Baltic Training Services Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		19–23 January 2015
Overall effectiveness	**This inspection:**	**Good-2**
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- a high proportion of apprentices and classroom-based learners are successful in gaining their qualifications, with an outstanding proportion of apprentices gaining qualifications within agreed timescales. Learners develop particularly good skills for work that employers value very highly

- a good proportion of learners gain jobs, promotions at work, pay rises or progress to further education. Standards of work are very high

- teaching and learning are good with innovative, use of information learning technologies

- the selection and recruitment process that matches learners to employers for work experience and apprenticeships is outstanding

- staff and managers have an excellent understanding of employers' priorities and those of the labour market around the country that they use particularly well to design bespoke training

- leaders' strategic planning is very effective. This has a significant positive impact on extending the range of provision for learners.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- the success rates for apprentices on information and communication technology (ICT) for practitioners' provision, although historically high and now starting to recover, have been declining over the last three years

- the teaching of English and mathematics is not challenging all learners sufficiently to enable them to excel in these subjects

- elements of quality processes such as the use and interpretation of some data, action planning following observations of teaching and learning and internal verification as well as the monitoring of reviews are not fully effective.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Reverse the decline in success rates for apprentices on ICT for practitioners provision by training assessors further in teaching and learning techniques that challenge and stretch apprentices both vocationally and in functional skills. Further identify employers' and learners' support needs to ensure apprentices continue with their programmes. Continue exercising due diligence in excluding employers who are not fully willing to help learners through the framework.

- Improve the teaching of English and mathematics by improving the quality of resources, including online resources and e-learning, and ensuring learners have good access to and guidance about them. Train both specialist and vocational staff in best practice to support and challenge all learners, regardless of starting points. In addition, further develop the systems and procedures that guarantee support within given time lines and to a good level. Ensure that targets for both English and mathematics relate very specifically to the individual roles of learners so that they become 'real' to learners and they learn from them.

- Improve elements of quality processes by collecting and interpreting data more fully and using it for improvement more specifically. Improve action planning following observations of teaching and learning so that completed actions can be traced easily and their impact seen. Increase the monitoring of reviews so that the quality of target-setting is improved; review the internal verification processes and implement actions to address any identified gaps.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good

- Baltic Training Services Limited (Baltic) provides apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and higher levels in ICT for practitioners and these make up the vast majority of the provision. A small number of apprentices follow business administration programmes, engineering and construction courses, a small portion of which is delivered by two subcontractors. A few apprentices are on social media and digital marketing provision that is a relatively new, but growing, provision. A small group of learners are on a pilot traineeship programme. Just under a quarter of all other provision is composed of classroom-based courses mainly aimed at getting unemployed people back into the labour market. A very small proportion of classroom-based provision is delivered by a subcontractor that specialises in working with foster carers and in developing their skills with children in their care.

- Overall success rates for the last three years for all apprentices are good; their success in gaining their qualifications within planned timescales over the same period is outstanding.

- Over the past three years, ICT apprentices consistently performed to an outstanding level in gaining their framework qualifications within planned timescales. However, over the same period, while remaining slightly above national averages, overall success rates have declined each year. Managers have taken good actions and current data are showing a renewed upward movement. However, this remains an area for improvement.

- Apprentices on administration and business management programmes overall achievement of their framework qualifications is good; their achievements within planned timescales are particularly good. The proportion of apprentices on engineering provision who gain their qualifications is excellent.

- Learners on the pilot traineeship provision enjoy good success in both gaining qualifications and in progressing to positive outcomes, including jobs.

- All apprentices benefit from very good and useful extra qualifications that keep their skills up to date with the rapid changes that affect the computer industry. They are of good quality and highly valued by learners and employers and benefit the businesses well.

- Qualification success rates for employability learners, both on general employability courses and those on vocationally based employability provision are good. The small numbers of learners working on the child development courses have an excellent record of achieving their qualifications.

- The majority of learners develop very good skills which they use well, for example, an ICT learner used his skills in understanding coding to develop a system that helped his company to respond to customer-care questions much more effectively and efficiently. Some older engineers in a well-established communications company developed such good new skills in fixing computer installation issues, that they substantially reduced call outs to customers, saved their employer a significant amount of money and dramatically increased customer satisfaction.

- Employability learners, through their team working on work-specific projects solve problems that they apply in their workplaces. They develop good work ethics and take employment vacancies that employers previously struggled to fill.

- Staff work extremely well with local jobcentres and employers around the country to develop training programmes specifically linked to identified job vacancies. A high percentage of learners, both apprentices and classroom-based, gain sustainable jobs, promotions at work or move into jobs with greater levels of responsibility. For employability learners they also progress to part-time work, voluntary work, work-experience programmes and other training programmes well.

- Managers at Baltic recognise that the systems to record destinations of learners are not yet systematic enough across provision to provide a fully accurate or timely picture of all learners' progressions.

- Managers make excellent use of labour market information to identify where there are skills gaps, and develop learners' skills to fill these. They are working extremely productively with a North East 'hub' of high profile national and international ICT employers and market leaders, to establish a network of provision to recruit for the 2,000 jobs in the region that currently cannot be filled.

- Learners make good, and sometimes excellent, progress. Standards of work for most learners are good. Learners progress to other levels of courses very well.

- English and mathematics development across the programmes requires improvement. A high percentage of apprentices are exempt from completing functional skills. However, the skills of the smaller percentage of learners assessed as needing development require improvement. Learners at all levels are not sufficiently challenged to develop English or mathematics skills that further help them excel.

- Managers scrutinise information to understand achievement gaps for learners well and take good actions to address these. For example, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities had been identified as not achieving their qualifications as well as their peers. Even though they were achieving at a higher rate than similar learners across the country, managers decided that this was not good enough. They put in extra support to help these learners. As a result current data show a rise in the achievement of qualifications to narrow this gap.

| **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment** | Good |

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good with some outstanding practice in places. This mirrors the overall good outcomes for learners as well as the pockets of excellent outcomes, such as the proportion of apprentices gaining framework qualifications within planned timescales. The two subject reports represent the largest areas of delivery; ICT apprenticeships being by far the largest number of apprentices and employability the largest proportion of classroom-based learners.

- Managers and trainers develop particularly strong partnerships with committed employers to ensure that learning programmes mirror professional working practices and learners demonstrate good work related skills that are valued by employers. Employability learners gain familiarity and confidence with occupational processes as they prepare for their guaranteed job interview. Close working with international industry innovators provide ICT trainers with the knowledge and experience to plan learning that motivates and captures apprentices' interest. All trainers and assessors have high expectations of their learners whether through their contributions within training sessions or as they progress through their workplace assessments.

- Good curriculum planning allows ICT apprentices to choose from five day 'modules' of scheduled intensive training that either closely reflects their workplace responsibilities or introduces relevant new knowledge. Employability learners benefit well from a mixture of online occupational qualifications that complement and extend their classroom-based learning. Trainers plan flexible additional individual training for those learners with foster care responsibilities who experience unavoidable absences. Learners on the pilot traineeship programme benefit from a well-organised programme leading directly to job outcomes.

- Lessons are well planned with trainers introducing a range of interesting activities and resources. Experienced trainers use apprentices' work roles creatively to expand topics, share working practices and motivate the learners. Particularly good questioning builds on learning and expands knowledge as trainers ask learners to develop their thoughts from previous responses.

- Trainers make meaningful reference to commercial practice, systems and principles, drawing on their own experience and those of the learners working in specific areas of expertise. Employers report that learners use skills that enable them to critique and improve their own in-house services and improve their businesses.

- Staff plan assessments effectively and assessment practice is good. Learners complete a varied series of activities before final formal assessments. For example, as a learning exercise, staff asked ICT advanced apprentices to 'hack' into a number of pre-programmed software systems to research and evaluate the differing levels of security, before completing their final assignments. Work placement visits are planned well to meet the needs of the learners. Assessors of engineering learners working in car sales quickly arranged additional visits to capture assessments such as a prospective buyer's test drive.

- The quality of trainers' feedback across learners' written work is inconsistent. Too often trainers make insufficiently detailed comments to provide clear guidance on what learners need to do to improve.

- Arrangements to provide advice, guidance and support for learners joining the programmes are outstanding. Using the exceptional and close working partnerships with employers, Baltic provide apprentices with a substantial choice of employer vacancies. They match apprentices to employers extremely well. Employability learners who successfully complete the programmes are guaranteed job interviews. Prior to introduction to the employer, trainers work intensively with learners to produce a good-quality curriculum vitae and develop interview skills and questioning specific to that employer. Progression to sustained employment is high.

- As apprentices commence their employment, a specialist member of staff works highly effectively as a facilitator to support both the learner and employer. They are in frequent contact with the employer and learner, providing good on-going support to prevent early leavers. For example, a change of manager for an apprentice was not handled particularly well leading to confusion over their training programme. Early intervention led to the learner successfully completing their programme.

- Managers monitor learners on all programmes closely and those learners who are considered at risk of falling behind or leaving their programme are referred to the support facilitators. Working as a team, all staff and employers support these learners. As a result more learners are making better progress and retention has improved.

- Trainers use the review process well to keep learners on track with their learning. Employability learners frequently evaluate their progress with support from their trainers discussing how they

can improve their work and use independent study to progress at an accelerated rate. Trainers use 12 weekly reviews with apprentices well to maintain high levels of progress. Employers contribute effectively to apprentice reviews and jointly plan activities. Health and safety and equality and diversity are well promoted in reviews. However, trainers do not sufficiently discuss safeguarding in reviews.

- The teaching of English and mathematics to apprentices requires improvement. Most apprentices are exempt from compulsorily completing functional skills. Those who need to complete functional skills qualifications are not targeted systematically by the specialist support team with active support and development. Too often they are directed to online materials that they often do not access. Trainers, both vocational and specialist, are not enthusing apprentices to excel in English or mathematics beyond the minimum required for the framework.

- Trainers integrate mathematics problem solving into classroom-based courses very well. Using specific work-related projects such as using numerical sorting systems similar to those found in warehouses, learners re-use and update their skills in a non-patronising, non-threatening way. English is integrated in these courses with trainers emphasising the importance of reading employer information well and preparing for specific questioning at interviews.

- The provider promotes a good culture of respect for all. Trainers very effectively create a culture of support with learners who did not previously know each other yet come together for short, specific training modules. Trainers explore principles of equality and diversity well during induction. They develop a safe environment where learners feel confident to respond to complex questions and query areas of uncertainty.

ICT for practitioners **Traineeships** **Apprenticeships**	Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in ICT for practitioners are good because:

- a very high proportion of apprentices successfully complete their qualifications within planned timescales and complete recognised vendor qualifications which enhance their career prospects well; they make good progress in training sessions and develop good technical skills in, for example, programming, software development and networking, which enables them to progress into higher-level training or employment

- trainers use their high level of ICT expertise to inspire and motivate apprentices; for example, in one session apprentices became highly enthused by linking how the network tasks they carry out in their employment relate to the relevant networking standards

- assessors and trainers have a good understanding of the apprentices' organisations and job roles and use this knowledge well to tailor training; for example, assessors regularly identify where additional modules, such as project management, benefit both the individual and the business

- trainers use skilful and probing questions to extend knowledge and develop deeper understanding; for example, apprentices explained confidently how businesses optimise search-engine rankings by using keywords

- trainers use information learning technologies well to reach learners who are geographically remote from them or who need extra tuition; for example, they successfully use webinars with learners around the country to increase flexibility in accessing learning and in allowing learners to learn at their own pace

- partnerships with employers are excellent, with employers making an important contribution to apprentices' progress, for example, by employing a software mentor to support apprentices to develop their programming skills

- apprentices are well supported and value this support, which helps them make good progress; for example, additional individual support on examination techniques prepares them well for assessment

- apprentices develop a good knowledge of ICT terminology, which gives them confidence to communicate with IT professionals and users; for example, apprentices can confidently explain the meanings of polymorphism and parameters while learning about object-orientated programming

- the recruitment process for apprentices is excellent; apprentices are well matched to the work place and most stay loyal to their companies

- assessors and trainers promote awareness of equality and diversity well; for example, discussing end-users literacy and IT skills and how apprentices can adapt their communication styles to best fit users' needs.

ICT for practitioners is not yet outstanding because:

- assessors do not set targets in reviews that focus on learning and skill development sufficiently

- apprentices' levels of mathematics and English skills are assessed at the start of the course but where a need is identified the support is not put in place quickly enough

- written feedback from trainers/assessors does not always identify what the apprentices need to do to improve further

- assessors do not expand apprentices' knowledge of e-safety enough.

Employability training	
Employability	Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in employability are good because:

- a high proportion of learners successfully complete their qualifications and their work is of a high standard; learners develop a wide range of transferable work-related and interpersonal skills; for example, listening to other team members' views, problem solving and working under timed conditions

- trainers have high expectations for learners to gain good jobs; learners quickly develop a high understanding of the importance of developing a good work ethic and positive attitudes to work, for example, in preparation for interviews in a factory

- teaching and learning are good with trainers making good use of a wide range of interesting, industry linked practical and theoretical activities that motivate learners well; for example, learners had to work as a team to improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of producing an object, making the learning real to them and giving them a good understanding of the job

- partnership arrangements between Baltic, employers, employment agencies and Jobcentre Plus are excellent and have a very positive impact on learners securing employment; learners are

highly motivated to achieve their qualification and improve their employment prospects, and are highly enthusiastic about the guaranteed interviews and the 'real' jobs on offer

- staff have developed a highly effective selection process that filters out learners who are unsuitable for the work on offer; for example, in one factory site the good matching of learners to jobs has dramatically reduced staff turnover at the production site

- trainers use initial assessment information effectively to set challenging targets for individuals; for example, learners are set different tasks based on their assessments and are encouraged to use peer- and self-reflection to assess the quality of their work in different job roles

- English is well integrated into the programme and learners have opportunities to reinforce skills while doing job-related tasks; for example, learners practise reading job instructions and work rules so that they understand the high importance of reading in detail

- mathematics is well integrated into the programme and learners have good opportunities to reinforce skills which help them to achieve their job aims; for example, sequencing and pattern recognition to identify product codes, producing a costing sheet for a production-line assembly job within a given time period and calculating stock costs.

Employability training is not yet outstanding because:

- the quality of written feedback on learners' work does not always offer advice on how learners can improve their work

- equality and diversity are insufficiently promoted though teaching and learning

- learners do not routinely receive exit information, advice and guidance

- managers are not yet routinely collecting all data on learner destinations.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	**Good**

- The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. Directors and managers at Baltic are strongly committed to the delivery of high-quality teaching, learning and assessment and are ambitious for their learners to progress into sustainable employment. Staff at all levels share this ambition and use it to motivate their learners to succeed. This is reflected in the consistently good outcomes for learners.

- Directors and managers make good strategic choices about the programmes the company delivers. The increased focus on offering apprenticeships at advanced and higher levels in ICT, coupled with partnerships with leading software companies both national and international, results in a range of provision that meets the changing priorities of major businesses and ensures that learners have industry ready skills for employment.

- Managers focus energetically on performance managing their staff, with the result that the great majority of teaching and assessment is now good or better. The focus of the multiple observations of trainers/assessors is firmly on learner progress and what trainers/assessors need to develop to improve. The judgements made by Baltic's observers are accurate and align with those found on inspection.

- In the great majority of cases, development actions are effectively followed up, and support is provided through a well-designed continuous professional development programme. In a small number of cases, however, targets following observations set for trainers/assessors have not been timely enough to impact on improving their practice.

- Directors and managers have a good understanding of the overall strengths of the provision and what they need to improve. The self-assessment process is effective in identifying the main areas where improvements need to be made and agrees with the findings at inspection.

- Improvement actions are mostly effective. For example, managers have taken action to halt the decline in ICT apprenticeship achievements in the past year through better support for both

employers and learners in the early stages of the apprenticeship and more effective selection of employers at the pre-apprenticeship stage.

- Some elements of the quality improvement process still require improvement. The analysis of data in the published self-assessment report is not detailed enough to highlight all areas of under-performance. Sector subject reports in the self-assessment report still have sections that are too descriptive and non-evaluative to be useful. Although assessment practices are sound, managers' sampling is not comprehensive enough to assure their quality.

- The use of employer and learner feedback to influence improvements is highly effective. Feedback is collected regularly and acted on quickly. For example, contacts with employers about how apprenticeships operate have been streamlined following feedback that too many different staff were giving out information, leading to confusion among apprentices and employers.

- Managers' partnership work with employers and learners to meet national employment priorities and plan the range of provision is outstanding. Market intelligence data from key business sectors is regularly analysed to identify skills gaps, such as entry occupations in ICT and distribution industries. Managers have positioned the company at the heart of developments in the North East to fill skills gaps in the ICT industry. They are working extremely well to design bespoke programmes to meet this need.

- The range of provision and bespoke programmes are excellent and are managed well. Baltic works highly effectively in partnership with employers, Jobcentre Plus and employment agencies to meet business needs, with courses being tailored around specific job roles. For example, managers working with a large employer in the North East developed a bespoke course to cover software development, network engineering and systems testing, with the result that learners were recruited directly by the company into roles demanding these skills. Work sector academies run by Baltic are very successful in securing jobs for unemployed learners in a range of industries. Employers value this provision highly.

- The management of English and mathematics requires further improvement, a point acknowledged by managers in the self-assessment report. A new quality improvement plan for developing English and mathematics has been developed but requires more specific and dynamic actions across the provision.

- The management of subcontractors, a small but valuable part of the provision and with good outcomes for learners, is very effective.

- The management of equality and diversity is good. There is a high-level strategic commitment to increasing equality of opportunity and promoting diversity among staff and learners. The majority of apprentices and learners on employability courses understand the relevance of these values to their working lives and can put them into practice in the workplace.

- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. Apprentices feel safe, and know who they have to report to if there are any incidents or concerns. Any incidents that are reported are quickly and correctly dealt with. Staff are trained to the right level to fulfil their safeguarding roles. There is good promotion and understanding of health and safety across the organisation. Employers and their premises are effectively checked before apprentices are placed with them, and are regularly reviewed.

- There is a good focus on developing the well-being of apprentices, through information on diet and alcohol use. The promotion of e-safety at apprentice reviews, particularly given the curriculum specialism at Baltic, is not as consistent or as thorough as it could be. Staff are well informed about approaches to protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism and other radicalisation activities. However, Baltic has not yet prepared a written policy in relation to this.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Baltic Training Services Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for practitioners	**2**
Employability training	**2**

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,336
Principal/CEO	Mr Tony Hobbs
Date of previous inspection	August 2009
Website address	www.baltictraining.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	**Level 1 or below**		**Level 2**		**Level 3**		**Level 4 and above**	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	142	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	**Intermediate**		**Advanced**		**Higher**			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	38	169	205	133	10	43		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	30							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ North East Training Solutions ■ Exordia ■ Network Training North East							

Contextual information

Baltic Training Services Ltd, based in Newton Aycliffe, delivers apprenticeships and classroom-based learning nationally, though with a substantial number within the North East of England. At the time of the last inspection, they were delivering Train to Gain provision. Since the last inspection, Baltic has moved into apprenticeship delivery, and more recently into specialising in ICT for practitioner programmes. Additionally, the company has grown programmes aimed at getting unemployed people back into the labour market. The largest numbers of learners by far are within the ICT for practitioners sector. Two subcontractors deliver engineering apprenticeships while a third subcontractor delivers a very small specialist programme aimed at supporting foster carers. Unemployment in the North East area is above the national average. The proportion of the local population who have no qualifications is 12.6%, which is 1.5% more than nationally.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	June Cramman HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Support Services as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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