

Oracle Training Consultants Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		01–04 July 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- The majority of apprentices make very good progress and complete their qualification within the expected timescale, including those who need additional support to help them learn.
- Apprentices acquire a good range of knowledge and skills, including English and mathematics. This improves their performance in the workplace and strengthens their future employment prospects.
- For the majority of learners, gaining the apprenticeship qualification is a valuable stepping-stone to taking on new roles at work or to higher-level qualifications.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Enthusiastic trainers use their strong vocational skills and knowledge very well to help all learners achieve to the best of their ability, whatever their starting points.
- Staff provide good information and guidance to help learners get on to the right programme.
- Managers have taken successful action since the last inspection to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the achievement of qualifications.
- The company works very effectively with partners and subcontractors to plan provision that meets local needs.
- All staff and learners have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe and display safe working practices.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates are not consistently high across all programmes.
- Some aspects of teaching, learning and assessment require improvement.
- Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is not sufficiently strong.
- Oracle does not make enough use of the views of learners and employers to improve the quality of its programmes.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Maintain and improve success rates further so that they are consistently high across all programmes by:
 - setting targets that are broken down into smaller steps so that learners understand clearly what they need to do next to make good progress towards achieving their learning aims
 - continuing to develop strategies to identify learners at risk of leaving or falling behind, and monitor the impact of these rigorously.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that it is consistently good across all programmes by:
 - providing more detailed written feedback to learners that tells them precisely what and how they can improve
 - placing greater emphasis on developing learners' capacity for reflection and independent learning, particularly in hairdressing.
- Increase learners' understanding of equality and diversity by relating it to practical applications in the workplace.
- Develop the collection and use of learners' and employers' views to strengthen the self-evaluation process and drive improvements in the quality of provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The majority of apprentices make very good progress and complete their qualification within the expected timescale. Success rates overall are above that of comparable groups nationally. Although success rates for apprentices on the intermediate beauty therapy programme dropped sharply in 2012/13, unpublished data indicates that these success rates have risen and are now significantly above the national rate. Apprentices' standard of work is good.
- Attendance in practical workshops and theory sessions is high, although it is slightly lower in Rotherham than in the Doncaster centre.
- Oracle Training Consultants Limited (Oracle) very effectively monitors the achievement of different groups of learners, including those at particular risk of falling behind with their studies. It has taken successful action to rectify the weaker achievement of learners with additional support needs. The increased number of learners with known medical issues that may affect their progress achieve at least as well as their peers.
- Apprentices' development of personal, social and employability skills is generally good. They develop good skills and knowledge that improve their performance in the workplace. Hairdressing apprentices broaden their knowledge of techniques by learning alongside others employed in different salons. This better prepares them for future employment elsewhere. Learners enhance their employability skills by taking additional units offered to them, such as the use of stone therapy and the application of acrylic nails.
- Apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills and achieve well in the functional skills tests that are a required part of their apprenticeship qualification. This is particularly pleasing for the high proportion of learners who begin their studies at mathematics level 1, often with a poor experience of learning mathematics at school.

- The majority of learners successfully build on their apprenticeship qualification to develop their work roles or progress to further training. About two thirds of intermediate level apprentices move on to advanced apprenticeships, many taking on supervisory roles in the workplace. Others become self-employed, setting up their own hairdressing salons, for example.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the high numbers of apprentices achieving qualifications. Enthusiastic trainers and assessors have high expectations of learners, that motivate them to make good progress and to improve their skills and confidence. Assessors and employers are strongly committed to the apprenticeship programme and support learners very well at all stages of their learning journey. Well-equipped salons and workplaces enable learners to develop their skills to a good industry standard.
- Trainers and assessors use their vocational skills and knowledge of industry very effectively to plan and deliver sessions. Detailed profiles of each learner are now standard features of lesson plans; trainers use these to ensure that programmes meet the needs of individual learners, even when they are working at different levels within the same class. One-to-one coaching and small group sessions foster rapid skill development. Some learners are appropriately stretched by undertaking units at higher levels than their main qualification; learners who have fallen behind benefit from revision sessions to help them catch up.
- The initial assessment of learners' starting points is thorough and effective with the result that they enter programmes at the right level and with realistic but challenging end dates. Arrangements for checking learners' performance are rigorous. Senior managers take direct responsibility for monitoring learners' progress towards reaching their milestones. Trainers provide additional support for learners identified as being at risk at initial assessment, and to those who fail to meet their targets. Some targets, however, are too broad and insufficiently detailed to inform learners and employers of the steps they need to take to make rapid progress.
- Trainers and assessors give good oral feedback to learners in classroom sessions and reviews to help them learn. Trainers and assessors are particularly skilled at questioning learners to encourage recall, reinforce knowledge, and help them to develop their practical skills. However, written feedback in learners' files and on individual learning plans is often too bland to enable learners to improve.
- Oracle has made significant progress since the last inspection to support the development of learners' English and mathematics. All learners undergo diagnostic assessments at the start of their programmes. Those below level 1 receive immediate additional one-to-one support to help them progress. Trainers and assessors take every opportunity to embed skills in vocational contexts. For example, activities such as measuring dyes and calculating how much peroxide to use when mixing colours in hairdressing help learners understand ratios and percentages. Assessors pay appropriate attention to spelling and punctuation when marking learners' written work. Learners make good use of mobile phones and video clips to store difficult technical terms for revision. Additional training in algebra and equations has increased staff confidence in preparing learners for tests.
- Oracle's specialist recruitment team provides apprentices with good information and guidance to help them select the right programme, and then to choose an appropriate pathway into further employment or higher-level qualifications. Learners who are not yet ready for an apprenticeship are placed on study programmes where their employability skills are developed further. The organisation's good reputation with employers and manufacturers, particularly within the hairdressing and beauty industry, opens up plenty of career opportunities for apprentices.
- Monthly themes prompt trainers and assessors to promote equality and diversity by skilfully weaving relevant topics into vocational sessions. For example, trainers use wigs to demonstrate different hair types and to open up discussions with apprentices about cultural diversity.

However, some apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity issues is too shallow, and too often they are unclear on how they can apply it in their workplaces.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Good

Apprenticeships

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which correlates well with the current success rates. Trainers and assessors have high expectations, which they communicate very well to learners. Apprentices are committed to and very satisfied with their studies.
- A wide range of enrichment opportunities such as industry promotions and social events enhance learners' interpersonal skills and community awareness. All apprentices are encouraged to enter competitions. Beauty therapy learners benefit from additional training in ear piercing, intimate waxing and demonstrations by internationally known make-up artists.
- Trainers and assessors provide good individual coaching to hairdressing and beauty therapy apprentices in the training centres and in their workplace training sessions. Additional salon training sessions requested by employers meet the needs of learners and the salon very well. Training takes place in good quality salons with employers who support the apprentices' development very effectively. Off-the-job training environments vary in quality; the cramped conditions and minor examples of poor hygiene in one centre do not reflect current industry standards sufficiently well.
- Trainers and assessors are enthusiastic and well qualified. They enrich and enliven learning by using their good experience within the industry to relate theory to practice. They use interesting learning resources and electronic learning materials in theory lessons to meet individual learners' needs and reinforce learning. However, trainers and assessors place too little emphasis on developing the skills of independent enquiry and reflective thinking.
- In good and better teaching, learners enjoy group activities, which stretch and challenge their knowledge well, such as a very effective carousel of activities in a hairdressing session researching colour selection. In beauty therapy, trainers and assessors reinforce the importance of a professional approach when dealing with clients. All learners are developing good practical skills appropriate to the level studied. In some lessons advanced apprentices 'buddy up' to provide very effective support for intermediate apprentices.
- Learners' written work is good. Trainers and assessors check work appropriately for spelling and punctuation errors. Opportunities for assessment are available in the workplace and training centres, and assessors plan these well. The best assessors ensure that apprentices are fully aware of the assessment criteria before they start their client's treatments.
- Written feedback on learners' practical progress requires improvement. In hairdressing, learners are unsure how to complete client consultation sheets and evaluate their own work on completion. Assessors give constructive oral feedback. However, their written comments do not make clear judgements on why learners performed a particular practical task well or on how they can make improvements.
- Learners receive a thorough induction that includes initial and diagnostic assessments. Trainers and assessors identify learners' prior experience and additional needs and take account of these when planning their programmes. They provide additional learning support and increased levels of individual coaching where appropriate.
- Progress reviews effectively engage employers in good professional discussion. Learners receive motivational oral feedback that encourages them to progress. However, the targets set are not always specific and challenging enough.
- The development of English and mathematics has a high priority in the programme, and a number of learners are taking qualifications at a higher level than required for the qualification. Learners calculate ratio and measurements in colouring and angles in cutting, and make good use of dictionaries to research and spell technical words.

- Equality and diversity are promoted well through displays around the premises and in teaching and learning activities. In beauty therapy sessions, trainers make good use of images to identify African Caribbean and Caucasian skin types and tones. However, most learners are vague on how they would modify consultation and services for the diverse needs of clients in their working environment. Questions on equality and diversity do not extend learners’ understanding sufficiently well.

Administration	Good
Apprenticeships	

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, and this is reflected in the good outcomes for learners. Learners are clear about what is expected of them and this motivates them to make good progress towards achieving their apprenticeship qualification within agreed timescales. The standard of learners’ work is high with a good range of evidence presented in their portfolios.
- Trainers and assessors are appropriately qualified and experienced; they provide effective support for learners, and this helps them to develop their confidence in the workplace. Learners receive a high level of support from their employers. For example, one learner working at an estate agent’s office is developing good skills using specialist software to manage income from rented properties. Learners are encouraged to work independently and trainers and assessors make appropriate use of printed materials to support this. However, the limited access to electronic resources does not support independent study well enough.
- Trainers and assessors understand the nature of the work where apprentices are employed very well. This helps them to plan very appropriate coaching and assessment activities, including individual sessions in the workplace for learners who need additional support. This good support helps learners complete with more confidence work-related tasks such as writing complex reports and dealing with challenging customer complaints.
- Trainers and assessors provide good oral feedback, which supports the development of learners’ written work and helps them complete administrative tasks in the workplace to a good standard. However, written feedback does not challenge learners enough to reflect on their progress and make improvements. Learners are assessed using a range of appropriate methods; however, trainers and assessors do not make effective use of technology to help learners progress more quickly.
- Initial assessment is thorough and trainers use the results very effectively to plan individual learning. Trainers and assessors set milestones with learners for the achievement of short-, medium- and longer-term targets. They monitor learners’ progress regularly through review meetings and keep employers fully informed of their progress. However, targets are too general, do not contain sufficient detail to help learners to achieve more quickly, and do not always make clear reference to the development of learners’ personal and work-related skills.
- Trainers and assessors help learners develop their English and mathematics to the level required for the qualification. A specialist tutor supports learners who require additional help. Trainers and assessors comment on spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in learners’ written work. However, there is insufficient action to help learners improve their English and mathematics skills beyond the level required for their apprenticeship.
- Trainers and assessors provide learners with good information and guidance at induction and during progress reviews. This enables them to make informed choices about further study and career progression. This support often motivates learners to progress to advanced apprenticeships and to take on additional responsibilities at work.
- Discussions during reviews on specific topics help learners develop a good general awareness of equality and diversity. However, trainers and assessors miss opportunities to extend learners’ knowledge of cultural differences to broaden their understanding of the wider world.

The effectiveness of leadership and management**Good**

- Leadership and management are good. Oracle places learners at the heart of all it does, creating a positive environment for learning. Managers have taken very successful action since the previous inspection to improve provision. The company has strengthened its management structure to make the roles of staff clearer and more effective. A more rigorous approach to identifying learners at risk of falling behind and better support for learners has increased the proportion of learners that complete their qualifications by the planned end date. Success rates in 2012/13 improved significantly.
- Oracle has raised the profile of functional skills by appointing a coordinator and providing professional development for staff. This has led to improvements in the delivery of English and mathematics and to better outcomes.
- Leaders and managers make highly effective use of performance management to improve teaching and learning. The observation process is now very effective at identifying strengths and areas for improvement accurately. Tutors requiring improvement benefit from good coaching and support. Further observations test the impact of this support and identify the progress that tutors make towards outstanding teaching, learning and assessment. Managers monitor the quality of subcontractors' work very closely and include their staff in development activities.
- Managers make effective use of self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas for development, incorporating these in a well-monitored and regularly updated quality improvement plan. However, Oracle does not make enough use of learners' and employers' views when evaluating the quality of its provision. The judgements in the self-assessment report are broadly accurate.
- The organisation has improved its management information systems and staff now use accurate data very effectively to evaluate performance and plan learning that meets the needs and interests of learners and employers.
- Senior managers use their links with external organisations, subcontractors and other partners well to take account when planning provision of wider community needs. They are held in high regard by partners, and have been instrumental in creating a strategy to promote apprenticeships across all sectors. Over the last few years, Oracle has provided enhanced experiences for learners to develop their hairdressing skills through exchange programmes in Belgium, Malta, Italy and Japan.
- Oracle has effective links in Doncaster with the children's services department of the local authority and with some local schools and special schools that support young people with additional personal and social needs. However, managers recognise the importance of ensuring that all parents and young people in the locality have better information about the apprenticeship training available through Oracle.
- Oracle has taken effective action to strengthen equality and diversity, increasing the number of learners from under-represented groups, such as males and learners with additional support needs. The flexible training and assessment arrangements meet employers' needs very well. Managers deal with the few complaints they receive quickly and effectively. Oracle does not tolerate bullying and harassment. However, trainers and assessors do not do enough to deepen learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues, particularly of their relevance to the working environment.
- Managers and staff place a strong emphasis on safeguarding and on promoting the welfare of learners. Oracle meets its statutory requirements for learners. All staff and learners display safe working practices and have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Where learners raise concerns, staff respond to issues quickly, sensitively and appropriately. They understand and use set procedures effectively. Managers and staff place a high priority on health and safety and routinely carry out risk assessments.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Oracle Training Consultants Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Administration	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	550							
CEO	Sally Marsh							
Date of previous inspection	February 2013							
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+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	204	23	61	52	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage Training and Development Ltd ▪ CTS Ltd 							

Contextual information

Oracle delivers training across South Yorkshire. The head office is in Doncaster with a second training centre in Rotherham. The company is led by two directors and employs about 25 staff. It has held a direct contract with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) since 2001 for apprenticeships in the retail and commercial enterprise sector, specialising in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Since 2012, Oracle has provided apprenticeships in business administration through a subcontractor, Engage Training and Development Limited.

Unemployment in both Doncaster and Rotherham is above the national rate. In Rotherham, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs A* to C grades including English and mathematics is similar to the percentage for England. In Doncaster, it is lower, at just below 55%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jan Smith HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Functional Skills Coordinator 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, 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 relevant 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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