

Superdrug Stores plc

Employer

Inspection dates		16-19 October 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate-4
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Inadequate-4
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Inadequate-4

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is inadequate because:

- Too many learners leave the programme without completing their qualification.
- The variations in the rate of progress and achievement of different groups of learners are significant.
- The overall planning and coordination of the learning programme are insufficient to provide a good, individualised learning experience for all apprentices.
- Too many aspects of teaching, learning and assessment require further improvement.
- Managers have taken slow, ineffective action to improve learner retention on programmes.
- The identified areas for improvement at the last inspection have not yet been rectified and outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have deteriorated.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners are developing good employability skills in retail and customer service and those completing the team leading qualification progress onto a managerial role.
- Superdrug delivers good on-the-job induction and initial training to its learners, including effective supervision from senior colleagues, and this allows learners to gain a thorough understanding of their role quickly.
- The apprenticeship programme is well established within Superdrug's vision for the development of its workforce and it meets the needs of its employees.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Take urgent management action to stem the continuing low rates of retention, so that all groups of learners can complete and achieve their qualifications in the planned time.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by increasing the programme resources, so that assessors have sufficient time to visit learners, by ensuring that on-line learning resources are accessible, and providing adequate additional specialist support to meet the literacy and numeracy needs of learners.
- Assess the apprenticeship programme with rigour, utilising all quality assurance arrangements, so that barriers to improving its performance are identified and included in the quality improvement plan.
- Make sure that equality and diversity are promoted well during the learners' journey by sharing good practice and closely monitoring the development of the learners' knowledge of equality and diversity matters.
- Fully integrate the apprenticeship programme with the existing staff learning and development processes in the organisation, thereby strengthening the overall learning experience and better meeting learners' needs.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since 2010/11, the number of learners who achieve their qualification has declined and is significantly below the percentage who achieves at similar providers. Success rates improved slightly for all apprentices last year, but they are still low and are significantly lower for the advanced apprentices. Learners undertaking a business qualification perform worse than learners in the retail programme. ▪ The number of learners who achieve their qualification within the planned time was very low in 2009/10 and, although this has increased over the last two years, approximately only half of the learners achieve within their planned end date. Almost two thirds of the current learners on programme are experiencing slow progress towards achieving their qualification by the expected date. ▪ Too many learners have left the programme without completing the qualification. The number of learners who leave the programme without achieving their learning goal has progressively increased in the past two years. The introduction of workbooks that did not meet all learning styles, the launch of a new customer service qualification to a very high number of learners and the reduction in learners' contracted hours have contributed to the poor retention of learners in programmes. ▪ The variations in the way different groups of learners progress and achieve are significant. Young learners are making the slowest progress with their qualifications. The provider has failed to identify that males are performing considerably worse than females. Data are not sufficiently analysed to reduce the differences in performance of different groups of learners. ▪ Progression for learners who achieve the team leading qualification is good as the majority of them have been promoted onto a managerial role. Progression is also good for the limited number of learners who complete their retail and customer service qualifications. In 2010/11, approximately a quarter of these learners progressed successfully from an intermediate onto an advanced apprenticeship. Similarly, last year, over a quarter of the learners who completed their qualification moved to a job with higher responsibilities. ▪ Learners are developing and demonstrating good workplace skills in customer service, product knowledge and point of sale activities. They demonstrate safe working practices in their stores, 	

broaden their skills base and work productively. They further develop useful employability skills such as team working, communication, research and analysis. Their self-esteem and confidence grow throughout the programme. Staff retention among those who completed their apprenticeship last year is considerably higher than for those who did not undertake the qualification.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement and do not address the inadequate outcomes. The provider has made some changes to the delivery model, but these have not yet impacted sufficiently on the quality of the provision and too many learners make poor progress with their qualifications.
- There is some good involvement by store managers which ensures learners receive a good induction and effective initial training into their job role. Most store managers take an active interest in learners' programmes and have a comprehensive understanding of the programme content. They provide time during working hours for the learner to complete on-programme work. Many communicate informally on a regular basis with assessors about learners' programme training needs and actively change the business work flow and provide on-the-job training opportunities when required. The coordination of training learners receive is insufficient to ensure they have a high quality learning experience.
- Some assessors do not manage well the coordination of the training learners receive on the job and the learning they undertake during the apprenticeship. Learners often duplicate training activities to meet the apprenticeship programme requirement. Although the initial assessment process is adequate, the results are not always used effectively to develop personalised learning plans for each learner. Some assessors make good use of coaching skills to challenge and extend learners' understanding about the retail sector. During the coaching sessions, learners are encouraged to develop their independent learning skills by conducting research on certain topics using, for example, the internet. However, learners do not have access to internet resources in stores or to other specific learning resources such as journals and textbooks.
- The quality of assessment varies across the learning programmes. Some assessors plan sessions particularly thoroughly and ensure that the session maximises opportunities to support learners' progress. However, other assessors do not plan so effectively and often do not coordinate their visits with learners' working hours. This often results in learners missing an assessment visit. Most learners receive effective feedback that helps them understand what they need to do next to progress with their qualification.
- The support for the development of key skills by learners needs further development. Assessors do not always promote literacy and numeracy sufficiently and do not correct spelling and grammar errors. The workbooks are not available in electronic format which means the learners miss an opportunity to develop their information technology skills. Functional skills are delivered by assessors and store managers. However, they are not sufficiently qualified or experienced to do so.
- The provision for information, advice and guidance is generally effective and meets the needs of learners well at the beginning of the programme and towards the end, highlighting the progression routes available within the organisation. However, learners do not receive sufficient information with regard to other further educational opportunities available to them externally.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is effective at ensuring learners develop a basic understanding of these topics through the completion of their workbooks. However, assessors are inconsistent when questioning learners to check their understanding of equality during their visits in stores. Sometimes, assessors do not engage in discussions to further develop the learners' awareness of equality and diversity more effectively.

Retailing and Wholesaling

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Although the provider has made improvements, such as the use of in-house assessors and further development of workbooks, these are yet to have a significant impact on outcomes. Success rates are still low and too many of the current learners are making slow progress and not on target to achieve on time.
- Learners receive good initial on-the-job induction and training, as well as close supervision from managers and senior colleagues, thus gaining a good understanding of their job role. Managers and colleagues continually assess learners' job competence, providing good feedback on any development needs, although these are not routinely shared with assessors.
- The overall formal planning and coordination of learning is insufficient. Initial assessment does not sufficiently inform individual learning plans and therefore these do not highlight the individual learner's skills development and support needs. The apprentice programme lacks sufficient formal integration with existing employer training and development processes. Learners do not have an effective, individual plan that encompasses and monitors all of their training and support sufficiently well.
- Coaching by assessors is effective. Assessors provide good guidance and explanations for the completion of the retail workbook, ensuring learners understand what they need to do to progress. Learners develop good independent learning skills, researching information well from the internet and employer manuals. However, learners do not have sufficient access to the internet whilst at work.
- Assessment practice is adequate and meets the needs of the awarding bodies. Most assessors use technology well, and clearly reference observations to the standards. Feedback to learners is clear and positive, but does not always inform learners sufficiently on how they can improve. Assessors do not always sufficiently review the target dates in the learning plan and too many learners are behind target. A few visits are lost due to ineffective planning.
- Support for key skills and functional skills requires improvement. Assessors refer learners to useful internet support sites, which learners use well. They generally provide effective coaching; although, in a few instances, the coaching session is not used to check that learners have thoroughly understood the relevant aspects of numeracy. Resources for the support of functional skills are limited as assessors are not fully qualified to deliver them and practice papers for tests are not yet routinely available.
- The provision for information, advice and guidance is generally effective. Learners receive sufficient information at the start to understand their training programme. At the end of programme, assessors provide useful information on progression to other qualifications, as available. However, they do not focus enough on how learners can continue to progress in other learning, external to the workplace.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is effective overall. Learners feel safe, and fairly treated in their workplaces. However, although their understanding of equality is covered in the workbooks, the questioning to check their knowledge is inconsistent. Where learners' answers are less than thorough, assessors do not explore and challenge this understanding further.

Business and customer services

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement and have not raised learner success rates which are substantially below national averages. A few learners are on target to complete within their planned date. However, too many are making slow progress towards their qualification.
- Learners are effectively encouraged to achieve a higher level of functional skills once they have achieved the necessary level of key skills as they advance to another qualification. The standard of work in their portfolios is good.
- Store managers are supportive of their learners, in some cases explaining the requirements for individual units. They contribute to training through daily briefings and weekly training sessions. They observe learners in the workplace and discuss where improvements are possible. However, these observations are not shared with assessors routinely which means that learners have to duplicate their work and this slows their progress. New learners have a thorough induction which helpfully identifies the competences and knowledge they need for the job. However, this is not integrated into the learner portfolio, leading to further duplication of evidence.
- Assessment practice is mostly good. However, in the past, some assessors have not been able to gain access to the stores due to business demands. Learners benefit from individual assessments which increase their confidence, engage them fully in their qualification and raise aspirations. Constructive feedback and clear action planning give them time to reflect on their work processes and what they need to do to improve. Assessors use skilful questioning and learners benefit from effective coaching during these sessions.
- Literacy is not promoted sufficiently well. Spelling and grammar errors are not always corrected in the workbooks. The workbooks are not available electronically, preventing learners from developing their information and communication technology skills. Learners develop good independent learning skills while completing the workbooks. However, the use of these resources predetermines the units which learners will complete and encourages little ownership of their portfolio.
- Teaching, learning and assessment activities have shown improvements but are insufficiently coordinated to give all learners the same learning experience. Some use is made of digital technology for professional discussions, but this is not commonly used across the company. Initial assessment is not used to plan training needs. Learners who have a great numeracy and literacy need are signposted to other external providers, but this is not included in their individual learning plans.
- The provision for information, advice and guidance meets the needs of learners. A brief induction gives learners the necessary information to tackle their qualification with confidence. They also receive good advice on progression to further qualifications.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is mostly adequate. Learners are questioned on their understanding of these topics and, in some cases, they are able to answer the questions correctly and extend the discussion to broader aspects of diversity. Team leading and customer service workbooks challenge learners to research equality and diversity themes, but their understanding is not checked consistently to ensure they further develop their knowledge of these matters.

The effectiveness of leadership and management**Inadequate**

- Superdrug's management of the apprenticeship provision is inadequate. Despite a recent change in management and in the assessor team, the company has not managed to reduce the numbers of learners who leave the programme early and to ensure that all learners make timely progress. The outcomes and the quality of provision have declined significantly since the last inspection, and current data indicate very little improvement.
- The apprenticeship scheme is well established as part of the human resources vision within Superdrug and features well in its strategic plan, where internal promotions form part of the succession planning. However, store managers vary significantly in their understanding and support for the programme.
- Managers in the training team closely monitor the new assessment team. In an attempt to control the quality of the programme delivery better, Superdrug now directly employs all its assessors and the company encourages existing employees in the stores to train as assessors. However, this has yet to improve teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers focus well on meeting performance targets with assessors by holding individual meetings and conducting twice yearly performance reviews. However, many assessors find the dual role of assessor and recruiter challenging, allowing little time for flexibility in responding to learners' requirements.
- Assessors are encouraged to continue their professional development and attend events and activities such as health and safety, updates on legislation and changes in expectations, such as the introduction or amendments to programme workbooks. However, despite this, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved since the last inspection.
- Staff training to support learners who need to improve or consolidate their literacy and numeracy is inadequate. Learners, assessors and store managers do not have access to professionally qualified tutors to assist them. No assessor is trained yet to the appropriate standard in literacy or numeracy, as highlighted at the last inspection.
- Superdrug provides apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of their employees, aligning well the management qualifications to the company's training. It now offers apprenticeship programmes to young school leavers, meeting the government's requirements. However, the customer services programme was implemented with insufficient preparation and many learners left early.
- The preparation for the introduction of functional skills has been slow and assessors are themselves taking the qualifications at level 2 in the same year as the learners. Only one assessor has achieved the English qualification.
- There are gaps in the provision of resources to support the programmes well. The availability of learning resources varies significantly across the provision, and access to on-line resources is not always available in the stores, which limits opportunities for apprentices to learn independently at work.
- Self-assessment is weak. The report in 2011 has taken insufficient account of the views of all stakeholders. It has not identified key areas for improvement, or developed an action plan in response to the last inspection report, making little progress in rectifying those areas for improvement identified in 2010.
- Although Superdrug has a robust management information system, which can provide monthly management reports on learners' progress and on numbers of leavers, managers have not made timely use of it to identify the underlying causes for poor performance. The provider has not yet taken formal action to rectify these in order to improve the programme.
- Despite the extensive quality management arrangements to observe teaching, learning and assessment in place, the quality of programmes has declined since the last inspection. Significant variations in assessor practice in planning and delivery remain and the apprenticeship programme is not integrated well with the employer's own training programme.

- Superdrug has a comprehensive equalities policy within its stores and has made appropriate arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity through the training programme. However, equality topics are not always fully explored in training sessions in order to expand learners' knowledge.
- Superdrug has not adequately used management data to identify the significant gaps in progress and achievement between different groups of learners. Managers have recently identified the low performance of learners with dyslexia, but have not yet found a way to provide specialist support for them.
- Superdrug meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. All assessors have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau and the company has a strong focus on the safety of its staff, including policies related to lone working and e-safety. However, sometimes, these are not well reinforced by staff.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Superdrug Stores Plc.

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	4	4
Outcomes for learners	4	4
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	4	4

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Retailing and wholesaling	3
Business Studies	3

Provider details

Superdrug Stores Plc	
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 350
	Part-time: 0
CEO	Ms Joey Watt
Date of previous inspection	March 2010
Website address	www.superdrug.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time								
Part-time				8				
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	41	230	0	23				
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Additional information

Superdrug Stores plc has its head office in Croydon, although the training team is based in its distribution centre in West Yorkshire. The apprenticeship programme manager and the operations manager are based there, along with the three members of staff who act as apprenticeship coordinators. The apprenticeship programme manager reports directly to the head of retail human resources.

A team of five assessors and two quality managers is based in the field, visiting stores across the country. The programme is entirely delivered by the provider. The number of current learners in learning is 302. Considering that all learners are based in stores, and a few in offices, across England, the impact of socio-economic factors affects some learners more than others. Learners are engaged in roles such as sales advisers, and team leaders. Approximately eight learners are completing a National Vocational Qualification in warehousing and storage under a workplace learning programme.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Maria Navarro HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Apprenticeship Programme Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and on-line questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account the main provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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