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Mr P Lewis
Vice Principal
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Dear Mr Lewis

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 12 November 2009 to look at good practice in hospitality and catering 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 employers, examination of documentation and the observation of resources and training activities at the college.

Features of good practice

■ The high and continuously improving overall and timely success rates.

The college has been successful in improving both overall and timely success rates continuously over a three-year period to well above national averages. This is particularly significant when compared with success rates for hospitality in London that are well below those for England. For example, in apprenticeships there was an improvement of 26 percentage points for both overall and timely success rates, both standing at 81% in 2008. Success rates for advanced apprenticeships are also high with no difference between overall and timely rates. Key factors in raising timely success rates to the same level as overall success rates include improvements in employer engagement and key skills success.

- The particularly effective promotion of progression opportunities within the hospitality industry.

The college offers a wide range of courses from entry to degree level. School pupils have the opportunity to attend a 10-week course on Saturday mornings called the 'Junior Chef Academy'. This is sponsored by a national hospitality employer and is beginning to lead to attendees progressing into training in the industry. There are many examples of full-time college learners progressing to work-based programmes as well as from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships. Learners interviewed were all keen to progress further in training including to higher education.

- The very good teaching and use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to enhance learning and improve completion of frameworks.

Theory and practical training are particularly good and planned thoroughly to make the best use of a wide range of resources. Staff are held in high regard by learners because of their ability to teach well and their particularly good industry backgrounds, such as holding a senior position in a Michelin starred restaurant. Practical training makes use of seasonal produce, such as game, which extends the experience of many learners beyond what they might face at work. This increases their future employability prospects. Hospitality staff have been using and developing resources for the VLE within the college for several years and make good use of it in all teaching. Learners take photographs of their completed dishes and store them electronically. Learners develop good information technology skills and can access the VLE remotely when outside the college, allowing them to catch up if they should miss their day at college.

- The very good integration of key skills into hospitality training including a competition-based assignment enjoyed by learners and their employers.

The college has integrated key skills into hospitality training well and they are enjoyed by learners. The culmination of much of the key skills work is a competition where learners must research and produce their own menu within a tight financial budget. All learners complete the task very well and approach it with enthusiasm and imagination. They are able to use communication, application of number and information technology particularly well. The level 3 project involves using software that explores nutritional values of food along with the concept of food foraging to reduce the carbon footprint of menus where food is not sourced locally. The menus produced are of a very high standard and extend the learning of both hospitality and key skills. There is a clear focus on improving the confidence and employability skills of learners. Employers can clearly see the relevance of key skills and support their learners well in preparing for the projects.

- The good engagement of employers in the apprenticeship programme helping learners to meet their targets by increasing training and assessment opportunities in the workplace.

The college coordinator of hospitality work-based learning has improved communication considerably with employers and has increased their

involvement in the learners' training. Careful planning ensures that visits to the workplace involve learners' supervisors and managers who can influence the job tasks available to learners. There are several examples of extra training and assessment opportunities being provided as a direct result of college intervention. There are detailed employer packs for both hospitality National Vocational Qualifications at levels 2 and 3, including details of key skills projects. Employers say that they now know what their learners are doing at college and they can adjust the work of learners to give them relevant experience to reflect what is happening at college. Many employers visit the college to judge or to see their learners. If necessary, assessments can be carried out by college staff in the workplace to keep learners on target to complete their frameworks. The college has been proactive in working with major hospitality employers to offer different apprenticeship routes that meet employers' and learners' needs.

- The wide range of enrichment activities enjoyed by learners that enhance learning and give a wider knowledge of hospitality.

Learners are given the chance to take an additional Westminster Diploma that is endorsed by the Craft Guild of Chefs. This is by examination and has much credit within industry, helping future employment prospects. Learners undertake a two-day trip, to the main food market of Paris, that helps develop understanding of quality produce and French cuisine. Trips are also arranged more locally, such as to Billingsgate Fish Market. There are also opportunities to compete in college and national competitions.

Areas for development

- Continue the preparations for the introduction of electronic portfolios.

The college is exploring the introduction of electronic portfolios that will require the logging of information online but which should reduce some of the work required with completion of paper portfolios.

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

Phil Hatton
Her Majesty's Inspector