

National Business College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53451

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Last day of inspection: 18 September 2009

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. National Business College Limited (NBC) is a private training organisation based in Huddersfield town centre and servicing the district of Kirklees and Calderdale. Established in 1983 as a private college, NBC specialises in business related subjects and information technology. The college has offered a variety of work-based training since 1993. At the last inspection, NBC offered training for apprentices and advanced apprentices in business administration and law and a small provision in customer service within the West Yorkshire region of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This remains the case. This inspection focused on apprentices in business administration and law.
2. The company employs ten staff members, including three directors who are responsible for financial management, marketing and training. NBC currently delivers training to 77 learners of whom 56 are undertaking qualifications in business administration and law. Of these 10% are males and 12% are from ethnic minority heritage backgrounds.
3. Educational attainment in West Yorkshire is below the average for England as a whole. According to the Office for National Statistics, the proportion of the population from ethnic minority heritage backgrounds in West Yorkshire is 15.8% compared to the national rate of 11.3% for England. Achievement of five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including mathematics and English in West Yorkshire is 64% and is in line with the national rate.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2007/08
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	110 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Business administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of NBC's provision is good. Directors provide good strategic direction and leadership with sound financial planning. NBC have implemented many improvements since the last inspection. Some outcomes for learners are outstanding. Staff work well with employers to provide good training at work that meets the needs of learners and employers well. Not enough teaching and learning stimulates or challenges learners. Quality improvement planning is insufficiently developed and processes for observing teaching fail to bring about necessary improvements. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Learners feel safe and protected from abuse. NBC satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity but policies need to be reviewed more regularly and staff trained.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Learners attain their learning goals outstandingly well. Their achievements are well in excess of national averages.
- Current learners are making very good progress and many are exceeding expectations. Learners enjoy their training programmes.
- Learners develop good employability skills, including broader skills such as communications which contribute well to their economic and social wellbeing.
- Assessors provide good, frequent coaching and assessment in the workplace to benefit learners. They set challenging targets linked to learners' prior knowledge and skills.
- Learners benefit from regular planned off-the-job training sessions held weekly at the training centre. Staff know their learners well and provide effective support for each learner. However, learners would benefit from improved setting of learning objectives in the sessions. Tutors use insufficient variety in teaching and learning methods and activities to challenge learners. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used insufficiently in off-the-job training to promote and support learning.
- The range of programmes provided meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well.
- Partnership arrangements are used well to develop the provision and NBC works particularly well with a range of employers with much repeat business. Good networking arrangements exist with many employers.
- Good strategic direction and sound business planning position NBC well. Data are used effectively to improve the provision. Monitoring of individual learners is extremely thorough and helps them make good progress. Team working is good. Staff have a strong commitment to supporting learners. The use of target setting is inconsistent.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. NBC creates a very safe learning environment. Learners feel very safe and protected from bullying and harassment. They clearly understand their rights and responsibilities but not all employer risk assessments include wider aspects of safeguarding and reinforcement of safeguarding in the curriculum is under-developed.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place but NBC has not reviewed these regularly. Staff have not undergone any recent training. NBC satisfactorily promotes and reinforces learner understanding.
- The learner forum actively involves learners in making decisions which affect them. Arrangements for learner and employer feedback confirm a high level of

satisfaction. Action plans following feedback are not complete. Links with the peer referencing group and employers benefit learners.

- The quality improvement plan is insufficiently developed. It does not provide an accurate picture of progress towards addressing issues identified through self-assessment and through other means. NBC's observation process has not been fully implemented. Managers do not have an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning.
- NBC provides good value for money. Success rates are very high and have a strongly improving trend. Financial health is good. Good improvements have been made to the accommodation and more are planned. Information learning technology (ILT) needs further development to improve teaching and learning.

What does National Business College need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by setting better learning objectives, increasing variety and challenge to learners and using more ICT.
- Ensure quality improvement planning systematically addresses all identified areas for improvement. Fully implement an effective observation process, which improves teaching and learning.
- Improve safeguarding arrangements by extending the risk assessment approach with employers, creating a record of contact details for all learners under the age of 18 and further developing the curriculum including e-safety to reinforce aspects of safeguarding for learners.
- Improve promotion of equality and diversity by regularly reviewing policies and procedures and providing training to staff.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- Nice friendly and approachable staff
- I get treated like an adult
- Small groups in the training centre
- I can do the qualification in my own time without any pressure
- The course supported my job role well
- The college found me employment really quickly
- The course is very well structured
- Regular focus groups ensure that our views are listened to and acted upon
- The feedback from assessors has been very encouraging and makes you want to succeed
- The opportunity to go onto higher education after completing my apprenticeship

What learners would like to see improved:

- Level 3 programme could be more challenging
- It would have been helpful to have seen a copy of a completed portfolio
- Bus fares to travel to the college are expensive and we get no help with them
- It took ages to get me a job
- I didn't have any teaching on the course
- IT equipment crashes a lot at the centre and we lose our work
- Teaching sessions could be more interesting and challenging
- Sometimes we have to chase our assessor to get our work back
- Our tutor was not very encouraging in the classroom

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- Kept well informed of learner progress
- NBC has given us good advice and guidance on other courses
- Learners receive excellent support from NBC
- The trainer always comes to the office at convenient times
- The training has helped team building
- The training has broadened employees' perspectives and helped them gain better job satisfaction
- Our employees can take these courses at the same time as they are doing their regular job

What employers would like to see improved:

- Could be more involved in what goes into the programme
- Course not really challenging enough especially for level 3

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

5. NBC has made good improvements since the previous inspection. Operational planning is firmly incorporated within the business plan which is very thorough and supports the company's strategies well. An annual quality timetable has been developed which plans all activities in a logical sequence. However, the quality improvement plan and the observation of teaching are insufficiently developed.
6. The strategy to improve success rates has been highly effective. Overall success rates are outstanding; they have improved substantially and are significantly above national averages. Almost all learners achieve their qualifications by their planned end dates. Males and learners from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve to the same standard as all other learners. Value for money is very good. Learner numbers have grown significantly and increases in funding are being used well to further improve the provision. User views confirm high levels of satisfaction with the training.
7. Self-assessment forms an integral part of the quality assurance process. Staff are fully involved in the process and are familiar with the key judgements. Learners and employers are appropriately involved. Not all judgements in the self-assessment report are supported by the evidence. Inspectors agree with most of the key judgements. Grades awarded by inspectors are the same as those in the self-assessment report.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Success rates are outstanding. Since 2006, overall success rates for advanced apprentices have continued to improve from 64% to 93% in 2009. In the same period, success rates for apprentices improved from 76% to 88%. In 2008/09, timely success rates were 89% for advanced apprentices and 84% for apprentices which are well in excess of national averages.
9. Current learners are making good progress relative to their prior attainment and many are exceeding expectations. They make very good progress in key skills and the technical certificate. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. Work is marked frequently. Some portfolios contain good examples of well written reports and letters. Learners demonstrate good computer skills. They enjoy their learning and are particularly well motivated to achieve. Learners recommend the provider to others.
10. Learners develop good employability skills, including broader skills such as communications which contribute well to their economic and social wellbeing. They develop and extend their background knowledge and workplace skills well. Many learners progress in their careers and some move on to higher education.

They demonstrate a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work.

11. Learners feel safe and welcome at the training centre. NBC has a very high emphasis on safety including security cameras and maintains zero tolerance of violence, drugs, theft and any form of discrimination. Learners have a very clear understanding of health and safety in the workplace and adopt safe working practices. NBC promotes health and safety and equal opportunities well during training. NBC routinely checks learner understanding during reviews. However, there is insufficient awareness training in internet safety measures.
12. At induction and during reviews NBC effectively promotes health issues. Learners are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle. They have the information that they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. NBC provides much useful information in the training centre including leaflets and posters, which learners have read and understand.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Learners benefit from good, frequent coaching and assessment in the workplace. They are set challenging targets linked to their prior knowledge and skills. Most learners understand how they are progressing towards their learning goals and what they need to do to improve. The training team works particularly well together to benefit the learner. Key skills assessment is good and integrated well into learners' work roles.
14. Learners benefit from regular planned off-the-job training sessions held weekly at the training centre. NBC staff know their learners well and provide effective support for each learner. Learners are comfortable to contribute to discussions. However, learners would benefit from improved setting of learning objectives for the sessions. Tutors use insufficient variety in teaching and learning methods and activities to effectively challenge learners. NBC makes satisfactory use of technology to support learning by the use of electronic testing. However, NBC uses ICT insufficiently in off-the-job training. Some handouts and information sheets are poor quality. NBC staff are appropriately qualified and experienced.
15. NBC keeps employers regularly informed about learner progress. The review process is effective in tracking and monitoring learners. Workplace supervisors contribute well to the process. Learners receive timely feedback and most learners know what they need to do next. Some learners would benefit from more specific target setting in reviews.
16. The range of programmes meets well the needs and interests of learners and employers. Learners develop effectively the required skills and knowledge to support career progression. Many employers see improvements to their business performance. Arrangements for training and assessment are flexible. NBC carries out workplace visits at least every three weeks and many learners attend the weekly structured training sessions in the centre. Good relationships

between assessors and employers benefit learners. NBC has introduced the customer service qualifications to provide learners with a wider choice.

17. The provider has established good partnership arrangements to develop the provision. NBC works particularly well with a range of employers with much repeat business. NBC works well to source timely, good quality work placements. Good networking arrangements exist with many employers. Some employers give talks to the apprentices during training sessions. The provider is proactive in promoting the training to those who have not been in education for some time. Learners are encouraged to progress onto level 3. Community groups meet regularly using the provider's premises, which has led to improvements to the local area.
18. Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Learners receive adequate information and advice to enable them to make informed choices before enrolling. Learners confirm good levels of support from training staff to promote their learning and development. The induction satisfactorily introduces learners to the structure and demands of the programme and their rights and responsibilities as learners. Tutors' detailed knowledge of individual learners ensures that barriers to success are removed. Learners receive timely advice to support their progression.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

19. Clear and measurable strategic actions have been set for the next three years which support government and LSC priorities well. Good business planning effectively supports NBC's strategies. Good use is made of data to help secure improvements in recruitment and learner performance. A wide range of reports are shared frequently with staff who understand the data well. Monitoring of individual learner performance is extremely thorough. Team working is good; staff share a very strong commitment to supporting learners. All staff receive an annual appraisal but performance objectives are often unclear. Teachers are appropriately qualified and have good industrial experience. A good range of training is well targeted at company and personal development needs.
20. NBC's safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. NBC has recently developed its policy which is comprehensive and used well to ensure learners are safe at the training centre. Staff have undergone appropriate training on safeguarding. NBC has a thorough health and safety risk assessment approach to employers but this does not include wider safeguarding aspects. NBC makes appropriate checks on staff which are effectively recorded. NBC currently does not have central contact details for parents or guardians of learners under 18. Inclusion in the curriculum to develop learner understanding of aspects of safeguarding including bullying, abuse and e-safety is under developed and limited to induction.

21. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. NBC has comprehensive policies and procedures which cover appropriate legislation but these have not been reviewed. NBC staff receive updates on equality and diversity but not all staff have undergone training and development. NBC collects and effectively analyses equality data and takes appropriate actions where necessary. NBC supports a measured approach to widening participation by working with local schools to encourage more boys to take up business administration apprenticeships. By working with local Asian businesses, NBC has successfully increased employment and apprenticeship opportunities for learners from ethnic heritage minority backgrounds. There is no discernable difference in outcomes for different groups of learners. NBC satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity to learners through induction and at each progress review. Learners display good attitudes and behaviour.
22. The learner focus group enables learners to make meaningful contributions to decisions which affect them. NBC processes for collecting learner and employer feedback are well established. Learners and employers report high levels of satisfaction. Routine follow up on actions taken from larger surveys, however, is not systematic. NBC make a good contribution to other learning providers in the region. Sharing good practice between other providers is positively benefiting all learners. Assessors have developed excellent relationships with many companies who provide good opportunities for learners. NBC provides good careers information to local schools.
23. NBC effectively shares good practice between teachers. Internal verification is rigorous and ensures the quality of assessment. Sampling plans, observation of assessment and standardisation are all very thorough. NBC's quality improvement plan is insufficiently developed and not linked effectively to self-assessment. The plan fails to provide an accurate picture of progress in maintaining the key strengths and addressing areas for improvement identified through self-assessment. Key strengths in the self-assessment report are not well supported by evidence. Actions identified in the quality improvement plan are not specific or measurable. Responsibilities, timescales, milestones and progress are not identified. Observation of teaching and learning has not been fully implemented. Too few observations have been carried out. Observation records do not clearly identify key strengths and areas for improvement. Grades awarded are not well supported by the evidence. The observation process does not sufficiently help teachers to improve their practice. Currently there are no moderation arrangements to ensure the reliability of observation evidence and grades.
24. NBC provides very good value money. Financial health is good; over a four year period there has been a healthy surplus of income over expenditure. Reserves have enabled good improvements to the buildings. The training centre provides a good environment for learning. Learning resources for are good. Computers and other hardware, while being sufficient in numbers, are in need of replacement. Currently there are minimal resources for information learning technology. Plans are in place for this in the coming year. Resources in most employers are good and enhance the learners' experience. Learners develop a

good understanding of sustainability during the induction and in other parts of the programme. Many learners have completed key skills projects on recycling within their companies. NBC does not have a policy on sustainability but actively promotes recycling.

Information about the inspection

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Training Director as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the LSC, the previous inspection report, data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection and emailed feedback from learners and employers prior to the inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

National Business College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships. Blank column: insert DWP employability programmes (including Workstep), or Judicial Services or nextstep as appropriate

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive	
Approximate number of enrolled learners						
Full-time learners	77				77	
Part-time learners						
Overall effectiveness	2				2	
Capacity to improve	2					
A. Outcomes for learners	2				2	
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1					
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	1					
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2					
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2					
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2					
A4. Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2					
A5. How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	N/A					
B. Quality of provision	2				2	
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2					
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2					
B3 How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2					
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3					
C. Leadership and management	2				2	
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2					
C2. How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	N/A					
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3					
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3					
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2					
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3					
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2					

*where applicable to the type of provision

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