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Dear Jane

Ofsted Good Practice Survey Programme 2008/09

An evaluation of adult progression in learning

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation during my visit on the 15th of January 2009. I am particularly grateful to you and all your staff for the hard work involved in preparing for the visit and for giving up a great deal of time during the visit to meet with me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

The visit provided much useful evidence, which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting for the Adult Progression survey, as well as a wider survey we are carrying out on progression, titled 'Moving Through The System'. It was particularly interesting to see provision in engineering and business administration.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made on this one-day visit included: interviews with staff, partners and learners and scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided. I reviewed a range of documents and visited the business units at Samlesbury.

Overall, the progression rates and arrangements to facilitate adult progression provided by BAE Systems are outstanding. I agreed to provide a summary of the good practice seen and to identify some areas for development, and I outline the main findings as bulleted points below.

The main strengths are:

- Very good success rates

In 2007-08 overall success rates for the advanced apprenticeship programme at the BAE Systems Warton unit were 88%, and the timely success rate was 83%, both well above the national rates. Engineering advanced apprenticeship overall success

rates were 81% in 2005-06, 93% in 2006-07 and 91% in 2007-08 which are consistently high for the sector and significantly above the national rates. Attendance at the training sessions is good and adequately meets awarding body requirements.

- Good development of skills and application of learning

Learners work on a wide range of engineering projects in the workplace and in the training centre, and quickly develop an understanding of the different engineering trades within the company. Learners develop skills that can be used in many parts of the business. They demonstrate particularly high levels of skills which they use with confidence. Learners produce high standards of work. They work very effectively as team members and make a valuable contribution to the company.

- Good career progression opportunities

BAE Systems provides very clear progression routes for learners. On successful completion of the apprenticeship framework, learners progress into full-time employment, with opportunities for increased salary and responsibility. In 2007/08, 85 learners completed (92%) and moved into employment with BAE Systems. Of the current workforce of supervisors and team leaders, 155 (46%) are from the apprenticeship scheme and at executive level, currently 232 (16%) are ex-apprentices. Learners who have completed the apprenticeship programme remain with the company for longer than those who are direct recruits.

- Good progression rates onto further and higher education qualifications

Most learners achieve qualifications at a higher level than those required for their framework. They also achieve additional qualifications. Craft advanced apprentices complete a national certificate for their engineering framework, and the majority progress to a higher national certificate (HNC). Technicians complete the HNC as a requirement of their advanced apprenticeship framework, and most learners choose to move on to study the HND. The company provides financial support for the qualifications. Many learners progress to degree level courses or to an equivalent vocational qualification, which, for the business administration apprentices includes accounting or procurement. BAE Systems provides financial support for learners who enrol on courses at the universities.

- Good range of programmes and additional qualifications that meet individual learner needs and support progression

BAE Systems provides craft and technical qualifications from ONC to HND, as well as business administration qualifications. The courses always include the higher maths option which prepares learners well for progression. Learners can move onto the foundation degree. All of the courses are delivered in the centre at times to suit core working arrangements. A range of disciplines is covered, to include manufacturing, plant and electrical. In addition learners have CAD and 3-D modelling tools training. Many study key skills at level 3. Business apprenticeship learners benefit from additional qualifications such as a project management course and an exam-based computer literacy qualification. Learners have a variety of enrichment opportunities

which develop good work-related skills which prepare them well for progression, as well as raising their profiles within the company. Activities include community projects, an innovation challenge to develop project management and leadership skills, manufacturing a stage set for a performing arts company whose performances are aimed at encouraging school children to consider engineering as a future career and an exchange visit with counterparts to work on one of BAE Systems' partner company bases in Germany.

- Creation of an effective learning environment to help learners identify their preferred areas of work  
Training staff set high expectations and learners respond well. The training centre emulates the rigorous work routines and procedures, and learners quickly understand and respect the company values. Training staff have excellent vocational experience. Learners benefit from the very well-resourced training rooms. They have access to whole or sections of aircraft in the training centre, which are used effectively to simulate working on real aircraft. Learners have the opportunity to work on a wide range of products and new technologies. Work placements are very good on all programmes and learners have the opportunity to move around the sections within the business units. They can extend their experience and sample different aspects of the business. This provides them with the opportunity to express preferences in which areas they would prefer to work and often they gain employment in the area on completing their apprenticeship programmes.

- Good support to facilitate participation and progression  
Training staff provide excellent pastoral and vocational support, which helps learner progression. Many of the staff are ex-BAE Systems employees and their working knowledge of the departments and processes enhances the support for learners. Many of the workplace supervisors, team leaders, managers and colleagues are ex-apprentices. They provide good mentoring and buddy support for learners. In addition, learners are supported by an occupational health team and the trade union. Celebrating learner achievement is of high importance, and BAE Systems has well thought out incentive schemes, systems and events to retain and reward apprentices.

- Good partnership working and links with external organisations.  
BAE Systems works well with schools and local consortia to promote progression into the apprenticeship programmes. The foundation degree was developed in conjunction with John Moore's University and good relationships exist with local further education colleges. Learners benefit from the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) established in conjunction with the various business units within BAE Systems. In addition, senior managers are members of organisations which support learner achievement and progression, such as the Employers' Federation, national focus groups, the sector skills and the Apprentice Ambassadors' Network.

Areas for further development:

- Obtain and evaluate learners' progression data

BAE Systems holds data on progression onto and through the levels of the qualification, which staff analyse well. Data is held on progression onto full-time employment and departments or business functions hold data on individual progression identified through the professional development reviews. However, the company does not have a system in place which captures and records data on progression across the whole of the company beyond the end of the programmes. BAE Systems is aware of this and is developing a process to capture information on achievers and support continuous professional development beyond the apprenticeships.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your adult provision. If there are any points or aspects of the visit you wish to discuss, please contact me. As we will be evaluating the survey, you may be contacted in the future to find out your views. I hope you will contribute to this evaluation.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted Website.

Yours sincerely

Linda Gallacher

Additional Inspector