

# Boots UK Limited

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 51537

**Name of lead inspector:** Bob Hamp HMI

**Visit date(s):** 11–12 November 2020

  

**Type of provider:** Employer

  

**Address:** Boots the Chemists Ltd  
Thane Road  
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## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

### Information about the provider

Boots UK Limited (Boots) is a pharmacy-led health and beauty retailer and is part of Walgreens Boots Alliance Group. It was founded over 170 years ago and has its headquarters in Nottingham, from which it delivers product development, store support, manufacturing and distribution functions. Boots delivers levy-funded standards-based level 2 apprenticeships. At the time of the visit, 112 apprentices study the pharmacy services assistant, 10 study the optical assistant and six study the beauty and make-up consultant.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders and managers were faced with a huge increase in demand for medication at the start of the pandemic. This required pharmacy apprentices to work longer hours. By contrast, optical and beauty apprentices were facing store closures, furloughs and redundancies due to restrictions imposed on personal contact. The decision to support the delivery of all apprenticeship courses was made in March. As a result, classroom-based delivery was replaced by online workshops and the further development of online learning and support was prioritised to allow all apprentices to continue with their studies.

Assessor/tutors supported apprentices to adjust to the demands of the online workshops and online delivery of their courses. Apprentices report more frequent communications with their peers and assessor/tutors and an increase in the range of

resources available to them, including videos, presentations and training packages. Monthly surveys undertaken by leaders and managers confirm that the vast majority of apprentices found these changes effective.

Apprentices' progress is monitored through bi-weekly intervention reporting. Assessor/tutors review and set actions for apprentices. Leaders and managers quality assure these actions and ensure that they are completed. Leaders and managers have oversight of these decisions through exception reporting and confirm that they challenge staff on action completion.

Attendance to workshop sessions is reported to be high. Assessor/tutors have maintained standards of punctuality for online workshop sessions during the restrictions.

Leaders and managers refer to the collaboration with end-point assessment providers as a positive outcome of the pandemic. The collaboration included the development of additional training resources to support online learning and the use of communications technology to deliver end-point assessments. As a result, apprentices continued to complete their courses during the pandemic.

### **What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Managers and assessor/tutors ensure that all apprentices receive training, development and assessment through virtual workshops. These planned sessions are enhanced by online learning packages and monthly reviews. Opportunities to undertake in-store observations are made where possible. Assessor/tutors develop the use of quizzes and webinars as part of these workshops. For example, pharmacy apprentices attended a webinar from Boots' chief pharmacist.

All staff ensure that training and assessment take account of COVID-19 restrictions and the three-tier alert levels. For example, pharmacy apprentices with increased workloads attend shorter sessions to accommodate in-store commitments. Furloughed beauty and optical apprentices attend longer online workshop sessions. Assessor/tutors work closely with beauty apprentices to complete practical tasks on family members in their 'bubble' to support their learning.

Assessor/tutors ensure that online learning resources are mapped to curriculum plans. Break-out sessions, introduced during the delivery of virtual workshops, enable assessor/tutors and apprentices to identify gaps in understanding and select appropriate topics to complete. This is particularly useful for apprentices who are unable to access the workplace.

Assessors/tutors have benefited from training in online learning packages and feel confident in using them. Managers remain committed to providing continuing professional development. For example, assessors are supported to complete their

qualifications online during the COVID-19 restrictions. Managers have also identified learning champions to provide support to staff and apprentices.

Information, advice and guidance have been particularly useful for apprentices who have been furloughed or made redundant during the pandemic. Careers information is updated frequently and includes blogs from pharmacy apprentices about what it is like working during the pandemic.

### **How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

Leaders and managers have updated the safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty policy following the COVID-19 restrictions. They have increased contact with external agencies, including the local 'Prevent' duty coordinator and local safeguarding groups, to keep up to date with relevant information.

Safeguarding champions have been appointed in response to the dangers of increased online activity, counter-terrorism and the pandemic. Staff and apprentices report that they are confident about how to spot phishing links in emails and fake meeting requests, and how to stay safe when using video conferencing.

Apprentices confirm that safeguarding and online safety are discussed with assessor/tutors and managers and they know whom to contact if they have any concerns for themselves or their peers.

Leaders and managers are focused on the well-being of staff and apprentices. Apprentices are aware of the support available to them such as the employee assistance programme, which offers a wide range of online personal support services.

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