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Mr R Drake
Assistant Principal
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Dear Mr Drake

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 7 December 2009 to look at good practice in care 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, employers and the scrutiny of documentation.

Features of good practice

- Effective support for learners, helping them to remain on programme and successfully complete their frameworks.

Care learners are effectively supported by Northampton College Business Centre in a number of ways. Flexible arrangements for training ensure that programmes meet the needs of learners and employers. Communication between employers and assessors is good and a partnership approach is taken in supporting learners. This means that any issues can be resolved quickly, enabling the learners' to complete their framework within agreed timescales. Initial and diagnostic assessment is conducted early in the programme, ensuring that those learners who need additional learning support are able to access it quickly. Assessors know their learners well.

- Good opportunities for progression on successful completion of frameworks.

Many learners progress from their apprenticeship programmes to other courses such as to frameworks of a higher level, National Vocational Qualifications at level 4, short courses or courses at the college. Employers report that approximately 80% of their learners have either progressed to a higher level framework or to a level 4 qualification. Some learners also progress to higher education programmes such as nursing or social work. The learners progressing to higher level apprenticeship programmes benefit from an awareness of the format of frameworks and the relationships already built with college staff, which help to ensure timely completion.

- Effective use of progress reviews to support learners in completing their frameworks.

Learners' progress is monitored closely to ensure that they are progressing at a rate that enables them to complete their frameworks in a timely manner. A business centre monitoring system is used to complement the main college system and helps focus staff awareness on ensuring learners' completion dates are met. For example, learners receive additional support to complete assessments. The review system is comprehensive. The recent introduction of a learner self-assessment enables learners to score themselves against their progress, highlighting their strengths and areas for improvement. This is then discussed with the learner and their employer and forms part of the formal review process. All reviews include a clear indication of the learners' progress through their framework.

- The good leadership and management of programmes that provide clear direction for improvement.

Work-based learning programmes have recently separated from the health and social care department and are now managed by the business centre. The business centre staff remain in close contact with the health and social care department, drawing on good practice across the two areas. The business centre's quality manager works closely with the quality manager from the college for the benefit of learners. Assessors and managers are well qualified and have good opportunities for continuing their professional development. Assessors have either completed or are working towards teaching qualifications and all have yearly industrial updating opportunities. They are involved with a functional skills development programme to support them in the transition from key skills to functional skills and are planning further curriculum developments in foundation learning. Continued improvement in timely success rates is also a key focus for development.

Areas for development

- To continue the preparation for the implementation of functional skills using outcomes from the functional skills development project to support delivery and ensure timely success rates.

The business centre is currently participating in a functional skills development programme. The outcomes of the project will support staff in planning for the transition from key skills to functional skills, ensuring that teaching, learning and assessment support learners in completing their frameworks and improving timely success rates.

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