

BL Training Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		15-19 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- high proportions of apprentices on level 2 barbering and level 3 hairdressing programmes complete their programmes successfully
- level 2 apprentices make good progress and achieve high standards
- teaching and learning are of good quality, assessment is rigorous and feedback helpful
- partnerships with employers are strong, resulting in good role models for apprentices, professional settings, coherent training plans and provision that is responsive to the needs of employers and apprentices
- advice and guidance are good at entry , during and at exit from apprentices' programmes resulting in good progression to higher levels of training and sustainable employment
- business planning and strategic management are detailed and managers have high expectations for apprentices and the quality of the provision
- performance management is good, underperformance identified quickly and, where necessary, appropriate action taken.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- the focus on the development of apprentices' personal development and wider employability skills is not strong enough
- weaknesses in apprentices' English and mathematical skills are not addressed systematically enough during progress reviews
- the proportion of apprentices aged 16 to 18 on hairdressing programmes which are retained is not high enough
- the attention given to apprentices' outcomes and teaching and learning in the self-assessment report and on learning during lesson observation is not strong enough
- the progress being made to improve poor written English among many staff is too slow.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the attention staff give to apprentices' personal development, well-being and wider employability skills during progress reviews and ensure that these aspects are considered formally during all such reviews.
- Make better use of the extensive information that exists about apprentices' progress in functional skills so that reviews are more clearly focused on what needs improving and how this is to be done.
- Improve the retention of apprentices aged 16 to 18 by monitoring their progress more closely, providing more specific support for apprentices likely to leave early and providing the more able with increased challenge.
- Prioritise the quality of teaching and learning and apprentices' outcomes during self-assessment and focus more sharply on how well teaching is impacting on apprentices' learning during lesson observation.
- Raise the level of English writing skills held by staff by implementing a strategy that includes continuing professional development, the monitoring of their use of English and the consideration of these skills during performance management.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- At the time of the inspection nearly all the 430 learners in training were apprentices, with 75% following hairdressing, 15% barbering and about 10% management programmes. About 35% were studying hairdressing at level 2, 25% barbering at this level and 35% hairdressing at level 3. Apprentices aged 16 to 18 comprise about 40% of the provision. About 50 learners studied customer service and team leading through workplace learning in 2013/14 but none is presently doing so.
- Outcomes are good because most apprentices develop their skills and knowledge well and a high proportion of them go on to positive destinations. The proportion of apprentices who completed their programmes successfully in 2013/14 was slightly above the national rate. The proportion was high in barbering and in level 3 hairdressing, but in hairdressing at level 2 the rate requires improvement. A high proportion of learners aged 19 years and over complete successfully but for learners aged 16 to 18 the proportion is slightly below the national rate; achievement is high but retention for this age group requires improvement. Projections for the current year are that the proportion who complete successfully will continue to be above the national rate and the rate for 16 to 18 apprentices much improved. A high proportion of workplace learners completed their qualifications in the planned time in 2013/14.
- Differences in achievement rates between men and women fluctuate between years but due to the small number of males, these differences are not significant. Very few learners are not White British and differences in achievement between these learners and White British learners are also statistically not significant.
- Most apprentices make good progress and develop their practical skills, knowledge and understanding well. Standards of work are high at level 2 but more variable at level 3. For example, a first year hairdressing learner completed a very precise one length bob style haircut using good dexterity when sectioning in conjunction with scissor control to cut the hair. Learners at an early stage of their programme are able to apply well-proportioned and defined foils and describe how they would adjust the sectioning pattern to achieve a particular look. A few apprentices, however, take too long to develop some basic practical skills such as

shampooing and conditioning and the standard of long-hair work demonstrated by a minority of learners at level 3 is not high enough. Team leading apprentices make good gains in their personal development and independent learning skills.

- Progression to positive destinations is good. A high proportion of successful leavers continue working in the hairdressing and barbering industries and most early leavers go on to positive destinations. One fifth of the employers who have apprentices enrolled with BL Training are owned by ex-apprentices of BL Training. Over half of BL Training's current trainers are ex-apprentices of this organisation. A high proportion of successful apprentices progress from level 2 to level 3 or to a related vocational apprenticeship. A high proportion of learners on traineeships progress to apprenticeships.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good which is reflected in the good progress that apprentices make. Staff have high expectations for their apprentices. They ensure that employers provide good quality salons, have high expectations for their own staff and their apprentices and contribute well to apprentices' development. BL trainers take good care to ensure that apprentices work safely and have a good understanding of safeguarding. They provide good support for apprentices, undertaking extra teaching when necessary and provide effective support for apprentices who have, for example, dyslexia or hearing impairment.
- Trainers maintain close links with apprentices and sustain a productive rapport with them by making frequent visits to their places of work. They provide teaching which is usually well paced and builds new learning securely on what is already known. They use learning materials which are of good quality and assess appropriately whether apprentices are learning through, for example, astute questioning, although on a few occasions questioning does not involve all the learners sufficiently. Trainers and employers' staff are good role models and demonstrate technical skills, for example of hair cutting techniques, clearly and skilfully. Practical activity is linked closely to underpinning theory so that apprentices develop a good understanding of the relevance of the theory. In a few cases the lack of clients meant apprentices have to work on practice heads, limiting the development of interpersonal skills.
- Trainers make good use of enrichment activities to deepen learning. For example, they organise photoshoots of apprentices' work using professional photographers and use external practitioners to provide workshops which demonstrate particular skills in, for example barbering. In a few lessons trainers do not differentiate the teaching well enough to provide sufficient challenge to the more able. Although information and learning technology is used extensively to provide learning resources, enhance interest and track and monitor progress, it is, on a few occasions, not used imaginatively enough, or used well enough to help promote learning in apprentices' own time.
- Apprentices' vocational progress is thoroughly and helpfully reviewed by trainers, who keep detailed records of the activities undertaken and are usually well informed of how their apprentices are progressing. In a few cases progress reviews are too focused on what has been done and not enough on what has been learned, what needs improving and how this is to be achieved. While trainers monitor and promote the development of personal and employability skills and practices well when they are discussed during progress reviews, these matters are not discussed frequently enough.
- Trainers plan the assessment of learners' competence in the workplace and training centres carefully and carry out assessment frequently and rigorously. Apprentices have a good understanding of their trainers' expectations, which are challenging, and of the performance criteria they are working towards. Trainers pay close attention to the assessment of apprentices' underpinning knowledge through their use of probing questions and provide constructive feedback which helps apprentices improve.
- The value of good functional skills is promoted systematically by trainers, who develop these skills well during much of the vocational teaching. They assess learners' levels of attainment in

English and mathematics systematically at programme start and identify areas requiring improvement appropriately. Trainers provide an appropriate level of challenge to apprentices to progress to level 2 but those who hold level 2 are not challenged to obtain higher grade GCSE passes. A specialist functional skills tutor provides good additional support to apprentices where this is required. Weaknesses in apprentices' English and mathematical skills are not addressed systematically enough during progress reviews.

- Staff provide good advice and guidance before and during apprentices' programmes. They have good links with school staff and agencies such as Job Centre plus. They provide summer academies which provide effective support for those who have not obtained employment and successful traineeships for those requiring further help. Staff undertake interviews, assess apprentices' incoming attainment and deliver extended induction arrangements, which ensure each apprentice has a suitably tailored programme and is well informed about policies, procedures and their apprenticeship. Staff interview leavers and give exit guidance which results in learners having a good understanding of what their next steps might be.
- Trainers promote equality and diversity well during their vocational teaching. For example, they develop apprentices' understanding of the wide range of clients' needs and teach how they might adapt their approach when dealing with clients with differing hair types, age, disability and ethnicity. Trainers create a respectful atmosphere where apprentices are treated equally and feel comfortable. They provided suitable guidance on company policies and expectations during interview and induction and make use of a good range of learning materials to deliver short learning sessions at the start of training centre days. Trainers develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity well when they cover these topics during reviews but do not do so sufficiently frequently.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Business and strategic planning are detailed and comprehensive and fully support the company's day-to-day operations. Managers evaluate realistically the company's strengths, areas for improvement, threats and opportunities, and clearly set out its potential for consolidating and expanding the provision in a highly competitive industry. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and are focused suitably on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Other responsibilities, such as finance, health and safety, curriculum, quality, and human resources are allocated appropriately. Staff are professional, knowledgeable and highly committed to their learners and the hairdressing sector.
- Directors are focused particularly on market trends and training needs within the hairdressing industry. They are unswerving in their commitment to securing sustained improvement and to being a high-quality training provider that meets the needs of learners and employers. They are responsive to the training needs of employers, arranging, for example, specific training on colouring or perming at times to suit employers' needs.
- Performance management is good. Through the annual appraisal process, managers systematically review trainers' performance and negotiate relevant targets for the following year. Line managers use their regular monthly meetings with trainers well to review trainers' ongoing performance. Underperformance is quickly identified and support provided. Managers take robust further action where necessary.
- Appropriate emphasis is placed on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through direct observation. Staff receive detailed feedback following observation but too little focus is placed on evaluating the impact teaching, progress reviews and assessment have on apprentices' learning.
- Managers provide staff with good vocational professional development which is relevant to the requirements of staff in each centre. Trainers are required to obtain a teaching qualification and to be qualified assessors. Celebrity stylists and product manufacturers provide training which develops trainers' hairdressing knowledge and skills. Not enough importance is given, however,

to improving the poor written skills of many staff and to ensuring that functional skills tutors obtain specialist functional skills qualifications at an appropriate level.

- The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. Very good use is made of data to help monitor and manage the provision. However, the self-assessment report does not evaluate sufficiently the impact leadership and management have on outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Managers monitor the implementation of the quality improvement plan systematically.
- The provision is highly responsive to need. Managers have added barbering to the provision recently and, in order to provide improved progression routes, a salon management apprenticeship at level 3 has been introduced. Managers maintain good working relationships and a high reputation with local and regional employers. A director is closely associated with the local learning provider network and is at the forefront of apprenticeship developments regionally and nationally. Senior managers attend local enterprise partnership meetings.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good and staff maintain an inclusive and supportive environment for all. A director who has suitable relevant qualifications is the lead officer and is supported appropriately by the other two directors. Relevant policies and procedures are implemented appropriately. The single equality scheme embraces successfully the nine protected characteristics set out in law. Regular staff training keeps staff up to date with developments and requirements.
- Safeguarding of apprentices and staff is good. Two designated safeguarding officers are responsible for safeguarding and health and safety arrangements. Apprentices say they feel safe. Strong attention is paid to safe recruitment of staff; all staff are checked and a single central register maintained. Any disclosures are sensitively and responsibly managed. Staff are regularly updated, and training has recently been given to staff and apprentices on the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. They have a good understanding of the dangers of internet grooming, bullying and abuse and staff place a high priority on protecting learners from these hazards. Managers maintain suitable links with external agencies including local safeguarding children boards.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

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

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	435							
Principal/CEO	Managing Director Kelvin Brennan							
Date of previous inspection	February 2012							
Website address	www.blhairdressing.co.uk							
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	4	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+		
	144	128	17	133	0	5		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	1		1		2			
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:								

Contextual information

BL Training Limited has its head office in Newcastle and maintains five training centres, each situated in a major town in the North East of England. It offers apprenticeships in hairdressing and barbering at intermediate, advanced and higher levels, a small number of team leading, customer service and management apprenticeships and a small number of traineeships. The company is managed by a board of three directors, with support from a financial controller, an operational manager and two area managers. BL Training works with 300 salons across an area from Berwick-upon-Tweed to North Yorkshire and employs 30 staff.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Colin Evans AI

Six additional inspectors, assisted by one of the directors 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:

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

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