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Ms P Denham  
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Dear Ms Denham

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: good practice in apprenticeship training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and learners, during my visit on 18 and 19 January 2010 to look at work in hospitality, motor vehicle and construction crafts apprenticeship training.

The visit provided valuable information which 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: interviews with staff, learners and employers; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of learners' work; and observation of one lesson and one learner review.

Features of good practice

- Very strong management of apprenticeship programmes leading to high-quality training and high success rates.

There is a clear culture of expectation throughout the college management team. Rigorous targets are set annually for the performance of apprenticeships. The Principal and Vice Principal meet with the apprenticeship manager each month to review success. This ensures that learners get the best possible experience and achieve their potential. The college apprenticeship team manages the programmes, working closely with section heads, training officers, assessors and training staff to ensure programmes are of high quality. The apprenticeship programmes are afforded the same status as full-time college courses and are an integral part of each curriculum area.

- Good team work and excellent communication between the curriculum and apprenticeship teams enable issues with learners to be identified early and resolved quickly.

Good team work is central to the success of apprenticeship programmes. Trainers, personal tutors, assessors and training officers all work closely together to ensure seamless delivery. Assessors, trainers and the curriculum team share an office, helping foster excellent communication between staff.

- Very well-qualified and competent staff contributes to the high-quality training and assessment.

Teaching and assessor staff in all three areas are well qualified and occupationally competent. Continuing professional development (CPD) is excellent. Staff have 14 CPD days a year, some of which must be used for industrial updating. Staff keep up to date with industry developments and use their skills and knowledge well in teaching sessions.

- Well planned training and assessment enable learners to develop appropriate skills and progress quickly.

Off-the-job training and assessment are planned well and are flexible, meeting the individual needs of learners and employers. When employers have requested that learners develop particular skills early to meet job requirements, the college has altered off-the-job training and assessment to facilitate this. In motor vehicle, block-release training for body repair work enables learners to complete required tasks more effectively. In hospitality, learners attend college one day each week for off-the-job training, helping ensure that they develop the full range of hospitality skills. The construction department makes very good use of community projects to enhance the curriculum and develop learners' skills, including traditional heritage skills. Key skills are fully embedded and contextualised according to the trade being delivered.

- Technology is used effectively to enhance learning and assessment and help learners to progress.

Technology is used well to help learners to develop skills. In construction, plasma screens and cameras have been installed in the practical environments to support and enhance learning and teaching. Construction learners routinely use digital cameras to capture evidence for their portfolios. In motor vehicle, an interactive information and learning technology suite is used to deliver fault-diagnosis techniques. Assessors use technology well in assessment.

- Very good support from training officers, assessors and tutors helps ensure learners' timely success.

Training Officers (TOs), assessors and tutors provide excellent support for learners. Each has a clear understanding and a respect for the roles and responsibilities of others. The TOs support learners with any problems they have during their training, arranging specialist support if required and reviewing progress. Assessors regularly visit learners at work, setting precise targets for learners to meet between visits. Tutors liaise well with TOs, assessors and employers in planning off-the-job training. The college has successfully narrowed the gap between timely and overall success rates in construction and motor vehicle and have closed the gap in hospitality.

- Excellent links with employers enables learners to gain the full range of experiences to achieve their apprenticeship.

The college has excellent links with employers. Employers are actively involved in learners' training and ensure that they gain the relevant experiences needed to successfully complete frameworks. In construction, the good links with employers ensured learners were able to complete their National Vocational Qualification in plastering, despite the problems of recession. All employers receive schemes of work for apprenticeship programmes and are well-informed about programme delivery. Some employers have observed college practical and theory lessons to develop their understanding of programme delivery.

- Thorough tracking and monitoring of learners' progress helping to raise timely success.

The tracking and monitoring of learners' progress is thorough in all three areas. In construction and motor vehicle, an electronic system, on a shared computer drive, is available to all staff and learners. All areas hold monthly meetings to monitor learners' progress. Where learners are making insufficient progress, actions are identified and support put in place to ensure that learners get back on track and succeed.

- Very good recruitment practices ensure learners are enrolled on appropriate courses at the right level.

Learners in all three areas are interviewed by occupationally competent staff who ensure learners know exactly what is expected of them to successfully complete an apprenticeship. In motor vehicle, a good proportion of the learners has progressed from the 14 to 19 provision, where there is now a young apprenticeship programme. Data demonstrate that the college is becoming increasingly successful in ensuring that learners are enrolled on the correct course at the appropriate level.

- Good celebration of learners' achievements acts as an inspiration for other learners and aids recruitment to apprenticeships.

The college is very good at celebrating learners' achievements. The apprenticeship programme receives good press coverage, with many apprentices winning local and national awards. The high profile of the apprenticeship programme in the local area has directly helped increase recruitment. Success stories act as an inspiration to current learners.

#### Areas for development

- The quality of learner reviews.

Not all reviews were up to date and those that were varied in quality. The best reviews were detailed with very precise targets identified. A small minority had targets which were too broad to be of help to the learners.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop apprenticeship training in your organisation.

As I explained in my previous letter, 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

Margaret Swift  
Her Majesty's Inspector