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Mrs Christine Hoyland
Managing Director
National Business College
1 Greenhead Road
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Dear Mrs Hoyland

Short inspection of National Business College (NBC)

Following the short inspection on 16 and 17 March 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 the provider was judged to be good in October 2009.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the last inspection in 2009, you have replaced many staff but have maintained a consistently good quality of provision over the intervening years. Many of the strengths identified at the last inspection still exist. More importantly for the apprentices, a high proportion of them continue to achieve their apprenticeship successfully each year and in the main, most of them achieve this within their planned time.

Although you have not fully remedied some of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, these do not directly affect the apprenticeship success rates. Apprentices enjoy their learning and coming into the college to do their functional skills and knowledge development. Staff, apprentices and employers have a good working relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

Safeguarding is effective.

Your senior managers and all staff place a high priority on ensuring that apprentices are safe from all forms of harm. Effective training for all staff ensures a good understanding of how to deal with a range of issues if they occur. Apprentices are very clear about whom they can approach if they have worries or concerns. Staff have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty but not all apprentices are yet fully confident in discussing or expressing all aspects of the issues involved clearly.

Inspection findings

- Since the last inspection in 2009, staff have maintained overall success rates at a good level. In some periods, success rates for certain groups of apprentices have been excellent, for example in 2013/14 all the advanced apprentices succeeded. The number of apprentices who complete their programme within their planned time has also been consistently very good.
- A large majority of apprentices achieve a positive progression to either full time employment, the next level of apprenticeship and, for an increasing number, to higher education.
- Staff and managers monitor the progress of apprentices well at weekly staff meetings. The current apprentices are making good progress and those still in learning for 2015/16 are on-track to complete in their planned time.
- Teaching and learning sessions have not improved sufficiently since the previous inspection because learning aims and objectives are still not precise enough and information and learning technology (ILT) resources are too limited. Tutors' understanding of the purpose of, and distinction between, aims and objectives is not sufficiently clear.
- In the observed lessons, the learning objectives were not comprehensive, clear or precise and they did not match the content of lessons and vice versa. Tutors did not use discrete, individualised learning aims to challenge all of the apprentices sufficiently. This results in some not working to their full potential and tutors not assessing their progress during the lessons adequately.
- The limited range of ILT available to tutors and apprentices results in a lack of variety in both teaching and learning activities, resulting in not all apprentices being fully motivated and engaged in exciting and challenging activities.
- Although staff monitor the progress of individual apprentices well at weekly 'huddle' meetings and take this opportunity to share knowledge and practice, senior managers have not fully addressed the issues reported at the last inspection regarding the quality of improvement planning. The most recent self-assessment report for 2014/15 contains too much description and focuses too much on 'everyday' activities. The report is not sufficiently evaluative and judgements, when made, not well supported by evidence.
- The resulting quality improvement plan is also too general, reflecting the content and structure of the self-assessment report and does not address key issues from the previous year specifically enough. The improvement plan does not adequately record the 'what needs to be done' and 'how it will be done' and by when.
- Managers now have a comprehensive list of contact details for all

apprentices who are under the age of 18. You check all staff appropriately, regardless of their role, before they begin employment. All staff have successfully completed training at level 2, enabling them to successfully support apprentices at risk. All staff and apprentices are clear how to report safeguarding concerns so that apprentices swiftly get the help they need. Managers and staff have a good understanding of the apprentices and their main issues and concerns so often they can de-escalate issues before they become serious.

- Apprentices are fully aware of the dangers and threats of social media and online grooming. They are able to discuss this topic with confidence and give practical examples of how to keep themselves safe online.
- Managers and staff have received extensive training on the 'Prevent' duty. Managers have a comprehensive action plan in place, and they have developed good links to a number of relevant external organisations. However, not all apprentices have the confidence to discuss the 'Prevent' duty in detail and are only able to describe broad, general issues.
- The promotion of equality and diversity to staff and apprentices is good. All staff have received training in equality and diversity to level 2 and they routinely update this training. Formal staff training successfully complements the routine, informal discussion at the frequent staff meetings. Staff promote a culture of respect that fosters a positive environment in which apprentices can work together well to explore key topics. Apprentices are able to discuss equality and diversity issues confidently, especially in relation to equal opportunities at work. However, apprentices do not yet have the confidence or the knowledge to discuss the whole range of British values in sufficient depth.
- All staff place a high priority on apprentices' welfare and well-being. They take appropriate action to support apprentices when welfare needs arise and, where appropriate, refer them to specialist external agencies, for example those dealing with homelessness, financial hardship, and drugs and alcohol misuse.
- Assessors and tutors have good systems to identify apprentices' learning and personal difficulties and/or disabilities at an early stage in the apprenticeship programme. They make appropriate arrangements for managing them and reducing their potentially adverse impact on the apprentices' learning and progress. Behaviour and self-discipline in class are good.
- Apprentices are developing a good range of personal and employability attributes including increased confidence, improved interpersonal skills and increased knowledge of the world of work.
- Staff maintain a good level of contact with workplace managers and supervisors to monitor apprentices' behaviour, progress and development in

the workplace. Assessors ensure a good involvement of employers in reviews and in other aspects of the apprenticeship programmes, such as the off-the-job learning.

- The managing director's plans to extend the range of learning programmes are based on sound local knowledge and 'intelligence' and on identified local enterprise partnership regional priorities. She and other managers have developed very good liaison with a wide range of training-related organisations and over 110 local employers, mainly small to medium sized enterprises, to respond to local needs.
- Managers have made good progress in designing and launching the higher-level business administration apprenticeship to satisfy the need for a higher-level business administration training programme and qualification. Senior managers have made a rational decision not to proceed with two previously identified programmes because of their incompatibility with existing provision and/or because of resourcing difficulties.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- a staff development programme is implemented to enable tutors to understand the function of, and distinction between, learning aims and objectives fully; this is to ensure that they are better able to formulate relevant aims and comprehensive objectives to support their teaching and apprentices' learning
- the range of ILT is extended to enrich and enliven teaching and learning, and in order to add variety to lessons
- the self-assessment process is improved to ensure that it focuses more strongly on evaluating the previous year's performance against the key stages of the apprentices' learning journey; in addition, ensure that the resulting quality improvement plan is also able to address both the identified strengths and weaknesses specifically, in order to continue to improve the quality of the apprentices' experience in all aspects of their training
- your staff further build apprentices' confidence in the 'Prevent' duty so that they can all take part in discussions on this duty and are fully able to protect themselves from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation
- all relevant documents and materials cover the breadth of British values so that they effectively reinforce for apprentices all of the component aspects and further build their knowledge of all core British values so that they have the confidence they need to explore and discuss these topics and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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

Tim Gardner
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors assisted by two Ofsted inspectors and the managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors reviewed provider documentation, policies and procedures, observed teaching sessions and met with a range of staff and apprentices to discuss the agreed lines of enquiry.