Oracle Training Consultants Ltd.

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		19–22 February 2013
Overall effectiveness	**This inspection:**	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
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:

- Overall success rates are only slightly above the national average rates and not all learners are progressing well enough.
- Not all tutors have sufficient skills to plan and deliver good teaching sessions, and the teaching of theory work needs improving.
- The results of initial assessment are not used sufficiently to create individualised learning experiences that challenge and stretch all learners.
- Progress reviews do not sufficiently capture and plan all aspects of the learners' progress.
- Learners do not always have access to realistic and appropriate assessment opportunities.
- Business and improvement plans do not contain sufficient ambitious, achievable targets.
- Quality assurance arrangements are not fully embedded and slow progress has been made in securing learning that is consistently good.
- Managers have made insufficient progress in fully improving the use of data and self-assessment.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners develop good skills and many make good progression onto employment.
- Learners are employed in good quality hair and beauty salons where they benefit from good coaching and learning support.
- The practical teaching is good, both in the training centres and in the workplace, and learners' standards of work are also good.
- Leaders and managers have introduced improvements in the programme management and success rates have increased since the last inspection.
- Managers have developed a coherent provision and forged good links in the community, widening the participation of learners in vocational training.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Continue increasing success rates ensuring all learners progress and achieve to their full potential.

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by further developing tutors and providing them with more learning resources and teaching strategies.

- Ensure the results of initial assessment are appropriately used to inform individualised learning plans that lead to a differentiated learning experience.

- Improve progress reviews ensuring learners, employers and assessors are engaged in discussing and planning learners' progress.

- Improve the use of data and target-setting to ensure challenging and ambitious objectives are set in all plans.

- Further develop the quality improvement procedures ensuring they inform a more evaluative and critical self-assessment process that leads to an improved provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement

- Outcomes for learners require improvement. Overall success rates for apprentices in hairdressing and beauty therapies have increased since the last inspection from 66% to 75% last year, but are only slightly higher than the national average for providers delivering programmes in the same area of learning and require further improvement. Success rates in hairdressing, where the majority of learners are, were lower at 73% last year. Success rates for beauty therapy programmes were high last year at 80%, seven per cent above the national average for this area.

- At Oracle Training Consultants Ltd. (Oracle), not all learners achieve and make good progress in relation to their starting points. Although the percentage of learners who achieve within their planned end date is high, this is influenced by the fact that all learners are set up the same length of time for their programme, regardless of their starting point and individual ability, which does not stretch sufficiently the more-able learners. Over half of the learners who joined Oracle last year already had a qualification that exempted them from completing some parts or the entire English and mathematics key skills. Despite this, they were still scheduled to achieve in the same generous length of time as those with no prior attainment.

- Last year, Oracle took over the business administration apprenticeship programme from another provider. Overall success rates for learners in the first six months of the recently introduced apprenticeship programme are still low and require improvement at 71%. The percentage of learners who have completed their qualification within the planned time is particularly low at 55%.

- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve worse than the rest. The achievement gap between learners with recognised learning difficulties and disabilities and those with no recognised learning difficulties has widened since the last inspection, from 15% approximately to 22%. Furthermore, last year, success rates for the 34% of the learners with recognised learning needs was 10% below the national average rate for this group.

- Learners develop very good skills at Oracle. They demonstrate good communication skills with clients and they display a sound understanding of customer care. They gain confidence in cutting techniques and develop good hairdressing skills. They become productive members of

staff and are an asset to their salons. Learners appropriately follow the relevant health and safety procedures in their hairdressing and beauty therapy salons.

- Learners progress well through the different levels of hairdressing qualifications. In particular, progression from intermediate levels and, thereafter, into employment is particularly good. Over half of the learners who completed the intermediate apprenticeship progressed onto an advanced apprenticeship and 86% of them secured a full-time job upon completion of their programme.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement reflecting the improved overall success rate which is only slightly above the national average. However, not all groups of learners progress and achieve well, fulfilling their potential.

- Teaching of practical work both in the training centre and in the workplace is good. Apprentices' enjoyment and engagement is clearly evident. The standard of learners' practical work is good and is usually above that required by the qualification. For example, they demonstrate sound competence in complex techniques such as the use of perming and colour correction.

- Tutors have good vocational experience, are enthusiastic and employers value the support they receive in meeting their business needs. However, not all tutors are able to apply the relevant teaching knowledge to plan and deliver learner-centred activities that inspire, stretch and challenge all learners.

- Theory teaching requires improvement to ensure all learners achieve to their full potential. Only a few learning sessions are sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. Learning strategies are narrow and place an over reliance on PowerPoint presentations and text books. Teaching places insufficient emphasis on developing learners' personal learning and thinking skills and functional skills are not embedded in the lessons.

- Initial and diagnostic assessments are adequate; however, the results of these do not routinely inform the learning programmes. Learners' prior skills and knowledge are not considered sufficiently to plan individualised learning programmes. Learners are not actively encouraged to achieve a higher level than the demands of the framework, regardless of the outcomes of their assessment and their prior attainment.

- Workplace progress reviews have not been sufficiently developed since the previous inspection and require further improvement. Tutors do not capture all aspects of the learner's progress and development whilst at work, with too much information pre-planned and an over-emphasis on assessment and tests. There is insufficient negotiation of targets between learner, employer and assessor and previous targets are not adequately reviewed.

- Many learners have regular access to assessment through frequent salon visits. Assessment practice is satisfactory, however, not all learners are provided with sufficient realistic, appropriate assessment opportunities where they can demonstrate their competence with clients instead of their peers.

- The quality of feedback following practical assessment is variable and requires improvement. Most written assignments have no written tutor comments. Learners' work is not systematically corrected and some tutors' written feedback have incorrect spelling. Learners repeat the same mistakes on further written work.

- Learners benefit from the good learning support and coaching they receive from their employers. They are employed in high quality hairdressing and beauty therapy salons that meet and exceed the industry's professional standards. Personal support for learners is satisfactory; however, issues highlighted at reviews are not always addressed adequately.

- Staff and learners' understanding of equality and diversity requires further development. Learners cover these topics in training sessions, and staff undertake development on equality

and diversity. However, the promotion of equality and diversity to learners and employers is not always further developed in order to generate a deeper understanding of these subjects.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- The leadership and management of the provision require improvement. Senior managers provide adequate strategic leadership. Staff have a sound understanding of the organisation's ethos and mission to raise standards within the industry that benefit all learners and contribute well to addressing regional and national employment priorities. Since the previous inspection, Oracle has made a significant investment in interactive computer-based resources to promote independent learning. The provider's business plan appropriately emphasises the importance of improvement actions designed to enhance the learners' experience, which managers adequately monitor. However, not all the stated objectives are sufficiently detailed, realistic and ambitious, and few refer to the full period covered by the plan.

- Leaders and managers have made good recent use of external support and best practice that has led to more effective strategic and operational management practice. Since the previous inspection, the provider has introduced improvements to programme management and staff accountability that have contributed to a rising trend in success rates which are currently around the national average. However, managers have made insufficient progress in fully addressing identified shortfalls in the use of data and self-assessment.

- Oracle rigorously audits its small amount of recently commissioned subcontracted provision for contract compliance purposes. Managers adequately performance manage the provision and have supported the subcontractor well to develop its operational procedures. However, Oracle has been slow in embedding its own comprehensive quality assurance and improvement arrangements.

- Managers adequately use data to support the monitoring of learners' individual performance and effectively identify and implement timely remedial action that promotes success. These arrangements link well to the good performance management of tutors that raises expectations of acceptable standards. However, this process is relatively new, has yet to be linked to staff appraisal and does not include the comprehensive use of detailed targets to aid monitoring and bring about improvement.

- Oracle has recently strengthened its arrangements for assessing the quality of learning sessions through direct observation and now effectively focuses on the experience of the learner. The process is thorough, with managers using an effective action-planning process to improve professional practice. However, managers have made slow progress in introducing these improvement measures and securing learning sessions' quality of a consistently high standard.

- The self-assessment process is a well-established part of Oracle's quality assurance cycle and makes adequate use of users' views. However, judgements in the current self-assessment report do not benefit from the use of comprehensive learner data on outcomes to ensure they are fully evaluative and self-critical. Managers appropriately monitor the adequately detailed improvement plan but the insufficient use of short and long-term targets limits the usefulness of this process.

- Oracle offers a suitable range of programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. Managers have developed a coherent provision that offers school pupils and post-16 learners an appropriate range and variety of vocational training which supports their progression. The provider responds effectively to initiatives designed to promote apprenticeships and has successfully engaged with employers who offer a high standard of training facilities that benefits learners.

- Oracle's promotion of equality and diversity is adequate overall. Managers have established particularly good links with education and training providers to engage with reluctant learners and adults needing to improve their employability. Work with local schools, use of the Foundation Learning programme and taster courses has successfully widened participation in

vocational training. However, there is a need to raise the participation of males and ensure all groups, particularly those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well.

- Oracle's safeguarding arrangements are good, meet statutory requirements and ensure the protection of learners. All staff and the designated safeguarding manager have received relevant Criminal Record Bureau vetting and training appropriate to their role. Oracle suitably responds to concerns raised by learners and protects them whilst in the workplace or training centres. However, some tutors do not always have the confidence to deal quickly and effectively enough with the needs of all vulnerable individuals.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Oracle Training Consultants Ltd.		
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	3	3
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
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3

Provider details

Oracle Training Consultants Ltd.

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0
	Part-time: 349
Principal/CEO	Diane Logan
Date of previous inspection	November 2010
Website address	www.oracle-uk.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	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Part-time	NA	NA	NA	7	NA	7	NA	NA

Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	116	11	32	26	NA	NA

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:	▪ Engage Training and Development

Additional socio-economic information

Oracle has been operating since 1998. It has its head office in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, where two directors and administrative staff are located. Oracle has a total of three training centres in Rotherham, Doncaster and Sheffield. Managers are peripatetic and work across the three centres. Following recruitment, the provider enrols learners onto programmes and finds them employment. Learners visit these centres once a week to attend off-the-job training. Assessors visit them in the work place, in hairdressing and beauty therapy salons across South Yorkshire.

The provision of the business administration apprenticeship programmes is subcontracted out. Oracle also delivers vocational provision for a number of schools in Rotherham and Doncaster. Recently, the provider has begun delivering vocational training as part of adult work programmes. The government funded training programmes account for approximately 90% of the provision at Oracle.

The current unemployment rate in Doncaster and Sheffield is approximately 6%, slightly lower than in Rotherham where it is just over 7%; however, still lower than the national rate which is almost 8%. The percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs or more at the end of their Key Stage 4 is, at 82%, slightly higher than the percentage for England.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Maria Navarro HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the foundation learning operations 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 individual interviews, telephone calls and online 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 all of the 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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