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### Effective engagement and close working with employers to develop successful training programmes: Fareport Training Organisation Ltd

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#### **Brief description**

Developing successful training programmes through effective work with employers to recruit the right learners. The result is training that is relevant to employment and learners who complete promptly and successfully.

#### **Overview – the provider’s message**

‘We have always believed that successful work-based learning must be a joint venture between the employer, the training provider - or providers - and the learner. “Action for Business” and the “Training Quality Standard” helped us to sharpen up our systems but we have established our own approach to relationships with employers and learnt from our successes – and our mistakes. An increasing emphasis on getting the right learner for the post, doing things once, understanding the employers’ business, and then close working at all levels have helped to improve success rates and satisfaction levels. Time invested at the beginning of the process – with an employer or learner - helps to reduce problems. And don’t offer anything you can’t deliver – even if it means saying no sometimes’.



*Jane Lamar, Head of Quality*

#### **The good practice in detail**

When Ofsted inspectors judged Fareport Training to be an outstanding provider in July 2011 they noted in the [report](#), among other things, that Fareport took particular care to understand employers' businesses and to make sure that training was designed to suit the employer and the learner. They also judged partnership working to be outstanding, with excellent communication between Fareport and employers, and with employers valuing Fareport's responsiveness to their needs. Jane believes that this is the result of many years' work, and comes from a mix of a strategic approach, systems, and personal efforts.

## The initial contact and recruiting of learners

Key elements of the strategic approach that sets Fareport apart are close initial involvement with employers and the selection of learners. The process starts when setting up new relationships with employers. Fareport goes to great lengths to understand the new business, with both a 'relationships manager' looking at the broader aspects and a specialised Learning Development Coordinator (LDC) looking closely at the detail. The initial contact includes a visit to the premises to get a feel for the environment, and may even include staff undertaking some of the employer's training, as was recently done with assessors undergoing 'barista' training with Costa Coffee. The relationship manager will check in with the employer at regular intervals and at least once each quarter. Though happy to receive positive feedback, Fareport is also keen to learn about any problems. If any are any raised they are placed on a Quality Improvement Log to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Fareport works well with employers to get the right learners. For some time this has mainly been through the online [Apprenticeship Vacancy Matching Service](#) hosted by the National Apprenticeship Service. Fareport asks the provider to start the generic template for a vacancy, but then supports the fine tuning. Once the vacancy is uploaded to the site, Fareport monitors interest, sending its own personal note to applicants alongside the automated response. Fareport staff will either meet with all applicants or, with the employers' agreement, filter the initial candidates. Jane explains: 'Even if we get applications that we can't progress to an advertised vacancy we make sure we offer them some advice, perhaps on other routes to employment, training courses or even other providers. We believe this is an important part of our wider obligation to help all young people, particularly those who are in danger of ending up outside employment or training.'

All learners attend an assessment day at Fareport. Employers may attend to provide a brief on the company or sit in on interviews, but Fareport usually deals with most of the process and then refers the final selection of learners to the employers. This is appreciated by employers, as confirmed by two relatively recent companies that work with Fareport. Vince Fyfield, Operations Manager at Costa Coffee, explains: 'We traditionally have a fairly high turnover of staff. We used to employ a recruitment agency but now we find that Fareport relieves us of a lot of that work and expense, and apprentices tend to be better motivated and stay with us longer – with some progressing well through the company'. Alex Baines is the Operations Manager at Liquid Friday, a payroll services company, and has a similarly positive view: 'We have an unusual business model; Fareport made sure they understood our work before we started recruiting. We like the concept of recruiting apprentices and together with Fareport we get some highly motivated young people who grow into and contribute to the business.'

## Tailoring the programme

An important aspect of Fareport's work with an employer is to ensure that the apprenticeship is closely linked with any training provided by the employer and operational procedures in the workplace. This takes time initially, but brings benefits through better learner understanding of the apprenticeship and successful completion. For instance, Costa Coffee has its own standards system, known as the 'Costa Check', and Fareport ensures that this is closely linked to the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) which reinforces learners' standards of work and reduces duplication of effort in the NVQ. At Liquid Friday, learners who were reflecting on areas such as sustainability as part of their NVQ were challenged to translate their ideas into properly costed proposals for the business; which they did successfully.

## Routine Contact



*Rachel Lawrence*

Regular contact with learners and employers is maintained during the apprenticeship. Routine visits are usually planned directly with the learner and take into account shift patterns and busy periods. Times when several learners may be present are also targeted. Visits are confirmed with the supervisors and always involve discussion with the employer or manager. Learners' progress is carefully recorded and both learners and employers are kept up to date about how well they are doing, with prompt action taken where they may be falling behind. Where an employer, such as Costa Coffee, has learners in a variety of locations, Fareport ensures that senior managers also get an appropriate monthly summary of learners' progress. Rachel Lawrence, an LDC at Fareport Training explains: 'Even if you have a good relationship with an employer it is best to make sure that all visits are "announced" and agreed; too many drop-in visits while passing by may make the employer feel they do not have enough control'.

## Successful partnership working

Another successful aspect of Fareport's work is in the way in which it develops wider partnerships with other providers. For instance, it works closely with Enham Training, a provider that specialises in supporting disadvantaged learners. When Enham places learners with employers such as Costa Coffee for work placements, it liaises with Fareport with a view to progressing them on to apprenticeships. Fareport, works closely with Enham to ensure that aspects such as the initial assessment are done once only, reducing the pressure on learners and employers.

Routine working partnerships with employers are enhanced by regular electronic bulletins. These provide information on such aspects as changes in legislation or funding for training. Fareport also hosts employer events twice each year which are run by a specialist firm. These bring companies up to date on general employment activities such as data protection, employment of individuals from outside the UK, or changes in the rights of temporary staff. These events are also supplemented by a helpline, using the same specialists, so that employers can receive initial advice on aspects such as redundancies or disciplinary matters.

## Other aspects of ensuring good employer engagement

Fareport is prepared to challenge an employer's training plans when first contact is made. For instance, when recruiting a large cohort of learners, the company ensures that the

employer fully understands the commitment and has the capacity to support a large number of apprentices.

Although systems underpin Fareport's work, personal contact is important. Staff aim to work with an appropriate manager in the company; sometimes this may not be the obvious post but may be someone in the company who is particularly interested in apprentices and understands their needs. They also aim to match the skills and experience of a LDC to an employer's environment.

While keeping an employer fully involved in an apprenticeship, Fareport takes the initiative in helping learners to complete requirements such as key skills, technical certificates and employee rights and responsibilities. They also look at the wider aspects of a learner's employment-related training. While some discussions may lead to further funded qualifications, for instance for supervisors, Fareport also makes general suggestions to build on the employers' own training and systems. Vince Fyfield comments: 'Using Fareport is effectively giving us a Learning and Development manager for all staff'.

Effective systems ensure that any contact with an employer is shared among relevant staff, whether this is on file or through emails. When an employer makes contact with someone in Fareport other than a regular contact they do not have to explain too much background, and are made to feel their business is important. 'You get informed support at all levels which is what we look for in someone we work with', explains Vince Fyfield.

In gathering evidence for an NVQ, Fareport uses a range of evidence that routinely ties in with an employer's activities; this could be reference to standard operating procedures, client comments on administration carried out by a learner, or even reviewing CCTV used in a store.

The Fareport philosophy is to challenge learners, get them to understand they are doing something special and celebrate their success along the way. This positive approach can influence the recruitment of other learners and persuade the employer that the effort is worthwhile. And that underpins Fareport's outstanding work with employers; making learners and employers feel special so they embrace the training and succeed.

‘Some businesses don't appreciate what a well-structured apprenticeship can offer business. Properly selected learners and a well-managed programme enrich the workplace, and help those who are hungry for information.’

## Provider background



[Fareport Training Organisation Ltd](#) was established in 1981. Still managed by the founder, Mick Reeve MBE, they have around 40 staff. Based in Fareham near Portsmouth, Fareport supports over 500 learners a year in businesses along the south coast and Hampshire. The main provision is for apprentices employed in health and social care, early

years and playwork, hairdressing and business administration.

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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