

Commercial in Confidence



B-SKILL LTD.



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1. Assessment Information.

Assessment Type	ACCREDITATION REVIEW.
Assessor's Decision	STANDARD MET.
Assessor's Name	PAUL D. GREGORY.
Visit Date	07/01/2018-09/01/2018.
Client ID	C12354.
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2. Organisation – Introduction, Aims, Objectives & Outcomes.

Located within Newcastle upon Tyne city centre B-Skill Ltd. has, during the past 17 years, become firmly established as an independent training provider. The company's raison-d'être is based on the belief that everyone, given the right learning opportunities and support, can realise their full potential. The company is actively engaged in delivering government funded classroom based employability and vocational training programmes, Apprenticeships and Traineeships in the workplace.

Since last being assessed B-Skill Ltd. has done much to embed its information, advice and guidance (IAG) service across the span of activities it undertakes. IAG is delivered to potential learners to ensure that the right learners are recruited onto the right programmes. All learner programmes have IAG in-built to the delivery of the programme to ensure learners are supported appropriately and informed as to their options and potential progression routes. Learners enrol from a range of backgrounds and employment sectors to access educational programmes that range from Entry level to Level 5. Learners may be employed or unemployed, looking for support to get back into work and/or learn new skills through funded learning opportunities via 'Learner Loans' in Health & Fitness, Beauty and Education.

In addition to its Newcastle Headquarters B-Skill Ltd. operates from Centres situated in Bootle and Ossett. During the latter part of 2017 the company secured its first Apprenticeship Levy contract with Culina, a major national distribution company, to deliver suitable training opportunities to its employees. During the planning of this assessment B-Skill Ltd. made known that it was keen to involve Culina members of staff and its learners as part of the on-site assessment process resulting in the Assessor visiting one of Culina's distribution centres near Northampton.

B-Skill Ltd. prides itself on having established a 'community' of delivery partners to help strengthen its ability to deliver training programmes nationally. Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy the company has concentrated on working with providers/employers in priority sectors identified by their Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP's). B-Skill Ltd. provides Apprenticeship Standards in Business Administration, Customer Service, Digital, Health & Social Care, Leadership & Management and Logistics & Supply Chain amongst others. The company recognises its responsibility for providing a comprehensive IAG service to staff members, partners and sub-contractors involved in the planning, supporting and delivery of services as well as to learners and employers participating in B-Skill Ltd. training programmes.

The company 'Vision' states, *'B-Skill are passionate about engaging employers and supporting learners to raise aspirations and achieve goals. People are at the heart of our success and we use learning to encourage all people to take pride in their own special contribution to society. We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to recognise the opportunities that are available to them and reach their full potential.'*

B-Skill Ltd. 'Values Statement' describes the principles that guide how the company operates by providing a framework for behaviour and conduct for all employees that includes integrity, respect, accountability, transparency, trust, responsibility, professionalism, understanding and opportunity, promoting the fact that it offers impartial, high quality IAG to all learners/employers to enhance their choice of learning, employment and personal goals.

Since last being assessed the company has developed an on-line portal that members of staff, learners and other stakeholders can access and use for the electronic transfer of documents etc. The company has attained National Equality Standard Committed2Equality (C2E) 'Gold' status for its work relating to Equality and Diversity. The company scored highly for how it promotes equality and diversity amongst managers and members of staff, customers and external stakeholders based on equal treatment for all regardless of age, disability, race, religion and sexual orientation.

In support of the company's strategic aims B-Skill Ltd. defines its IAG service to be: -

- *The provision of accurate, up-to-date information about career opportunities, learning opportunities and progression routes. It will direct learners to find help and advice and explain how to access it.*
- *Provision of impartial guidance to help both adults and young people to confront barriers, develop themselves and make progress through learning.*

In order to achieve its stated aims the company has identified a number of key priorities that managers and staff members need to fulfil for its Employability and Apprenticeship Programmes. The company has attributed activities to each to show what managers and staff members need to undertake to achieve each priority successfully. For example, in relation to the Employability Programme one of the priorities is for learners to understand the information provided and decide on the right choice of programme for them. Other priorities include updating their personal skills, attitudinal changes, accessing employment opportunities and gaining relevant qualifications/standards. In respect to its Apprenticeship offer new learning has to be demonstrated along with improvements in maths, English and ICT skills, improved promotion prospects and signposting to progression opportunities amongst other priorities.

A range of measures is in place through which the company regularly reviews progress against all its key priorities. The company target for learner/employer satisfaction is 90% positive feedback for all programmes. FE Choices data confirms 94.8% learner satisfaction and 87% employer satisfaction. Where the company fails to achieve any of its targets the additional action required is shown in the company Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

In 2017 the success rate for the company Employability Programmes was 88% of which 25% of learners gained suitable employment. The targets set for 2018 include maintaining the learner success rate at 88% of which 50% have to achieve positive outcomes consisting of a minimum of 25% job outcomes and 25% into other positive destinations.

The company Apprenticeship programmes for 2017 show 71% overall success of which 57% were timely completions. The figures surpass the previous years that were 54% and 44% respectively. The targets set for 2018 are 73% overall success with timely learner completions set at 60%. In respect to the Culina contract the company has agreed a target of 80% learner retention for 2018 and has adopted the 73% overall success rate as for all its Apprenticeship programmes.

The company Management Team and B-Skill-Ltd sub-contracted partners monitor company performance against its stated targets at monthly review meetings supported by staff compliance, standardisation, management and team meetings.

The company operates a sampling regime involving individual learner plans (ILP's), learner and employer feedback as well as established internal quality assurance checks/procedures.

Additional measures to evaluate the service involve learner satisfaction surveys, learner forums, observations of teaching and learning, customer service telephone calls, Ofsted learner view surveys and learner success stories/case studies, amongst others. The company Self Assessment Report, compiled using the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) questions, provides the company with a means to understand what parts of the service are working well and those in need of attention. The process for overseeing areas for improvement involves the company QIP, used to track progress for introducing change and improvement.

Since last being assessed the company has started making greater use of technology to provide a more efficient and effective service. The company IT portal allows partners/employers to access information held by B-Skill Ltd. In addition 'One-File', 'Share-Point' and 'CognAssist' are software applications that are now being exploited more fully for data recording, sharing information or assessing the learning styles and the competencies of learners. The company has also embarked on using social media sites to promote the service and make information more readily available.

Through prudent financial and personnel management B-Skill Ltd. has maintained its position as a training provider in what has been a difficult trading period for all providers. The company has taken the decision to embrace the fiscal changes introduced by the Government re the training Levy initiative having now developed its own structured approach to engage at a more strategic level with employers.

Whilst the company has endured some uncertainties due to national changes impacting on the training sector, resulting in some loss of momentum, this assessment appears to have been a timely encounter, helping place the company's IAG service 'front and centre' of other work considerations, if only for a limited period of time. Looking forward, the areas for improvement recommended in this report are aimed at helping B-Skill Ltd. develop a stronger/clearer focus on the IAG activities that managers and staff members undertake, raising awareness about the importance of having an effective IAG service, its significance to the on-going success of the company and the ability of managers and staff members to relate (evidence) what they do and why they do it to the requirements of the **matrix** Standard.

Of particular note was the desire by the company and those working within it to provide a good quality, successful service to learners/employers. Many staff members cited obtaining their job satisfaction through the levels of responsibility they have, the fact that they feel their voice is heard within the company, the prevailing management style and company ethos in putting the learner first and not profit and loss considerations as experienced by some staff when working for other providers. Team synergies, good levels of collaboration and effective partnership working provide learners/employers with a joined-up service aimed at helping them achieve their learning/work ambitions.

The on-site assessment has hopefully helped B-Skill Ltd. to fine-tune parts of the service it provides and acted as a reminder about the significance IAG has for much of what takes place within the company and, that between learners, employers, partners and other stakeholders to ensure the service continues to meet the needs of all concerned.

B-Skill Ltd. is well positioned to build on what it has achieved to date utilising the knowledge, experience, skills and abilities of managers and members of staff in maintaining the company's reputation and developing its IAG service still further.

Comments received from learners/employers/partners/staff members about the service include: -

"I would put B-Skill at the top of the list of all the organisations we deal with. Communications work well and what the company does for learners works well."

"B-Skill has a good reputation."

"I have always heard good things about B-Skill's reputation from different providers within the sector."

"B-Skill has a system or procedure for everything, it is very prescriptive, very clear and very professional."

"I have always had a good relationship with B-Skill. I particularly like 'One-File' that allows me to submit work, shows me where I am at, what I have accomplished and the milestones ahead about what I need to achieve."

"Since joining B-Skill it has been a breath of fresh air for me. Its an open organisation, they listen to what I have to say."

"B-Skill is good at helping learners understand what their options are and signposting to other providers depending on their circumstances."

"My overall experience has been positive. What the company does is thorough and I have had a more personal service. I would recommend them."

"I enjoy working for B-Skill, I get on with everyone and everyone is keen to help each other."

"B-Skill has brought my confidence on and my abilities to a point where I have now been asked by my employer to apply for a much more senior role."

"Communication is massive, I was surprised by the availability of my Trainer who tells me to phone or email. I sent an email query at 10pm one night and got a response within a few minutes."

The scope of the assessment included an assessment of the internal processes for delivering the IAG service, the extent and suitability of the service, the success or otherwise of partnership working, the effective delivery of IAG by those delivering the service, the overall management of the service, the outcomes experienced by learners having received the service, identification of service strengths, possible improvements to the service and examination of the areas previously identified as 'Strengths' and 'Areas for Further Development.'

3. Strengths.

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.

- An increasing number of learners are now being provided with a detailed diagnostic assessment of their skills, abilities, interests, personality and aptitudes. Learners particularly appreciate the way in which information about their course/learning programme is explained and tailored to meet their particular learning styles and other needs. A number of learners felt the comprehensive approach taken by their Trainer to assess their capabilities and help them achieve successful outcomes had also, in many positive ways, significantly changed their own perceptions of themselves (3.4, 3.5).
- The Assessor received complimentary remarks from B-Skill Ltd. partners about the company 'On-boarding Process' to induct new partners when being engaged as sub-contracted organisations. The commitment made by senior management and staff members to facilitate an effective working relationship has been appreciated and has led to successful partnership working arrangements. Partners reflected on the fact that they had not previously experienced having been made so welcome as a 'partner' by other prime contractors they work with. Sub-contracted partners genuinely feel valued as part of what B-Skill Ltd. refers to as its 'community of partners' engaged to deliver positive outcomes to learners/employers (1.8).
- Since last being assessed B-Skill Ltd. has made a firm financial commitment towards investing in existing and new technology to improve efficiency and support staff members in the effective delivery of the IAG service. Members of staff reported being 'enthused' by the company's move to use technology in ways to make administration and recording processes easier but also to deliver a more bespoke service to individuals by identifying any real or potential learning barriers they may have and to deliver training that fits their learning style (4.7).
- B-Skill Ltd. has invested significant resources towards establishing its first Levy contract involving a big employer within the distribution sector. B-Skill Ltd. has taken the opportunity to work closely with the employer and those it employs to identify their needs. The work has resulted in the development of suitable training programmes across a number of distribution centres now on offer as part of a pilot programme. The scale of all that has been involved is new to B-Skill Ltd. nevertheless the company has taken the opportunity not only to engage with the employer, having competitively fought for and been awarded the contract, but develop its own strategy for going forward to now be in a position to offer other big employers a more ready-made solution to meet the training needs of their employees reducing the planning and start-up time involved. The work undertaken by B-Skill Ltd. has helped to inform the planning and delivery of its IAG service thereby strengthening the company's offer when bidding for future similar contracts (1.2, 2.1, 4.8).

4. Areas for Development.

A number of areas for development were identified during the assessment that may develop or enhance the service delivered. These are detailed below and for the company to consider as part of its ongoing continuous quality improvement actions. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments.

- B-Skill Ltd. has a genuine commitment towards the training and development of those it employs. Staff development however is mainly focussed on staff gaining suitable qualifications to deliver the service along with what can be regarded as mandatory awareness training in respect to Safeguarding, Equality & Diversity, Health & Safety and the Government's Prevent/Radicalisation agenda. In recognition of the fact that learners are being enrolled from across the social spectrum, many of which may bring with them a variety of social/personal problems, B-Skill Ltd. may wish to consider extending awareness training to include such topics as anger/conflict management, drug/alcohol abuse, mental health issues, dyslexia, homelessness, medication dependency amongst others. In doing so it will better equip those that deliver the service to more readily recognise the signs and signals an individual may display before being presented with more difficult situations to manage or it compromising their own personal safety/wellbeing. A low cost option would be to seek support from local statutory or voluntary organisations specialising in supporting people coping with the kind of problems outlined above and inviting a representative to B-Skill Ltd. staff meetings to raise the awareness of those delivering the service as part of B-Skill Ltd. duty of care towards its employees. Consideration could also be given to extending an invitation to representatives from the organisations that B-Skill Ltd. sub-contract. An alternative approach would be to identify suitable on-line training packages for all staff members (2.4).
- The B-Skill Ltd. company website is primarily an information giving tool containing a range of valuable information that is easily accessible to learners/employers. However, there is scope for B-Skill Ltd. to exploit its website on a number of fronts. For example, extending the range of information currently available and enhancements to the web-support provided to include information about those that deliver the service (pen pictures), the kind of help and support (IAG) available to learners and prospective learners, access to the company's key policies – complaints, compliments, IAG, Safeguarding, Equality & Diversity Policies etc., the company's measureable IAG aims and objectives, a hyperlink to the National Careers Service website, inclusion of podcasts and video clips, employer testimonials, information about the changes and improvements the company has made to the service resulting from learner/employer feedback, information about company success and achievement as well as access to Internet tools such as magnifiers, a text to speech facility, a facility to change website colours and font sizes for those visually impaired and a translation facility all of which helps to make the IAG on offer a more inclusive service (1.6, 4.7).
- The work undertaken to develop suitable training programmes for Culina has exposed the need for B-Skill Ltd. to consider carefully the needs of all its learners.

Culina employs a quota of foreign nationals whose first language is not English. A number of Polish speaking learners had found difficulty in understanding the requirements of their course with others finding the duplication of work already completed frustrating not having interpreted the questions asked of them sufficiently accurately in the first place. Whilst B-Skill Ltd. employs a Functional Skills Specialist who has some capacity to provide additional support it became apparent during the assessment it was proving insufficient to address the needs of learners working for Culina. Without the company having more established and recognised procedures in place individual members of staff are making best use of the resources they can make available such as dictionaries and Google translate. In order to provide an all-inclusive service to learners B-Skill Ltd. is encouraged to consider having clearly defined contingency plans in place to support Trainers and other members of staff that is/are readily accessible to them and possibly to learners (1.3, 2.1, 3.2).

- IAG is recognised as a specific and critical part of all the services provided by B-Skill Ltd. There is however, still a need to develop a stronger focus on the IAG service within the company and, to help achieve that, consideration should be given to identifying/appointing an 'IAG Champion.' In doing so it will help to raise the IAG profile within the company, making the service more explicit. A service Champion will be able to look across company contracts and delivery models to identify good practice, ensure consistency of service, contribute to the needs of other staff members through the company continuous professional development (CPD) processes, become a point of contact for other staff members for IAG issues and act as a mentor, advising the company about new initiatives re the IAG service during the planning/implementation stage (e.g. Culina) and being in a position to contribute to the future development of the service. Other possible benefits could include the IAG Champion attending network meetings locally within the IAG employment sector and bringing back new ideas, initiatives and good practice for adoption by the company and helping to ensure new members of staff obtain a common understanding of what the terms 'Advice' and 'Guidance' mean in the context of the IAG service provided by B-Skill Ltd. (1.2, 2.1, 4.8).
- Whilst recognising the approach taken by B-Skill Ltd. to build the provision of IAG into all parts of its learning programmes the company IAG measurable aims and objectives, as published by the company, could be further enhanced. The company is encouraged to list alongside each of the aims, and the activities involved to achieve them, quantitative and qualitative data to indicate the current position (whether each aim has been/is being achieved) and then to include a fourth column to indicate what impact achieving the said aim has had on either learners, employers or B-Skill Ltd. as a company. By bringing the information together in one document it will provide managers and staff members with a clearer indication of what is being achieved and the benefits service users have derived. It will also help to align the company IAG aims and objectives with the requirements of the **matrix** Standard and make the IAG service more explicit within the company (1.1, 4.1).

The annual **matrix** Continuous Improvement Check will allow the company to demonstrate on an ongoing basis the developments they are continuing to make in order to support individuals <http://matrixstandard.com/continuous-improvement-checks/>. These may include the Areas for Development above. Please note that annual Continuous Improvement Checks are mandatory and non-completion within the required timescale will impact on your company's accreditation.

5. Methodology.

The following methods were used to gather evidence against the **matrix** Standard during the assessment process.


- Meeting with the Managing Director.
- Meeting with the Quality Assurance Manager.
- 'Skype' interview with the Key Account Manager.
- Meeting with two employer (Culina) management representatives.
- Informal focus group meetings involving a total of 11 learners (3).
- 'Skype' focus group discussion involving 4 learners.
- One-to-one meeting with a learner.
- 'Skype' interview with a learner.
- Telephone interview with a learner.
- 'Skype' interviews with staff that deliver the service (2).
- Meetings with partnership representatives (2).
- Telephone interview with a partnership representative.
- Meetings with staff that deliver the service (7).
- Document Review.
- Review of the premises and facilities available at: -
 1. Suite A15, Milburn House, Dean Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE11LE and,
 2. Culina, BMW Parts Depot, Great Bear, Unit C, Nectar Way, Pineham, Northampton NN4 9BX.
- Review of B-Skill Ltd. website – <http://b-skill.com>

Conditions of Accreditation.

Holders of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation must:

- Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
- Throughout the period of accreditation satisfy Assessment Services Ltd that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
- Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out 3 weeks either side of the accreditation anniversary date.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
- Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrix@assessmentservices.com .
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
- Inform Assessment Services Ltd of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
- Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause Assessment Services Ltd and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
- Only use the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines. For example, if a certain department is successfully **matrix** accredited, the Quality Mark can only be used on that department's letterhead or on that department's page on their internet homepage.
- Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for accreditation review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by Assessment Services Ltd and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to being a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
- Be aware that Assessment Services Ltd reserves the right to remove any accreditation and/or certification previously applied if payment is not received for services provided.

Whilst accredited the organisation will be signed up for IAGonline - a community website for all **matrix** holders. Once signed up, any employee of the organisation can join the community and access regular posts and join specialist interest groups for support and discussion.

	
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