

Dimensions Training Solutions Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 51551

Name of lead inspector: Jai Sharda HMI

Last day of inspection: 9 December 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Dimensions Training Solutions Ltd (DTS) is a private training company operating as a work-based learning provider since 1983. The company has training academies in Barnsley, Leeds, Sheffield, Wakefield and York, with the head office based at the Barnsley centre. In addition to these, the company has seven school academies located across the south, west and north Yorkshire local authority regions, from which it delivers hairdressing programmes for school students aged 14 to 16.

2. DTS has contracts with the Skills Funding Agency and the Young People’s Learning Agency to provide apprenticeship training in hairdressing for 169 intermediate level learners and for 83 advanced-level learners. DTS’s apprentices are employed in around 190 salons. The company also provides vocational level programmes for about 465 Key Stage 4 learners within their own city or town centre academy as well as in some purpose built salons located within school premises across Yorkshire. DTS also delivers a post-16 foundation learning hairdressing programme for about 50 learners on behalf of two local training providers. The proportion of male learners and those from a minority ethnic group is very low. Some 59% of apprentices have an identified additional learning need. Apprentices follow the DTS induction process and then attend off-the-job training for one day each week. Most assessments take place at DTS’s academies.

3. DTS’s senior management team consists of a chairman, supported by four directors, who have responsibility for the company’s overall performance, finances, business development, planning and recruitment needs. Of the 42 staff that DTS employs, 25 work in the company’s training and assessment team. Government funded training programmes account for almost all of DTS’s business.

4. DTS provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - IGEN (Hairdressing and beauty therapy)
 - CTS Training (Hairdressing and beauty therapy)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to16	448 part-time learners
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	418 full-time learners

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
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3

Overall effectiveness

5. DTS is a satisfactory provider of work-based learning. Success rates for advanced apprentices are high. Success rates for intermediate level apprentices have increased by 10 percentage points over the last four years, but still remain well below the national average. A small proportion of intermediate level learners achieve after their planned end date.
6. Learners become competent hairdressers who make a valuable contribution in the salons where they work. They behave professionally and treat their clients with respect.
7. Learning sessions are satisfactory; the better sessions are well-prepared and challenging. However, in the weaker sessions tutors do not always plan well enough to stretch and challenge everyone at an appropriate level and fail to meet the needs of learners with different abilities.
8. Assessors provide clear and helpful feedback on learners' work, but some learners miss out on an opportunity for assessment because there are not enough clients at their training academy. Many learners and employers would prefer that DTS brings back salon-based assessments where clients are more readily available.

9. Staff do not always set detailed or manageable targets during reviews. Sometimes, they leave targets on the review paperwork for several months, without checking if the learner has made progress towards achieving them. Review questions are often repetitive and do not help learners to improve their understanding.
10. DTS staff are hard-working and committed to learners. However, the company's policy of offering 'open access' to its apprenticeship programme means that it often struggles to meet the needs of all learners, many of whom have literacy and numeracy difficulties or other barriers to learning.
11. DTS has appropriate policies for ensuring that learners are safe. All potential staff receive thorough Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks before an offer of employment is made. Posters in all the centres inform learners whom they can confide in if they feel unsafe or if they feel bullied.

Main findings

- The proportion of advanced apprentices who successfully achieve the full apprenticeship is good. Most also complete well within the planned period of study. Success rates for intermediate level apprentices have improved over the last four years, but remain low. Some fail to achieve within the planned timescale. Management actions to improve intermediate level success rates have had limited success.
- Learners gain good skills in hairdressing, which help them to become more employable in the industry. They know how to look after customers in the salon and they behave professionally at work. Learners gain in confidence and self-esteem. Those with additional learning needs make good progress in achieving literacy and numeracy skills.
- Learners report that they feel safe in the salons where they work and during off-the-job training at DTS's academies. They know whom to contact if they feel unsafe. Learners understand the main terms of their employment rights and responsibilities.
- In the better learning sessions, tutors plan carefully to ensure that all learners receive sufficient challenge by participating in the learning activities. In less effective lessons, tutors do not use appropriate strategies to involve learners with differing abilities. Specialist hairdressing resources in the academies are sometimes in short supply. Some learners benefit from the good in-house training provided by their salon and the opportunity to work with experienced stylists.
- Learners receive clear feedback on what they have to do in order to achieve the units of their National Vocational Qualification. Assessor feedback on learners' work is constructive and helpful. However, many learners express frustration at the lack of a sufficient number of clients at the training academies, where DTS now carries out learners' assessments. Some learners and employers say that they would like DTS to reinstate salon-based assessments.

- Targets set during progress reviews are insufficiently detailed. In some cases, assessors do not review targets for several months. Review questions used to reinforce learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity are often repetitive and unrelated to hairdressing. Learners have a limited understanding of how to deal with the diverse range of clients. Employers do not participate sufficiently in the review process.
- DTS provides opportunities for hairdressing apprentices throughout Yorkshire. Employers and learners generally comment favourably on the provision. Some salons provide additional product-specific training for staff. DTS has productive partnerships with a large number of salons. The good relationships DTS has with schools currently benefits around 465 Year 10 and 11 students, who attend a DTS hairdressing programme for one day a week.
- Staff are passionate about the company's ethos of providing open access to its programmes. However, DTS struggles to maintain satisfactory provision for learners, most of whom have additional learning needs. Many fail to complete the programme and others complete well after the planned period of study. The recent departure of many key staff in a short period of time has contributed to DTS's challenge of maintaining satisfactory standards.
- DTS's safeguarding procedures are satisfactory, with some good features. Procedures for carrying out CRB checks are thorough. All staff have received good quality training. Designated staff provide a safeguarding role at each of the company's centres. Although learners and employers receive detailed information about safeguarding, their understanding is generally very basic.
- DTS staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their work. They form good relationships with learners, most of whom have additional learning needs. However, DTS does not market its programmes to groups that are under-represented on its programmes. Managers do not sufficiently analyse differences in performance between different groups. Reinforcement of equality and diversity during progress reviews is satisfactory.
- DTS's self-assessment process is satisfactory. Managers generally lead on self-assessment activity. The company does not effectively involve the full range of its stakeholders in contributing to self-assessment. However, most judgements are sound, though some grades are generous. The company's procedures for assessing the quality of teaching and learning are insufficiently thorough and too many learning sessions are over-graded.

What does DTS need to do to improve further?

- Improve overall success rates and completion within planned end dates by ensuring that clearer and more measurable targets are set during progress reviews so that learners know what they need to do to make good progress and successfully complete their programme.
- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity during progress reviews and in learning sessions. Extend the range of questions asked during reviews to

include discussions around learners' responsibility for meeting the diverse needs of clients and colleagues in the salons.

- Make more effective use of the views of learners, employers and staff, as well as the outcomes of quality-improvement processes, to support judgements in the self-assessment report.
- Monitor and enhance tutors' performance through observations, accurate grading and effective post-observation support. Improve teaching, learning and assessment through staff development to ensure that tutors use a wider range of activities, effective questioning techniques and regular checks on learning during sessions.
- Develop a strategy for ensuring that learners have sufficient access to clients so that they can make better progress in their professional practice and towards completion of their apprenticeship within their planned timescale.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the high quality in-house training provided in the salons
- the availability and helpfulness of DTS staff
- their increased independence and confidence to meet new people
- the small class sizes.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the number and availability of models in the training academies
- the quality of resources in the training academies
- the decision to carry out all assessments in the academies with the reintroduction of salon-based assessment
- the amount of practical training and demonstrations in the academies.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the help provided by DTS staff
- the progress that their apprentices are making
- the great partnership with DTS.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the decision to carry out all assessments in the training academies: salon-based assessments should be reinstated
- the disruption caused to learners by the recent staffing changes at DTS.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

12. DTS has a satisfactory capacity to improve. The overall provision remains satisfactory, as it was at the last inspection. Success rates are generally satisfactory, though they are good for advanced apprentices, but below national rates for intermediate apprentices. Senior leaders provide clear strategic direction. A recent restructuring has helped to focus staff time and resources on improving the quality of training. However, learners and employers comment unfavourably on the disruption caused by staff changes at DTS. Staff remain focused on meeting learners' needs. Learner and employer feedback on the quality of provision is generally positive.
13. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. The company makes satisfactory use of stakeholder feedback to improve provision. The quality-improvement plan is realistic and monitored regularly. The company generally recognises and understands its main strengths and areas for improvement, but it has relied on an inaccurate and over-generous assessment of the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors gave the same grades as those in the self-assessment for most aspects of provision, but they gave a lower grade for equality and diversity and capacity to improve.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

14. Overall success rates for advanced apprentices, who make up about one third of all apprentices, are good and well above national rates. The proportion who complete within the planned timescales is also good. Success rates for intermediate level apprentices have improved over the last four years, but remain below national rates. The proportion of those who complete within the planned period of study has fluctuated for the last two years but it has generally been just below national rates. Some 40% of intermediate level apprentices leave their programme early, mostly for reasons over which DTS has little influence. DTS has implemented a range of strategies to help learners to complete their programme, but it has had limited success.
15. Progression from intermediate level to the advanced-level apprenticeship is satisfactory. Some 33% of apprentices who completed their intermediate apprenticeship in the last year progressed to an advanced apprenticeship. DTS carries out little formal analysis of the progress and achievement of different groups of learners. In particular, it does not use data to determine whether learners identified as having additional learning needs, or those from more disadvantaged areas, perform as well as other groups of learners.
16. Learners develop good practical skills which employers value. Skill levels are satisfactory in practical sessions and learners demonstrate good client care. Learners conduct themselves in a professional manner and display a

professional image which reflects industry requirements. They develop confidence, self-esteem and employability skills. Those with identified additional needs receive appropriate support from DTS's dedicated Skills for Life team, and make good progress with their literacy and numeracy skills.

17. Learners feel safe in their workplaces and in the training academies. During induction learners receive basic information and contact numbers of relevant staff to support their needs for health and safety, well-being and equality and diversity. They are aware of their employment rights and responsibilities.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

18. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. In the better lessons, tutors produce detailed schemes of work and planned activities to engage, stretch and challenge learners. DTS delivers most learning sessions at its academies. However, the limited range of learning resources and specialist products and equipment do not always meet the needs of all learners. In a minority of cases, tutors do not use effective strategies to support learners at different levels of learning. Some salons provide very good in-house training. In these salons, learners benefit from structured practical training and the opportunity to work with highly experienced senior stylists.
19. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Learners are clear about what they have achieved and what they need to do to achieve their learning aims. Feedback to learners on assessed work is prompt and appropriately recorded. DTS's academies, where all assessments now take place, have an insufficient number of clients and resources for learners to work with. Learners and employers express considerable dissatisfaction with DTS's recent decision to replace salon-based assessments with assessments carried out in the training academies.
20. Progress reviews are inadequate. Review targets are insufficiently detailed or challenging and do not sufficiently encourage timely unit completion. Training staff do not adequately or regularly review learner targets. Review questions to reinforce health and safety and equality and diversity are repetitive and insufficiently related to the hairdressing industry. Learners' understanding and responsibility of the diverse needs of clients is weak. Employers are insufficiently involved in the review process.
21. The provision meets the need and interests of learners well. Most employers are satisfied with the training programme. Some salons provide additional training from product manufacturers. DTS has formed productive partnerships with a wide range of hairdressing employers throughout the county. It has developed strong relationships with good quality employers who are committed to training. DTS participates well with schools across Yorkshire and provides vocational training opportunities for around 465 students in Year 10 and 11.
22. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners who progress from an intermediate apprenticeship to an advanced apprenticeship receive appropriate

information and guidance to help them make an informed decision. Most learners have additional learning needs for which they receive satisfactory support from DTS's Skills for Life team. Learners have good access to DTS staff and managers quickly resolve issues or concerns raised by learners and employers.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

23. DTS's senior managers provide a reasonably clear strategic direction. A recent organisational restructure was carried out to help the company focus its provision more clearly on improving the quality of its training provision, but it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative. Staff have a satisfactory understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, the recent departure from the company of nearly a quarter of its staff has contributed to a decline in the overall quality of provision. Staff at all levels understand well the company's corporate aim of promoting an open access recruitment policy. However, the company has found it very difficult to retain learners long enough for them to complete their programmes.
24. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory, with good features. DTS has a comprehensive policy for safeguarding learners. All staff receive an enhanced CRB check, which DTS renews after three years. DTS maintains an up-to-date central record that identifies when each CRB check is due for renewal. The company has a designated senior safeguarding officer and a designated officer at each training academy and at each school where the company provides training. Staff training in safeguarding is frequent and comprehensive. Learners say that staff and other learners treat them with respect. They know who to go to if they feel unsafe or threatened. DTS provides learners and employers with appropriate safeguarding training materials and information. However, their understanding of safeguarding is limited.
25. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The company has appropriate policies and procedures that cover the legislative requirements. Staff receive regular training in equality and diversity and demonstrate considerable enthusiasm for working with learners, most of whom have additional learning needs. Relationships between staff and learners are good. The company does not specifically promote marketing activities to increase the low number of males and those from minority ethnic groups. Managers do not make full use of the available data to identify and reduce performance differences between different groups of learners. Staff do not use a sufficiently wide range of resources to promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equalities during progress reviews. Assessors use a standard bank of questions to test learners' knowledge, but they do not sufficiently contextualise these questions to help learners apply their understanding to the workplace. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is generally limited.
26. DTS has appropriate systems for collecting information from learners during their programme. However, it does not have a written user engagement

strategy. Owing to the poor response rate from postal questionnaires, the company has recently begun to collect feedback from learners in person during review visits, this is analysed to identify any concerns. However, the provider does not inform learners of what actions it has taken to make improvements as a result of their feedback. The company also regularly gains the views of employers and takes appropriate actions when they raise concerns.

27. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. The self-assessment process is generally accurate, but is insufficiently inclusive. Although managers consult with some staff, there is little evidence that the company effectively uses the views of stakeholders to support self-assessment judgements. In addition to using some of its senior staff to carry out observations of teaching and learning, DTS also uses an external company to carry out observations. Reports from this company to DTS suggest that most teaching and learning is good or better. However, inspectors found this to be an inaccurate assessment. Grades given by the company were generous. Observers tend to focus on teaching rather than on learning. Few observation reports contain judgements related to the learners' experience. They rarely record any improvement actions or targets for tutors to help them further develop their practice.
28. DTS is committed to managing its available resources effectively and provides satisfactory value for money. Staff are well qualified and all have an appropriate teaching or assessor qualification or are working towards one. The company focuses well on reducing the number of learners who have exceeded their planned completion date. Specialist resources for learners do not always meet the expectations of learners or employers.

Information about the inspection

29. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's director of training, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, 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.
30. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They 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)
Dimensions Training Solutions Limited
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	14-16	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	234	0	234
Part-time learners	465	465	0
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	4		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	4		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	3		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a		
Quality of provision	3	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	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a		
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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