

Inspection of The Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology

Inspection dates:

21 to 23 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Inadequate
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

The Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology is an independent learning provider based in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. They provide training and apprenticeships in ophthalmology services. They obtained a contract to provide levy-funded apprenticeships in November 2017 and began enrolling apprentices in October 2018. At the time of the inspection, there were 14 adult apprentices studying level 4 healthcare science associate apprenticeships based in NHS trusts across England. The provider works with one subcontractor that teaches apprentices English and mathematics in preparation for their functional skills qualifications as part of their apprenticeship.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Most apprentices enjoy their learning. They recognise the value of the resources they have been given to help them to study. As practising ophthalmic technicians, they are committed to their vocational area. However, the curriculum has not been designed to help them develop knowledge, skills and behaviours beyond those that they had when they started the apprenticeship.

Apprentices are motivated to study for a qualification that supports career progression and recognition of their technical skills within the NHS. However, for too many apprentices, particularly those for whom English is an additional language, state that the volume and frequency of written assessment are too great, and they become demotivated over time.

Apprentices value the vocational knowledge of their assessors and work-based mentors. They recognise the support they receive from them when they meet. However, too much reliance is placed on work-based support and independent learning as opposed to a clearly planned and sequenced curriculum that is taught effectively. Assessors do not meet with apprentices frequently enough to support their learning.

Apprentices feel safe both in work and with the provider. They have a clear understanding of safeguarding practices in the workplace but are better able to explain this from the perspective of their patients and service users than from their own.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders do not ensure that the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship are met. Apprentices do not develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours as many have worked in the sector as ophthalmic technicians for more than 5 years. The knowledge that they do acquire is not sufficient to claim public funds for an apprenticeship and is more akin to continuous professional development (CPD) activities that should be funded by their employer.

Leaders ensure that the taught curriculum for the embedded diploma qualification is logically sequenced, allowing those who have been out of education for some time to start with a focus on study skills before moving on to vocational knowledge, which underpins work in an ophthalmic clinic. Leaders have not created effective assessments that link to the apprenticeship. On too many occasions, apprentices are asked to complete additional work, which increases their already high workload and causes anxiety. For example, they complete additional assignments that are not required for their apprenticeship when they already have the skills.

Apprentices do not receive any teaching as part of their apprenticeship, and they learn very little. Apprentices are provided with learning resources to study, and they subsequently pass due to their extensive experience and knowledge of the sector.

Assessors do not meet with all apprentices regularly enough. For some apprentices, the gap between progress reviews is too long. Progress reviews are too brief and place a disproportionate focus on assessment completion as opposed to developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to make a greater contribution at work. Too many apprentices do not benefit from enough assessor support to make the rapid progress of which they are capable. For example, a few apprentices have not spoken to their assessors in over seven months.

Leaders do not ensure that employers and workplace mentors attend apprentices' progress reviews regularly. In too many cases, employers are not involved in the planning of learning to create opportunities for apprentices to practise the knowledge and skills they are learning. The provider does not effectively support workplace mentors to understand their role in supporting apprentices at work. As a result, the quality of on- and off-the-job learning is inconsistent and depends on the workplace mentors' enthusiasm, availability and understanding of the apprenticeship.

Apprentices who speak English as an additional language and those who require English and mathematics functional skills to complete their apprenticeship are not offered enough support to help them achieve their apprenticeship. Leaders and assessors do not ensure that apprentices complete English and mathematics skills assessments at the start of their apprenticeship to identify gaps in their knowledge. Many apprentices seek additional English support from their colleagues and families and attend classes at other providers to support them in completing their assessments. These apprentices do not make the rapid progress they are capable of.

Leaders and assessors do not make appropriate use of apprentices' prior learning and experience to plan a challenging curriculum. Most apprentices have worked for many years in ophthalmic technician roles, but this is not considered when planning their learning. Although apprentices are successful at end-point assessment, this is due to their extensive experience prior to them starting the apprenticeship.

Leaders have not planned or taught a personal development curriculum as part of the apprenticeship. While apprentices complete reflective assessments on mental health, they do not have the opportunity to discuss this further. They discuss fundamental British values within the context of their work but have no wider understanding of areas such as democracy or the rule of law. As a result, apprentices do not develop their broader understanding of life in modern Britain throughout their apprenticeship.

Leaders do not ensure that apprentices receive any careers education, information, advice or guidance. Too many apprentices do not have a clear understanding of the opportunities available to them once they have completed their apprenticeship. A few apprentices are not interested in progression but are focused on gaining the accredited qualification incorporated into the apprenticeship that demonstrates their prior skills and will give them professional certification.

Leaders have recruited highly knowledgeable and experienced practitioners as assessors. Leaders encourage assessors to keep up to date with current sector practices. However, they do not encourage or support assessors to complete CPD related to their teaching practice. As a result, apprentices do not benefit from effective design and assessment of the curriculum to help them learn.

Leaders do not ensure that they have quality assurance processes that extend beyond the requirements of the awarding organisation. They do not routinely gather or use data effectively to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeships that they provide, for example using attendance data to identify when assessor reviews have been missed. Those responsible for governance do not have sufficient information to be able to hold leaders to account and improve the quality of training that apprentices receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff receive safeguarding training through their work with the NHS as well as with the provider. They have put in place appropriate policies and procedures to ensure that staff know how to keep apprentices safe. They follow safer recruitment checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with apprentices.

Leaders have appropriate links to safeguarding services in the local area; however, they have not yet developed these links to cover the regions in which apprentices work.

Minor administrative errors in safeguarding documentation were rectified during the inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should develop robust processes to enable them to monitor the quality of education that apprentices receive and the progress that all apprentices make.
- Leaders and assessors should use assessed starting points effectively to ensure that apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviour throughout their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices are given support to develop their English and mathematics skills throughout their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentice progress review meetings are frequent and regular and support all apprentices to make swift progress on their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that communication with employers to review apprentices' progress is frequent and includes planning and reviews of on- and off-the-job learning.

- Leaders should ensure that those responsible for governance are given appropriate and effective information to allow them to hold leaders and managers to account to swiftly improve the quality of training that apprentices receive.
- Leaders should ensure that all teaching staff develop their teaching skills through planned training.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices receive impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance to understand their next steps.
- Leaders should ensure all apprentices have sufficient opportunities to help them develop their knowledge of healthy lifestyles and well-being and to understand local risks.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2539296
Address	59 New St Burton-On-Trent DE14 3QY
Contact number	01283 204846
Website	www.ahpo.net
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rosalind Harrison
Provider type	Independent Learning Provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Runway Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Centre, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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