

Mercedes-Benz UK Limited

Employer

Inspection dates		13–16 November 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Apprentices achieve particularly high success rates and develop very good technical and practical skills that lead to outstanding outcomes.
- Mercedes-Benz UK (MB UK) provides particularly good personal support for apprentices that helps them to succeed and achieve the very high standards set within the apprenticeship framework requirements.
- A good standard of teaching, training and assessment encourages apprentices to quickly develop the knowledge and skills employers require for them to be able to work effectively on highly technical vehicle systems.
- Very well planned apprenticeship programmes ensure that on- and off-the-job training is closely monitored to provide clear, well-coordinated and effective apprenticeship frameworks.
- Apprentices' skills are developed and assessed at an early stage of the programme, allowing the apprentices to improve their confidence and become productive very quickly. Frequent assessments in the workplace from the start of the programme following off-the-job training provide clear evidence of competence and motivate them to work hard and to succeed.
- Managers demonstrate ambitious and decisive leadership through clear strategic direction that has led to continuous and rapid improvements. MB UK has heavily invested in building a very high-quality apprentice training academy and developing a successful apprenticeship programme to meet the needs of its dealership network.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Teaching and learning during the off-the-job training are not always sufficiently stimulating and do not include a wide enough range of teaching methods to fully engage apprentices.
- Trainers and assessors do not build relevant aspects of equality and diversity into the apprenticeship learning programme imaginatively enough to develop and test apprentices' understanding.
- The additional learning support some apprentices need is not always provided quickly enough.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the standard of teaching and learning during off-the-job training, by sharing best practice between tutors and involving apprentices more in the learning process. Make sure that lesson observations focus on the learning taking place and not just the performance of the tutors.
- Integrate personal learning and thinking skills into the apprenticeship learning programme, to develop apprentices' cognitive abilities and make apprentices more responsible for their own learning.
- Include more inspiring aspects of equality and diversity in the programme. Identify interesting and topical equality and diversity issues relevant to the industry that apprentices may encounter. Plan in opportunities to raise and discuss the equality and diversity issues to stimulate their interest and develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Promote the benefits of employing female apprentices to employers in the dealership network. Identify any reasons why female candidates selected by MB UK as suitable for apprenticeships are often not recruited by dealership employers. Use evidence identified by employers recruiting female apprentices to promote to other employers the benefits of doing so. Work with employers to break down the barriers that may exist to ensure recruitment processes are fair and unbiased.
- Provide prompt support for apprentices identified as requiring additional learning support to ensure that their progress is in line with that of other apprentices. Provide a systematic process that identifies additional support needs, together with the level of support required, and ensure it is planned into the apprenticeship programme. Evaluate the effectiveness of any support provided in helping to improve apprentices' progress and achievement rates.
- Ensure that detailed information is included in improvement action plans, with clearly measurable success criteria if the required actions have been fully achieved.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
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- In the last three years success rates have been very high and improving for motor vehicle apprenticeships, and they are well above the national success rates. The published apprenticeship success rates for the last full year period are exceptionally high. Good improvements have been made in the proportion of apprentices achieving within the planned time, and for the last three years this has been well above the national averages.
- An effective 'at risk' system is used to quickly identify apprentices who are falling behind with their work or whose personal problems are holding back their progress. An action plan is agreed to address any identified issues, and it is regularly monitored by the apprentice programme's operation manager to make sure all issues are fully resolved. This process has helped to improve significantly the retention of apprentices and the completion of apprenticeship frameworks within the planned time.
- There are no marked achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices. All achieve well and make good progress relative to their starting points and learning goals, although the achievements of apprentices aged 16 to 18 are marginally lower than of those aged 19 or over.
- Apprentices develop good personal, social and technical work skills during their training. They quickly improve their confidence and maturity levels as they learn new practical trade skills and gain additional technical knowledge. A high number of apprentices, over 80%, who recently completed their programme are still employed in Mercedes-Benz dealerships.

- From the start of the programme there are high expectations that, after completing their apprenticeship, apprentices will progress onto courses that lead to higher-level MB technician qualifications. Many past apprentices have gained further qualifications and progressed to higher levels within the dealerships. Many ex-apprentices become mentors for new apprentices, and some progress into management positions within the dealerships.
- Employers have a very good understanding of the apprenticeship programme and demonstrate an excellent commitment. They knowledgeably spend time discussing off-the-job training reports, looking at progression against expectations and being involved in target setting during the eight-weekly progress reviews. Employers pay for hotel accommodation and other expenses while the apprentices attend several one-week blocks of off-the-job training at MB UK each year.
- Coordination of on- and off-the-job training is very good because the training programme is planned and organised well. Off-the-job training reports are used particularly well to inform employers about the work tasks in which apprentices need to gain competence. Assessments are well planned to take place following sufficient exposure to the work tasks. The good planning and coordination of on- and off-the-job training enable apprentices to efficiently develop their skills and to make very good progress with their qualification requirements.
- Apprentices' English and mathematics skills are developed particularly well. The apprentices receive detailed and constructive feedback about their written work that helps them to develop their writing abilities. However, a minority of apprentices require specialist additional learning support and organising this has been too slow. The recent requirement to integrate personal learning and thinking skills into the apprenticeship programme has not yet been met, although MB UK is planning to introduce it in 2013.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good overall and this contributes significantly to the particularly high success rates. Apprentices benefit from employment in a variety of well-equipped motor vehicle dealerships and service workshops that are of very high quality and provide good quality opportunities to develop the necessary skills.
- Planning and delivery of apprenticeships are particularly good, with excellent communication and coordination between the MB UK training academy and the workplace. Dealership employers see apprentices as a valuable business investment and participate enthusiastically. Employers make significant efforts to provide suitable workplace tasks and opportunities for apprentices to collect relevant evidence towards their qualification.
- Teaching and training are good, both in the training academy and the workplace. Tutors recruited for their vocational expertise use their knowledge well to engage and motivate apprentices. Skilful questioning and frequent assignments successfully test and reinforce learning. Tutors do not get enough opportunities to share best practice, particularly in terms of how to involve learners more in learning.
- Highly-skilled workshop mentors provide expert guidance to apprentices, enabling them to develop very high levels of practical skills and technical knowledge. At all stages of the apprenticeship programme, safe working practices are given a very high priority, as is apprentices' awareness of environmental issues.
- Apprentices have high expectations placed on them, and successfully complete a wide range of tasks between each period at the MB UK training academy. At the same time as completing their apprenticeship studies, they work towards additional MB UK competences, to prepare them to aim for higher recognition as qualified MB technicians.
- Apprentices develop particularly good personal, communication and customer care skills and many demonstrate good maturity. For example, one apprentice showed outstanding customer care skills when running the reception desk for a week in a major commercial vehicle dealership. All apprentices communicate confidently with their managers, customers, peers and training staff and all present a very professional attitude that reflects their pride in the MB brand.

- Following a recent period of high staff turnover, assessment and tracking of apprentice programmes are now particularly strong. Assessment is carefully planned and particularly thorough. Apprentices are frequently directly observed in the workplace for skills competence. Personal learning and thinking skills are not sufficiently integrated into the programme, and reinforcement of equality and diversity during training sessions and at progress reviews is often unimaginative and focused too much on legislation.
- Assessment of skills begins at a very early stage in the programme and employers state that apprentices gain confidence and become productive very quickly. Feedback following assessment is detailed and constructive, and clearly identifies their progress. Tracking systems accurately inform apprentices, their employers and MB UK of progress against expected outcomes.
- Apprentice progress reviews are comprehensive, thorough and detailed. Well-informed reviewers understand all aspects of apprentices' progress, including that made at the MB UK training academy. Reviews revisit previously set targets and lead to a number of very specific, challenging targets that are clearly communicated to the apprentice, their mentor and the employer.
- Apprentices take great responsibility for their learning throughout the programme. They clearly understand what is expected of them and the commercial consequences of not completing work on time or to a high enough standard.
- The apprentices recruited have high levels of literacy and numeracy. Additional learning support is mainly good, but in a small number of cases there is significant delay in providing the required support.
- Personal support for apprentices is outstanding. MB UK takes safeguarding and apprentices' personal safety very seriously and carefully supervises young apprentices during their residential training blocks and workplace activities. MB UK employs a learner liaison officer who not only offers support at the training academy but also regularly visits apprentices at their hotel to check on their well-being and resolve any concerns. Workplace mentors make considerable efforts to support apprentices in the workplace, and assessors are flexible and very responsive to apprentices' needs.
- Resources are of a very high standard, both in the MB UK training academy and the workplace. Dealership workshops are very well equipped, with high levels of cleanliness and health and safety, and apprentices readily adopt these high standards. They clearly understand the need to provide excellent customer service to a range of very discerning customers.
- At the MB UK training academy, excellent facilities are used for teaching and training on passenger cars, commercial vehicles and parts operations. Apprentices benefit from a preview and introduction to the latest vehicle technology when new products are being evaluated.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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- Apprentices benefit from ambitious and decisive leadership. Inspirational strategic direction has led to continuous and rapid sustained improvements in apprentices' outcomes, and improvements in training and assessment. Strategic planning is exceptionally thorough and the head of training provides strong leadership to a highly experienced staff team.
- Since the last inspection the pace of improvements has been very good. MB UK has made a £2.3 million investment in an apprentice training academy, developing the apprenticeship programme and improving apprentices' experiences and success. Staff and managers have worked exceptionally well to improve the standard of coaching, training and assessment, and the quality of the sessions observed has improved over time. However, their observations do not always focus enough on the learning taking place during sessions, rather than the teaching.
- The system for evaluating and developing staff performance and expertise is thorough. Leaders have high expectations of staff and apprentices. They routinely and rigorously evaluate the quality of training and provide underperforming staff with good support. Apprentices benefit

from excellent training resources, and highly experienced staff use outstanding MB UK technical training materials, resources and facilities to develop their practice.

- Good arrangements for raising quality have led to sustained improvements. Managers ensure that the experiences of apprentices and employers are the main focus of all improvement initiatives. MB UK is highly critical of its own performance and that of the subcontractor, and has responded very strongly to the findings of the previous inspection.
- The arrangements for, and frequency of, assessment in the workplace are now highly effective. Senior managers use data well to measure performance. Target setting is well established, with challenging targets for the subcontractor and MB UK staff. Self-assessment is effective, although the success criteria in the quality improvement plan are not always measurable. Managers make good use of the views of apprentices and employers to improve the experiences and welfare of apprentices.
- The programme is highly structured and closely meets the needs of new apprentices and employers by offering carefully designed and highly useful programmes of training and learning. MB UK offers training in a good range of motor vehicle trades to apprentices and employers, and meets their needs well. The management of learning programmes is good, as is the planning of on-and off-the-job training that prepares apprentices well for permanent employment.
- Apprentices benefit from highly individualised on-the-job coaching and assessment. MB UK is committed to the promotion of apprenticeships within its national dealership network. A high proportion of apprentices progress to higher-level MB professional skills development programmes.
- Managers use data well to monitor enquiries, applications and placements. MB UK receives a satisfactory level of enquiries and subsequent initial applications from women. However, too few female applicants successfully achieve a placement with MB dealerships. The arrangements to follow up unsuccessful applications are underdeveloped, and staff do not routinely investigate and review the reasons.
- Almost all apprentices from under-represented groups successfully complete their qualifications, but there are too few apprentices to identify meaningful trends.
- Equality and diversity are promoted at induction and progress reviews, and apprentices' behaviour is well managed. However, some work is still needed to fully integrate relevant and interesting aspects of equality and diversity into the apprenticeship learning programme.
- MB UK meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices. All training staff and assessors undergo timely enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks, and the records sampled were up to date. Apprentices are well cared for and their health, safety and well-being are thoroughly checked throughout the programme.
- MB UK takes care to ensure that safeguarding is given a high priority at all times, but especially whilst apprentices are staying in the hotel accommodation during off-the-job training blocks. A staff member from MB UK regularly visits the hotel and provides good support for apprentices, transport is provided to and from the hotel when attending the academy, and a no-alcohol rule is strictly enforced.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Mercedes-Benz UK Limited

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	1	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Motor Vehicle	2

Provider details

Mercedes-Benz UK Limited	
Type of provider	Employer
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 331
	Part-time: 0
Principal/CEO	Marcus Breitschwardt
Date of previous inspection	July 2010
Website address	http://www2.mercedes-benz.co.uk/content/unitedkingdom/mpc/mpc_unitedkingdom_website/en/home_mpc/passengercars/home/ownership/apprenticeships.html

Provider information at the time of the inspection						
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	234	13	61	9	0	0
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (FSA)					
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remit Resourcing 					

Additional socio-economic information

MB UK has its headquarters in Milton Keynes and is engaged in the import and distribution of passenger cars, light and heavy commercial vehicles and spare parts. The company started an apprentice programme in 1995, managed through external training providers. In 2008 the company expanded its training division to incorporate delivery of apprenticeships internally. MB UK offers motor vehicle apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships to its franchised retail dealership network across England, Wales and Scotland. Remit Resourcing provides a team of trainers and assessors who work solely for MB UK. Assessors visit the dealerships for assessment and progress reviewing purposes. Trainers provide block release technical training at a purpose-built training centre in Milton Keynes.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

John Grimmer HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the apprentice programme operations manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on apprentices' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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