

Aston Recruitment and Training Ltd.

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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. Aston Recruitment and Training Ltd. (Aston) is a private training organisation, which provides modern apprenticeships in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Aston was established in 1987 and has its headquarters in Northampton. Since the previous inspection, the provider no longer offers provision in business administration and law. At the time of inspection, there were 10 advanced hairdressing apprentices and 77 apprentices. Two learners were enrolled on a Train to Gain hairdressing programme, there was one privately funded learner and three business administration apprentices.
2. Aston's managing director sets the organisation's strategic aims and direction, assisted by the finance and operations director. A quality and contracts manager works with both directors to support their role. The provider currently employs 14 staff, seven of who are subcontracted to work for Aston. The provider carries out the quality assurance of training for one assessment centre based at a private hairdressing salon. It also carries out the internal verification and quality assurance monitoring processes for a further two private salons. All learners attend Aston's training centre in Northampton to receive background theory and key skills training.
3. Northamptonshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funds Aston's training. The provider recruits most of its learners from the Northamptonshire area, where residents from a minority ethnic background account for 4.9% of the population according to the 2001 census. This is considerably lower than the average of 9.1% for England as a whole.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2

Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
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Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
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Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
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Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
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Sector subject area

Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. The hairdressing and beauty therapy provision is good. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are good. Aston's leadership and management are good, as is equality of opportunity.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

5. Aston demonstrates that it has good capacity to improve. The provider has a clear focus on meeting learners' needs and on continuous improvement. The effectiveness of the steps taken by the provider to promote improvement since the previous inspection is good in both hairdressing and in leadership and management. Success rates for learners are high and learners progress well. The provider has comprehensive quality improvement arrangements, but has not yet established a formal quality improvement plan.
6. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It involves staff appropriately and reflects learners' and employers' feedback accurately. The process appropriately reflects the learner experience, but it is insufficiently comprehensive in describing the key points. Inspectors' mostly agreed with the strengths and areas for improvement identified in the report.

Key strengths

- High success rates
- Very good development of learners' skills
- Highly effective review process
- Strong and clear leadership
- Good actions to improve the quality of the provision
- Good promotion of equality of opportunity

Key areas for improvement

- The inadequate planning and delivery of some background theory training
- The under-developed quality improvement processes for some parts of the provision

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. The success rate for hairdressing apprentices is high. It improved from 69% in 2003/04 and 61% in 2004/05 to 79% in 2005/06 and was consistently above the national average. In 2006/07 however, the success rate has fallen to 63%. Success rates for the small number of advanced apprentices in hairdressing are also well above the national average. Success rates for male learners and those from a black ethnic background are good at 73% and 85%, respectively.
8. Apprentices develop very good skills early in their programme. Some first year learners carry out advanced colouring techniques on clients and blow dry with confidence. The standard of some learners work is well above the requirements of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 2. Some learners have participated in photographic shoots and had their work portrayed in a leading industry journal. All learners display a professional attitude towards their clients and reflect good industry standards of hygiene and health and safety. Learners benefit from attending frequent hair shows and demonstrations organised by the provider in partnership with employers and well-known stylists.
9. Learners progress well with their qualification and approximately half of the current learners have progressed ahead of their planned targets. Most of the learners who left in 2006/07 have obtained promotion at work after completing their qualification. Three learners have become style directors and a further two have successfully set up their own salons.
10. Inspectors' judgements matched most of the strengths and areas for improvement highlighted in this section of the self-assessment report.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

11. The overall quality of provision is good. Employers provide learners with well-planned and effective on-the-job training. Learners receive effective individual tuition to develop their skills. Staff focus strongly on learners' high standards of professional client care, good manners and mutual respect. They integrate key skills well with the vocational training to ensure learners cover them early in the programme. Learners' portfolios are well organised and contain a wide range of good evidence.
12. Aston has developed a highly effective review process. Reviews are regular and staff involve employers effectively in setting targets for learners, which help them progress quickly to complete their qualifications. Staff monitor learners' progress well throughout all aspects of the training programme, including activities in salons. Employers assess learners' progress independently of the learners who also carry out a self-assessment of their own progress. Staff reinforce health and safety and equality of opportunity well

during reviews and challenge learners' understanding through good use of effective questioning.

13. Employers show strong commitment to the training programme. Aston has worked hard to build good working relationships with employers and keep them well informed of changes which affect the programme through regular meetings and newsletters. Employers use their own initiative to manage their input to the training process and contribute regularly through providing practical demonstrations in the training centre for all learners. They encourage and support learners to organise hair shows and to enter competitions. Employers have a very good understanding of the apprenticeship framework and are fully aware of the progress their learners make.
14. Learners receive good individual support. Staff meet regularly with learners to support them with learning and personal matters and respond confidentially and promptly to issues raised. Aston has made changes to the learning programme to take account of learners' individual circumstances. Learners receive their own newsletter, which makes them aware of the different types of support. They benefit from an effective induction, which incorporates training in health and safety and equality of opportunity. Learners receive adequate information, advice and guidance at the beginning and end of their training programme. They speak positively about the comprehensive support available to them. Aston identified this strength in its self-assessment report.
15. Assessment practices are generally satisfactory. Assessment is regular and many employers are involved in on-the-job assessments. Learners receive prompt and accurate feedback on their competence. Initial assessment and guidance are satisfactory. Aston assesses learners' literacy and numeracy skills satisfactorily; learners complete on-line assessments and obtain prompt feedback on their performance.. At the time of inspection, the provider had identified only one learner with additional learning needs who was receiving appropriate levels of support.
16. The planning and delivery of some background theory is inadequate. Some lesson plans are insufficiently detailed and do not identify the individual activities planned for the session. Tutors do not make learners sufficiently aware of the aims of the lesson. Some learning activities are not challenging enough. Tutors demonstration of some practical skills is incorrect, as partly identified by the provider as an area for improvement in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

17. The leadership and management of the organisation are good. Aston has strong and clear leadership. Since the previous inspection, the provider has ensured that it focuses its strategy well on the learning experience. Aston has a specific strategy to increase learner

retention and achievement, which it updates regularly. There are clear business and marketing plans, which support the delivery of the organisation's objectives. The provider meets local needs well through the delivery of accredited hairdressing NVQ units for 14-16 year old learners. Aston shares its mission and objectives appropriately with staff and reviews them regularly at meetings. The provider identifies this strength in its self-assessment report.

18. Internal and external communications are particularly effective. Frequent, well-minuted meetings take place, which focus on learner's progress. The team discusses issues such as health and safety and equality of opportunity. Aston implements any actions for improvement quickly. Learners and employers have access to a very useful newsletter showcasing the learners' work and communicating very clearly any changes relating to the qualification and the general progress of learners. Employers receive very frequent visits from the management team and hold in-depth discussions about learner progress and improvement areas in the provision. Aston identified this strength in its self-assessment report.
19. Aston uses its management information systems well to manage learner progress. The provider carries out a very comprehensive analysis of data to monitor the different aspects of learners' achievements. Those learners at risk of not completing in a timely manner are promptly identified and corrective actions are implemented. Staff agree monthly activity targets for each learner and these are carefully monitored by management and regularly updated onto the centralised information system.
20. Aston promotes equality of opportunity well. The provider has a year plan which identifies a wide range of activities designed to promote diversity and equality of opportunity. The provider's equality and diversity policies adequately reflect the current legislation. Staff training on equality of opportunity and cultural diversity takes place regularly and staff display a very good level of awareness of the relevant diversity issues within the hairdressing industry.
21. The provider has focused particularly effectively on the promotion of hairdressing as a career to under-represented groups. Marketing materials and promotional events have successfully targeted male learners and those from a minority ethnic background. Aston has exceeded all of its recruitment targets for these groups. The provider is actively involved in the promotion of African-Caribbean hairdressing at a national level and is working closely with other providers and awarding bodies to create a dedicated NVQ. Aston uses media and community initiatives well to deliver free careers advice to groups who are difficult to reach, such as young mothers and learners from an Asian background.
22. Aston shares its equality and diversity policies with employers and monitors their use well. Learners receive comprehensive equality of opportunity training during induction and in progress reviews. However, staff do not formally record the development of learners' equality and diversity knowledge on the review forms.
23. After the previous inspection, Aston implemented a number of good initiatives to improve the quality of the provision. The provider has carried out substantial development activities with their staff and subcontractors. Aston focused on developing a better relationship with learners by establishing a training centre at their headquarters. Learners who required a new work placement were able to remain on their programme at the

training centre while the provider found a new employer. The provider increased the number of hair demonstrations for learners to offer them additional hairdressing skills. Aston strengthened the internal verification process through the recruitment of a lead internal verifier and the training of three members of staff as internal verifiers. The provider gathers learners' and employers' feedback throughout the year and carries out a careful analysis to identify any areas for improvement.

24. Staff appraisal and development are satisfactory. Although staff receive a six monthly appraisal to review their performance, their objectives do not relate clearly to business needs and targets are insufficiently challenging. Aston plans annual staff training effectively and ensures it focuses on improving the quality of learning through staff performance.
25. The strategy for literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory. Learners carry out a comprehensive initial assessment to identify their individual needs and receive appropriate levels of support.
26. Some aspects of quality improvement are underdeveloped in the provision. The quality improvement policies and the year planner are too general. There is no formal quality improvement plan, to capture the priority areas identified through the different improvement activities. Although the provider carries out teaching and learning observations regularly for all staff and subcontractors, the observation process is insufficiently challenging. The provider does not moderate the grades given for observations. Aston identifies this area for improvement in its self-assessment report.

What learners like:

- The training they receive in their salons
- The support Aston staff give them - 'they are kind and helpful'
- The hair shows and the extra learning activities that involve learners
- 'Aston makes you feel like you are part of the team'

What learners think could improve:

- No improvements identified

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/c ollege NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	37	43%	31%	35%	22%
		timely	36	39%	22%	31%	15%
	05-06	overall	8	63%		50%	
		timely	7	57%		43%	
	06-07	overall	7	100%		100%***	
		timely	7	100%		100%***	
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	70	63%	46%	61%	36%
		timely	68	57%	30%	56%	23%
	05-06	overall	38	79%		79%	
		timely	39	77%		77%	
	06-07	overall	60	63%		63%***	
		timely	60	60%		60%***	

Note 'At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006-07 had yet to be fully validated'

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

*** 2006-07 data has not been validated by the LSC at the time of publication of the report