

GR and MM Blackledge plc

Employer provider

Inspection dates 21–24 June 2016

Overall effectiveness **Inadequate**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for learners	Inadequate
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Directors do not hold managers to account for the quality of provision and apprentices' performance.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that the recommendations made at the previous inspection have been implemented.
- Managers have not developed effective monitoring and improvement arrangements; consequently, the quality of the provision has declined and many apprentices do not achieve their potential.
- Managers do not have reliable data to enable them to intervene when apprentices' progress is slow and many apprentices do not achieve their qualifications.
- The majority of apprentices who achieve are only offered progression to part-time employment in the stores.
- Staff at all levels have not ensured that apprentices understand fully the demands of learning and working in the company's stores; consequently, many leave their apprenticeships before completing them.
- Assessors do not take into account apprentices' starting points, aspirations and previous experience when planning their individual training.
- Assessors do not promote the values that prepare apprentices well for life in modern Britain.
- Assessors do not ensure that apprentices develop further their skills in English and mathematics.

The provider has the following strengths

- Most apprentices who remain on their programmes achieve and develop good practical skills in retail and customer services as a result of good on-the-job coaching.
- The small proportion of apprentices who are on advanced level courses achieve well.

Full report

Information about the provider

- GR and MM Blackledge is a public limited company whose head office is in Leyland, Lancashire. The company trades as 'Grahams' and 'Bodycare' from 135 stores located across England, Wales and Scotland. The company has a turnover of around £132 million and employs approximately 1,600 staff.
- The company has been offering work-based learning since 1997. It currently offers intermediate- and advanced-level apprenticeships in retailing and wholesaling for learners aged 16 to 24; most of the apprentices are 16 to 18 years old. A small minority study at advanced level. The human resources manager is responsible for the provision and is supported by two assessors.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that directors scrutinise robustly apprentices' outcomes and the quality of provision, so that they can hold managers to account for swift improvements.
- Increase the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications so their prospects for progression in employment or onto other programmes improve.
- Develop effective arrangements to evaluate and improve the quality of all aspects of the provision, so that staff at all levels have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and can take effective actions for improvement.
- Improve the collection, analysis and use of data relating to all aspects of the apprenticeship programme, such as apprentices' progress and early leavers, so that swift action can be taken to halt poor performance.
- Make sure that potential apprentices are offered clear advice and guidance so that they can make informed choices before starting on apprenticeships.
- Take quick and effective action to support apprentices who are at risk of leaving early, so that they complete their apprenticeships.
- Ensure that assessors identify and record apprentices' starting points accurately and use the information to plan their individual on- and off-the-job training effectively, ensuring clear and detailed learning targets so that apprentices' progress can be reliably monitored and improved.
- Make certain that assessors are confident to promote the values that apprentices need to understand in order to live successfully and productively in modern Britain.
- Ensure that assessors provide apprentices with detailed feedback on their work and assessments, so that they understand what they have to do to improve and achieve high standards.
- Ensure that assessors review well apprentices' progress with the full involvement of store managers so that apprentices can receive the support needed from staff at all levels to progress and achieve.
- Ensure that assessors develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills further, so that they become more productive employees.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Leaders and managers have failed to implement effectively their plans to extend the company's previous successful apprenticeship programme for their employees. They have not eradicated weaknesses found at the previous inspection and, as a result, all aspects of the provision have declined.
- Leaders and managers have not acted quickly to halt the decline in the performance of apprentices. They have not ensured that training arrangements in stores are conducive to learners making good progress. For example, apprentices take computer-based assessments on their sales tills during stores' opening hours. Managers have failed to ensure apprentices receive effective support from staff at all levels to stay and achieve; as a result, too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship.
- Managers have not developed robust and reliable arrangements to collect and use data to improve the quality of apprentices' training. They have not ensured that assessors record accurately apprentices' starting points and their progress; consequently, managers do not have accurate data to take effective action to ensure apprentices can progress well, such as by providing more study time in stores to help apprentices to improve their skills. Managers cannot reliably evaluate the number of hours that apprentices receive for off- and on-the-job training.
- Managers have not implemented the previous inspection's recommendation to establish robust arrangements to monitor the quality of the provision. As a result, they do not have a clear view of the quality of training that apprentices receive and cannot take effective action to ensure swift improvements. The company does not produce a self-assessment report; consequently, all staff with responsibility for delivering aspects of training, such as store managers providing on-the-job training, do not have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and are unable to contribute to improvements.
- The provision does not meet the needs and interests of apprentices because many do not stay, progress and achieve. In planning their work, assessors take little account of apprentices' potential and abilities. Leaders and managers have not set high aspirations for apprentices to develop their English and mathematics skills beyond the level needed to complete the apprenticeship framework.
- Leaders and managers have developed an inclusive culture within stores. Apprentices are confident about reporting discriminatory or bullying behaviour. However, managers have not ensured that assessors can confidently promote the values that apprentices require to live successfully in modern Britain, such as democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Directors have not challenged managers effectively for the declining performance of apprentices and the weaknesses in the provision.
 - Directors do not have a robust strategic oversight of the company's apprenticeship training to ensure effective arrangements are in place to improve the provision.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - The company has a number of relevant policies and procedures to ensure the well-being of all employees, including apprentices. These include policies to deal with substance misuse and different forms of harassment. Managers at all levels act quickly in response to any concerns.
 - Assessors have received appropriate safeguarding training on keeping apprentices safe and identifying and supporting vulnerable apprentices. Apprentices know how to report their concerns and have a good knowledge of working safely in stores, for example when handling heavy goods.
 - Managers have not ensured that assessors are confident enough to extend apprentices' knowledge and understanding of the risks of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Store managers and assessors do not offer apprentices clear information to enable them to decide whether or not they are fully committed to completing a retail apprenticeship in the company. Apprentices are allocated half an hour per week study time in stores; however, store managers do not ensure that apprentices use their study time effectively. Consequently, apprentices lose interest and many leave early.

- Assessors do not have high expectations of apprentices. Off-the-job teaching, learning and assessment fail to inspire and challenge apprentices or meet their individual aspirations and developmental needs. Consequently, many apprentices are disengaged, become bored and make slow progress.
- Assessors do not use apprentices' starting points in English, mathematics and retail-related skills to plan their individual learning and assessment. They do not ensure that apprentices' training builds on their prior learning, attainment and experience. Assessors plan and teach to the minimum standards that apprentices require for their qualifications; as a result, apprentices do not achieve to their potential.
- Assessors do not set apprentices clear and appropriate short- and medium-term learning targets to help them to plan their study and achieve within the planned timescale. They often direct apprentices too much when answering questions; consequently, they cannot evaluate apprentices' knowledge and develop their depth of understanding.
- Store managers who are responsible for on-the-job training are not involved in the review of apprentices' progress and setting their learning targets. As a result, apprentices do not progress at the rate at which they are capable.
- Assessors do not ensure that apprentices eliminate their weaknesses in writing and mathematics. As a result, apprentices do not become accustomed to applying English and mathematics to good standards in their job roles.
- Assessors fail to check and provide timely feedback on apprentices' written work. Many of the answers that apprentices write in their retail-theory workbooks contain spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors which are not identified by assessors. Too many answers are incomplete or incorrect and a few lack sufficient depth. Consequently, apprentices make repeated errors and the standard of apprentices' written work does not improve.
- Store managers and assessors provide apprentices with good on-the-job training and experience enabling them, over time, to develop a good range of retailing skills. For example, they become adept at ascertaining customers' needs, describing and showing them suitable products, assessing stock levels and replenishing the shelves, and arranging product displays.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate

- Apprentices do not develop English and mathematics skills well enough to become more effective employees; they cannot apply confidently these critical skills in their everyday lives. Apprentices' oral communication skills improve as a result of working with colleagues and liaising with customers.
- Assessors have not ensured that apprentices have a good understanding of the values of life in modern Britain. For example, too many apprentices do not recognise the importance of democratic voting.
- Apprentices do not receive high-quality impartial careers guidance to enable them to develop ambitious and realistic plans for their future careers. They are not fully informed about the options available to them to progress in the company or in the retail industry generally. Too few apprentices progress to apprenticeships at advanced level.
- Apprentices' motivation and commitment to their apprenticeship vary too much depending on the support that they receive. Too many are demotivated because they are not supported enough to manage the demands of work and study in stores.
- Staff in stores ensure that apprentices develop a good understanding of the importance of healthy and safe ways of working and how to minimise risks to customers and colleagues. Managers provide sufficient information to apprentices to ensure they have a good awareness of dealing with diverse customers, for example customers with mobility difficulties. Apprentices value and respect their colleagues and the customers they serve. However, assessors do not ensure that apprentices have a good enough understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Outcomes for learners are inadequate

- Assessors do not reliably determine and record apprentices' starting points and what they subsequently learn. Consequently, the progress of individual apprentices cannot accurately be evaluated.
- For two consecutive years, following the previous inspection, the proportion of apprentices who have been successful has declined to low levels because many leave early. Of the number of apprentices who

are successful, too many take much longer than planned to complete.

- The standard of apprentices' work is variable and occasionally below that required for the apprenticeships. Assessors do not have high expectations of apprentices. Assessors do not encourage apprentices to improve their quality of work and reach as high a standard as possible to improve their chances of remaining and progressing in their employment.
- The company employs apprentices for 32 hours per week during their training; however, almost all who complete successfully gain employment for only 16 hours per week. Too few intermediate apprentices progress to advanced level courses. The small proportion of apprentices at advanced level achieve well.

Provider details

Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16-18 and 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	245
Training and head of human resources	Sarah Blackledge
Website address	None

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+		
	88	7	N/A	16	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	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"> ■ None 							

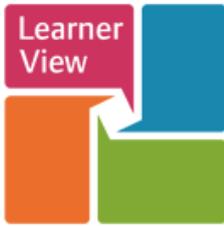
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Cocker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the training and human resources manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's development plans and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students 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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