

INSPECTION REPORT

Vidal Sassoon

04 November 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Vidal Sassoon is an international hairdressing company with salons in London, Manchester and Leeds. The foundation and advanced modern apprentices in hairdressing are all employees of the company.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The quality of learning in hairdressing is good. The leadership and management of Vidal Sassoon are satisfactory, as are equality of opportunity and quality assurance.

GRADES

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	3

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- outstanding practical training
- high attainment of practical skills by learners
- good training resources
- good health and safety practices
- outstanding staff development in hairdressing
- good range of progression opportunities
- effective complaints procedures
- strong commitment to continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- poor implementation of key skills
- inadequate initial assessment
- poor use of data
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities
- inadequate quality assurance procedures

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more consistent written feedback on assignments
- better use of promotional materials

THE INSPECTION

1. Four inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Vidal Sassoon in November 2002. They visited all nine salons (excluding Glasgow) in the United Kingdom (UK) during which 36 salon managers, trainers and artistic directors were interviewed. Sixty-five learners were interviewed. Fifty-nine portfolios and 52 individual learning plans were examined. Inspectors observed and graded 16 learning sessions. Inspectors watched a video and examined photographs of learners' work. They examined a range of documents including business plans, management information, minutes of meetings, staff details, appraisals, and learners' questionnaires. Inspectors studied the August 2002 self-assessment report which was the first produced by the company.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	3	10	2	1	0	0	0	16
Total	3	10	2	1	0	0	0	16

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Vidal Sassoon opened his first formal private school in 1969. The company has always maintained a thriving business in training other hairdressers from around the world, as well as operating a chain of hairdressing salons. The salons and schools organisation was sold to two of his colleagues in 1983. The company still maintains the same hairdressing philosophy and standards. The organisation has grown to incorporate 11 schools/education centres and 25 salons throughout England, Scotland, Wales, Germany, Canada and the United States of America. Vidal Sassoon produces technical teaching tools through mail order and over-the-counter sales. It runs shows and a seminars business, which teaches new techniques to other hairdressers, supports product launches and aids the training programmes of other hairdressing companies. Vidal Sassoon hair professionals are in demand to provide hair support to magazines, photo shoots and fashion shows.

3. Vidal Sassoon maintains a dedicated staff training salon and a large number of training staff devoting between 20 to 100 per cent of their time, to training of foundation and advanced modern apprentices. The modern apprentices are considered to be future staff, predominantly in UK salons, but also around the world. The inspection included the single salons in Cardiff, Leeds and Manchester, as well as six salons and the staff training salon in London. The UK company employs approximately 400 staff. Each week, approximately 3,000 clients and 140 fee-paying students are serviced by these businesses.

4. The company has a formal management structure which comprises the UK executive team of managing director (co-owner), director of colour and technical research (co-owner), international human resources director, international creative director and international marketing director. The regional management team is made up of the general manager of salons, general manager of schools, UK creative director, and UK head of colour and technical research. The team in each salon or school is made up of a manager, creative director and head of department (tinting and perming), stylists, tinter/permers, modern apprentices (assistants) and a reception team. Several Vidal Sassoon staff are internationally known and a number of ex-staff have also gone on from the company to establish international reputations. There are 117 modern apprentices funded through a national contract with the national contracts service of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Vidal Sassoon draw staff from all over the country, from a range of educational backgrounds.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Practical training for young people in hairdressing is outstanding. There are good progression opportunities in the company, and learners can participate in many events to enhance their training. Particularly good attention is paid to health and safety by learners and trainers. Initial assessment is not adequate to form the basis of the individual learning plans. Training in key skills is not started until several months into training. The retention rates for foundation modern apprentices were poor, but are improving.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

6. Vidal Sassoon is a privately owned international hairdressing company, which the present owners bought in 1983. In addition to its hairdressing salons, the company is also involved in the training of fee-paying students and the teaching of new techniques to established hairdressers. They train many of their own staff through modern apprenticeships. The managing director and director of colour and technical research are the owners, and there are four executive directors. The executive director for human resources has overall responsibility for training. Two senior managers in the UK headquarters and a training co-ordinator oversee and co-ordinate the modern apprenticeship programmes. All learners are employed by the company and are trained in the hairdressing salons where they work. The training is given by salon staff and management, who have been trained in-house for the role. National vocational qualification (NVQ) assessors are also based in the salons and have appropriate assessor qualifications. There are a range of policies and procedures in place related to equal opportunities and quality assurance. Vidal Sassoon has a three-year business plan which was produced in 2001. Prior to April 2001, it was part of the Focus Central London Training and Enterprise Council's (TEC) direct contract. They have been directly contracted by the national contracts service for the past 18 months and produced their first self-assessment report in August 2002. There is no subcontracted training.

STRENGTHS

- strong culture of learning throughout the organisation
- outstanding staff development in hairdressing
- open, consultative management style
- good range of varied progression opportunities
- effective complaints procedures
- strong commitment to continuous improvement
- accurate self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- poor use of data
- insufficient training and information on equality of opportunity
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities
- inadequate quality assurance procedures
- inadequate internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of promotional materials

7. There is a strong culture of learning throughout Vidal Sassoon and everyone is interested and enthusiastic about keeping themselves up to date with the latest techniques. In addition to its training of modern apprentices, Sassoon has a 'varderer' scheme which trains qualified hairdressers who wish to join the company. There is continuation training for its own employees who have achieved modern apprenticeship frameworks in order to bring them up to Vidal Sassoon's own standards. The staff training school trains staff who want to pursue specialised training for a new career path within Vidal Sassoon, such as artistic directors. Job descriptions for all grades of hairdresser include a requirement to pass on knowledge and advice to modern apprentices during work activities, in addition to any formal training given. This extra training is given by some of the most talented staff in the company. As all training is carried out in the workplace, managers have responsibility for all aspects of learners' progress. The commitment to good training is throughout the company and is encouraged by all levels of management. Assessors are based in the salons and are involved with the teaching staff in the planning, training and assessment on an ongoing basis. As the assessors are present in the workplace, assessment can take place whenever there is a suitable opportunity. Salon managers and creative directors in the salons are actively involved in the learners' progress reviews and associated action-planning. All learners are trained on an allocated day each week and have numerous opportunities to learn through observation during the rest of the working week and by attending Vidal Sassoon shows and soirees. When the NVQ is achieved, learners who have not completed the modern apprenticeship framework are kept in full-time training and not allowed to work in the salons until they do so.

8. Staff development is outstanding. The firm has a staff development system called 'directional paths' which employees are encouraged to take in order to achieve their aims for role changes within the company. Once accepted onto a directional path all staff training needs and activities are evaluated, with feedback on performance to the employee. Records of training are kept in files in the salons and on the central human resources management information system. In all cases, the standards are very high.

9. The management style is open and consultative. Vidal Sassoon has a number of well-established communication channels. Learners can raise problems through their mentor, salon representative or head assistant, in order for them to be passed on through meetings. The open management style allows and encourages learners to approach salon management or senior Vidal Sassoon management directly. Managers have implemented improvements from the salons on a number of occasions. For example, the decentralisation of modern apprenticeship training in London and its provision back to individual salons, and ideas on training areas being taken on board when salons are refurbished. There is a well-defined organisational structure with the roles and responsibilities of each grade detailed in their job descriptions. There are clear and effective procedures for the recruitment of staff. All applicants are interviewed and successful applicants undergo a thorough induction process. Staff have comprehensive job descriptions. All staff involved in assessment and verification are occupationally competent and qualified. The staff appraisal system is well recorded and is linked to the setting and achievement of personal objectives.

VIDAL SASSOON

10. Vidal Sassoon is a member of, and is in regular contact with, all major national and international hairdressing organisations. Internal communications are maintained through the use of information technology (IT), written communications and staff meetings at all levels. Meetings are minuted and agreed action points are communicated to staff. Vidal Sassoon actively encourages open debate and welcomes suggestions for improvement and the identification of weaknesses. Salon managers keep colleagues aware of developments through regular staff meetings, but they are not always effective for sharing information on training developments. Regular meetings are held at various management levels, where the quality of provision and the performance of business units is monitored and reviewed. Health and safety is well-managed and includes an annual review at all salons.

11. The use of data is poor. The management information system does not include training. The human resources department maintains a spreadsheet with details of all learners from which the staff can produce reports showing information on the salon, gender, ethnicity and year. Managers at the company's headquarters have accurate and current data on the number of starts, and retention and achievement rates. Salon managers rely on the data produced at the headquarters. Staff are not aware of any national averages or benchmarks, although they have requested them from a variety of organisations. As Vidal Sassoon has only had its own training contract for the past 18 months, there are limited data to identify trends. The current data are not used to generate targets for retention and achievement rates or equal opportunities. Data are not collected at head office to monitor the achievement of NVQ units, although this is available in salons. Headquarters' staff have not set targets for individual salons or areas to improve retention and achievement rates. All learners who are retained, complete the framework eventually, even if progress is slow in some cases. The company has been investigating ways to improve the retention rates. A pilot scheme has been introduced in Manchester, where teaching and assessment staff act as mentors and this seems to have improved the retention rates. It is planned to introduce the scheme throughout the company. The London salons have carried out all NVQ training in the workplace since 2001, and the rate of progress has increased. The company identified weaknesses in initial assessment and teaching of key skills and plans are in place for improvements to be put in place in January 2003.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

12. Vidal Sassoon is positive about equality of opportunity. There is clear intention to ensure that all staff and learners can progress within the company. The equal opportunities and harassment policies are comprehensive and provide effective protection for employees. Policies are reviewed at least each year to ensure that recent legislation is included. Updated documents are distributed to all salons each year or whenever a change occurs. Managers are responsible for the local management of equal opportunities and support is provided through the human resources department. All employees are given a copy of the policies during induction. The main areas of most salons have good physical access. Some training takes place either upstairs or in basement locations which have limited access, but the main salon could be used if access is a problem. In some salons, ramps are available to allow wheelchair access to the main salon. When salons are refurbished, there is a policy in place to ensure full access for those with restricted mobility.

13. There is a wide range of opportunities to progress within the company. Learners can choose which area of hairdressing they would like to specialise in, including colouring and perming, working towards becoming an artistic director, manager or teacher in the training schools. Opportunities are also available for work in the promotional and show team. Across the company there is a good variety of role models, which are used to promote diversity and equality. At careers events and at pre-course induction, Vidal Sassoon effectively use male staff and those from minority ethnic groups to promote positive role models. Around 6 per cent of learners are recruited from minority ethnic groups. The recruitment of male learners is good and currently they represent 14 per cent of learners.

14. There is an effective complaints procedure and all staff are fully aware of it. There are a number of routes which staff can use to raise grievances and concerns, as well as a formal grievance procedure. Each salon has an elected salon staff representative who staff can refer to, if they feel unable to raise concerns with their manager, trainer or mentor. The human resources department at the head office is considered to be approachable if staff have problems which cannot be solved in the salon. All staff are fully aware of these mechanisms and are confident about using them. There is a company policy which ensures that any disciplinary action is agreed with a minimum of two senior managers before any formal action is taken. Complaints are well recorded and full records are kept on file.

15. There is insufficient training and information on equality of opportunity. Learners are not given clear information on what might be an equal opportunities issue, or how this could be identified. At the induction, learners are told about the equal opportunities policy and are told how to use the harassment procedure, but the information is not reinforced throughout the training. There are no resources available to help learners or staff understand equality of opportunity issues and how they might apply to the hairdressing industry. However, the strong role models and culture of Vidal Sassoon helps learners to understand. Staff have not been trained in equality of opportunity and

there is insufficient knowledge of how to improve learners' understanding.

16. Equal opportunities are not effectively monitored during the review process. Learners are not routinely asked to consider equality and there is no area on the progress review form for the reviewer to record concerns. Learners know where to raise complaints and grievances, but equality issues are insufficiently recorded. Learners attention is not drawn to potential problems which may occur during workplace situations. Data are collected on the diversity of learners in training, but they are not used to target specific areas of under-representation. Data are not used to ensure that managers monitor the diversity of the company, or benchmark against local or national diversity.

17. The company has previously produced some excellent materials which helped to promote equality and diversity to potential learners, but these have recently been withdrawn and replaced with less appropriate materials focusing on the fashion points of the industry.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

18. There is a strong commitment to continuous improvement throughout the company, despite the absence of formal written quality assurance procedures. The high standards on which Vidal Sassoon insists, provides an excellent learning environment for hairdressing modern apprentices. The company is an acknowledged leader in the field of hairdressing and their learners are in high demand throughout the sector. Although trainers are not formally observed, the amount of team working ensures that managers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their training staff. All staff observed or interviewed by inspectors are interested in sharing good practice and in promoting improvements to training. Learners and staff are asked for their views on training using questionnaires. There is an accurate self-assessment process. The self-assessment report for August 2002, was the first to be produced by the company and is structured around the seven questions in the 'Common Inspection Framework'. It was written by members of the senior management team, who consulted salon management, teaching and assessment staff and learners. The report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses subsequently identified by inspectors. A comprehensive action plan has been produced to deal with the weaknesses identified through the self-assessment process.

19. Quality assurance procedures are inadequate. A quality assurance policy was written in October 2002, but has yet to be circulated to staff. The policy lists the various reports and data which are to be generated, and the manuals and booklets which lay down the standards expected in all aspects of hairdressing. The policy does not explain how the various elements of the quality assurance system fit together or recognise the impact on the learner. The hairdressing procedures in the company's manuals are very clear and well presented. However, there is no formal process to ensure that the procedures are followed.

20. Internal verification is inadequate. It is limited to the assessment of written assignments and portfolio evidence with insufficient observation of the assessors. There are a number of novice assessors in salons who are not supported by observation and direct feedback on their performance. Feedback on assessment is sometimes sent by the salon managers and does not always reach the assessors who could not attend the meetings. Internal verification of written assignments is identifying problems such as insufficient detail on data protection. There is insufficient co-ordination of internal verification and it is not standard throughout the company. For example, it is more consistent in one salon which is an approved centre in its own right. However, there is little impact on learners because the high standards required mean that practical assessments are valid and are supported by evidence such as client analysis sheets and photographs.

Good Practice

Vidal Sassoon has strong links with local careers services, schools and Project Trident which is a national project to arrange work experience for pupils and allows structured work experience for up to two weeks. Learners who are now modern apprentices state that it was a useful and rewarding experience. Early research shows better retention rates among learners who have done work experience.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	117	2

21. Vidal Sassoon offers foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in hairdressing, leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and a key skills qualification. There are two intakes a year, in July and September. The training programmes are planned to allow most learners to complete a foundation modern apprenticeship framework in one to two years and an advanced modern apprenticeship framework in two to three years. There are 73 foundation modern apprentices and 44 advanced modern apprentices. All learners are employed in salons belonging to Vidal Sassoon and are situated in London, Manchester, Cardiff and Leeds. There are also four training schools situated in London. Recruitment is managed from the head office in London where they promote nationally for employees. Learners are invited to attend a pre-induction evening with their guardian. Learners have a week's induction at the start of their programme, where they cover course requirements, appeals procedure, health and safety, equal opportunities, NVQs and key skills and the company's history and philosophy. A company devised initial assessment is carried out with learners at the interview stage. For foundation and advanced modern apprentices, the training is carried out on one day a week. Level 2 and 3 learners have regular, planned assessments by their allocated in-salon trainer/assessor. Each learner has an allocated mentor in the salon. Vidal Sassoon's staff have the appropriate assessment and verification qualifications. There are no members of staff with basic or key skills qualifications, although some members have attended a key skills workshop.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	1		4		67		59		89						
Retained*	0		0		0		0		0							
Successfully completed	0		0		0		12		9							
Still in learning	1		4		25		10		4							

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	61		55													
Retained*	0		0														
Successfully completed	0		0														
Still in learning	47		26														

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- outstanding practical training
- high attainment of practical skills by learners
- many enhancements to training
- good training resources
- good health and safety practices
- good induction process
- good mentoring project in Manchester salon

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- poor implementation of key skills
- inadequate initial assessment
- ineffective progress reviews

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more consistent written feedback on assignments

22. Practical training in hairdressing is outstanding. Of the 16 observations made by inspectors, 13 were outstanding or very good. Trainers work with salon staff in order to ensure that learners develop practical skills which will enable them to work in one of the Vidal Sassoon salons worldwide. Learners constantly work alongside stylists as they carry out a full range of salon services. In larger salons, learners rotate between different stylists every three months to encourage exposure to different aspects of hairdressing

skills. Off-the-job training is scheduled throughout the year in all salons and takes place on one day a week. It is mainly practical training, but in the five London salons there are additional sessions on background knowledge which are attended by learners on a rota basis. Learners have at least three models during practical training and they are scheduled to ensure that practical skills are developed in logical progression. Trainers demonstrate techniques on a model and learners copy the techniques on their own models. Learners benefit from close attention and support in practical training, with a maximum of six learners to a practical trainer. All learners enjoy their training sessions and can see the relevance to the practical skills. In the background knowledge sessions, which are an integral part of the practical demonstrations, learners participate well and are fully involved in the development of the session. Emphasis is placed on the characteristics of male and female styles and achieving finishes on Asian or African-Caribbean hair types. Trainers make links between practical activities to emphasise key points. Learners understand the need to study background knowledge and can give relevant information when recommending products to clients. The strength of outstanding practical training was identified in the self-assessment report.

23. Learners who were observed within their practical training demonstrated a high level of attainment. Learners who have been on their training programme for a short period of time showed competence in some of their practical NVQ units, such as in cutting and blow-drying. Some learners demonstrate abilities above the NVQ level. Learners have developed confidence, they question their trainer when they are unsure of something or simply want more information. Inspectors felt that the long hair work they saw in several salons was of an outstanding level, some being produced by learners who were only a few months into their training.

24. Learners receive significant enhancements to their training including attending trade exhibitions and additional training sessions from professional hair product companies. Recent training has included massage techniques and new colouring products. Vidal Sassoon effectively develops learners' artistic skills, which includes visits to art exhibitions. The salons hold annual events for learners to participate in shows and all learners participate either in London or elsewhere. Models are selected and learners design a 'total look' including clothes. In the London event, a new learner did much of the compering. Several hundred friends and family attended to see the work and all learners enjoyed the event, which makes good evidence for NVQ level 3 work. Learners have the chance to see launches of new hair collections twice a year and the creative team often demonstrate to staff in salons. Potential creative directors put on shows, which are attended by learners. This exposure to events provides learners with an excellent insight into creative hairdressing techniques at a higher level than would normally be seen. Many participate as assistants in professional photo-shoots of hairstyles. Some learners do work during end of term shows for local arts colleges.

25. The standard of resources to support training is outstanding. Practical off-the-job training is carried out in professionally designed salons of the highest standards. Many have areas dedicated to learners for their training days. Learners work on a wide range of clients, many of outstanding quality for fashion work at NVQ level 3. Although some

VIDAL SASSOON

models are booked in by the salon reception, learners often take responsibility for finding their own clients. Most learners average three models on training days at NVQ level 2 and more at NVQ level 3. There is a wide range of professional hairdressing products and equipment available to learners. The training staff and range of stylists available to learners is outstanding. Learners can watch stylists on a daily basis, who take time out to explain techniques that they are using on clients. Demonstrations of practical skills are given by hairdressers who present to other professional hairdressers on a regular basis at seminars around the world.

26. Standards of health and safety are exemplary in all salons. At induction, health and safety is thoroughly covered and is continually reinforced in training and in the daily work of salons. Learners are all aware of the need for maintaining high standards of hygiene. Hair is swept up immediately and food and drink are only consumed in designated areas. During demonstrations, emphasis is placed on protecting clients and removing jewellery that might cause problems. All learners are given information on hand care to avoid shampoo dermatitis. Special creams are provided near washbasins and cotton gloves are provided for those who need them. Trainers demonstrate good practice by always wearing gloves when checking the development of chemicals on hair. Skin tests are given before the use of colourants. All learners have knowledge of the regulations concerning the safe use of chemicals and manual handling. Staff who have had problems with dermatitis are helped to overcome it, which includes providing medical help. All learners portray a professional yet fashionable dress code in the salon, wearing appropriate footwear to protect their feet. Staff rooms at all salons contain prominent reminders about health and safety.

27. There is a good induction process. After the interview stage, learners are invited with their guardian to a pre-induction evening to make learners aware of their role within Vidal Sassoon. Managers, artistic directors, stylists and assistants give accounts of how they came into the company and how they developed into their job roles. Information on the training programmes is also discussed. Senior members of the salon teams carry out the main induction over at least a week, with similar arrangements for any late starters. The learner receives a detailed induction into the company and its philosophy. Learners are given a comprehensive induction pack, which reinforces all the detailed information given throughout the week. Learners demonstrate a good understanding and recall of their induction.

28. There is a good mentoring project in the Manchester salon which was developed to improve the retention rates. Each learner is allocated a mentor, who is also their trainer or assessor. Through the internal verification system, learner's progress is monitored effectively. Mentors and learners are given very specific action plans each month, which allows learners and mentors to be fully aware of the support and action needed to progress the learners' NVQ work. Actions and targets which are not achieved are checked with the manager and new targets are set. Retention rates have improved in Manchester, as have the speed of progression through the NVQs.

29. The amount and quality of written feedback on assignments varies between

trainers. Some comment on aspects of presentation or use of photographs, and others pick up on spelling mistakes. There is insufficient consistency in the feedback to enable learners to improve their performance. Internal verification does not concentrate sufficiently on the observation of assessments.

30. The retention rates are poor for foundation modern apprentices. In 2001-02, the retention rate was 47 per cent, and for 2002-03 it has improved to 77 per cent. However, it is too early in the programme to make judgements. For advanced modern apprentices the retention rates over the same period is 100 per cent, but there are very few learners. Learners develop good skills, but many foundation modern apprentices could complete in a shorter time. Many complete in 15 to 18 months, but others take over two years.

31. Key skills are not fully implemented throughout the company. Some key skills assignments and activities have been developed but it is too early to see their impact. Some learners are working towards the wrong level of key skills. Some assessors have attended a key skills workshop, but there is limited understanding. Recently learners have completed some work towards the key skills, but in some cases, this is after they have been training for a long time. Key skills are not included in the training and assessment days and this was identified in the self-assessment report.

32. The initial assessment is inadequate. A basic skills test has been devised by the company, but it is poor and does not identify what support is required for learners who have additional needs. There is no initial assessment for key skills to identify the correct level. There is little account of learners past learning or experience, and school qualifications are not widely used to determine the exemptions from external tests. The initial assessment is not used as a basis for individual learning plans. Targets are not challenging enough and learners are given the same end dates for unit completion across the company. Most of the target dates are not individual to the learner and if the learner achieves before that date the plans are not regularly updated.

33. The quarterly progress reviews are ineffective. They do not include specific targets and actions for the learners to achieve before the next review. Comments by the reviewer are general and do not make an impact on the learner's progress. The reviews do not identify any additional support for learners and equality of opportunity is not reinforced.

Good Practice

Managers, artistic directors, trainers and stylists at Vidal Sassoon are excellent professional role models for learners. This is through their appearance, interpersonal skills with clients, awareness of health and safety and through demonstrations of hairdressing skills.

Learners at Vidal Sassoon take part in a hairdressing show at least once a year. The show is held in the evening in an outside venue where learners can invite guardians and friends. Learners select their own models and create a 'total look'. The show provides evidence for NVQ level 3 and encourages confidence.

Poor Practice

Key skills are not introduced into training for several months and opportunities to gather evidence are not taken.