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Dear Mr Consterdine

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: good practice in apprenticeship training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 19 November 2009 to look at good practice in construction apprenticeship training.

The visit provided valuable information that 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 discussions with key members of staff, learners and key partners, together with a review of documentation relating to the apprenticeship training programme and associated quality assurance material.

Features of good practice

- The very effective support provided by vocationally competent staff to help learners achieve the apprenticeship framework.

Vocationally competent training officers provide good support to learners and help them to progress through the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Training officers complete progress reviews and link effectively with college subcontractors and with employers to monitor learners' progress. The support provided by training officers with regard to the completion of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) requirements is particularly effective. Training officers run portfolio-building sessions to guide learners through the evidence requirements and liaise with employers to enable learners to complete activities in the workplace that allow assessment by direct observation. Learners speak very highly of the support provided by training

officers, especially with regard to completing the portfolio requirements of the framework.

- The good arrangements for providing initial advice and guidance and for the selection and testing of applicants.

A useful and informative website provides information, advice and guidance to prospective learners. The application process is explained clearly and includes a Basic Skills Agency assessment of literacy and numeracy, together with an aptitude assessment. Data show a close correlation between high numeracy marks in initial assessment and overall qualification success rates. Learners that require additional support are identified following initial assessment and appropriate support arrangements are put in place. Applications are monitored by gender and ethnicity and a number of initiatives are ongoing to encourage the participation of females and other underrepresented groups.

- The strong relationships with employers that support apprentices in achieving the target qualification.

Regional managers, assistant regional managers and training officers know the employers in their areas well. Employers speak highly of the provider and receive frequent contact informing them of learners' progress. Employers are very supportive of their apprentices and work closely with the provider to ensure that the work activities completed give learners the required range of experience. Where learners are unable to complete an aspect of work required by the qualification with their employer, the provider, working closely with the employer, finds an alternative work-placement to enable the learner to gain the required experience and gather the evidence necessary for them to complete the qualification.

- The productive working relationships with college subcontractors that support learners' progress.

Training officers and regional training centre coordinators work closely with college subcontractors and together support learners to progress. The provider has produced teaching and learning materials to help support college staff in the delivery of the technical certificate aspect of the framework. Working relationships between the subcontractors and the provider are good and training officers are informed of learners' progress. Frequent progress reviews are completed by training officers and these detail what learners need to do to further improve. The provider makes good use of subcontractor facilities to support learners with the NVQ aspect of the framework.

- The good performance management arrangements to quality assure the apprenticeship training programme.

Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and include regular internal monitoring visits, audits and regional inspections carried out by the internal quality team. A quality handbook, together with relevant policies and procedures, defines roles and responsibilities as well as expectations clearly. Regional managers receive a wide range of management information to help them monitor the performance of staff, learners and subcontractors in their

area. Frequent team meetings enable effective communication. All staff are appraised and are set performance targets relevant to their job role. Staff have received training and development that better equip them to perform their duties. Subcontractors are monitored appropriately by the provider and are supported or challenged as necessary.

Areas for development

- To improve timely success rates by enabling learners to complete NVQ assessment activity and collect the required evidence as soon as they are competent to do so.

Timely success rates continue to be below average and have been exceptionally low in previous years. Learners start completing assessment activities or gathering evidence for the NVQ aspect of the framework during the third and fourth year of their course. However, in some cases, learners have completed activities to the required assessment standards well before they are formally assessed and opportunities to accredit these activities are missed. Careful planning is required to enable learners to complete the framework within the timescale set and to enable assessment as soon as the learner is competent to complete a task rather than after a set period of time.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop apprenticeship training in your organisation.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Paul Joyce
Her Majesty's Inspector