

Report summary

Learning from the best

Examples of best practice from providers of apprenticeships in underperforming vocational areas

The overall proportion of apprentices who successfully completed their frameworks rose from 49% in 2005–06 to 71% in 2008–09. Further progress still needs to be made in improving outcomes. Some individual vocational areas have shown less marked rates of improvement.

Between October 2009 and January 2010, inspectors visited 39 providers to identify the key features of successful provision in three currently underperforming vocational areas: hospitality, motor vehicle, and retail; and two historically underperforming areas that have improved to the national average in recent years: care and construction. The providers visited had been judged to be either good or outstanding for their overall effectiveness at their most recent inspection or had shown a recent history of sustained improvement in apprenticeship success rates in one or more of these particularly challenging areas.

Inspectors found common factors that contributed to high overall success rates in the providers surveyed and which improved the time that apprentices took to complete their qualifications.

There is an important role for both providers and employers in making sure that young people are well-suited for the apprenticeship they wish to undertake. Recruiting learners with good ability in mathematics was particularly important in motor vehicle and construction frameworks, as was the testing of manual dexterity. Initial assessment was used well to inform the selection of learners and to identify their needs for support early on. Apprentices who had previously undertaken vocational or taster courses while still at school succeeded better as a group than those who did not have such experience. An evaluation of each new apprentice's job role helped in planning training and assessment by identifying gaps in the apprentice's experience, particularly in hospitality and retail.

All the providers in the survey had developed their engagement with employers well. There were many examples of flexible training and assessment to meet employers' needs, such as evening and weekend training workshops in care and the employment of assessors with specialist experience in retail. All the employers visited

were engaged well in training their apprentices, most of whom were supported by staff, often previous apprentices, acting as mentors.

Where timely success rates were high, managers used management information effectively to plan the work of their assessors. The continuity brought about by having one assessor (or training officer) throughout the training programme was a positive feature commented on by almost all the apprentices and the employers who were surveyed. The assessors acted as a key point of contact between the provider, the employer and the apprentice, promoting training and assessment.

Regular visits by assessors to the workplace and effective reviews helped apprentices to make good progress. In almost half the providers surveyed, making better use of evidence from the workplace contributed to increasing the number of apprentices completing their frameworks and reducing the time they took to do so. Particularly in construction, measures to provide additional assessment opportunities with other employers had helped to counteract the negative impact of the recession on timely success rates.

The use of individual learning plans was one of the most variable features, even among these good and outstanding providers. Commonly, the best practice, particularly in care and retail, was found where much of the delivery and assessment were on employers' premises to ensure that training objectives were met. There were many examples of the good provision of key skills, starting from induction and then contextualised so that the apprentices and employers could see the relevance of these to their vocational area.

Key findings

- Where data were available from the providers surveyed, it was clear that those apprentices who had gained prior experience of work-related learning in their vocational areas at 14 to 16 through courses such as Young Apprenticeships were more successful, in terms of progress and completion, than those starting straight from school without the benefit of this experience.
- In several large motor vehicle and construction providers, arrangements for the preliminary testing and screening of applicants were effective in selecting those who were more likely to cope well with the mathematical requirements of the frameworks.
- Almost all the providers in the survey saw improved initial advice and guidance, given at recruitment events, in interviews or online, as having a positive impact on recruiting learners into the right area of learning and therefore reducing the drop-out rates later on.
- Early initial assessment had a positive impact on the take-up of learning support, a key factor in improving success rates. Where data were available, apprentices who received learning support as a result of initial assessment did as well as, or better than, those who did not require it.

- In almost half the providers surveyed, focusing on the planning of training and assessment, and making better use of evidence from the workplace, helped to increase the number of apprentices who successfully completed their frameworks and reduced the time they took to do so.
- In the best providers seen, the individual learning plan was used well to meet the needs of each apprentice and this had a positive impact on progress and the timely completion of frameworks.
- Almost all the providers in the survey provided good training in key skills. The key skills were contextualised to the areas of learning and introduced early on, so that apprentices saw that they were relevant and enjoyed the learning. Application of number at level 2 was the most difficult area for many apprentices to pass and this had a negative impact on timely success rates.
- The strong vocational backgrounds of the providers' staff and having one main assessor throughout training were key factors in engaging employers and apprentices.
- Good support from the employers in the survey was a key common factor in raising success rates, allowing the providers to capture work-based evidence more effectively and to coordinate on- and off-the-job training.
- Flexible training and assessment met the needs of employers and apprentices while at the same time increasing the amount of evidence derived from the workplace.
- Regular contact between the staff of the provider and the employers in the survey focused on setting targets to provide work-based evidence so that apprentices made progress.
- Good use of management information in planning and monitoring the work of assessors was a key factor in driving the timely success of their apprentices.

Main report published 13 October 2010
www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090225

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/090225.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090225