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Mr T Barnett  
Hawk Management (UK) Ltd,  
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Dear Mr Barnett

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 retail 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 one employer.

Features of good practice observed

- The highly effective arrangements for managing performance impacting positively on improving success rates.

There are very clear targets for staff and highly structured systems for reviewing performance regularly. These include frequent data reports, good internal verification arrangements, clear procedures for monitoring and chasing learners' goals, excellent internal communications and very good support for assessors. Each assessor has a fortnightly individual review with their line manager, which thoroughly appraises all available data to explore actual performance against planned targets. Good practice is identified well and quickly transferred across the organisation. The company has invested significantly in physical resources to support improved performance. These include teaching aids, technology, learning materials, training rooms and company cars for assessors.

- The open and supportive style of management contributing to successful outcomes for learners.

There is good stability and longevity in staff resources, especially at management level. Managers' roots are firmly founded in teaching, training and assessing, particularly in the retail sector where they are all very experienced. Managers are easily available to all staff and there is a high mutual regard. Staff feel their views are important and that they have good opportunities to make contributions to quality improvement through regular meetings and specific staff development days. One highly unusual feature of the management style is a complete open book arrangement within the organisation. All financial matters are fully shared with staff so they are all aware of the income and expenditure of the company as well as the bank and profit situations. This transparency has helped staff feel more secure in their jobs and, equally importantly, has given them ownership of the financial contribution they each make to the company's success.

- The extensive partnership arrangements with other organisations that benefit learners.

Hawk Training is a very outward-looking company with extensive sector contacts that have been built up over many years. The senior managers take time to get involved in projects and to network with other organisations. For example, Hawk Training is represented well on various steering groups and committees and has been involved significantly in the development of the Retail Academy. It is an organisation that is comfortable working with other providers in promoting good practice. It has developed good working relationships with key employers. Its approach means that managers are well informed of sector developments and well placed to make informed decisions about business and strategic planning. These partnerships bring benefits to learners by being aware of the latest developments in retail training.

- The outstanding systems for monitoring learners' progress helping ensure good timely success rates.

The company uses very effective software to record and monitor learners' targets and progress. It is a web-based system that allows assessors to update activities in 'real time' while they are actually on-site with learners. It presents progress data in both statistical and graphical formats and clearly measures timely achievement against a series of intermediate goals. This informs assessors and managers effectively at any time if a learner slips behind their target. The system automatically flags any deadline that has been missed so that appropriate interventions may be taken. Reports are produced every week that show the current status of every learner, by colour-coding them and by showing actual achievement against planned goals as a percentage. Learners have access to this data and use it well during assessor visits. Employers will be able to access the same information about their learners through the internet from 2010. Managers regularly interrogate the system to identify achievement by different groups and to monitor best- or worst-case scenarios in terms of meeting overall company targets. The transparent use of the data and the ease at which staff can access them have

led to a degree of healthy, friendly competition among assessors. This has been instrumental in helping the company maintain good timely success rates in retail.

Areas for development

No significant 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

Kevin Culver  
Additional Inspector