

Buzz Learning 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:

- Employability training

Description of the provider

1. Buzz Learning Limited (Buzz) is a training and development company based on two sites in Wansbeck, Northumberland. Incorporated in March 2004, Buzz provides an entry to employment (E2E) programme through an LSC contract. Buzz also has a subcontract with A4e for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programmes. Since the prime contractor is A4e, this provision was inspected but only reported on where relevant in leadership and management. Of the work carried out by Buzz, 99% is government funded.
2. Currently 21 learners are enrolled on the E2E programme. Of these, 43% are women, with no learners from minority ethnic groups. Learners are referred either by a Connexions personal adviser, through self-referral or from a specialist agency such as the youth offending team. The programmes last for 22 weeks on average and cover personal and life skills, vocational training and literacy and numeracy. Learners take short work-related qualifications and literacy and numeracy qualifications at either entry level or level 1. Learners progress into apprenticeships or full-time courses at the local college or into employment. All learners take part in planned work experience during their programme.
3. The manager of the company is supported by the head of training. Six trainers and two assistant trainers deliver the provision across all programmes. They are supported by an administrative and finance officer and three assistants.
4. Unemployment rates in Wansbeck are at 7.3%, compared with the north east at 6.2%. The population of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is less than 1%, considerably below the national average of 9.1%. A number of wards in Northumberland, including Wansbeck, have high indices of deprivation, although neighbouring areas are extremely affluent.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

Preparation for life and work	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievements and standards, the quality of provision, leadership and management and arrangements for equality of opportunity are all satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. The provider's capacity to improve is satisfactory. This is Buzz's first inspection. However, Buzz previously delivered E2E under a subcontracting arrangement with a local college. Progressions have risen steadily and are now satisfactory. Job outcomes are low but significantly improved. Learners on both E2E and DWP programmes develop good skills. The staff team is responsive to learner, employer and partner needs and requests. A full complement of staff now exists after a period of absences. Management support of staff is good. Some actions have been taken to improve skills for life across the provision. However, these actions have not appropriately developed the expertise across the company. Although many quality improvement measures are in place, some have had insufficient impact. The self-assessment process is good. It is fully inclusive of all staff, learner and employer views. It is critical and evaluative. Inspection findings matched most strengths and areas for improvement, though Buzz insufficiently considered the progression rates in E2E. Grades awarded match those given in the self-assessment report with the exception of capacity to improve where Buzz graded this area higher.

Key strengths

- Good development of vocational and personal skills
- Good, supportive work placements
- Very responsive team
- Supportive and open management style

Key areas for improvement

- Low achievement of key objectives
- Slow development of skills for life
- Incomplete quality improvement processes

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Learners develop good vocational and personal skills. They make good progress in their work placements. They have good initial training and then quickly develop a range of valuable work-related skills, which are of great benefit to employers. For example one learner was placed in the reception area of a caravan park. She quickly developed a range of skills, including reception work, answering the telephone, taking holiday bookings and dealing with customer queries and has now become a part-time employee of the company. Learners also develop a good range of personal skills. Many join the E2E programme with low levels of confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Buzz works well with them on their personal development. Learners are introduced into work placements at an early stage of the programme. They quickly develop self-confidence and motivation when working with colleagues and customers. Most learners also achieve short, work related qualifications such as first aid, manual handling and health and safety courses to help them progress in the work place.
8. Learner progressions are satisfactory. During 2007/08, the progression rate was 54%. This compares satisfactorily with the LSC target of 53%. Of these, 36% progressed into employment, 44% into full-time education and 20% into apprenticeships.
9. Learner achievement of key objectives is low. Only 28% of leavers during 2007/08 achieved all the agreed objectives in their individual learning plan. Buzz carries out a detailed initial assessment of learners during the induction period. However, the objectives recorded are often unrealistic and unachievable in the timescale. Staff are now being trained in setting specific and achievable targets. Objectives that are now being set are more realistic. Some of the targets relate specifically to the achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications. A number of learners have failed to meet these targets. Achievement of skills for life qualifications are low, though improving. Buzz identified the strength and area for improvement found at the inspection in their self-assessment report.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

10. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Buzz plan and manage sessions adequately. The training accommodation is appropriate and offers a welcoming environment for the E2E learners. The tutors are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. They provide an appropriate range of activities for the learners. Learners participate well in the sessions and show good interaction with their tutors. In one session, the tutor gave learners information on bullying. They worked enthusiastically on their anti-bullying poster to display in the training room. However, in some sessions images used in presentations contain too much text and information and some training delivery is insufficiently clear or the pace is too fast for all learners.
11. Target-setting for learners is satisfactory. Until recently some of the targets negotiated with the learners during their four-weekly reviews were too vague or long-term. Some

learners found their objectives too difficult to achieve. Buzz gave their staff specific training on setting SMART targets. Learners are now given shorter term, more easily achievable targets. Staff and learners monitor progress carefully during the four-weekly reviews. Learners find this process much clearer and focused. They are now able to understand and work towards their targets more confidently. Buzz identified these issues in its self-assessment report.

12. Learners have good, supportive work placements, as identified in the self-assessment report. Buzz has a wide range of work experience placements with local employers. These include local retailers, builders, caravan parks and motor vehicle engineers. Learners take short vocational tasters or attend placements for two or three days per week. Staff match the placements to the learners' work preferences. Employers provide learners with good training and valuable work experience. In two retail placements, for example, all learners follow an initial training programme allowing them to experience all aspects of retail work. The store managers spend time with each individual learner and, where necessary help and support them with both work-related and personal issues. Buzz staff monitor their progress regularly and they receive good, constructive feedback on their progress in their placement.
13. Learner support is satisfactory. Each member of the E2E team has a caseload of about twelve learners who they support and mentor throughout the duration of their programme. This works well and learners speak positively about their time at Buzz. Learners receive ongoing support throughout their programme of personal and social development. Partnership working to support individual learners is satisfactory. External agencies give sessions and provide support in areas such as drug and alcohol misuse, teenage pregnancy and sexual health. They are also used to deliver longer programmes on building self-confidence, self-esteem and anger management. Many learners' confidence and behaviour improves well. Information advice and guidance are satisfactory. Although staff have no formal qualifications in advice and guidance they have a range of experience which they use well to give individual guidance to learners. Buzz is aware of the need to develop more formal guidance systems and is in the process of gaining MATRIX accreditation.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

14. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. The staff team are very responsive; where issues occur they quickly resolve them. For example, learners in Buzz's regular forums identified they needed more comfortable chairs for group work and improved access to refreshments. Staff made these improvements quickly. The staff are also very responsive to employers. Communication is good as are interventions to alter learner behaviour. They work well with employers to

ensure the learners have the correct training for their needs. Staff give employers good advice on the individual needs of learners. They have a good range of work placements for learners. On DWP programmes, Buzz has a very good working relationship with personal advisers. They identified that many referrals to the Gateway had skills for life needs and were unsuitable for this programme. Buzz is leading a pilot programme with DWP to give more appropriate initial assessments of participants.

15. The management style at Buzz is supportive and open. Most of the team have been with the company less than a year. Managers give good support to staff. Staff training is well-matched to individual needs and to the priorities of the company as well as the needs of learners. Staff are enthusiastic and keen to develop the provision. They have a good range of experience and qualifications, which are used well to support individual learners. Staff contribute ideas freely and are fully included in the development of the provision. As the team has grown, communications and sharing of practice has improved with regular staff meetings and working groups as well as informal peer support. Although communication is now satisfactory, the DWP and E2E teams do not always share materials or information across provision. All staff are well-involved in self-assessment activities, including all reception and administration staff. Buzz has a clear focus on the needs of individual learners.
16. Accommodation and teaching and learning resources are satisfactory as are arrangements for internal verification.
17. Buzz's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Staff take appropriate actions to develop equality and diversity. For instance, they brought in an arts worker to support E2E learners on racism issues. They develop games and activities to challenge stereotypes. Reviews in DWP programmes now include specific questions to develop understanding of equality. The policies and procedures are satisfactory and contain some good examples and definitions to guide staff on interpreting equality legislation. Analysis of data is satisfactory. Buzz monitors data on gender, ethnicity and disability which is shared with Connexions staff to encourage recruitment of learners from under-represented groups. Some data is analysed on the relative achievement of men and women. However, this is as yet incomplete. Buzz have insufficient information for analysis of trends over time. Access to buildings for learners with mobility problems is satisfactory as are adaptive resources. Staff training and development in issues related to the range of learners' needs is satisfactory. However, some staff are insufficiently confident to fully explore issues with learners. Buzz is aware of this and is planning an equality and diversity qualification for all staff.
18. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. Buzz has an appropriate procedure and Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place.
19. Buzz has insufficiently developed skills for life provision. In the past year the company has had a number of staff sicknesses and vacancies, which the team has now covered. However, development of skills for life is slow. Buzz now has staff with appropriate qualifications and skills. Some work on embedding of skills for life is underway but much work is still to be done. Some staff that started this process are no longer in place. Others have been with the company a short time. They have developed some new session plans with skills for life established and have created some new materials at different levels. Achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications are low but improving.

20. Quality improvement processes are incomplete. Buzz has introduced many quality improvement processes. Some have had insufficient time to be fully effective. In Buzz's observation of teaching and learning process most staff have now been observed. The grades and issues arising from sessions are similar to those observed during inspection. Managers are starting to use the system effectively to identify training issues and give support. They do not yet have a moderation process; some records of observations do not match the grade awarded and action points for tutors are insufficiently specific. They do not yet have a full cycle of observations. They are not able to analyse any trends arising from the observations. Buzz collects feedback from learners at different points in their programme. This information is collated and individual issues are tackled. However, Buzz does not yet analyse this data overall to effect improvements. The management information system is used for contract compliance. However, it is insufficiently used to plan improvements.

What learners like:

- 'I enjoy working at Buzz, I have completed lots of certificates such as first aid, manual handling and health and safety'
- 'We get lots of support from Buzz'
- 'Buzz staff are really helpful, my tutor came with me to my college interview'
- 'I really enjoy my work placement'

What learners think could improve:

- None identified

Annex

Learners' achievements

Outcomes on **Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes** managed by the provider **2005 to 2006**

Year	Number of leavers in the year	Achieved objectives rate*	Progression rate**
2007/08	46	28%	54%

* These are key objectives identified for each learner following an E2E programme

** Progression is measured in terms learners' movement to further education, education and employment, during or at the end of their training period