

# Mercedes-Benz UK Ltd

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 58456

Name of lead inspector: Richard Moore HMI

Last day of inspection: 9 July 2010

Type of provider: Employer

Address: Mercedes-Benz Apprentice Academy  
Denbigh Road  
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## Information about the provider

1. Mercedes-Benz UK Limited (Mercedes-Benz) is the official importer and distributor of Mercedes-Benz motor vehicles and parts from Germany into the United Kingdom (UK). Formed in 1974, the company has a dealer network of approximately 200 outlets across the UK, most of which are franchised. The company's head office is at Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire where it employs more than 700 staff. This is also the location for its purpose-built training academy, attended by all learners for off-the-job training. Mercedes-Benz has not previously been inspected as it managed its apprenticeship programme from 1995 to 2008 through external providers. In 2008, the company expanded its own training division to incorporate delivery of the provision internally, taking over the apprenticeship programme for more than 420 of its employees. Apprentices were previously trained by a very large work-based training company that went out of business.
  
2. Mercedes-Benz offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in motor vehicle. At the time of the inspection, there were 174 apprentices and 77 advanced apprentices on a range of vehicle maintenance and repair and parts operations programmes. The company divides its apprenticeship programme up into three areas; 'heavy vehicle', 'light vehicle' and 'parts'. Recruiting dealers employ the apprentices and mentor them in the dealerships. A technical training manager and an apprentice programme operations manager are responsible for the training programme. Mercedes-Benz subcontracts background theory training and all assessment, internal verification and observation of teaching and learning to Skillnet, who were inspected by Ofsted in January 2010 and judged to be outstanding. The inspection did not include the provision at Mercedes-Benz. This subcontracting arrangement started in August 2009 after another provider had previously held the contract for these aspects of the provision during 2008/09. Background theory training, including key skills, takes place at the training academy. Staff carry out assessment and progress reviews in the workplace.
  
3. The following organisation provides training on behalf of Mercedes-Benz:
  - Skillnet

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	151 apprentices 244 advanced apprentices

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Motor vehicle	3

## Overall effectiveness

- Mercedes-Benz provides satisfactory provision for motor vehicle learners. Success rates are very high, particularly for the large group of advanced apprentices. The rate at which learners complete their qualification, however, has been very slow to date, partly owing to circumstances outside the control of the company, but current learners are now making better progress. Learners enjoy their training and develop good skills and technical knowledge. They are proud to work for Mercedes-Benz and value the good resources and reputation of the company. Training in the workplace is good and is satisfactory at the training academy. Assessment practices are poor and do not allow learners to demonstrate sufficiently the skills and knowledge they gain. Checks carried out by the subcontractor on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are insufficiently rigorous and are not monitored by managers at Mercedes-Benz. The provision is appropriate in meeting users' needs and learners receive satisfactory levels of support. Partnership working is satisfactory, but the relationship with the subcontractor is under-developed and does not yet maximise the potential of the programme. Staff in the dealerships are not sufficiently aware of what training takes place off-the-job in the training academy. Mercedes-Benz shows a strong commitment to the apprenticeship programme and monitors key performance indicators carefully. Senior managers involve themselves fully in all operational aspects of the programme. Safeguarding arrangements are good, particularly when the learners are away from both home and the workplace and are in the training academy. Equality of

opportunity is satisfactory, but there are few women on the programme and arrangements are not in place to support learners with additional learning needs. Capacity to improve is satisfactory. Mercedes-Benz has made a lot of recent improvements to the programme, but there is not yet a sustainable track record of good performance in some key aspects of the provision, most notably teaching and assessment practices.

## Main findings

- Success rates are very high and improving. They are particularly high for the large cohort of advanced apprentices. Most of the learners who finally achieved their qualification in 2008/09 and 2009/10 had been on the programme for at least a year beyond their planned end date. At the point in 2008 when Mercedes-Benz took over the contract for their training, they were at various stages of completing their qualification.
- Timely success rates are very low. Learners working for Mercedes-Benz who have achieved their apprenticeship in the last two years were on the same programme with the previous training provider for up to three years. Mercedes-Benz was initially slow to implement measures to rectify this historical slow progress but recent initiatives are starting to have a much more positive impact on learners' progress towards completing their qualifications on time.
- Learners develop good technical knowledge and practical skills. They are highly motivated by working for a prestigious company and in high quality work settings. Learners mature quickly, gain self-confidence and enjoy their learning. They feel very safe, both in the workplace and when they are away from the dealerships attending the training academy and staying in residential accommodation.
- Teaching and training are satisfactory. Learners receive a high standard of training in the workplace, delivered by supportive and knowledgeable work-based mentors. Off-the-job training has improved in the last 18 months and is satisfactory. Learners benefit from good resources both in the dealerships and at the training academy.
- Assessment practices are poor. The quality and range of learners' assessment evidence in their portfolios is insufficient and does not reflect the learners' range of skills and knowledge adequately. A number of changes of assessors have led to many learners receiving conflicting information, a lack of continuity and hindrance to their progress. Mercedes-Benz does not carry out any initial assessment of learners' literacy and/or numeracy skills and it does not have any arrangements in place to support any additional learning needs.
- The provision responds appropriately to the needs and interests of employers and learners. Learners take pride in working for a prestigious brand name. The one-week blocks of off-the-job training help to reinforce background theory learning. Mercedes-Benz provides an appropriate range of leisure activities for learners staying away from home whilst attending the training academy. Work-based mentors do not receive sufficient communication about the content of off-the-job training.

- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Work-based mentors support learners well in the dealerships. Employers have confidence in the recruitment process for the apprenticeship programme, which is fair and rigorous. Support for learners' personal needs has recently improved at the training academy. Some learners are not sure who to approach about additional support needs or what their options are for progression after completing their apprenticeship.
- Mercedes-Benz demonstrates a strong commitment towards the apprenticeship programme. The company has overcome challenging circumstances to repair the damage caused by the previous providers involved in the programme. It has invested heavily in a training academy and facilities for the learners whilst away from home. Senior managers involve themselves fully in the operation of the programme. There is a strong focus on performance at all management meetings.
- Arrangements to safeguard learners are good. Mercedes-Benz pays close attention to safety in the workplace and to the welfare of the learners staying in the residential accommodation whilst at the training academy. Codes of practice for learners are clear, well understood and rigorously enforced, sometimes too much so for the older learners. All staff receive safeguarding training and appropriate vetting covers all relevant staff.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners have a good understanding of matters relating to equality, and their conduct towards each other is respectful and empathetic. Very few instances occur of bullying or harassment. However, a very small number of dealerships have inappropriate images on the walls in the work areas. The proportion of women on the programme is very small and there are few initiatives to encourage them to take up motor vehicle engineering as a career.
- Mercedes-Benz has satisfactory engagement with users to bring about improvements and to involve them in decision-making. The company routinely gathers much feedback from learners, on which it acts where possible. However, learners are not always sufficiently aware of how issues have been resolved, nor do they have sufficient opportunity to discuss issues face-to-face with managers and staff.
- The focus on improving the quality of important parts of the training programme is insufficient. The quality improvement activities carried out by the subcontractor are not rigorous enough and do not cover all parts of the apprenticeship. Managers at Mercedes-Benz do not monitor the parts of the training programme and the quality assurance activities subcontracted to Skillnet in sufficient detail.

### What does Mercedes-Benz need to do to improve further?

- Continue to set and monitor targets for learners and staff to ensure timely success rates are high for learners who have started their apprenticeship in the last two years.

- Raise the standard of assessment activities to more adequately reflect the skills and knowledge gained by the learners.
- Improve and act upon the feedback received from monitoring activities for teaching, learning and assessment, through more rigorous management focus on the subcontractor's responsibilities.
- Develop initial assessment procedures and support arrangements to identify learners' additional learning needs and ways in which these needs can be supported throughout training.
- Improve communications between work-based mentors in the dealerships and the training academy staff to provide a more coherent training plan and experience for the learners.
- Work in partnership with dealers and other organisations to plan suitable initiatives that will increase the participation of under-represented groups and to ensure these groups are supported in the workplace.
- Provide learners with more opportunity for face-to-face communications so that they can better influence their learning and their experiences whilst in residential accommodation during periods of off-the-job training.

#### Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

##### What learners like:

- the opportunity to be always learning new skills
- the prestige of working for Mercedes-Benz
- the good training and facilities in the workplace
- the recent improvements to the training programme
- the way the programme prepares them well for their future careers
- the amount of practical work and the enjoyment they get from the training
- the help and advice from the dealerships
- friendly and approachable trainers
- supportive colleagues at work
- the one-week blocks of off-the-job training.

##### What learners would like to see improved:

- the range of recreational activities when attending the training academy
- the rules relating to the residential accommodation, which they find too stringent
- the frequent changes of assessors
- communications between the training academy staff and work-based assessors
- scheduling of tests during off-the-job training
- knowing the outcome when they feed back their views on the programme

- explanations of what happens at the end of their apprenticeship
- their understanding of what certificates they will receive during their programme.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the improved management of the programme
- the detailed progress reports about the off-the-job training
- the good responses to issues they raise
- the programme being managed wholly by Mercedes-Benz
- the improved focus on learners achieving their qualifications
- the high levels of investment in the training academy
- the good skills that learners develop.

What employers would like to see improved:

- work-based assessors' knowledge of the overall training programme
- the quality assurance of assessors' work
- the advance notice they receive of the dates for blocks of off-the-job training across a whole year and the training to be covered in each block.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

5. Mercedes-Benz has a track record of recent improvements to the apprenticeship programme. However, some improvements have yet to be fully embedded within the provision to ensure their sustainability. The company has a clear vision and appropriate priorities to sustain these recent improvements in performance. The learners and employers discern many recent positive changes. Success rates have been very high for the last two years for those learners who started with the previous provider between three and five years ago and there are signs that timely success rates may be much better for the present cohorts of learners. The company is already aware of some of the issues identified by inspectors and managers have taken action to rectify them. However, there is a lack of awareness of the quality of crucial parts of the provision, such as the standards of teaching and assessment, and not enough monitoring of the subcontractor's responsibilities. Not all staff are sufficiently committed to securing sustained improvements in the roles they carry out.
6. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and this has resulted in a first self-assessment report for the company which is clear and comprehensive. It reflects the Ofsted inspection methodology and framework accurately. Inspectors' grades match many of those in the report, but crucially not those for teaching, learning and assessment, all of which Mercedes-Benz has not monitored in sufficient detail. The involvement of staff is satisfactory, but the dealerships have very little input to the process. Managers monitor the comprehensive quality improvement plan at monthly meetings, but there has been some slippage in meeting important target dates for completion of some of the actions.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

7. Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates are very high and well above national averages for the last two years. They show an improving trend, particularly for the large group of advanced apprentices. Success rates are only satisfactory for the much smaller cohort of apprentices. Two years ago, all learners who have achieved their qualification to date were inherited by the company from another provider which held a contract to train Mercedes-Benz apprentices. Despite learners' frustration at the protracted time it has taken them to complete their apprenticeships, they have been keen to stay in employment with such a prestigious company and to finish the programme. There are too few learners from minority ethnic groups and few women in training to make a meaningful judgement on possible differences in success rates for different groups of learners.
8. Timely success rates are very low and significantly below national averages. The legacy of taking over the training of its own employees, and an unsuccessful agreement to deliver training and assessment through a



subcontractor prior to the current one, has contributed to learners taking an overly long time to complete their qualifications. Mercedes-Benz has been slow in the past to implement actions to rectify this slow progress and some learners have been in training for two or more years in addition to their time with the previous provider. Initiatives now in place are starting to have a positive effect on learners' progress and potential to achieve by their targeted date for completion.

9. Learners develop good technical knowledge and practical skills. They perform tasks which enhance their skills, particularly through the additional training that Mercedes-Benz provides. Learners mature quickly, gain self-confidence and enjoy their learning. Many previous apprentices now occupy more senior roles within the company.
10. Learners feel very safe, both in the workplace and when they are away from the dealerships attending the training academy and staying in residential accommodation. Some older learners feel the arrangements for their safety are too stringent. Healthy eating options are available at the training academy and fresh drinking water is readily available. Some learners find the choice of menus too limited.

### The quality of provision

Grade 3

11. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Training in the workplace is good. Supportive work-based mentors have high expectations of the learners. Resources are good, both in the dealerships and at the training academy. Training staff and work-based mentors are very experienced and have high levels of expertise. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Some practical and theory classes in the training academy are too slow and do not challenge all the learners sufficiently. A small number of learners become passive and disinterested in what they are learning.
12. Assessment practices are poor. The range of evidence in learners' portfolios is narrow and of poor quality. Learners do not have sufficient ownership or understanding of their portfolios. Frequent changes of assessor have led to a lack of continuity and slow progress. Mercedes-Benz has no arrangements in place to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills or to offer any subsequent support for their additional learning needs. Progress reviews are satisfactory but do not involve work-based mentors appropriately. Reviews do not provide enough constructive feedback to learners or sufficient focus on learners' skills development and well-being.
13. The provision responds appropriately to the needs and interests of employers and learners. Learners enjoy working for a prestigious brand name, which gives them high levels of self-esteem. The one-week blocks of background theory training at the academy help learners to consolidate their understanding of important topics. Mercedes-Benz has introduced a range of onsite activities at the hotel when learners are away from home, but some learners would like to

be able to do more in the evenings. The company has recently appointed new staff members to develop the activities further. Work-based mentors do not receive enough information about the content of off-the-job training. Many learners are unaware of the process for key skills training and assessment.

14. Partnership working is satisfactory. Mercedes-Benz has formed good links with Skillnet to deliver training and assessment for learners. Senior managers from both companies work well together to resolve operational problems. However, arrangements to monitor the subcontractor's full range of responsibilities in sufficient detail are incomplete.
15. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners receive high quality support in the workplace and have good personal relationships with work-based mentors. The recruitment process for the apprenticeship programme is thorough and fair. Support for learners at the training academy is satisfactory and has improved through recent appointments to the staff team. Some learners are not sure what progression routes are available when they finish their training or who to turn to if they have additional support needs.

## Leadership and management

Grade 3

16. Mercedes-Benz demonstrates a strong commitment and support for the apprenticeship programme at a time when there is a lot of pressure to reduce business costs. Managers acted quickly when the previous training provider went out of business and have invested substantial amounts of money in the training academy, facilities at the residential accommodation and other aspects of the provision. Senior managers take a very active role in the programme, which has a high profile at national staff events.
17. Well-structured business and financial planning lead to a strong focus on key performance indicators. Managers at all levels use monthly meetings to monitor the performance of the programme very closely. Actions to resolve under-performance are timely and appropriate and are followed up at subsequent meetings.
18. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and ensure that learners are safe in all aspects of their work. Staff pay close attention to safety in the workplace. Policies are clearly displayed and codes of conduct are strictly enforced, sometimes too much so for older learners, when staying in the residential accommodation. Computers at both the training centre and the hotel have restricted access to the internet. Vetting arrangements for all relevant staff, including those who work for the subcontractor, are appropriate. All staff have received safeguarding training. The police have recently begun a series of personal safety training sessions for the learners.
19. The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Comprehensive policies and visible procedures help learners to understand the implications of their behaviour and this shows in the respect they demonstrate

for each other. Learners have a memorable induction on equality when they first join the programme and they have a good recall of the main themes. Mercedes-Benz has recently started to analyse the profile of applications from new recruits to assess its recruitment practices. Female and ethnic minority staff at the training academy present good role models for potential recruits, but all the trainers and assessors are male. Women make up a very small proportion of the total learners and there are few specific initiatives to recruit women on to the programme. Assessors check the dealerships' own equal opportunities policies and procedures, but in three of those visited by inspectors posters with inappropriate images were displayed in the workshops.

20. Mercedes-Benz gathers and analyses feedback regularly from learners at the end of each block of off-the-job training. Where feasible to do so, managers take actions to resolve any issues, but they do not always communicate the outcomes to the apprentices. Learners do not have sufficient opportunity to discuss their experiences on the programme with managers face-to-face.
21. The focus placed on improving the quality of important parts of the training programme is insufficient. The subcontractor's quality improvement activities are not rigorous enough and do not cover all aspects of the provision. Internal verifiers' feedback is often too descriptive and does not focus on the quality and range of evidence. Observation of teaching and learning records contain very little feedback to justify the very positive grades given and action planning to improve performance is very weak. Mercedes-Benz does not monitor the quality of the training programme in enough detail nor does it review the activities carried out by the subcontractor to assure high standards. Standardisation meetings do not focus sufficiently on the sharing of good practice or ways in which to ensure consistency.

## Information about the inspection

22. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's apprentice programme operations manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans and data on learners and their achievement over the last two years.
23. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Mercedes-Benz UK Ltd**

Learning types: 14–16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16–18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners	251	251
Full-time learners		
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	-	
Quality of provision	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	-	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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