

Effective employer engagement: DH Associates

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Brief description

To be effective a training provider needs to not only meet the needs of the learner but also the needs of the employer. This example shows how DH Associates has developed excellent partnerships with learners and their employers that provide high-quality programmes leading to outstanding outcomes.

Overview – the provider’s message

‘Before gaining our first government-funded programme, we had many years experience of delivering commercial courses to employers in the health and social care sector. Ensuring that we fully understood the needs of the employers, the objectives and business benefits of the training being delivered, and how to measure their achievement was crucial to gaining and keeping our clients. When we started delivering government-funded programmes it was natural for us to continue with this approach, because we recognised that the employer is the key to a successful funded programme too. We are proud that the relationship between provider, learner and employer is a true partnership with each party clearly recognising their role and responsibility in making the partnership work’.



Dawn Hodge, Managing Director

The good practice in detail

At the [inspection](#) in 2010, DH Associates achieved outstanding for all aspects of provision. Critical to this success is the three-way partnership between provider, learner and employer. It is this partnership that ensures that both the aims of the learner, and of the employer, are fully met through the training programme.

Identifying the needs

Work starts with a full organisational and training needs analysis, carried out by the managing director or by the business development manager. It includes:

- the profile of the employer, the business vision and goals, and the workforce development needs
- measurable business objectives

- a proposed training solution to meet the objectives
- the parts of the solution that can be provided through government-funded training, signposts to other possible sources of funding and aspects that the employer will have to fund.

Once agreed, it is consolidated into a formal service agreement, setting out the service specifications for both provider and employer together with the measurable objectives.

Reviewing the contract delivery

The service agreement includes a schedule of review dates at least every three months. Either the managing director, or the business development manager, visits the employer to review the performance of the programme, to measure the impact of the training in achieving the business goals, and to discuss any delivery issues from both the provider's and employer's perspectives. An action plan is drawn up to address any issues and agreed by both the employer and the provider.

'Recognise that the employer is the key and ensure that you develop the relationship with employers as a real partnership with each party having a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities'

Reviewing learners' progress

Learners' progress is reviewed regularly by assessors. The direct involvement of the learner's supervisor is a requirement to ensure that the planning of training and assessment meets both learners' and business needs. A monthly report showing the overall progress of each learner is sent to the employer's main contact. These reports are used at the three-monthly contract reviews to ensure that learners are on target to complete programmes within their planned timescales and to identify appropriate actions if there are any issues. Assessors actively build relationships with the learner's manager so that any issues can be raised or feedback provided.

Consultation, networking and employer support

A range of other methods is used to ensure that employers are fully briefed and engaged. Employer days are held every three months. The agenda for these meetings is largely set by employers who use it as a good way of networking with other employers in their sector. Typically the meetings will include updates on forthcoming sector or legislative changes, changes in funding for training or other improvement activities, and support to carry out business activities such as the Provider Compliant Assessment – an annual service self-assessment in this sector. These are supplemented by quarterly newsletters, regular email updates, and frequent informal telephone contact.

So what do the employers think?

Mark Tattenhall, from Tattenhall Local Care, sees the support provided by DH Associates as being particularly important. He says, 'We have only been in business for just over 12 months and approached DH Associates on the recommendation of another employer. They have provided much more than I could have expected from them. In addition to providing training for our employees they have been an invaluable source of advice and guidance on many aspects of developing our business and ensuring that we meet legislative requirements. The training has been first class and really built the confidence of the staff who are now enthusiastic and motivated to continue with further training'.

Melanie Russell, the owner of TLC Ltd, has a long-standing relationship with DH Associates. She feels that, 'the employer days, together with other support, have been very helpful in enabling us to achieve our growth strategy. The whole approach builds a high level of mutual trust and respect'.

Provider background

[DH Associates Limited](#) is an independent learning provider based on a single site in Neston, Cheshire. It was founded in 1994 and provides health and social care programmes within the North West of England.

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