

BHS Limited

Employer

Inspection dates		22–26 October 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Most learners achieve particularly well, but this is not reflected in success rates for younger learners, advanced apprentices or those recruited into weaker performing regions.
- Too many learners do not complete their programme within the time agreed, and these delays have not yet been successfully resolved.
- BHS retail training is very good, but learning materials are not comprehensive enough and the planning of training does not take enough account of learners' prior knowledge or experience.
- The testing and assessment of learners' knowledge and skills vary too much in quality and effectiveness, and too often this means that slow progress is not clearly identified.
- Many store managers and learners do not know enough about the requirements of the programmes to challenge some of the weaker practices that they may experience.
- Testing, planning, and teaching and learning in mathematics and English focus too much on gaining the qualification rather than providing a positive and meaningful learning experience.
- The way performance is monitored has not been sufficiently robust, and as a result the actions taken to improve the weaker aspects of provision have been slow.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Success rates for a large group of learners are high.
- Particularly effective retail training and support from store managers are key factors in the very good development of learners' retail and employability skills.
- Learners are highly motivated and increase their confidence considerably whilst on the programme, and many progress into more responsible job roles.
- The excellent recent analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of BHS accredited training has led to a detailed and robust plan to improve the provision.
- BHS has been effective in planning programmes to meet the needs of its business as well as the learners.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the planning of training to challenge more able learners, and introduce a greater variety of quality learning materials to extend learners' knowledge and understanding across all aspects of the apprenticeship programme.
- Ensure that managers and learners fully understand the requirements of the programme so that they can be actively involved in assessing its effectiveness.
- Make sure that the initial testing of learners' skills in mathematics and English, and subsequent teaching and monitoring of learners' progress, take full account of each learner's job role.
- Improve the performance of all assessors to the levels of the very best, and so remove the variations in the quality of service provided, in order to reduce significantly the number of learners making slow progress.
- Improve achievement in weaker regions up to the level of the most successful.
- Build upon, and fully implement, the recommendations from BHS's strategic review.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success rates have steadily improved over the past four years, and are high overall. Apprentices aged over 19 are the largest group of learners by far, and their very high success rates are well above the national average for similar retail provision. However, success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 require improvement, and are too low for the recently introduced advanced apprenticeship programme. ▪ The performance of BHS regions varies significantly. For example, in the East Midlands success rates are outstanding, but in the West they are too low. Too many learners still do not complete their programme within the time agreed. ▪ The development of learners' retail and employability skills is good, and learners significantly improve confidence in their ability to work in a high-pressure retail environment. The standard of customer service and their understanding of it are much improved throughout the programme, and this actively supports BHS core values. ▪ Learners very much enjoy the opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications and to improve their skills beyond those offered by in-house training alone. Learners completing apprenticeship programmes progress well and many are promoted into a more responsible job role. 	
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment does not match the good outcomes for apprentices, and this contributes significantly to the slow progress experienced by many learners. For example, constant changes of assessor and/or periods of assessor absence have had a negative impact on learners' ability to complete the programme in the time agreed.
- In-house training is very good. Learners successfully develop a broad range of retail and social skills by working in a variety of departments such as the in-store restaurant, customer service, fashion and lingerie. BHS 'master classes' are used effectively to develop learners' skills beyond the requirements of the retail qualification.

- Store managers use their considerable retail and customer care knowledge and experience very effectively to challenge learners' thinking and promote high standards of knowledge and competence. During the training, many managers get learners to take on greater levels of responsibility for staff and/or product lines.
- BHS has matched its own in-house training to accredited qualifications well. Retail learning materials are appropriate, although learners have limited access to supplementary learning resources to further support and extend their understanding. The planning of training and assessment does not adequately take account of learners who have considerable retail knowledge and experience, or those who are more able.
- Most learners achieve the required qualifications in English and mathematics. However, the initial testing of learners' skills in mathematics, English or more complex learning needs is not thorough enough to support effective planning of learning or use of learning resources. Opportunities are missed to develop learners' understanding of mathematics and English during the training. Some assessors are not sufficiently qualified, skilled or confident to provide learners with good support in mathematics and English.
- Good appraisal by BHS store managers ensures learners have a clear understanding of how they can improve their retail skills. However, the process of assessing learners against the formal apprenticeship qualifications is much less clear. In the better instances, assessment is planned well, assessors use a good range of methods to good effect, and the related records help learners to review their progress and enhance learning. However, too often the questioning to gauge learners' knowledge is superficial, learners are not sufficiently aware of when or how assessments will take place, and feedback following assessment is not sufficiently clear in helping learners to improve.
- Support from BHS store managers is very good. Learners speak very highly of this help and say it is very much related to their increased enthusiasm to achieve the qualification and develop their career further. However, the system for reviewing learners' progress is underdeveloped. The planning of visits by subcontracted staff does not take sufficient account of their work schedules and too many store managers and learners are not involved enough in the system, so they do not understand it fully or know the reasons for progress sometimes being slow.
- BHS is a highly inclusive employer and responds particularly well to the local circumstances of its customers. However, opportunities to further promote and develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity through training are missed. For example, BHS promotes goods to reflect the celebration of different major cultural events, but does not use such events to develop learners' understanding even further.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- BHS demonstrates a particularly strong commitment to the development of retail apprenticeship programmes throughout the organisation. Its mission to be 'market leading and award winning' is fully embedded in the company ethos. The BHS Board has demonstrated its support for the programmes by allocating more resources to improve the monitoring of learners' progress and even out performance between different stores and regions.
- Managers at all levels demonstrate much enthusiasm for the programmes, and promote very high standards through unusually strong support for learners. Key apprenticeship performance targets help to maintain the company's focus on its core values.
- BHS has effectively increased the proportion of learners who successfully complete the programme. However, the actions it has taken to reduce the proportion of learners who complete the programme outside the time agreed have been much less effective. In the last contract year, fewer than half the learners completed their programme in the time expected. Effective steps have recently been taken to address this, but too many learners currently on programme continue to experience delays and make slow progress.

- The performance management systems have not been rigorous enough to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Monitoring of the progress made by individuals or groups of learners has not been good enough, and has not identified the reasons for learners' slow progress. BHS and Elmfield Training have not dealt with problems of underperformance by some assessors promptly or effectively enough. New arrangements have recently been introduced to monitor learners' progress and the support provided by assessors and stores, but it is too soon to judge their impact.
- BHS's recent strategic review and self-assessment of the programmes provides a thorough, up-to-date and frank assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes. It also makes clear and achievable recommendations for improvement. Some of these have already been implemented, although it is too soon for them to have had much impact. Other recommendations include amending the service level agreement with the subcontractor, to increase the rigour of contract management.
- The programmes have been designed well to meet the needs of both the business and individual learners. Progression routes currently range from pre-apprenticeship opportunities for unemployed learners to level four training, and new programmes are being introduced.
- BHS's equality and diversity policies and procedures are appropriate to the needs of a large commercial operation. Learners have a clear understanding of bullying, harassment and discrimination procedures. The company has started to take action to reduce achievement gaps between different geographical regions.
- BHS Ltd meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

BHS Limited

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

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

Provider details

BHS Limited	
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0
	Part-time: 909
Principal/CEO	Darren Topp
Date of previous inspection	September 2008
Website address	bhs.co.uk

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Part-time	0	0	3	28	0	2	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	50	681	3	187	0	0		
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ Elmfield Training							

Additional socio-economic information

BHS operates 185 stores across major towns and cities throughout the United Kingdom. Apprenticeship programmes are available to all retail employees, regardless of their prior attainment.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Richard Beaumont HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Learning and Development Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and 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 to gather the views of learners and the employer; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the provision and graded the sector subject area 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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