

CfBT North East nextstep

Inspection report

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Type of provider: nextstep contract

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Information about the provider

1. The prime contractor for North East nextstep is CfBT, a not for profit registered charity and company limited by guarantee. The North East area comprises Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Wearside, County Durham and the Tees Valley.
2. Throughout the region, there are wards with very high indices of deprivation. The proportion of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds is about half the national average with considerable local variations. Unemployment across the region is 1.4% above the national rate of 5.7%, again with considerable variations between areas.
3. The Director of UK Services, based in Reading, has responsibility for the provision of the nextstep service. Also based in Reading is the adult guidance service manager who is the national manager of the programme, and reports to the director. The nextstep North East regional manager is responsible for the operational management of the contract supported by two assistant regional managers, ten coordinators and adviser and administrative staff.
4. CfBT's in-house team of advisers provide 30% of the universal service and 90% of the differentiated and personalised services (DPS) sessions. CfBT has a network of 55 subcontractors who operate from over 1,000 venues. These include Jobcentre Plus offices and many outreach centres.

Type of provision	Number of customers in 2008/09
Universal services	24,295
Universal plus services	1,776
Differentiated and personalised services	9,970

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for customers	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Overall effectiveness

5. The overall effectiveness of CfBT's nextstep provision is satisfactory. Strategic direction is clear with a good focus on meeting the needs of under-represented groups. The self-assessment process is inclusive and thorough. The report is critical and judgemental. It accurately identified many of the findings identified by inspectors, however most grades awarded by the provider were higher than those awarded by inspectors.
6. Outcomes for customers are satisfactory overall and good for the universal plus and DPS service. Insufficient customers are successfully contacted to determine their progression outcome. Advice sessions are satisfactory overall. Customers develop increased confidence and motivation. Venues are welcoming, safe and well located. Resources are good.
7. CfBT supports its subcontractors well. It communicates well with them and provides good support, advice and training for their staff. Arrangements for quality assuring the performance of subcontractors and interventions are insufficiently rigorous. Arrangements for safeguarding and equality and diversity are satisfactory. Value for money is satisfactory.

Main findings

- Progression outcomes on universal services are satisfactory. Progression into training has improved and is satisfactory; progression into employment has declined and is low. Progression outcomes on DPS and universal plus services are good. The number of customers successfully contacted to determine their progression outcomes is low.
- Customers develop their skills and understanding satisfactorily. They develop an improved understanding of curriculum vitae development. Some customers become more motivated and leave sessions with a much clearer focus of what they need to do to progress. Attendance is variable and low in some venues. A few sessions take place in open-plan environments that do not ensure privacy.
- Overall nextstep sessions are satisfactory. In the better sessions, advisers use effective questioning and interpersonal skills and make good use of information technology (IT). In less effective sessions, the discussions and action planning are too adviser-led with insufficient customers' involvement.
- Action planning is satisfactory overall. In the better action plans, customers identify and prioritise their own actions. In some cases, action plans are insufficiently specific, actions are insufficiently time-bound and action planning is too adviser-led.
- Resources are good. Advisers have good local knowledge, and a wide range of resources that are often used well to meet customers' needs. All advisers have laptops with internet access and printers. Venues are well located to meet customer needs.
- Promotion of Skills for Life support in many nextstep interventions is insufficient. In the better sessions, advisers facilitate effective discussions and make referrals to specialist providers. However, many advisers lack confidence in raising Skills for Life support with customers.
- Partnerships are very effective in meeting customer needs. CfBT have a wide range of effective partnerships particularly with training providers and Jobcentre Plus. Partnership meetings effectively facilitate networking and share practice. Sub-contractors work well with each other. CfBT link well with employers to provide flexible support in response to large-scale redundancies.
- Support for customers is satisfactory. Advisers build effective working relationships in sessions and a good proportion of customers attend additional appointments. However, advisers sometimes miss opportunities to explore fully customers' barriers to participation in employment and learning.
- Strategic leadership is good. CfBT plans and structures its provision well to meet customers' needs. It supports its subcontractors effectively with relevant training and resources. Sharing of information and good practice is effective.
- CfBT has satisfactory arrangements for meeting safeguarding and equality and diversity requirements. It has appropriate policies and procedures. CfBT staff

have appropriate training on safeguarding and equality and diversity. However, CfBT does not collect sufficiently detailed information on the safeguarding training provided by its subcontractors.

- CfBT manages its resources very effectively to meet the needs of its customers. It has particularly effective arrangements to utilise staff at very short notice to deal effectively with the needs of employers and customers following mass redundancies. Employers appreciate the flexibility, sensitivity and skills of advisers when dealing with difficult situations.
- Arrangements for monitoring subcontractors' performance against targets are broadly satisfactory. However, quarterly contract reviews are insufficiently rigorous. The audit of skills action plans has not provided sufficient information to ensure improvements are realised.
- CfBT has inadequate arrangements for monitoring the quality of advisers' work. Written feedback to advisers following the observation of interventions is often insufficiently judgemental and does not always identify appropriate development needs. Action planning from observations is imprecise. The provider does not standardise or moderate the results of observations, and many sessions are over graded.

What does CfBT need to do to improve further?

- Further develop systems and procedures to improve customer attendance.
- Ensure that all customers have the opportunity for private interviews.
- Ensure all customers are fully involved in the interventions and take ownership of their agreed actions.
- Ensure all advisers have sufficient confidence and understanding of skills for life, in order to promote positively customers' development of these skills.
- Further develop techniques to identify customers' barriers to participation in learning and employment.
- Continue to increase the proportion of customers successfully contacted to establish more reliable progression outcome data.
- Devise and implement robust quality assurance processes, in particular for observations of interventions and for performance management of subcontractors, and ensure that the outcomes inform quality improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What customers like:

- the helpful and encouraging advisers who boost confidence and encourage them to develop the skills to promote themselves to prospective employers
- the useful information and websites that help explore new career paths
- the increased awareness of how to recognise transferable skills and create a curriculum vitae

- being referred to appropriate learning programmes
- gaining experience through voluntary work
- learning how to make speculative approaches to employers
- the impressive and focused service which encourages action and gives sense of purpose.

What customers would like to see improved:

- better promotion of the service
- more time to digest the information given
- the opportunity for everybody to have an automatic intervention as soon as they start to claim Jobseekers' Allowance
- the amount of bureaucracy: less time should be spent filling in forms.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the prompt and responsive service provided by very down to earth and professional advisers to meet the needs of the organisation and staff at risk of redundancies
- excellent service with excellent feedback from staff that attended sessions and received the help and support they needed
- advisers work well with the limited resources that employers have available and this does not deter them in any way from performing their role
- those who attend feel more confident and positive about finding new or alternative employment
- employers' staff are given individualised support that they require to meet their needs such as skills for life, suitable learning programmes, and options to gain additional qualifications.

What employers would like to see improved:

- offer employers a designated contact person and telephone number so that when they need to organise events they know who to call and work with
- clearer information about how the various support organisations link together and manage the support provided during redundancy periods
- better follow up of people supported to inform employers about who received what training and type of support.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 3

8. CfBT has satisfactory capacity to make and sustain improvements. Strategic leadership is good. The provider has clear, appropriate plans for the future of the service. The structure of the service supports the implementation of the plans. The provider works well with a carefully chosen range of partners to promote participation. CfBT's rapid response to mass redundancies in the region has been strong and effective. Staff are well qualified. Outcomes are good for the DPS and universal plus service and satisfactory for universal service. Management information is used well to plan and monitor the service.
9. Appropriate targets are set and progress against them is monitored. CfBT is developing an appropriate range of well-designed quality systems. However, some quality processes are insufficiently effective, particularly the process for the observation of interventions. Induction for new staff is effective in helping staff to understand CfBT and their own role within it.
10. Self-assessment is inclusive and reflects the experience of users. The most recent self-assessment report is critical and judgemental. It accurately identifies many of the strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, all of the provider's grades, except the grade for equality of opportunity, are higher than those awarded by inspectors. The provider's arrangements for safeguarding and for the promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Resources, including information technology and reference materials, are good and accommodation is satisfactory.

Outcomes for customers Grade 3

11. Outcomes for customers are satisfactory. Progression outcome rates on the universal service are satisfactory. During the period August 2008 to July 2009, progression into training has increased and is satisfactory. However, progression into employment has declined and is low. Progression outcome rates on the DPS and universal plus service are good. A high number of these customers were unemployed at the time of their first advice session. Following large-scale redundancies, many customers have been able to access training courses. Outcomes for customers have improved consistently from October 2008 and are high. Progression to employment is satisfactory. Since August 2008, the numbers of customers successfully contacted to determine their progression outcome has been low, particularly for universal customers.
12. Customers make satisfactory progress in developing their personal and employability skills. Most improve their confidence and self-esteem, and become more motivated towards progressing to learning and employment. Customers improve their understanding of job search skills such as curriculum vitae and covering letters. They also learn more about suitable reference

sources. Most leave their sessions with a clearer focus on what they need to do to progress.

13. Customer punctuality at appointments is satisfactory. However, attendance is variable. It is too low in some venues. Advisers try to contact customers to ensure attendance, but this is not yet having a significant impact on attendance levels.
14. Customers feel safe. They enjoy the interventions and find them helpful. The venues provide generally good arrangements for safety, security and privacy. The introduction to nextstep effectively ensures that customers feel welcome and understand confidentiality arrangements. However, a few sessions take place in open-plan environments with insufficient privacy.
15. Some advisers promote voluntary work well and develop good links with local voluntary groups. However, this is inconsistent and some advisers miss the opportunity to promote voluntary work opportunities to customers to develop employability skills.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

16. Overall nextstep sessions are satisfactory and some are good. In the better sessions, advisers demonstrate good questioning and interpersonal skills that effectively challenge customers to reflect and focus on realistic aspirations and needs. In the good sessions, advisers use IT particularly well to enhance the customers' understanding and stimulate their interest. In the satisfactory sessions, the discussions are often too adviser-led and customers do not have sufficient involvement in reflecting on their needs, exploring options and confirming the agreed actions. In some cases, the interactions between customer and adviser are stilted, whilst the adviser types the action plan.
17. Action planning is satisfactory overall. In the better action plans, customers identify and prioritise their own actions. Advisers recap and clarify the actions with the customers very effectively. In other instances, the action plans are insufficiently specific and time-bound, and action planning is too adviser-led.
18. Resources are good. Advisers have good local knowledge, and have access to a wide range of resources to meet customers' needs. Most advisers use laptops with internet access well. They also have printers and mobile telephones. Customers receive relevant, up-to-date information in relation to employment, training and funding opportunities. This includes useful careers information and skills assessment. A wide range of well-located venues meet customer needs.
19. Promotion of Skills for Life support in many nextstep interventions is insufficient. In some there is good practice with advisers effectively discussing the development of literacy and numeracy and making referrals to specialist providers. However, many advisers lack confidence in raising the subject with customers, even where there is a clear need for additional support. Although

there has been recent training for advisers to understand skills for life better, this is not yet improving the promotion of skills for life training for customers.

20. Partnerships are very effective in meeting customer needs. CfBT has developed a wide range of partners to develop the provision. Partnership meetings are effective in networking and sharing practice. Subcontractors are developing good working relationships with each other and there are good links with training providers and Jobcentre Plus offices. Providers have good knowledge of local support agencies to support customers. CfBT are developing good links with employers to provide support in response to large-scale redundancies. The response is flexible to meet the needs of customers and employers.
21. Support for customers is satisfactory. Advisers build effective working relationships in sessions and provide opportunities for customers to access additional appointments. However, advisers sometimes miss opportunities to explore fully customers' barriers to participation in employment and learning. In a few interventions, advisers do not secure dates for follow-up sessions.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

22. CfBT has a clear, appropriate strategic direction with a strong focus on meeting the needs of under-represented groups. It uses its subcontracting arrangements effectively to meet the diverse needs of customers. Extensive research is conducted into local and regional demographics and this is used well to plan provision. CfBT meets its strategic aims through effective planning. Management information is used well to plan and to monitor performance. The company supports its subcontractors and its staff well through training and development, and communicates well with them. It has an effective meetings structure which helps staff at all levels to improve and share their practice. Staff are well motivated and work effectively as a team.
23. The provider responds rapidly and very effectively to local circumstances; for example, in cases of mass redundancies. It has good arrangements to bring together adequate numbers of well-prepared advisers to meet the urgent needs of customers.
24. Staff are well qualified. All advisers have, or are working towards, a level 4 qualification in information, advice and guidance. The planned staff training supports strategic aims. Staff appraisal is satisfactory, and their training needs are adequately met. CfBT has effective arrangements for performance management.
25. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. CfBT has recently increased the focus on safeguarding. An appropriate policy specifically covers dealing with vulnerable adults. Designated senior staff have been trained and all CfBT advisers have completed alerter training. All staff are well informed about customer safeguarding arrangements. A single central record of enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks is maintained for CfBT staff at CfBT head office. CfBT maintains a record of completed CRB checks on subcontractor staff.

CfBT does not collect sufficiently detailed information on safeguarding training completed by subcontractor staff. Recently improved and appropriate arrangements are in place for checking health and safety at venues.

26. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. CfBT has an appropriate equality of opportunity policy, code of conduct and development plan. Satisfactory checks ensure that subcontractors have appropriate equality and diversity policies. An equality and diversity working group provides an effective forum for sharing information, intelligence and best practice in equality and diversity. Advisers treat customers with dignity and respect and are effective in promoting equality of opportunity. CfBT advisers have regular training in equality and diversity. CfBT does not gather sufficient information on subcontractor equality and diversity to ensure it meets requirements. Good use is made of data to identify areas of need and plan provision to meet those needs. Customers have good access to provision in a wide range of locations and from a wide range of specialist providers. CfBT managers analyse the participation and outcomes for different groups of customers thoroughly. Recently managers have started to set actions for strategies to increase participation rates of priority groups. Satisfactory procedures are in place for customers to make complaints suggestions and comments. Complaints are dealt with appropriately. CfBT has improved its methods for gathering feedback from customers and is starting to use this information to plan improvements.
27. Arrangements for monitoring subcontractors' performance against targets are broadly satisfactory. The provider conducts an effective risk assessment to trigger actions. However, quarterly contract reviews are insufficiently rigorous. CfBT examines all skills action plans for compliance, and this has improved practises among advisers. The company has introduced peer observation and shadowing for new staff, and this helps them to improve their practise. CfBT observes sessions, but records of observations do not provide sufficient evidence to support the grades awarded, and many sessions are over graded. Records of observations are insufficiently judgemental and developmental. They are not sufficiently monitored or standardised. Action planning with advisers is insufficiently focused to help them to carry out actions successfully. Sessions delivered by subcontractors' staff are graded, but grades are not always shared with CfBT. CfBT does not monitor subcontractors' observation practice sufficiently.
28. Value for money is satisfactory. Resources are used effectively to meet customers' needs. Customers receive useful information, advice and guidance to help them to further their prospects. CfBT chooses well-located venues to attract its priority groups.

Information about the inspection

29. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's assistant regional manager, 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 local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and data on customers and their progression outcomes.
30. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires customers and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed information and advice sessions. Inspectors collected evidence from each of the nextstep services the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

CfBT North East nextstep				
nextstep				
Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Universal service	Universal Plus service	DPS
Approximate number of customers	62,446	38,934	3,542	19,970
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3			
Outcomes for customers	3	3	2	2
How well do customers achieve and enjoy their learning?	3			
How well do customers attain their learning goals?	3			
How well do customers progress?	3			
How well do customers improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3			
Do customers feel safe?	3			
Are customers able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	n/a			
How well do customers make a positive contribution to the community?*	n/a			
Quality of provision	3	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2			
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for customers?	2			
How effective are the care, guidance and support customers receive in helping them to achieve?	3			
Leadership and management	3	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2			
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	3			
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of customers?	3			
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for customers?	3			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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