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## Employer-designed and delivered apprenticeship training: Finning (UK) Ltd

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### Brief description

This example examines how Finning (UK) Ltd invested in the future by designing and delivering the apprenticeship training for all of its apprentices in the United Kingdom.

### Overview – the provider’s message

‘Prior to 2007, our apprentices were trained by a local college. However, the apprenticeship was disjointed and took too long to complete. When returning to their branches, apprentices lacked the confidence to develop their skills quickly and become competent engineers in the workplace. So the company committed to taking all apprentice training in-house and invested in a purpose-built apprentice training centre. Tutors were recruited and developed from within the existing workforce to ensure that excellent levels of product knowledge and experience would be passed on.’



Apprentices are now able to complete the main part of the apprenticeship by attending training blocks of up to eight weeks at the centre over a two-year period. The third year is mainly spent in the workplace and apprentices achieve full competence by the end of their third year. Two recent endorsements have demonstrated the success of the programme. We were inspected by [Ofsted](#) in December 2010 and graded as outstanding for our apprenticeship training. And our apprentices recently achieved the highest scores of all authorised Caterpillar repairers in the world in tests set by Caterpillar.’

*Paul Lawson, Apprentice Programme Manager*

### The good practice in detail

## Background

Finning (UK) Ltd supplies, repairs and maintains Caterpillar plant equipment and machinery in the UK. In 2006, the company decided to make a major investment in its future by designing and carrying out the apprenticeship training for all of its apprentices in the United



Kingdom. Prior to that time, apprentices were trained and assessed by a college of further education. However, the company decided that the training was not providing them with appropriately skilled people within a suitable time period. It took four years for the college to complete the apprentice training and ex-apprentices were not sufficiently competent to work independently as skilled trades people.

The cost of building the apprentice training centre and recruiting skilled engineers to train and assess up to 25 new apprentices each year was estimated at £1.5 million. The investment was authorised and from 2007 the company started to deliver its own apprentice training programme.

## The provision for apprentices

A purpose-built training centre was erected and equipped with the specialist equipment required to repair and maintain Caterpillar plant equipment and vehicles. Staff were recruited from the skilled engineers within the company. They were trained and gained qualifications to deliver training and to carry out National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessments where required. Caterpillar's comprehensive training course was incorporated into a carefully planned two-year programme of on- and off-the-job training. Mentors were identified and trained at each company branch to oversee their apprentice's progress at work and to act as witnesses for NVQ competence purposes.

Training has been designed so that apprentices cover a major component module in depth during five training blocks which last up to eight weeks over a two-year period. Apprentices master important skills and gain the required knowledge by carrying out repair and maintenance tasks on plant equipment similar to that which they will work on in their branches; they then return to their branches to build on their competence.



'Apprentices are learning by doing and so they enjoy the work and gain confidence in their knowledge and abilities', says Paul Lawson. 'Challenging targets are set and met to ensure the apprentices complete their planned apprenticeship requirements within tight timescales. Tutors go out and assess the apprentices in their branches and gather evidence of real work being done to the high standards expected by the company.'

Apprentices stay in local hotels during the training blocks; younger and older apprentices are designated different hotels for safeguarding purposes. Branch managers receive a report on the progress made by each apprentice during their training block. The report details the



skills and knowledge they have gained and any areas of work they need to practise and be assessed again to gain the competence. Directors and senior managers provide some of the training sessions themselves at the training centre. This commitment demonstrates to the apprentices and to the rest

of the workforce how important the company considers apprentices to be to the future of the company. Some additional elements have been built into the two-year programme to enhance the apprentices' experience. These include a bench-fitting skills course, a welding course and a teambuilding and problem-solving day to develop the apprentices' personal effectiveness.

The well-planned and coordinated two-year intensive training and assessment programme has resulted in well trained apprentices who thoroughly enjoy their training, quickly gain workplace competence and become highly motivated and confident members of the workforce at a much earlier stage of their training. The first two years of training provide apprentices with a good level of skills and knowledge in preparation for the advanced part of the apprenticeship in the third and final year. In the third year they attend two-week off-the-job training blocks at the company's apprentice training centre; however, most of the work is done in their branches. Apprentices have the motivation and confidence to build on the skills gained in the first two years and to develop higher level skills to complete the advanced apprenticeship requirements.

## Provider background

**Finning (UK) Ltd** is the sole Caterpillar dealer in the UK and Ireland. The company sells Caterpillar equipment and provides a parts and product support system for the entire Caterpillar line. The company employs 1,450 people of whom around 500 are service engineers, including more than 350 who are field engineers. Apprentices work as part of the service engineering function and are based at one of 11 branches in the UK and Ireland. The apprentice training academy and company headquarters are in Cannock, Staffordshire.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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