

# Dollond & Aitchison Limited

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**Inspection date**

20 June 2008

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**Inspection number**

316763

## Contents

<b>Background information .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Inspection judgements .....	3
Scope of the inspection.....	3
<b>Description of the provider.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Summary of grades awarded .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Overall judgement.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Effectiveness of provision .....	6
Capacity to improve .....	6
<b>Key strengths .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Key areas for improvement.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Main findings .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Achievement and standards .....	7
Quality of provision.....	7
Leadership and management .....	8
Equality of opportunity .....	8
<b>What learners like .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What learners think could improve.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Learners' achievements .....</b>	<b>11</b>

## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Retail and commercial enterprise

## Description of the provider

1. Dollond & Aitchison Limited (D&A) was established in 1750. D&A has its headquarters in Birmingham and operates across England as a high street retailer specialising in providing optical eyecare and eyewear. It has 211 stores throughout the country, employing over 2,500 employees.
2. The National Employer Service (NES) began funding D&A to deliver training in 2002 as a pilot programme. D&A delivers apprenticeships, NVQ and Train to Gain programmes in optical retailing. All learners are supported by D&A to complete the full optical retailing apprenticeship framework, irrespective of their programme. At the time of inspection, there were 94 optical retail apprentices and 17 advanced apprentices. Thirty three learners were enrolled on a Train to Gain programme. There were also a further five adult apprenticeships and another five learners undertaking an NVQ programme.
3. Work-based learning is managed by the head of learning and development, who is accountable for all aspects of the programme. He is supported by two learning and development managers who are responsible for the implementation of the programmes and the quality assurance systems.
4. The training programme is mostly delivered in the workplace by a team of 14 assessors who are D&A employees. Learners also undertake off-the-job training covering both optical, technical and customer service knowledge at D&A's Academy based at its headquarters.

## Summary of grades awarded

<b>Effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
Apprenticeships	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Achievement and standards</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
Apprenticeships	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
Apprenticeships	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
Apprenticeships	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
<b>Equality of opportunity</b>	<b>Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Sector subject area

<b>Retail and commercial enterprise</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
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## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

#### Good: Grade 2

Apprenticeships

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Train to Gain

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. The retail and commercial enterprise provision is good. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are good. D&A's leadership and management are good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

#### Capacity to improve

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. D&A has satisfactory capacity to improve. This is the provider's first inspection. The management of the programmes is good and success rates are high for all programmes except for apprenticeships. D&A has also implemented effective actions to improve learners' achievements and timely completion of programmes has improved in the current year.
7. Arrangements for self-assessment and development planning are satisfactory. Inspectors agree with many judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report is too descriptive and the significance of a number of strengths is overstated. The self-assessment process does not take sufficient account of the views of assessors and tutors.

## Key strengths

- High success rates on Train to Gain programmes
- Particularly good development of technical and interpersonal skills
- Excellent career progression
- Good teaching, training and learning
- Highly effective tailored programme to meet the needs of learners and the business
- Very effective arrangements to support learning
- Very strong strategic promotion of learning
- Good operational management of the programmes
- Very good access to training by all optical retailing staff

## Key areas for improvement

- The weak progress reviews
- The insufficiently well established quality improvements systems
- The insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity in training

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

#### Good: Grade 2

Apprenticeships  
Train to Gain

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2  
Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

8. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are high at 86% in 2006/07, as are advanced apprenticeships. In 2004/05, the overall success rates for advanced apprentices was 78%. This figure increased to 83% the following year and fell to 64% in 2006/07. In the current year, success rates for advanced apprentices are 76% to date. Success rates for NVQ learners are also high at 79% in 2006/07 and 72% in the current year to date.
9. Success rates for the optical retailing apprentices are satisfactory. In 2004/05, success rates were low at 16% due to the transition from delivering D&A's own in-house training programme to government funded apprenticeships. Success rates increased to 61% the following year and were 58% in 2006/07. Success rates have already increased markedly to 76% in the current year so far.
10. Across all programmes in the current year, overall success rates and the timely completion of programmes has improved. Learners are very well motivated and they make overall satisfactory progress towards their qualifications. The standards of work in their portfolios is generally good.
11. Learners develop particularly good technical and interpersonal skills which are very well enhanced through the training programme. Practical workshops are supported by further training and supervision in branch so that the learners are fully able to undertake a wide range of measurements and optical assessments. Learners display increased confidence and very good communication skills with customers.
12. Learners experience excellent career progression at D&A. In 2006/07, over 86% of the apprentices progressed onto an advanced apprenticeship programme. Employees can also further develop their careers by joining D&A's own management development programmes. Since 2005, over 20% of all employees undertaking the management development programme have previously completed an advanced apprenticeship. Each training stage is linked to an increase in the learners' salary.
13. All learners achieve key skills qualifications regardless of the type of programme they undertake. Many learners achieve a higher level of numeracy or literacy qualification than that required by their programme.
14. Inspectors agree with most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report relating to achievement and standards.

### Quality of provision

#### Good: Grade 2

Apprenticeships  
Train to Gain

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2  
Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

15. The quality of provision is good. Teaching, training and learning are good. Tutors possess good current specialist knowledge. Theory and practice are effectively linked with both tutors and learners being able to apply theoretical concepts to daily experiences in the branches. Learners enjoy their training and lessons are well planned providing good and lively interaction. Key skills are well integrated with the vocational training. Training in the workplace is highly effective. Learners benefit from having access to a wide range of good quality optical equipment, both in the training academy and their branch. This strength was correctly identified in the provider's self-assessment report.
16. Initial assessment and diagnostic testing is effectively carried out at the beginning of the learners' first programme. However, the findings of initial assessment are not always fully used in planning training sessions to meet all learners' needs. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Workplace assessments are conducted appropriately, are well recorded and offer timely feedback. Learners are clear as to what they need to do to improve their performance or complete their work. Workbooks are thoroughly marked by the tutors and regularly checked by the branch managers.
17. The tailored training programme is highly effective in meeting both learner and business needs. The programmes provide a well trained workforce and contribute to the retention of staff within the company. The well structured innovative programmes cover all aspects of the job roles effectively. Learners are enthusiastic about their programme and particularly value the residential training sessions which provide exceptional opportunities for them to share best practice and learn new skills. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.
18. There are very effective arrangements to support learning. Learners receive a highly informative introductory pack at the beginning of their programme. A well organised 'buddy' system gives good support to learners with all aspects of their training programme in the workplace. Literacy and numeracy support is successfully provided as required. Learners receive very comprehensive careers advice and are clear about their options for further progression within the company.
19. Learner progress reviews are weak. Some reviews are carried out late and practice is inconsistent across areas and branches. Learners' progress is monitored satisfactorily but learners are not always clear as to how much work still remains to complete the qualification. Target-setting is weak with insufficient emphasis on short term targets. Questions asked during reviews relating to health and safety or equal opportunities are superficial and do not fully test the learners' understanding of these topics. This issue was only partially identified in the self-assessment report.

## Leadership and management

### Good: Grade 2

Apprenticeships

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Train to Gain

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

**Equality of opportunity**

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

20. Leadership and management are good. Strategic leadership to promote learning is very strong as recognised in the self-assessment report. Directors and senior managers strongly promote training and development for all staff. The chief executive, supported by a good senior management team, provides focused leadership with a clear vision for learning



within the company. Staff development is specifically linked to clear business objectives. Good strategic planning involves staff at all levels. The company learning and development plan is supported by significant financial investment.

21. Operational management of the training programmes is good. Useful data is collected about learners and used by managers to accurately monitor their progress towards their qualifications. The learning and development managers meet assessors regularly to discuss the progress of individual learners. On- and off-the-job training is well co-ordinated to ensure that learners effectively cover all aspects of the programme. Involvement of supervisors and branch managers in training is good. This was correctly identified in the self-assessment report.
22. Internal communications are satisfactory. A regular schedule of staff meetings and training sessions are held within each branch. Assessors hold regular update meetings with the learning and development team reviewing each learner's performance and highlighting any issues that might affect their progress.
23. D&A uses its management information systems effectively. The learning and development managers have access to timely and accurate information on learner progress and achievement.
24. The company system for staff performance and development reviews is satisfactory, although not all assessors have been reviewed in the last year. Staff are encouraged to identify their personal and professional development needs. However, insufficient use is made of all information available to support performance management of tutors and assessors.
25. D&A is clearly focused on the continuous improvement of the programmes. Over the last year, the dedicated assessment team has been strengthened with the creation of assessment support roles. The workbooks and training materials have been redesigned to eliminate repetition and reflect the qualification standards more effectively. Success rates for the current year have improved across all training programmes and the number of learners succeeding in a timely manner has noticeably improved.
26. D&A gathers learner feedback and responds to it appropriately. Evaluations of training sessions are used effectively to improve quality. The process of internal verification is satisfactory and standardisation meetings are held to identify best practice. However, many quality improvement arrangements are not well established. For example, the provider has recently introduced a system of lesson observation. Although observations of each member of staff are to be carried out once a year, the specific criteria for the observations have yet to be agreed. Managers have been overly reliant on informal observations of staff. The outcomes of formal observations have not yet been used in appraisals to accurately identify staff development and training needs.
27. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. D&A offers very good access to training to all their optical retailing staff. Every member of staff can access training regardless of their eligibility for government funded programmes. D&A funds 60% of all training. The provider offers key skill qualifications to all learners. There are also advanced plans to offer an NVQ programme to staff working in the warehouse and distribution division of the company. The good access to training for all staff was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

28. Learners are aware of the grievance and appeals procedures and their rights and responsibilities are effectively covered in the training workbooks. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunities is adequate. The monitoring of learners' safety and welfare takes place during progress reviews.
29. There is insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity during training sessions. Learners' knowledge and awareness of equality issues are not developed alongside their vocational knowledge. There is no reinforcement or monitoring of the knowledge of equality of opportunity developed by learners during the progress reviews. D&A does not carry out a systematic analysis of differences in performance amongst the different learner groups. No actions have been identified for addressing performance imbalances amongst different gender groups.
30. Arrangements for self-assessment and development planning are satisfactory. Inspectors agree with many judgements in the self-assessment report. However, the report is too descriptive and the significance of a number of strengths is overstated. The self-assessment process does not take sufficient account of the views of assessors and tutors.

## What learners like:

- The support they receive – 'My buddy has helped me with all aspects of my training'
- The very good training provided
- The knowledge they gain
- Their expert trainers who explain complex subjects in a simple way
- The training programme and its focus on the customer

## What learners think could improve:

- Decrease the amount of paperwork used during the training
- Reduce the amount of information they receive
- The allocation of study time

## Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes** managed by the provider **2004 to 2007**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	9	78%	31%	78%	22%
		timely	9	78%	22%	78%	15%
	05-06	overall	29	83%	36%	83%	29%
		timely	29	79%	24%	79%	19%
	06-07	overall	33	64%	50%	64%	44%
		timely	33	64%	34%	64%	30%
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	101	59%	46%	16%	36%
		timely	118	49%	30%	10%	23%
	05-06	overall	107	86%	54%	61%	49%
		timely	98	60%	38%	35%	34%
	06-07	overall	103	75%	59%	58%	56%
		timely	97	49%	44%	33%	41%

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

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Success rates on **work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes** managed by the provider **2006 to 2007**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006/07	overall	30	86%
		timely	25	58%

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* Provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'