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Mrs Jill Nagy
Chief Executive
Rochdale Training Association
Fishwick Street
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Dear Mrs Nagy

Short inspection of Rochdale Training Association

Following the short inspection on 16 and 17 February, 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 November 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Rochdale Training Association makes a significant contribution to improving skills in Rochdale and in other parts of the North West. You, your leadership team and the board of trustees have a clear and ambitious strategy to provide high-quality provision that meets local needs and is responsive to national priorities. You have expanded your apprenticeship provision to meet identified needs in, for example, construction and warehousing, and you have introduced traineeships to provide a progression route on to apprenticeship programmes. You gather and analyse comprehensive information about the destinations of learners and apprentices on completion of their programme; this enables you to measure the impact of your provision on meeting local needs.

A high proportion of apprentices complete their programmes successfully within the planned time. Success rates fell slightly in 2014/15 but remain significantly higher than the rates for similar providers. You identified accurately the reasons for the slight fall and took action to improve apprentices' success. This has resulted in improvements in the current year in areas where success rates dipped last year. A very high proportion of learners complete their pre-employment courses successfully. The great majority of current learners and apprentices benefit from effective teaching and training that enable them to make good progress.

Nine subcontractors deliver over a third of your provision. You monitor the performance of subcontractors closely and take action to improve performance where it falls below the high standard that you expect. You have ceased working

recently with one subcontractor whose performance was a serious concern. Among most subcontractors, including those delivering a high volume of provision, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and success rates are high.

Trustees have a wide range of relevant expertise. Trustees receive regular and useful information about the quality of provision and about the organisation's financial performance, and they use this well to support and challenge you and your leadership team. Trustees have a good understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders, managers and trustees place a high priority on ensuring that learners and apprentices are safe. All staff employed by Rochdale Training Association carry out appropriate training in safeguarding, including training on the 'Prevent' duty. External agencies contribute well to training; for example, Greater Manchester Police deliver training in preventing radicalisation and extremism. The managers in your subcontractors participate in the majority of Rochdale Training Association's programme of training on safeguarding, and the subcontractors' contracts have been modified recently to make this a mandatory requirement.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns about safeguarding. Managers respond swiftly and effectively when concerns are raised. However, teachers and trainers do not always give sufficient attention to developing learners' and apprentices' understanding of safeguarding during their programmes.

All staff who have contact with learners and apprentices are subject to enhanced disclosure and barring checks. Managers maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date record of checks carried out on their own employees and those of subcontractors to enable them to make safe recruitment decisions. A minor inaccuracy in recording that staff had completed disclosure and barring checks was rectified immediately during the inspection.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers very successfully develop the curriculum to meet local needs and national priorities; they have expanded the apprenticeship programme significantly over the last two years. They work closely and successfully with provider networks and local strategic partnerships to identify and respond to skills needs. Leaders and managers successfully target provision to recruit learners from disadvantaged parts of the community and to attract young people from local schools onto the apprenticeship programme.
- Managers develop the apprenticeship programme well in response to the specific needs of employers. Managers work closely with employers to identify the skills that they need and ensure that apprentices develop these skills through following appropriate modules on their qualifications.

- A thorough self-assessment process enables leaders and managers to identify accurately areas for improvement. Self-assessment draws well on a wide range of evidence, including observations of teaching, learning and assessment, performance data, and evaluations of subcontractors' performance. Managers carefully monitor progress against actions for improvement and record the impact. However, several of the actions are not specific enough and it is not clear how they will result in improvement.
- Managers closely monitor the performance of subcontractors and provide good support and relevant training. Managers agree relevant actions with subcontractors to improve the quality of provision when they identify that success rates have fallen below target. However, intervention is not always sufficiently prompt to ensure that success rates do not fall.
- Teachers and trainers use a wide range of effective strategies to improve the skills of learners and apprentices. Teachers and trainers provide detailed and helpful feedback so that learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve. As a result, apprentices make good progress in improving their occupational skills and a high proportion complete the framework in the planned time. Unemployed learners on pre-employment courses quickly acquire the personal, social and work-related skills that they need for work.
- Teachers and trainers do not always challenge learners and apprentices to develop their skills and understanding beyond the requirements of their qualifications. Learners and apprentices do not always develop their independent learning skills well enough, or extend their learning through independent study. Managers have recently introduced a new virtual learning environment which learners and apprentices are beginning to use. However, teachers and trainers are not yet making sufficient use of this resource to extend skills and understanding.
- Most learners and apprentices make good progress in improving their English and mathematics skills. Over half of apprentices join their programmes without English or mathematics qualifications at the appropriate level. The great majority of these apprentices achieve the English and mathematics qualifications that they need to complete the apprenticeship framework. Apprentices successfully acquire the English and mathematics skills that they need in their job roles. Learners on pre-employment courses quickly improve the speaking and listening skills that they need to in order to be successful at job interviews and when they gain employment.
- Many apprentices progress successfully to a higher level apprenticeship when they complete their programme. They often secure roles with greater responsibility as a result of their improved skills. A high proportion of learners on pre-employment programmes secure jobs on completion of their course.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and trustees should ensure that:

- actions for improvement identified through the self-assessment process are always specific enough to enable managers and staff to know what they need to do to improve the quality of provision
- they identify quickly any weaknesses in subcontractors' provision and take prompt action to tackle them so that they do not have a negative impact on learners' and apprentices' success
- teachers and trainers extend learners' and apprentices' understanding of safeguarding during their programme
- teachers and trainers challenge learners to extend their skills and understanding beyond the requirements of their qualifications
- they develop a range of approaches and resources, including the virtual learning environment, to improve learners' skills in working independently.

I am copying this letter to the Skills Funding Agency. The letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Steve Hailstone

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection the team was assisted by you as nominee. We held meetings with you, your senior leaders, the chair of trustees, managers, teaching staff, partners, learners and apprentices. We observed teaching, learning and assessment and looked at learners' and apprentices' work. We spoke with learners and apprentices at your main site and at employers' and subcontractors' premises. We reviewed key documents including those relating to the provider's strategy, self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of learners and apprentices by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.