

Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited

Employer

Inspection dates		12–15 May 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- until recently most apprentices made very slow progress with their learning; success rates have fallen since the previous inspection and are low
- staff do not use the results of the initial assessment of apprentices' English and mathematics skills well enough to plan individual support to ensure that all apprentices succeed
- additional learning support for English and mathematics is insufficient
- managers were slow to recognise and act on the declining success rates
- practice managers have an insufficient understanding of the apprenticeship programme and how they can help all apprentices make good progress with their learning
- quality improvement arrangements do not adequately measure the quality, use and impact of online training materials
- managers make insufficient analysis and use of available data to plan improvements.

This provider has the following strengths:

- the large majority of apprentices stay on their programme and receive sufficient support to help them eventually to succeed
- recent changes to management have improved the progress current apprentices are making
- apprentices enjoy their training, become more confident and clearly link their learning to their work with customers
- trainers and practice staff provide apprentices with good careers advice and guidance throughout their programme; most progress to further training and gain promotions within the company
- the apprenticeship programme successfully supports the business needs of the company
- arrangements for safeguarding apprentices are good
- apprentices have a good understanding of relevant equality and diversity topics and apply this well in meeting the diverse needs of their customers.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that practice managers clearly understand their responsibilities to support individual apprentices to succeed.
- Use initial assessment results and other evidence of prior attainment to plan effective learning and support, particularly for English and mathematics that takes account of the particular needs of each apprentice.
- Ensure that written assessment feedback is timely, clearly identifies strengths and areas for improvement, informs work practices and leads to further improvement.
- Develop the quality improvement arrangements to cover all key aspects of the provision.
- Improve the collection and analysis of management information to allow managers to accurately monitor the progress of all groups of apprentices and plan effective improvement actions.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Boots Opticians Professional Services Ltd (Boots) provides a range of occupational and professional training for all staff. All publicly-funded learners are on optical retail programmes. Around 90% of these apprentices are aged 19 or over, with almost all undertaking an intermediate apprenticeship. A very few apprenticeships are at advanced level. All apprentices are employees of Boots and work in its opticians' practices.
- The outcomes for apprentices require improvement. Their success rates have declined since the previous inspection with too few completing all aspects of the apprenticeship within the planned duration of the programme. Trainers and practice staff provide support for those learners who continue beyond the planned end date of their training and the large majority of these subsequently succeed.
- The earlier provision of support for English and mathematics and a stronger emphasis on timely success has led to current learners making at least adequate progress. In-year validated data shows that success rates have increased, but they still require further improvement.
- Apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities and male learners are less likely to succeed than other groups.
- Apprentices develop adequate English and mathematics skills for their job roles, such as carrying out measurements and calculations to ensure that customers' spectacles fit comfortably and lenses are in the correct position. However, staff do too little to ensure apprentices are confident and prepared for external examinations. As a result, a large minority fail at the first attempt.
- Apprentices are very clear about their career progression opportunities and the qualifications and skills they need to acquire in order to become a dispensing optician or practice manager. As a result of their training, apprentices become more ambitious and many subsequently go on to further and higher education.
- Almost all apprentices remain in permanent employment with Boots at the end of their training. Learners become more confident and demonstrate good personal and social skills that make them valued employees. A high proportion of apprentices gain workplace promotions and undertake additional responsibilities within their practices, such as acting as mentors for newly recruited staff.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because too few apprentices complete all aspects of the apprenticeship within the planned timescales.
- Staff motivate apprentices well and because of the high expectations of senior managers and workplace supervisors, they readily participate in learning. Apprentices who have started training since September 2014 make the progress expected of them. They clearly understand the links between their learning and the expected standards of customer care.
- Practice managers do not fully understand the requirements of the apprenticeship programme; where they do, they support learners to complete written assignments and develop clinical skills more effectively. Apprentices value and benefit from the supportive buddy system in their workplace that develops their confidence and promotes effective team work.
- Staff do not use the results from the initial assessment of apprentices' basic skills sufficiently to inform the planning of teaching, learning and assessment. Those with identified additional learning support needs receive little planned support. These apprentices achieve their qualifications at a slower rate than other apprentices.
- Staff develop apprentices' work-related English and mathematical skills effectively through informal coaching and supervision in each practice. Apprentices quickly develop and use appropriate technical vocabulary. They are able to carry out accurate measurements and accurately interpret prescriptions for lenses in order to support customers to select suitable spectacle frames.
- Preparation for functional skills examinations is poor. Too many apprentices fail the external examinations at their first attempt. Boots provide support for mathematics functional skills through an adequate range of on-line training videos and previous examination papers. However, very few learners use these resources.
- In coaching sessions, assessors use their extensive knowledge and enthusiasm to extend skilfully learning and understanding of complex subjects, such as the anatomy and physiology of the eye. In these sessions, learners make good progress. Assessors and workplace supervisors motivate and inspire learners to reflect on their learning and improve their work practice, such as dealing sensitively with customer complaints.
- Assessment of learning requires improvement. Assessor caseloads are very high and individual workplace coaching and assessment is infrequent. This limits opportunities for additional individual learning support, which contributes to slow progress by a few apprentices.
- Tutors agree reasonable learning targets during progress reviews and learners understand what they need to do to complete their assignments. However, the recording of targets is not always clear and tutors do not always share them with assessors and workplace supervisors, or monitor them frequently enough to ensure apprentices make effective progress.
- Assessors provide detailed oral feedback so that apprentices are clear about what they do well and where they can improve. However, written feedback on learners' projects and assignments often contains insufficient detail. Staff do not routinely correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar in learners' work.
- Apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance throughout the programme. Assessors and professional colleagues provide accurate guidance on a wide range of opportunities for career progression. This motivates apprentices very well. Most apprentices plan to make a career in optical retail and associated fields.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of identifying and meeting the individual needs of the diverse range of customers. For example, they carefully identify potential barriers to

communication, then explain and check customers' understanding of clinical procedures using appropriate vocabulary.

- Apprentices understand and consistently demonstrate safe working practices, including, maintaining good hand hygiene when teaching a customer how to insert contact lenses.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, although the apprenticeship programme is an essential part of the company learning and development strategy, managers were too slow to recognise the declining achievements of learners and act to improve the provision.
- The planning and management of the apprenticeship programme demonstrate the clear commitment of senior managers to meet commercial and national priorities. The programme is designed to meet the needs of the business and does so well. Training helps apprentices to gain the skills, motivation and confidence to achieve their career aims. They improve their long-term employability skills and a few go on to become qualified opticians.
- Senior managers recognise the issues facing the apprenticeship programme and have recently introduced a range of initiatives to improve outcomes for learners. They have reorganised the team responsible for apprenticeships and clarified management roles and quality improvement responsibilities. They have introduced a new model to provide training, e-portfolios and online learning resources. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of all of these actions.
- Managers have improved the collection and analysis of management information since the previous inspection. However, they still do not use summary reports effectively to accurately monitor the progress and success of all groups of apprentices and to agree success milestones in order to judge the impact of each improvement initiative.
- Managers now accurately identify and take action on areas of under-performance to overcome the slow progress made by the apprentices who had passed their planned end of training. Improved monitoring of learners' progress has resulted in prompt performance management actions and current learners are progressing well.
- Learning resources and equipment in the training centres are good. Boots has increased the range of online learning resources for all company training, including apprenticeships, since the previous inspection and an increasing number of apprentices are using electronic portfolios.
- Communication is good. Managers and staff use frequent and effective meetings to monitor individual apprentices' progress and plan improvement initiatives. Information for practice managers about the apprenticeship programmes is provided in national conferences, territory meetings and electronically. However, engagement and support for the apprenticeship in many practices is insufficient to support swift progress by all learners.
- Self-assessment makes good use of feedback from apprentices, training staff and practice managers as well as observations of teaching, learning and assessment to build a clear understanding of the overall strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. The most recent quality improvement plan accurately reflects the areas for improvement. However, it is too early to judge its' full effectiveness in supporting improvements to the quality of the training and outcomes for apprentices.
- The development of the established quality improvement arrangements has not kept pace with changes to the programme and they do not cover all key aspects of the provision. Managers and staff invest much effort in ensuring that the programme meets the minimum standards required by the awarding body and monitoring the quality of the technical off-the-job training. However, they place too little emphasis on assessing the use, quality and impact of the online learning resources and the effectiveness of additional learning support for English and mathematics.

- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Learners feel safe, demonstrate safe working practices and are well aware of their responsibilities for their vulnerable customers. Arrangements for the accommodation and supervision of those apprentices aged 16 to 18 who attend residential training are well established and effective.
- Boots promotes equality and diversity very well, resulting in a respectful work environment. Apprentices have a good understanding of the diverse needs of their customers, including vulnerable groups. However, the actions of managers and staff to narrow the achievement gaps for all groups of learners have not been effective.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Boots Opticians Ltd

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	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
Health and social care	3

Provider details

Type of provider	Employer							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	403							
Principal/CEO	Ms Jayne Johnson							
Date of previous inspection	August 2012							
Website address	www.Boots.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+		
	37	333	0	1	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
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"> ■ N/A 							

Contextual information

Boots Opticians Professional Services Ltd (Boots) has around 630 branches in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Boots offers a wide range of training, including the optical retail apprenticeship. The apprenticeship programme is an essential element of the staff training and development strategy for the business. Managers organise apprenticeship training centrally from their offices in Aston, Birmingham, but the company recruits and employs learners nationally. Publicly-funded programmes make up a minority of all accredited training for employees.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Gerard McGrath HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Learning and Development Manager – optical consultants 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 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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