

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr Tony Horridge
Managing Director
Cablecom Training Limited
1 Wylam Court
Westland Way
Preston Farm Industrial Estate
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 3FB

Dear Mr Horridge

Short inspection of Cablecom Training Limited

Following the short inspection on 6 and 7 April 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 July 2011.

This provider continues to be good

The directors plan the provision highly effectively to meet the needs of both large corporations and small to medium enterprises in key economic sectors across a number of different regions of the country. Since the last inspection, you have invested significantly in the construction of a purpose-built and well-resourced training centre for the telecommunications sector, with the result that you now provide an increasing number of trained technicians for this expanding industry. At the same time, you have diversified into other areas of training, such as security, retail and hospitality, and health and social care, in response to the priorities of different regional local enterprise partnerships.

The directors have managed this expansion into new areas of provision carefully and proportionately. You have increased your capacity as a board of directors by bringing in additional expertise to ensure that you retain control over the quality of what you deliver. You have put in place effective performance management arrangements to oversee and improve the delivery of your geographically dispersed network of associate tutors and assessors, as well as your directly employed staff. As a consequence, the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment across all areas of your provision is good.

Learners on your employability programme, which is your largest type of provision, develop good technical and personal skills that increase their chances of securing

sustainable employment. The great majority of your learners are unemployed and come to you with low levels of prior attainment and reduced confidence. Your tutors and assessors equip them with specific vocational skills and develop the essential attributes of punctuality, team-working and problem-solving that make them more employable. They are also given the opportunity to take additional qualifications, such as in air blown fibre maintenance in telecommunications and how to identify improvised explosive devices on security courses that are valued by employers. The rate of progression of these learners into employment is high, and in some areas, such as spectator safety, where nearly all learners gain employment, is outstanding. However, outcomes for learners on your still small, but growing, apprenticeship programme require improvement.

The directors and senior managers understand well the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. As a result, they are able to intervene effectively to transform an area for improvement into a strength, or to identify what needs to be changed to secure improvements. For example, your managers and tutors acted swiftly to increase the numbers of learners achieving their functional skills qualifications in English over the space of 12 months. Although you have not yet been successful in increasing the numbers of learners taking functional skills qualifications in mathematics, you have effectively identified the causes for this and have put in place plans to address them.

The progress made in addressing the majority of areas for improvement identified at the last inspection has been reasonable. You and your managers have overhauled the arrangements for observing teaching, learning and assessment, so that they are now effective in supporting tutors and assessors to improve their practice. Directors and senior managers now use the self-assessment and quality improvement planning processes more skilfully to identify areas for improvement and plan effective interventions. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment is still too variable. The tutors on your employability programmes are highly effective in embedding equality and diversity into their teaching, but assessors at apprenticeship reviews pay cursory attention to these themes. Across all of your provision, the quality of target setting in individual learning plans and at reviews still requires improvement. Tutors and assessors set targets that are too vague and general to enable learners to understand what they would need to do to progress further. The impact of this is mitigated by the high standard of verbal feedback that learners and apprentices receive, so they make good progress overall.

Safeguarding is effective.

Directors and senior managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and they take appropriate actions to safeguard learners. The directors use their industry experience to generate a high-level commitment to the promotion of health and safety across all aspects of the provision. This is evident in the scrupulous induction of visitors to the evacuation procedures and risks at each training site, through to the additional units on health and safety that learners and apprentices are encouraged to take as part of their qualifications.

The recruitment and vetting of all staff is rigorous. Managers conduct full checks on the employment history and references of prospective staff before they are appointed. All staff, irrespective of role, have a Disclosure and Barring Service check. Staff and learners are fully briefed on all aspects of safeguarding as part of induction, and are clear about who they need to report any concerns or incidents to. As a consequence, both staff and learners feel safe. However, refresher training for staff in safeguarding is overdue.

Directors and senior managers have developed policies and procedures for the implementation of the 'Prevent' duty which fit their context as a provider, taking into account the geographical and vocational areas in which they deliver. The majority of staff have a good understanding of how to identify and refer learners at risk of radicalisation and extremism. The promotion of fundamental British values through teaching, learning and assessment is planned, but has yet to start.

Inspection findings

- Learners' progress on the small, but growing, apprenticeship provision requires improvement. Although overall success rates are higher than the national rate, the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within planned timescales has declined over the past year. This decline is particularly marked for the youngest apprentices, and for those taking apprenticeships in security services. Assessors, apprentices and employers are not using the e-portfolio system in a consistent way, with the result that progress is not being sufficiently monitored and tracked. Managers are aware of this area for improvement and have put in place actions to address it, but these will not arrest the decline in the timely success rates of the current apprentices. Good links with employers in the telecommunications and security industries provide high-quality training and assessment facilities for apprentices. Assessors deliver good practical and theoretical training with the result that apprentices develop relevant industry-specific and work-related skills, much valued by employers.
- Unemployed learners develop good employability skills that enable a high number to secure sustainable employment. Managers work effectively with employers to design vocationally specific courses with employability skills embedded within them. For example, courses in telecommunications and spectator safety support learners to develop both industry-specific skills, such as fibre optic cable installation and fire safety, alongside the core employability skills of customer service, team-working and communication. Tutors set high expectations for attendance and punctuality, and challenge vigorously language and behaviours which are unacceptable in the workplace. Tutors engage and motivate learners highly effectively. As a consequence, learners are enthusiastic and attend classes ready to learn. The great majority of learners on employability programmes achieve their qualifications. However, within the current year, the retention of a small minority of learners on the telecommunications programme is poor.

- The development of learners' English skills is good. Managers have been effective in addressing their learners' low pass rates in functional English over the past two years. Between 2013/14 and 2014/15, success rates on level 1 and level 2 English have increased by 21% and 8% respectively, taking them just above national rates. This rapid rate of improvement has been sustained into the current year, with a high proportion of apprentices passing their functional skills qualifications within the planned timescales. Tutors are skilled at integrating both English and mathematics into employability courses. For example, learners on the telecommunications course develop a good understanding of industry-related numeracy, such as using Ohm's Law to solve problems with electrical circuits.
- The numbers of learners who achieve functional skills mathematics qualifications are too low. Managers are not able to offer all their learners without level 1 or 2 qualifications in mathematics the opportunity to attend discrete classes and pass their functional skills qualification tests. Managers have developed realistic plans to address this lack of capacity, but as yet these have not been implemented.
- Managers have transformed the arrangements for observing tutors and assessors since the last inspection. They are now an effective means for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Tutors and assessors are observed twice a year, with a good input from observers from external institutions, reinforced by a system of internal moderation. None of these features were in place at the time of the last inspection. Particular attention is paid to quality assure and improve the work of the network of associate assessors, who deliver a high proportion of the provision and are dispersed across the country. Managers have instituted effective quality audit visits, which cover all aspects of the associates' performance. Managers act decisively to remove any poorly performing associates. Actions from observations are used as part of the appraisal and performance management of directly employed tutors and assessors and inform the provider's plan for continuous professional development. The changes to the observation system have contributed to sustaining good quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent. In the largest provision type, the employability programme, tutors skilfully incorporate equality and diversity themes into their teaching and learning. At induction, the starter activity explores key concepts including culture, values, respect and radicalisation in easily digestible formats. In a session on job application letters, links are made to ageism, gender and the use of human resource monitoring forms. However, in the much smaller apprenticeship provision, reference to equality and diversity is perfunctory, with the result that apprentices think that equality and diversity are the same. Although staff model a culture of mutual respect and tolerance, the procedural priority and promotion given to equality and diversity is too low-key.

- Managers use the self-assessment process well to identify accurately the main strengths and areas for improvement of their provision, which align closely with those found by inspectors. Managers implement the actions in the resulting quality improvement plan effectively, being held to account for their actions by the directors. As a consequence, a number of key areas for improvement, such as the poor success rates in functional skills English, have been addressed quickly and successfully. Other areas, such as the need to broaden the curriculum to reflect the priorities of various local enterprise partnerships, have taken longer to implement, but have still been achieved. The use and analysis of data in the self-assessment report is good. However, managers' use of data to identify problems in-year, such as the decline in retention on telecommunications programmes, has not been so effective.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers are more consistent in tracking and monitoring apprentices' progress across all areas of the provision, so that more apprentices complete their qualifications within planned timescales
- tutors and assessors set clear and precise targets in individual learning plans to enable learners to understand what it is that they need to do to improve
- managers accelerate the implementation of the plans to develop the skills of existing teaching staff to teach mathematics, so that more learners can take their functional skills mathematics qualifications
- managers spread the good practice found on employability courses in embedding equality and diversity in teaching, learning and assessment to the apprenticeship programme
- staff improve their use and understanding of data so that they can intervene quickly and effectively to address any reductions in the retention and lack of progress of specific groups of learners, particularly those on telecommunications programmes.

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

Charles Searle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors were assisted by the quality manager as nominee. Inspectors met with directors of the company. They held meetings with a range of managers, tutors, assessors, apprentices, learners and employers. Inspectors carried out observations of teaching, learning and assessment, and conducted walk-throughs of learning sessions to explore particular themes. They scrutinised learners' work and assessment records and key documents relating to the provider's strategy and implementation plans, self-assessment and improvement plans, and safeguarding records. Inspectors considered the views of learners through discussions during learning sessions visited and through responses received through Ofsted's online questionnaire.