

# Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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**Unique reference number:** 51573

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**Inspection date(s):** 14 November 2019

**Type of provider:** Employer

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Boots Opticians Professional Services Limited was inspected in October 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Boots provides levy-funded apprenticeships for its own staff. The most recently recruited 45 apprentices are following level 2 standards programmes for optical assistants, and pharmacy services assistants. The 53 apprentices who were recruited earlier in the programme are completing frameworks in optical retail and pharmacy services.

### Themes

**To what extent do staff now identify apprentices' starting points and use this information to design learning programmes that enable apprentices to achieve their potential?** **Reasonable progress**

Apprentices benefit from a comprehensive introduction to their apprenticeship. This helps them to understand the fundamentals of their programmes. They complete detailed assessments of their English and mathematical skills that assessor-tutors use well to identify any extra support that apprentices may need. They direct apprentices to online resources that help them to fill in any gaps in their knowledge.

Assessor-tutors frequently undertake detailed and helpful progress reviews with apprentices. Most assessor-tutors set targets that are largely based upon their assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that the apprentices need to develop. Apprentices find these targets helpful when prioritising their work.

**How much progress have managers made in developing an English and mathematics strategy and in using this strategy to help apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills in these subjects?** **Reasonable progress**

Managers have developed an English and mathematics strategy that addresses many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. This has led to all assessor-tutors improving their own English and mathematical skills and an expectation that

all apprentices will gain a level 2 qualification in these subjects by the end of their apprenticeship.

Assessor-tutors understand that one intention of the strategy is to provide individualised English and mathematics programmes for apprentices. They ensure that all apprentices undertake online learning activities tailored to their individual needs. This helps many to improve their English and mathematics skills. However, the strategy itself does not make this intention clear.

All apprentices undertake a work-based project specifically designed to develop their English and mathematical skills. This is a successful innovation and managers intend to develop additional, similar projects soon. Apprentices produce work of a good standard for these projects.

Assessor-tutors do not do enough to identify and help apprentices rectify weaknesses in their other written work. Although they highlight some mistakes that apprentices have made, they miss others. The feedback that assessor-tutors give is often not sufficiently precise to help apprentices improve, and they do not provide further support to help apprentices avoid mistakes that they make consistently. Consequently, not all apprentices improve the standard of their writing as they progress through their apprenticeship.

**How much progress have managers made in ensuring that assessors have appropriate skills to support apprentices with their learning, including with recently introduced standards apprenticeships?** **Reasonable progress**

Managers have taken steps to help assessor-tutors to develop their teaching skills. For example, they arranged for an external trainer to give guidance on things to consider when planning lessons.

Managers frequently observe assessor-tutors at work so that they can judge the effectiveness of improvement actions. They produce reports on this activity that they use to inform discussions between assessor-tutors and themselves about training and development needs. However, the lesson observation records include a confusing amount of detail which is not always helpful or relevant. Although the manager works with assessor-tutors to address any identified weaknesses, the actions they take lack precision and are not always clear. In addition to individual meetings with their manager, assessor-tutors participate in quarterly meetings with managers and colleagues that include discussions and training to support them with their teaching.

Assessor-tutors have developed a good understanding of the end-point assessment (EPA) requirements of the newly introduced standards apprenticeships. They understand what apprentices need to do to achieve high grades. Managers have arranged further training from an EPA awarding body to enhance this understanding.

Assessor-tutors, and apprentices' workplace colleagues, provide effective training and guidance. As a result, apprentices enjoy their learning and develop substantial new knowledge and skills. For example, the optical assistant apprentices learn to read prescriptions, understand the different problems that patients have with their eyes, and can use this information to give advice on appropriate lenses and frames.

**To what extent do apprentices now understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism, and the impact these may have on their lives and work? Reasonable progress**

Staff have undertaken training on radicalisation and extremism with the regional 'Prevent' coordinator. This helps them to ensure that apprentices receive detailed information when they join Boots, about radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices develop their understanding further through online training. All apprentices recognise the warning signs of radicalised behaviour and are confident about what to do if they encounter it in store or in their personal lives. Apprentices understand the important role they can play in identifying safeguarding concerns through their regular contact with patients.

**To what extent do governors challenge leaders and managers and support them to deliver high-quality programmes? Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection governance arrangements have been revitalised. Senior leaders are now represented on the board and an external apprenticeship expert has been recruited. Managers present a comprehensive range of information to board members that provides an analysis of the progress apprentices have made. As a result, board members are well informed and are able to ask pertinent questions. However, minutes of these meetings are not recorded well enough and board members do not set clear improvement actions for managers.

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