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Mr J Harkness
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Dear Mr Harkness

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 hospitality 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 an employer.

Features of good practice

- Comprehensive initial assessment that is used effectively to ensure learning is planned well and support needs are identified.

Initial assessment is thorough and provides a comprehensive picture of each learner at the start of their training. Learners complete initial assessments with the North Lancs Training Group (NLTG) staff who will be working with them. This helps to ensure that training officers and Skills for Life specialists have a very good understanding of their learners from the outset of the apprenticeship. An initial interview is used to analyse a wide range of topics including learners' work roles, preferred learning styles, motivation for completing their awards and long-term career objectives. Training officers identify carefully how each piece of information will be used within the individual learning plan, ensuring that the relevance of the activity is made clear to the learner from the outset of training. Assessment of literacy and numeracy skills are also completed at this stage; where support needs are identified further diagnostic tests are completed and used to develop a

second Skills for Life learning plan. Skill scans and job analyses are completed to ensure that qualifications match learners' work roles and that appropriate qualification units are selected. Individual learning plans document clearly how the results of initial assessment are used to shape learning. Recent guidance has been effective in improving the accuracy with which achievement targets are set and end dates for the apprenticeship programmes are agreed.

- Particularly well-planned and structured learning in the workplace.

NLTG staff carefully plan the content of each visit to apprentices at work. A visit sheet details how the session will be conducted, the learning activities to be completed, resources to be used and targets to be achieved. Preferred learning styles are taken into account when determining the approach to be taken. The plan is shared in advance with the apprentice and the employer to ensure that they understand the session objectives and are prepared to contribute as necessary to their delivery. Staff development has been effective in raising their understanding of their roles as coaches and learning mentors, alongside the role of assessor that they have traditionally undertaken.

- Very productive partnership work with employers and learners that helps improve the apprenticeship provision.

The company has long-established working relationships with a large number of employers who value the quality of training that NLTG provides. Employers state that they are well-informed about the programme content, the contribution that they are expected to make to its delivery and their apprentices' progress. Communication between employers and NLTG staff at all levels is very productive; employers believe that their views are important to the company. NLTG recognises that employers and learners are best placed to make relevant comments about programme content and methods of delivery. Employer and learner representatives attend all programme standardisation meetings which are held on employer premises to facilitate easy involvement. Recent improvements to the way in which both the National Vocational Qualification and key skills elements of the framework are delivered have been introduced as a direct result of learners' and employers' feedback. Partnership working with schools is increasing; the company has introduced a young apprenticeship programme recently to ensure that the needs of local school pupils are met.

- Strong focus on ensuring that learners make good progress.

Learners have clear achievement targets specified in their individual learning plans. Progress in meeting given deadlines is monitored closely by the training officer at each review meeting. Regular meetings between training officers and their managers are used to highlight any concerns with learners' progress. There is clear accountability. Senior managers hold bi-monthly meetings during which overall targets are monitored and the success of all programme staff is scrutinised closely. At all levels, there is a focus on ensuring that each learner makes progress, with individual support strategies

implemented and their effectiveness monitored. Training officers visit their learners at least every month, with additional visits made as necessary to ensure their support needs are met. Learners and employers speak highly of the flexibility with which training officers approach their work.

- Highly effective management of staff to ensure that they provide learners with a quality learning experience.

NLTG sets its staff high standards. They are provided with clear guidance on how to carry out their roles. They are set stretching targets linked to key company objectives, such as increasing learners' success rates. Their performance is monitored closely. NLTG has strong values that it asks its staff to uphold. Learners and employers comment on the professionalism displayed by staff who have an excellent knowledge of the hospitality industry. Learners understand that they are expected to display a similarly professional attitude towards their work. Staff development is comprehensive and planned well. Staff are offered good support to develop the skills needed to fulfil their roles. Managers at NLTG recognise that this is essential if their staff are to have the confidence needed to train and support their learners effectively.

Areas for development

- Increase the use of technology to improve learning and assessment opportunities in the workplace.

The use of technology to support learning in the workplace is underdeveloped. Opportunities to use technology to facilitate the assessment process, for example through the use of digital voice recorders, are missed. Portfolios are comprehensive but rely heavily on the production of a high amount of written work by learners. Apprentices do not have access to an online bank of resources to extend their vocational learning.

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

Judith Hamer
Additional Inspector