

Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited

Employer

Inspection dates

9–12 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not succeeded fully in tackling weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and in leadership and management identified at the previous inspection; self-assessment of the provision and the subsequent quality improvement planning are not sufficiently comprehensive.
- Until recently, senior managers in a governance role did not provide sufficient support, challenge and scrutiny to the team; this meant that the pace of change has been too slow.
- Managers do not have a firm grip on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and how to make ongoing improvements.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good; apprentices do not consolidate their skills sufficiently.
- Staff and managers are not held to account for their performance as their job roles in relation to the delivery of teaching, training and learning of apprentices are not clearly spelt out in their job descriptions; consequently targets in their yearly appraisals are not specific or measurable.
- Too few apprentices complete their programme in the planned period.
- Tutors do not make sufficient use of the findings from assessment of apprentices' previous learning, work experience or skills and achievement in English and mathematics; this means that all apprentices follow the same programme with insufficient challenge for apprentices to achieve highest level of skills.

The provider has the following strengths

- Apprentices develop good clinical and customer service skills; they become valuable employees and work in desirable careers in optical consultancy and pharmacy adviser roles.
- Managers have customised their training programmes very well to meet the current and future workforce needs of Boots.
- Careers guidance and advice are good and impartial; they prepare apprentices well for a rewarding career.
- Senior managers invest heavily in high-quality learning resources and the training and development of their staff including apprentices.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Boots is the UK's leading pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer on the high street, with around 2,500 stores in England, as well as stores in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Boots is part of the Walgreens Boots Alliance Group. The company recruits and employs staff nationally and trains them across a range of programmes to meet the company's needs. Publicly funded programmes make up a minority of all accredited training for employees.
- Managers have reduced the number of optical retail apprentices from nearly 400 at the previous inspection to currently 21 apprentices, as they have stopped enrolling apprentices on a monthly basis. Since September 2016, Boots has also run a healthcare apprenticeship programme for 62 apprentices who will be working as pharmacy advisers. This programme was run as a company-funded programme in 2015/16. All apprentices are due to complete their apprenticeship in October 2017, and a new cohort for both programmes is due to start in September. An apprenticeship manager supported by a delivery manager and five newly appointed assessors teach and manage the healthcare programme. After several changes at the executive team level within Opticians, a senior learning and development manager was appointed last June.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the teaching, learning and assessment skills of all staff who have a role in supporting apprentices to gain qualifications and develop practical skills by:
 - providing focused training to develop staff's skills in coaching, mentoring and training, and in providing feedback to apprentices, so that apprentices achieve higher grades and demonstrate their confidence and competence in applying skills learned in theory sessions
 - sharing good practice with other staff from within the company.
- Staff and managers should ensure that all apprentices achieve high levels of skills and reach their potential by:
 - identifying routinely and accurately the starting points for all apprentices to include their prior achievement, work experience and levels of English and mathematics, including any gaps in their skills in these subjects
 - designing and delivering individual programmes with appropriate challenge based on the apprentices' abilities, aspirations and career goals
 - setting and reviewing challenging targets for all apprentices on skills development – not just on the completion of units of qualifications.
- Ensure that the quality of feedback is consistently good and it helps apprentices to improve their skills further by:
 - ensuring that they fully understand what they need to do as a result of verbal and written feedback

- providing greater detail to apprentices by stating what they have done well and what they need to do to improve standards of their written and practical assignments
- setting apprentices targets to develop their English and mathematics skills in the context of their work and career aims beyond the minimum requirements of qualifications.
- Strengthen self-assessment and development planning to ensure that all staff and managers maintain a clear focus on continuous improvements by:
 - having a full understanding of the strengths and areas of improvement of the provision and how each of these impacts on apprentices
 - planning a course of action to improve the quality of training, including observations of all interactions with apprentices with specific targets and milestones for improvement
 - taking steps to maintain strengths
 - evaluating actions to ensure that all targets for improvement have been met.
- Formalise governance arrangements by ensuring that:
 - senior executives who will carry out the governance function for each programme are clearly identified
 - senior executives receive formal reports on the performance of each apprenticeship programme including qualification achievement rates, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the difference apprentices are making to the business and their personal development
 - senior executives provide high levels of scrutiny, support and challenge to secure success and progression for all apprentices.
- Instil a culture of high performance and accountability in the apprenticeship provision by:
 - clearly defining the roles of all staff involved in the apprenticeship provision
 - setting them specific and measurable targets related to their job role
 - holding them to account by measuring their performance on a regular basis.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers support their highly skilled staff well to keep their clinical skills up to date; however, they have not recognised the crucial role they play in teaching, training and supporting apprentices. Staff's skills and expertise in teaching and training are too narrow, restricted to presentations and one-to-one support. Managers have not provided for these staff the necessary ongoing professional development of skills in coaching, mentoring, teaching, use of e-learning resources and giving feedback. This means that apprentices do not get sufficiently high-quality and challenging learning experiences.
- Observations of teaching, learning and assessment are not leading to sustainable and tangible improvements. Observers do not have the skills in observing and evaluating learning and focus on recording what the tutors do in classes rather than on what learning takes place and its impact on apprentices' progress. Grades awarded to lessons and tutors are often too generous. Action plans to improve tutors' practice after the observations are unclear and tutors are unsure about what they need to do to improve and how to do it.
- Managers know their provision well; however, the self-assessment report is insufficiently comprehensive, based on the provision for optical apprentices only. In the quality improvement plan, managers focused with partial success on improving the weaker aspects of the provision such as achievement of qualifications, safeguarding and British values, and some aspects of leadership and management identified at the previous inspection. They did not identify fully the weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment identified by the inspectors.
- Performance management requires improvement. Staff and managers are not held to account for their job roles. Their job roles do not clearly identify their teaching, training, coaching or assessment responsibilities to support apprentices. Managers do not set specific and measurable targets to hold these staff to account. Targets are too broad and focused on improving outcomes, not improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment – so that outcomes improve as a result. The process is too informal and does not lead to sustained improvements in the quality of learning for apprentices.
- Senior leaders and managers are ambitious for the programme and for apprentices. They have a very clear plan to develop apprenticeship programmes at different levels from a level 2 to level 6 to meet the emerging and pressing needs of patients and the National Health Service (NHS). To this end they have invested heavily by funding a precursor programme to the new healthcare apprenticeship. This started in September 2016 and was highly successful.
- Managers have invested in a new data management system and a broad range of learning resources. Apprentices enjoy learning from good-quality booklets and digital learning resources, including those for English and mathematics. Apprentices make extensive use of the Boots academy online portal, to consolidate their learning. This has an extensive range of learning resources.
- Programmes are customised to meet the business needs of Boots, combining clinical and front-of-house customer service skills, often exceeding framework requirements. As part of workforce planning, managers have revised their apprenticeship delivery model to

better meet the needs of Boots. They decided to offer year-long programmes as they found the roll-on, roll-off model of apprenticeship delivery that they had run for optical retail apprentices did not work for the business or for the apprentices. As part of their strategy to improve workforce skills further, managers plan to offer a level 3 healthcare apprenticeship and offer a revamped year-long optical consultants' apprenticeship programme for 100 apprentices, from September 2017.

- Managers have succeeded in improving parts of the programme. They track current apprentices' progress closely, and this has improved qualification achievement rates. Practice managers are now more involved in the training of apprentices than before; managers have withdrawn an e-portfolio method of gathering evidence that apprentices found unhelpful.
- Although managers have improved their understanding of data and management information, they do not monitor the take-up of apprenticeships, progression and jobs by different groups of apprentices and their relative performance to enable them to identify and narrow any gaps in achievement.
- Managers have adopted a pragmatic and effective strategy for the ongoing development of their apprentices' English and mathematics skills. In order to stress the importance and need for high-level skills in these subjects, managers set apprentices tasks that involve using both set of skills. For example, healthcare apprentices are asked to calculate the correct dosage of paracetamol for patients of different ages after reading a complex set of information and instructions using both English and mathematics skills.
- Managers have been successful in recruiting an increasing number of apprentices from minority ethnic groups and those from deprived areas to reflect modern British society more accurately in Boots' workforce. They have raised apprentices' awareness of equality and diversity well and the benefits of this approach to society and the company. As a result, apprentices provide a sensitive service to customers from diverse backgrounds, protecting their privacy and dignity.

The governance of the provider

- The responsibility for the governance of the apprenticeship programme at senior executive team level has been unclear and arrangements have, as a result, been ineffective.
- Senior executive team managers have changed roles too frequently or left the company, so that there has not been the stability necessary.
- A recently appointed senior learning and development manager reports to a designated executive team manager about the performance of the optical apprenticeship programme. The executive team manager receives informal and verbal reports on the progress made but has not provided sufficient challenge or support.
- Two managers responsible for the optical retail apprenticeship programme have been left to carry out the improvement work on their own. This has resulted in slow progress to make improvements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The responsibility for safeguarding sits with one of the experienced and knowledgeable senior managers. He takes the lead on a broad range of safeguarding issues, such as the 'Prevent' duty, extremism, radicalisation, online safety, bullying and harassment, and child sexual exploitation. He has ensured that all staff are fully familiar with their responsibility to safeguard apprentices. Managers conduct appropriate background and suitability checks on all staff who come regularly into contact with the apprentices
- Links with various local authorities and other agencies dealing with safeguarding are strong. Managers seek guidance and advice from them and refer cases promptly on to them when necessary.
- Staff have benefited from useful training on safeguarding and 'Prevent'. As a result, they are well aware of the potential dangers to apprentices. They remain vigilant and protect apprentices from harm. Apprentices are safe and feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement; this was the case at the previous inspection.
- Staff do not make use of the findings of the assessment of apprentices to identify their individual starting points, qualifications and experience. Consequently all apprentices complete an identical optical retail or healthcare programme. Those apprentices who are more capable are not challenged beyond the standard requirements of the apprenticeship to make more rapid progress and move on to their next step. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection and managers have not resolved this fully.
- Apprentices do not receive sufficiently high-quality or precise written feedback to help them improve their assignments or encourage them to attempt to achieve the highest grades on the healthcare apprenticeship qualification. Tutors do not routinely make apprentices aware of their spelling and grammatical errors and do not encourage apprentices to check and correct these. Apprentices receive developmental feedback for practical training verbally which they do not record; this makes it difficult for them to refer back and learn from it.
- Assessors do not conduct a thorough review of apprentices' progress to establish their overall progress in achieving qualifications and skills development in their job roles. Assessors focus apprentices' attention mainly on unit and module completion, as opposed to skills development. The formal progress reviews are not frequent enough to identify slow progress or enable prompt intervention where apprentices are falling behind, as these are held only quarterly. Assessors do not set and review specific, measurable and meaningful targets for apprentices. As a result, assessors and apprentices alike are insufficiently clear about next steps and how apprentices will achieve them.
- Assessors have good industry knowledge and experience which they use to provide flexible support for apprentices, meeting their needs and those of the business. However a few optical workshop tutors do not use sufficiently directed or skilful questions to check

apprentices' understanding or provide additional challenge; consequently apprentices do not consistently make the strides in their learning of which they are capable.

- All apprentices benefit highly from the clinical supervision they receive from their employer. They access and engage regularly in a wide range of e-learning modules, in-house training programmes, such as internationally acclaimed training for customer service, diploma workshops and clinical supervision on the shop floor.
- Apprentices value the high level of personal support they receive from their assessors, tutors and buddies which helps them keep on track with their studies.
- Healthcare apprentices demonstrate sound knowledge of equality and diversity and treat customers with due respect and courtesy. For example, an apprentice took a pharmacist to one side to discuss a customer's symptoms of an intimate infection, to maintain confidentiality. They maintain patients' dignity and show respect to drug abusers when dispensing controlled drug substitutes to them.
- Apprentices have good understanding of the health and safety requirements of the highly regulated fields of work. They use this knowledge to protect patient confidentiality, keeping drugs and medication safely according to the company procedures. They use safe working practices such as using foot stools to reach medicines stored on high shelving.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices are highly motivated to learn and progress in their careers. They take their learning seriously and often make good progress towards developing skills.
- Optical and healthcare apprentices develop and practise a wide range of technical skills and knowledge, such as dispensing prescription medicines or optical products and labelling medicines. They become valuable team members and demonstrate high levels of customer care skills. They demonstrate professional behaviours, such as good communication with colleagues and customers, and develop into reliable and useful employees. As their confidence increases, apprentices take on additional responsibilities at work.
- Apprentices are employed as permanent employees and have access to all facilities and benefits from the outset. They enjoy their work and are enthusiastic about their prospects with the company. Apprentices are mature and respectful of each other's point of view in discussions. In so doing they demonstrate an important workplace skill and one of the core British values.
- Apprentices attend training sessions enthusiastically and develop skills to learn on their own, often accelerating their progress and enhancing their knowledge of the sector. A large majority of apprentices produce assignments of a good standard. Written work, completed workbook tasks and case study reports are well presented and of a good standard. The most able apprentices produce assignments which demonstrate good use of English.
- Apprentices are clearly focused on maintaining their own health and well-being. As an example of the company's approach to this, one apprentice has become a company health education champion.

- Tutors do not have high enough expectations of apprentices and do not encourage apprentices sufficiently to aim higher than the minimum standard set for the apprenticeship. This is particularly important to healthcare apprentices who have the option of higher level achievement such as a merit or a distinction.
- Apprentices have a good awareness of safeguarding. They feel safe and know to whom to report any concerns. Apprentices have undertaken useful online scenario-based training that looks at various dangers in their work context and requires them to consider one of three options. This has consolidated apprentices' learning of safeguarding topics well.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- A majority of apprentices do not achieve their qualifications in the planned period. From a very low base two years ago, the current rates of achievements of qualifications have improved but are not yet good.
- Staff provide extensive support to prepare optical apprentices who needed to pass their qualifications in English and mathematics to complete their apprenticeship. This has improved the first-time pass rates to good levels. Managers no longer recruit apprentices who need to achieve a GCSE pass in English or mathematics. None of the current cohort of apprentices on the health apprenticeship needs to take these qualifications.
- Apprentices develop appropriate levels of skills in English and mathematics to meet the requirements of their job roles. For example, healthcare apprentices prepare prescriptions after reading the instructions carefully. Optical retail apprentices accurately carry out measurements and calculations to ensure that customers' spectacles fit comfortably and the lenses are in the correct position. However, managers have plans in place to develop higher levels of skills in these subjects to enable apprentices to progress to the next stage of their career.
- Apprentices receive detailed guidance about career progression in Boots and other related sectors. This improves their understanding of their career progression opportunities. Apprentices aspire to become pharmacy technicians, dispensing opticians or practice managers. Managers claim that many apprentices progress to higher levels in the company or go onto further and higher education, although they do not collect data on the progression of apprentices to enable apprentices' progression to be precisely measured.
- All apprentices are employed and remain in permanent employment with Boots after completion of their training. They make a good contribution to their employer's business by using their well-developed clinical and customer care skills. Many gain promotion and take on additional responsibilities at work, such as buddies to new apprentices.
- Healthcare apprentices are making expected progress to develop skills and complete their qualifications. Current optical retail apprentices have improved their rate of progress and are making expected progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51573
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	126
Principal/CEO	Erica Moore (senior HR partner)
Telephone number	07341 074 696
Website	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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	23	60	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the learning and development manager, 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 apprentices 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.

Inspection team

Harmesh Manghra, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Osmaston	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector

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