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Mr Bryan Riley
Chief Executive
Alder Training Limited
Sandfield Park
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Dear Mr Riley

Short inspection of Alder Training Limited

Following the short inspection on 10 and 11 February 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Alder Training Limited was judged to be good in December 2010.

This provider continues to be good.

You, your director of operations and managers have established a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement. As a result, you have maintained the strengths from the previous inspection and dealt effectively with the recommendations.

The director of operations and staff monitor very closely the apprentices' progress towards completing their qualifications. Consequently the proportion of apprentices who gain their qualifications has increased and is high. You and your staff have been very successful in ensuring that almost all your apprentices who complete their qualifications do so in the planned time. The large majority of traineeship learners progress to other courses or employment.

Assessors skilfully use their vocational experience and knowledge in health and social care, and business administration, to coach apprentices well. Consequently, the large majority of apprentices develop their skills and knowledge very well and become more productive employees. A significant number of apprentices take on additional responsibilities in their workplace.

You and your managers have planned and implemented traineeship programmes effectively, ensuring that the needs of young learners are met well. Your staff are particularly successful in placing traineeship learners with employers who support learners very well; consequently they develop good employability skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff continue to safeguard all your learners effectively. Safeguarding arrangements and the actions to safeguard all learners are fit for purpose. Assessors and tutors teach all your learners well about safe practices, including child protection issues and the safe use of the internet and mobile phones. Arrangements for checking that staff have appropriate backgrounds for working with young people are effective. Your staff have implemented well the arrangements for the learners who require safeguarding checks for employment or work experience. You keep a detailed record of safeguarding incidents and the responses made to the issues raised. Your collaboration with external agencies that support vulnerable young adults is particularly effective.

Your staff receive regular training about safe practices and more recently they have received training in relation to the risks of extremism and radicalisation. Despite this, they are not all confident enough to develop and monitor learners' understanding of extremism and radicalisation.

Inspection findings

- You and the director of operations have fostered a culture of high expectations. All staff are encouraged to identify operational or performance issues and make improvements. This culture stems from your open and supportive management approach, because staff are confident to identify areas for improvement and are empowered to implement relevant solutions.
- Senior managers monitor the action plan for improvement exceptionally well and take effective action to enhance performance of staff at all levels. For example, as a result of their dealing effectively with staff performance issues, the proportion of apprentices in administration who complete their courses successfully has increased significantly.
- As found at the previous inspection, you continue to use an effective system to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, training and assessment. Staff who undertake observations of teaching make accurate judgements about the quality of teaching they see. Action plans for tutors, following their observations, are detailed and linked to effective staff development that helps them improve their teaching. A minority of observers do not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching and training on the development of apprentices' and traineeship learners' knowledge and skills.
- You and your staff are progressing well in the development of the arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of the training delivered through the recently introduced electronic portfolio system.
- You have correctly identified in your self-assessment report that your tutors and assessors do not always promote fundamental British values sufficiently well.
- The director of operations and your staff have been very successful in increasing the proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their qualifications, which is now higher than that of similar providers. They have developed a very effective and comprehensive system to monitor the progress of apprentices against their individual learning plans. When an apprentice does not progress well enough, managers agree a detailed action plan with the apprentice's assessor to ensure swift improvement.

- You have good information about the impact of the apprenticeship programme for your learners; for example, those who take on more responsibility at their workplaces get promotions or progress to higher-level courses.
- Assessors use their occupational expertise well to coach apprentices in the workplace, ensuring they develop an in-depth understanding of good practice. Many apprentices who are experienced in their job role study additional units which enable them to develop new skills and knowledge, preparing them well to take on additional responsibility in their workplace.
- Employers value highly the training and support provided by your assessors for apprentices because the training meets their specific needs particularly well. Following the previous inspection, as a result of the changes that you and your staff have made, for example, by discussing on- and off-the-job training during progress review meetings, the majority of employers are involved fully in these meetings.
- Apprentices work with assessors to develop clear and detailed assessment plans and this ensures assessments in the workplace are organised well. Assessors are very flexible in arranging visits to suit the apprentices' and the employers' workplace demands. Assessors have a very productive relationship with the apprentices' line managers and provide them with frequent feedback on the progress of their apprentices.
- Assessors use the results of apprentices' assessment of their starting points well to plan their training and development. They check and record apprentices' progress against their individual training plans well. In a very small minority of cases, they do not extend the skills of the more experienced apprentices sufficiently well.
- You have introduced and implemented the traineeship programmes well. Staff have been effective in embedding all aspects of the programme. Learners benefit significantly from well-organised work preparation training, effective teaching of English and mathematics and good-quality work experience that meets their needs. Your staff ensure traineeship learners are placed in good-quality and supportive employers that meet the career aspirations of learners well, such as with dentistry and childcare employers. As a result of good work experience, good teaching and very effective support for personal needs, the trainees stay on their courses, feel motivated and make good progress.
- Tutors assess the traineeship learners' starting points well to determine their needs and their career options. Tutors have detailed knowledge about traineeship learners' personal challenges, such as poor punctuality, which they must overcome to be successful. Not all tutors record this information systematically; consequently traineeship learners cannot always review their own personal development accurately.
- Most learners on traineeships progress into apprenticeships or employment. They grow in confidence and self-esteem, and improve their personal and employability skills. Traineeship learners have good attendance and are punctual for their lessons. Tutors provide traineeship learners with effective advice and guidance; therefore they make informed decisions about their study and career options. Traineeship learners enjoy their lessons, particularly the practical lessons. Many are very motivated and demand to learn more, for example about products and equipment used in dentistry. The large majority of traineeship learners make good progress in developing their English and mathematics skills.

- Senior managers have developed an effective strategy to enhance further apprentices' and traineeship learners' skills in English and mathematics. Assessors and tutors are suitably qualified to teach functional skills in English and mathematics. Senior managers have appointed a specialist teacher to oversee the introduction of GCSEs in English and mathematics for the early years educator apprentices and, as a result, the pace of development of these courses is good.
- The extent to which apprentices and traineeship learners develop their skills in English and mathematics is monitored closely by managers and staff. They implement an action plan swiftly if any apprentice is at risk of making slow progress in developing these skills. As a result, the pass rates for apprentices who take functional skills external assessments for the first time are particularly high across all levels.
- The procedure to share information between assessors and specialist English and mathematics tutors about apprentices and traineeship learners who require most support is not fully embedded. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices and traineeship learners do not achieve their full potential in developing these skills. They do not find developing these critical skills interesting, because a few assessors and tutors fail to engage their interest and make English and mathematics topics relevant to them.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- all staff who evaluate the quality of teaching and training systematically evaluate the impact of teaching and training approaches on apprentices' and traineeship learners' skills development and learning
- the information about the destination and progression of all apprentices is systematically collected and used to evaluate fully the impact of the provision
- assessors always build on the vocational experience of all apprentices to extend even further their skills and knowledge, and tutors record personal developmental needs of traineeship learners so that they can evaluate their own development and progress
- all assessors and tutors continue to raise standards in teaching English and mathematics by using a range of strategies that all learners find relevant and stimulating, and by recording and sharing information about all learners' developmental needs in these subjects
- assessors and tutors are confident to extend apprentices' and learners' knowledge about the risks of radicalisation, extremism and fundamental British values.

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

Yours sincerely

Shahram Safavi
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection we were assisted by you, the Chief Executive, as nominee. We met you, the director of operations, your management team, assessors, tutors, apprentices and traineeship learners. We observed training and lessons with members of your staff and looked at apprentices' and learners' work. We held meetings with traineeship learners, and interviewed your apprentices. We reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices and traineeship learners by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires, and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.