



matrix[®]
quality standard for information
advice and guidance services

Assessment Report

BCTG Limited



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behalf of the Department for Education
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ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Maintaining accreditation
Assessor's Name	Steve Jackson
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	03/06/2024 – 04/06/2024
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C12136 - PN202303
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	28 May 2027

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	Remote via Teams and phone
Staff interviews	4
Recipient interviews	3
Partner interviews	7
Document review	SAR/QIP, Examples of contracts, IAG Policy, Safeguarding and Policy, Risk Management EDI Policy and other key policies, Feedback questionnaire and surveys, Learner Handbook.

About the organisation

BCTG Limited (described hereafter as BCTG) is an independent training company based in Oldbury in the Black Country, West Midlands. The organisation is considerably different to that assessed in the last **matrix** Accreditation Review in May 2021. In July 2023, an adverse Ofsted inspection report led to the loss of apprenticeship contracts. Coupled with a number of other contracts coming to an end the organisation had to make made drastic decisions to reduce the size of the company and by the end of 2023 there was the expectation that the company would close. However the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) extended a contract to deliver Sector Based Training Academies, now known as SWAPs for a further six months and then until September 2024. This has provided BCTG the opportunity to further strengthen its delivery, performance and the quality of delivery and

outcomes. The SWAPs operate in the healthcare, security, aviation services, hospitality and non-teaching staff sectors.

BCTG is in the unusual position of operating as a Prime contractor supporting a number of sub-contractor entities.

The BCTG Vision is 'To lead the transformation towards improved social mobility and a vibrant regional economy by addressing the economic and social needs within our communities' and this is backed up by its mission 'to consistently deliver excellence and measure value by serving as an agile, responsive 'One Stop Shop' for individuals and employers. Through proactive initiatives and partnerships, we aim to empower individuals, enhance skills, and foster economic growth within our communities.'

Delivery is based around the 4 main pillars of the Learner Journey: Enrolment and onboarding, Induction and Curriculum, On Programme and Exit and Destination. Using this model the new Senior Leadership Team embarked on a complete re-design of the organisation's functions to ensure effective and high quality operations and performance and restore reputation. The SLT comprises a Director and Heads of Data and Compliance, Quality of Education and Finance. The SLT are supported by an Advisory Board that meets monthly to review outcomes, safeguarding and offer appropriate support and challenge. One of the new Non-Executive Directors is a current Ofsted Inspector so BCTG receives regular updates on Ofsted practice and advice on approaches. Challenge is welcomed by leaders of BCTG and encouraged. BCTG has developed considerable expertise in bidding for contracts and is in partnership with several key organisations. The current sub-contract consortium of six companies has been reduced from thirty, and this has helped to manage consistency and quality much more robustly.

BCTG has produced clear and business plans and the current Self-Assessment Plan demonstrates well the priorities, objectives and targets of the organisation. BCTG has improved its management of its contracts, and sub-contract partners interviewed recognised the expertise and integrity of BCTG's staff, who appeared to be working very well with other organisations and partners. There are possibilities of widening the organisation's activities by bidding for employability and preparation for work contracts with WMCA though this is dependent on many other factors.

The scope of the **matrix** Accreditation Review was the IAG offered by BCTG to its sub-contract consortium, and how contracts are managed by BCTG to ensure that learners receive IAG, training and employability support.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

BCTG's SWAP contract with WMCA depends upon outcomes from the SWAPs as delivered by sub-contract partners. SWAPs are structured around a two week course that is targeted on jobs with a particular employer and SWAP curriculum content is co-designed with the employer. SWAPs contain a mixture of skill enhancement and personal development and the courses include embedded IAG which creates opportunities to support individual learners depending on the needs identified

through initial assessment and pre-course screening and IAG. Once enrolled Tutors are responsible for running the courses. Learners are referred from a number of sources, often recommendations from friends and family, seemed to be the most persuasive means. More traditional referrals such as from Job Centres and housing associations remain important. Several partners evidenced better Pre-enrolment IAG. This could range from eligibility checks to work-readiness, English language skills and motivation for the course. This process is still work in progress and BCTG has as an action plan to improve the screening process which could lead to improved outcomes.

Once potential learners have been screened and join the course the majority respond well. Learners will be helped to create an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) usually through a meeting with one of the tutors and this helps focus the learning experience. The IAG provided is to ensure the ILP is realistic and practical and demonstrates the support available. The process to complete this includes understanding expectations and any additional learning needs, barriers to learning, aspirations and an initial review. BCTG has ensured the ILP is a working document and requires its sub-contractors to ensure every learner completes an ILP. The ILP also includes a Weekly participation Log to help the learner reflect on learning and changes to their skills as well as whether any further help is needed. Post course plans are also completed and any outcomes from the course from the learners' perspective. The last section includes an evaluation of any work placement undertaken and an analysis of work readiness. The processes surrounding the completion and updating of the ILP help focus the IAG provided.

Two learners interviewed described their difficulties with IT and had struggled with formal support systems which required digital skills they did not possess. These skills, English and Maths and employability activity are the main activities accessed by learners with IAG embedded in all to ensure learners developed confidence to access support beyond the course. The ILP is the main tracker for progression and BCTG has introduced a Destination Tracker for all its subcontractors to ensure there is consistency in follow up. Although it is intended that employment is the main goal, other activities can be captured. Again this should lead to capturing positive outcomes beyond the immediate end of the SWAP.

Relationships with subcontractors' staff are very good, and with other agencies especially for referral for more in-depth support. Many aspects of the training and IAG work is delivered in partnership rather than simply a contractual requirement. This is significant and is testament to BCTG's hard work in winning back trust by adding value to its offer and understanding learners' needs. The organisation recognises the need to be innovative and deliver to high standards consistently. It is interesting to note that all the subcontractors interviewed were very clear how valuable the relationship with BCTG is, because of far better contract management and the expertise of the staff and their ethos, which in turn leads to better IAG support and outcomes for learners.

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

Learners interviewed were highly satisfied with the training and IAG services they received from the SWAP experienced as evidenced by BCTG surveys and the comments made to the **matrix** Assessor. For example one learner said:

The SWAP has been a lifesaver. The tutor understand our needs and made me feel I am a person not a number. My tutor was always encouraging me and suggesting ways I can improve. I enjoyed it and it was great to meet new people and some of them I'm still in touch with through WhatsApp.'

Another learner said:

I hated school and I never got qualifications. But the SWAP was ideal for me – short and quite intense and I looked forward to going. The tutors were brilliant, always making the course interesting and its great the way they relate it to real life.

Two learners interviewed had been part of a SWAP course that led to a job which they were still in and this had clearly raised their confidence. Another was still in touch with her tutor who was sending her jobs to apply for after the end of the SWAP and regularly checked in to make sure she was well. What was also clear was a sense of trust built up between learner and tutor, trust which was lacking in previous experiences especially with statutory agencies.

The IAG service is delivered effectively to meet most clients' needs. Feedback from partners was fulsome with subcontractors expressing confidence and trust. They all confirmed positive interventions by BCTG that had helped with the progression of learners, further confirming the positive feedback about BCTG recorded on questionnaires. The focus on Quality delivery is key and there were many examples provided by BCTG which demonstrated the commitment to continuous improvement. The SAR and emerging QIP (built upon the Post Inspection Action Plan) appeared to focus on the right areas for change and the use of data and key outcomes such as attendance, achievement and outcomes were the main performance monitoring tools. The Head of Quality has recently begun a review of the data set used by all sub-contractors and this was proving to be very helpful in identifying performance issues. There was one example of a sub-contractor being issued with a notice to improve a specific KPI issue, which showed BCTG was taking difficult but positive steps to improve performance. The Quality Team of BCTG is working to raise standards even further and are reviewing processes and procedures routinely, as well as working with subcontractors to review operational activity and establish good practice.

BCTG staff are working hard to ensure that they can meet any future challenges and continue to work positively even though there remain many uncertainties ahead.

What is working particularly well

A number of strengths/areas that are working particularly well were identified during the assessment, which are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- BCTG provides clear contract and performance management to subcontractors with very good direction, communication, and decision making. Teamworking in the organisation is excellent. Leaders and managers provide very good line management support. Overall professionalism has helped focus staff effectively on delivering high quality IAG services to learners through the emphasis on quality to its subcontractors. (1.1, 2.1)
- Subcontractors' tutors give learners a sense of being individuals and valued. Confidence and self-belief are consistently noted as major changes by learners through BCTG and subcontractors support. The energy and enthusiasm displayed by all staff is a key element of the SWAPs success. (2.8, 3.2)
- Partners interviewed consistently praised the quality of delivery and the high standard of support for delivery performance. BCTG's staff were noted for their professionalism and enthusiasm, while all partners mentioned their 'can do' attitude. BCTG emphasises the bespoke nature of their offer depending upon the nature of the SWAP while contextualising within the local and national labour market. Differences between job opportunities in the city of Birmingham and smaller towns in the West Midlands make such context important. Professionalism is embedded in the offer and delivery to customers and through the co-designing of curriculum with employers. (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.8)
- The commitment to continuous improvement is embedded in all activities in delivery and reinforced by BCTG's values. Professional observations and the surrounding support for these is well-established and provides much confidence that sub-contractors are meeting expected standards and exceeding these. The feedback loop is managed well and gives excellent feedback. The re-establishment of the Quality Team is an excellent improvement that demonstrates BCTG's commitment to review and continuous improvement. Partners are becoming very supportive of the services provided by BCTG and recognise they are integral to high quality delivery. (2.3, 6.1, 6.2,)
- Good internal CPD and sharing of good practice gives BCTG an edge in determining what works well. Shared values and a determination to help learners progress well enhances delivery. BCTG provides good opportunities for staff to acquire new skills and experiences. (2.5, 2.6)
- Targets and outcomes are robustly monitored, and outcomes evaluated. A new destination tracker has added to BCTG's capacity to identify interventions and trends and provides the means to augment the evidence base and demonstrate greater impact, the effectiveness of IAG activity and the impact on the users of its services. (5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2)

Development suggestions

Development suggestions are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and development suggestions. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in any way lacking. 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. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- We discussed the reasons that led to the comment in the Ofsted monitoring report: ‘However, too few learners gain employment on completion of their course. Of those learners that gain employment, too few remain in employment in the months following their studies.’ This suggests the context of SWAPs is not being taken into consideration, but crucially indicates a potential ‘weakness’ in the impact of the SWAP in terms of hard outcomes. It is suggested that BCTG examines forensically the reasons for the lack of better outcomes or sustainability to identify if there are any barriers or issues that could be addressed collectively. One example is travel for those in the security sector. Some employers appear to expect their workers to travel to venues away from home, which suggests the need to be able to drive and have access to personal transport. Without the driving skill it is questionable whether it is fair to allow the learner on to the SWAP until s/he has passed their test and can travel. Currently such learners are being disappointed and their inability to progress means this counts against the outcomes for BCTG and the subcontractor. Similarly the length of time DBS checks are taking means that learners who may be successful in obtaining a job subject to gaining a DBS clearance could be waiting a long time and the outcome could be counted as a negative. These examples suggest a more rigid approach to enrolment until these conditions are met. (4.1, 4.2)
- BCTG recognises the importance of providing a robust evidence base that demonstrates value for money, effectiveness, and strong delivery performance. However it is suggested that impact and value for money would be even more strongly evidenced if tracking of outcomes were extended to show impact on specific groups and/or communities. Is it possible from SWAPs to identify learners/users who have received specific tutor interventions and whether their outcomes have improved compared to others who have not received specific interventions? Further it is recommended that regular Return on Investment analyses would demonstrate how funders investment in BCTG was significant. There could be a clear plan to identify value for money factors and the services that could give BCTG competitive

edge. (5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 7.1, 7.2)

- Following on from this it is suggested that BCTG considers producing a short 'Impact Report' that describes the differences 'before and after' training and captures learner comments and the achievements of learners as well as a hard facts summary. This could form the basis of an alternative narrative about the learner journey and build evidence about 'what works' and differences made. Hopefully, this could be a factor in tendering/commissioning or at least demonstrating added value. (5.1, 6.1, 6.2, 7.2)
- Business Growth potential is exciting if BCTG gets the chance to continue and grow from the SWAPs base. The sub-contract model operated along the lines BCTG has adopted is viable and could offer alternatives for funders that can help communities further. BCTG could use this to widen its search for new business beyond immediate geographic boundaries and across a wider range of funding sources. It should also be confident that its support services to partners are developing well. Equally as the tendering process continues to develop with the West Midlands Combined Authority, new links with other partners will suggest opportunities for expanding provision.(2.6, 2.7, 3.2)
- Soft outcomes, especially confidence and resilience could be measured through Outcome Star tools, which is good practice and stimulates ownership and improvements in self-belief. Some learners have been struggling with health conditions, particularly anxiety, so going on a SWAP course represents a considerable personal commitment and this could be a factor in considering destinations, which may require more targeted follow up post SWAP experience. (4.2, 4.3, 5.2)
- Further consideration could be given to the impact of BCTG and the consortium on BAME communities and support for the resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers. It is suggested that BCTG could explore with funders how it may be able to target its services to such groups based on the consortium's experience and some of the subcontractors' considerable expertise and complement the work of other organisations. (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.2)
- It is suggested a synopsis is produced and regularly updated of the CPD provided by BCTG and the good practice arising from consortium meetings and standardisation meetings to demonstrate added value from the subcontract model, emphasising the importance of cooperation rather than competition. This should help the evidence base for added value. There was a very good example provided of this through safeguarding briefings and discussions which could be extended to other IAG and teaching and learning. (4.1, 4.2)
- Impartial IAG is referenced in planning documents and learner support materials regularly and clearly, but it is suggested that more specific reference is made to referral to the National Careers Service for impartial careers IAG. This should be added to the descriptions of careers education and IAG in the

CEIAG policy and the Learner Handbook. Although subcontractors frequently mentioned impartiality this should be emphasised in the evidence base in preparation for the next Ofsted Inspection. It is further suggested that referral to other expertise in external organisations is featured in the Learner Handbook with specific examples and case studies. This is a key feature of the post Swaps support. BCTG should further consider the consistency of support during the thirteen week tracker period since this appears to vary between subcontractors.(1.4, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 3.2)

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