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Mr P Jones  
Principal  
Bromley College of Further and Higher Education  
Rookery Lane  
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Dear Mr Jones

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 9 November 2009 to look at good practice in motor vehicle 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 training activities both at the college and in the workplace.

Features of good practice

- The strong quality-improvement focus on continuously improving high overall and timely success rates.

The college has been successful in improving both overall and timely success rates continuously over a four-year period to well above national averages. For example, in apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships there was an improvement of 30 and 54 percentage points respectively for overall success rates and 19 and 54 percentage points respectively for timely success rates. Key factors in raising success rates include improvements in the use of management information to monitor learners, improved learning support and employer engagement. Clearer assessment information is given to learners and they are more able to influence their own assessments. A key factor in improving timely success has been the earlier completion of key skills and technical certificates. Level 2 key skills are started towards the end of the apprenticeship programme, giving advanced apprentices a 'head start' in a part of their programme that many struggle with.

- The particularly effective promotion of progression opportunities helping raise the expectations of learners and their employers.

Over three years, the number of learners progressing from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships has changed so much that it is seen by both learners and their employers as the expected final outcome of funded training. Good use has been made of role-models such as a female apprentice who progressed from a college National Vocational Qualification level 1 course to recently complete her advanced apprenticeship. Employers appreciate the rounded education that their learners receive and encourage specialist training from manufacturers to further enhance what has been learnt. Young learners on school link programmes interviewed were very aware of all the progression opportunities within the college.

- The very good use of virtual learning environment (VLE) to enhance learners' understanding of theory and improve completion of frameworks.

Theory training is particularly good and planned thoroughly to make the best use of a wide range of resources. It is both innovative and fun for learners. Planning involves strategies to meet the needs of learners, including developing their personal and social skills. A session observed stretched learners' understanding and developed their ability to work as a team. Testing of knowledge gained through a game format from television was enjoyed by all learners. They demonstrated clearly that they had learnt from the teaching session. Voting buttons were used along with discussion to arrive at answers to different problems that reinforced and consolidated learning well. Staff in motor vehicle are at the forefront of using and developing resources for the VLE within the college. Learners can, and do, access materials from home or work, helping them to catch up if they should miss their day at college.

- The very good integration of key skills into motor vehicle training increasing their relevance and enjoyment to learners.

The college has integrated key skills well. Their contextualisation into motor vehicle is both understood and appreciated by learners. Learners routinely convert imperial to metric measurements and understand the importance of key skills in both achieving their apprenticeship frameworks and in their working lives. Very good use was made of a video showing complex work on car engine cylinder heads. Staff research various free video-hosting websites to source video clips that learners enjoy watching and build lesson plans around them. This example involved learners in making measurements of a cylinder head as shown on the video and applying their findings to their own work situations. There is a clear focus on improving the communication skills of learners, all of whom were confident to speak and perform tasks in front of their class.

- The good use of simulation to extend practical learning opportunities.

The college has both purchased and produced their own test rigs and virtual simulations so that learners can experience a range of technical problems in practical workshops. These 'problems' would be difficult to otherwise provide in a practical setting. Learners really enjoy the challenge and stimulation produced by trying to solve these problems. They extend the knowledge and experience of learners and help to develop skills which can be applied in the workplace. Management is very supportive of the development of resources.

- The increased focus on engaging employers in the apprenticeship programme, helping learners to meet their targets by increasing assessment opportunities in the workplace.

The college works with a range of motor vehicle employers, from small independent garages to large franchises. Employers have been fully engaged in the apprenticeship programme as a result of a concerted effort by motor vehicle staff alongside a dedicated college 'Business Focus' team. Regular visits to the workplace involve employers in reviews and in helping to generate work-based evidence. The purpose of reviews was evaluated as part of consultation with employers. Employers are very aware of what their learners are doing in college and have a high regard for the improving levels of communication with the college.

- The good management of training programmes that promotes effective teamwork to meet learners' needs.

Programmes are managed very well within a supportive team culture that focuses on meeting learners' needs. College staff know their learners well and plan good training and assessment opportunities using a wide range of resources, many of which they have developed. Motor vehicle staff have been fully involved in the planning of new specialist accommodation that will further enhance the already good experience of learners. The recruitment of skilled and experienced staff with strong industry backgrounds, together with continual professional development, gives current knowledge of working practices in motor vehicle and helps ensure credibility with learners and employers.

#### Areas for development

- Continue the preparations for the introduction of functional skills.

The introduction of functional skills is being managed well to minimise the potential impact on the achievement of learners in motor vehicle. Functional skills have been trialled with a group of college learners to identify potential problems both in the delivery and decreased availability of testing opportunities. Although these trials indicate the possibility of lower success rates, they have given a clearer picture of what needs to be done to help minimise this.

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