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Andrew Robson
Head of Training
North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry
Commerce House
Exchange Square
Middlesbrough
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Dear Mr Robson

Short inspection of North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry

Following the short inspection on 21 and 22 October 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in September 2009.

This provider continues to be good.

- Your leadership team has maintained the good quality of education and training since your last inspection in September 2009. You and your team have continued to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, which has led to the large majority of apprentices completing their programme within the planned timescales. Lesson observations accurately identify strengths and weaknesses; action plans following these observations are concise and clearly identify tutors' and assessors' areas for development; they are subsequently supported well by experienced staff to improve their teaching practice further.
- Governors continue to set aspirational targets which are closely linked to local enterprise partnership and 'Working North East' priorities; managers respond well to the challenge of achieving these targets. Operational managers have developed good systems to ensure that they monitor the achievement of different groups of apprentices and plan improvements where appropriate.
- The implementation of the specifications of apprenticeship standards for England (SASE) are effective. Apprentices receive well-planned off-the-job learning linked to their apprenticeship, which enhances their skills and is suitably applied in the workplace, meeting the apprentices' and

employers' specific needs. English, mathematics and ICT skills are taught well, with most apprentices passing their qualifications.

- At the previous inspection, inspectors acknowledged that outcomes for learners and the quality of teaching and learning in business administration and dental nursing were good. Inspectors also identified a number of areas of improvement, including: the promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning; reviewing teaching and learning to increase the amount of apprentices achieving their qualification within the planned timescale; the inclusion of more detail in written plans and contracts and raising employer awareness of safeguarding.

Since the last inspection your leadership and management team have taken positive actions in improving most of these areas which have enhanced the quality of education and training at NECC.

- Staff at all levels promote equality and diversity well, both in the workplace and in the classroom.
- Since the last inspection the large majority of apprentices now complete their apprenticeship within planned timescales. However, a small minority of apprentices in business management and manufacturing technologies make slower progress.
- Leaders and managers use an electronic portfolio incorporating a virtual learning environment, which allows apprentices to undertake independent study when away from the classroom. Managers use this system effectively to monitor the progress of all apprentices; they use it diligently in monthly one-to-one meetings with tutors and assessors to monitor apprentices' performance. Apprentices value using the electronic portfolio to understand the progress that they are making on their programme.
- Managers have improved the clarity of written plans and contracts throughout the business. Documents such as the organisation's self-assessment report clearly evaluate the strengths and areas of improvement of the organisation; the quality improvement plan provides clear actions to bring about improvements.
- Managers have improved the information that employers receive on safeguarding. Employers receive appropriate guidance before an apprentice starts with their organisation and this is reinforced throughout the programme. Inspectors reviewed a number of documents which detail the improved relationships between NECC and employers with regard to the promotion of safeguarding and keeping apprentices safe.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and have taken positive action to safeguard apprentices. Managers are acutely aware of their new responsibilities in respect to the 'Prevent' duty guidance and have swiftly updated their safeguarding policies and procedures to reflect this. Leaders and managers have been appropriately trained in the 'Prevent' duty and all staff are undertaking this training. Designated safeguarding officers have been appropriately trained and support apprentices exceptionally well with care and compassion on the rare occasions when incidents are disclosed. Designated safeguarding officers work well with other agencies across the region to inform their own practice and promote issues that apprentices may face in their work or personal lives. For example, in classrooms and public areas inspectors observed posters related to the issue of forced marriage, detailing helplines which offer support and guidance.

Inspection findings

- The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. Operational managers have been relentless in their focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This has led to the implementation of highly successful strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning which have had a demonstrable impact on the achievement of apprentices.
- Governors do not receive sufficient breadth of information on the quality of teaching and learning; this limits their ability to challenge senior managers to make further improvements rapidly. For example, until very recently governors did not receive sufficient information on the gaps in achievement between different groups of apprentices.
- Managers have ensured a highly effective system of performance management. They support tutors and assessors well, monitoring and evaluating their performance in yearly appraisals and monthly one-to-one meetings. A wide-ranging programme of development consistently supports tutors and assessors in making improvements to their teaching practice. In 2013, a highly effective development programme to improve tutors' and assessors' skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) led to more than three quarters of the workforce improving their skills; this has now resulted in apprentices' high functional skills achievement rates.
- The monitoring of subcontractors is effective. However, while the contract is very detailed, too much emphasis is placed on audit and funding body requirements. Managers acknowledge that additional key performance

indicators in relation to the quality of teaching and learning could be included to improve the already high success rates at these partners.

- Leaders and managers accurately evaluate strengths and areas for improvement and have implemented a very rigorous improvement planning process. This is extremely well monitored by senior managers and has resulted in recent effective initiatives such as the introduction of the teaching and learning strategy. Most of the areas for improvement identified in the 2013/14 self-assessment report have been achieved.
- Leaders and managers have implemented an effective strategy to support apprentices to develop English, mathematics and ICT skills. They set clear expectations at the beginning of the programme; all apprentices understand the importance of English, mathematics and ICT to their future success in their career and personal lives. Managers ensure that apprentices who require additional learning support receive well-organised sessions that meet their needs well; this support accelerates their progress. The successful development of the functional skills strategy has significantly improved achievement rates in these subjects, which are now good.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well. Inspectors observed the effective promotion of equality and diversity in a number of sessions throughout the inspection. In one dental session, apprentices understood how ethnic and cultural differences were factors that need to be considered in oral health consultations in their dental practice.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- governors receive in-depth information on the performance of all apprentices at NECC and, where underperformance is identified, exert appropriate challenge to senior managers to make rapid improvements
- following staff training, 'Prevent' duty guidance is disseminated to apprentices and their employers to ensure they are aware of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and the referral mechanism they should follow should they have any concerns
- they rapidly improve the small minority of apprenticeship programmes that are underperforming, such as business management and manufacturing technologies.

Yours sincerely

Paul Cocker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors were assisted by the Head of Quality. We met your senior leaders, managers and governors. We visited your regional centre in Middlesbrough and your satellite centre in Darlington to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at apprentices' work. We held meetings with apprentices, staff and managers. We reviewed key documents relating to self-assessment, improvement planning, performance management, strategic plans and safeguarding. We considered the views of students by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of apprentices and employers during on-site activity.