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Mr Martyn Fletcher
Director of Asset Support Group
Doosan Babcock Limited
Birmingham New Road
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Dear Mr Fletcher

Short inspection of Doosan Babcock Limited

Following the short inspection on 13 and 14 January 2016, 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 Doosan Power Systems Limited was judged to be good in August 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you have successfully maintained an organisation-wide culture of high expectations and ambition for all staff and learners. As a result, learners continue to achieve very well, and the quality of apprenticeship training has been successfully maintained over time. You and your leadership team have ensured that staff at all levels across the organisation share your commitment to high standards and good achievement on apprenticeships, so that apprentices develop their vocational skills quickly and successfully.

The board of directors is well informed; its members have a very good understanding of how the apprenticeship programmes closely meet the development needs of apprentices and the workforce needs of the company. They also understand that the programmes contribute to the skills development of workers in the engineering and construction sectors more widely. The company's strategic partnerships continue to be extensive and beneficial to the local economy with a broad range of local, regional and national organisations, and the apprenticeship programmes reflect local enterprise partnership (LEP) priorities well. You and other directors continue to provide rigorous challenge by asking searching questions of managers, and have a very good understanding of the key strengths and areas for improvement of the apprenticeship programmes. The board of directors ensures that

leaders and managers at all levels are held to good account where learners' achievement on apprenticeships falls below the company's high expectations.

Leaders have ensured that all apprentices continue to benefit from highly effective and well-planned training that is aligned to the specification of apprenticeship standards for England (SASE). Well-qualified teachers and trainers with a wealth of industry expertise use their skills effectively to inspire apprentices, so that they make significant gains in knowledge, skills and understanding and want to progress to achieve their full potential.

Apprentices have very positive attitudes towards their learning and skills development, including understanding the importance of improving their mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They demonstrate mutual respect for one another and their behaviour is excellent at all times. Leaders place high importance on ensuring that all apprentices develop valuable vocational skills and improve their confidence, communication, teamworking and interpersonal skills, mirroring the corporate values and behaviour expected of all employees.

In the workplace, apprentices continue to make rapid progress as a result of the good on-the-job training and mentoring support provided by the skilled engineers and supervisors allocated to them. They frequently ask relevant questions to develop further their knowledge and understanding of current engineering and project-control practices. Apprentices quickly acquire and demonstrate a good range of technical and problem-solving skills. As a result of their increasing confidence and competence in their job roles, most are given more demanding and challenging work tasks early on in their programmes that prepare them well for skilled employment. All apprentices who achieve their apprenticeships progress into permanent and sustained employment within the company.

At the previous inspection, inspectors identified that the company's apprenticeship programmes contributed well to business planning and to long-term strategies which aid company growth; this continues to be the case. You and your management team have successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection report, with the exception of the need to further improve the rigour of assessment.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and the leadership team have ensured that apprentices have a particularly well-developed level of understanding regarding the arrangements to keep them safe. Leaders and managers have successfully sustained an organisational culture that is committed to maintaining the highest levels of safety through the 'focus2zero' and 'safety connect' initiatives. Learners feel safe, and work and learn in safe environments.

Learners are well protected while living away from home and while working on site. In the workplace, detailed and thorough health, safety and organisational checks of all sites to which apprentices are allocated are risk assessed, and suitable precautions and control measures are put into place to prevent incidents occurring. Apprentices benefit from very safe learning environments and know whom to contact if they have any concerns or worries. Managers adopt rigorous and robust safer recruitment practices in line with the company's safeguarding policy. Safeguarding records are robust and up to date, detailing the actions taken to help assure apprentices' safety and well-being.

Managers have very recently formalised a Prevent policy which appropriately sets out how the company intends to protect apprentices from the dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation. This policy has yet to be formally approved by the board of directors. Leaders rightly acknowledge in the quality improvement plan that further development work is required to implement the Prevent strategy fully in all the company's activities. Learners have a particularly good level of understanding and awareness of the importance of values such as inclusion, tolerance and respect for others; however, their understanding of other aspects that underpin fundamental British values is less well developed, and so is identified as an area that requires improvement.

Inspection findings

- The effectiveness of leadership and management continues to be good. Directors and senior leaders take decisive action when required; they provide clear strategic direction to provide high-quality apprenticeship provision which meets the company's strong ambitions and needs. Leaders and managers communicate their high expectations very effectively to all staff and sub-contracted partners, through challenging performance indicators and detailed service level agreements. The monitoring of the work of sub-contractors is very effective.
- Leaders and managers use management information very effectively, both to monitor the effectiveness of the provision, and to help them to make informed decisions and plan further improvements to the apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers have successfully ensured that the range of provision meets national needs very well, and contributes to meeting local needs by providing highly skilled apprentices who possess the practical and employability skills necessary for the engineering and construction sectors. The company is leading on the development of two industry-specific 'trailblazer' standards in pipe-fitting, and rigging and slinging. Senior managers are actively contributing to the establishment of occupational competency standards for three other 'trailblazer' qualifications in project control, project management and welding.

- Assessors use a good variety of assessment methods, and learners receive very good developmental oral feedback to understand what they need to do to improve; however, not all assessors capture in writing the richness of this oral feedback. Since the previous inspection, the coordination between assessors, workplace supervisors and apprentices has improved, resulting in most apprentices making the progress expected of them. However, internal verifiers are not yet ensuring that assessment takes place when learners require it, rather than when assessors decide to offer it. Some assessors miss opportunities in the workplace to gather as much timely evidence as possible of apprentices' achievement. This results in delayed progress for some apprentices towards gaining their qualifications.
- Not all assessors provide sufficient detail in apprenticeship progress reviews, or develop sufficiently helpful learning targets with learners. As a result, a small minority of apprentices are unsure as to their progress or what they need to do to complete their full qualification. However, the vast majority of apprentices are doing well and making good progress.
- Since the previous inspection, you and your team have successfully maintained the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to a good standard. This good standard is reflected in the outcomes for learners, which are also good. Teachers, trainers and assessors, all of whom are well qualified, make particularly effective use of their vocational knowledge to reinforce learning; they are careful to link learning to further study and to the workplace. Teachers make effective use of ICT and other resources to aid learning, and to develop apprentices' ability to learn independently and as part of a team.
- Apprentices develop good levels of knowledge and job skills that are highly valued by supervisors and employers; they are enthusiastic about their studies, and keen to improve and successfully develop high-level advanced craft skills. For example, apprentices in pipe-fitting quickly learn the importance of working to industry standards, and use specialist tools and equipment with confidence and precision.
- Apprentices rapidly develop positive attitudes to learning, including understanding the importance of improving their English, mathematical and ICT skills. Specialist English and mathematics tutors at sub-contracted colleges provide good support to the few apprentices who need to develop their English and mathematical skills in order to pass the functional skills elements of their framework. Most apprentices improve their mathematical and ICT skills and apply these well in their job roles. For example, project control apprentices use their ICT skills particularly well when working with spreadsheets and communicating complex sequencing information associated with maintenance projects. Apprentices in steel erecting confidently calculate the weight limits for lifting equipment based on the slinging angles of the load to be lifted.

- Teachers and assessors develop apprentices' oral communication skills well and introduce engineering terminology to develop their technical vocabulary. However, the development of apprentices' written English skills requires improvement. A minority of assessors do not routinely identify and correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in apprentices' portfolios, to promote professional standards, or provide guidance on how they can improve their work. Assessors occasionally provide assessment guidance notes containing spelling mistakes.
- Apprentices develop good personal, social and teamworking skills that improve their confidence and self-esteem, allowing them to become more effective in the workplace. They display professional values and behaviour, such as good punctuality and attendance, and being courteous to both peers and employers. Supervisors report that their apprentices rapidly gain confidence both in living away from home and working within teams; as a result, they give them more demanding tasks and greater responsibility within the workplace. Apprentices enjoy their courses, feel safe, and have a good understanding of safeguarding.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have ensured that the proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeships both overall and in the planned timescale has further improved and is now very high. Most apprentices make good progress in their training activities compared with their starting points. All apprentices who successfully complete their programmes remain in employment, in jobs that are well matched to regional skills priorities, in which they take on a greater variety of work tasks and responsibilities, and in which a few gain early promotion.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders, managers and directors should ensure that:

- managers swiftly implement across the company the draft policies, procedures and planned staff training to protect apprentices from the dangers associated with radicalisation, and that tutors and assessors develop and reinforce apprentices' understanding of the importance of fundamental British values at every opportunity
- all assessors and tutors help apprentices improve their English skills throughout their programmes by marking and assessing learners' use of spelling and grammar more thoroughly and frequently, and providing them with clear guidance and strategies for improving their writing
- all apprentices complete their qualifications on time by encouraging assessors to make more extensive use of all forms of assessment; and that assessors provide precise detail in their written feedback to apprentices on what they need to improve, how they might go about it and when their progress will be reviewed
- managers increase their monitoring of learners' progress reviews to check the quality of target-setting by assessors; and that managers review the quality of internal verification, setting in place any actions required to tackle any examples of weak practice.

Yours sincerely

Victor Reid

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted inspectors were assisted by the training manager as nominee. We met with directors, senior leaders and managers. We visited seven sites to observe teaching, learning and assessment and to look at apprentices' work. We held meetings with apprentices, staff and site supervisors and reviewed key documents relating to self-assessment, improvement planning, performance management, strategic plans and safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking the views of apprentices and employers during on-site activity.