

Venture Learning Limited

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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' monitoring 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. Venture Learning Limited was established in October 2003 as a private training provider and specialises in hairdressing training. It has five training centres in and around Wigan and Leigh. Three of the training centres are located in high schools. The company's head office is in Wigan, where a team of three directors is responsible for the leadership and management and the day-to-day running of the company. It has four shareholders, two of whom are also directors. In addition to the directors and shareholders, Venture Learning employs 22 people.
2. Venture Learning has 105 apprentices and 47 advanced apprentices, all following programmes in hairdressing. In addition, it has 208 pupils from 13 local schools following National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 1 programmes in hairdressing. The provider has a single contract with Greater Manchester LSC and works with 110 employers.
3. The unemployment rate in Wigan is 2.8% compared with the national average in August of 2.3%. Wigan is rated 80 out of 354 local authorities in the index of deprivation. In Wigan in 2007, 61% of young people achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C compared with the national average of 62%. According to the 2001 census, 2.4% of the population are of minority ethnic origin.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Outstanding: Grade 1
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Overall and timely success rates are outstanding and learners develop very good hairdressing, personal and social skills. Leadership and management are outstanding and the arrangements for equality of opportunity are good.
5. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Learners attend the training centres for off-the-job training and benefit from excellent individual coaching with a strong emphasis on developing personal and social skills. Venture Learning has outstanding arrangements to meet the needs of its learners, partners and community. Social and educational inclusion are excellent. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

6. Venture Learning has an outstanding capacity to improve. Managers and staff are clear on how they will continue to improve quality. Arrangements for quality improvement are well established and highly effective in bringing about improvements in the provision. Quality assurance systems are excellent; long established, comprehensive and are applied thoroughly by staff and managers. All areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been resolved. Success rates have improved significantly and continue to be well above national averages.
7. The self-assessment process is highly effective and the report accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement. Action plans are developed well, contain appropriate actions and effective targets, and are audited frequently and thoroughly. The self-assessment action plan is co-ordinated with the business and strategic plans. It is regularly and effectively reviewed by managers.

Key strengths:

- Outstanding overall success rates
- Very good timely success rates
- Very good development of learners' hairdressing, personal and social skills
- Exceptional individual coaching both on- and off-the-job
- Particularly effective monitoring and reviewing of learners' progress
- Outstanding links with local schools
- Excellent engagement of employers
- Outstanding support for learners

- Excellent and well established arrangements for quality assurance and quality improvement
- Clear strategic direction supported by very good operational planning
- Particularly good management of growth and change
- Highly productive partnerships
- Very good staff development and performance management
- Good reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity
- Outstanding educational and social inclusion

Key areas for improvement:

- Insufficiently early involvement of staff in self-assessment

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

8. Success rates are outstanding. Venture Learning has continued to improve achievement and standards since the previous inspection when they were good. Since then, overall and timely success rates have improved considerably and remain well above the national average. In 2007/08, the overall rate for all apprentices was 20 percentage points above the national average at 84% and the timely rate was 26 percentage points above the national rate at 74%. Separating success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices, both were outstanding in 2007/08 at 83% and 86% respectively.
9. Learners develop good practical hairdressing skills in the training centres, where they respond well to the very good classroom teaching. Apprentices work confidently with clients and use techniques to a high and commercially acceptable standard. Learners' written work is of a high standard and learners develop good information technology skills in their assignment work. Portfolios are well presented and help learners to progress. Apprentices also develop good skills in their hairdressing salons where many advanced apprentices operate as stylists. School pupils develop useful additional skills such as blow drying, the use of tongs and devices for straightening hair, manicure and make-up. A strong emphasis is placed on developing their personal and social skills. Learners agree to a set of behaviour values which are reinforced throughout theory and practical sessions, and help them to develop their confidence, communication and social skills.
10. No differences exist in success rates between male and female learners, or learners from different ethnic groups. All achieve equally well. The self-assessment identified the strengths in achievement and standards.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

11. Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. The provider identified most of the strengths in its self-assessment report. Group sizes in the training centre are small and learners benefit from exceptional individual tuition and coaching. Tutors are skilled in giving learners clear explanations of complex topics. Learners develop their literacy and numeracy skills in small groups with the support of a specialist tutor. Tutors have a good understanding of the current commercial industry and have close links with the salon employers. In the practical sessions, assessment opportunities are planned well by tutors. A good range of models is available to enable learners to practise their skills and for assessment purposes. Theory sessions are interesting, highly interactive and challenge learners' knowledge. Learners are confident in asking questions and contributing to group work. Most employers in the salons provide well planned and delivered on-the-job training sessions, which give learners additional opportunities for skills

development and assessment. Assessors visit salons frequently and learners have good access to timely assessments. Extensive use is made of work-based assessment.

12. Monitoring and reviewing of learners' progress is highly effective. Learners are fully aware of the progress they have made and of the target dates for the achievement of the component parts of their apprenticeship framework. They are much better placed to achieve them by the planned date. Very high timely success rates confirm this. Individual learner's progress is well recorded in their portfolios, individual learning plans and in the progress review forms. Wall charts are displayed in the training centres to provide a visual record of individual learner's progress, showing the current percentage towards the full achievement required for the NVQ. The charts are used effectively by the learners and are frequently updated. Venture Learning's tutors regularly review learners' progress during off-the-job training. Employers are involved in the reviews and are fully aware of learners' progress. Clear and effective targets are set at each review and progress is monitored closely by Venture Learning's staff and the employers. They use the information to plan their in-salon training and assessments. Learners make good progress. Many of them complete their programmes ahead of time.
13. The engagement of employers is excellent. Venture Learning has a well established network of salon employers. Well-planned on-the-job training is an integral part of the learning process. Venture Learning's tutors and assessors make frequent contact with employers. Newsletters and information packs keep them informed. Many salons have one or more work-based assessors. They support learners and take an active part in their training and assessment. Many link the in-salon training with the off-the-job training in Venture Learning's centres. Venture Learning's staff support employers in a range of business matters, such as health and safety and employment contracts.
14. Links with local schools are outstanding. Venture Learning has established an excellent relationship with 13 schools in the borough and is a key player in the consortium that has been established to develop vocational education and the diplomas. Venture Learning has worked very closely with three schools. It has provided these schools with valuable support and expertise in establishing their own professional salons with a modern image and the latest industry-standard equipment. Students in schools make outstanding progress with very good skill development. Courses in schools are organised very well and have been enhanced to meet learners' needs. In addition to level 1 hairdressing, learners complete short courses in make-up and manicure. Realistic learning opportunities with clients are good. Enrichment opportunities include visits to hair shows and work-placements in salons. Guidance and support for learners is outstanding. Individual support and coaching in practical sessions is exceptionally good. A strong emphasis is placed on developing learners' personal and social skills. Students agree to a set of behaviour values that are reinforced throughout theory and practical sessions with constant reference to health and safety.

15. Support for learners is very good, from Venture Learning's staff and from salon employers. Venture Learning has an appropriate and effective skills for life strategy. Initial assessment is effective at identifying learners who require additional support. A specialist tutor provides excellent support for learners in literacy and numeracy skills. Learning sessions in literacy and numeracy inspire and motivate learners. Venture Learning has developed excellent systems to monitor the support given to learners to ensure they achieve the key skills. The hairdressing tutors provide support in key skills for all learners. Learning materials are occupationally related. Learners receive good support for their training from their employers who encourage learners to acquire skills above the level required for the NVQ. All staff provide very good guidance and personal support for learners. Learners are confident about asking tutors for support. Venture Learning's staff help learners to resolve problems arising in the workplace. Venture Learning has a system which is used with learners who are at risk of leaving their programmes early. Learners' attendance and achievement is monitored closely and any problems are resolved early. Initial advice and guidance is impartial, unbiased and highly effective.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

16. Venture Learning has a clear strategic direction supported by very good operational planning. Managers and directors have carefully developed a strategy for expanding the provision while maintaining high success rates and improving quality. A clear and thorough development plan sets an agenda for carefully managed growth into areas of provision where Venture Learning can meet social and educational needs, as well as provision that meets the needs of learners with higher academic attainment on entry. All of this is based on the firm foundation of careful business planning and timely staff development to ensure staff have the skills to meet the challenges that growth brings.

17. Management of growth and change is particularly good. Since the previous inspection, Venture Learning has changed its operation considerably. Careful planning and good links with funding bodies and schools have resulted in the clear strategic direction in line with local and national priorities. The new and highly successful collaboration with schools and the valuable work with learners, such as single and young mothers and those at risk of entering the category of people not in education, employment or training, has been skilfully managed. Careful operational planning and staff development has made a valuable contribution to the success of these areas of work.

18. Arrangements for quality assurance and improvement are excellent and established well. Quality assurance systems were in use before the previous inspection and continue to be used exactly as envisaged then. This consistency over a sustained period has helped to achieve outstanding outcomes. Venture

Learning has a full set of policies and procedures to cover all aspects of quality assurance and improvement. They are well written, comprehensive, regularly reviewed and applied thoroughly by staff and managers. Staff benefit from a useful and helpful quality assurance manual which provides checklists and work instructions in a clear format. Venture Learning carries out particularly good audits of the policies and procedures. They are planned well and clearly structured, and each audit produces a detailed report and action plan. Action plans are monitored effectively and all actions are followed up and signed off by a senior member of staff. Other quality assurance activities include a very good system of observation of teaching and learning, highly effective monitoring of learners' progress reviews, excellent and comprehensive file checks and particularly good internal verification. Many of the strengths were identified in the self-assessment report, as was the absence of areas for improvement. However, staff are involved insufficiently in the early stages of writing the self-assessment report.

19. Partnership working is highly productive. Venture learning has a broad range of links with local employers and other organisations, such as Connexions and YMCA, to meet the needs of the local area. Venture Learning's commitment to widening participation and education and social inclusion is outstanding. The organisation promotes apprenticeships well and is involved in raising learners' ambitions through 'aim higher' projects. A range of courses have been developed to meet the needs of the local community and in particular introductory courses for young people not in education, training or employment. Much of Venture Learning's provision is targeted to meet the needs of learners with low academic attainment on entry. These learners are supported well and achieve as well as other learners.
20. Communication is good and staff work well as a team. The formal meetings structure is streamlined and effective. Meetings at all levels are recorded effectively and produce appropriate follow-up actions. Good use is made of the accurate and timely management information and data.
21. Performance management is very good. Staff appraisal is well established and is effective in setting targets for staff, monitoring their performance and identifying development needs. Staff development is excellent. The balance of organisational and individual priorities is appropriate, and all staff are encouraged but not forced to develop themselves. Clear and detailed appraisal records are helpful to managers and staff in raising standards and bringing about improvements.
22. Equality of opportunity is good. Venture Learning actively promotes gender equality. Male role models are used effectively in promotional materials along with other methods of promoting a career in hairdressing to men. For example, the company sponsors a local junior football team with shirts which advertise hairdressing training. The proportion of male learners reflects the national average and the low numbers of learners from minority ethnic groups is around the local average.

23. Reinforcement of learners' knowledge and understanding of equality of opportunity is particularly effective. Learners display a good knowledge of equality and diversity. Initial training in equality and diversity starts positively at induction and continues with very effective reinforcement actions, such as poster campaigns, during individual learner's progress reviews and in tutorial sessions.
24. The organisation meets current government requirements on safeguarding and all staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. Staff have received updated training on equality and disability legislation. The organisation now has centres for training that are accessible for learners with mobility difficulties, although the training salon in Wigan town centre is not accessible.

What learners like:

- 'All the staff are approachable'
- 'They explain things simply and take time even when you are struggling'
- 'We learn a lot and they make it fun'
- 'I was very shy at the start of the course, now I find it easy to join in'
- 'Staff are friendly'
- 'I learn something new every week'
- 'Don't change anything'
- 'I enjoy helping juniors in the salon training'
- 'We're treated like adults'
- 'We can work at our own pace'

What learners think could improve:

- Learners were unable to identify any improvements

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by the provider **2005 to 2008**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	05-06	overall	26	50	53	50	42
		timely	24	21	34	21	27
	06-07	overall	45	56	63	51	56
		timely	43	35	43	35	38
	07-08	overall	29	84	68	83	62
		timely	27	74	48	74	44
Apprenticeships	05-06	overall	53	80	57	77	51
		timely	52	74	37	73	33
	06-07	overall	92	63	64	63	60
		timely	110	67	47	67	44
	07-08	overall	61	86	67	85	64
		timely	46	74	52	74	50

- * 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'