

BL Training Limited

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Description of the provider

1. BL Training Limited (BLHT) is a privately owned company providing apprenticeships in hairdressing to 459 learners in the North East. The company has contracts with Local LSC in County Durham, Northumberland, Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear. Off-the-job training is provided at five training centres in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Durham and Sunderland. A new centre is due to open during the summer of 2007 in Ashington. Head office is located in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne city centre, where a managing director and the administration team are based. Two senior managers provide operational leadership to the five centre managers, with a further three managers responsible for quality assurance, information and communication technology (ICT) and administration support. In total BLHT has 37 staff, most of whom are full-time employees.
2. Most learners are recruited through Connexions, employer referral or BLHT's marketing and attendance at careers events. Currently 59 of the 459 learners are advanced apprentices. Learners on apprenticeship programmes are employed and attend off-the-job training for theory, practical and key skills training and assessment. Attendance patterns at the centres are negotiated and agreed between learners, their employers and tutors. The main pattern of attendance is one day every alternate week. Some learners attend the centre for related theory and key skill training and assessment only. For these learners, all practical training and assessment is completed on-the-job. BLHT works with 302 salons, of which 35 have work-based assessors. BLHT assessors visit salons every four weeks to complete on-the-job assessments. Learner progress reviews are completed in salon every 12 weeks and involve the learners with their employer.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good Grade 2

Sector subject area

Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards are satisfactory while the quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity are good. Provision in hairdressing is also good.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

4. Senior managers effectively use staff evaluations, audits produced as part of the quality cycle and management data to inform self-assessment judgements. Inspection findings substantiated many of the strengths and areas for improvement identified by BLHT. The report is succinct and generally evaluative in its summaries of provision. The quality improvement plan is detailed with targets and impact indicators linked to measurable outcomes. All staff receive a leaflet summarising the key strengths and areas for improvement and an explanation of the processes that informed the judgements.
5. BLHT has good and comprehensive strategies for continual improvement. Quality assurance audits are systematic and scheduled at appropriate times of the year to inform staff development and operational planning. Good and carefully planned improvements benefit from the inclusion of staff, employers and learners in the evaluation process. Success rates for apprenticeships have improved during 2006-07, while the numbers of learners who leave the programme early have reduced. Weaknesses identified at the previous inspection are all resolved. BLHT's use of management information systems and business planning were judged as weaknesses at the previous inspection and are now strengths. During 2003-04, BLHT bought out one training provider and took over a contract from another. Quality assurance and improvement monitoring is now established through the five training sites. However, there are some remaining issues on the quality of some level 3 assessments. Currently BLHT is working to improve the staff appraisal process, the strategy for gathering employer views and the process of risk assessing employer salons.

Key strengths

- Apprentices develop good practical skills
- Good teaching and learning
- Good learning support for individual learners
- Good and supportive employers
- Very comprehensive review process
- Good strategic planning
- Good and inclusive curriculum planning
- Good use of information systems
- Very effective quality monitoring and actions for improvement

Key areas for improvement

- Slow progress of learners
- Some insufficiently robust assessment practice for advanced apprentices
- Poor use of appraisal to achieve organisational objectives
- Insufficiently structured processes for gathering and taking action on learners views

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. Apprentices develop good practical skills early in their programme. In their first year of training they are able to demonstrate advanced colouring and cutting techniques. Learners benefit from working in good quality salons and use role models effectively to replicate good standards of practice. Many work independently exhibiting good levels of competency in the selection and completion of client services. As they complete their apprentice programme, many are working on clients in their salons.
7. Apprenticeship success rates overall are satisfactory. Apprentice success rates were 59% in 2004-05 but declined to 46% in 2005-06. Success rates for 2006-07 are much improved with 73% of learners who have left the programme completing the framework. Advanced apprentice success rates have also improved. Success rates between 2004 and 2006 were 26% and 23% respectively. Of the learners who have left the programme in 2006-07, 65% have completed the framework.
8. Improving learners' computer skills is an integral part of the hairdressing curriculum and a mandatory requirement for assignments. All learners have the option of an additional information technology (IT) key skill qualification and 53% of learners are working toward the award. Of the 32 learners who have taken the written component, 100% have been successful.
9. Learners are not progressing and achieving in a timely fashion. Timely success rates are consistently poor and below national averages. The company attributes the poor timely success rates to the non-alignment of the LSC contract period of 20 months and the learners individual learning plans based on a 24-month training period. However, of the 420 learners still with individual learning plans of 24 months, 20% of learners are 10% or more behind target.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. Overall, the quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are also good. Detailed and considered schemes of work identify and co-ordinate off-the-job and on-the-job training. Employers use the schemes effectively to plan supportive and related training within their salons. Lesson plans integrate key skills, equality and diversity and include a good range of activities to meet the learning needs of the group. Although tutors share the lesson topic with learners' this does not always include the expected learning outcomes. Learners are interested, motivated and challenged to produce good standards of work. Learners are conversant with key skills and their relevance in hairdressing. They value and benefit from employer

visits to the centres to give demonstrations and talks on current and emerging influences in hairdressing. Product manufacturers and photographic sessions together with the annual hairdressing shows provide further good additional learning opportunities.

11. Learners have good individual support. BLHT identifies all learners' additional learning support as part of a thorough initial assessment. These learners together with learners who fall 10% behind their targets are effectively monitored at weekly team meetings. Good and effective actions to support learners include additional salon visits and one to one sessions with their assessors, referral to external specialist agencies and re-negotiated training plans. Literacy and numeracy needs of learners are well supported. Many of BLHT's staff are qualified at key skills level 2 or 3, with all remaining staff working towards the qualifications.
12. Frequent and comprehensive learner progress reviews effectively monitor achievements and additional training needs. Learners receive good and effective advice and guidance on areas requiring improvement and the training opportunities available to them. Employers are actively involved, commenting on learner's progress and agreeing training plans. Detailed action plans set meaningful targets that are time based, measurable and systematically revisited at the following review. Promotion of equality of opportunity is particularly good and parents of learners under the age of 18 receive a copy of the review.
13. Good and supportive employers provide learners with well-planned and effective on-the-job training. Employers use the detailed training plans and review targets to support learners' skill development. The well-conceived employer pack produced by BLHT is used by employers in understanding the apprenticeship framework. They plan training and assessment opportunities within their salons and give time for additional off-the-job training where appropriate. Employer evaluations effectively assess new initiatives as part of BLHT's quality assurance process. Ten employers across the region were involved in the four prestigious hair shows designed to raise the image of hairdressing to prospective learners and highlight new trends to existing learners.
14. Assessment overall is satisfactory. Assessment is regular with some employers actively involved in on-the-job assessment. However, there is some insufficiently robust assessment practice at level 3. Assessor feedback is not always detailed enough to help and guide learners to improve and there is an over-reliance on pictorial evidence.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

15. Leadership and management are good and good strategic planning is evidenced at all levels of provision. BLHT's active involvement with local and regional provider networks effectively informs business and development planning. Through a robust and comprehensive review of current practice and external initiatives, senior managers have identified six key priorities. Each of the three senior managers takes responsibility for two priority areas and develops minimum standards, operational objectives and action plans. Carefully monitored action plans and progress reports are shared at the monthly senior managers meetings. Communication throughout the company is good. Summary explanations of the priorities are distributed to staff in leaflet form and staff are conversant with, and fully understand annual strategic aims. Good management strategies include staff incentive schemes, good financial forecasting and high staff participation in implementing the development objectives. BLHT staff have established good links with schools and have successfully completed a level 1 programme for Key Stage 4 learners. Staff at each centre act as business ambassadors, attending local schools as role models and assisting youngsters in developing good interview skills.
16. Curriculum evaluation and planning is constant and inclusive. Staff from all centres contribute to focus groups which evaluate and further develop all key learning processes. Learner and employer views on programme content and methods of training are considered. To reduce repetition the assessments, assignments and written test are designed to integrate vocational, key skill, and ICT qualification requirements. This approach has been successfully extended to map level 2 qualification requirements into level 3. Well constructed equality and diversity training is further reinforced by good and meaningful questioning during review.
17. BLHT's management information system is reliable, accessible and used by all staff to effectively monitor learner progress against targets. Staff input learner achievements through the use of hand-held personal computers. Reports, forecasts and predicted outcomes are regularly presented at senior manager meetings, team meetings and staff development sessions. Information used to risk assess and quality assure placement salons is less robust. BLHT intend to extend salon monitoring to include an employers commitment to the qualitative aspects of training.
18. A well defined quality assurance cycle is scheduled, implemented, and reported on at relevant points throughout the year. Detailed and critical auditing of practice has initiated the use of consultants, employer forums and staff focus groups in developing and improving the provision. Teaching and learning observations are completed at all stages of the programme. Although the

documentation focuses on teaching, the judgements recorded in better observations are evaluative and learner focused. BLHT is developing new reports that focus on learners and learning. Development outcomes from lesson observations systematically inform BLHT's comprehensive staff development programme. Recruitment, learner success rates, reductions in early leavers, improvements in learner reviews, curriculum planning and the use of management information are much improved. Areas currently under development are staff appraisal, the observation of teaching and learning, employer feedback and the risk assessment of employer salons.

19. Equality of opportunity is good. BLHT's skills for life strategy is well established and all staff are qualified or working towards literacy and numeracy level 2 or 3. Good initiatives are in place to attract learners from minority ethnic groups and men. BLHT sponsors an 11 to 17 year old boxing club, a local football team and has good links with another provider working with Chinese learners. Carefully considered content and images in marketing material reflects BLHT's target group. Leaflets, posters and wallet cards promote staying healthy and safe. Drinks and cereal bars are available for all learners within the centres and as learners achieve targets, they receive hairdressing equipment to celebrate their success. Access to three of the five centres is restricted for learners and clients with limited mobility, particularly in Newcastle. BLHT is in the process of acquiring new premises with ground floor accommodation in Ashington.
20. BLHT has insufficient processes for collecting and responding to learner feedback. Although feedback is collected with regard to changes to paperwork and practice, there is no formal process for learners to provide general feedback on the provision as a whole.
21. Annual appraisal is insufficiently linked to the company key priorities and improvement plan. Staff have no personal targets and the outcomes of teaching and learning observations do not inform the appraisal process. Although development outcomes agreed during appraisal take account of the company's targets for literacy and numeracy qualifications, little is done to identify and meet staff training and development needs. BLHT is introducing a new process that better links to quality improvement targets.

What learners like:

- The help and support they receive from staff
- Their off-the-job training day
- The opportunity to work on clients
- Regular review and assessments
- Meeting friends
- Lessons combine fun with learning
- Relaxed atmosphere

What learners think could improve:

- More frequent attendance at the centre for off-the-job training
- More clients in some centres and more variety in others
- More demonstrations and practical content for level 3 learners
- More male hair cutting as part of the programme
- Less stairs to climb to get to theory classes at Newcastle
- Quicker distribution of the promised equipment when personal targets are reached

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes managed by the provider/college 2004 year to 2006 year

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners	Provider NVQ rate	National NVQ rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Hairdressing Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	97	*27%	43%	*23%	32%
		timely	111	*18%	27%	*14%	20%
	04-05	overall	39	38%	41%	26%	29%
		timely	38	11%	28%	11%	20%
	05-06	overall	62	35%	45%	23%	36%
		timely	60	8%	26%	8%	19%
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	190	*43%	63%	*35%	50%
		timely	197	*20%	39%	*18%	31%
	04-05	overall	160	69%	50%	59%	42%
		timely	166	39%	33%	36%	28%
	05-06	overall	338	48%	55%	46%	52%
		timely	419	22%	38%	21%	36%

* It is possible the LSC data is unreliable