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Ms J Woolley
Associate Director
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Dear Ms Woolley

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 13 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 associate directors, managers, key members of staff, learners in the training centre, learners and employers on-site and the observation of a learner progress review.

Features of good practice

- Good and constantly improving overall and timely success rates.

Overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved by 32 percentage points over a four year period. Overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships have improved 22 percentage points over the same period. Timely success rates have also improved and are almost the same as overall success rates. Key factors in this are low ratios of trainer-assessors to learners, regular visits to the workplace, good access to assessment, and support while on-site and in college. In addition, learners move between employers to improve their training and assessment opportunities and aid progression.

■ Good development of practical skills and technical knowledge by learners.

The standard of learners' work on-site is good and meets the expectations of employers and their customers. Learners demonstrate a clear understanding of the technical knowledge relevant to their chosen craft. They take great pride in their work and are able to explain good practice in a range of different contexts. Learners have a good awareness of safe working practices and demonstrate these on-site and in the training centre. All trainer-assessors have industry skills that reflect current practice and benefit learners. These are kept up to date through continuing professional development in the industry. On- and off-the-job training are complementary and learners rarely repeat activities. Learners extend their skills by taking part in skills competitions, strongly encouraged by Total People.

■ Active involvement of employers in training benefits learners' progress.

Employers play an active role in training and are enthusiastic and supportive of their learners. They demonstrate a clear understanding of training and assessment and seek to help learners gain the most from their training. Learners are given responsibility to complete specific tasks on-site. Most are able to complete these to a good standard with minimal supervision. Employers make a good contribution to learners' progress reviews, especially when targets are agreed for on-the-job training. All employers, with whom Total People works, have identified work-based recorders who support learners in gathering evidence and confirm the authenticity of work.

■ Improved focus and delivery of key skills increasing success rates.

Much priority has been given to improving key skills. Key skills are now delivered and achieved much earlier in the programme. An improved ability in key skills has helped learners' self-confidence and progress in their vocational studies. The teaching of key skills is contextualised within learners' main studies. Well-designed assignments involve learners working to specifications and building regulations, designing projects, determining health and safety arrangements, estimating costs and producing reports. Learners develop their oratory skills by presenting their project findings to the rest of the group. They see the relevance of this approach and the importance of key skills to their future development. The construction team has a key skills champion who leads on developments. A dedicated functional skills team supports learners individually, in small groups or in drop-in sessions.

■ Well-planned assessment meets learners' and employers' needs.

Assessment is well-planned and managed. A diverse range of assessment methods are used both on- and off-the-job. Learners are visited every three weeks by trainer-assessors to carry out assessment and to provide support. All learners are assessed through direct observation of competence on-site, which removes the need for simulation and write-ups for product evidence. Learners are able to contact assessors and request assessment when the opportunity arises. Assessors respond well and carry out assessment outside normal working hours to meet learners' and employers' needs. The recording and monitoring of assessment is very detailed and thorough. Learners receive

helpful feedback from assessors, both orally and in writing, which explains clearly what they need to do to improve. Learners' portfolios are presented well and contain a wide range of evidence which is carefully cross-referenced to the performance criteria.

- The good guidance and support that helps learners to complete their training.

Learners are guided and supported well by their training advisers. They provide first-rate technical support to help learners develop their vocational skills and effective personal support to help them deal with personal problems. Training advisers establish strong relationships between the learner and employer. They often act as advocates for learners in helping resolve personal and work problems. As recession has hit the construction industry, an increasing number of learners have faced redundancy. These learners have received useful guidance and support to identify further employment opportunities. Many have acquired alternative employment through their training advisers which has enabled them to complete their apprenticeships. The support provided is highly valued by learners who say it is instrumental in enabling them to stay on their programme and achieve.

Areas for development

- Develop more effective sharing of good practice in the use of information learning technology.

The use of information learning technology in teaching, learning and assessment is not developed well in construction. Good practice in the use of this technology is developed well in Total People in subject areas, such as engineering, but as yet this has not been developed in construction.

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

Michael Berry
Her Majesty's Inspector