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Ms R Fidler
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Dear Ms Fidler

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: the role of employers in work-related education and training

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation during my visit on 10 November 2009. I am particularly grateful to you and all your staff for the hard work involved in preparing for the visit and for giving up a great deal of time during the visit to meet me. Please pass on my thanks to all those concerned.

The visit provided valuable information that will contribute to our national survey of good practice in the role that employers play in work-related education and training. Published reports are likely to list the names of contributing organisations but individual contributors will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with nine staff, four employers and four learners, and scrutiny of the examples of good practice provided. Several documents, case studies and data were reviewed.

I agreed to provide a summary of the good practice seen and to identify an area for development, and outline the main findings below.

The main strengths

- Overall success rates are high and consistently above national rates. Timely success rates have increased significantly in the current year and are approximately 15% above last year's national rate.
- The curriculum and course offer is very responsive to employers' needs. Training consultants take an exceptionally flexible approach to training and assessment in the workplace. Some employers' training has been very

effectively mapped by HTP into the requirements for government-funded qualifications. These learners receive coherent, and often seamless, training from HTP and their employer. Employers' specific needs, such as improving the communication and written skills of their staff, are met very well through HTP's Skills for Life course.

- HTP and employers work productively to develop good quality, and often bespoke, learning packages, workshops and materials that make good use of employers' case studies, systems and training. HTP ensures highly relevant training for learners not in employment by including input from employers.
- Employers are encouraged to be fully and actively involved in learners' programmes from their start. The high level of employer participation during induction, skills scans and initial assessment clearly sets out HTP's expectations for the whole programme.
- HTP has an exceptionally effective structure to support employers. The specialist business development team works enthusiastically with new and existing employers. HTP's employer engagement team meets regularly to evaluate employers' feedback and ensure it is meeting local and national needs. Team work is very productive in ensuring employers and learners receive a high-quality experience.
- Communication with employers is excellent at all levels. Training consultants have a strong industry background which is used to good effect in developing employer relationships. They use innovative ways of promoting current and future training opportunities with employers and learners. HTP holds high profile networking events for employers.
- HTP is very effective in reducing employers' perceived barriers to participating in learning programmes. It provides an excellent learner recruitment and selection process which gives employers a shortlist of potential candidates to interview. Employers, particularly small companies, find the advice they receive from HTP's human resources helpline invaluable. Many employed learners and those attending placements make good use of the reduced price bus passes that HTP negotiated on the Isle of Wight to allay concerns raised about the cost of public transport to attend work.
- HTP has good arrangements for improving the quality of assessment and training delivered by employers. Its in-house assessor and teacher-training courses greatly improve employers' understanding and involvement in learning programmes. Employers receive very useful feedback from HTP staff carrying out observations of on-the-job training and coaching.
- The Albert Cottage Hotel and restaurant, owned by HTP, provides excellent learning and assessment opportunities. Learners who are not in employment, including young apprentices, develop a suitable work ethic and high standards. This is highly beneficial in helping them to progress into sustained employment. Employed learners make good use of the facility to develop skills and competence in topics they are not able to cover at work.

- Employers benefit significantly from HTP's work-related education and training. Learners' develop good communication skills which they use well when communicating with employers' customers, partners and schools. One employer has seen outstanding improvements in the calibre of staff applying for promotion since introducing a pre-assessment and development centre training package that was developed in partnership with HTP.

The main area for further development is:

- continuing to improve the Entry to Employment and foundation learning progression rates. These have been as high as 57% in 2007/08, but dipped to 49% in 2008/09. In the current year, progression rates are much improved at 66%.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop provision. If there are any points you wish to discuss, please contact me. We gather information on the impact of our visits. To this end, you may be contacted by telephone or sent a questionnaire to complete six to 12 months after the visit. I hope you will contribute to this evaluation.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website and will be available to the team for your next inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector