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Ms J Haram  
Director  
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Dear Ms Haram

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 4 November 2009 to look at good practice in childcare 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, key partners and employers, and scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice

- Highly effective recruitment and additional learning support that prepares learners for training and framework completion.

The dedicated business development team works closely with the childcare department, giving them a good understanding of the requirements of childcare apprenticeships. Following the interview process and initial and diagnostic assessment, clear communication between the business development and delivery teams helps place learners on to the correct framework level and identifies their support needs. The business development team also plays an active role in the detailed induction of new learners. Early initial and diagnostic assessment has provided a key focus in supporting learners identified as having additional support needs. These learners successfully complete their apprenticeship frameworks as well or better than those learners without such needs.

Good dyslexia support is a particularly important feature of additional learning support as 25% of the current group have been identified as having dyslexia. Key staff members are qualified to level 3 in dyslexia recognition and analysis. Learners identified as having dyslexia are referred to an external specialist to identify appropriate methods of support. A panel of key staff meet on a three-monthly basis to review all learners with additional support needs. Support strategies are adapted according to the outcome of the review. Targeted support includes increased numbers of workplace visits, individual sessions with support staff and assessors and attendance at drop-in sessions. The high levels of support that learners receive ensures that they are able to successfully complete their apprenticeship frameworks and progress to advanced apprenticeships.

Data show that improved support for learners has had a significant positive impact on retention and success rates.

- Good use of partnership arrangements to raise achievement and share good practice.

Training Plus Merseyside chairs The Greater Merseyside Healthcare Forum. The forum has the aim of improving work-based learning within the region. The agreed protocols, sharing of good practice and standardisation of key processes mean that all providers in the forum provide a consistent approach to the delivery of apprenticeship frameworks. Targets are set within the forum for success rates across Merseyside providers. For example, online testing for key skills has been introduced across the forum and has helped raise achievement of key skills. Support for members is provided in the form of discussion groups, workshops and training events, such as the recent careers information, advice and guidance event.

- Excellent use of management information systems for monitoring learners' progress and improving framework completion.

The management information system (MIS) is highly effective in monitoring learners' progress. Reports generated by the system are used in fortnightly meetings that managers have with assessors and teaching staff. At each meeting, the progress of learners is discussed in detail. Targets are set and monitored, for all staff and their learners, using the MIS. The MIS generates information at all levels including learner and assessor productivity. Where underperformance is identified, action is taken to improve it with progress being reviewed at the monthly management meetings. Such close monitoring has had a significant impact on framework completion, with a clear focus of all concerned on timely completion.

- Strong leadership and management providing clear direction for the company and its staff.

Senior managers within the company set exceptionally high standards that have led to very well-managed programmes, with a clear focus on further improvement. The emphasis on continuous improvement is highlighted in the thorough quality improvement strategy. All staff are well qualified and are provided with opportunities for continuing professional development. All staff completed teaching qualifications and have at least level 2 key skills. Staff are aware of the five-year strategy within the company and their part in

achieving it. Significant investment has already been made to premises and resources, such as information technology. All teaching and learning areas are fully equipped with computers and additional technological resources, such as MP3 players. Keeping learners safe takes a key focus, and all training rooms are fitted with cameras and have clear internet protocols for security. Learners feel that the improvements made have had a positive impact on their learning.

#### Areas for Development

- Continue the support for staff in helping learners to achieve their key skills and the preparations for the introduction of functional skills.

The key factor for many learners not achieving timely success in 2008/09 was completion of key skills. Senior managers have put actions in place to support staff in helping learners to complete their key skills. The introduction of functional skills, particularly in mathematics, has been identified as a priority development area, particularly where so many learners have additional learning needs. Training Plus Merseyside is involved in the functional skills support programme and has plans in place to support learners and staff in the implementation of functional skills.

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

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones  
Additional Inspector