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Mr C Garcia
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Dear Mr Garcia

Ofsted 2010–11 survey inspection programme: numeracy – tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 26 and 27 October 2010 to look at your work in numeracy.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, learners and employers; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of learners' work; and observation of five learning sessions involving numeracy.

Overall, Lifetime Health and Fitness Limited (Lifetime) is good at tackling the challenge of ensuring that young people and adults gain the numeracy skills they need for their careers and personal lives.

Key findings

- Lifetime is managing its key skills provision well. It is currently reviewing its learning support arrangements to increase the team's capacity to cope with the increasing number of learners doing key skills, including those taking application of number. Assessors use the results of the initial and diagnostic assessments well to plan learning sessions. Assessors are clear about when to refer learners for specialist numeracy support and learners are fully aware of the areas they need to develop in numeracy. Two specialist tutors provide numeracy support for a large number of learners across the country. One of the specialist tutors is highly qualified. The other specialist tutor and all assessors are appropriately qualified to help learners develop their numeracy skills.

- The business development team works very well with national employers to ensure it has a good understanding of what the apprenticeship entails. Employers and learners are enthusiastic about all aspects of the programme, including learners' work towards the qualification in application of number.
- The assessors and specialist tutors provide good support to develop learners' numeracy skills and enable them to complete their application of number project and prepare for the external test. They use their good industrial experience well to put the work towards this qualification into the context of each learner's job. They also identify where learners have applied numeracy when they observe them completing tasks at work for their main qualification. However, they do not link these examples to the application of number in either the assessment records or during discussions with learners. Learners interviewed said they viewed their project as a discrete activity for the qualification and did not appreciate the full range of circumstances where they use mathematics at work.
- A high proportion of learners require additional learning support in numeracy. The two specialist tutors have a good understanding of how to help learners overcome any barriers to developing numeracy skills. They combine this and support in literacy and language skills very effectively to build learners' confidence in all the basic skills they need for their training.
- Lifetime has developed a good range of learning resources for application of number. Assessors make very effective use of external resources, including computer-based resources, to help them explain relevant mathematical concepts to learners. They are adept at building on the methods learners are comfortable to use when carrying out mathematical calculations, only suggesting different ways where they feel it appropriate. However, a few learners do not have easy access to the internet at work or home, restricting the range of activities they can use for further practice. The specialist tutors have designed a useful flowchart showing the process for completing key skills, but not all assessors use this resource with their learners.
- Lifetime has consistently high overall and timely success rates that are significantly above the national average. Application of number success rates are very high, at 90% for the last three years. A good proportion of learners achieve the external test when they sit this for the first time.
- The apprentices learn to value the importance and usefulness of numeracy for their work and personal lives as they complete their application of number project. Assessors collaborate very effectively with learners to agree an individual project that is particularly relevant to their work environment or interests. Some learners continue to use their increased numeracy skills to manage shifts at their leisure centre, understand sales targets and analyse and react to trends in complaints.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop the strategy and capacity for providing additional learning support in numeracy, taking account of the growing number of learners and wide geographical area in which they work

- ensuring that all staff share good practice effectively and that assessors use the specialist resources for numeracy with all their learners, including those not identified as needing additional learning support
- improving learners' appreciation of how numeracy applies fully to their job role by including this within assessments.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop numeracy at Lifetime Health and Fitness Limited.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector