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Mrs B Hughes
Head of Continuous Improvement
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Dear Mrs Hughes

Ofsted 2011–12 survey inspection programme: employability - the impact of skills programmes for adults on achieving sustained employment

This survey evaluates providers' response to initiatives launched on 1 August 2011 to use Skills Funding Agency funds flexibly to support people on benefits.

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and participants, during my visits on 17 and 18 October 2011 and 22 February 2012 to look at your work in employability provision in Birkenhead and Liverpool.

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, participants and subcontractors; scrutiny of relevant documents; analysis of participants' work; and observation of two pre-employment training sessions.

Key findings

- Since August 2011, Avanta has effectively built on its knowledge and experience of delivering skills and employability programmes. It has successfully developed and piloted a pre-employment training programme that is now established in three regions of England. Managers are effectively extending the synergy between the company's skills division and employability division through the development of sector-specific pre-employment training courses.
- Avanta has re-branded and moved into refurbished offices in Birkenhead and Liverpool that provide participants with a welcoming and productive environment for them to develop their employability skills. These offices

were specifically sited to be close to jobcentres and other work programme providers.

- In Birkenhead and Liverpool, Avanta has developed very effective partnerships and working relationships with jobcentres, work programme prime contractors, subcontractors and employers. A subcontractor in Knowsley runs a successful retail academy to ensure that local people are developing the vocational and employability skills needed for a new retail development.
- Avanta has developed a comprehensive handbook that provides training staff with detailed guidance on the pre-employment training programme. A wide range of useful resources is available to staff who are enthusiastic about the positive impact the programme is having on unemployed people. Staff share good practice through meetings and Avanta's quality assurance arrangements.
- During the pre-employment programmes, participants gain in confidence and are more motivated to find employment. They value the opportunity to reflect on, and demonstrate, employability skills and to build an accurate and personal CV. However, not all actions identified by individuals during the programmes are recorded on Avanta's job management system.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop the vocational and sector-specific pre-employment training programmes and where possible link programmes with recruitment opportunities identified by employers
- ensuring that the job management system captures all the key learning points and actions participants and staff identify during the pre-employment training programme so that they can monitor and review participants' progress.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop employability provision at Avanta.

As 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 is also being sent to the Skills Funding Agency.

Yours sincerely

Joy Montgomery
Her Majesty's Inspector