

Bridgeway Consulting Ltd

Address: Bridgeway House, Riverside Way, Nottingham, NG2 1DP

Dates of Inspection: 28-31 October 2014

Name of Inspector: Martyn Groucutt

Overall Effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding
	This inspection:	Outstanding
Capacity to Improve		Outstanding
Learner outcomes		Outstanding
Quality of Provision		Outstanding
Leadership and Management		Outstanding

Key findings of the inspection

This is an outstanding provider that fully complies with NSARE's requirements.

- The company remains committed to sustained improvement. The outstanding judgements found in all areas in the last inspection have been maintained. They are reflected in the fact that the company remains a principal contractor to Network Rail.
- There is an outstanding capacity to continue to sustain improvement. The quality of training and assessment remains extremely high, which supports learners in making rapid progress.
- An extremely positive staff appraisal system includes a large element of self-assessment. It enables individual performance targets to be set that not only address the identified needs of the company but also support the professional development of staff.
- While most training continues to support the internal requirements of the company, systems to support external clients and deliver high quality training are effective. Clients are extremely positive about the service they receive from Bridgeway.
- Learners are supported in developing a keen understanding of safety. The commitment to ensure that this is effective is reflected in membership of several safety forums, including the prestigious Project Safety Leadership Group.
- There is an expectation that directors will lead by example.
- Staff from non-rail backgrounds are trained in a range of rail based competencies.
- A very positive element is the way in which the company identifies and develops the talents of its staff. It trains trainers and assessors from within to meet expanding demands. Some members of staff still in their 20s already hold COSS or similar qualifications.
- Throughout the organisation, at every office, there is a commitment to excellence. Staff help and support each other to create an outstanding organisation.

What the judgements mean

Judgement	Description	For overall effectiveness
Outstanding	These features are highly effective	The provider will receive another inspection within 24-36 months
Good	There are very positive features present	The provider will receive another inspection within 18-24 months
Requires Improvement	There are features which must be improved	The provider will be suspended from delivery until it can demonstrate to the Inspectors that the areas for improvement have been addressed, which must be within 4 months or accreditation will be permanently withdrawn
Inadequate	There are features which are not of an acceptable standard	The accreditation for delivery will be permanently withdrawn

Introduction

This was the second inspection of this provider. The last inspection took place on 25-28 June 2012. This inspection was carried out by one inspector on behalf of NSARE as part of a national programme of inspection within the railway industry. The inspector made five overall judgements against a set of common criteria.

Before the inspection, a range of documentation was scrutinised including the company's self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. Documentation checked during the inspection included copies of the company's regular safety bulletins, learning materials, a range of policies and procedures, and samples of completed workplace assessments. Discussions were held with directors and managers throughout the company, and with administrative staff, trainers and learners. The views of external clients were gathered from discussions with managers, in person and by telephone, and from several testimonials that had been received from clients of Bridgeway Consulting. Policies, procedures and management documentation were scrutinised in hard copy or online in the company's intranet. The inspector spent three and a half days on site between Nottingham and West Malling offices, and visited a rail depot to observe training provided at a client's site. During this time six trainers were observed.

Description of the setting

Bridgeway Consulting is an engineering consultancy service that covers all aspects of railway infrastructure. Its head office is in newly acquired premises in Nottingham, providing office and other accommodation, and a range training rooms. Other offices where training is provided are situated around the country, notably in West Malling (which has also been acquired since the last inspection), Hayes and Bristol. A majority of rail based training is delivered internally for the company's own staff to enable them to meet contractual requirements but a wide range of external training is also provided. This covers the provision of safety critical courses and assessments covering Sentinel requirements, together with a range of other training. Examples include small plant and equipment, machine and crane controller, first aid, manual handling and IOSH training. The company is a principal contractor for Network Rail. Contracts for training are held with a range of external organisations, including several national railway companies (for example, in Eire and Northern Ireland, Croatia, Sweden and New South Wales). Other examples of training and support includes that provided for other Network Rail principal contractors, United Kingdom rail projects such as Cross Rail and Thameslink, and the Office for Rail Regulation, for whom Bridgeway Consulting acts as the sole provider of Sentinel staff training.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

Capacity to improve

Grade: Outstanding

Since the last inspection the company has continued to expand and now directly employs nearly 650 people, solely sponsoring all but a handful. As well as internal expansion, several major rail-based companies and national railway systems have been added to an already impressive list of clients since the first inspection. Long-term planning has enabled the company to respond very successfully to the emerging needs in the industry, such as the expansion of OLE provision. A five year plan provides focus and direction, reflecting the detailed systems that are in place to prioritise areas for growth and to measure the success of the company in meeting targets. It has created a clear vision and priorities that will continue to sustain improvements and raise expectations. Very effective management systems have been expanded to ensure that the demands created by expansion can be met successfully. This is further supported by the extremely strong commitment to the company shown by staff at all levels.

Learner outcomes

Grade: Outstanding

Since the start of this year the company has provided 758 courses that have led to 3,472 additional competencies being gained by learners. During this period there have been 49 deemed not competent, and when the e-learning element of the PTS-initial is removed there have been three. This reflects the high quality training and assessment that the company provides. Age, gender or ethnicity are not barriers to progress and promotion, and this is reflected in the fact that it is not unusual to have staff who become a COSS and PICOP while in their 20's. The company response to the current shortage of industry trainers and assessors is to train their own, again bucking the age profile seen nationally and training trainers still in their 20's or 30's.

Under the Managed Services provision, which sees Bridgeway Consulting enter contracts with other companies to develop bespoke training and development, whole programmes of training and development are provided and managed. A range of companies, including some very major rail-based companies, avail themselves of this service and speak very highly of the training their employees receive, but equally of the administrative team who support the provision. High quality ICT systems allow companies using this service full access to monitor or amend the training and support given to them through dedicated areas in the Bridgeway Consulting portal, while regular face to face meetings ensure the smooth delivery of such contracts. This provides definitive evidence of learners being able to make rapid progress in the rail industry over time. However, it is not yet so easy to measure the progress of learners who attend 'one-off' training events.

Safety is a key priority and a focus for all training. This is reflected in the fact

that the company is represented at director level on a wide range of national safety forums, including the prestigious Project Safety Leadership Group. A very sophisticated software system records and tracks all safety incidents. It enables the company to monitor them in a range of ways. These include incidents by type, by location and by department. It can monitor trends, individuals or causes of incidents. The HSQE Team looks in detail at all incidents on a monthly basis and investigates until each can be signed off, seeking to learn lessons for the future.

Quality of Provision

Grade: Outstanding

Outstanding leadership was acknowledged at last year's annual rail industry awards, in the lifetime achievement award given to the director who heads up the division that provides training and assessment. He works very closely with the impressive learning and development manager, and the effective Corporate Development and Sustainability team. It has grown considerably since the first inspection to reflect the continuing growth of the company and the services provided. Experienced trainers have many years' service in the rail industry, while at the same time career development opportunities are seeing the company train its own trainers, so that the provision of training and assessment is not jeopardised by any skills shortage.

All trainers have level 3 or level 4 training qualifications. They are skilled practitioners and are very well supported in their own professional development. High quality training facilities support a range of technology which is used effectively to support learning. At the same time, the company is happy to train at client's premises and during the inspection this was observed at a south London train depot late one evening. The company is rightly proud of its flexibility and the ability to provide training at any time, day or night, seven days a week. For learners with special needs it has internal expertise in functional skills support and has developed a link with a local college of further education to benefit from their wider expertise. It enables all learners to be well supported.

Learners receive effective support and feedback from trainers throughout courses and are encouraged to provide feedback on their learning. Online technology provides much more effective feedback than that traditionally gained from completing hard-copy questionnaires. The trainers are also expected to evaluate their own effectiveness on-line each day of a course, though some do this more enthusiastically than others. This is part of the process that evaluates the performance of each trainer, and of the team as a whole, over time. A programme of peer observation and review supports staff in learning from each other. The company is looking to extend this by introducing independent, external observations of its trainers to support and monitor their effectiveness.

The extremely strong commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity is reflected in the fact that age, gender, sexuality or ethnicity are not barriers to being successful. This is reflected throughout the company up to director level.

Leadership and management

Grade: Outstanding

The commitment to hands-on excellence is seen from the managing director down. All directors, whatever their area or previous professional backgrounds are expected to develop rail based competencies. The director who leads on ICT, for example, joined the company with no background in rail and is now a practicing PICOP in addition to his ICT responsibilities. It is noticeable that many leaders within the company are promoted from within. They have sometimes started in lowly positions but because of good training and support they have risen through the ranks, sometimes up to director level. The associate director for human resources started as an administrative clerk and at this year's industry awards she received the national award as human resource's 'person of the year'. The range of staff from many different backgrounds who are successful throughout the company reflects the outstanding commitment to equality of opportunity.

Clear five-year planning, underpinned by impressive data-sets, provides a clarity of vision that has enabled the company to grow. Its clients are themselves often major players in the rail industry, or rail systems in their own right. There is a commitment to providing value for money and high quality services. This has enabled the company to be successful in gaining new high profile projects, most recently in the development of HS2. Very positive links with Network Rail are reflected in the fact that Bridgeway Consulting continues to be a principal contractor.

Appraisal, which includes an impressive element of self-evaluation, leads to challenging targets being set for staff. This allows the company to address its identified areas for development, while at the same time giving impressive support for personal professional development. When staff take on new responsibilities there is an excellent programme of mentoring to ensure they receive good support. Staff are also enthusiastic in helping and supporting each other. A range of detailed policies and procedures support key areas such as whistle-blowing, health and safety, recruitment and equality and diversity. Safety is a continuous focus, emphasised in the monthly '3:4:3' publication.

Recommendations for improvement

- **Learner outcomes**
 - Develop a process to monitor the progress of learners who have attended training but whose companies are not covered by a Managed Services agreement to gain information on the impact of their training over time.
- **Quality of Provision**
 - Introduce a system to support external review of trainers in order to gather unbiased and objective information on their effectiveness in supporting learners.

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