

INSPECTION REPORT

Saks Education Ltd

26 May 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

Saks Education Ltd

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for Saks Education Ltd	1
Grades	2
About the inspection	2
Key Findings	3
What learners like about Saks Education Ltd	9
What learners think Saks Education Ltd could improve	9

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	10
Equality of opportunity	12
Quality improvement	13
Retail and commercial enterprise	15

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Saks Education Ltd (SEL) was established in 2000. It is a subsidiary of Saks Franchise Services (Saks), the head office of which is in Darlington, County Durham. It has training academies in Darlington and central London and also uses other premises in the centre of Manchester. It provides training for apprentices and advanced apprentices in hairdressing and beauty therapy and national vocational qualification (NVQ) training for adults. There are 203 learners, of whom 181 are working towards hairdressing qualifications and 22 are working towards beauty therapy qualifications. All learners are employed. Most training and assessment takes place in the workplace. In addition, learners attend Saks training academies for specialist training which is individually scheduled in line with their learning plan. Saks is managed by a national training manager who reports directly to the managing director. There are three administration staff and seven tutors who train and assess learners in different regions throughout the UK. SEL is supported by the financial and human resource departments of Saks. Training is funded through the National Employer Service.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 1

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding.** Leadership and management are outstanding, as are the arrangements for equality of opportunity, quality improvement and work-based learning in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

3. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is well managed, very inclusive and effective. The views of all relevant parties are used accurately to develop judgements. The development plan tackles all the issues identified through self-assessment and the plan is closely and regularly monitored and reviewed. Good progress is being made to implement the actions in the plan, and this is reflected in the inspection findings. SEL has accurately identified most of its strengths and at the time of inspection had rectified most of its weaknesses.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to maintain the high quality of provision.** SEL has a range of effective measures to evaluate and improve key learning processes, including retention and success rates. Retention rates are very good and success rates are satisfactory and improving on apprenticeship programmes. Success rates for adult learners are good. Thorough performance management and comprehensive quality improvement documents and systems are used effectively, to improve the provision. Thorough, well-managed development planning has contributed to successful quality improvement.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SAKS EDUCATION LTD:

- maintain the high quality of the provision

- improve written feedback to learners to highlight good practice and provide greater detail on improvements needed
- continue to improve retention and success rates
- continue to promote and improve recruitment from minority ethnic groups
- maintain and continue to improve management and quality improvement systems
- continue to promote the use of website communications

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		1
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		1
Quality improvement		1

Retail and commercial enterprise			1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Hairdressing</i>			
Apprenticeships for young people	164	1	
Other government-funded provision	17	1	
<i>Beauty therapy</i>			
Apprenticeships for young people	15	1	
Other government-funded provision	7	1	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 25 days inspecting SEL's hairdressing and beauty therapy provision throughout England. All inspection activities took place in the main week of the inspection. SEL provides apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and NVQ training for adult learners in hairdressing and beauty therapy. This area of learning is graded generically, as the judgements are common to both areas of learning.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	25
Number of learners interviewed	62
Number of staff interviewed	22
Number of employers interviewed	16
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	29

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

6. **Retention rates on hairdressing and beauty therapy apprenticeship programmes are excellent.** Ninety per cent of the 2004-05 intake were retained. For the first 10 months of 2005-06, 87 per cent remain in training. In beauty therapy, retention rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme have increased from 69 per cent in 2004-05 to 90 per cent in the current year. Retention rates on the 25 plus programme have significantly improved from 73 per cent to 92 per cent.

7. **Success rates on the 25 plus programme are very good** and have improved by 10 per cent to 83 per cent currently. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes are satisfactory and improving. The success rates for advanced apprentices in hairdressing declined slightly during 2004-05, but have improving significantly and are currently at 68 per cent in the first 10 months of the contract year. The success rate for advanced apprentices in beauty therapy has also shown a significant increase from 30 per cent to 63 per cent. Success rates for hairdressing apprentices are incomplete as they have not yet reached the end of their programme, but they are generally making good progress, and 20 per cent of learners have completed their apprenticeship framework early.

8. **Learners' practical skills in hairdressing and beauty are good.** Learners often produce work that is above the standard required by their NVQ. All learners and staff give a high priority to working safely, hygienically and professionally to reflect best industry standards. Learners' written work and portfolios of evidence are satisfactory.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Retail and commercial enterprise	2	5	5	0	12
Total	2	5	5	0	12

9. **Learners are provided with an exceptionally well-planned and delivered, individually focused training programme.** Tutors and Saks salon trainers work well together to provide a cohesive programme of learning. The frequency of visits in the workplace is very good and motivates learners to achieve their learning targets and meet deadline dates. Training strategies are used well to ensure good learning and assessment and to meet learners' individual learning styles. Learners can request additional visits for training or assessment.

10. **The learning environment is very good.** The salons and academies reflect the best industry standards of equipment and product range. Apprentices develop their skills and techniques by working alongside stylists who work to a very high standard. Salon trainers provide good in-salon training on a regular weekly basis with additional individual coaching provided as necessary to help improve apprentices' skills and knowledge. All salons have a strong commitment to training.

11. **The very good range of additional training opportunities improves learners' experiences significantly.** Employers strongly support learners in carrying out additional

learning activities. Learners participate well at these events. Work carried out during the events is used well to provide evidence for NVQ units.

12. The monitoring and learner review process is strong, comprehensive and thorough.

Learners are visited in their salon at least once a month and have a formal progress review every 12 weeks. Targets are set at each visit and effectively guide the learner through the NVQ and key skills framework. Salons receive a copy of the review report to help them plan specific in-salon training and to identify assessment opportunities. Training and individual learning plans are updated regularly as units are achieved.

13. Learners are provided with many opportunities for assessment. Assessments are recorded appropriately and meet awarding body requirements. Prominently displayed salon charts are used to remind apprentices of assessment progress.

14. Learners receive good individual support. Diagnostic testing takes place during the induction period to identify learners' preferred learning styles and any additional learning needs. Additional support is provided by tutors for learners with additional literacy and numeracy needs. Learners requiring specialist support, for example those with dyslexia, are given support by external organisations contracted by SEL.

15. Key skills training is satisfactory. Recently updated assignments integrate the literacy and numeracy skills into hairdressing and beauty therapy assignments. Some tutors hold key skills qualifications and the remainder are working towards them. Learners start key skills activities during their induction period. Many apprentices take advantage of this early start to complete ahead of time.

16. Feedback to learners on written work does not provide them with sufficient information to help improve their work. Good work is not highlighted so that learners can repeat this pattern of work with future assignments. Ways to improve unsatisfactory work are not identified in sufficient detail. Grammatical errors are not corrected.

Leadership and management

17. Strategic management is very good. The business and strategic plans set clear direction for the company and are updated annually. The objectives are communicated very effectively to all staff and are monitored through regular team meetings, annual staff appraisals and development improvement plans. Effective risk assessment on business objectives identifies potential and actual weaknesses, which are resolved quickly.

18. Operational management of hairdressing and beauty therapy is very good. There is a strong emphasis on improving learners' retention and success rates. Performance management is thorough. All tutors have targets linked to this objective. Central records are updated regularly to report learner progress and achievement. The training manager monitors learner progress and this is discussed at monthly staff meetings. Managers and tutors plan learning very well and successfully co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Lesson plans and schemes of work are very thorough and detailed. Individual learning plans are used well to constantly reflect on achievement target dates and progress. Salon trainers provide good in-salon training on a weekly basis. Final achievement of the NVQ and framework is celebrated by an announcement in an SEL publication and at an annual national awards ceremony.

19. **Managers place a strong focus on improving retention and success rates.** Employers are fully involved in the training, evaluation and assessment of learners. Recruitment arrangements now include an extended induction period where the learners complete an initial assessment, and health and safety and some key skills training, before being signed on to the programme. This strategy has already had a significant effect on improving retention rates, which are currently very good.

20. **Communication is particularly effective between employers, tutors and apprentices.** A variety of communication strategies are used including newsletters, e-mail, questionnaires and the SEL education website. Employers are kept up to date about the provision and learners' progress. SEL staff meet on a regular basis.

21. **Resources to support learning are good.** Visual presentations and handouts are good. Salon and NVQ training are well integrated. Schemes of work and lesson plans are linked well to salon training and to individual learning plans. Tutors are well qualified in their vocational area and hold, or are working towards, a teaching qualification.

22. **Financial management is strong** and targets for monthly achievements and completions are reported on a specially designed spreadsheet. Managers use this information to monitor closely the financial implications of apprenticeship achievements each month throughout the contractual year.

23. The management information system is used effectively to monitor performance. A new database system was introduced in 2005, followed by a learner monitoring system in late 2005. Since January 2006, this system has been used to monitor the progress of individual learners effectively. The management information system is used to produce reports and to analyse data on all aspects of the provision.

24. **Staff development is good.** Staff complete a self-assessment to identify their own training needs. Annual appraisals, lesson observations and internal verification are used to identify training needs. Training is approved if it benefits the learner and the company.

25. Health and safety arrangements are thorough. All salons complete a risk assessment as part of their health and safety review. Individual recording of health and safety issues for each learner is good. Employers and tutors are required to complete a health and safety monitoring record for each learner. This is reviewed every three, six or 12 months, depending on the level of risk assessed during the health and safety review.

26. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are satisfactory and learners receive appropriate individual support.

27. **Equality of opportunity is promoted very well throughout the curriculum.** At induction, equality of opportunity is covered thoroughly through a range of tasks and activities that present policies, procedures and legislation in a relevant way to learners. Equality and diversity are promoted well through hairdressing, beauty therapy and key skills assignments. At each progress review, equality and diversity and health and safety are discussed in detail with the learner. Tutors use themed scenarios to encourage discussion and to develop learners' understanding.

28. There is good use of equal opportunities data to implement continuous improvements. A range of data is collected and analysed, and is then discussed by management at monthly meetings. Learner performance by gender and ethnicity is evaluated and improvement targets are set in the equal opportunities and business plans. In an attempt to influence individual salon recruitment practices and further improve recruitment of under-represented groups, SEL has conducted a survey of employers that provide information on job applications by those from minority ethnic groups. Currently, 14 per cent of learners are male learners. Three per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups, a decrease of 3 per cent from the previous year.

29. Learners receive good support. Staff work well to ensure that learners can meet with them at all times that suit their needs. In 2004-05, eight learners were made redundant. SEL successfully secured employment for four of these learners in other Saks salons and helped the other learners find new work placements. If a learner leaves their employment with a Saks salon, SEL supports the learner to find a new work placement even if this may not be in a Saks salon. Currently, 38 learners are being trained by SEL and working for other hairdressing companies.

30. Good use is made of case studies to promote hairdressing and beauty therapy training to non-traditional groups. Promotional and marketing materials for SEL contain appropriate non-stereotypical images. Adverts are targeted at potential learners to deal with under representation. Saks trains all new franchisees in positive recruitment and equality as part of the induction. All SEL education staff have comprehensive training in equality and diversity.

31. The comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures include up-to-date legislation and the company reviews them annually. They are well written in clear and simple language, with examples to illustrate terms such as harassment and bullying. Information on equality and diversity are explicitly explained using appropriate language in a comprehensive and useful learner handbook.

32. Not all Saks establishments are accessible for learners with restricted mobility. Saks Academy, in London is located on the lower ground floor of the city centre building. There are no lifts, and access for people with restricted mobility is poor. Alternative arrangements are in place, but are not explicitly detailed in the company's disability statement. Saks now ensures that all newly opened Saks salons are situated on the ground floor to ensure good access.

33. SEL has excellent and inclusive strategies for quality improvement, which have a direct effect on learners' experiences. These strategies are supported by comprehensive quality assurance documents and systems. An extensive range of evidence and contributors are used to produce the quality improvement plan. Improvement plans continually review, reflect and evaluate the provision in order to improve it. The company makes good use of data to measure progress, focus on targets for improvement, identify trends and confirm priorities, notably for improving success and retention rates.

34. The self-assessment process is very thorough and inclusive and is very effective in improving the quality of the provision. Learners' and employers' views were collected using questionnaires with specific emphasis on their views on the quality of training and support. A well-written development plan tackles all the issues identified through

self-assessment. The self-assessment grades were lower than those given by inspectors. The better inspection grades reflect the effect of the improvements implemented through the self-assessment action plan. Many of the weaknesses in the report have been remedied.

35. Evaluation mechanisms are good and work well to ensure good practice is shared and poor practice resolved. Learners and employers are invited to complete evaluations every six months. The introduction of a new website, developed by SEL, has helped to improve communication with employers and learners and it makes responding to evaluations easier. Results are summarised and actions are communicated to learners and employers.

36. There is a very well-planned and thorough programme of observations of teaching and learning and learning processes, which includes initial assessments, progress reviews, individual and group learning, exit and progression interviews and assessment activities. Observations are formally recorded and graded.

37. Internal verification is well planned and recorded. Standardisation meetings are held at the head office in Darlington. Those assessors unable to attend are kept up to date with detailed minutes from the meetings and through meetings with tutors.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very good strategic management
- very good operational management
- strong management focus on improving retention and achievement rates
- particularly good promotion of equal opportunities throughout the curriculum
- good use of equal opportunities data to aid continuous improvement
- particularly good staff development
- excellent strategies for quality improvement
- rigorous and inclusive self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Retail and commercial enterprise

Strengths

- excellent retention rates
- very good success rates for adult learners
- good standard of practical work
- exceptionally good individualised training
- particularly good learning environments
- very good range of additional training

SAKS EDUCATION LTD

- strong monitoring and review process
- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- insufficient feedback on written work

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SAKS EDUCATION LTD:

- 'involvement in photos-shoots and competitions'
- 'salon training sessions'
- 'individual attention during training'
- 'working at my own speed, I can complete quicker'
- 'they provide a really high standard of training'
- 'everyone is so friendly and there is a really good atmosphere'
- 'the intensive technical support we get'
- 'I don't know what to expect - it's exciting'
- 'I really like the in-depth sales training'
- 'they keep me updated in new techniques'
- 'I joined the company because of the name and good reputation'
- 'I like watching the stylists at the academy'
- 'we are treated as equals and not as juniors'
- 'I get a lot of support'
- 'no one forgets you, you can contact someone anytime for help, including evenings and weekends'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SAKS EDUCATION LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the frequency of tutor visits
- the amount of paperwork
- the amount of in-salon training
- barbering training - none provided at present
- the number of days at the academy - not enough

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

Strengths

- very good strategic management
- very good operational management
- strong management focus on improving retention and achievement rates
- particularly good promotion of equal opportunities throughout the curriculum
- good use of equal opportunities data to aid continuous improvement
- particularly good staff development
- excellent strategies for quality improvement
- rigorous and inclusive self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

38. Strategic management of SEL is very good. The business and strategic plans set clear direction for the company and are updated annually. The objectives are communicated very effectively to all staff and are monitored regularly through regular team meetings, staff annual appraisals and development improvement plans. SEL is supported by the financial and human resource management systems and staff of Saks, the parent company. SEL is able to accurately forecast and plan for the development of the apprenticeship programme. For example, it anticipates additional apprentice places for newly opening Saks salons in 2006-07. Effective risk assessment on business objectives identifies potential and actual weaknesses. One risk identified in 2005 was the high turnover of the education team in the south and the effect of this on learners' experience and success rates. Actions enabled the recruitment of additional part-time staff who could work full time if required. The human resource department works with the training manager on the recruitment of staff and to ensure that policies are fair and applied rigorously and evenly across the whole of the organisation.

39. The operational management of SEL is very good. Performance management is thorough. The performance of tutors is monitored closely and good practice is shared. Monthly reports are shared with each tutor detailing learners' unit completions and framework completion against target dates. The training manager reviews each learner's progress and this is discussed at monthly staff meetings. Poor progress is quickly identified and actions are taken to help the learner improve. Regular meetings between the training manager and tutors have a very clear focus on the effectiveness of training and the quality of learners' experience and performance. The training manager very effectively ensures that learners receive very good learning sessions and a wide range of training opportunities, and are supported by good learning resources. Lesson plans and schemes of work are very thorough and detailed. Individual learning plans are used well to monitor achievement target dates and progress. Managers and tutors plan learning very well and successfully co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Learners cover all aspects of the

apprenticeship framework during very frequent visits by tutors and have additional training to meet the excellent standards set by the company. Salon trainers provide good in-salon training on a regular weekly basis.

40. Managers place a strong focus on improving retention and success rates. All salons that wish to employ and train apprentices are thoroughly checked and a clear commitment is required from the salon owner to comply with SEL training, to support the learner with regular salon training and to be involved with reviewing the learner's progress. Employers are fully involved in the training, evaluation and assessment of learners. Recruitment arrangements now include an extended induction period where learners complete an initial assessment, health and safety and some key skills training before being signed on to the programme. This strategy has already had a significant effect on improving retention rates, which are currently very good. Financial management is strong and targets for monthly achievements and completions are reported on a specially designed spreadsheet. Each month managers use this information to closely monitor the financial implications of the apprenticeship achievements. This information is shared with tutors to ensure that they understand the significance of timely success for their learners. The management information system is used effectively to monitor performance. A new database system was introduced in 2005, followed by a monitoring system in late 2005. Since January 2006 this has been used to monitor the progress of individual learners effectively. The management information system is used to produce reports and analyse data on all aspects of the provision.

41. Internal and external communications are good. Tutors meet together with the training manager formally every two months to review targets and plan actions. Progress on outstanding actions is fully reviewed at subsequent meetings. The training manager also has frequent informal meetings with the education staff. Communication is particularly effective between employers, tutors and learners. Tutors visit learners in the workplace at least once a month and sometimes more frequently. Visits are always prearranged to ensure that the learner and employer are available. Employers are very well informed and fully understand their role and responsibility in supporting their learner to achieve their qualifications. In addition to these regular visits, newsletters, e-mail, memos, questionnaires and the SEL website help to keep learners, tutors and employers up to date with developments.

42. Staff development is good. Staff complete a self-assessment to identify their training needs. Annual appraisals, lesson observations and internal verification are used to identify training needs. An identified training need is approved if it benefits the learner and the company. All training is supported financially by SEL. Assessors working in the salons also have access to, and make use of, continual professional development opportunities provided by Saks and SEL.

43. Resources to support learning are good. Tutors are well qualified and have an excellent range of professional experience. All tutors maintain a bank of good learning resources on their laptop computers, which they use during training. Schemes of work and lesson plans are linked to salon training and to individual learning plans and are particularly effective in integrating salon and NVQ training. Learning environments are good and reflect best industry standards. Learners develop their skills and techniques by working alongside stylists who work to a very high standard.

44. Health and safety arrangements are thorough. Most learners are working in Saks franchised salons, and a few are in other independent salons. The Saks salons are covered by comprehensive health and safety policies and procedures. These comprehensive arrangements extend to salons which are not part of the Saks. All salons complete a risk assessment as part of their health and safety review. Individual recording of health and safety issues for each learner is good. Employers and tutors are required to complete a health and safety monitoring record for each learner. This is reviewed every three, six or 12 months depending on the level of risk assessed during the health and safety review.

45. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are satisfactory and learners receive appropriate individual support. Diagnostic testing is completed during learners' extended induction period and support is provided before learners start their apprenticeship programme. One learner with dyslexia receives independent support funded by SEL. Learners who are made redundant or leave a Saks salon are provided with good support. They are encouraged to continue their training with SEL, even if their new job is not at a Saks salon, and are often helped to find new employment.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 1

46. Equality of opportunity is very well promoted through the curriculum. At induction, equal opportunities is thoroughly covered through a range of tasks and activities that presents policies, procedures and legislation in a relevant and memorable way to learners. Equality and diversity is a theme that is promoted very well through hairdressing, beauty therapy and key skills assignments. For example, a key skills communication assignment requires learners to research and write a short report on legislative requirements and to discuss terms such as discrimination, ageism and disability. Highly effective cases studies on job applications and interviews are used to highlight to learners, discriminative practices. Other assignments and learning workbooks effectively reinforce and develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity throughout their learning programme. At each progress review, equality and diversity, and health and safety are discussed in detail with learners. Tutors use themed scenarios to encourage discussion and develop learners' understanding. Learners are able to confidently discuss in detail topics such as ageism, disability and sexism and to explain how these relate to them in the workplace. However, not all tutors record the discussion topic or the level of learners' understanding sufficiently well on the review paperwork.

47. The use of equal opportunities data to ensure continuous improvement is good. A range of data is collected and analysed, and is discussed by management at monthly meetings. Learner performance by gender and ethnicity is evaluated and improvement targets are set in the equality and diversity plan and are linked to business planning. Many targets in the plan have been achieved. Learners are recruited directly by Saks salons. In an attempt to influence individual salon recruitment practices and further improve recruitment of under-represented groups, SEL has conducted a survey of employers that have provided information on job applications by learners from minority ethnic groups. Since January 2006, applications from the SEL website have been analysed by gender and ethnicity. It is planned to use this data, and regional ethnicity statistical data, to set improvement targets that accurately reflect regional populations, and to focus support for salons within these specific areas. Currently, 14 per cent of learners are male which is above the sector average. Three per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups, which is a decrease of 3 per cent on the previous year. These learners successfully completed their programmes.

48. Learners receive very good support to enable them to access learning opportunities. Staff work well to ensure that learners can meet with them at times that suit their needs. In 2004-05, eight learners were made redundant and SEL was successful in securing employment in other Saks salons for four of these learners and helped the other learners find new work placements. If a learner leaves their employment with a Saks salon, SEL supports the learner to find a new work placement even though this may not be in a Saks salon. SEL negotiates with the new employer to continue the training with the learner. Currently, there are 38 learners who are continuing their training in other salons. These learners have the same high standard of learning and level of support as those employed in Saks salons.

49. Good use is made of case studies to promote hairdressing and beauty therapy training to non-traditional groups. For example, two learners from minority ethnic groups, and who have successfully completed their programme, are used to help promote hairdressing and beauty therapy training. Adverts are targeted at potential learners to deal with under-representation. Promotional and marketing materials for SEL contain appropriate non-stereotypical images. Saks trains all new franchisees in positive recruitment and equality as part of their induction. All SEL education staff have comprehensive training in equality and diversity when they join the company. Tutors participate in annual equality and diversity training, but this is not planned as part of the staff development programme. Equality and diversity are standard agenda items at meetings.

50. The comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures include up-to-date legislation, and the company reviews them annually. They are well written in clear and simple language, with examples to illustrate terms such as harassment and bullying. Information on equality and diversity are explicitly explained using appropriate language in a comprehensive and useful learner handbook. An equality and diversity plan was developed following an equality audit. Many of the targets in the plan have been achieved. A learning needs policy gives detailed guidelines on procedures for supporting learners with additional learning needs. Risk assessment is rigorously carried out for learners with physical disabilities, as part of the company's health and safety procedures. However, not all Saks establishments are accessible for learners with restricted mobility. Saks Academy, in London is located on the lower ground floor of the city centre building. There are no lifts, and access for people with restricted mobility is not adequate. Alternative arrangements are in place but are not explicitly detailed in the company's disability statement. Saks now ensures that all newly opened Saks salons are situated on the ground floor to ensure good access for all.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 1

51. SEL has excellent and inclusive strategies for quality improvement. Improvement strategies are supported by comprehensive quality assurance documents and systems. An extensive range of evidence and contributors aid the judgements in the quality improvement plan. Examples include interviews with staff, learners and employers, file checks and the results of the planned programme of observation of teaching and learning. The training manager carries out all quality monitoring activities in line with the quality monitoring plan. Improvement plans are developed, which continually review, reflect and evaluate the provision in order to identify ways to improve it. The company makes good use of data to measure progress, focus on targets for improvement, identify trends and confirm priorities, notably for improving success and retention rates. Responsibility and

accountability for providing the learners with a high standard of training is shared by all SEL staff. Each tutor receives monthly reports on their learners' performance. The training manager thoroughly reviews this data with each tutor. Action plans to provide additional support for learners, and for the tutor if necessary, are produced.

52. The self-assessment process is very thorough and inclusive and is very effective in improving the quality of the provision. The most recent self-assessment report was produced in December 2005 and was the company's second report. Learners' and employers' views were collected using questionnaires with specific emphasis on their views on the quality of training and support received. A series of workshops were held where tutors and Saks staff worked together to identify the key strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. The staff self-assessment process is particularly thorough. A well-written development plan tackles all the issues identified through self-assessment. Proposed actions and targets are realistic and the plan is closely and regularly monitored and reviewed at team meetings. Good progress is being made to implement the actions in the plan, and this is reflected in the inspection findings. The self-assessment grades were lower than inspection grades. The better inspection grades reflect the effect of the improvements implemented through the self-assessment action plan. Many of the weaknesses in the report had been remedied.

53. Evaluation mechanisms are good and work well to ensure good practice is shared and poor practice rectified. Learners and employers are invited to complete evaluations every six months. The introduction of a new website, developed by SEL, has helped to improve communication with employers and learners and makes it easier to respond to evaluations. Completed evaluations are summarised and the results and subsequent actions are promptly communicated directly to employers as well as being posted on the website and included in the newsletter. The summary is particularly effective in celebrating good practice. Instances of poor practice are also highlighted and any action taken to rectify them is reported.

54. There is a very well-planned and thorough programme of observations of teaching and learning and relevant processes that include initial assessments, progress reviews, individual and group learning, exit and progression interviews, and assessment activities. Observations are formally recorded and graded. Detailed feedback is given and action taken. Feedback from observation of progress reviews has enabled improvements to be made in key skills teaching and monitoring of learners.

55. Internal verification is planned and recorded well. Salon-based assessors are well supported by tutors and the training manager during the regular salon visits. Standardisation meetings are held at the head office in Darlington. Those assessors unable to attend are kept thoroughly briefed by the tutors and through the newsletter and the website.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hairdressing</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	164	1
Other government-funded provision	17	1
<i>Beauty therapy</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	15	1
Other government-funded provision	7	1

56. There are 203 learners overall. Of these, 113 are apprentices and 51 are advanced apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and key skills. There are 15 advanced beauty therapy apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and key skills, and 24 learners on the 25 plus programme working towards NVQs in hairdressing, beauty therapy and nail services at levels 2 and 3. Saks has training academies in London and Darlington and uses other premises in Manchester. Most training takes place in the workplace. Learners are employed in 77 Saks salons. SEL also provides training to learners in 12 salons that are not part of the Saks company. These learners started their training at a Saks salon, but then moved to other salons outside the company. Seven tutors are responsible for the co-ordination and delivery of training and assessment and there are five internal verifiers. There are 13 qualified work-based assessors, with a further 12 working towards the assessor award.

Strengths

- excellent retention rates
- very good success rates for adult learners
- good standard of practical work
- exceptionally good individualised training
- particularly good learning environments
- very good range of additional training
- strong monitoring and review process
- very good management of training

Weaknesses

- insufficient feedback on written work

Achievement and standards

57. Retention rates on hairdressing and beauty therapy apprenticeship programme are excellent. In 2004-05, 90 per cent of all hairdressing apprentices were retained. Currently, 87 per cent are still in training. In beauty therapy, retention rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme have increased from 69 per cent in 2004-05 to 90 per cent in the current year. Between 2004-05 and 2005-06 retention rates on the 25 plus programme

have significantly improved from 73 per cent to 92 per cent.

58. Success rates over the past two intake years on the 25 plus programme are very good and have improved by 10 per cent to 83 per cent. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes are satisfactory and improving. The success rates for advanced apprentices in hairdressing declined slightly during 2004-05. They have improving significantly to 68 per cent for the current year. The success rate for advanced apprentices in beauty therapy has also shown a significant increase from 30 per cent to 63 per cent. It is too early to comment on the overall success rate in 2004-05 for hairdressing apprentices as they have not yet had sufficient time to complete their programme. However, learners are generally making good progress towards the completion of their apprenticeship framework. Twenty per cent of learners have completed their apprenticeship early.

59. Learners' practical skills in hairdressing and beauty are good. Learners often produce work that is above the standard required by the NVQ. For example, in a practical hair cutting session, apprentices carried out advanced cutting techniques to a high standard. In another session introducing learners to dressing long hair, learners quickly acquired intricate plaiting skills. In beauty therapy, learners applying a day make up used high fashion techniques well to achieve a professional finish. All learners and staff give a high priority to working safely, hygienically and professionally to reflect best industry standards. Learners' written work and portfolios of evidence are satisfactory.

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	83	47	31	46	21
		timely	90	21	19	20	13
	2004-05	overall	78	40	31	40	22
		timely	74	26	22	26	15

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

60. Learners are provided with an exceptionally well-planned and delivered individually focused training programme. Tutors and Saks salon trainers work well together to provide a cohesive programme of learning. The frequency of visits to the workplace is very good and motivates learners to achieve their learning targets and deadline dates. Tutors visit learners every month and often spend a whole day with the learner. Training strategies maximise learning and assessment opportunities, and meet the learners' individual learning styles. Learners can request additional visits for training or assessment. All learners have their tutor's mobile telephone number and frequently contact them for help and support, often in the evenings and at weekends. Alongside this individual approach, learners can access, through a very professional, easy-to-use SEL education support website, training information, key skills activities and an apprentice communication forum.

61. Learning environments are particularly good. The salons and academies reflect the best industry standards of equipment and range of products. They are stimulating learning

environments. Apprentices develop their skills and techniques by working alongside stylists and beauty therapists who work to a very high standard. Salon trainers provide good in-salon training on a weekly basis with additional individual coaching as necessary to help improve apprentices' skills and knowledge. All salons have a strong commitment to training. Salon staff are encouraged to attend regular skills updating and product seminars and apprentices benefit and learn from their knowledge and expertise. The link between salon trainers and tutors is particularly effective in integrating salon training with NVQ training.

62. There is a very good range of additional training opportunities that add significant value to the learners' experience. The opportunities include product seminars by manufacturers, competitions, Indian head massage, participation in photo-shoots and attendance at specialist courses at one of the Saks academies. Employers strongly support learners in carrying out additional learning opportunities. Work carried out during the events is used very productively to provide evidence for NVQ units. Learners are encouraged to attend and participate in a range of internal and external competitions. Learners' success at internal and external competitions is celebrated in the company newsletter and at an annual Saks salons awards ceremony held in London. Learners who attend this event have the opportunity to meet other learners and Saks stylists from all over England. Learners are highly motivated by this event and work well to improve their performance. Learners who have completed their apprenticeship framework have gone on to win national competitions. One learner has become a Saks franchisee and has their own salon.

63. The monitoring and learner review process is strong, comprehensive and thorough. Learners are visited in their salon at least once a month and have a formal review every 12 weeks. Targets are set at each visit and effectively guide the learner through the NVQ and key skills framework. The salon trainer and SEL tutor work closely with the learner to establish new time-bound targets and recognise achievements. Salons receive a copy of the review report to enable them to plan specific in-salon training and identify assessment opportunities. Training and individual learning plans are regularly updated as units are achieved. Learner targets and achievements are monitored centrally on the management information system, and a monthly report which analyses learner progress is sent to all tutors.

64. Learners are provided with many opportunities for assessment. Assessments are recorded appropriately and meet awarding body requirements. Prominently displayed salon charts are used to remind apprentices of assessment progress. Good use is made of witness testimonies in support of practical assessment opportunities in the workplace. Some salons have their own qualified assessor available to support learners should an assessment opportunity arise during the working day. Learners working in salons with no in-house assessors are visited regularly by tutors who make extra visits for assessment on request.

65. Learners receive good individual support. When learners are recruited by a Saks salon, they complete an extended probationary period of approximately three months. During this time, learners complete diagnostic testing to identify their preferred learning styles and any additional learning needs. Additional support is provided by tutors for learners with additional literacy and numeracy needs, until they can confidently work alone. Where specialist support is required, for example for apprentices with dyslexia, the company uses

external agencies to provide it.

66. Key skills training is satisfactory. Assignments have recently been redesigned to integrate the literacy and numeracy skills into hairdressing and beauty therapy assignments. Some tutors hold key skills qualifications and the remainder are working towards qualifications as part of their continuing professional development. Learners start key skills activities during the extended induction period. Many apprentices take advantage of this early start to complete ahead of time.

67. Feedback to learners on written work does not provide them with sufficient information to help them improve their work. Good work is not highlighted so that learners can repeat this pattern of work with future assignments. How to improve unsatisfactory work is not identified in sufficient detail. Grammatical errors are not corrected and this does not support the good work established during key skills support in communications.

Leadership and management

68. Operational management of hairdressing and beauty therapy is very good. There are clear lines of accountability and responsibility. Strong emphasis is placed on improving retention and achievement rates. All tutors have targets linked to this objective. Strategies to monitor learner progress and unit achievement are very effective. Central records are regularly updated to report learner progress and achievement. Tutors receive monthly reports detailing their learners' progress against target achievement dates. The training manager monitors learner progress and this is discussed at monthly staff meetings. Poor progress is quickly identified and actions are taken to help the learner improve. Final achievement of the NVQ and framework is celebrated by an announcement in an SEL publication and at the annual national awards ceremony.

69. Communication is particularly effective between employers, tutors and apprentices. A variety of communication strategies are used, such as newsletters, e-mail, memos, questionnaires and the SEL education website. SEL staff meet on a regular basis for bi-monthly progress checks and monitoring meetings, for example. The sharing of good practice and quality improvement is a key element of all meetings.

70. Resources to support learning are good. Presentations and handouts to support learning are good. All tutors use the same resources to provide consistency for the learners. Tutors are well qualified in their vocational area and hold or are working towards a teaching qualification. Two staff are working towards higher-level qualifications in teaching and management.

71. Learners have a detailed understanding of equality and diversity. There is ongoing promotion throughout the learners' programme. At induction, learners are issued with a comprehensive apprentice information pack. It contains detailed information about equal opportunities legislation and employment rights and responsibilities. Learners complete a questionnaire which checks the application of their knowledge in real-life scenarios based on recruitment and employment. Key skills and hairdressing and beauty therapy written assignments effectively promote equality and diversity. Learners are able to discuss in detail their rights and responsibilities under equal opportunities.

72. The training manager who delivers training and conducts progress reviews observes

tutors at least once a year. Sessions are graded and any development needs are identified and actioned. The training manager also makes unannounced visits to tutors during salon training and assessment visits as an additional quality check. Tutors and learners evaluate all training sessions and identify where improvements can be made.

73. Internal verification is well planned and organised with a monthly schedule of activities. Internal verifiers meet bi-monthly to carry out standardisation activities. All the components of the hairdressing and beauty therapy frameworks are covered during the meetings. Assessors are observed twice a year to standardise practical assessment practice. SEL tutors are responsible for ensuring standardisation across all in-salon assessors.

74. The production of the self-assessment report is now a well-established process within hairdressing and beauty therapy. Learners and employers contributed to the report. Judgements in the report matched many of the findings of inspectors. The development plan sets challenging targets.

