

Apprentice Funding Assistant Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		15–19 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- apprentices develop good knowledge and high levels of practical skills in hairdressing, beauty therapy and barbering
- apprentices grow into their job roles, as they are employed from the start of their programmes; a high percentage of them progress onto advanced apprenticeship programmes
- trainers use their extensive industry experience well to coach apprentices to achieve high standards
- the use of high-quality learning environments raises apprentices' aspirations
- managers have worked very effectively to establish strong networks and partnerships with employers that meet precisely the needs of the hairdressing industry, employers and apprentices
- trainers, employers and apprentices make excellent use of an innovative and bespoke management information system to assess and track apprentices' progress.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- managers and trainers place insufficient emphasis on the development of high standards of apprentices' written English to prepare them for future promotion and higher-level study
- a small minority of theory lessons do not engage apprentices fully
- a small minority of trainers do not make good enough use of the information on apprentices' starting points to plan learning to meet precisely their individual needs
- written feedback to apprentices during reviews focuses narrowly on unit completion and not on skills development; apprentices do not fully understand what they need to improve and how
- apprentices do not have a full understanding of e-safety to protect themselves from harm
- too many younger apprentices leave their programme without completing their apprenticeship framework; managers and staff do not consistently record their partial achievements and skills development and signpost them accordingly to other study or employment opportunities.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of theory lessons is of a consistently high standard. Rapidly improve the quality of theory sessions by ensuring that trainers have the skills and confidence to plan and deliver training using a wider variety of teaching and learning methods and more effective questioning techniques, in order to ensure that all apprentices participate fully in learning and progress rapidly according to their potential.
- Introduce early assessment of apprentices' English and mathematical skills and share the results so that all training staff have a clear and detailed understanding of apprentices' starting points, in order to plan learning that matches their individual learning needs.
- Sharpen trainers and assessors' skills in providing high-quality written feedback to the apprentices clearly and concisely, so that they fully understand what they have done well and how they can improve further, thus enhancing their skills of critically evaluating their own work and consolidating their learning through self-study and research further.
- Set specific and measurable targets that focus on skills development, knowledge and behaviour, rather than tasks and unit completions, thus enabling apprentices to recognise how theory links with practice and to produce a higher standard of work.
- Set high standards for the development of apprentices' written work by ensuring that all trainers routinely check, correct and reinforce the importance of accurate use of English, paying full attention to the rules of grammar, to prepare apprentices for higher level study or promotion; further improve the knowledge, confidence and skills of trainers so that they are fully aware and competent in identifying opportunities to embed the development of English, and to a lesser extent mathematics, from the beginning of the apprentices' training programme.
- Enhance and consolidate apprentices' understanding of e-safety so that they appreciate the full implications of cyber security and take adequate precautions to protect themselves from harm; ensure that such learning is reinforced and checked at all stages of learning such as induction, teaching sessions and assessment and progress reviews.
- Conduct a routine follow up of the apprentices leaving early and the reasons for it. Take rigorous action promptly to offer them alternative programmes, including a detailed account of their skills development, unit completions and the sectors in which their skills could be used, in order to build on the skills already developed as an apprentice.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Apprentice Funding Assistant Ltd (AFA) provides apprenticeship programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 and those over 19 years of age. Intermediate apprentices make up two thirds of the provision. Apprentices aged 16 to 18 constitute two thirds of the total of learners. Most apprentices are on hairdressing apprenticeships, with a very small minority on beauty therapy, and very few on recently established barbering programmes and business administration.
- Since the award of a contract in its own right in April 2013, AFA has continued to improve outcomes for apprentices. With the help of aspirational employers, managers have recruited well-motivated learners who are keen to learn a new skill and progress to a rewarding career. Apprentices develop a sound understanding of the hairdressing and beauty therapy sector, appreciating the creativity, trends and careers in the sector.

- Apprentices cut and style clients' hair to high standards as they work alongside experienced hairdressers. They are inspired to learn from their trainers and managers and learn their craft quickly. Apprentices raise standards and improve their skills by challenging each other by taking photographs of their work and sharing them with their peers.
- Beauty therapy apprentices develop a good range of professional skills such as applying dermal fillers, massage, pedicure and waxing in this highly intricate and safety-critical sector of employment. Apprentices on the recently introduced barbering programme are making substantial progress. Apprentices on business administration programmes make good progress and produce high standards of work.
- Most apprentices make rapid progress to grow into their job roles of hairdressers or beauty therapists and command higher wages and commission. Employers have high expectations of their apprentices' ability and confidence in the quality of training to produce experienced workers so that they offer a job to all apprentices from the start of their programme. Apprentices grow in confidence and become accomplished stylists by the end of their training. Having raised their aspirations, a good percentage of them progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeship programmes. Apprentices progress to higher levels to develop both their skills and employability.
- Success rates are excellent for apprentices aged 19 years or over. They develop high resilience and are enthusiastic about their choice of career and prospects within the sector. They stay on their programmes and complete their qualifications with firm plans to enhance their career through working, for example, on a cruise liner, off-stage with artists, or barbering and haircutting work with children with special needs. Others consider the possibilities of setting up their own businesses.
- Overall success rates have improved to good levels and are currently above national rates. Apprentices aged 16 to 18 years are a little less focused and they do not complete their qualifications in the planned period to the same extent or with the same enthusiasm as the older apprentices. A significant minority of 16 to 18 year-old intermediate-level apprentices left early in 2013/14. Although managers have successfully reduced the level of apprentices leaving early, too many do not complete their programmes.
- Apprentices acquire a good awareness of health and safety as it relates to their workplaces and know how to keep themselves safe. They use the tools and techniques correctly and safely, such as holding the scissors and comb and sitting in a specific position while performing a pedicure on clients. This guides them to work safely so as not to develop back problems in later professional life.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of the interpersonal skills necessary for the hairdressing sector and refine these skills effectively. They are able to adapt their language and the choice of topics for conversations, to make their clients feel at ease, according to their interests and needs.
- By taking effective action, managers have reduced the achievement gap for apprentices aged 16 to 18. The numbers of apprentices from minority groups are too small to make any meaningful comparisons.
- Apprentices develop appropriate English and mathematics skills for working in salons reading instructions and following formulae. However, their written skills at higher levels are insufficient to help them in gaining higher positions or further study.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, reflecting good outcomes for most apprentices including high levels of skills development and the achievement of qualifications. Apprentices enjoy their training and make good progress in the development of essential customer care and

technical skills in hairdressing and beauty therapy; this successfully prepares them for employment.

- Apprentices benefit from the high standards of care and support provided by trainers and employers, who encourage and motivate them to succeed. Trainers have extensive occupational experience, which they use efficiently to enliven practical training in highly effective mini demonstrations interspersed with theory and coaching sessions. As a result apprentices enjoy their learning and develop good practical skills, such as contemporary colouring techniques and graduated hair cutting.
- Training facilities in the workplaces and the training salons are of a very high standard. By using a broad range of industry-standard, on-line learning resources and a good on-line assessment tool, trainers extend apprentices' knowledge and skills well. They accurately record assessment results so that apprentices can closely monitor their own progress towards achievement.
- Apprentices develop their vocational skills quickly as a result of highly effective partnerships with employers and AFA training centres. Salon managers and trainers are positive role models. They have high expectations of their apprentices and demand good professional standards at all times.
- Apprentices rapidly acquire a strong work ethic, take pride in their work and develop high levels of professional practice. They develop and demonstrate competence in a broad range of skills such as perming, highlighting, colouring, massage, eye lash extension, epilation and application of dermal fillers. Apprentices regularly update their skills and enhance their earning ability in a constantly evolving industry.
- Trainers use their significant industry experience well to plan learning. Due to small class sizes, trainers have detailed knowledge of their apprentices, which they use well to support them promptly to build their confidence and skills.
- The planning of theory sessions requires improvement in a small minority of sessions. Trainers lack imagination to plan lessons that engage apprentices fully in learning as they do not use a variety of learning activities to accommodate the full range of learning styles of apprentices, and as a consequence, apprentices do not make sufficient progress. The handouts and documents in these sessions are of poor quality. Trainers do not ask specific or direct questions to individuals, to engage less confident apprentices. In such sessions, trainers rely too much on slides to present information rather than interactions and learning. This does not inspire apprentices.
- Initial advice, guidance and periods of extended work experience prior to their enrolment ensure that apprentices experience the hairdressing industry, explore careers within it and understand the commitment required to complete programmes. However, careers and progression advice for apprentices at the end of their programmes varies considerably both in quality and level of detail. Apprentices do not all have sufficient knowledge of their next steps. Staff do not take full account of the apprentices' prior learning and experiences.
- Practical skills assessment is good. It is flexible, frequent and highly effective. Assessors check apprentices' knowledge thoroughly, providing good oral feedback during and at the end of practical assessments. By doing so, assessors carefully match apprentices' development needs to clients' requirements. However, trainers do not record this level of detail in writing. Therefore, apprentices are unable to improve further their practice as a result of this insufficiently detailed written feedback.
- Apprentices quickly increase their self-confidence and skills in mathematics within the workplace. Trainers enhance apprentices' understanding of mathematical concepts such as ratios and angles, and how these link to salon practice. For example, in one training centre, apprentices completed 'colour theory bingo' where they competed for a 'winning line' by describing the colours represented by the numbers.
- Trainers do not focus sufficiently on the development and reinforcement of high standards in the writing skills of apprentices in teaching sessions. A minority of trainers do not correct spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in the apprentices' portfolios as they are not confident about their own written skills. The provision of discrete functional skills sessions across the country is

often sporadic and for a minority of apprentices starts too late, due to the limited availability of suitably qualified trainers.

- Apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity. They respect people from a range of backgrounds in the workplace and demonstrate cultural sensitivity when serving clients in salons. However, some trainers do not extend apprentices' understanding of equality themes during planned reviews, to prepare apprentices fully for working in a diverse society.
- Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of personal safety, both maintaining their own and their clients' safety in the context of their work. However, apprentices' understanding of e-safety and the dangers associated with online bullying, financial fraud and grooming is basic.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- AFA managers and the directors have a very clear vision and mission to improve the quality of hairdressing training nationally. They have used the national labour market information to increase the supply of highly trained hairdressers, who are in short supply. To realise this vision they have used a rigorous vetting and selection process to select the most committed employers and trainers who share their vision and mission and extended the reach of the provision to 38 centres across the country.
- Employers, managers and trainers have very high expectations of apprentices. Employers value the contribution apprentices make to meet the demands of a growing and rapidly changing sector for hairdressing and beauty therapy. For example, one employer was highly appreciative of the prospects of raising standards of hairdressing and beauty therapy for Asian clients. Responding to high expectations from employers, a good percentage of intermediate-level apprentices have progressed to advanced levels, particularly since they do not need this qualification to work in the sector.
- Curriculum management is good. To reduce the numbers of early leavers among apprentices aged 16 to 18, managers have introduced the delivery of functional skills at the outset and have implemented rigorous fortnightly monitoring of the progress of apprentices against their planned end dates. This has improved the rates of completion of qualifications in the planned period and reduced the rates of early leavers significantly.
- Directors and senior managers manage the performance of AFA staff closely through annual appraisal and focused bi-monthly meetings to review their progress against key performance measures. They have well-considered contingency plans to ensure that they have sufficient numbers of staff to discharge their responsibilities to the required standard.
- AFA managers and centre managers manage the performance of trainers against a range of well-defined criteria. Centre managers observe their practice informally on a regular basis and offer suggestions for improvements. This results in improved teaching of practical skills. However, AFA managers do not observe teaching and learning of all trainers and do not link these to the performance management of individual trainers.
- Directors and managers provide good staff training to meet the needs of the organisation. Staff development for trainers is appropriate and broad-ranging, and includes the sharing of good practice, standardisation and briefings. However, trainers do not have sufficiently high levels of teaching skills required to raise teaching standards to higher levels.
- Managers use data particularly well to monitor and manage the performance of centres and apprentices by obtaining and using a wide variety of live reports from the bespoke management information system. Directors and managers take swift action to deal with any under-performance across a range of activities and also monitor centre compliance against a range of set criteria. This bespoke programme enables managers to implement suggested changes quickly. All parties use the system well to cascade updates and changes to give an accurate picture of the performance of apprentices.

- Managers do not track apprentices who leave their programmes early. Apprentices develop a range of practical and highly developed personal and customer care skills as well as completing a number of units of qualifications; however, managers do not conduct a sufficiently detailed analysis of the skills apprentices acquire to signpost apprentices to enhance their prospects of future employment and further education. This is particularly important since apprentices can use skills such as personal learning and thinking skills and employers' rights and responsibilities in other employment sectors and contexts.
- Managers and directors have successfully improved the provision by working diligently to implement a comprehensive quality improvement plan aligned to the self-assessment report. All staff understand the dynamic nature of the quality improvement plan and work collaboratively to drive the organisation forward. This includes extensive sharing of good practice, standardisation, team meetings and a robust internal verification system with frequent observations of assessment which helps drive apprentices' progress.
- AFA managers and directors recognise the importance of involving all partners in the self-assessment process. All parties, including partners, employers, apprentices and associates are well aware of the process and its importance in improving the provision. They contribute to the process fully in various ways. Managers use data well to support findings in the self-assessment report.
- Managers promote equality and diversity to apprentices and centre staff successfully. They have successfully improved the gender balance on their apprenticeship programme and increased the number of males on the hairdressing programmes. Managers work diligently with the centres to remove barriers to learning for individuals with difficult personal circumstances.
- Staff have a good awareness of equality and diversity, however not all of them have an up-to-date knowledge of recent changes in legislation, as AFA managers have not provided formal updating. This limits their ability to promote diversity confidently to apprentices.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good within the network. Managers check the suitability of staff working with vulnerable adults and young people routinely. They are well aware of their responsibilities to safeguard apprentices and have made robust plans to protect them. Staff have a good understanding and knowledge of safeguarding. This is reinforced further through valuable training provided by the local authority and is cascaded to centres and associates. Due to very good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board, managers seek further guidance and support to deal with complicated issues successfully.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Apprentice Funding Assistant 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						2		
Outcomes for learners	2						2		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2						2		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2						2		

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

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16-18								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	434								
Chair of the board of directors	Mr Simon Lampert								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.apprenticefunding.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+			
	148	52	55	56	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

Apprentice Funding Assistant Ltd, established in 2013, is a national provider that works with 38 salons throughout the country to train hairdressers, beauty therapists and barbers. Some 100 trainers are employed in a self-employed capacity to deliver and assess training in salons. A small team of core staff based in Norwich support the trainers with staff development, learning resources and manage their performance. Barbering is a relatively new apprenticeship programme for the provider and the sector.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Harmesh Manghra HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Contracts 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. 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:

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

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