

Halfords

Employer

Inspection dates	5–8 April 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The design of the apprenticeship programme does not link effectively to the learning and skills development that already takes place throughout Halfords' own training.
- Learners do not benefit from the planned and structured involvement of their store managers in the apprenticeship programme. As a result, they do not make sufficiently rapid progress.
- The currently available performance data and its analysis do not enable leaders and managers at all levels to identify and tackle apprentices' slow progress.
- Quality assurance arrangements are not sufficiently comprehensive to ensure that managers have an accurate overview of the quality of the apprentices' learning experience.
- The monitoring of apprentices' progress during review meetings is insufficient. Target setting does not provide apprentices and store managers with enough information to plan learning to ensure that apprentices make the progress expected.
- Assessors do not plan the teaching of English and mathematics skills sufficiently to ensure that learners extend their knowledge of these skills.
- In the first year of the apprenticeship provision, too few apprentices are making sufficient progress towards achieving their apprenticeship framework.
- The progress apprentices make depends on the geographical region where they are based.
- The progress apprentices make towards achieving their English and mathematics qualifications is very slow.

The provider has the following strengths

- The particularly successful implementation of the company's in-house training programme underpins learning and development for apprentices and meets the national skills priorities.
- Trainees progress well to the apprenticeship programmes enhancing their employability prospects.
- Effective in-store coaching and mentoring by managers and experienced colleagues develop apprentices' retail skills and confidence.
- Apprentices are motivated to learn and they acquire a particularly good range of additional skills in cycling and automotive work. This increases the contribution they make to the business.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Halfords is a large retailer of motoring and cycling products, and an operator in garage servicing and auto repairs. Trading since 1892, it employs approximately 8,000 employees across 460 stores in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
- Halfords started hosting a traineeship programme in October 2014 as part of its learning and development strategy. The programme is funded and delivered by two contractors that recruit the trainees from among young people who are not engaged in education, training and/or employment in their local communities, and arrange work placements for them in Halfords' stores. Halfords began delivering its apprenticeship programme in February 2015. To date, the provider has enrolled 1,140 employees onto the 18-month retail intermediate apprenticeship and a further 12 onto the warehousing and distribution intermediate apprenticeship.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Review the design of the apprenticeship programme to reduce the repetition in learning activities that apprentices experience from having undertaken the in-house training programme. Clearly define and establish the roles of store managers and colleagues in supporting the apprenticeship programme, improving the coordination of on- and off-the-job learning so that apprentices make good progress.
- Improve the collection and analysis of data relating to the performance of the apprenticeship programme. Share this information with leaders and managers at all levels so that they can target the geographical areas where the apprenticeship programme is not performing well enough, challenging them to improve.
- Ensure that effective systems are in place to monitor rigorously the progress apprentices are making towards the completion of all elements of their apprenticeship so that they make the progress of which they are capable, in particular the most-able apprentices.
- Ensure that all apprentices are able to develop their English and mathematics skills further by using initial and diagnostic assessments to identify their development needs, develop apprentices' strategies to check and improve the standard of their written English, and integrate the development of mathematics and English skills in learning and assessment activities.
- Further develop the quality assurance arrangements to offer the programme manager and the assessors a clear understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment experienced by apprentices and how this affects apprentices' progress. Ensure that identified areas for improvement are built into a robust action plan that is reviewed by the leaders and managers of the programme.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- Managers have not designed the apprenticeship programme well enough at the outset to make sufficiently effective use of the good in-house staff development programme which all employees complete. Most apprentices commence their apprenticeship programme while they are still completing the in-house training required of all employees in their first three months of employment. Consequently, they can appear to take longer to complete their apprenticeship. The in-house training programme substantially meets the requirements for the background knowledge and technical certificate of the apprenticeship but leaders and managers have not yet linked this directly to the learning units of the framework. As a result, leaders and managers do not record apprentices' successful achievement of the in-house training against the apprenticeship framework, and apprentices have to repeat work unnecessarily. This slows their progress and in a small minority of cases demotivates them and confuses them about their learning priorities.
- Store managers are insufficiently involved in the apprenticeship programme. They take part in the in-house training programme, contributing very strongly to the apprentices' skills and knowledge development through on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching. They assess apprentices' skills and knowledge throughout each stage of the programme. However, there is too much variability in how effectively assessors use the store managers' contribution in the assessment of learning, and many store managers do not know how their role supports apprentices' progress.
- Leaders and managers at all levels do not have enough comparative information to judge how well apprentices in different stores and regions progress through their framework and, in particular, to identify those apprentices who are most at risk of not completing within the planned time. They do not set targets for assessors that focus on ensuring that apprentices make good progress.
- Apprentices who do not already have a GCSE in English or mathematics at grade C or above work towards achieving the appropriate functional skills qualification. However, managers have not ensured that apprentices have the opportunity to develop their English and mathematics skills further than the minimum requirements of their apprenticeship.
- Quality assurance is too narrowly focused on complying with the requirements of the awarding body for the qualification. Managers do not have a clear understanding of the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment, or of the apprentices' experience on the programme. Quality improvement plans do not recognise inspectors' findings of the slow progress made by many apprentices.
- Senior leaders have established a clear and ambitious strategy to introduce traineeships and apprenticeships as part of Halfords' people development and succession planning. This vision is shared by managers at all levels and strongly supports the in-house staff development programme.
- Leaders promote a very positive and inclusive culture within the learning and development programme. Halfords provides training and employment opportunities to those who have been out of work for long periods, such as ex-offenders. The apprenticeship programme is actively promoted to all staff including those on part-time contracts, using government funding only for those who have been employed for less than a year when they enrol.
- The apprenticeship meets regional employment priorities and business needs well. Since its launch, managers have seen a significant reduction in staff turnover and an improvement in customer satisfaction. Learners receive pay rises when they successfully complete their induction programme and when they complete the next phase of their training, which motivates them strongly.
- Managers at all levels are ambitious for their apprentices and provide very good support to enable them to develop the technical and more general employability skills, knowledge and confidence to succeed in their job roles and future careers. All the assessors have a suitable background in the retail sector and senior managers support them to gain appropriate additional qualifications, for example to teach functional skills.
- Leaders promptly and accurately identified weaknesses in the implementation of the new apprenticeship. Following a detailed analysis of the progress made by individual apprentices, leaders took decisive and robust action to increase the number of assessors and to improve the way assessors work.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The company's head of development is instrumental in the implementation of the overall strategy and provides appropriate scrutiny in a governance capacity.

- Through regular and frequent reviews, he knows the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship provision and is well placed to hold managers to account. As a result, he has strengthened the operational management of the apprenticeship programme, but it is too early to gauge the impact of these actions on the apprentices' progress and the quality of the provision.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Apprentices understand clearly the importance of working safely and adopt safe working practices from the start of their employment. They know how to keep themselves, their colleagues and customers safe, in particular when working in the automotive area.
- Apprentices are aware of how to raise any safeguarding issues and in the few instances where safeguarding concerns have been escalated, these have been appropriately dealt with. Assessors use any such incidents to improve their own practice.
- Assessors have received training to recognise the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and are currently introducing this knowledge to all apprentices to develop further their understanding of these topics. The safeguarding policy does not make appropriate reference to e-safety but apprentices are aware of the potential risks associated with using social media.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **requires improvement**

- Halfords has 1,152 apprentices in retail and warehousing and storage. All apprentices are on intermediate-level programmes and the significant majority of apprentices are on retail programmes. Too many apprentices do not make rapid progress towards the completion of their apprenticeship because assessors take insufficient account of the learning that takes place during in-house training programmes and do not assess apprentices' skills frequently enough.
- Insufficient matching between Halfords' in-house training programme and the apprenticeship programme results in apprentices duplicating their work and as a result, in a small minority of cases, they are confused and their progress is slowed. Managers are not sufficiently clear about how to be involved in the planning of assessment and learning activities with apprentices and assessors. As a consequence of this, apprentices are making slow progress.
- Assessors do not use their thorough evaluation of apprentices' skills in English and mathematics at the start of their apprenticeship well enough to plan learning that enables apprentices to make good progress. For apprentices who need to achieve qualifications in English or mathematics, assessors do not always schedule learning early enough in the programme, resulting in too many apprentices making slow progress. Apprentices are not challenged to develop their English and mathematics skills further than the minimum requirements of their apprenticeship.
- Assessors do not monitor the progress that apprentices make with sufficient rigour. Progress reviews are mostly too infrequent and brief, and targets that assessors agree with apprentices during progress reviews are not always sufficiently specific. As a result, apprentices are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their skills, and this contributes to their slow progress.
- Too often, assessors' written feedback on apprentices' assessed work does not provide sufficient detail to help apprentices make rapid progress or to improve the quality of their work. Assessors do not routinely correct apprentices' spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes, or provide them with strategies to identify and correct these errors themselves.
- Apprentices are well presented and professional and make a valuable contribution to their employer's business. They make good progress in the development of technical skills through their workplace training. For example, they quickly gain the skills to build and repair bicycles to industry standard, with a strong focus on safety, meeting customers' needs well. Apprentices enjoy their work, feel safe in their working environments and know how to work safely.
- Apprentices benefit from good individual coaching from managers and staff in the workplace, and develop their knowledge and skills through the completion of bespoke distance learning materials and attendance at off-the-job training events. Assessors are knowledgeable and experienced. All assessors have previously been employed in Halfords' stores and use their understanding of Halfords' standards and procedures to plan assessment activities that relate well to apprentices' job roles, accurately assessing the progress that apprentices make in improving their skills. Technology is used very effectively to support learning.

- Apprentices make good progress in improving the personal and social skills they need for work. They gain a good awareness of how to stay safe at work and are aware of reporting procedures. Training has a strong focus on the importance of promoting equality and diversity in the workplace. Apprentices working in the distribution centre who speak English as a second language receive particularly effective support with the development of their English language skills from qualified tutors who visit them regularly at the workplace.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of the progression opportunities available to them at Halfords. Assessors successfully support apprentices to make clear and realistic career plans to enable them to progress in the organisation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- The development of English and mathematics skills is not promoted well enough throughout the apprenticeship training. Apprentices complete their online practical exercises in English and mathematics but they do not benefit from additional learning opportunities throughout the apprenticeship where they could apply their learning within the retail environment. This limits the development of these skills, in particular for the many apprentices who are keen to progress their careers to a higher level within Halfords.
- Apprentices develop positive work-related behaviours and good team-working skills, often supporting their colleagues by being flexible with shift changes. For example, they work well with their colleagues when stocking shelves after a delivery and provide support to colleagues with information requests about stock location.
- Apprentices develop effective operational retail skills and are able to deliver reliable customer service. For example, they quickly learn to use a range of industry-standard tools to a good standard and develop the skills to build bicycles and to complete pre-delivery inspections to meet customers' orders.
- Apprentices gain the required communication skills that allow them to deal with customers' queries effectively, helping them to choose the right products and maximising sales. Improved confidence levels and empathy skills help apprentices to deal with complex customer challenges better.
- Initial advice and guidance ensure that apprentices know the requirements of the apprenticeship programme and their rights and responsibilities. When joining the programme, apprentices receive a broad range of information on topics such as housing, industry, health and well-being. They receive good information about future career opportunities in Halfords, and most are clear about their planned progression routes.
- Apprentices have a good awareness of health and safety and adhere to safe working practices in stores: for example, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves, a high-visibility jacket, or goggles when fitting batteries.
- Apprentices develop a very good understanding of their customers' diverse needs and they value and respect their colleagues and the customers they serve, for example facing deaf customers and speaking slowly so they can lip-read. Assessors are aware of what fundamental British values are and use appropriate learning activities to promote these to apprentices. Apprentices are becoming more independent and employable. They are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Outcomes for learners require improvement

- In the first year of programme delivery, not enough apprentices are making good progress towards the achievement of their apprenticeship framework. The progress they make towards achieving their English and mathematics learning goals is particularly slow.
- Some geographical regions are performing better than others. The progress apprentices make is too variable upon the region where they are based. There are no major differences in the progress and achievement of different gender or minority ethnic groups of apprentices.
- Apprentices make good progress towards the completion of Halfords' internal training programme, which constitutes the main part of the technical and skills knowledge required to complete the apprenticeship programme.
- Apprentices achieve their learning goals relating to the development of product knowledge and retail skills particularly well. However, the apprenticeship programme is in its early stage and no apprentices have been on the programme long enough to achieve the full qualification.

- Apprentices are developing technical skills over and above the requirement of the qualification. Many choose to undertake training in both the cycles and automotive training modules, demonstrating a personal interest in becoming more knowledgeable about the products and services available to customers.
- Apprentices enjoy learning and becoming part of a team in their stores. In particular, new employees benefit from the mentoring support of their more experienced colleagues and they receive good coaching from their store managers during their apprenticeship programme. This helps them to settle in the workplace quickly.
- The vast majority of the learners in the Halfords' traineeship programme have developed good employability skills and progressed into the apprenticeship programme, improving their career prospects.

Provider details

Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	0
Principal/CEO	Ms Jill McDonald
Website address	www.halfords.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	0	1,152	0	0	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	0							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Maria Navarro, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Nelson	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the group head of people development, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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