

Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 52492

Name of lead inspector: Deavon Baker-Oxley HMI

Last day of inspection: 15 January 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce (BLCC) is based in Luton. Its work-based learning department was established in 1984. Learner numbers and areas of learning offered have decreased since the last inspection.
2. The provider has received government funding since 1984 to provide apprenticeship training. It now provides apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes in business administration and law. The provider has a very small number of learners on Train to Gain programmes within this subject area.
3. BLCC has a work-based learning team consisting of a, business development manager, a centre coordinator, and two assessors, one of whom is full time. Of-the-job group training covers background knowledge, as well as training. Assessment, which takes place in the workplace is by visiting assessors. Luton is the base for the majority of learners. All are in employment.
4. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Luton was 28.1%, and in Bedfordshire it was 6.7% compared to 9.1% in England. The number of pupils in 2009 gaining five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at A* to C in Luton was broadly in line with the national average.
5. The last inspection of Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce was October 2007, and its last monitoring visit was December 2008.
6. BLCC provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Luton Borough Council

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	36 apprentices

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 learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Present learners are making good progress, with the majority having achieved their technical certificate. Learners enjoy their training and receive very good help and support from their assessors. The provider has worked hard to build good relationships with its employers, including developing mentors within the workplace and ensuring regular support for learners. Training and assessment are satisfactory and learners appreciate and enjoy off-the-job training sessions which gives them the opportunity to share ideas and information with other learners. Target setting, in a minority of instances focuses insufficiently on driving forward learners' progression. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory and the promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall, however the recording of evidence is insufficient in learners' portfolios to support the effective reinforcement of equality issues.

Main findings

- In 2008/2009, overall and timely success rates for advanced business administration apprentices were above the national average. Rates for advanced customer service apprentices remain high.
- Most learners achieve good standards at work. Business administration learners develop a range of effective paper-based and electronic administrative skills.

Customer service learners are able to provide reliable customer service to their clients.

- Off-the-job technical certificate training gives learners the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with apprentices from different work environments. Training staff provide well planned individual coaching and mentoring in the workplace.
- Learners benefit from good work opportunities to practice their administrative and customer service skills. Most learners have progressed further in their employment whilst being on the apprenticeships. This includes widened job roles and, in a few cases, gaining promotion.
- The provider has developed good partnerships to meet learners' needs. It has been very effective in presenting the benefits of apprenticeships to Chamber members. In addition, it promotes work-based learning well to a range of community groups including Muslims, Polish and ex-offenders.
- The provider trains and effectively deploys work-based mentors. They support learners well at work and have good involvement in learners' reviews.
- A majority of current learners are making expected progress towards achieving the goals in their individual learning plan but the remainder make slow progress.
- Success rates for business administration and customer service apprentices have declined.
- Target-setting is not always sufficiently effective enough to help progress a minority of learners towards achieving their qualification on time. In particular, short-term targets do not always have planned completion dates and staff do not always check progress reviews targets for completion.
- Arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory but staff do not reinforce and record equality and diversity during learner's reviews.
- The provider has a clear strategic direction and vision, which it shares effectively with all staff including how to meet further the training needs of industry and learners and the introduction of new initiatives such as the Young Chamber, which involves working with schools to introduce young people to business.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The provider has taken effective action to manage the economic down turn ensuring that it is still able to meet the needs of local employers and learners. The recent appointment of the new management and delivery team has been effective in refocusing the BLCC's direction and motivation to improve the quality of provision.
- Overall management of the programme is satisfactory with a few good aspects. Well structured off-the-job learning effectively meets the leaning needs of learners and employers'. Some 80% of learners achieve their technical certificate early in the training programmes. This effectively supports the NVQ. The effective monitoring of learners' progress is insufficient.
- Communications between the team members are good although formal recording of meetings is insufficient. No formal process is in place for collecting

feedback from learners and employers to aid the continued quality improvement of the provision

What does Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce need to do to improve further?

- Increase apprentice success rates by ensuring learners are actively involved in all aspects of the programme.
- Improve the progress of learners by ensuring short-term targets have planned completion dates and that staff check progress review targets for completion.
- Reinforce the promotion of equality and understanding of diversity in the workplace by ensuring that learners and employers with have clear information on individual's legal obligations and rights under the various acts.
- Improve the monitoring of progress by developing and implementing a system which shares information on progress with learners and employers.
- Increase the effectiveness of formal team meetings through ensuring they have agendas and managers record the outcomes.
- Continue to improve the quality of provision by developing and implementing a comprehensive system which effectively collects feedback from learners and employers.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- working flexibly and at their own pace
- very supportive and helpful assessors
- gaining greater insight into their job, for example data protection
- time at work to study
- work and learning at the same time
- the opportunity to move on to the advanced apprenticeship
- the friendly environment at the training centre
- off-the-job technical certificate training
- very helpful key skill worksheets.

What learners would like to see improved:

- very wordy technical certificate questions that make it difficult to identify what the question is about
- arrangements to contact the assessor.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- training meeting business needs
- learners enjoying their training
- flexible training that does not disrupt the business
- improvements in apprentices' writing skills
- new skills development of employees.

What employers would like to see improved:

- information available to small business on progression courses.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

8. The provider's capacity to make and sustain improvements is satisfactory. However since the last inspection BLCC has experienced a number of significant internal and external changes. Not all areas identified for improvement have been fully rectified. However managers have taken effective action to combat the economic down turn and its impact on the number of learners on training programmes. They have worked effectively to establish a focused training and assessment team and learning programme that meets the needs of employers well. Outcomes for learners show a marked improvement and current learners are making good progress. The provider has a clear vision for the development of the provision and is committed to meeting the needs of both learners and employers. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and includes the views of staff. Inspectors agreed with a number of areas for improvement although they also highlighted further recommendations. The development plan does not clearly set measurable targets for achievement.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. Overall outcomes for learners are satisfactory. The overall success rate declined in 2006/07 but increased in 2007/08 and 2008/09. In 2008/09, overall and timely success rates for business administration advanced apprentices were above the national average. Those for customer service advanced apprentices remain high but for business administration and customer service apprentices they have declined. However, learner numbers are low and a high proportion of early leavers were made redundant in difficult economic environment. The majority of current learners are making expected progress towards achieving the goals in their individual learning plan. However, a minority are making slow progress. About half of apprentices progress on to the advanced apprenticeship.
10. Most learners achieve good standards at work. Business administration learners develop a range of effective paper-based and electronic administrative skills. Customer service learners provide reliable assistance to their clients. A large number of learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. They produce good quality researched portfolios of evidence which develops relevant knowledge and skills. Generally portfolios are well structured and learners' written work is of a good standard.
11. Learners benefit from good work opportunities to practice their administrative and service skills. Most learners have progressed further in their employment whilst being on the apprenticeships. This includes widened job roles and in a few cases gaining promotion. All learners have a good understanding and adopt safe working practices in learning and at work. They feel safe and know their rights and responsibilities at work. Generally learners are well motivated,

enthusiastic and enjoy their learning. They have very good records of attendance and timekeeping.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

12. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Training and assessment are satisfactory. Learners particularly like the off-the-job technical certificate training. This gives them the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with apprentices from different work environments. Training staff provide well planned individual coaching and mentoring in the workplace. They provide good quality key skill learning resources which learners find helpful in preparing for external tests. Target-setting is not sufficiently effective to enable a minority of learners to progress in achieving their qualification on time. In particular, short-term targets do not always have planned completion dates and training staff do not check progress review targets for completion. The reinforcement and the recording of the promotion of equality and understanding of diversity does not take place at reviews.
13. The provision adequately meets the needs and interests of learners. Declining economic activity has reduced the range of programmes the provider offers. BLCC provides clear progression routes from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeship in both business administration and customer service. About half of business administration learners have the opportunity to gain further accreditation by taking additional NVQ units. BLCC provides well co-ordinated technical certificate learning at its training centre that suits learners' and employers' needs. Most employers provide an extended range of services to learners including time off to work on their apprenticeship training, which effectively contributes to their enjoyment and achievement.
14. The provider has developed good partnerships to meet learners' needs. It has been very effective in presenting the benefits of apprenticeships to Chamber members. In addition, it promotes work-based learning well to a range of community groups such as the Muslim, Polish and ex offenders. The recruitment of most of the current learners is due to a positive approach to working with partners.
15. Overall the quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory in helping learners attain their learning goals. Learners comment positively on the support and guidance they receive from assessors. Assessors have good rapport with learners and when necessary provide effective coaching and mentoring in the work place. The provider trains and effectively deploys work-based mentors. They support learners well at work and their involvement in learners' reviews is good. At the inspection, no learners had additional learning needs.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

16. Leadership and management is satisfactory. BLCC has taken effective action to manage the economic down turn ensuring that it is still able to meet the needs of local employers and learners. The recent appointment of the new

management and delivery team has been effective in refocusing the provider's direction and motivation to improve the quality of provision. Managers and staff have a clear commitment to ensuring learners achieve. BLCC has supported learners that fail to secure funding to successfully achieve their qualification.

17. The provider has a clear strategic direction and vision which is effectively shared with all staff. Managers are starting new initiatives to further meet the training needs of industry and learners. The Young Chamber involves working with schools to introduce young people to business. The comprehensive three year development plan clearly identifies areas for development across the business but lacks specific details on the actions to achieve these objectives.
18. Overall management of the provision is satisfactory with some good aspects. Well-structured off-the-job learning effectively meets the learning needs of learners and employers. Some 80% of learners achieve their technical certificate early in the training programmes. This effectively supports the NVQ. Key skills provision is effective. Learners are able to attend off-the-job training key skills workshops on an individual basis for additional support. Staff regularly visit learners in the workplace. Assessment practices are satisfactory and meet awarding bodies criteria. The centre co-ordinator manages assessors case loads well. Effective monitoring of learners progress is insufficient. Although communication between the team members is good, formal recording of meetings is insufficient.
19. BLCC has satisfactory safeguarding arrangements. All assessors have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. Clear policies and procedures including clear roles for all staff cover this area. BLCC promotes safeguarding well and offers learners satisfactory advice about safeguarding. All assessors have undergone safeguarding training with further training planned. The provider makes use of posters and other material to raise and reinforce the issues with learners and employers.
20. Arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory. Policies sufficiently reflect recent legislation with a named individual responsible for equality and diversity. The provider takes effective actions to widen participation in learning and engages with different community groups. Learners introduction to equality and diversity is satisfactory. Policies cover harassment and bullying. The procedures for grievances and complaints are clear. Existing policies are widely distributed through employee handbooks. Satisfactory coverage of equality and diversity takes place during staff induction. The provider is positive in ensuring all employers with learners on the programmes have a clear understanding of the BLCC's stance on equality and diversity and that it will take appropriate action to protect learners. There is no discernible difference in the performance of any group of learners. The provider has a clear self-assessment report for equality and diversity and an action plan, however no recent update has taken place for these documents. Reinforcement of the promotion of equality and understanding of diversity in the workplace is insufficient and does not cover sufficiently legislative information for learners and employers to provide a clear understanding of the individual's legal obligation under the different acts.

21. BLCC's self-assessment is satisfactory and inclusive of staff. Inspectors agreed with a number of areas for improvement although they also highlighted further recommendations. The development plan does not clearly set measurable targets for achievement. Although taking place informally, the provider has no formal system to collect feedback from learners or employers to aid the continuous quality improvement of the provision.

22. Value for money is satisfactory. The recent improvement in outcomes for learners supports this judgement. The provider has a satisfactory policy outlining its approach to sustainable development during the economic down turn and supporting training. Resources to support and enable planned improvements to take place are adequate.

Information about the inspection

23. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's business development 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), the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

24. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	17	7
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	0	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	0	
Quality of provision	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?	3	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	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 learners?	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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