

Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited

Employer

Inspection dates

23–26 October 2018

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

- Governors are not sufficiently knowledgeable about apprenticeships to challenge leaders and managers to deliver a high-quality programme.
- Staff do not fully identify apprentices' starting points nor use this information to ensure that their learning programme enables them to achieve to their potential.
- Leaders and managers have not developed an effective English and mathematics strategy. As a result, apprentices do not develop these skills further while on programme.
- Leaders and managers do not use data sufficiently well to measure and evaluate the wider outcomes apprentices achieve.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not improved sufficiently since the previous inspection. Assessors do not have the necessary skills to support apprentices well with all aspects of their learning.
- Managers do not use the findings from quality assurance processes to support staff development and manage their performance.
- Apprentices do not have a thorough understanding of how the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation could impact on their lives and work.

The provider has the following strengths

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have critically reviewed the programme and improved apprentices' learning experience.
- Apprentices benefit from very effective coaching in the workplace that helps them to develop vocational practical skills of a high standard.
- The management of the programme has been strengthened since the previous inspection, and quality compliance has been re-established.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve within the planned time has greatly improved; a very high proportion of pharmacy apprentices achieve their qualification.
- Apprentices demonstrate highly professional behaviours and attitudes in the workplace; all are promoted upon completion of the programme, improving their economic prospects.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Boots is the UK's largest pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer, with around 2,500 stores ranging from local community pharmacies to large health and beauty stores. Boots Opticians is one of the biggest opticians in the UK. Boots and Boots Opticians are both part of the Walgreens Boots Alliance Group.
- Nearly 170 years after it was founded, Boots employs approximately 60,000 people across the UK. Some 5,000 of these are based in the headquarters in Nottingham, from which they deliver product development and store support, as well as manufacturing and distribution functions.
- Boots delivers levy-funded framework-based intermediate apprenticeships in optical retail and pharmacy services. At the time of the inspection, there were 19 optical apprentices with a further 19 on a pharmacy apprenticeship. Four assessors and two quality assurance staff report to two apprenticeship managers and a senior manager. The quality manager completes the apprenticeship delivery team.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders must ensure that those selected to exercise the governance of the programme are sufficiently knowledgeable about apprenticeship provision to enable them to hold leaders to account for the success of the programme and to challenge managers to deliver a learning programme of the highest standards.
- Swiftly develop and implement a thorough English and mathematics strategy that focuses on delivering specific learning activities that target the further development of apprentices' skills in these subjects, with the support of appropriately trained assessors.
- Leaders and managers should further develop the use of data to ensure that they measure the progress that learners make from their starting points and evaluate the wide range of outcomes that apprentices attain while on the programme.
- Managers should include the findings from quality assurance processes, such as teaching and learning observations, when managing the performance of their teams and agreeing staff development.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that assessors swiftly develop the necessary teaching and training skills to enable them to support apprentices to increase their knowledge and practical skills
 - supporting assessors to make good use of the information gathered at the start of the programme with regard to apprentices' prior skills and knowledge to set targets that are sufficiently challenging to help them achieve their potential
 - ensuring that the written feedback that learners receive is of high quality and enables them to make rapid progress and improve the standards of their work.
- Reinforce the training delivered to apprentices and measure its impact to ensure that they develop a thorough understanding of the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation and how these issues could affect their personal lives and work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Last year, the new leadership team focused sharply on improving the apprenticeship programme. Areas such as the apprentices' personal development and the rate of achievement have been maintained or improved, but progress with developing teaching, learning and assessment has been slower. This means that the provision, overall, requires further improvement to become good.
- Leaders and managers have not developed and implemented an appropriate strategy to support learners with further advancing their English and mathematics skills from their starting points. They have only recently introduced improvements such as initial assessment of these skills for all apprentices, so that they can identify their starting points. Assessors do not have the necessary training skills to be able to support apprentices with the development of their English and mathematics skills.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of how their staff perform through regular and frequent meetings and performance appraisals. However, they do not link sufficiently the findings from the teaching and learning observations to their staff performance processes, including staff's personal development activities. This slows the pace of progress in improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers have strengthened the reliability of their information management systems, which has enabled them to access accurate data on the performance of the programme. However, their scrutiny and evaluation of the outcomes attained by apprentices are too narrow. Managers do not measure sufficiently the progress apprentices make across a wide range of skills and behaviours while on programme.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have reviewed the apprenticeship programme critically and made a considerable investment to resource it well and support its development. The newly appointed apprenticeship management team has ensured that quality becomes the key driver in their improvement journey.
- Leaders and managers have worked intensively to raise the profile of the apprenticeship programme within the organisation. As a consequence, the apprenticeship programme now benefits from the wide support of leaders at the highest levels.
- Senior leaders now place the apprenticeship programme at the centre of the organisation's strategy for recruiting talent. Their vision and renewed aspiration are that their employees should have a high-quality learning experience when they join Boots as apprentices.
- The significant investment the provider has made in supporting prospective apprentices during the application and selection process prepares them well for the programme. Throughout their learning, apprentices receive helpful advice and guidance on the wide range of career development pathways available at Boots.
- Since the previous inspection, managers have successfully focused on re-establishing much-needed quality compliance across the learning programme. Through their improved quality assurance arrangements, they can now identify precisely the strengths and weaknesses of every stage of the learning process. As a consequence, their evaluation of the quality of the provision is comprehensive and sufficiently critical. Leaders and

managers have used their quality improvement plan well to tackle the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

The governance of the provider

- The governance of the programme requires improvement. In the last 12 months, leaders and managers have begun defining and forming appropriate governance arrangements for the apprenticeship programme. However, those currently acting as governors do not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to enable them to challenge leaders and to hold them to account for delivering an apprenticeship of the highest standards.
- Senior leaders in the organisation demonstrate a keen interest in the development of the apprenticeship programme. Their role as corporate governors in the last year has been focused on providing constructive support to the programme's leaders that has secured the engagement of stakeholders across the business.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have further developed the safeguarding arrangements, increasing the number of safeguarding officers and ensuring that those involved in the programme have been appropriately checked under the disclosure and barring system. The good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Boards help staff keep up to date with safeguarding topics.
- Leaders and managers have a strong focus on securing the well-being of all employees, including apprentices. Staff appropriately identify and address any risks identified when younger learners are travelling to the off-the-job workshops and training events. Staff act promptly and thoroughly to support any apprentices identified as vulnerable.
- The recently appointed leadership team has ensured that staff and apprentices receive comprehensive training on safeguarding matters, including the 'Prevent' duty. However, apprentices have an insufficiently deep understanding of the risks posed by radical and extremist behaviours.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Assessors do not use their evaluation of apprentices' existing skills in English and mathematics at the start of their course well enough to plan learning that enables apprentices to make good progress with these skills. As a result, apprentices do not receive sufficient support to develop their English and mathematics skills beyond their starting points.
- Assessors and tutors lack sufficient experience and knowledge to plan learning that meets the needs of individual learners. Tutors focus on delivering to qualification criteria rather than on engaging learners in the taught subject. As a result, apprentices do not deepen their vocational and technical knowledge during their learning sessions with assessors. In a few cases, the pace of classroom sessions is too slow to enable learners to make rapid progress in their learning.
- Most assessors review apprentices' progress regularly, but they do not set targets that are

sufficiently precise to assist apprentices to develop their skills, attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. Consequently, apprentices do not encounter sufficient challenge to help them achieve their potential.

- In a few cases, assessors' written feedback on apprentices' assessed work does not provide enough detail. This does not help apprentices to make rapid progress or improve the quality of their work. Assessors provide helpful and encouraging verbal feedback to apprentices following assessment of their practical skills, which helps them to improve their practice.
- Workplace mentors provide very effective day-to-day coaching that helps apprentices to settle and progress quickly in the workplace. Apprentices develop a thorough understanding of the necessary technical vocabulary and demonstrate numeric ability within the parameters of their job duties. Pharmacy apprentices confidently advise customers on the safe use of over-the-counter medicines and efficiently dispense medication for patients.
- Apprentices benefit from working in high-quality environments, with most workplace managers being fully involved in the apprenticeship programme. They ensure that apprentices have study time at work to help them make progress with their learning. Apprentices undertake off-the-job training that is fully relevant to the requirements of the sector and the learning programme.
- Apprentices have good opportunities to complete additional training at work, such as a 'dementia friends' course. As a result, they become valuable team members. The good support they receive from their assessors with building clear and realistic career plans motivates them to further their professional prospects at Boots.
- Since the previous inspection, the frequency of face-to-face contact between assessors and apprentices has increased considerably and is a significant contributor to the apprentices' improved progress rates. Assessors supplement this contact with remote updates and professional discussions, which enable apprentices to make steady progress in developing their vocational skills.
- Apprentices feel safe and are generally aware of their rights and responsibilities. They work safely and know what to do if they experience any safeguarding or well-being issues at work. They have developed an appropriate understanding of British values and how these apply in the context of the workplace and in their wider communities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices develop a wide range of technical skills that enable them to perform their job roles very well. Apprentices practise their verbal and written communication skills and are proficient in applying mathematical calculations. Workplace managers contribute significantly to the development of these skills through their job functions; for example, when using optical equipment, dispensing prescriptions, and conducting sales analysis.
- Apprentices take pride in their learning and enjoy their work as optical consultants or pharmacy advisers. They are enthusiastic and appreciate how the new skills they develop contribute to their future employability. Attendance is good at the off-the-job training sessions, where apprentices enjoy discussing and sharing ideas together. They extend their knowledge further by using a wide variety of technical online resources developed

by the company and by attending specialist additional training.

- Apprentices demonstrate a high level of professional attitude and behaviours. They improve personal and social skills such as independence and self-organisation. Their increased confidence and self-assurance enable them to support others in their team well. The majority have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities as an employee.
- Apprentices' work is professional and meets industry standards. Employers are particularly pleased with the high levels of customer service skills which apprentices demonstrate and their competence to carry out complex sales of products and services independently. Apprentices are highly valued by branch staff.
- Apprentices benefit from extending their understanding of how businesses operate in society today. They work in teams to complete a business challenge, through which they develop a useful insight into a range of external influences and considerations, such as the importance of the use of language when marketing a new product or service.
- The thorough information, advice and guidance that apprentices receive ensure that they join a programme that meets their career aspirations and interests. They receive ongoing information about progression opportunities within the company and wider industry. The vast majority aspire to progress within the company or to further higher-level training within the optical or pharmacy industries.
- Apprentices demonstrate a good working knowledge of equality and diversity and understand well the sensitivities that can occur when dealing with customers, for example by ensuring that there is adequate space for a customer's wheelchair, putting them at ease, and enabling them to take their eye test in comfort.
- Apprentices feel safe and follow safety procedures at work. They are clear about how to report safeguarding concerns, if they should arise, and know how to keep safe online, for example when using social media. However, their understanding of the risks and dangers posed by radicalism and extremism and their implications in the wider community is superficial. Assessors and tutors do not routinely broaden apprentices' understanding of these topics.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The apprenticeship programme is insufficiently challenging for some learners, particularly those with a higher ability. Some learners are already very well qualified in other sectors before they start their programme. They are enjoying learning about the healthcare sector, but they find that the academic content is not sufficiently challenging for them. In these cases, these apprentices do not make progress according to their potential.
- Apprentices are able to meet the technical language and mathematical requirements of their frameworks. However, they do not further develop these skills while on the programme, considering their starting points. Leaders and managers have recently removed the requirement for prospective apprentices to enter the programme having achieved already a qualification in English and mathematics. Only two learners were required to take functional skills this year, and they achieved them successfully.
- The proportion of qualification units where apprentices achieved a higher grade has increased considerably in the current year. However, in these cases of higher

achievement managers do not know if apprentices made good progress against what was expected of them, as they do not measure the apprentices' starting points to plan their learning programme.

- Last year, apprentices achieved at a rate comparable to the national average. Although achievement by the optical apprentices who began their training under the previous management team continued to be low, it was good for the pharmacy apprentices. The large majority of apprentices achieved within the planned time last year – a significant improvement since the previous inspection.
- The number of pharmacy apprentices that stay long enough to complete their programme is not sufficiently high, due to a few learners withdrawing from the programme for personal reasons. Assessors and mentors have made appropriate efforts to support these apprentices with their training programme. In the current cohort, all apprentices who remained on programme have completed within the planned time.
- All apprentices who successfully achieve their programme gain promotion in the workplace with a commensurate increase in salary. A few have already progressed to high-profile positions such as store manager or national trainer.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51573
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	93
Principal/CEO	Angela McShane
Telephone number	07384 237208
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+		
	12	26	-	-	-	-		
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	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and funding 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 learners and workplace supervisors; 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

Maria Navarro, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector
Bryan Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018