

Superdrug Stores plc

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

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Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

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 programme is entirely delivered by the provider. The apprenticeship programme manager reports directly to the head of retail human resources.

Ofsted inspectors conducted a monitoring visit in May 2013 to explore the progress being made against the recommendations of the last inspection in October 2012. At that inspection overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners and the effectiveness of leadership and management were judged to be inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was judged to require improvement. The two subjects inspected, retailing and wholesaling and business studies, were both judged to require improvement.

This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit which were areas for improvement at the last inspection.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has been made in improving the weak self-assessment process and ensuring that quality improvement activities lead to a consistently high quality experience for all learners?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection a detailed cycle of quality improvement activity has been devised and implemented. The range of activities has been extended to cover all aspects of learners' experience whilst on an apprenticeship. The observation of teaching and learning process has been strengthened, although the process does not sufficiently focus on the learning taking place during observed activities. A wider range of evaluations is now used to capture the views of learners and store managers to inform quality improvement activities. Reporting to senior managers and to the board is more frequent and more detailed enabling greater support and challenge. However, these reports do not yet sufficiently focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Self-assessment is now more evaluative and self-critical and leads to a more detailed quality improvement plan that is frequently discussed with staff at team meetings. Some targets on the quality improvement plan are not sufficiently specific or measurable. Whilst learners' and store managers' views on the quality of provision now inform self-assessment, the provider recognises the need to further increase their direct involvement in the self-assessment process.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in increasing success rates and implementing effective systems to reduce the proportion of learners that leave their programme early or do not complete within the planned timescale?	Reasonable progress
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From the poor position in 2010/11, the provider improved success rates for 2011/12 at a time of declining national averages. The proportion of those succeeding within their planned timescales increased to close to national averages; although, due to continued retention issues, overall success rates remained well below national averages. Since the previous inspection the provider has worked hard to address the retention issues. Revised processes for learner sign up ensure greater commitment by learners and improved understanding and commitment by store managers to supporting their learners. The tracking and monitoring of learner progress and early intervention to support learners at risk of not achieving or leaving the programme have improved through revised monthly assessor case load meetings. The proportion of learners making slow progress and of those leaving the programme early has decreased considerably during the current year. One apprenticeship programme has been removed from those offered following a review of its appropriateness in meeting the needs of learners and alternatives are currently being evaluated.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to provide a good individualised learning experience for all learners?	Reasonable progress
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Since the previous inspection improvements have been made to the observation of teaching and learning process which has been redesigned to cover the different aspects of the learners' experience and now grades the quality of the session being observed. However, whilst improved, the observation process is insufficiently focused on the learning taking place. The promotion of safeguarding and equality and diversity has been improved with the introduction of detailed handbooks providing useful and valuable information to learners. The monitoring and checking of learners' understanding of equality and diversity have significantly improved and now form part of the review process and the development of materials covering a range of topics for assessors to use with learners. The individual learning plans have been re-designed to provide better information on learners' starting points and progress being made. Initial assessment methods are appropriate, but the results are not sufficiently well used to personalise learning. The provider recognises the need to further develop resources to support independent learning through use of the internet and other methods.

What progress has been made in improving the planning and co-ordination of training?	Reasonable progress
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At the time of the previous inspection assessors had been unable to access learners due to the demands of individual stores. This has been improved with agreements now being put in place with store managers to identify clearly their responsibilities

and commitment to the training of their learners. Assessor caseloads, which were too high at the previous inspection, have been reduced.

Assessment planning has improved, with clear guidance outlining the expectations of an assessment visit. The tracking and monitoring of assessment have improved and now better link to the planning of visits. A more consistent approach has now been adopted to providing learners with designated time to study whilst at work. However, some learners do not have access to internet research facilities or access to a computer for private study at work. The cancellation of assessor visits at short notice due to a lack of coordination between the on and off aspects of the learners' training has significantly reduced. The frequency of assessor visits has increased since the previous inspection. Coordination of on- and off-the-job training, although improved, is still not sufficiently linked to all applicable activities taking place at work.

What progress has been made in improving the support to meet the English and mathematics needs of all learners?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection good links have been made with a local college to help improve the teaching of functional skills within the apprenticeships. The college has acted as an adviser to the company on the way best to support learners particularly those with low entry levels in English and mathematics. Strategies to support learners' wider needs, such as dyslexia, have been identified and are starting to be implemented. Assessors have now all achieved level 2 in English and mathematics. Two staff are taking level 5 qualifications, with an intention to develop these tutors as specialist support for another staff. All assessors are attending regular training sessions to improve their understanding and confidence in functional skills. Assessors now check learners' work for correct spelling and grammar; although, whilst this has improved, it is still not consistently being carried out.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

What progress has been made in improving the use of management information to identify underlying causes of underperformance and variations in the performance of different learner cohorts?

Reasonable progress

Management information is now used more effectively to manage the apprenticeship programmes and monitor the performance of the provision. The frequency of reports has increased and monthly reports are now produced to inform staff meetings. The reports are much more detailed, analysing performance by a range of indicators such as age, gender, geographical location and individual assessors. Issues of underperformance are now being identified and addressed much more quickly at assessor case load meetings. Regional managers are provided with monthly reports showing comparative regional performance to increase competition for improved performance. Reporting to senior management and the board is more user friendly, with a greater focus on issues and actions being taken. Following analysis of data, a project is currently being undertaken to identify why male success rates have declined and why the men succeed less well than their female colleagues.

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