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Ms B Brown
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Dear Ms Brown

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 18 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 key partners.

Features of good practice

- The good selection and recruitment processes for your apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of employers.

Selection and recruitment processes are organised well and provide employers with good quality young people suitable for the apprenticeship programmes. VT Training operates the recruitment process for several franchised vehicle dealerships and independent garages nationally. Most vehicle manufacturers have their own websites for young people to apply for apprenticeships with their franchised dealerships. VT Training employs a recruitment team which handles information from the manufacturers' sites that VT Training has contracts with. Web-based software is used to assess applicants and to match potential vacancies to the most suitable applicants. Interviews are arranged with employers who select the candidate they find best meets their requirements. The process is managed well. VT Training staff also inform applicants about other vacancies they may wish to consider if they are not selected for their initial choice. This could be with an independent

garage or in related areas such as body repair, vehicle refinishing or vehicle parts. Most manufacturers have a pre-entry requirement that applicants will need a minimum of three GCEs at grade C or above. VT Training also organises initial assessment testing and diagnostic assessment testing to identify any additional support needs.

- The setting and maintaining of high standards to promote a professional approach to apprenticeship training.

Good standards of dress code and conduct are required for all apprentices attending the training centres. All apprentices are expected to arrive at the training centre in a shirt, tie and trousers regardless of whether they work for a franchised dealership or for an independent garage. Training centre staff adhere to a smart dress code projecting a professional image and acting as role-models. Training centres are clean, modern, well-equipped and well-managed. This adds to the overall professionalism that is expected during the off-the-job training. Learners say that they enjoy working in an environment where standards are high. They feel that this helps to create mutual respect and a more adult and mature environment. Learners show a keen interest in learning and achieving. They say that the high standards expected make them feel like a 'professional technician' as apposed to a 'dirty mechanic'.

- The flexible training arrangements that provide bespoke training packages to suit employers' and learners' needs.

A flexible approach to providing training helps meet the varying needs of different employers and manufacturers. Programmes are designed according to the needs of their customers rather than offering a single model for all. For example, some manufacturers require blocks of training organising at a central location and delivered by VT Training staff. Others prefer a day-release course delivered at a local college but managed by VT Training. The training centres are used well with various courses running throughout the year. This has also provided flexibility to employers if their apprentices have not been able to attend on their planned dates; they have been able to attend on alternative dates instead.

- The excellent training workshops and classroom facilities providing well-planned and well-managed training enjoyed by learners.

Apprentices attend modern well-equipped training centres using up-to-date vehicles and first-class training equipment. An experienced and knowledgeable team of training staff provides courses that are very well-planned and delivered. The tutors are given time to do research and to develop and organise courses. Tutors work hard as a team to make lessons as interactive as possible and to engage learners in interesting activities to enhance their learning opportunities. Training materials are of a high standard and tutors are constantly looking at ways to update and improve them further. Learners enjoy their training and respect their tutors for their knowledge, experience and for the way that they make complex subjects interesting and fun to learn about.

- The regular assessor visits to the workplace to engage employers and support their learners to succeed.

Learners receive frequent visits in the workplace from VT Training assessors. Employers are taken through an employer induction pack when an apprentice starts work to explain their role in the programme and that of VT Training. Assessors visit the workplace at least monthly or more often if learners and employers require it. The regular visits help to keep employers focused on the planned training programme and their role in it. They also provide opportunities to assess learners carrying out work as evidence for their qualifications. Assessors have completed qualifications to help them support learners with additional learning needs. All courses use a 'skills matrix' to plan the various elements of the apprenticeship framework and identify when, where and how the various course components are to be achieved. The matrix is a very effective way of planning training and assessment and of coordinating on- and off-the-job training. Employers use the matrix to identify what training they need to provide linked to the off-the-job training. The training matrix requirements are constantly monitored to check that learners are progressing at their expected rate. Assessors have built good working relationships with employers that help timely framework completion.

- The good use of incentives for learners to complete apprenticeships on time.

Good use is made of incentives for learners to complete all of the apprenticeship framework requirements within their planned time. For example, learners on a vehicle manufacturers' programme were told at the start of the programme about a race-track event celebration day that they would experience if they achieved the framework as planned. Information was given to them about the event throughout their apprenticeship, reminding them of what they would miss if they did not complete the work as expected. Learners who took part in the day of driving activities at a race and events track said that they had been motivated by the incentive offered. Having the opportunity to drive some of their 'dream' vehicles around a race track and off-road had made them determined to complete a challenging and busy programme on time. Some learners complete an outdoor-activities course at the start of their apprenticeships. This improves their problem-solving skills and teamwork abilities and motivates them to achieve.

- Good management of change to support staff and their learners to achieve.

Staff at VT Training are well-managed and supported. Many had been transferred from a training provider that suddenly ceased trading and were used to different ways of working. Senior managers provided clear direction about what was required and provided the support to achieve this. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to their jobs. There is good team-working to help each other perform better and to continue to improve the roles of trainer or assessor. Separation of these roles has provided staff with a clearer focus to meet employers' needs and to help learners achieve.

Areas for development

No key areas for development were identified during this visit.

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

John Grimmer
Her Majesty's Inspector