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Mr M Currie
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Dear Mr Currie

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: the role of employers in work-related education and training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation during my visit on 20 October 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 me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

The visit provided valuable information that will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. The published report for this survey will list the names of contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to help form the judgements included interviews with 13 staff, five employers and six learners; observations of information, advice and guidance sessions and scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided. A range of documents, case studies and data were reviewed.

I agreed to provide a summary of the good practice seen and to identify some areas for development and outline the main findings below.

The main strengths

- Overall success rates on the Train to Gain Skills for Life provision are high and improving. In 2007/08, overall success rates were 76.8%, which is above the national average of 71.8%. Currently in 2008/09, these rates have increased further to 84.6%.
- Overall success rates on apprenticeship programmes are well above the national average at 75.3% in 2007/08. Timely success rates are high and have improved over a three-year period. In 2007/08, the proportion of learners completing their apprenticeships within the planned time increased to 62.8%, 17% above the national average.

- Job outcome rates are low, but have improved during the first year of the co-financed Skills for Jobs programme. Many providers are achieving significantly lower job outcomes than Mantra Learning. In September 2009, job outcomes for Mantra Learning were 42%, and for the consortium 32%, placing them in the top three providers in the North West. Thirty four per cent of learners remain in learning. Clear targets have been set to ensure job outcomes improve.
- Collaborative working with employers is particularly effective. Mantra Learning works very closely with employers to ensure that they are fully involved in the planning and delivery of training. Regular feedback is collected and used by Mantra learning to improve the quality of off-the-job training. Any aspect of the training that is graded as satisfactory or below by an employer is clearly actioned by Mantra Learning and reviewed with the employer at six-monthly intervals. Employers are actively involved in the recruitment and selection of apprentices and in the planning of their learning. They are also supported by Mantra learning in the recruitment of new staff. Employers are encouraged to observe and deliver off-the-job training, but their expertise is underused in the delivery of training.
- Communication with employers is frequent and well-planned. Regular meetings with individual employers and learners provide good opportunities to discuss the learners' programme and future assessment needs. They are used very effectively to ensure that learners' on- and off-the-job-training is of a high standard. Detailed reviews are used to plan learners' work roles to enable them to complete their apprenticeship within the planned time. Many employers have been supported and trained by Mantra Learning to become assessors, increasing their understanding of the assessment process and providing immediate access to assessment for learners. Currently not all employers have assessors in the workplace.
- Mantra Learning places a strong emphasis on ensuring all training staff have relevant industrial experience that is regularly updated. This knowledge ensures that training meets the changing needs of the logistics industry and that apprentices are well-equipped to work effectively and efficiently in the industry. Employers are used particularly effectively to support the updating of training staff.
- The company responds flexibly to changing industry needs. Employers are actively supported by Mantra Learning through a business improvement needs analysis. This detailed review supports employers to identify training needs and business targets for their company to enable them to operate more effectively and support staff to progress. As a result of this analysis, Mantra Learning develops and delivers a range of programmes, and ensures that on- and off-the-job training is current and relevant. Mantra Learning has recently invested in a new learning and research innovation centre equipped with the most up-to-date technology to provide real work and training for apprentices and all employees involved in the logistics industry.
- Mantra Learning offers a particularly broad range of provision to meet the needs of employers and learners. Courses, many of which have been

designed with employers and higher-education providers, are offered from entry level to level 5. A recently developed programme, in conjunction with the DWP, is supporting employers to manage their redundancy programmes as well as to support employees during their redundancy notice period to gain additional skills and to move into alternative employment. Close working with the national trade union learning team is helping employers to offer new learning opportunities to employees, such as literacy and numeracy at levels 2 and 3.

- Mentors are used very effectively, particularly to support young apprentices and work-based assessors. They ensure that learners are provided with a good range of opportunities to enable them to develop good working practices and to provide stretch and challenge in the workplace. Mentors support learners to develop good work skills, such as punctuality and behaviour. In addition, they ensure that new assessors understand their role in the assessment process and the importance of the planning of assessment.
- Strong and well-established collaboration with schools is providing increasing numbers of school students of all abilities with enhanced vocational and learning choices from Year 9 onwards. Programmes, which are designed, developed and delivered in collaboration with employers, include the Young Apprenticeship Programme and bespoke, individualised learning. They very effectively offer stretch and challenge to gifted and talented learners, helping them to make good progress with A-level courses and progress faster than their peers. Mantra Learning's individualised learning is particularly successful in supporting learners at risk of exclusion to remain in education. Employers and learners report that this experience of work-related learning ensures that they are work-ready when they move into employment. Mantra Learning's close attention to safeguarding ensures that all learners are safe while attending training at their premises as well as in the workplace.

The main areas for further development, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the number of learners progressing into employment from the Skills for Jobs programme
- developing the use of the new learning research and innovation centre warehouse to use employers in the delivery of training for learners
- continuing to develop the training and use of assessors in the workplace.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop provision. If there are any points you wish to discuss, please contact me. We gather information on the impact of our visits. To this end, you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete six to 12 months after the visit. 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 and will be available to the team for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Clinton
Her Majesty's Inspector