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B-Skill Ltd (B-Skill)

Developing Capacity to Improve, Preparing for Re-inspection

Summary

B-Skill has focused on rapid and continuous improvement since being judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted, July 2010. LSIS advisers from the Sector Support Service (now the Improvement and Development Service) worked with the team to improve self-assessment and quality processes, and prepare for re-inspection. As a result of this intensive focus, and a collective vision based on quality improvement, all aspects are now 'satisfactory' and improving.

About B-Skill Ltd

Established in 2000, B-Skill delivers pre-vocational courses for young people in the North East and vocational courses nationally for adults in cleaning and support services.

B-Skill is a delivery provider for approximately 53 young people on Foundation Learning programmes split across the Blyth and South Shields training centres. They are working towards qualifications in subjects including construction, plumbing, customer care, functional skills and personal social development.

B-Skill has 443 adult learners nationally on Employer Responsive programmes, funded by the Skills Funding Agency and the European Social Fund. Learners work towards level 2 qualifications in cleaning and support services or local environmental services. All are employed by organisations, mostly in the North of England or in the Midlands.

The challenge

B-Skill were judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted July 2010. This judgement was made for overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, leadership and management and health, public services and care'.

At the time of inspection, the company was undergoing a major restructure. It was clear about its vision for improvement, but had not yet implemented the necessary change.

The activity

Following inspection, B-Skill commenced their plan of swift improvement. This included a radical restructure of the organisation which aimed to refocus everyone on learner outcomes and to work in a more joined-up way. One key difference was the shift of responsibility in quality; a Business Improvement Manager replaced the post of Quality Manager, and business improvement

became part of what every employee did. This change highlighted the need for everyone to take responsibility for quality and improvement.

A small team of LSIS advisers provided a range of support to B-Skill between January and July 2011. Amongst this activity was work on self assessment and preparing for inspection.

Self Assessment

B-Skill had identified that they would benefit from an external view of their self assessment practices. The adviser supported the organisation to improve by:

- Reviewing of a range of documents and processes including the Self Assessment Report (SAR). Providing key action points regarding the structure and content of the SAR. For example, the inclusion of a summary of action taken since the last inspection.

“The Adviser was able to bring a level of impartiality to our SAR which was critical. The review made us realise how rigorous Ofsted would be and provided useful pointers about how to present our evidence clearly.” (Paul Wileman, CEO, B-Skill)

- Facilitating a SAR external moderation review panel. The adviser modelled the chairing of this panel.

“We have since completed another SAR and have continued to follow the principles started with our LSIS Adviser, using external moderation within our processes.” (Paul Wileman, CEO, B-Skill)

Inspection Preparation

The LSIS Adviser provided support to the Quality Nominee in preparing for the Ofsted monitoring visit (March 2011). The key task was to develop a clear inspection management strategy, as agreed by senior colleagues.

The B-Skill Inspection Management Strategy included:

- Development and distribution of an information sheet and agreed sets of questions to focus thinking/preparation of learners, employers and staff to ensure that they felt informed of the purpose of the visit and their role
- Reproduction of the Senior Management Team discussion notes which reflected individual and collective responsibilities
- Distribution of the five key themes of Every Child/Learner Matters
- Circulation of copies of the revised inspectors handbook (Sept 2010)
- Design of a draft visit schedule for the two days and forwarded to the inspectors
- Liaison with the lead inspector to clarify proposed arrangements

- Discussions and considerations regarding the evidence base which could demonstrate 'distance travelled' and 'rate of progress' which related to the seven key themes identified for the visit
- Design and refinement of a context statement forwarded to the lead inspector
- A review of the supporting quality improvement plans

“The development of the Inspection Management Strategy differed dramatically from our former approach to preparing for inspection. We previously had little experience of Ofsted and had thought that our good work would be self-evident. The LSIS adviser focused us on a strategy which supported us to prepare and present our evidence clearly to inspectors within the limited time they had to visit.” (Paul Wileman, CEO, B-Skill)



B Skill
Executive Team



B Skill Full
Team

The outcomes

- Clear outcomes from the support provided by advisers included: A more accurate and rigorous SAR and related processes including external moderation
- An inspection management strategy which provided clear roles, responsibilities and an overview of tasks and documents to be prepared prior to the visit.

Three 'significant progress' judgements were awarded at the March 2011 Ofsted monitoring visit. This included self assessment and improvement planning, and leadership and management in addressing issues and quality since the last inspection.

The impact

At the full re-inspection July 2011, B-Skill gained satisfactory grades for all areas which had previously been judged inadequate, including capacity to improve, overall effectiveness and leadership and management.

The Ofsted Report July 2011 specifically stated,

"Since the previous, inspection when B-Skill was judged inadequate, the company has worked hard to achieve its vision of high performance and the quality of its provision has improved considerably. Staff are highly motivated, well qualified and experienced."

and

"The introduction of external moderation has increased the rigor of the self-assessment process and inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be broadly accurate."

"LSIS intervention helped us to speed up the process of improvement and gave us more confidence in what we were doing right. It also helped us to move to the next level by providing clear development points in a range of key areas. The advisers we worked with were all very good at being 'critical friends'; they were forthright with their suggestions, understood the urgency needed and were encouraging and supportive in their manner – we felt that they were part of our team for a while." (Paul Wileman, CEO, B-Skill)

The lessons learned

"The key challenge for our organisation following the July 2011 inspection and throughout the restructure was to maintain our collective belief; to ensure that all staff knew that we could and would improve - and we did." (Paul Wileman, CEO, B-Skill).

The CEO considers the following to be the key lessons learnt, and potentially useful points for other providers who are focusing on rapid improvement and preparing for re-inspection:

- Ensure everyone knows there is commitment from the top of the organisation, and all the way through
- Be consistent with your vision, but urgent and flexible in the way you deliver improvements
- Have a clear strategy to manage your inspection
- Quality and continuous improvement should be central to the organisation and everybody's responsibility, it should be your mantra
- Explore the use of an external moderator, it can be helpful in adding impartiality to certain tasks such as the SAR
- Encourage all staff to be 'problem solvers', rather than 'problem finders'
- Communication, communication, communication! Everyone needs to be a good listener – everyone should invest in time spent listening, it is worth it
- Make sure you take time to thank staff for their continued commitment and hard work

Useful links

<http://www.b-skill.co.uk/>

Links to related case studies

Interested in what B-Skill achieved and have any questions? Then get in touch with Paul Wileman

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