

INSPECTION REPORT

Vidal Sassoon

15 June 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. As well as training its own staff, Vidal Sassoon is one of the largest trainers of experienced hairdressers in the world, attracting thousands to its schools, shows and seminars. The company teaches new techniques to other hairdressers, supports product launches and aids the training programmes of other hairdressing companies. It also provides hair support to magazines, photoshoots and fashion shows.
2. In November 2002, Regis Corporation acquired Vidal Sassoon (Haircare Ltd). Although there were changes with some of the office functions, the changes did not affect the actual training provided to the learners in the salons. Under the Regis Corporation, the company has embarked on an expansion programme with the introduction of Sassoon Studio, which is a brand of the previous Vidal Sassoon salons. Vidal Sassoon also produces technical teaching tools available to hairdressers the world over, through mail order and over-the-counter sales.
3. In the UK, Vidal Sassoon has salons in Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, Cardiff and six in central London. It also has four schools in central London, plus an internal team members training salon operating out of the Bayswater salon. There are currently three studio salons, in Nottingham, Edinburgh and Liverpool. In the UK, Vidal Sassoon employs approximately 420 team members, of whom 350 are based in salons and the rest in the schools and head office. Each week, approximately 3,000 clients and 140 fee-paying students are serviced by these businesses.
4. The team in each salon is made up of a salon manager, a creative director who is responsible for all salon training and standards, a colour director, stylists, tinter/permers, learners and receptionists. These staff make up the training and assessing staff, with salon managers generally being the internal verifiers and creative directors and some stylists acting as trainer/assessors.
5. Recruitment occurs mainly through direct contact by learners, often following careers visits to schools, work experience or on the recommendation of parents or hairdressers. Vidal Sassoon delivers apprenticeships to 95 learners funded by the National Employer Service.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

6. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Vidal Sassoon's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Provision in retail and commercial enterprise is outstanding.
7. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process involved feedback from staff and learners and accurately identified the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The report is critical and focuses well on the training and experience of learners. The grades given by inspectors are the same or higher than those given in the self-assessment report.

8. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

Good training identified in the 2002 inspection has improved to outstanding, with improved success rates and timely achievement. Most of the weaknesses highlighted in the 2002 inspection have been improved and are now satisfactory.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR VIDAL SASSOON:

- maintain the outstanding level of practical training
- further develop the teaching of essential background knowledge
- maintain and further develop the self-assessment process
- improve the completion and use of long-term training documents
- develop strategies for delivery of literacy, numeracy and language skills support
- further develop strategic planning to widen participation
- continue to develop the use of management information
- further develop planning of quality improvement

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality improvement	2

Retail and commercial enterprise		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hairdressing</i> Apprenticeships for young people	95	1 1

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

9. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 12 days at the Vidal Sassoon head office and seven salons in London, Leeds and Manchester. All aspects of the hairdressing provision were reported on and graded.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	37
Number of staff interviewed	18
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

10. **Learners demonstrate a particularly high level of creative skills.** They carry out carefully planned work which incorporates the wider aspects of fashion. Excellent manipulative skills are used to good effect when creating new looks. Much emphasis is placed on experimenting with colour and shape.

11. **Learners develop good interpersonal skills.** They place an emphasis on high standards of professional care, good manners and mutual respect. Learners have a positive attitude to their clients and the hairdressing industry. Their individuality is reflected in their personal presentation, which is exemplary.

12. **Framework achievement is good.** Overall, two-thirds of learners complete their frameworks. Timely success is good and has increased from 57 per cent in 2003-04 to 64 per cent in 2004-05. Vidal Sassoon's learners achieve skills beyond the standards required for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) before becoming stylists on the shop floor.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Retail and commercial enterprise	7	3	1	0	11
Total	7	3	1	0	11

13. **Practical teaching is outstanding at all centres.** Learners receive individual support and are taught in small groups. Trainers encourage learners to participate to develop their practical skills. Learners experience an exceptionally strong focus on creative development through their training and by assisting different stylists. They have a wide range of models on whom to develop practical skills.

14. **Portfolios are particularly well evidenced and organised.** Practical work is illustrated with mounted photographs and each model worked on is documented with appropriate

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model progress and monitoring sheets. Progress sheets include a grade for the standard of the work from both the trainer and the learner. Some assignments were exemplary in standard, demonstrating high levels of artistic design and research.

15. **Vidal Sassoon provides outstanding additional learning opportunities**, including an annual assistants' end-of-year show, fashion shows for designers, various media events and photoshoots. All learners interviewed have had the chance to assist at external shows. Learners not only attend the main trade shows but take an active part in them. The end-of-year shows allow learners to plan hairstyles, graphics for the invitations, clothes, make-up, choreography, music, visual imagery and themes. Learners visit external venues, such as art galleries, to help develop their artistic abilities. They take additional barbering units and benefit from a period of final intensive training.

16. **Health and safety practices are good.** Every work unit has a built-in disinfectant jar that is maintained and used by learners. All staff and learners maintain high standards of cleanliness, contributing to the cleaning of the salon. Personal and protective equipment is well used when carrying out hairdressing services. Learners are asked a range of health and safety questions at their review to reinforce understanding.

17. **Training resources are outstanding.** All salons are of an exceptional standard, with good-quality products, and teaching staff who have international reputations in the industry. There is an extensive bank of training resources, including Vidal Sassoon's own training videos and publications.

18. Learners receive good initial advice and career guidance at their interview on the range of career paths available at Vidal Sassoon, which is further covered during a comprehensive and memorable induction. All learners have good awareness of what they can progress to in the industry and all learners expect to progress onto advanced apprenticeships.

19. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are screened at induction to identify any literacy and numeracy skills support needs. There are many examples of support, such as learners having readers for written assessments and being given additional time for individual support. Learners have a staff member to help with any problems.

20. Internal verification is satisfactory. Learners have access to fair and reliable assessments. Internal verification is planned with regular sampling of assessment decisions.

21. **The completion of long-term documents is poor.** Individual learning plans are poorly completed and do not include detailed information, such as target dates for the completion of units and individual support needs. Review forms do not accurately record learners' progress or fully record the content of reviews.

Leadership and management

22. **Communication is good and is focused on training**, to the benefit of learners. Good internal communications include the use of e-mail, written communications and staff meetings at all levels. Vidal Sassoon actively encourages open debate and welcomes suggestions for improvement. It focuses well on sharing information on training developments, including data to manage training. Health and safety is managed and

promoted well.

23. **Staff development in hairdressing is outstanding**, and promoted through a particularly strong learning culture throughout the company. All staff maintain and further develop their skills through creative workshops and presentations of new hairdressing collections. The company has a staff training school and continual training is encouraged by all levels of management.

24. **Learners have an unusually wide range of varied progression opportunities.** They can choose a practical area of hairdressing they would like to specialise in as well as different job roles. These include being a stylist, or working towards becoming an artistic director, colour director, manager or trainer in the training schools or salons. Opportunities are also available for work in the promotional and show teams. The staff development system is promoted to learners from induction onwards.

25. **Learners' welfare and security are promoted well.** All learners are aware of, and are confident to use, the effective grievance system. Records show careful recording of complaints and following-up of investigations. Vidal Sassoon is clearly not afraid to tackle problems and intervene where appropriate and has been successful in persuading learners to stay with the company following complaints.

26. **There are many examples of improvements in training.** Vidal Sassoon has improved several of the areas identified as weaknesses in the previous inspection, bringing provision to a satisfactory position. It places a strong emphasis on sharing of good practice as a tool for quality improvement, and the training programme is planned and co-ordinated well.

27. **The provider collects and uses learners' feedback well.** This includes annual and post-induction questionnaires, which Vidal Sassoon analyses and reviews to identify themes and plan appropriate actions to improve the experience of learners. Learners have their own separate staff meetings every six weeks, chaired by a learner. Their feedback is given to managers.

28. Vidal Sassoon has clear and effective procedures for the recruitment of staff with comprehensive job descriptions. Staff involved in assessment and verification are occupationally competent and qualified. Staff appraisal is recorded well and is linked to the setting and achievement of personal objectives. The use of data is satisfactory overall, although insufficiently developed in the monitoring of equality of opportunity.

29. Satisfactory policies on different aspects of equality of opportunity are in place, including a simple guide aimed at explaining the policy to learners. Learners and staff have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. It is covered at induction using a video and a number of relevant scenario discussions. It is reinforced at progress reviews, through the use of a bank of questions.

30. The main areas of most salons have good physical access. Recruitment procedures are satisfactory and all applicants are interviewed.

31. Vidal Sassoon makes at least satisfactory use of management information, collecting comprehensive and accurate information on the progress of learners for each salon, as well as nationally. Learners' reasons for leaving courses are collected and analysed to see

if any corrective action is necessary. A number of learners leave their programmes early for reasons beyond Vidal Sassoon's control, with an element of poaching by other salons taking place.

32. Internal verification is satisfactory, with a comprehensive strategy in place to ensure the awarding body's requirements are met. The provider conducts regular forward planning and sampling of assessment decisions, with feedback to assessors. All assessors maintain their continuous professional development.

33. The self-assessment report process is satisfactory, with suitable input from staff, learners and senior staff and suitable use made of management information and previous inspection reports. The self-assessment report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses subsequently identified by inspectors. Vidal Sassoon has produced an appropriate development plan to deal with the identified weaknesses.

34. **Planning of literacy, numeracy and language skills support is inadequate.** Vidal Sassoon has no policy that details how it will support learners with particular needs, and no guidelines for staff on how to support learners with particular support needs. The support being given meets the needs of current learners but is not recorded in enough detail in individual learning plans and review documents.

35. **Insufficient strategic planning takes place to widen participation.** The provider has no specific strategy for equality and diversity and no development plan other than the one arising out of the self-assessment report. It has no specific targets outside of those agreed with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) relating to equality and no strategies on how these targets would be achieved. Generally, the provider's use of data to manage equality and support strategic planning has been poor.

36. **The provider does not sufficiently plan quality improvement.** It has no overall strategy to explain how quality improvement works at Vidal Sassoon. Although many informal and formal systems cover various aspects of quality improvement, and many examples exist of quality improvement happening, these components have not been brought together into a formal system.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good communication focused on training
- outstanding staff development in hairdressing
- wide range of varied progression opportunities
- good promotion of learners' welfare and security
- good collection and use of learners' feedback
- many examples of improvements in training

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of literacy, numeracy and language skills support
- insufficient strategic planning to widen participation
- insufficient planning of quality improvement

Retail and commercial enterprise

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good achievement of frameworks
- particularly creative practical skills of learners
- good development of learners' interpersonal skills
- outstanding practical teaching
- well-evidenced portfolios
- outstanding additional learning opportunities
- good practices in health and safety
- outstanding training resources

Weaknesses

- poor completion of long-term training documents

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT VIDAL SASSOON:

- 'I will be able to work anywhere in the world because of the reputation of Vidal Sassoon'
- 'we all look forward to the soiree'
- 'I have been able to express my artistic abilities'
- 'I came here because of the 'wow' factor'
- all the different career opportunities available
- 'it's got the highest standards in the industry'
- 'my mum came here to have her hair done and said I had to do my training here'
- 'working with the best people in the industry'
- 'so many people here are an inspiration to me'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK VIDAL SASSOON COULD IMPROVE:

- 'I'm nervous asking people to model'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good communication focused on training
- outstanding staff development in hairdressing
- wide range of varied progression opportunities
- good promotion of learners' welfare and security
- good collection and use of learners' feedback
- many examples of improvements in training

Weaknesses

- inadequate planning of literacy, numeracy and language skills support
- insufficient strategic planning to widen participation
- insufficient planning of quality improvement

37. There is good communication that is focused on training, to the benefit of learners. Good internal communications are maintained through the use of e-mail, written communications and staff meetings at all levels, within salons, across the UK and internationally. Meetings are minuted and agreed action points are communicated to staff. Vidal Sassoon actively encourages open debate and welcomes suggestions for improvement from staff. An open management style allows and encourages learners to approach salon management or senior Vidal Sassoon management directly. Salon managers keep colleagues aware of developments through regular staff meetings, with an improved focus on sharing information on training developments. Data is being collected on learners and is being used to manage training. For example, data is available on learners' progress on every component of their apprenticeship framework. This includes the percentage achieved for individual NVQ units. The data is used in the salon and at head office level. Regular meetings are held at various management levels, where the quality of provision and the performance of salons are monitored and reviewed. The general salon manager visits salons at least once a month, looking at performance and sitting in on training and staff meetings. Internal verifiers attend training meetings on a rota basis. A human resources manager from the Regis Corporation attends key meetings, and some business practices have been adopted from the Regis Corporation. For example, Vidal Sassoon has improved the retail lines sold in its salons, resulting in increased sales. The changes were communicated well, with appropriate associated staff development that included learners. Health and safety is managed and promoted well. The safe-working ethos is communicated particularly well to staff at all levels and reviewed annually in each salon. External communication is also good. Vidal Sassoon is a member of, and is in regular contact with, all major national and international hairdressing organisations, including several related to training.

38. Staff development in hairdressing is outstanding. There is a particularly strong learning culture throughout the company, and all staff are keen to maintain and further

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develop their skills while keeping themselves up to date with the latest techniques. Creative workshops are held two days a year, with the UK creative and colour directors, to keep all staff up to date with hairdressing techniques outside of the normal salon environment. All staff attend presentations of the new Vidal Sassoon hairdressing collections three times a year. In addition to its training of modern apprentices, Vidal Sassoon has a scheme which trains qualified hairdressers full-time who wish to join the company until they reach a Vidal Sassoon standard. It also offers full-time continuation training for its own employees who have achieved apprenticeship frameworks 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 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. There is a commitment to good training throughout the company and continual training is encouraged by all levels of management. Assessors are based in the salons and are involved with teaching staff in the planning of training and assessment of learners 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 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's shows and evening events. Learners who achieve the NVQ are not allowed to work in the salons until they complete the full apprenticeship framework.

39. An unusually wide range of varied progression opportunities is available for learners at Vidal Sassoon. Learners can not only choose which practical area of hairdressing they would like to specialise in, including colouring and cutting, but also different job roles. These include being a stylist, or working towards becoming an artistic director, colour director, manager or trainer in the training schools or salons. There are assistant posts for managers and directors which have provided an improved career structure. These posts require completion of an assessors' qualification, which demonstrates the commitment to training in the company. Opportunities are also available for work in the promotional and show teams, both in the UK and internationally. Vidal Sassoon promotes progression through a staff development system called 'directional paths', which employees are encouraged to take to achieve their aims for role changes within the company. The paths available are promoted to learners from induction onwards. Across the company there is a good variety of role models, which helps promote progression. There is unusually high progression of learners from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships as part of preparing for job roles.

40. The company has 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 recorded well and is linked to the setting and achievement of personal objectives. The use of data is satisfactory overall, although insufficiently developed in the monitoring of equality of opportunity.

41. The planning of literacy, numeracy and language skills support is inadequate. Where required, following initial assessment, staff support learners in the salons where they work. The company has made moves to identify local support available in different locations. It has no policy that details how it will support learners with particular needs. Several readers who are not hairdressers have been used to help learners with written questions. More information and communications technology has been introduced into salons to help with assignments and key skills testing. However, Vidal Sassoon has no guidelines for staff on how to support learners with literacy and language support needs. The support being given is insufficiently detailed in individual learning plans and review documents. This weakness has not seriously affected current learners, most of whom have good literacy, numeracy and language standards.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

42. The company promotes learners' welfare and security well. All learners are aware of, and confident to use, the effective grievance system. Records show careful recording of complaints and following up of investigations. Vidal Sassoon is clearly not afraid to tackle problems and intervene where appropriate. For example, one complaint about perceived unfair treatment led to all staff being interviewed in confidence, by a member of the company's human resources department, before a judgement was made and an action plan agreed. The action plan identified coaching as a way of preventing the reoccurrence of problems. Vidal Sassoon has been successful in persuading learners to stay with the company following an open and positive approach to dealing with their complaints. There are a number of other routes which staff can use to raise grievances and concerns, as well as the formal grievance procedure. Each salon has an elected salon staff representative, whom staff can talk 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. Company policy ensures that any disciplinary action is agreed with a minimum of two senior managers before any formal action is taken.

43. Satisfactory policies on different aspects of equality of opportunity are in place. Vidal Sassoon has a basic and appropriate policy that covers up-to-date legislation on equality of opportunity. It is regularly updated, the newest version having been produced in May 2006, and is applicable to the whole company. There is a simple guide aimed at explaining the policy to learners which is written in straightforward, plain English. Either the policy or the simple version is displayed on the staff noticeboards at each salon. There are also policies on harassment, disability discrimination, stress at work, maternity leave, parental leave, using e-mails with regard to offensive material, and a public interest disclosure policy covering whistle blowing. All of these policies indicate a provider that is genuinely interested in promoting equality among staff.

44. Learners and staff have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. Equality is covered at induction for learners, using a video and a number of relevant scenario discussions. It is reinforced at progress reviews, through the use of a bank of questions. These have not been used consistently by all salons in the way intended. Tutors choose which question to ask and deal with any issues that arise out of the answer. Learners' answers are not recorded. There are no standard answers or extended guidance for tutors to refer to, allowing for possible erroneous or incomplete advice. Staff have a useful trainers' guide relating to equality and all staff, including learners, have annual training on equality of opportunity. However, there are no formal means of measuring

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staff members' understanding or the effect of the training they receive. Key messages are covered through staff meetings in the salon, with equality of opportunity being a standing agenda item. Equality is being covered as part of the company's quality assurance procedures. Teaching and learning observations prompt observers to comment on equality of opportunity, and training sessions for staff on equality of opportunity are being evaluated.

45. 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, a policy is in place to ensure full access for those with restricted mobility.

46. Recruitment procedures are satisfactory. The main promotional activity is school visits, and the company also carries out mailshots to 380 schools every January. Boys' schools are part of the mailshot database, but Vidal Sassoon does not target them specifically with different promotional literature. When there is interest at a boys' school, Vidal Sassoon sends heterosexual men to give presentations as it feels that this will break down any misconceptions boys may have and alleviate peer pressure. It also asks male learners to revisit their old schools and give short presentations to boys, which is good practice. The company has no hard data on the success of the schools' marketing to enable it to identify and improve aspects of the activity. The Vidal Sassoon website was used by a number of learners to get information on the company. Vidal Sassoon is active in offering a fairly large number of places to Year 10 schoolchildren for work experience. Managers recently intervened in some planned new marketing materials that portrayed an insufficiently diverse range of images. The marketing material is being changed as a result. All applicants receive an interview, with the company normally starting the process in February and having one intake of learners each year. Prospective learners undergo a 40-minute group session to inform them of the company, and Vidal Sassoon has a checklist to ensure that all learners are given the same initial information. In London, salons have developed new interview guidance notes to bring more consistency into the process. This has not been fully adopted outside London.

47. Insufficient strategic planning takes place to widen participation. Vidal Sassoon has no specific strategy for equality and diversity and no development plan other than the one arising out of the self-assessment report. There are no specific targets relating to equality, or strategies on how they would be achieved. There is limited awareness of contractual targets agreed with the LSC for the participation and achievement of men and minority ethnic group members. Vidal Sassoon is either on target or ahead of target in respect of these. Although there are a number of success stories around equality, such as an Asian male trainer who was previously an apprentice, none of these have been formally recorded. There is no firm data to show the real success of the company's promotional efforts, such as how many boys' schools visited generate new learners or how the profile of successful applicants matches that of all applicants. Generally, the company's use of data to manage equality and support strategic planning has been poor. However, Vidal Sassoon has recently contracted with a company to produce appropriate data and they are currently agreeing what needs to be reported on. Managers have a clear understanding of the two priority areas of development relating to equality of opportunity, improving staff understanding and attracting more men into training. Nearly 26 per cent of all employees are men, which is a good profile for hairdressing. In common with the

industry, the proportion of learners who are men is less than this. Although an impressive 17 per cent of new starters in 2005-06 were men, the number of men currently on programme accounts for only 8 per cent of all learners in learning. Staff feel that there is a culture of equality established in the company and that the ethos dates right back to Vidal Sassoon himself. The number of staff and learners from minority ethnic groups is representative of national population figures, but perhaps is indicative of the company being less successful at promoting equality than it would like to be.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

48. There are many examples of improvements in training. Several of the areas identified as weaknesses at the previous inspection have been improved to a satisfactory position. These weaknesses include the use of data, training and information on equality of opportunity, monitoring of equality of opportunity and internal verification. There is a strong emphasis on sharing of good practice as a tool for quality improvement. Quality is an agenda item discussed every two months at managers' meetings, where good practice is identified and shared. Recent examples have included a learning plan for display on salon noticeboards, a key skills folder giving guidance and support to all salons and summary sheets of learners' progress for each salon showing percentage achievement of NVQ units. The company also has a plan for what aspects of the learning process will be reviewed throughout the year in the meetings. The training programme is planned and co-ordinated well. Training materials are professionally produced and have been standardised to help ensure consistent approaches to teaching. Staff can only create their own materials with approval, helping ensure that new materials are shared and used consistently.

49. Learners' feedback is collected and used well. Learners complete annual and post-induction questionnaires. Completion rates are high, and the human resources manager analyses and reviews the questionnaires to identify themes and plan appropriate actions. Examples of actions taken on feedback include changing the model-seeking practice of learners and making teaching sessions more lively and fun, with better use of session planning for teaching. Currently, changes to the induction programme are being considered in response to feedback. There is no formal mechanism, such as the use of posters or a newsletter, to let learners know how their views have been acted on. Learners who are assistants in each salon also have their own separate staff meetings every six weeks, chaired by a head assistant. Their feedback is given to managers. The general manager is seen as being approachable by learners and she gets a lot of informal feedback through monthly visits to salons. In London, learners are very aware of support outside of their salon from head office.

50. The use of management information is at least satisfactory, having been a weakness at the previous inspection. Head office now has comprehensive and accurate information on the progress of learners for each salon, as well as nationally. Learners' reasons for leaving are collected and analysed to see if any corrective action is necessary. There are a number of early leavers every year who go for reasons beyond Vidal Sassoon's control, including an element of poaching by other salons.

51. Internal verification is satisfactory, having been inadequate at the previous inspection. The company has a comprehensive strategy in place to ensure that the awarding body's requirements are met. Learners have access to fair and reliable assessments. The internal verification plan ensures that there is regular forward planning and sampling of assessment

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decisions. Assessors are given feedback to support consistent assessment practice, and some assessors have made improvements to their practice. All assessors maintain their continuous professional development. Regular, productive meetings of internal verifiers and assessors include standardisation activities. Feedback from the external verifier is widely shared and acted upon.

52. The self-assessment report process is satisfactory. There is suitable input from staff, but it is sought after rather than before the first draft is written. The evidence base used includes the views of learners and senior staff, management information and previous inspection reports. The report identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses subsequently identified by inspectors. Vidal Sassoon has produced an appropriate development plan to deal with the weaknesses identified through the self-assessment process.

53. Insufficient planning of quality improvement takes place and no overall strategy explains how quality improvement works at Vidal Sassoon. Although there are many informal and formal systems that cover various aspects of quality improvement, and many examples of it happening, they have not been brought together into a formal system. For example, there has always been an informal observation system of training. The general manager and the UK creative director observe training at most salons on a monthly basis. They have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the various staff who deliver training around the country. However, there is no plan of when and how often a member of staff should be observed. A more formal observation system, that includes grading and fuller recording of what has been observed, was introduced at the start of the year but has not yet covered all staff. The new system covers induction and learning sessions, but not progress reviews.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hairdressing Apprenticeships for young people	95	1 1

54. Vidal Sassoon delivers apprenticeships in hairdressing throughout England and Wales. It has 95 learners, of whom 46 are apprentices and 49 are advanced apprentices. Eight per cent of learners are men and 11 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. All learners are employed by Vidal Sassoon and attend off-the-job training on one day a week, usually within their own salons. Each salon usually has two or more staff involved in training, but with other staff giving specialist input as required. There are usually several qualified assessors in each salon, including managers and creative directors. There are five internal verifiers. Learners are mainly recruited through direct contact with Vidal Sassoon. Many have taken part in work experience before becoming learners.

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good achievement of frameworks
- particularly creative practical skills of learners
- good development of learners' interpersonal skills
- outstanding practical teaching
- well-evidenced portfolios
- outstanding additional learning opportunities
- good practices in health and safety
- outstanding training resources

Weaknesses

- poor completion of long-term training documents

Achievement and standards

55. Learners demonstrate a particularly high level of creative skills, far beyond what is normally seen on inspection. They carefully plan their work to incorporate the wider aspects of fashion and clients' lifestyles. Learners have excellent manipulative skills and use these to good effect when creating new looks. This was well evidenced as learners practised a particular long hairstyle for a forthcoming fashion show. Photographs of previous work and videos of their end-of-year show also demonstrated the creativity of learners. There is much emphasis on experimenting with colour and shape and learners enthusiastically experiment with this when developing their creations for the end-of-year show.

56. The development of learners' interpersonal skills is good. All learners attend a series of lectures following their trial period to give them a broad-based knowledge of customer service and client care. Emphasis is placed on high standards of professional care, good manners and mutual respect. Learners are monitored by their trainers to ensure they adhere to the expected standard. All learners demonstrated very good client care with professional salon etiquette. Learners have a positive attitude to their clients and the hairdressing industry. Their individuality is reflected in their personal presentation, which is exemplary. Learners at Vidal Sassoon are good role models for the industry.

57. Framework achievement is good. Overall, two-thirds of learners achieve their frameworks. Timely success is good and has increased from 57 per cent in 2003-04 to 64 per cent in 2004-05. Vidal Sassoon rewards and encourages early completion with a financial incentive. This is then followed with further incentives for the Vidal Sassoon classic and creative skills tests that learners complete before becoming stylists on the shop floor. A high number of learners have exemptions from key skills qualifications and most of the remaining learners complete their key skills qualifications well ahead of their main qualification.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	33	76	43	73	32
		timely	24	58	27	54	20
	2004-05	overall	3	100	40	67	29
		timely	4	100	28	50	20
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	30	67	62	67	49
		timely	30	57	38	57	30
	2004-05	overall	39	67	48	64	41
		timely	39	67	32	64	28

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

58. Practical teaching is outstanding at all centres. Learners receive individual support and groups are small, usually with four or five learners to a trainer. Trainers encourage learners to participate and ensure they receive detailed instructions to develop their practical skills. When demonstrating a particular technique, the trainer invites each learner to have a turn to check their skill level. Learners then accurately copy the style on their own models, with excellent results. There is an exceptionally strong focus on creative development. Learners assist different stylists in turn to observe their different creative skills. Learners at Vidal Sassoon have a wide range of models of different ages, genders and lifestyles on whom to develop their practical skills. Each salon has a bank of models. These are supplemented by learners 'hunting' for their own models. They receive training for this related to the area of the city where they work and usually operate in pairs, with a

more experienced learner accompanying a newer one. Many learners appreciate the communications skills that they develop as part of this process of acquiring extra models. The teaching of essential background knowledge varies from satisfactory to outstanding. The best teaching involved learners in planning cuts that they found most difficult. They did this planning in front of a group using a flip chart. The satisfactory teaching relied too much on working through externally produced materials that were repetitive and unstimulating.

59. Portfolios are particularly well evidenced and organised. Much of the practical work is recorded with mounted photographs in the portfolio. Each model worked on is documented with appropriate model progress and monitoring sheets. The progress sheets record information on the models that learners have worked on, the task that was carried out and a grade for the standard of the work from both the tutor and learner. Assignments are generally good, neatly written or word-processed with research and evidence collected from websites and journals. Some assignments were exemplary in standards, demonstrating high levels of artistic design and research.

60. Vidal Sassoon provides outstanding additional learning opportunities. Learners are excited and enthusiastic about the many opportunities to participate in a broad range of external activities. These include the annual assistants' end-of-year show, fashions shows for graduate designers and named designers, and various media events and photoshoots. All learners interviewed have had the chance to assist at external shows. Learners not only attend the main trade shows but take an active part in them. The end-of-year show is a mandatory annual event that enables learners to exhibit and celebrate the skills they have learnt, at whatever level they are currently at. Each salon presents its own team event at an off-site venue. Learners plan the hairstyles, graphics for the invitations, clothes, make-up, choreography, music, visual imagery and themes. One salon even had music composed for their show. Learners are also involved in the choice of venues. The shows are of an exemplary standard, not only exciting to watch and participate in, but resulting in work that most hairdressers would be proud to achieve. Learners visit external venues, such as art galleries, to help develop their artistic abilities. All learners' frameworks are enhanced by taking additional barbering units. London learners are seconded to the company's 'barber shop' for six weeks to carry out their training and assessment, while others receive specialist in-salon training. A structured training programme is sent in advance to learners so that they can familiarise themselves with the requirements of the training programme. Learners receive an induction into the barbering unit at the beginning of the programme. On completion of their frameworks, all learners benefit from a period of final intensive training at a London venue to ensure that they can work to a particularly high standard.

61. There are good practices in health and safety. Unusually in hairdressing, every work unit has a built-in disinfectant jar that learners maintain and use on a regular basis. All staff and learners maintain high standards of cleanliness. Learners' tools are checked for cleanliness before they start work. Personal and protective equipment is used well when carrying out hairdressing services. All staff contribute to the cleaning of the salon throughout the day. Learners are asked a range of health and safety questions at their review to reinforce their understanding of health and safety, which is often emphasised during training.

62. Training resources are outstanding. All salons are of a high standard with a wide

VIDAL SASSOON

range of good-quality products. Many of the teaching staff have international reputations in the industry. Learners are taught by staff with specialist skills in areas such as colouring and cutting. This includes creative directors, for example, when they are preparing models for shows. There is an extensive bank of training resources, including Vidal Sassoon's own training videos and publications.

63. Learners receive good initial advice and career guidance at their interview on the range of career paths available at Vidal Sassoon, which is further covered during a comprehensive and memorable induction. All learners have good awareness of what they can progress to in the industry and all learners expect to progress onto advanced apprenticeships. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are screened at induction to identify literacy and numeracy skills support needs. There are many examples of support, such as learners having readers for written assessments. Trainers allocate additional time for individual support. There is much evidence of 'softer' support for learners, who are allocated a staff mentor as an additional point of contact to help with any problems. Although there is no specialist basic skills tutor, current learners do not require specialist support and are making good progress.

64. Internal verification is satisfactory. Learners have access to fair and reliable assessments. Internal verification is planned with regular sampling of assessment decisions. Feedback to assessors leads to consistent assessment practice. There is at least one internal verifier in each city and assessors meet regularly to standardise their work.

65. The completion of long-term documents is poor. Individual learning plans are poorly completed and lack detailed information, such as target dates for the completion of units and individual support needs. Likewise, review forms do not accurately record learners' progress or fully record the content of reviews. Quarterly reviews do not have short, specific and timed targets. Details of the non-completion of targets are not recorded. The reviews do not identify additional support for learners. Although learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity, questions to reinforce it are not recorded well at reviews.

Leadership and management

66. Vidal Sassoon has good management of training. There is a clear training strategy which is designed to provide the learners with opportunities to progress within the company. Most training now occurs within salons and promotion to more senior positions is linked to involvement in training future Vidal Sassoon stylists. There is a strong ethos of continuous staff development in hairdressing skills at all levels. This, together with regular managers' meetings, ensures the continuous sharing of good practice. Training is planned well to give learners maximum attention. The self-assessment report accurately reflects Vidal Sassoon's training and its strengths and weaknesses. Learners are encouraged to share their concerns, which are effectively dealt with, and most learners value the support of their mentors. Learners' views are regularly sought, but feedback on the outcomes of their evaluation is not shared with learners.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL VARIATIONS

Hairdressing training was outstanding at all of the Vidal Sassoon salons visited in London, Leeds and Manchester.

