

Oracle Training Consultants Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53749

Name of lead inspector: Mike White HMI

Last day of inspection: 12 November 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 2-5 Prince's Street
Doncaster
DN1 3NJ

Telephone number: 01302 813900

Information about the provider

1. Oracle Training Consultants Ltd (Oracle) is a privately owned training company that has been providing government-funded training since 1999. The company contracts with the Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Entry to Employment (E2E) is provided under subcontractor agreements with Community Training Services Ltd and Morthyng Ltd. Oracle also works with Doncaster and Rotherham local authorities, to provide school programmes and programmes funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).
2. The company's head office is in the centre of Doncaster, with two other training centres in Sheffield and Rotherham. Oracle employ 42 staff, including four senior managers, six junior managers, nine administrators, 10 trainers, eight training consultants and five housekeeping staff. There are 120 apprentices and 49 advanced apprentices on hairdressing programmes, and 19 apprentices and 15 advanced apprentices on beauty therapy programmes. Twenty-four learners are on the E2E programme and 102 on the schools or other programmes funded through the ESF. Since 2009, Oracle has established links with several international schools in Japan, Belgium, Italy and Malta.
3. Unemployment in August 2009 in Yorkshire and the Humber was 8.9% compared with 7.9% nationally. In 2009, the proportion of school leavers gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including mathematics and English, in Yorkshire and Humberside was 46.9%, compared with 50.4% in England.
4. The provider provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Morthyng Ltd
 - Community Training Services Ltd
 - Doncaster Local Education Authority
 - Rotherham Local Education Authority

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Entry to Employment	76 learners 24 learners
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	180 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	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3

Overall effectiveness

5. The overall effectiveness of Oracle is satisfactory. Following a decline from previously high rates in 2008/09, success rates for apprentices were satisfactory in 2009/10. Monitoring of learner progress during the current year indicates continued improvement. The quality of teaching and training is good and partnership working strong. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Some aspects of progress reviews such as the contribution employers will make to learners' training require improvement. Directors and senior managers have taken decisive and appropriate actions to address significant challenges faced by Oracle during 2009 and early 2010; they have implemented a range of effective recent improvements. Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. Learners state that they feel safe and protected from abuse. However, some key aspects of management procedures and staff training require further development. Oracle is aware of the need to undertake a more detailed analysis of the reasons why learners leave their training early. Self-assessment and quality improvement plans are not central to quality improvement activities.

Main findings

- Overall success rates for apprenticeships are satisfactory although they have declined from previously high levels. Timely success rates are also satisfactory and have been consistently above national averages since 2006/07. Progression for those learners on E2E and pre-16 schools provision is generally good.

However, progression from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeship is satisfactory.

- Learners display confidence and competence in their work. Learners enjoy their work and have a good attitude to employment. Professional standards of client care are good. Learners are developing appropriate literacy and numeracy skills for their programmes. Learners display interest and enjoy their learning.
- Learners state they feel safe. Emphasis on health and safety in most practical lessons is good. Oracle conducts risk assessments for use of products, equipment and salon placements. However, staff do not always record checking of health and safety awareness in sufficient detail on progress reviews.
- Attention to the health and well-being of learners is good. Learners receive grooming sessions that focus on personal hygiene and sexual health. They also have first aid, drug and alcohol abuse awareness training. Drinking water, fruit and breakfast club facilities are available in training centres. Laundry services are available for those living away from home.
- Practical lessons use a wide variety of techniques and treatments to meet individual learners' needs. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboard in theory sessions to develop understanding and to encourage learners to participate. Questioning techniques are satisfactory but too much use is made of general questioning.
- Assessment practice is satisfactory and detailed feedback helps learners to progress further. Learners' targets on the review form are insufficiently precise. Employers' comments are too general and do not indicate the contribution they will make towards learners' training. Review forms do not encourage detailed recording of equality and diversity, health and safety, safeguarding or employment rights and responsibilities.
- Learners value the flexible approach to the delivery of their training, which allows them to complete their programmes early. Enrichment opportunities are good, with a wide variety of activities both in England and abroad. However, few additional qualifications are available.
- Partnership working is strong. Oracle works with two other providers to deliver the hair and beauty diploma and delivers E2E under subcontract agreement with two other providers. Links with schools are good. The provider works with a wide range of hairdressing and beauty salons.
- The number of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has significantly increased; their success rates declined in 2009/10 although they remained above national averages. Oracle was slow in responding to this; however, a specialist tutor now assists teachers, supporting their learners and developing resources. The reasons why learners leave their programmes early are not analysed in sufficient detail.

- Oracle has undergone a very challenging period during 2009 and early 2010. It has responded to this challenge in an appropriate and decisive manner. The company has seen consolidation of its provision, management restructuring, and significant staffing changes as part of its strategy to return to its previously stable position.
- Oracle gives safeguarding a high priority. The promotion of equality and diversity is integrated well into training sessions, however, staff fail to record the checking and reinforcing of learners' understanding during progress reviews in sufficient detail.
- Good use is made of both learners' and employers' views to improve the provision. Oracle informs learners and employers effectively about actions taken following their feedback through a number of methods. Their views inform the self-assessment process well, but the self-assessment report and resulting quality improvement plan are not sufficiently at the centre of quality improvement activity.

What does Oracle Training Consultants need to do to improve further?

- Further improve success rates to meet company targets, by continuing to closely monitor the impact of the improvement actions taken during 2010.
- Record in more detail the discussions around equality and diversity, health and safety, safeguarding, and employment rights and responsibilities on the progress review form.
- Ensure employers indicate on progress reviews the contribution they will make towards learners' training.
- Carry out a more detailed analysis of available information about unsuccessful learners and quickly implement actions to further narrow identified achievement gaps.
- Develop the use of the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan as key drivers in improving the quality of provision.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the competitions
- being treated like an adult
- the approachable and friendly staff who help build self-confidence
- the good support
- the flexible approach to assessments to fit with work commitments
- the frequent opportunities to give feedback
- the good teaching
- the good equipment.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more space in the Rotherham centre
- more information on their rate of progress
- more information about the training planned for the next few weeks.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the good links between on and off the job trainers
- the good communication
- frequent visits by assessors
- the quality of the training.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more involvement in the review process
- support for some learners to progress faster.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

6. Following a decline in 2008/09 from previously high success rates, Oracle made significant improvements to the monitoring and tracking of learners' progress and to the provision of additional support. For the significant majority of apprentices, success rates for 2009/10 improved to satisfactory levels. Retention, learner progress, and the success of those completing their apprenticeships during 2010/11 indicate continued improvement. For learners on the E2E and schools programmes, progression rates are good.
7. Oracle has responded well to a particularly challenging period in 2009 and early 2010. As part of its strategy to return to its previously stable position, it has taken decisive actions to consolidate its provision, restructure its management team and to make significant staffing changes. Oracle has made satisfactory progress in addressing key challenges from the last inspection. Managers use a good range of approaches to engage with learners and employers; they use feedback effectively to bring about improvements to the services provided.
8. Whilst the self-assessment process is inclusive of staff, and informed by both learners' and employers' views, managers do not use the resulting report and quality improvement plan to drive the quality improvement process. Although the report is successful in identifying many of the strengths and some of the areas for improvement, it gives insufficient weighting to the importance of learners' success rates when determining key areas for improvement and grades. The resulting quality improvement plan misses some important areas for improvement to either address weaknesses, or improve on satisfactory aspects of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

9. Success rates for hairdressing apprentices, the significantly largest cohort of apprentices, declined in 2008/09 from high to satisfactory. In 2009/10, they improved to above national averages although they remained satisfactory. Success rates for the few advanced hairdressing apprentices show a three-year trend of improvement to 2009/10. However, whilst the number of learners completing within agreed timescales was satisfactory, overall success rates remained low. Success rates for beauty therapy apprentices declined in 2009/10 from previously satisfactory levels. Advanced apprentices success rates declined from exceptionally high rates to satisfactory in 2009/10.
10. Progression from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships is satisfactory. Progression rates for learners on the subcontracted E2E programme and for learners on 14-16 schools programmes are good for most learners.

The numbers of learners from minority ethnic groups and male learners are too low to allow for detailed analysis of their performance. The numbers of learners with disclosed learning difficulties and/or disabilities increased significantly between 2006/07 and 2009/10. Success rates declined from previously high levels to satisfactory levels.

11. Learners demonstrate good commercial standards and display confidence and competence in their work. They show interest and enjoyment in their work and have a good attitude to employment. Learners develop appropriate literacy and numeracy skills for their programmes. School pupils on the diploma programme are knowledgeable about the effects of products during treatments.
12. Focus on learners' health and well-being is good. Oracle works well with learners to develop their understanding of personal hygiene, sexual health and drug and alcohol abuse. Drinking water, fruit and breakfast club facilities are available in training centres. Laundry services are available for those living away from home. A wide variety of leaflets is also available providing information on various aspects of personal health and well-being. Adherence to health and safety is good. Learners state they feel safe. Most learners have taken part in a well-designed safeguarding project where they reviewed possible danger 'hot spots' locally. Learners make a satisfactory contribution to community.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. In practical lessons, trainers use a wide variety of techniques to meet individual learners' needs. They place strong emphasis on health and safety and client care. Trainers make very effective use of a good range of resources in theory sessions; they use interactive whiteboards well in these sessions, to develop understanding and to encourage learners to participate. Learners show a good understanding of race, age and gender issues in relation to their workplaces. Trainers integrate equality and diversity into training sessions well. Questioning techniques are satisfactory although too much use is made of open questioning. The coordination between Oracle trainers, assessors and employers is effective and helps to develop good short-term targets in learners' training plans.
14. Assessment is satisfactory with detailed and constructive feedback to help learners to progress. Overall, progress monitoring and target-setting is good; however, employers' comments on many progress reviews are too general and do not indicate the contribution they will make towards learners' training. Progress review forms do not record in sufficient detail the discussions around equality and diversity, health and safety, safeguarding or employment rights and responsibilities.
15. The range of provision is good. Learners value the flexible approach to their training, which allows them to complete their programmes early. Enrichment opportunities are good and include trips to fashion shows and competitions, visits by external speakers, manufacturer product training, European and Japanese exchanges, advanced colouring techniques, first aid and safeguarding. However, few additional qualifications are available for apprentices.

16. Provision is responsive to the needs of the local community; partnership arrangements are good. Oracle works with the local college of further education and another beauty therapy provider to deliver the hair and beauty diploma. They also work well with two E2E providers to deliver vocational training in hairdressing. Oracle works closely with local schools attending approximately 30 careers events. Oracle works in partnership with a wide range of hairdressing and beauty salons.
17. Support for learners is satisfactory. Oracle has been slow in introducing sufficient resources and staffing to cope with the increase in the number of learners with additional learning and support needs. A recently employed specialist tutor trains and assists teachers in supporting their learners, and has developed a range of resources for them to use. Learners can attend additional assessment sessions at the college. Pastoral support is good.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

18. Oracle experienced a very challenging period during 2009 and early 2010. It responded to this challenge in an appropriate and decisive manner. As part of its strategy to return to its previously stable position, the company has consolidated its provision, restructured its management team and made significant staffing changes. In recognition of declining success rates in 2009/10, the company has redeveloped and strengthened its systems to monitor learner progress and help those needing additional support. Indications are that the strategy has been successful and that success rates are improving; however, it is too early to judge the overall impact of actions taken until final success rates for 2010/11 are available.
19. Oracle gives safeguarding a high priority, has appropriate policies and procedures covering children and vulnerable adults and is meeting its statutory obligations. All appropriate staff are subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and the company applies safe recruitment principles. Oracle has a designated lead officer who has undergone appropriate level 3 safeguarding training. Other staff have undertaken appropriate basic awareness training with more planned. Learners' induction includes good awareness-raising activities, and staff promote safeguarding well throughout the centres. Learners show a satisfactory understanding of safeguarding and of how to report any incidents; they confirm feeling safe in their workplaces and in the training centres. Health and safety vetting procedures for employers are appropriate. The reporting of any non-attendance at off-the-job training is well managed, thorough and timely.
20. The promotion and practice of equality and diversity are satisfactory. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and reflect current government legislation; managers are currently incorporating them into a single equality scheme. They are also systematically applying equality impact assessments to all policies and procedures. Staff have completed a certificated level 3 award in equality and diversity. They promote procedures for reporting bullying and

harassment well throughout the training centres and learners confirm that they have a good understanding of how to report such incidents.

21. Oracle is very active in delivering provision aimed at persons who are, or are in danger of becoming, not in training, education or employment. The company uses male role models effectively to promote programmes to potential male learners; numbers are slowly increasing. Activities to increase the numbers of learners from black and minority-ethnic groups have been largely unsuccessful. Oracle analyses data to identify achievement gaps but not in sufficient depth; it has been slow to implement appropriate actions to address the declining success rates for learners with disclosed learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
22. Oracle makes good use of a range of effective approaches to collect the views of learners and employers. Learners confirm that their views contribute to improvements in the provision and that Oracle informs them well about actions taken following their feedback.
23. Oracle provides satisfactory value for money. Oracle is a supportive and caring organisation committed to supporting and developing its staff and learners. It has invested heavily in providing good quality learning resources to benefit learners. Commitment to managing resources in a sustainable manner is strong. Staff are very experienced and appropriately qualified. The success rates for learners are satisfactory.

Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director 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 funding body, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. 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)
Oracle Training Consultants

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	16-18 Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	0	0	0	0
Part-time learners	329	102	24	203
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3			
Outcomes for learners	3	3	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?	3			
How safe do learners feel?	2			
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	2			
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	N/A			
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2			
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?	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?	2			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4			
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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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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