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Effective improvement of subcontracted work-based learning: BCTG Ltd

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Brief description

This case study explains how BCTG subcontracts apprenticeship training effectively to provide good value for money. It also promotes apprenticeship training well and participates actively in providing unemployed young people in the midlands with routes into apprenticeships and other training.

Overview – the provider’s message

‘Since our inception as a not-for-profit limited company in 2001, BCTG has been about working in partnership to deliver training that meets the needs of our learners and their employers. Our subcontractors are true partners who we support and develop through extensive and robust quality improvement and providing staff development. By improving the providers we improve the quality for our learners.’



Chris Luty, Managing Director

The good practice in detail

Background

BCTG operates work-based learning through a network of carefully selected partner providers who sign up to deliver good training along with high learner success rates and progression to sustained employment and further higher level training. The company has moved away from Train to Gain towards apprenticeship programmes, developing their providers from delivering adult training and assessment to a model where young people are able to acquire practical and theoretical skills, tailored to meet employers' needs. The employers do not want apprentices who are fully 'job-ready', but want young people who can learn practical and theoretical skills while being moulded into each employer's culture, practices and ways of working.

Five professional values reflect the company's commitment to meeting the training needs of learners and their employers. They are:

- continuous improvement
- reliability
- value for money
- people focused
- collaboration.

Selecting partners and monitoring performance

The selection process for partner subcontractors is robust. It takes into account previous history, experience and financial stability as well as ensuring that the provider will fit as part of the consortium. Extensive due diligence procedures have ensured that no contracts have needed to be terminated in 11 years of working.

Key performance indicators are used well to monitor performance. These are:

- no individual subcontractor to be below 85% overall success or 75% timely success for apprenticeships (some 10 percentage points higher than the national averages)
- no subcontractor to be below 65% positive progression for foundation learning and [Kick Start Gold](#) (a programme for young people not engaged in education or employment)
- a minimum of 90% of observations of teaching and learning to be graded good or better (higher than is typical in work-based learning)
- at least 90% of employers to identify a measurable positive impact of the training on their business
- at least 90% of employer feedback to be rated as good or better
- a minimum of 90% of learner feedback to be rated as good or better
- at least 95% of subcontractor feedback about BCTG to be rated as good or better



Robust contract management and quality monitoring

Arrangements for contract management and quality monitoring are extensive and cover the key areas of the apprenticeship 'journey' from recruitment through to completion of frameworks and progression.

Each subcontractor's performance is monitored regularly and risk-rated using a 'RAG' traffic lights designation (red–amber–green) on the basis of:

- performance against the terms in the contract
- outcomes of observations of key training processes
- performance against equality and diversity impact measures
- health and safety
- audit/compliance outcomes
- financial control
- the accuracy of claims.

Contract management meetings focus on identifying potential problems as early as possible and providing support to prevent them developing into something that impacts on learners.

The frequency of contract management meetings, at least quarterly, is determined by risk ratings, and take place alongside regular contact by email, telephone and drop-ins. BCTG gathers learners' and employers' views directly through learner and subcontractor surveys.

Meetings with subcontractors are well-structured and all providers are expected to attend. A useful by-product is the voluntary networking that has resulted in improvements. BCTG also promotes more formal networking between their providers. For example, a better health and social care provider will support another of the providers where there are areas in need of improvement. The supported provider may in turn have better childcare provision, and so be prompted to help another provider in that area.

Observations of teaching and learning (OTL) arrangements are well developed with clear grade criteria. The observations cover:

- initial assessment and induction
- initial advice and guidance
- progress reviews
- off-the-job delivery (teaching and learning)
- exit reviews

Each process is observed in its entirety against standards that are shared with the subcontractors. Where a grade 3 or 4 is awarded to an individual a centrally provided subject learner coach works with them to improve in preparation for a re-observation. Sector-specific observers are used to ensure that feedback is well informed and relevant. A system of moderated peer observations facilitates the sharing of good practice across the consortium. These observations are in addition to each subcontractor's own OTL arrangements.

The observation programme helps BCTG to identify underperformance, and to ascertain what each provider needs to do to improve. The self-improvement capacity of the subcontracted providers is being developed through paired observations moderated at the time of the OTL and the establishment of a supportive peer review group.

Each provider is also supported in their individual self-assessment reporting, which inform an overall BCTG report and quality improvement plans.

Staff development and other benefits for subcontractors

BCTG provides an internal programme of staff development focused on improving teaching, learning and assessment. Training includes equality, diversity and safeguarding. Information and expertise on the development of resources is shared. External events are promoted, where it would be useful for the providers to hear things 'first hand'. A working group is assessing the impact of student loans with the 12 subcontractors who will be affected when they are introduced. A post of loans coordinator has been created to support staff and provide advice for learners about how to access loans.

BCTG actively markets apprenticeships through 'apprentice showcase' events. The most recent, held at Wolverhampton Football Club, attracted over 1,000 young people with their parents and carers, and included active taster sessions provided by major employers such as Jaguar, Land Rover and Carillion.

Provider background

BCTG Limited was established in 2001 as a not-for-profit limited company, and is based in Oldbury, in the West Midlands. The company manages a large consortium of about 40 subcontracted training providers based in the Midlands and further afield. Subcontractors are a mix of small- and medium-sized private providers, delivering either multi-sector or specialist single-sector skills training in most areas of learning. At the most recent [inspection](#) in May 2012, BCTG was judged to be good.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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