

Commercial in Confidence



**Assessment Report**

**For**

**B-SKILL LTD.**

**On behalf of**



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## 1. Key Information.

Assessment Type	REVIEW.
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET.
Assessor's Name	PAUL D. GREGORY.
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Client ID	C12354.
Assessment Reference Number	PN100536.

## 2. Organisation – Information, Introduction and Overview.

Established in 2000 B-Skill Ltd. is an independent training provider located in Newcastle-upon-Tyne that supports young people and adults, on a national basis, in gaining vocational and non-vocational qualifications and employability skills. The company has become a mainstream provider of training to employers in the support services industry, helping employers develop their workforce by raising the aspirations, achievements and personal development of individuals.

B-Skill Ltd. delivers a core set of products to learners and employers such as Apprenticeships (16-18 and 19+ age groups), pre employment training, a recruitment service, consultancy and commercial services, single qualifications and an offender service (Offenders' Learning & Skills Service – OLASS). The kind of training courses on offer by the company to meet the needs of learners and employers include Business Administration, Cleaning and Support Service, Customer Services, Infection Control, Business Improvement Techniques, Team Leading and Management amongst various others.

Since last being assessed the changes introduced by the Government affecting available funding streams for learning and Ofsted's findings following an inspection of training provided by the company prompted the Directors to initiate a company restructure, requiring members of staff to work through a period of organisational change. Having previously had Centres in most major towns and cities the restructure was felt necessary to continue to deliver successfully Government funded training programmes i.e. Apprenticeships and Employability Programmes. The company now concentrates on delivering the service from its Centre in Newcastle and one located in Bootle (Liverpool). The company is sub-contracted to deliver training on behalf of other providers as well as sub-contracting training providers nationally to deliver programmes on behalf of B-Skill Ltd. The company previously relied on a large pool of 'Associate Assessors' to help deliver the service and following the changes introduced now employs all staff delivering the service bar one Associate. The Directors also decided to strengthen the company focus on operational delivery and quality assurance by separating the roles and appointing experienced/qualified managers. The main source of funding for training comes via the Skills Funding Agency.

The information, advice and guidance (IAG) service provided by the company is an implicit yet integral part of the role/responsibilities of all managers and members of staff, particularly Trainers, Client Relationship Managers and Employment Consultant. Initial contact by an employer or prospective learner initiates the service at which point information is provided as to the span of learning opportunities available or, if information needs to be job or employment sector specific then more targeted information is provided to meet the needs of the individual/employer. The information provided is then supplemented by the advice that Directors, managers and members of staff provide based on their experience, expertise and specialist qualifications.

The company 'Vision' states, 'B-Skill is all about people – and about all people. Our aims are simple and sincere. Our success is achieved by equipping all people through learning, each to recognise and realise the opportunities that are available to them; enabling people through learning, each to achieve fulfilment and to take pride in their own special contribution to society. These underpinning beliefs will direct and drive all our actions. This is both our passion and our purpose.'

The company is headed by two Directors having specific areas of responsibility within the company that they oversee and manage supported by a Head of Finance, Operations Manager, Internal Quality Assurance Manager, Business Development Manager and two Client Relationship Managers that form part of the company workforce of 32 staff.

It was reported that whilst accreditation to the **matrix** Standard is regarded as a contract requirement it also supports the company's aim to provide learners with a positive experience. The Standard, it was reported, will also help to enhance the overall quality of the service by identifying possible gaps in the service and contribute to what the company wants to achieve for its learners. The company has achieved Investors In People – Bronze (IiP). Accreditation.

The managers and members of staff demonstrated how meeting the needs of learners/employers is of paramount importance and in doing so they provide a quality service that is recognised to be such by all who are involved with the company. The Assessor found well-qualified, experienced members of staff operating in close-knit teams delivering the service to learners, employers, partners and stakeholders. The effects of organisational change are now quickly becoming part of the history of the company as managers and staff members are anxious to support the on-going and future success of B-Skill Ltd. There is a strong company ethos that is built around the desire to help and support individuals, championed by the two Directors. Based on the comments received from external partners the company's philosophy is something that is very apparent to them and a major factor for retaining B-Skill Ltd. as one of their partners.

Since last being assessed the company has reviewed the 'Areas for Continuous Improvement' documented in its last Assessment Report to identify the positive, where progress has been made and the negative, where it can be properly regarded as being work in progress.

The scope of the assessment included the internal processes for delivering the IAG service, the extent and suitability of the service provided, the success or otherwise of partnership working, the effective delivery of IAG by those delivering the service, the overall management of the service and the outcomes experienced by learners having received the service.

### **3. Areas of Particular Strength.**

A number of strengths were identified during the Assessment. These are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- Members of staff delivering the service operate to recognised procedures relating to the IAG service that help to ensure the needs of learners are properly identified and remain the focus for attention throughout the learner journey. Many complementary remarks received from learners highlight the level of support provided to them and the extent to which members of staff do go to provide individuals with a positive experience to help them achieve their goals and aspirations. The provision of an effective IAG is said to reflect the good levels of success and achievement learners enjoy (3.2).
- B-Skill Ltd. has adopted a range of quality assurance (QA) practices and procedures

that progressively have become embedded as normal ways of working for all managers and staff. The value of quality assurance, operating at different levels to support and inform the delivery of the service, cannot be over stated. QA provides a framework within which managers and staff members operate and it is a key factor for ensuring consistency regarding the delivery of the service. QA can properly be regarded as the 'glue' that binds the service and staff together. Managers and members of staff have positive views about quality assurance recognising that the procedures help to achieve good learner outcomes albeit, at times, procedures that might be regarded by some to be more administrative than they wish. The QA data produced enables staff to review performance and assess whether standards are being maintained (4.5).

- Trainers provide learners/employers with a comprehensive induction covering all aspects of their training programme. Learners reported having a clear understanding of the IAG service offered along with information about company procedures and its policies such as Equality & Diversity, Safeguarding and Health & Safety. Following the company's decision to make learner induction a two-part process a learner's allocated Trainer now makes two appointments, the first to determine the needs of the learner and the second to progress a learner's enrolment, subject to their agreement based on the information provided at the initial meeting. The change has benefited the learners as it ensures learners are on the right course at the right level and also benefited the company by reducing learner drop-outs and thereby improving learner retention figures (2.1, 3.1, 3.3).

#### 4. Areas for Continuous Improvement.

A number of areas for continuous improvement were identified during the Assessment that could enhance the service delivered. These are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard. These will form the basis for discussion at the twelve and twenty four month Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC).

- The company regards its IAG service to be an integral and implicit part of what members of staff provide to learners, employers and partners. Managers and members of staff will benefit from having the IAG profile raised within the company. B-Skill Ltd. is encouraged to consider making its IAG aims and objectives more explicit to help members of staff distinguish the company IAG priorities from the strategic aims of the company. Possible options are to include IAG as a 'standing agenda item' at staff and management meetings and the allocation to staff of more clearly defined IAG work priorities/targets/projects as part of the organisation annual review (appraisal) process (1.1, 4.6).
- Evidence gathered relating to specific Elements within the **matrix** Standard suggest the service could be enhanced by strengthening the links and interdependencies relating to the company Vision/Values, the measureable IAG aims and objectives, the competences relating to staff roles and staff performance/development. The positive benefits to be derived from aligning the parts of the service mentioned above remain unclear to managers and members of staff delivering the service. Consideration could be given to appointing an IAG Champion within the company and utilising the experience, qualifications and experience of existing member(s) of staff to develop the understanding of the B-Skill Ltd. workforce generally (1.1, 2.3, 2.4, 4.6).
- A mix of views exists amongst managers and members of staff about what the terms 'advice' and 'guidance' actually mean in the context of the IAG service provided by B-Skill Ltd. What for one person amounts to advice for another it is guidance with some staff unable to differentiate between the two, consequently not all staff recognise the boundaries of their role and when to signpost/refer learners or seek appropriate support from those more knowledgeable/experienced. B-Skill Ltd. may wish to consider ways to

address matters for existing staff and cater for the needs of newly appointed employees. One option is to discuss the terms at management/staff meetings, agree the definitions and commit details in writing so they remain a source of reference for existing personnel and those newly appointed (2.3, 2.4).

- B-Skill Ltd. actively encourages learner/employer feedback having a genuine regard for the views of those that receive the service. However, to demonstrate that the views of learners/employers are important and result in improvements being made to the service B-Skill Ltd. is encouraged to consider completing the feedback loop by providing all its customers with details about the changes/improvements made to the service resulting from learner/employer feedback. That, in turn, will encourage others to express their views to help improve service delivery. Examples of how this can be achieved include 'You said/We did' notice boards or including details in company email circulations/newsletter, social media sites and having a dedicated section as part of the company website (1.7, 4.3).
- B-Skill Ltd. makes a positive and purposeful commitment to the on-going development of staff. A number of good examples were noted where the investment made by the company has benefited individuals resulting in them undertaking their responsibilities more effectively and/or progressing within the company. Staff continuous professional development is regarded as an important ingredient for the future success of the company. To build on its current position the company may wish to consider the competencies that Trainers require to deliver the service and explore options to provide suitable training and/or development opportunities in advice and guidance. The company is also encouraged to consider ways to allow more staff the opportunity to represent the company at IAG sector meetings to share good practice/ideas similar to the Provider Network meetings that managers already attend (2.3, 2.4).

## 5. Methodology.

The Assessor used a range of methods to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard,

- Meetings with the Company Directors (2).
- Meetings with Managers (3).
- Informal focus group meetings involving a total of 10 learners (3).
- Telephone interview with a learner (1).
- Meetings with partnership representatives (2).
- Telephone interview with a partnership representative (1).
- Meetings with staff that deliver the service (9).
- Review of documentation.
- Review of the premises and facilities available at Sefton Investment Centre, 375 Stanley Road, Bootle, Liverpool L20 3EF and Suite 15a, Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. NE1 1LE.
- Review of B-Skill Ltd. website – <http://www.b-skill.com>

## 6. Findings Against the matrix Standard.

### 1. Leadership and Management.

*The way in which the organisation is led and managed to develop an effective service.*

Since becoming established B-Skill Ltd. has continued to make incremental progress to become a recognised provider of accredited training in Apprenticeships and vocational training for the support services industry that include Customer Service, Cleaning & Support Services, Business Administration, Team Leading and Management. The company has sourced Apprenticeship opportunities for individuals in employment sectors such as financial, insurance, legal, property services and customer service amongst others. The company is sub-contracted by The Manchester College to provide offender-learning opportunities for individuals detained at Holme House Prison and Deerbolt Young Offender Institution. The Bootle Centre delivers employability programmes on behalf of Job Centre Plus to help individuals enter employment by up-skilling them in areas such as searching and applying for a job, preparing for an interview, interview skills, career progression, positive attitudes and behaviour at work, working in a team, rights & responsibilities at work, solving work-related problems and in gaining industry specific certificates such as the Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS Card) and in Health & Safety for the construction industry.

The measureable aims and objectives of the company are to ensure the success of its learners enrolled onto its training programmes, initially by ensuring the right learner is enrolled onto the right programme at the right level of study/qualification. The IAG service plays a central role in achieving the company goals as it provides individuals with information about the various programmes allowing them to decide the right learning opportunity for them, set themselves realistic targets, update their skills and change their perceptions of employment/workplace, gain relevant qualifications to access employment or progress their learning in other ways. B-Skill Ltd. has comprehensive learner tracking procedures in relation to the above that are outlined further under Element 4 of this report.

To provide a focus on what the company aims to achieve to be successful and develop the business B-Skill Ltd. has published a three year Strategic Business Plan that describes the financial targets for the company in 2014/15 and projected financial targets over a five year period. The Plan also outlines the company's nine 'Strategic Points' that include 'Quality and customer service will receive a higher focus than ever before and; A blended approach to teaching and learning by expanding delivery methods to include e-learning.' The Strategic Business Plan is intended to provide a focus to help facilitate the ongoing and future success of the company.

Following the company restructure B-Skill Ltd. has aligned its meeting structure to support the needs of staff and the business. The Directors meet with the Head of Finance on a regular basis as an Executive Team and also meet as a Management Team when membership swells to include the Operations Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, Business Development Manager and HR Specialist. One of the Directors also sends regular email circulations to inform all staff of changes along with other relevant information. The Directors closely monitor performance and the Apprenticeship framework requirements and are regarded by members of staff to be good at providing regular updates and clear direction about what the company priorities are that chiefly relate to learner timely success and achievement. The Internal Quality Assurance Manager is generally regarded within the company to be a point of contact to obtain support or guidance on matters relating to the IAG service.

One member of staff stated, *"I have worked elsewhere and I find B-Skill professional, they invest in their staff and will work with you to improve things."* Another said, *"I like the work I do*

*and B-Skill is a good employer when good staff are in place, (name) is more supportive and I have more opportunity to comment and make suggestions.”*

B-Skill Ltd. has effective policies in place covering Health & Safety, Data Protection, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Disciplinary & Capability Procedures. Company policies are accessible via the company database 'SharePoint' that also allows access to recognised partner organisations. Members of staff were able to explain the implications should they have to deal with issues appertaining to the company Safeguarding and complaints policies and the procedures for completing learner risk assessments when required. The Directors and members of staff work closely with partners to facilitate additional help and support for people who may have special needs or who are disadvantaged in other ways. A full risk assessment is completed for learners having a disability and for those involved in work based learning in respect to their place of work. Learners reported having been informed about the B-Skill Ltd. key policies during their induction and note was made of the policy information provided by the company contained within its 'Learner Handbook' relating to Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Safeguarding and a section entitled 'Your Rights.' In addition to providing information on the above the Learner Handbook contains sets of questions on each topic so that learners can start to test their knowledge and understanding.

The company has published an 'Information, Advice & Guidance Strategy' (dated August 2014) describing a set of 'Guiding Principles' that the company operates to and information about how the service is to be delivered, what the company will offer, what the company expects from its learners and an explanation of how learner information is dealt with confidentially. The majority of learners reported they had been told about the B-Skill Ltd. Confidentiality Policy during their induction. Details of the Appeals and Grievance, complaints procedures are contained within the Learner Handbook. The company website provides links to other important and relevant websites e.g. National Apprenticeship Service, National Careers Service, NHS Direct, Talk To Frank, Mind Mental Health, Samaritans, Lesbian Gay & Bisexual Foundation, Equality & Human Rights Commission as well as others.

B-Skill Ltd. occupies office accommodation in Newcastle and in Bootle shared by other organisations. Note was made of the Health & Safety and first aid information displayed within its offices/training rooms, Fire exits are clearly marked, fire-fighting equipment is made available and prominently located within each building. The company has appointed Safeguarding and Equality & Diversity Champions as well as nominated First Aiders. Details of the members of staff are displayed, along with contact details, within each Centre. The company has been awarded 'C2E' - Committed to Equality Standard Certification.

Learner outcomes are based on the B-Skill Ltd. contract deliverables, to support individual learners so they successfully achieve their learning goals/qualifications within the set timescales allowed. Learners reported having received a full explanation of what their learning options are, what their studies will lead to and how that will help them in their role as an employee, progress within their organisation or, where applicable, secure suitable employment e.g. Apprenticeship. One learner described how completing his training has resulted in him changing the way he organises the work for his team as a Team Leader and how he now manages the members of his team. Learners reported feeling comfortable knowing what the company can, and will do, to help them achieve without any guarantees having been given. Learners reported having no misconceptions around what their training will contribute towards expressing views that the company is properly managing their expectations.

The main means of marketing the service are via the company website, recommendations through collaborative partnerships, direct mail shots, telephone canvassing of potential employers/learners and verbal recommendations given by existing learners/employers. The majority of learners reported having become aware of the service through their employer or by word of mouth recommendations. Very few examples were available where existing learners

had seen any marketing or promotional material relating to the company. B-Skill Ltd. website makes relevant information available via its main page, drop-down menus and via links to other relevant websites.

The company has a dedicated page as part of the website that explains the information, advice and guidance service that B-Skill Ltd. provides. Information is regularly made available via social media sites i.e. Facebook and LinkedIn.

Members of staff feel that their voice is heard within the company should they wish to make recommendations/suggestions, improve or shape the future development of the service. The company meeting structure provides managers and members of staff with the opportunity to share information and discuss possible changes. Staff member working groups are used to develop and improve the service allowing individuals to have their say and contribute to the on-going work of the company. One example of where learners have contributed to improving the service involves the Bootle Centre where a partition wall has been erected to separate learners involved in employability training from other learners using computers for ICT training or job search so there is less distraction between the two groups.

B-Skill Ltd. works collaboratively with a wide range of partner organisations, key agencies, Awarding Bodies such as Edexcel and Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE) as well as statutory agencies. New business opportunities are continually being sought with the company having recently established new working partnerships with Durham County Council Adult & Community Learning, Newcastle College Group, Triage based in Teesside and TQ Training in Daventry. Managers and members of staff recognise that partnership working is a key element when it comes to maximising choices for learners. Good, effective partnership working involving B-Skill Ltd. became apparent during interviews with members of staff and partner representatives. Described as an excellent partner to work with B-Skill Ltd. has earned for itself a very good reputation. Partners commented on B-Skill Ltd. being professional, committed, reliable and flexible reflecting how B-Skill Ltd. is perceived by its partners.

One partner said, *“Quality, they set out clearly their expectations. We have received quarterly visits that are properly structured. B-Skill is really good to work with, good communicator, very transparent and accurate in what they do.”* Another commented, *“I have always found B-Skill helpful, if we have any queries we contact B-Skill and they will resolve any issues quickly. B-skill is very supportive and we have been able to share our experiences and information and we have learnt a lot from them.”*

## **2. Resources.**

### *The assets invested and applied in providing an effective service.*

Financial resources are closely monitored and matched to the needs of the service. Shortly after the company re-structure a Quality Assurance Manager was appointed in keeping with one of the company's Key Strategic Points i.e. recognising the need to maintain and develop standards within the company and amongst its partners. Members of staff reported having access to the right equipment in order to fulfil their work responsibilities. Examples were given to highlight how staff members provided mutual support to each other to help deliver the service and address some of the personal problems learners have that impact their ability to learn.

Learners reported having been provided with up-to-date, accurate and reliable information. Examination of the literature and other types of information made available to learners was found to be relevant to meet their needs and current. Of particular note is the visual display used at the Bootle Centre to make information available concerning job vacancies/opportunities. Individual members of staff have a responsibility to maintain the kind of information they provide to learners and reported keeping up to date via the Internet e.g. National Careers Service website, by networking with partners, attending sector events/meetings such as the Provider

Network meetings and maintaining regular contact with others within the employment sectors that they deliver training for. One member of staff mentioned referring periodically to the National Careers Service website to keep abreast of national changes in legislation, Government priorities relating to learning and work and identifying possible good practice. Staff commented on how the Directors regularly share information to highlight changes in procedures, regulations or working practices as a result of external influences. One Trainer described how she uses different ways to get relevant information across to learners that include quizzes, games and case studies.

One learner said, *“They (B-Skill Ltd.) said they don’t want to hit you with too much information all at once, I have been elsewhere and they just seem to throw a bit of paper at you and tell you to get on. Here they help you progress at an individual level and don’t belittle you.”* Another commented, *“I got my confidence back coming here.”*

The role and responsibilities of all staff are linked, to a larger or lesser degree depending on their role, to the delivery of the IAG service. Each member of staff has a Job Description that describes their key areas of responsibility as well as the qualifications, skills and competences the post holder requires to undertake their role and responsibilities successfully. Some staff reported maintaining their membership to recognised sector bodies that entitle them to receive publications and other relevant literature to keep up-to-date with industry standards.

Examples of staff development that has taken place include Equality & Diversity, Health & Safety and Manual Handling training. On an individual basis personal development has involved staff members completing Safeguarding training via an on-line virtual college, Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) qualifications, in-house training to develop staff members regarding their functional skills, NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance and NVQ British Institute of Cleaning Science Level 4.

Although the company has a relatively small workforce various opportunities have arisen allowing individuals to progress and advance within B-Skill Ltd. Some members of staff have been with the company for a number of years with others having joined the company more recently following the company reorganisation. Examples of career progression within the company include one of the Directors having started with B-Skill Ltd. in a different role, another staff member having commenced on an Apprenticeship to then progress into a full-time role and later secure promotion into their current position.

One member of staff commented, *“I like the company ethos and the people I work with and the fact that as a company they want to move forward. The company is prepared to look at itself and recognise what needs to be done.”*

Members of recently appointed staff gave a description of what their induction had involved and how it had served them sufficiently well to commence work in an effective manner. The company has a structured staff induction procedure that new staff reported having received. When asked none were able to suggest how their induction could have been improved as it was felt it had covered sufficient aspects of the company, policies and procedures, their role and responsibilities and all the practical activities required to get them started in their role e.g. database passwords, use of equipment etc. Newly appointed staff post their inductions are asked to complete an induction questionnaire to provide the company with feedback. Recently appointed members of staff reported being happy with the induction they had received and the level of support provided enabling them to undertake their responsibilities in a competent fashion. A recent development is the intention to introduce a ‘Buddy Coach’ to support newly appointed members of staff.

### 3. Service Delivery.

*The way in which the service is delivered effectively.*

Learners reported receiving a detailed course induction providing them with a clear understanding of their study programme, information about key policies to which the company operates and a description of what they can expect from B-Skill Ltd. Learner outcomes ranged from learners having been found a work placement or enrolment onto one of B-Skill Ltd. apprenticeship programmes to descriptions of where attending their employability programme had helped individuals raise their confidence levels, gain a better insight into what kind of issues a working life can present and how to prepare for becoming employed. Of particular note are the highly favourable comments received from learners and partners alike about the ability of members of staff to deliver specialist training, having themselves had previous work experience/qualifications within the sector. The company provides each learner with a copy of the Learner Handbook (three versions are produced to suit the needs of the learner depending on which programme they enrol) containing helpful information regarding their study programme.

The company has in place an IAG Strategy. Information about the service is readily available via the company website.

Learners reported the importance of the high quality support that members of staff offer throughout their learning journey. For some it had contributed towards them building their confidence enabling them to mature as a person and having confidence to make their own decisions. A new venture by the company is the provision of an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course in Huddersfield in support of the local university to develop the abilities of domestic staff employed by the university. B-Skill Ltd. is in the process of introducing a six week intervention post a learners induction to establish if the learner has/is experiencing any problems and assess whether the learner needs any additional help and support.

One learner cited, *"We are told what the options are. They tell you about themselves. I am sure that by coming here I am learning new things. The Tutors told us about themselves. B-Skill has time for you, I have learnt a lot coming here and its warm and friendly."*

Learners explained how they satisfied themselves about the information and advice they had received to be in their best interests (impartial and objective). Many had based it on the fact that different options had been explained to them, along with the benefits and disadvantages associated with each option, so learners can decide if what they are told fits their requirements. Some learners explained having carried out further checks/research of their own to confirm what they had been told was correct before reaching a decision. Members of staff emphasised the importance of providing an impartial service and were able to describe the range of actions they take before explaining to learners what their options and choices are. The company makes good use of learner case studies with wall-mounted displays noted in the Bootle Centre. Information about what previous clients/learners have said about their training are accessible via the company website along with learner case studies. Presenting information in a variety of ways is more likely to have an impact on individuals to help build their confidence and/or act as a motivator.

One learner commented, *"I have changed how I do things at work to deal with things better. Some of the training I was dreading, my Tutor (name) put me at ease."*

Learners were clear about the fact it had been their decision to attend B-Skill Ltd. Their initial involvement might have come about through their employer based on what their employer wanted or thought best however, learners were reassured by the thorough induction procedures used by the company they are suited to a particular programme and if their abilities fall short then additional support is made available e.g. functional skill training. For learners considering

progressing into employment or learning they had reached a decision with the help and support of staff within the company. None of the learners taking part in the assessment felt they had been coerced, manipulated into making a decision.

Learners reported that the advice and guidance they had received enabled them to make realistic and informed choices about their learning programmes. The initial learner assessment is a comprehensive process reported to have a positive impact (outcome) when enrolling learners onto specific courses of their choice. Induction arrangements allow learners to settle quickly, understand their rights and responsibilities, the demands any learning involved will place upon them and help to identify whether they have any additional learning needs. The company makes Internet access available to learners for undertaking job search activities.

The company has embedded procedures for monitoring learner progress using aspects of B-Skill Ltd. policies and practices and quality assurance procedures to maintain quality and consistency of the service. Procedures are supplemented through learner 'progress reviews' and observation events that help ensure the progress of each learner is on track with his/her learning milestones and overall time limits within which learners are expected to achieve their qualification. Company procedures involve an assessment of the needs of learners to identify whether a person requires additional learning support. The company aims to provide extra help where possible to enable a learner to progress such as functional skills training so that they can complete their training programme successfully. In the past learners had to be referred externally to other providers for support regarding functional, something the company now has the capacity to deliver in-house. The additional needs of a learner are often identified during enrolment when learners are asked to complete a personal profile describing their needs and when members of staff complete a training needs analysis for each learner.

One learner said, *"I have gained more confidence as a result of my training and my decision making has improved."*

B-Skill Ltd. aim is to provide sufficient information in an easily understood format so that learners can make informed decisions. The company aims to provide learners with an all-encompassing service to address their training needs. Occasionally it requires a member of staff to refer a learner to external services but even then the initial support might come first from the learners employer. Referrals by the company include help to resolve employment issues and to explore further learning opportunities via local colleges etc. Examples of where learners have been signposted include Newcastle and Tyneside colleges, Jobcentre Plus, South West Durham Training for engineering Apprenticeships and self-help lines when instances of self-harm and eating disorders have been identified involving learners.

#### **4. Continuous Quality Improvement.**

*The way in which the service provided is reviewed and improved on an on-going basis.*

The B-Skill Ltd. Strategic Business Plan describes the company business aims and objectives that the Directors and members of staff aim to achieve. The company focus is very much towards providing learners and employers with a positive, rewarding experience that results in individuals having gained employment, obtaining suitable qualification(s) and/or having built their personal skills to develop them as individuals. Comments were received during the assessment to indicate that the success of B-Skill Ltd. is measured in part through the amount of repeat business the company attracts. The IAG service is recognised as an implicit and integral part of the service that the Directors, managers and members of staff deliver. At the operational level ample evidence was gathered to indicate the kind of activities that are being used to monitor/measure performance particularly in relation to learner success and achievement.

At the start of each programme/course learners are informed of what their programme/course is about, what the intended learning goals/outcomes are and what kind of benefits the training should deliver.

The IAG aims and objectives, coupled to the overall company aims are to: -

- Provide individuals with information about the various programmes allowing them to decide the right learning opportunity for them,
- Setting realistic targets so learners are not set-up to fail,
- Update their skills,
- Change their perceptions of employment/workplace,
- Gain suitable qualifications to access relevant employment opportunities or
- Progress their learning in other ways.

To evaluate learner progress relating to the above the company collates evidence obtained from various sources that include pre-course marketing materials and company website, referral interviews, learner and employer feedback, learner IAG/inductions, learner portfolios, learner success rates, job outcome targets, learner individual learning plans, learner tracking procedures, FE Choices data, observations of teaching & learning (OTL's) customer service calls (learner tracking), IAG compliance checks and learner feedback received by Internal Quality Assurance staff members.

In 2014 the company success rates for learners 'on programme' were in excess of 95% with job outcomes not as successful as predicted at 15% - data produced from the company Management Information System (MIS) and the Skills Funding Agency quarterly reports. Over 50% of learners completed add-on courses. Whilst the company has no accurate means to capture achievement/progress regarding soft skill measures it is felt that a more positive than negative outcome was achieved for the vast majority of learners. The company targets for 2015 include maintaining the success rate of a minimum 95% with 50% positive outcomes for learners comprising of 25% job outcomes and 25% positive destinations.

For learners involved with WBL programmes the company aims to: -

1. Have learners demonstrate where new learning has occurred,
2. Improve the ability of learners re ICT, English and maths,
3. Improve learner promotion prospects,
4. Gain relevant qualifications,
5. Achieve timely learner progress and achievement.

Data for 2014 shows learner achievement to be 84.4% and 69.2% for timely completions both sets of figures are a significant improvement when compared to 2013 that were 80% and 28.6% respectively. Changes introduced by the company regarding learner inductions and the provision of IAG is seen to have had a positive impact on the company's position. Targets set for 2015 are 94% learner achievement and 75% timely completions.

Performance management and quality assurance are key activities within the company to ensure funding targets and the requirements of Awarding Bodies are met and to provide a consistent service to learners. A calendar of events is maintained that informs/drives what QA activities need to be completed during any given month. The company has a defined 'Quality Assurance Framework' to which it operates. The Framework sets out the different stages involved that range from ones at a strategic level to ones that are operational i.e. Business Plan, Operational Targets, Executive Management, Self Assessment, Quality Improvement Plan, Team Meetings and Standardisation Events to monthly Performance Reviews all of which support the company 'Performance Framework.' A 'Quality Assurance Self Assessment Cycle'

operates along the lines of a 'Plan, Do, Review' approach informed by the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (CIF). A document entitled 'Quality Management Procedure' explains the principles to which the company aspires. A range of methods are used to capture relevant data, including feedback. The document describes how success, achievement, policies and procedures are reviewed and contribute to the management information the company produces to monitor progress. The company has in draft format an 'Internal Verification (IQA) Strategy & Procedures' document intended to bring together all aspects of quality assurance to satisfy the needs of the company and external bodies such as Ofsted, statutory and Awarding Bodies.

Weekly Executive, Management Team meetings along with monthly staff/standardisation meetings are used to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving learner achievement and assess learner outcomes.

The company feedback mechanisms contribute to the on-going maintenance and improvement of the service. Feedback data produced by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) relates to that obtained from learners and employers. The company utilises a 'Programme Evaluation Survey' to obtain feedback from learners. The questionnaire contains a total of 27 questions that learners are asked to respond to using a five band grading scale for each question. The survey results provide the company with meaningful feedback about the service it provides to learners. Trainer's complete 'Programme End Review' documentation for each learner to show whether the learner has successfully completed their training programme and achieved all their planned outcomes and what progression routes an individual wishes to take. Good perceptions of the Service were evident in survey results. In addition the Assessor received praise about the Service from learners and from partner representatives.

The company has a formal staff appraisal and performance procedure a description of the process is contained within the company Employee Handbook. Performance is evaluated via monthly, quarterly and annual review meetings. Evidence gathered shows that the completion of staff appraisals by managers to be up-to-date. Members of staff have an understanding about what the company is aiming to achieve but are unclear about how the company IAG priorities relate to the company aims and objectives and generally struggled to explain what they thought their work activities contribute towards insofar as the IAG service is concerned at a more strategic level.

The company considers it very important that its relationships with its partners are sound and effectively managed. Managers and members of staff at all levels within B-Skill Ltd. share responsibility for ensuring that partnership working is effective and beneficial to the company, its partners and learners. To achieve that the company has contract meetings with its main funder, the SFA as well as review meetings/audits conducted by Awarding Bodies. B-Skill Ltd. invites its partners to attend an annual conference to hear about company proposals for the year ahead allowing those that attend to contribute, express their views and provide feedback. The company circulates to its partners a questionnaire prior to the completion of the company SAR so the views/feedback obtained from partners can be incorporated into the findings of the SAR.

Procedures are in place for ensuring that the delivery of training is quality assured driven and managed through activities such as observation events to assess the quality and consistency of the service. Internal Verifiers (IV) and an External Verifier (EV) monitor the quality of the training provided with QA procedures determining the quality of Individual Learning Plans. Quality issues are discussed at management and staff meetings. Internal auditing procedures oversee performance across training and service delivery supplemented by the work undertaken to monitor progress against the contract(s) awarded to the company. Learners and employers are contacted by telephone by Internal Quality Assurance staff to check on the quality of the service they received.

The completion of the company 'Self Assessment Report' is an annual occurrence when

managers and members of staff evaluate the service(s) they provide to identify IAG service strengths and areas for improvement. Any issues identified in need of attention are included in the company Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). The QIP contains collated information regarding areas for improvement drawn from learner and employer feedback, the completion of the company SAR, internal and external audits as well as other sources. Examination of the company QIP revealed it to contain a number of issues that the company aims to address i.e. Too much teaching, learning and assessment is not good, Arrangements to develop learners' skills in English & Mathematics are underdeveloped, Quality assurance procedures to improve the observation of teaching and learning lack vigor, Improve outcomes for learners by placing greater emphasis on progression to further education or study, amongst others.

Members of staff delivering the service have access to information technology (IT) in the form of laptop computers, mobile phones and specialist equipment to support the training provided. Learners reported having been given access to computers to complete job search enquiries. Members of staff use IT to deliver Power Point presentations. The company is moving increasingly towards the electronic recording of learner portfolios (introduced during 2014) to improve efficiency. Learner information retained electronically allows staff to share information in a confidential manner, as the system is password protected. The company has commissioned a pilot IT course to assess its suitability using external consultants. External consultants have been engaged to advise the Directors on matters about growing and developing the company as a successful business. A series of workshops are also proposed to up-skill the Trainers regarding teaching and learning styles to enable them to be more effective in their role. The company is currently looking to appoint someone into a new role as a Learner Engagement Officer.

With regard to the future development of the IAG service B-Skill Ltd. has a clear ambition to sustain the quality of the service it now provides to learners/employers/partners. The ongoing development of the company and its staff are key considerations with B-Skill Ltd. having engaged consultants to deliver in-house training to members of staff. Note was made of the draft company Strategic Plan for 2015-17 within which the strategic aims and objectives of the company are described under four key headings namely, Leadership & Management, Organisational Development, Teaching & Learning and Financial Sustainability & Business Development. Under the section Teaching and Learning one of the company objectives is to further develop and enhance its IAG service.

## 7. Conclusion.

B-Skill Ltd. quality assurance procedures are, and will continue to be, a key factor for maintaining and improving the service. It is now a mandatory part of the assessment procedures for all organisations accredited to the Standard to demonstrate that they have properly embraced continuous quality improvement. The following describes the procedures that apply: -

1. A follow-up call will be made to B-Skill Ltd. by the Assessor 3 months after the on-site assessment to ensure the Assessment Report has been received, clarify any queries regarding the strengths and areas for continuous improvement identified and discuss any additional areas for development B-Skill Ltd. has identified. It also provides opportunity to discuss the Continuous Improvement Check (CIC) procedures, discuss any concerns and explore the possible use of a **matrix** Advisor to assist B-Skill Ltd. to move improvement and developmental issues forward.
2. Further contact will be made with B-Skill Ltd. at 12 and 24 month intervals, post the on-site assessment, to discuss any issues, changes or challenges that may have been encountered during the preceding twelve months; discuss and reflect on what has been

accomplished and what other areas for improvement B-Skill Ltd. has identified/introduced. The focus for future discussions will be on the progress made to improve the IAG service and the recommendations made in this report. It will also take account of on-going proposals by the B-Skill Ltd. to enhance the service to its customers, the hard and soft measures used to evaluate how good the IAG service is along with evidence to show how the IAG service has contributed to achieving successful learner outcomes. Details of the issues involved/discussed are to be recorded as part of the CIC procedures. A template will be forwarded to B-Skill Ltd. for completion.

## 8. The matrix Standard Evidence Grid.

Criteria	Met	Not Met	Strength	AfCI
The service has clearly defined measurable aims and objectives which link to any wider organisational strategic aims. 1.1	✓			✓
The service is provided with clear leadership and direction 1.2	✓			
The organisation implements policies to promote equality and diversity, impartiality, confidentiality and professional integrity in all aspects of service delivery 1.3	✓			
The organisation complies with existing and new legislation which might impact upon the service 1.4	✓			
The organisation defines client outcomes and uses them as a measure of success for the service 1.5	✓			
The organisation promotes the service in ways which are accessible to all those eligible to use it 1.6	✓			
Clients and staff influence the design and development of the service 1.7	✓			✓
The organisation establishes effective links with other appropriate partnerships and networks to enhance the service 1.8	✓			
The organisation uses its resources effectively to deliver the service 2.1	✓		✓	
Clients are provided with current, accurate and quality assured information which is inclusive 2.2	✓			
The organisation defines the skills, knowledge, competencies and qualifications, in line with current national recognised professional qualifications and frameworks, for individual staff roles, linked to the aims and objectives of the service 2.3	✓			✓
Staff are supported in undertaking continuous professional development and provided with opportunities for career progression 2.4	✓			✓
Effective induction processes are in place for all staff 2.5	✓			
The service is defined so that clients are clear about what they might expect 3.1	✓		✓	

The service is delivered effectively to meet its aims and objectives 3.2	✓		✓	
The service provided is impartial and objective 3.3	✓			
Clients are given appropriate options to explore and understand that they are responsible for making their own decisions 3.4	✓			
When exploring options, clients are provided with and supported to use appropriate resources including access to technology 3.5	✓			
Clients benefit from signposting and referral to other appropriate agencies or organisations 3.6	✓			
The organisation measures and evaluates the service against its stated aims and objectives and identifies improvements 4.1	✓			
The organisation monitors and evaluates client outcomes to support and improve service delivery 4.2	✓			
The organisation evaluates feedback on the service to build upon its strengths and addresses any areas for improvement 4.3	✓			✓
The organisation evaluates the effectiveness of its partnerships and networks to improve the service 4.4	✓			
The organisation defines quality assurance approaches which are used to improve the service 4.5	✓		✓	
Staff performance, linked to their role within the aims and objectives of the service, are reviewed and evaluated to improve the service 4.6	✓			✓
Effective use is made of technology to improve the service 4.7	✓			
The organisation continually reviews improvements to help inform the future aims and objectives of the service 4.8	✓			