

Blue Training UK Ltd

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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:

- Public services
- Retailing and wholesaling
- Hospitality and catering

Description of the provider

1. Blue Training UK Ltd (Blue Training) was established in 2003 and is based in Salford. The company has three main areas of provision which all focus on training and development. The work-based learning element accounts for 90% of the company's overall business. Greater Manchester LSC contracts directly with Blue Training and provides funding for apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. Currently 131 learners are completing qualifications in public services; retailing and wholesaling; and hospitality and catering. Training is carried out in the workplace, with a minimum amount being undertaken at the training centre in Salford. A managing director, an operations manager, two business development managers and 16 training, support and administrative staff support the management and delivery of these programmes. Blue Training also employ a number of consultants to advise on finance, health and safety and quality. Blue Training has developed significant partnership arrangements with two large employers.
2. Manchester has the fourth highest proportion of non-white population in England, at 19%, while in Salford minority ethnic groups make up only 4% of the population, compared with a national rate of 9.1%. The unemployment rate for Greater Manchester in 2005 was 2.5% compared with a national rate of 2.9%. Within the Greater Manchester area Salford has the highest rate of unemployment in the 16-24 age range and Manchester has the second largest unemployment rate nationally. In both Manchester and Salford progression rates into further education and training are low.

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: Inadequate: Grade 4

Sector subject areas

Public services	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Retailing and wholesaling	Good: Grade 2
Hospitality and catering	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The quality of provision is good, with good teaching and learning, good arrangements to meet the needs of learners and employers, and satisfactory support for learners. Leadership and management are good. The company is relatively new and undergoing a period of planned growth. Partnership arrangements to support developments are particularly effective. The company's approach to equality of opportunity and social inclusion is inadequate.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

4. The provider has not been inspected previously but has demonstrated it is in a good position to make improvements. Blue Training has a clear and strong commitment to continuously improve the quality of provision. Underperforming staff have been replaced, a competency framework has been introduced for staff, and a major investment in resources to support learners and staff has taken place. Success rates are good in retailing and wholesaling, and many learners are still on programme and making satisfactory or better progress in public services, and hospitality and catering. Good assessment practices and good partnership arrangements are a feature of all three sector subject areas. The commitment from employers is particularly good. Blue Training has a particularly effective management information system to support the capacity to improve. Good and established quality assurance arrangements are in place, many of which have been recently reviewed and improved further. Feedback from different stakeholders is collected, analysed and used well to improve provision. Regular audits are used effectively to identify improvements, and actions are put in place quickly. New initiatives have been introduced to develop additional good quality systems and procedures to support the planned growth. Although some of these have not yet been implemented or evaluated, many staff already have a good understanding of them. Work is ongoing to ensure all action-planning is co-ordinated and project managed. The self-assessment process is inclusive. Self-assessment is regarded by staff as an important tool for improving the quality of provision, and staff are proactive in identifying areas for change, and introducing improvements. Although the self-assessment report is not particularly evaluative or critical, the development plan is a detailed record of how important changes and actions are going to be implemented.

Key strengths

- Good strategic management

- Particularly effective management information system
- Good partnership arrangements

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient monitoring of access to portfolios
- Inadequate promotion of equality of opportunity

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Overall success rates for retailing and wholesaling for both apprentices and Train to Gain learners are good. Learners are developing good skills. In hospitality and catering, and public services achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners make satisfactory or better progress. Retention is high and learners demonstrate a broad range of occupational skills. It is too early in the programme for any overall success rates. Monitoring the performance of different groups of learners is detailed and effective.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

6. The quality of provision is good. Teaching, learning and assessment planning and practice are good across all three sector subject areas, although in some aspects of hospitality and catering target-setting and action-planning is insufficient. The arrangements to meet the needs and interests of the learners and employers are good in public services, retailing and wholesaling and hospitality and catering. Support for learners is good in public services, and satisfactory in both retailing and wholesaling and hospitality and catering. Information, advice and guidance for learners are satisfactory across all sector subject areas.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

7. Leadership and management are good. Strategic management within the company is good. The approach to change and growth is planned and stepped. Strategies and objectives have been shared with staff, who are all committed and enthusiastic about the future direction and increasing scale of operations. Leadership is supportive, with a clear focus on the competence and development of staff. Staff recruitment, training, development, appraisal and quality improvement initiatives are clearly linked to a competency framework. Communication with staff is effective, and makes good use of up to date information technology (IT) resources. Regular and informative meetings are used to share best practice. However, minutes of meetings do not record and follow through with action-planning. Staff training and development is purposeful and linked to objectives and targets. Staff have recently completed a 'train the trainers' course and are not only positive about this experience but have already implemented ideas for the benefit of the learners. The accommodation is of a high standard and resources to support learners and staff are good.
8. The management information system used by Blue Training is particularly effective. Data is available at different levels and used by staff in a range of ways to monitor the progression of different groups of learners, and the performance of staff. Meaningful reports are produced which contribute to action-planning and decision-making. The current system is being upgraded to provide a system that will benefit the expected growth

in the company, and provide even better reporting facilities. The web-based portal will make data and information available from anywhere by multi-users at the same time.

9. Partnership arrangements are good. Blue Training contributes effectively to working relationships with partners, employers and other training providers. Two large national employers provide much of the current business for the company, and Blue Training is working well with other employers locally to pilot the expansion of the business. One such pilot with Salford Connexions involves the company in engaging young people, identifying their learning needs and matching them to training. Regular meetings and joint reviews of progress allow all stakeholders to focus on the learners' experience, share good practice and develop high standards.
10. A number of established and effective practices are used well to monitor and improve the quality of provision. For example, the collection, analysis and use of feedback is thorough and informative, and regular audits are completed to ensure consistency of practice. Additional quality improvement initiatives are being developed to prepare the organisation for growth and provide a range of good quality standards to evaluate performance against. Many of these initiatives are ready for implementation. The self-assessment process and report are inclusive, although not particularly judgemental. However, the development plan is far more detailed, action orientated and focused on quality improvements.
11. Monitoring of access to the e-portfolios is insufficient. Arrangements are insufficiently thorough to ensure learners can access their portfolios using the IT systems. Learners are not encouraged to take ownership and input evidence into their portfolios. Cross referencing and signposting of evidence within the portfolios completed by trainers/assessors are sometimes inconsistent and not always relevant.
12. The promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate. The provider has an equal opportunities policy and equality of opportunity data is analysed. However, no strategy or action plan is in place to guide developments. Learners' awareness is raised at the induction stage but this is not reinforced at reviews. Staff training and development has not been sufficient to provide the level of understanding and confidence to promote and discuss equality and diversity issues with learners. Support for learners with literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) needs is satisfactory.

What learners like:

- Reliable, professional assessors
- Staff are friendly and are good at communicating
- Access to assessor
- 'All the training happens in the workplace'
- No paperwork and no homework
- Support on the computer from assessor
- 'Being recognised for doing my job at last'
- 'It made me realise how much I already knew'

What learners think could improve:

- Access to electronic portfolio
- Share the results of literacy, numeracy and language skills testing
- Supply a copy of the technical certificate
- Provide access to the NVQ criteria

Sector subject areas

Public services

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

13. Currently 29 Train to Gain learners are working towards NVQ level 2 in supporting services in healthcare. All learners are employed and engaged in a range of tasks related to the service sector, in particular, cleaning and domestic work. Training and assessment takes place in the workplace. Learners are expected to complete the NVQ in six to seven months.

Strengths

- Particularly effective assessment planning and practice
- Good matching of learners' and employers' needs
- Good support for learners

Areas for improvement

- None identified

Achievement and standards

14. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Most learners started the qualification in October 2007 or later, hence no success data is available at this early stage. Learners are making satisfactory or better progress, and the standard of their work is satisfactory. Learners enjoy the programme and gain confidence and motivation. Employers benefit from learners' improved understanding and practice. The percentage of learners still on programme after three to four months is very good.

Quality of provision

15. The quality of provision is good. Assessment planning and practice is particularly effective. Assessment planning is well detailed and identifies clear and timely targets for learners to achieve. Learners feel well prepared for the frequent assessment visits. The assessment of learners' practice is carried out through the use of a good and wide range of methods. The use of electronic equipment for assessment purposes is good, for example, Bluetooth witness testimonies. Feedback to learners is informative and focused on improving practice. Assessment techniques are used very well by trainers/assessors for identifying areas where additional knowledge and learning is required by individual learners. Further training can also be requested by learners or their employers.
16. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Some evidence is available of relevant learning taking place in the working environment. For example, a learner worked effectively through an online exercise to understand how to deal with burns and scalds. The trainer/assessor was effective at questioning and encouraging the learner to show her understanding. Learner induction is thorough, informative and used to identify additional learning support needs. The staged approach ensures all learners understand the programme requirements and commitments, and the health and safety issues. Learners provide information about their skills and job role. The learner induction booklet provides

some helpful information to raise awareness of equality of opportunity. However, learners are not provided with an opportunity to discuss their understanding of equality and diversity in follow-up reviews. The questions asked by staff do not encourage discussion. A first review is carried out with learners at an early point in their programme. The review targets are not specific or individualised. For most learners it is too early in the programme to have completed a second review and, to date, not many employers have been involved in the reviews. Currently 20 of the 29 learners are receiving additional support for literacy and numeracy. The support provided by a qualified tutor is frequent. Most resources to complete activities are IT based, and help to develop the learners' IT skills. Trainers/assessors are kept informed about the learners' progress with literacy and numeracy support. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the support, but the management information system has been developed to better monitor this aspect of performance.

17. The matching of learners' and employers' needs is good. Blue Training has good links with employers and work hard to understand what skills are required in the workplace. Employers are committed to the effective partnership arrangements with the company. Trainers/assessors are responsive and act quickly and appropriately on feedback from employers. The programmes delivered help employers to effectively develop the skills of their workforce. Learners benefit from on-the-job training, and understand and value why and how they are carrying out their job roles. Learners are engaged and building on their previous work experience. The electronic portfolios are helping to upskill the workforce through the development of some IT skills.
18. Support for learners is good. Trainers/assessors are very flexible and visit the workplace frequently. Learners recognise their own personal development and value the information and guidance they receive. The IT resources to support learners are particularly effective and complement the electronic portfolio. Employers are supportive of their learners. They are well informed about the programme, and the progress their learners are making. Trainers/assessors support and communicate effectively with employers and give clear details about future planned visits.

Leadership and management

19. Operational management of the programme is good. Staff are well trained and developed within the company. All staff have recently completed a 'train the trainers' course and developed their coaching skills. Communication is effective and makes best use of IT resources. Regular formal and informal activities ensure staff are informed about developments and changes to procedures and practices. Equality of opportunity is not well promoted with learners and staff, although plans are in place to deliver staff training very shortly. The performance of staff is monitored closely and effectively through progress and planning meetings, and the appraisal system. Detailed occupancy sheets are provided to staff on a weekly basis to help them monitor the progress of the learners accurately. A good range of effective quality procedures are in place and are constantly reviewed to improve the programme. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. The self-assessment process and report is inclusive of all staff. The report is not very detailed or evaluative and did not identify all of the strengths and areas for improvement.

Retailing and wholesaling

Good: Grade 2

Context

20. Blue Training offers retail and wholesaling apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. Learners on the retail apprentice programme are trained and assessed for achievement of two literacy, numeracy and language qualifications, a retail technical certificate and NVQ at level 2 or 3. Learners following a wholesaling apprenticeship, complete the NVQ and four literacy, numeracy and language qualifications. Train to Gain learners are trained and assessed to complete a level 2 NVQ. Currently 20 apprentices, two advanced apprentices and 22 Train to Gain learners are enrolled. Assessment and training is mostly delivered at the learners' workplace.

Strengths

- Good overall success rates
- Good training
- Good assessment
- Good arrangements to meet the needs of learners and employers

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient observations of assessors

Achievement and standards

21. Achievement and standards are good. In 2006/07, 75% of apprentices achieved full frameworks. In 2007/08, 72% of apprentices and 80% of Train to Gain learner have achieved successfully. These are above the national averages for retail learners. Pass rates for the retail technical certificate are very good, with over 50% gaining a distinction grade, and over 30% gaining a credit grade. Learners are gaining and developing skills which lead to promotions and additional responsibilities in the workplace. Learners present themselves smartly and professionally and this is consistently monitored on visits by assessors. Learners gain literacy, numeracy and language qualifications through using workplace activities. The late introduction of these qualifications has been recognised and resolved with current learners.

Quality of provision

22. Quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Assessors have current occupational expertise which benefits learners and employers. Through individual coaching learners gain additional skills, such as how to improve procedures in identifying fraudulent payments, teamwork and general health and safety. A comprehensive paper-based workbook is used to support learners to prepare for the technical certificate at level 2. All assessors have recently completed a 'train the trainer' course. Assessors now better understand different learning styles and how to plan and deliver both training and assessment more effectively. More development of assessors' training skills is planned. Blue Training's centre in Manchester is excellently resourced and professionally presented to create a good learning environment for learners. Initial assessment covers all aspects of the apprenticeship or Train to Gain programmes. Learners' past experience, current skills,

literacy, numeracy and language skills and learning styles are assessed before starting the programme. Learners are given an induction which is delivered over three or more visits to prepare them for the various components of their programme. Health and safety support material is issued to all learners. Learners are not always aware of their results from the initial assessments, although additional learning needs for literacy and numeracy are well met.

23. Assessment is good. All assessors are very well equipped with laptops with GPS/wireless connection and mobile telephones with video and audio facilities. Investment in IT speeds up the assessment process, and learners' progress. Electronic portfolios are the main system to record NVQ achievement and are used well. Learners are observed unobtrusively in the workplace and instant photographic evidence is used to validate learners' work. Any written evidence can be photographed for the portfolio and attached to the electronic portfolio. Once the assessor uploads evidence to the central system the internal verifier can access evidence, without waiting for a portfolio. Assessors use different methods of assessment to encourage learners to get involved in their qualifications. Literacy, numeracy and language skills assessment is planned well with learners and is relevant and beneficial to the workplace. Delivery of these skills and technical certificate exams through the assessor's laptop computer is flexible and instant. This meets the needs of the learner and employer. Some learners do not have access to the electronic portfolios as they do not have access to the internet.
24. Arrangements to meet the needs of learners and employers are good. Blue Training has forged strong relations with one major retail employer. This has led to a successful pilot being delivered. Good preparation with this employer ensured store managers were well informed and asked about reservations and constraints. Learner satisfaction surveys are very positive.
25. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are visited in the workplace regularly. The assessors are sensitive to the learner's workplace requirements and adapt their visit accordingly. Learners' mobile telephone numbers are taken by the assessors and text messaging is used effectively to confirm appointments and to prompt learners about evidence. Information, advice and guidance are readily available. Learners have recently been issued with a new learner handbook which outlines the procedure for accessing portfolios online, making a complaint and finding helpful information on relevant websites. Health and safety and equality of opportunity are monitored through the review process. When learners complete their programme an exit review helps learners to reflect on their programmes, and how it has impacted on their performance. This information is used well to introduce improvements to the programme. If learners request further training assessors give advice about the next level.

Leadership and management

26. Leadership and management are good. A particularly effective management information system helps assessors to monitor and manage learner occupancy and progression. Good quality information is used well in regular individual reviews between assessors and managers. Investment in resources is good and has had a positive impact on training and success. Assessors are responsible for inductions, initial assessment, literacy, numeracy and language skills, NVQ planning, assessment, reviews and exit interviewing. Staff training and development to support assessors in these tasks is effective. Internal verification is thorough. A clear written internal verification procedure identifies when and how assessment will be monitored. Learners' portfolios are sampled a minimum of

three times. Internal verifiers sample mostly through desk-based sampling via the electronic portfolio. Two standardisation meetings are scheduled each year. Assessors discuss equality of opportunity through assessment and review but it is often limited to issues of bullying and harassment and does not explore any other areas of diversity. No formal training for assessors has taken place to update current equality and diversity issues. The self-assessment process and report included all staff and views from learners and employers. The report was not particularly critical but did identify some key strengths. Observations of assessors in the workplace are insufficient. Although an observation schedule is in place it has not been fully implemented. New assessors have been insufficiently monitored at the different stages of the learners' journey to help them improve their practice.

Hospitality and catering

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

27. Blue Training offers a range of programmes in hospitality and catering at levels 2 and 3. They include food processing, multi-skilled, professional cookery and hospitality supervision. Currently 58 learners are on Train to Gain programmes, 55 are working towards an NVQ level 2 and three are working towards an NVQ level 3. All learners are employed by a national employer who contract directly with Blue Training. All learners receive an induction in the workplace that covers the content of the NVQ, equal opportunities and health and safety. All assessment takes place in the workplace.

Strengths

- Good assessment practice
- Particularly effective working relationships with employers and learners

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient target-setting and action-planning on some aspects of the programme

Achievement and standards

28. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners have only recently started on their qualifications and are making adequate progress towards achievement. Retention is good. Of the 62 learners who started the programme only four have left early. Learners demonstrate a wide range of occupational skills within the workplace. Learners are confident during assessment and present evidence well. Learners' prior attainment and experience adequately influences their NVQ. For example, some learners join the programme with a wealth of experience in their job role and are challenged to make faster progress.

Quality of provision

29. Quality of provision is satisfactory. Assessment practice is good. Assessment planning is particularly well detailed. Learners and employers are always fully aware of when assessment is taking place and what is due to be assessed. Good use is made of technology in assessments. Blue Training has introduced a paperless portfolio. Assessors use a voice recorder effectively to assist in the recording of evidence. This helps provide extensive and detailed performance evidence during observations. It also facilitates the flow of conversation and allows rephrasing of ambiguous questions during background knowledge questioning. It ensures the effective capture of all available evidence. Good use is made of photographic evidence and products of work. However, not all evidence is clearly referenced in the portfolio.
30. Teaching, training and learning are satisfactory. Initial assessment and induction are satisfactory. Target-setting and action-planning for some aspects of the programme are insufficient. Individual learning plans do not always reflect the individual nature of the programme. Target dates are not always set for key aspects of the learners' programme.

Learners do not always understand or value this document. Many learners are aware of their NVQ but have insufficient awareness of other aspects of the programme. For example, training is a key part of the Train to Gain programme, however, action plans, individual learning plans and targets on progress reviews insufficiently detail these aspects of the programme. Assessors ensure additional support is made available where additional learning needs have been identified.

31. Programmes and activities for learners are good. Working relationships with learners and employers are particularly effective. Blue Training is working well with a major employer to meet their needs and the individual needs of learners. Programmes are developed to ensure they encourage participation of learners. Communication with employers is good. Most managers gain clear benefits from staff participating on the programme. Learners value the programmes and are gaining a meaningful qualification.
32. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners have frequent visits from their assessor. For many this is fortnightly, or more often if required. Visits are flexible to suit the learners' work schedule and, in particular, their need to gather specific evidence for their NVQ. All learners have telephone numbers for their assessors which can be, and indeed are, used at various hours. Learners value this support. Support specifically relating to the use of technology in assessment is good. Information, advice and guidance is delivered adequately as part of the programme.

Leadership and management

33. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff training and development is satisfactory. Staff have an appraisal which results in clear targets being set. Staff develop their skills and progress within the company. Communication across the company is satisfactory. Meetings for staff are regular. Assessors have regular telephone conversations with each other to discuss specific issues. Internal verification is satisfactory. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements do not always adequately ensure that all key aspects of the learners' experiences are monitored. Monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. Equality and diversity is discussed at induction but rarely discussed after this as part of the overall programme. Learners generally have a poor awareness and understanding of equality and diversity. Progress reviews are superficial and do not systematically ask sufficiently probing questions in this area. The self-assessment process is fully inclusive. Action plans are in place to make further improvements.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by the provider **2006 to 2007**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Apprentices	2006/07	overall	4	75%	56%	75%	53%
		timely	4	75%	44%	75%	42%
	2007/08	overall	13	79%		72%	
		timely	10	80%		77%	

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain programmes** managed by the provider **2007 to 2008**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain	07/08	overall	24	83%
		timely	10	42%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'