

NVQs.com Training Group

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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.

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), 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:

- Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Description of the provider

1. NVQs.com Training Group (NVQs.com) is a private provider of hairdressing training. It owns the trading name of Lookfantastic Training Limited (Lookfantastic), which is a division of the Lookfantastic Group Limited. The group has two main training centres in Brighton and Worthing and a head office in Hove, where it is currently developing a new training centre due to open in January 2008. There are two satellite training centres in Uckfield and Heathfield, run by Partners 4 Training (Partners) and Topknots Hair (Topknots), respectively. NVQs.com is in partnership with 110 hairdressing salons throughout Sussex to provide work-based learning, including eight Lookfantastic salons, which trade as separate franchised units under licence to Lookfantastic Franchisee Limited. The provider subcontracts some training to Partners and to Topknots. Partners owns a number of salons and delivers all aspects of training through its own trainer/assessors and internal verifiers. Staff from NVQs.com carry out the quality assurance of this provision. Topknots carries out practical training for learners in partnership with NVQs.com, which in turn delivers background theory training and internal verification. NVQs.com also partners with two local community colleges to deliver hairdressing training to 14 to 19 year old learners and collaborates with Chichester College in the provision of hairdressing at the college's Brinsbury campus.
2. NVQs.com contracts with Sussex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for apprenticeships. Some 168 learners are enrolled on hairdressing apprenticeships, of whom 151 are apprentices and the rest are advanced apprentices. Of these, 11 learners are men, 51 have additional learning needs. All these learners are employed. There are also an additional 66 learners aged 14 to 16 who are studying for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 1. NVQs.com does not deliver any beauty therapy provision.
3. The managing director is responsible for the company's day-to-day management and reports to four board members. The management team comprises a training director, a regional manager and two area managers. NVQs.com employs 10 full-time and two part-time members of staff.
4. West Sussex is predominantly affluent with some areas of deprivation. The proportion of people who are self-employed is higher in West Sussex than in the South East and England as a whole. The unemployment rate in West Sussex in July 2007 was 1.1% compared with the national average of 2.3%. Unemployment rates are higher in Brighton and the surrounding area. The proportion of residents in Sussex from minority ethnic groups is low.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Hairdressing provision is good. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are good. Leadership and management is good, as is equality of opportunity.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

6. NVQs.com demonstrates good capacity to improve. Effective steps have been taken by the provider to promote improvement since the previous inspection. NVQs.com has rectified all of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and many are now areas of strength. Arrangements for quality improvement are good. Overall success rates have improved significantly over the last three years. They have declined slightly in 2006/07, but are still above the overall national average for apprenticeships. The provider has identified the main reasons for the slight fall in success rates. It has implemented a number of successful actions in 2007/08 to improve initial assessment and to identify those salons that do not support learners sufficiently well.
7. The self-assessment process is good. It includes all staff and incorporates accurate data well. The most recent self-assessment report for 2006/07, written just before the inspection, identifies some, but not all, of the strengths of the provision. The report is comprehensive and has a strong focus on the quality of learners' experiences. The accompanying action plan for 2007/08 is very detailed and managers monitor the targets in the plan closely. The grades given by inspectors matched those in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- Very good development of learners' skills
- Very good teaching and learning
- Particularly thorough monitoring of learners' progress
- Very good partnerships to promote hairdressing
- Good learner support
- Strong leadership
- Good actions to improve training programmes
- Good promotion of equality of opportunity

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficient availability of models at one training centre
- Insufficient formal analysis of some aspects of performance

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

8. Achievement and standards are good. Learners' develop a wide range of very good skills. The standard of some learners work is well above the requirements of the NVQ at level 2. They demonstrate good technical skills and very well developed social skills. Learners show high levels of confidence and good communication when dealing with clients during consultations. The standard of personal presentation is very high. Learners are highly motivated and use their time in the training centres very effectively to develop all aspects of their role. They plan their work carefully to incorporate a good range of cutting and styling techniques, which meet industry requirements. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is very good. They make very effective use of photographic evidence to demonstrate their progress.
9. Success rates are satisfactory. The overall success rate has improved from 36% in 2004/05 to 63% in 2006/07, but this overall trend of improvement has not been consistent over this period. The apprenticeship success rate at level 2 has declined from 74% in 2005/06 to 63% in 2006/07. The success rate for advanced apprentices has improved over the same time period from 23% to 67%. Learners make good progress and timely success rates have improved rapidly over the last three years and are now significantly above national averages. NVQs.com has investigated the reasons for the drop in success rates in 2006/07 and has implemented a number of appropriate actions to rectify the issues identified. Many of the current learners are on target to complete their qualification before the agreed end date.
10. Progression rates are good. In 2006/07, 15 of the 18 learners who planned to complete their advanced apprenticeship had progressed from the level 2 apprenticeship. Learners enjoy their training and attendance rates are good.
11. Data used by inspectors to make judgements matched the success rates in the self-assessment report. The provider did not identify all of the strengths in achievement and standards through its self-assessment process.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

12. Teaching and learning are good. Staff are well qualified, very experienced and particularly enthusiastic about their work. Tutors have very good practical skills and technical knowledge and integrate up-to-date industry standards and practices well with their teaching. Team teaching in practical and background theory sessions is particularly good. Demonstrations are very clear and enable learners to reproduce cutting techniques to very high standards. Most learning sessions begin with clear aims and objectives and engage learners quickly in enjoyable and stimulating activities. Tutors place a strong emphasis on high standards of professional care, good manners and mutual respect. They integrate key skills teaching effectively with background theory sessions and challenge learners constantly to check their understanding of important concepts. Thorough health and safety practices are in place. NVQs.com ensures learners receive regular training in the

workplace. The provider invites employers to attend background theory and practical learning sessions to develop their training skills. In a small number of training sessions, trainers do not integrate background theory training sufficiently well with practical sessions to ensure continuity of learners' understanding.

13. Insufficient models are available at one training centre. The number of learners attending this centre has increased, but the number of clients has fallen. Managers are very aware of this area for improvement, and have identified the reasons and actions taken in the self-assessment report. They plan to move to a new training centre early in 2008, which is located in an area with more residential housing and potential clients.
14. Monitoring of learners' progress is particularly thorough. Staff carried out detailed checks of all aspects of learners' progress during reviews. Action plans are very detailed and contain targets that learners negotiate carefully with their training advisers. Learners are very aware of the targets, which they use well to help plan their work. Staff follow up learners' progress against their targets at subsequent reviews. Promotion of health and safety and equality of opportunity during reviews is particularly good. Training advisers carry out detailed discussions with learners to identify any issues at work and/or the training centres. Employers are involved fully in all reviews and give detailed updates on learners' progress. They contribute to the setting of targets. Staff encourage learners to keep their own personal diaries to record the activities carried out during training at work.
15. The extent to which programmes meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. NVQs.com uses partnerships very well to promote hairdressing to a wide range of age groups, as identified in the self-assessment report. Many of the partnerships are based in areas where there is a shortage of hairdressing provision for young people. The provider contributes funding, commercial advice, branding, staff, products and expertise in salon design to its partner providers. NVQs.com has developed accredited hairdressing courses successfully for 14 to 16 year olds at two local community colleges and for learners aged 14 to 19 at the Brinsbury campus of Chichester College. At one of the community colleges, learners aged 14 to 16 from a neighbouring school also attend for hairdressing training and learners in the sixth form study for hairdressing qualifications alongside their GCE A Levels. The retention rate is 100%. Working relationships with salons are very good. NVQs.com assists in the recruitment of new staff for employers who make good use of the good communications and up-to-date training.
16. Support for learners is good as identified in the self-assessment report. Staff meetings have a strong focus on the identification of issues which affect learners' progress. Where staff identify problems, they take immediate action to resolve them. This has enabled some learners with particularly challenging personal issues to continue their training and to make good progress. The arrangements for initial assessment and induction are very thorough and set out clearly the expectations that NVQs.com has of its learners and staff. The provision of information, advice and guidance is detailed, impartial and realistic. Learners with additional learning needs receive good support. For many learners this support is one of the main reasons why they are still on the programme.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

17. Leadership and management is good. Managers provide strong leadership. NVQs.com has a clear strategy for the expansion of its provision to meet the needs of new groups of learners. Staff use their considerable commercial experience to improve the provision. They have a positive approach to all aspects of training and very good problem-solving skills. is clear and decisive. Senior managers are passionate about the role of work-based learning, and hairdressing in particular, as a career route for young people. The managing director takes a very active role in the promotion of work-based learning throughout Sussex and is a member of the local LSC board. Until recently, he was chair of a member organisation representing the interests of all work-based learning providers across the county for five years. Managers are very supportive in assisting with training and assessment during periods of staff shortages.
18. The provider has taken good actions to improve training. Overall success rates have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Staff have rectified all of the weaknesses identified then and many are now key strengths. Staff share good practice well to improve their teaching and assessment. Managers make good use of audit checks to improve the quality of lesson plans and reviews. NVQs.com has recently introduced a grading system and a range of performance criteria to identify salons that demonstrate good or poor performance and no longer contracts with those employers who do not meet the required training standards. The provider does not allow work-based assessors who do not attend standardisation meetings to continue to assess learners.
19. Promotion of equality of opportunity is good. Learners demonstrate high levels of respect for each other, staff and their clients. At induction, learners receive a checklist which prompts them to find out about their employer's arrangements for equality of opportunity. The employers' handbook contains comprehensive guidance on equality of opportunity. Learners have a very good understanding of equality and diversity issues that are common to the hairdressing industry. Staff check learners' understanding of equal opportunities thoroughly during reviews. The provider has focused very effectively on the promotion of hairdressing as a career to under-represented groups and currently has 11 men in training.
20. The strategy for literacy, numeracy and language support is effective. Learners carry out a comprehensive initial assessment to identify their individual needs and many receive good levels of support. NVQs.com has experienced problems in recruiting a specialist literacy and numeracy tutor until recently, but has made good arrangements to ensure this has not had a negative effect on learners.
21. Insufficient formal analysis is carried out of some aspects of performance. The accuracy and reliability of data is good. The member of staff responsible for data has a very good understanding of new measures of success and provides a wide range of regular performance reports. Some managers are not sufficiently aware of trends in performance or differences in success rates between the different training centres and types of qualification. Some management meetings do not focus sufficiently on overall performance. Staff have a good awareness of why success rates have declined, but do not identify the reasons in the self-assessment report or identify targets for improving success rates in the 2007/08 action plan. Managers do not set staff specific formal improvement targets during appraisal. Teaching and learning are good, but observations of learning sessions are not sufficiently detailed and do not identify the strengths and areas for

improvement accurately. Some observations of assessment carried out by internal verifiers are insufficiently detailed

What learners like:

- Very supportive staff – ‘staff are easy to get on with’
- Good atmosphere – ‘we are treated like adults’
- Training they receive at the training centres
- Individual attention to learners’ needs
- Realistic action plans – ‘I feel I am making good progress now’

What learners think could improve:

- Accessibility to the training rooms at the Worthing centre
- Refreshment facilities at the Brighton training centre
- Availability of clients and models at the Brighton training centre
- Delays to the theory teaching timetable caused by some learners forgetting their text books and/or folders

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by the provider 2004/05 to 2006/07

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	45	22%	48%	22%	34%
		timely	44	14%	31%	14%	22%
	05-06	overall	13	23%	53%	23%	44%
		timely	11	0%	34%	0%	28%
	06-07***	overall	18	67%		67%	
		timely	18	67%		67%	
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	78	45%	51%	44%	39%
		timely	79	42%	29%	41%	22%
	05-06	overall	102	74%	58%	74%	52%
		timely	99	67%	38%	67%	34%
	06-07***	overall	142	63%		63%	
		timely	146	61%		61%	

* 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

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

*** LSC data for 2006/07 has yet to be validated