E programmes were inspected over a period of four days. This was the only visit. Inspectors did not report on the small number of apprentices who are still on programme.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	13
Number of learners interviewed	33
Number of staff interviewed	28
Number of employers interviewed	7
Number of subcontractors interviewed	5
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	13
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	4

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **The retention and achievement rates for Train to Gain learners are good.** In 2004-05, 95 per cent of learners completed the programme and 86 per cent achieved their target qualifications. All 119 learners who began training in 2005-06 are still on programme.

10. Train to Gain learners improve their practical skills. Employers are more confident about the quality of learners' work and many report that learners are now more motivated. However some learners make slow progress, taking longer to achieve their goals than expected.

11. The progression rates for learners from E2E programmes in 2004-05 were satisfactory and have improved during 2005-06. Standards of learners' work are generally satisfactory. Learners on E2E programmes work towards nationally recognised qualifications in literacy and numeracy. All learners have opportunities to attend courses on basic first aid, food hygiene, health and safety in the workplace and manual handling.

12. **Achievements by Train to Gain learners on literacy courses are good.** Sixty-eight learners enrolled on level one literacy courses, and 82 per cent of learners achieved this qualification.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Preparation for life and work	0	0	3	1	4
Total	0	0	3	1	4

13. The literacy support for Train to Gain learners is very good. All learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. A qualified skills for life tutor visits learners in the workplace one day each week until they complete the level one literacy qualification. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Lessons are well planned. Excellent literacy resources have been developed to support learners. Learners receive detailed action plans and progress reviews on their literacy courses.

14. Specialist learning resources for the cleaning programme are good. Assessors take out specialist cleaning equipment for training sessions to ensure that learners get to use a wide range of industry-specific equipment and machinery. B-Skill has provided a good-quality learning resource pack for learners and employers.

15. Assessments are satisfactory. Learners have regular contact with their assessor. Assessment visits are arranged at times to meet the needs of learners and employers, regardless of shift patterns. However, action-planning is brief and some plans are not clear. Portfolios have a good range of evidence. All learners have access to professional information advice and guidance workers where a need is identified, or the learner requests it.

16. Employers are involved with the programme to a satisfactory extent. B-Skill employs a full-time customer care officer to liaise with employers. All employers are provided with a comprehensive employers' pack which gives relevant programme information. Employers are kept informed of learners' progress.

17. Training is poorly planned. Information about learners' experiences and abilities is collected at induction, but this is not used to plan learning effectively. Many learners are making slow progress and are receiving unnecessary training. For some learners the sequencing of training is poor.

18. The provider has good individual support arrangements with Connexions for E2E and preparation for progression learners. The Connexions service gives advice and guidance to potential learners before they enrol. The Connexions personal adviser attends monthly reviews with learners in centres and provides support on progression when learners complete their training.

19. The preparation for progression programme provides a wide range of good activities for learners. These include courses in rugby coaching, fire brigade training and teambuilding and a residential visit to the Keilder Forest. Learners are enthusiastic about these activities.

20. Additional support for learners is good. Learners are supported by B-Skill's staff, a team of mentors and the specialist E2E Connexions officer. Mentors support learners in classes, at the training centres and other locations. All learners receive literacy and numeracy support in group sessions and many of them work towards nationally recognised qualifications.

21. The induction of learners and learners' progress reviews are satisfactory. Following

induction, health and safety, and equality and diversity are reinforced throughout the programmes. Learners take a certificate in health and safety in the workplace before joining work placements.

Leadership and management

22. **B-Skill's managers have provided strong leadership to manage and achieve major changes to the way in which B-Skill delivers its services to learners.** The provider has successfully introduced E2E and Train to Gain programmes, expanded its non-government funded provision, developed partnerships and established training centres outside the region.

23. Staff feel involved in the progress that the provider is making to meet the needs of its learners. B-Skill has invested in communications systems, including a very effective intranet software program to ensure that staff and partners are well informed. Many key processes have been reviewed recently and been implemented, but it is too soon to judge their effects.

24. **B-Skill has developed strong and innovative local partnerships.** The directors have set a clear strategic direction which sets partnership and collaboration at the centre of its strategy for growth and improved opportunities for learners. Existing partnerships are well established. In response to the area inspection of South Tyneside, B-Skill and other partners have developed a consortium. This consortium has funded and developed a one-stop shop for learners in South Tyneside town centre. There are also successful partnerships with employers. Partnership activities are successful in widening participation and supporting learners.

25. B-Skill has a detailed retention and progression policy. **It has taken successful actions to improve the retention and progression of learners over the past year.**

26. The provider's access to and use of data is much improved and is now satisfactory. The management information system is available to all of B-Skill's sites and to its partners. However, data is not always available for individual teams to monitor the performances of their learners.

27. **Some of the provider's teaching and learning resources are poor.** Some buildings are inadequate and there is not enough basic equipment for some occupational areas. The provider plans to rectify this situation. The staff teaching the vocational subjects are not all appropriately qualified.

28. Data is used effectively to monitor the progress of groups of learners. However, targets have not been set to improve participation by under-represented groups and remove barriers to learning.

29. B-Skill has identified the equality and diversity training needs of some of its staff, and a series of targeted training activities has been arranged. Access to most training sites is adequate, but there is no lift or wheelchair access at the main office in Newcastle.

30. One of B-Skill's key objectives is that the provision should meet common and continuously improving standards. Regular feedback from learners, partners and staff is analysed. Managers respond quickly and effectively to resolve issues which are identified

from this and other quality assurance activities.

31. **Subcontractors are thoroughly monitored.** B-Skill is committed to supporting its partners to meet its exacting standards. The business improvement manager makes regular and frequent visits to the subcontractors and to B-Skill's training centres, where he carries out thorough monitoring of the provision. Contracts are detailed and include challenging targets, but there are no service-level agreements.

32. Internal verification is satisfactory. A senior internal verifier co-ordinates these activities and provides good support for the occupational internal verifiers and assessors.

33. There is not enough formal reporting and recording of quality improvements. A useful business improvement log records some actions, but there is no summary of the finding of quality assurance activities to develop action plans, bring about improvements, or measure success. Lesson observations are not analysed to provide information about teaching and learning in the self-assessment report. The observation of the teaching and learning process does not lead to changes in practice. There are very few opportunities for staff to share good practice in teaching and learning.

34. Quality improvement policies and procedures are published on the provider's intranet and are available to all staff. However, some staff have only a basic awareness of quality improvement.

35. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive, and is based on a wide range of evidence and information. However, there are no contributory self-assessment reports on the various parts of the provision, such as the construction training delivered as part of E2E, or individual B-Skill training centres. Staff cannot accurately assess their contribution to the provider's success.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong leadership and management to bring about change
- innovative partnerships
- successful actions to improve the retention and progression of learners
- good actions to bring about continuous improvement
- thorough monitoring of subcontractors

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal reporting and recording of quality improvement processes

Health, public services and care

Cleaning

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good support for learners' literacy needs

- good specialist learning resources

Weaknesses

- poor planning of training

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good achievement of literacy qualifications on Train to Gain courses
- good individual support arrangements with Connexions
- extensive range of good preparation for progression activities
- good additional support for all learners

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching and learning resources

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT B-SKILL LIMITED:

- 'for me it is an achievement'
- 'good support visits by assessor'
- 'I have learnt more about my job'
- 'tutor approachable and makes learning fun'
- 'the opportunity to try different trades'
- 'the practical training'
- 'meeting lots of new people and learning lots of new things'
- 'being able to study at work'
- 'the brilliant tutors'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK B-SKILL LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- accuracy of information - the words in the candidate log book are misleading
- the time allowed at work to study for the national vocational qualification (NVQ)
- the amount of construction placements
- the length of sessions - they are too short
- the length of the programme - it is too short

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- strong leadership and management to bring about change
- innovative partnerships
- successful actions to improve the retention and progression of learners
- good actions to bring about continuous improvement
- thorough monitoring of subcontractors

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal reporting and recording of quality improvement processes

36. B-Skill's managers have provided good leadership to manage and achieve major changes to the way in which B-Skill delivers its services to learners. Since the reinspection in 2003, the provider has changed its programmes. It no longer offers apprenticeships, and all learners are recruited to E2E, planning for progression, or Train to Gain programmes. B-Skill's existing apprentices were supported appropriately to complete their training. The provider has also successfully extended its privately funded provision, and developed partnerships and training centres outside the region.

37. A well-defined, well-structured management team with line management roles and responsibilities provides good systems for communications with all staff. All staff feel involved in the progress that B-Skill is making to meet the needs of its learners. Staff feel valued. They are proud of B-Skill and have the opportunity to contribute to the provider's development. Good communications systems ensure that staff and partners are well informed. The meeting structure is effective, with standard agendas and minutes, a weekly team briefing, and a very effective intranet which is also available to partners. Many key processes have been reviewed recently. These processes are in operation, but it is too soon to be able to evaluate their effects. The processes include appraisals, training needs analyses and the process for observations of teaching and learning.

38. The provider has established strong and innovative local partnerships. The directors have set a clear strategic direction for B-Skill, which sets partnership and collaboration at the centre of a strategy for growth and improved opportunities for learners. There are clear rationales for existing and proposed partnerships. B-Skill is the lead provider of E2E in South Tyneside. The subcontracted providers include national and local providers and a local further education college. The partnerships are well established. All partners have a good knowledge of each other's provision and learners are often referred to other programmes. External speakers and activities for learners are shared by partners.

39. In response to the area inspection of South Tyneside, B-Skill and other partners including South Tyneside College and Support Training have developed a consortium. This consortium has jointly funded a training and advice centre in South Tyneside. All partners are represented, and joint advice and guidance services provide a one-stop shop

for learners. A shared process for initial assessment and quality improvement is planned and progression routes for learners have been identified. Further progression opportunities are being developed. The consortium hopes to improve the services to learners by recruiting additional partners. The provider also has successful partnerships with employers.

40. B-Skill has a successful retention and progression policy. The retention and progression of learners has improved over the past year. Learners' progress is monitored thoroughly. All learners are risk-assessed, and prompt and rapid action is taken to retain learners on programme. This has sometimes included intervention by Connexions' advisers and B-Skill's managers. When a subcontractor who delivered construction training recently ceased training, B-Skill established a construction training centre and employed a specialist trainer within two weeks. All learners were retained on the programme.

41. Access to and use of data is much improved and is now satisfactory. Data is accurate and easily available. A range of reports is produced to enable managers to monitor performance. The management information system is also available at all of the provider's sites, and to all partners through the intranet. However, data is not always available to enable individual teams to monitor the performances of their learners. For example, data is not available for the construction learners on E2E, and success rates are not analysed for each of the provider's training centres.

42. The emphasis on health and safety is appropriate. Learners receive instruction in health and safety and in using personal protective equipment. B-Skill is currently upgrading its health and safety practice, including risk assessment, by using external consultants.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

43. B-Skill widens participation in its programmes effectively. The provider uses a wide range of publicity and marketing methods to recruit learners. Staff attend advice and guidance events at school and community venues, and B-Skill's leaflets are informative and contain positive images. However, the text in some of the information for learners is too complex. The provider's staff work with client groups such as pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers. A planning for progression programme has been introduced successfully. This programme provides opportunities for young people who are not in education, employment or training and are not ready to begin the E2E programme.

44. Equality and diversity are introduced satisfactorily. On the E2E programme, good use is made of resources to reinforce learners' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity. All learners have a useful and informative guidance sheet. Before placing learners with employers, or training employed learners, a check is made of the employers' equality policies and, where necessary, the B-Skill customer service manager helps employers to write such a policy.

45. Data is used effectively to monitor the progress of groups of learners. However, targets are not set for the recruitment of under-represented groups and to remove barriers to learning. B-Skill has identified the equality and diversity training needs of some staff and a series of targeted training activities has been arranged. The first sessions have been well attended and enjoyed by the staff. Access to most sites is adequate, but there is no lift or

wheelchair access to the main office in Newcastle. The selection and recruitment of staff is satisfactory, and follows written procedures.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

46. The provider has taken effective action to bring about continuous improvement. One of the key company objectives is that the provision should meet common and continuously improving standards. A number of quality improvement processes exist, including regular feedback from learners, stakeholders and staff. All learners and staff can complete online questionnaires on the intranet. These surveys are analysed by the business improvement manager and discussed at management meetings. Managers respond quickly and effectively to resolve any issues identified. Actions taken may focus on individual learners, such as when an incident of harassment was identified and resolved, or on whole groups of learners.

47. The business improvement manager makes regular and frequent visits to the subcontractors and to B-Skill's training centres. He monitors the provision thoroughly. This includes monitoring the quality of provision, as well as auditing the systems and processes. Where areas for improvement are identified, detailed development plans are produced which identify actions to be taken. B-Skill monitors how effectively the issues are resolved. Where subcontractors do not meet the required standards, the contract may be withdrawn, but B-Skill is committed to supporting partners to meet its exacting standards. Good practice is shared at regular monthly meetings which are attended by all partners and chaired by Connexions' officers. B-Skill's managers frequently arrange external speakers to attend these events, in order to share information and to improve learners' opportunities. Contracts are detailed and include challenging targets, but there are no service-level agreements.

48. Quality improvement is not formally reported and recorded sufficiently. A useful business improvement log records some actions, but there is no summary of the findings of quality assurance activities to develop action plans, and bring about improvements or measure success. The observations of the teaching and learning process are satisfactory and include learners' progress reviews. Staff receive helpful feedback and their training needs are identified. However, there is no analysis of learning session observations to use in the self-assessment process. No improvements have been made to the planning of teaching and learning.

49. Quality improvement policies and procedures are published on B-Skill's intranet and are available to all staff. However, some staff have only a basic understanding of quality improvement. Learners from B-Skill and its subcontractors complete questionnaires electronically on the intranet. The results are shared with staff and the information is used in the self-assessment process, but this information is not used sufficiently to improve learners' experiences.

50. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive, and is based on a wide range of evidence and information. Inspectors' findings matched the grades identified in the self-assessment report. However, there are no contributory self-assessment reports for the various parts of the provision, such as the construction training delivered as part of E2E, or individual B-Skill training centres. Staff cannot accurately assess their contribution to the provider's success.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Cleaning Train to Gain	119	2 2

51. B-Skill has 119 learners on cleaning programmes. Of those learners, 116 are working towards the cleaning and support services level 2 NVQ and three learners are working towards the caretaking level 2 NVQ. Twenty-nine learners are on programmes in Yorkshire and Humberside. All of the learners are on Train to Gain programmes. There are four assessors, one full time and three part time. These are supported by an internal verifier, and the lead internal verifier. All staff are appropriately qualified, and have relevant occupational expertise. B-Skill uses a marketing company to recruit client companies and engage their staff as learners. All training and assessment is carried out in the workplace. Companies' specific training needs are agreed before programmes begin. B-Skill works with a range of companies which includes NHS trusts, care homes, large and small contract cleaning companies and local authorities.

Cleaning

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very good support for learners' literacy needs
- good specialist learning resources

Weaknesses

- poor planning of training

Achievement and standards

52. Retention and achievement rates are good. In 2004-05, of the 313 learners who began the programme, 95 per cent completed the training and 86 per cent achieved their target qualification. Sixty-eight learners enrolled for an additional qualification in literacy at level one, and 82 per cent of them achieved this qualification. All 119 learners who began programmes during 2005-06 are still in training. They have improved their practical skills and employers are confident about the quality of work produced by learners after they complete their training. Many employers report that learners are now more motivated and employee retention has improved. However some learners make slow progress.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Adult training (long courses)	2003-04	overall	121	97		0	
		timely	135	70		0	
	2004-05	overall	285	96		0	
		timely	271	95		0	
	2005-06	overall	180	88		0	
		timely	235	61		0	

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

53. Literacy support for learners is very good. All learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills during their inductions. Learners identified as needing literacy support are provided with a qualified skills for life tutor. Some learners choose not to accept this support, but learners are offered the support again by their assessor when they have gained confidence in their programme. At this stage more learners accept the offer of literacy support. Nineteen learners are enrolled on courses leading to a level one qualification in literacy. The tutor visits learners in the workplace one day each week until they complete their literacy qualification. Lessons are well planned, and have been adapted to meet learners' needs. For example, the tutor uses terms and language that are appropriate to the learners' work roles. Excellent contextualised learning resources have been developed to support the learners. They receive detailed action plans and progress reviews as part of their literacy courses, to ensure that they understand what they need to do and what progress they are making. This good practice in the planning of learning is not shared with the occupational assessors.

54. Specialist learning resources are good. Assessors take specialist cleaning equipment to training sessions to ensure that learners get used to a wide range of industrial equipment and machinery. Where specific training needs are identified, employers are provided with written codes of practice to help them develop safe practices and support the training needs of their learners. B-Skill has produced a good-quality learning resource pack for learners and employers. This pack includes information about safe working practices, standard operating procedures, information about equipment that the learners may not have access to, and provides quizzes, exercises and tutor support materials. This detailed information is linked directly to the NVQ standards.

55. Assessment is satisfactory. All learners are visited each month, but most learners are visited every two weeks. Assessment visits are arranged at times to meet the needs of the learners and the employers, and to ensure that all learners have equal access to assessment, regardless of the shift patterns. Learners are given time at work for assessment visits. However, there is not enough action-planning, and there is some confusion about where to record action points. Some action points are recorded on progress review sheets and some on the action plan sheet. Learners' portfolios contain a

good range of evidence to make the most of assessment opportunities. Some of the portfolios make good use of a diverse range of evidence.

56. Initial advice and guidance is provided externally before learners enrol on the programme. All learners have access to professional information, advice and guidance workers where the need is identified, or the learner requests it.

57. Training is poorly planned. Detailed skills scans are completed as part of an occupational initial assessment and all learners complete an initial assessment in literacy. Learners' prior achievements and experience are also discussed and documented. The results of these activities are not used to plan learning accurately. All learners begin on the same units and follow a similar learning plan for the NVQ, working for the same length of time on the same sequence of modules, regardless of their prior experience and qualifications. Some learners' training needs are not identified soon enough. Many learners are making slow progress and are receiving unnecessary training. For some learners the sequencing of training is inappropriate.

Leadership and management

58. Employers' involvement in training is satisfactory. B-Skill employs a full-time customer care officer to liaise with the employers. The provider holds meetings with prospective employers to identify their needs, and establish effective relationships. All employers are provided with a comprehensive employers' pack giving relevant programme information. Employers are kept informed of learners' progress. Detailed contract reviews are carried out periodically on employers who have 10 or more learners, in order to monitor performance, which includes learners' progress, and to obtain feedback from employers.

59. Internal verification is satisfactory. The internal verifier has appropriate sampling plans and carries out satisfactory levels of sampling. A senior internal verifier co-ordinates internal verification processes throughout all the schemes, including standardisation and the sharing of good practice. The senior verifier provides good support for the occupational internal verifiers. Assessors receive detailed feedback reports and any necessary actions are followed up. The internal verifier spends at least one day each month with each assessor to observe assessment activity and provide ongoing support. Learners are interviewed by the internal verifier to gain feedback about the assessment process. However, the internal verifier does not make it clear when sampling, if the assessment is summative or formative. All tutors are observed teaching twice each year. Feedback is given to the tutors, together with a development plan if appropriate.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i>		2
Other government-funded provision	57	2
Entry to Employment	99	2
Train to Gain	18	2

60. B-Skill holds the main contract for E2E provision in South Tyneside and offers a range of vocational training. The provider has enrolled 185 young people on the E2E programme since August 2005. Ninety learners were enrolled with B-Skill, and the remainder with the five subcontractors. Of the 99 learners currently on the programme, 52 are men. Forty-two of those still in training are with B-Skill. Progress reviews take place at least every four weeks. A wide range of work placements is available for E2E learners with over 20 employers involved. The average length of stay of E2E learners on the programme is 28 weeks. Eighteen learners are on Train to Gain courses in literacy and these learners are also enrolled on level 2 NVQ cleaning courses.

61. B-Skill has enrolled 57 learners on the planning for progression programme since it began in September 2005. This is a 16-week programme funded by the ESF and is designed for learners who are not ready to go straight to the E2E provision. Of the 57 learners on this programme, 39 are enrolled with B-Skill and the remainder are enrolled with partners.

62. Learners may join E2E or the planning for progression programme at any time and attend one of the training centres at South Shields or Hebburn. All learners receive a comprehensive induction to the programmes and complete initial assessments in literacy and numeracy. Nine per cent of all learners are from minority ethnic groups and 23 per cent have a disclosed disability.

Strengths

- good achievement of literacy qualifications on Train to Gain courses
- good individual support arrangements with Connexions
- extensive range of good preparation for progression activities
- good additional support for all learners

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching and learning resources

Achievement and standards

63. The progression rates for learners are improving. Progression rates from E2E programmes for 2004-05 were satisfactory. Of the 262 learners who began the programme, 44 per cent progressed to further employment or further training. A further 2 per cent are still in training. Of the 185 E2E learners who began in 2005-06, 50 have already progressed to employment or further training, 39 have completed and 95 are still

in training. In 2004-05, 54 per cent of learners left without completing their programmes, but this figure has been reduced to 22 per cent for the first 10 months of the period 2005-06. Of the 57 learners who enrolled on the new planning for progression programmes which began in September 2005, 27 have completed their courses successfully.

64. Train to Gain learners achieve well on literacy courses. Of the 68 learners who enrolled on this course in 2004-05, 82 per cent achieved the literacy qualification, in addition to their NVQ.

65. Standards of learners' work are generally satisfactory. Learners on E2E programmes work towards nationally recognised qualifications in literacy and numeracy. All learners have opportunities to attend courses on basic first aid, food hygiene, health and safety in the workplace and manual handling. To help develop their personal and social skills, learners attend courses on effective interaction skills. B-Skill celebrates success by nominating a learner to be achiever of the month.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Inspection:

LSC funded work-based learning																
Entry to Employment	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	185		262	100	329	100	0	100								
Progression ¹	50		116	44	144	44	0	100								
Achieved objectives ²	39		100	38	90	27	0	100								
Still in learning	95		4	2	0	0	0	100								

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

Train to Gain Skills for Life																
Train to Gain Skills for Life	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	19		68	100	78	100										
Retained*	1		59	87	54	69										
Successfully completed	0		56	82	46	59										
Still in learning	18		0	0	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

The quality of provision

66. Individual support arrangements with Connexions are good. The Connexions service gives advice and guidance to potential learners before they enrol on planning for progression or E2E programmes. Prospective learners are given choices and must make a positive decision to join a programme. Learners are then referred to B-Skill which, as the main contract holder for these programmes, arranges an interview and initial assessment to ensure that learners are placed on the correct programme and with the appropriate

subcontractor. The Connexions personal adviser remains in contact with the learner throughout the programme. Connexions' staff attend the learners' monthly progress reviews in the training centres. The personal adviser provides support for progression at the end of the learners' programme. There is also a designated E2E programme Connexions personal adviser. This adviser supports learners who may be at risk of leaving the E2E programmes before completing them.

67. B-Skill provides a wide range of good activities for learners, particularly those on the planning for progression programme. During this 16-week programme, learners attend a variety of activities including a week-long rugby coaching course and a fire brigade training course. Other activities include teambuilding and taking part in a residential visit to the Keilder Forest where learners help with general maintenance and construction work for a voluntary organisation. Learners are enthusiastic about these activities, especially the week spent with the fire brigade. At the end of the week, learners take part in a full-scale practice, including the use of a fire engine.

68. Additional support for learners is good. B-Skill has taken part in a scheme to train independent mentors for young people and now uses this service for its learners. Learners who are experiencing difficulties are referred to this independent mentoring service by the B-Skill learner advocate co-ordinator, or by the specialist E2E Connexions adviser. The mentors are able to meet with learners away from the training centres, to discuss personal and social problems. All learners receive literacy and numeracy support in group sessions and many of them work towards national qualifications. B-Skill identifies and makes suitable provision for learners with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

69. Literacy training for Train to Gain learners is well planned. The detailed initial assessment is used to plan learning programmes which take place in the workplace or at one of the training centres. Targets are set and monitored. The tutor visits the workplace regularly and has developed good literacy resources to support the learners.

70. Learners' progress reviews are satisfactory. Reviews take place at least every four weeks. The learner and the tutor are joined by the Connexions personal adviser at the review. Appropriate targets are set for learners. The targets for E2E learners are recorded online on the E2E passport during the review process.

71. The induction of learners is satisfactory. Learners attend a two and half day induction, at the South Shields training centre. They receive comprehensive outline of what they can expect from their programmes, and information on health and safety and equal opportunities. Initial assessment is satisfactory. At induction learners complete literacy and numeracy tests and plans are made for any appropriate support that they may require.

72. B-Skill's promotion of health and safety is satisfactory. Following induction, health and safety matters are reinforced throughout the programmes. Learners work for a certificate in health and safety in the workplace before they are placed.

Leadership and management

73. Equality and diversity is promoted by B-Skill's staff. Learners and staff discuss equal opportunities and diversity at induction and before attending work placements. There are regular sessions for learners to raise their awareness of equality and diversity. Staff training

has included a course on ageism.

74. The self-assessment process is satisfactory, and includes staff contributions. However, the report's findings matched some of the strengths identified by inspectors, but not the weaknesses. The E2E provision in construction delivered by B-Skill was not evaluated separately. B-Skill's staff who teach vocational subjects do not always have appropriate vocational qualifications. Observations of teaching and learning are not thorough enough and do not always lead to changes in working practice. Although communications among staff are generally satisfactory, there are very few opportunities for staff to share good practice in teaching and learning.

75. Some of the teaching and learning resources are poor. The accommodation at the training centre at South Shields, although about to be changed, does not currently support good-quality teaching and learning. The teaching rooms are small and it is difficult to control the temperature. The teaching room at the Hebburn site can only accommodate a maximum of four learners and the computers. There is insufficient basic equipment in the workshop. In one session, three of the five learners could not take part in all of the practical activities and tutors did not have a coping strategy to deal with this situation. There were spelling mistakes on some of the work displayed in the skills for life teaching rooms.

