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Ms J Tindale
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Dear Ms Tindale

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 27 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, the views of learners, and the examination of documentation and training resources.

Features of good practice

- The very swift rise in overall and timely success rates following significant changes to the delivery model of apprenticeship training.

Whitbread has successfully improved both overall and timely success rates in a single year, from historically low rates to above the national average. This is despite some negative impact remaining on success rates from their previous delivery model when using a subcontractor. The key factor in raising success rates has been changing the delivery model for training. This included fully engaging managers in training, improving learners' support, improving the delivery of key skills and making a significant investment in both electronic and traditional paper-based learning resources that specifically reflect the needs of Whitbread and the hospitality industry.

- Particularly effective management action to bring training under company control to improve the quality of the learner experience and better meet the needs of the company.

Senior company managers recognised that the quality of training being provided by a large subcontracted training provider on their behalf was not meeting company or learners' needs. Low success rates and an unsatisfactory learning experience resulted. They stopped working with the subcontractor last year and took over the provision of government-funded training themselves. Actions included internal restructuring to provide focused management support for training apprentices. Whitbread has always been a company with a strong focus on training their workforce and reviewed what was already in place to cross-reference against hospitality and catering National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) units. The strong involvement of managers substantially influenced the training model that was eventually implemented. Managers interviewed are very experienced in the industry and enthusiastic about providing progression opportunities in training and employment. A new subcontractor provides specialist literacy and numeracy support to Whitbread staff and is managed carefully to ensure that learners' needs are met in the workplace. Managers in different regions are competitive and keen for their learners to do well and succeed.

- The apprenticeship training model that ensures learners are well-supported in the workplace to develop commercial skills and to complete their frameworks.

Training managers, and staff from a new subcontractor, have planned learning carefully that links Whitbread's own training materials and programmes to NVQ units. This provides learners with training which meets the skills needs of the hospitality industry as well as those required by Whitbread. Training is provided intensively in the workplace over a six-month period according to a schedule that is shared with and understood by all parties involved. This includes progress reviews that identify actions to support learners who might fall behind schedule. Learners are supported well. Induction is provided by new starter 'champions' and helps to enthuse new learners. These champions are selected carefully and seen as a key role in advocating the benefits of training. The learner is also supported throughout training by a 'buddy' who is an experienced team member, as well as their managers. There may be a series of buddies in different areas on a particular site, such as the kitchen, reception or restaurant. Training involves high-quality, easy-to-use written and electronic learning materials and workbooks that reflect the work of Whitbread. Electronic materials are accessed through portable, easy-to-use, tablet computers. There are some 24 workbooks for different Whitbread brands. For example, an apprenticeship and a core skills workbook that includes key skills contextualised to the hospitality industry. Intensive delivery keeps learners interested in completing online theory assessments alongside the practical assessments made by their workplace managers. There are many success stories of learners progressing well within the company, often from very low levels of confidence and self-esteem.

- The particularly effective support for learners that enables them to succeed and progress within their employment.

Information and guidance to potential learners are of a high standard. Learners have usually been employed by Whitbread for two months before being offered the chance to become an apprentice. This ensures they

understand both the industry and the progression opportunities within Whitbread. Good support is built into programme delivery by the use of new starter champions, mentors and managers who are committed to training. Specialist literacy and numeracy support is available to those learners who need it. A confidential counselling service is available to provide support with personal issues. Career progression opportunities in Whitbread are promoted well and many previous learners are good role-models who have progressed to supervisory and management roles, after successfully completing company training programmes. Completion of training is rewarded through links to increased salaries.

- Effective use of data to improve the quality of training and reduce staff turnover.

Monthly contract meetings with the subcontractor ensure a tightly run contract linked to good performance and progress of learners. Whitbread training managers know how well each subcontracted member of staff is performing. A separate third-party company produces all data for Whitbread as data management had been a problem in the past. Managers have a guide for apprentices that helps them to complete forms well and carry out reviews. Electronic reminders are used to help keep learners on target for timely completion. A snapshot of what is happening in each region is produced for regional managers on a monthly basis by the learning and skills team. This helps to make managers competitive and encourages their support for training. Reduced staff turnover has been a benefit of this approach.

Areas for development

- Continue the focus on developing the role of new starter champions.

Much progress has been made in a short period of time in establishing the role of new-starter 'champions'. Whitbread recognises the importance of this role in promoting and supporting training, particularly for their apprenticeship programme. They have produced a new-starter 'champion' engagement plan for the coming two years to ensure that suitable staff continue to be available and properly trained for the role.

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