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Mr Jonathan Bourne
Managing Director
Damar Limited
Petersgate House
64 St Petersgate
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Dear Mr Bourne

Short inspection of Damar 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 Damar Limited (Damar) was judged to be good in August 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Your senior leadership team and staff at all levels have maintained successfully the strengths found at the previous inspection and dealt effectively with the recommendations. You and the operations director have a detailed knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement in apprentices' outcomes, in teaching, training, learning and assessment, and in leadership and management. Your senior team is determined to take effective and swift actions to make further improvements.

You and your senior management team have a clear strategy for Damar to respond to apprentices' and employers' training requirements, particularly in the legal and financial sectors. Senior staff have developed successful partnerships with employers and qualification awarding agencies. These have resulted in the development of new provision and qualifications for apprenticeships in the legal sector.

Damar has increased significantly the number of apprentices since the previous inspection; currently you train 924 apprentices nationally. The senior leadership team has reorganised the staffing structure to good effect. They have also introduced a number of well-considered information learning technology systems to ensure that staff provide good provision for apprentices.

The high-quality teaching, training and assessment has resulted in current apprentices making good progress from their starting points. Since the previous inspection, the vast majority of apprentices have gained their qualifications within the planned time.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your staff have ensured that the arrangements to keep apprentices safe are up to date and fit for purpose. The designated safeguarding officer is well informed and has developed very effective policies and procedures to support apprentices who are at risk of harm.

Staff take very effective and prompt actions when risks to apprentices are identified or reported, including, for example, the exceptional support provided around a potential forced marriage. Staff maintain a clear record of safeguarding incidents and the responses made to them. Partnership working with external agencies that support vulnerable young adults is particularly effective.

Well-informed safeguarding policies and procedures regarding the risks of extremism and radicalisation resulted in the designated safeguarding officer taking appropriate action when alerted to the potential exposure of your apprentices to extremism. Trainers have received training on safe practices and how to inform apprentices about these risks. However, some trainers are not confident enough to develop and monitor apprentices' understanding of extremism, radicalisation and online grooming.

Inspection findings

- You and the operations director have a clear understanding of the provision's strengths and areas for improvement. The improvement action plan is detailed and robust. Since the previous inspection, you have maintained a good track record of planning and implementing successful improvements. Managers' intervention to improve the quality of one of the subcontractors' provision has been successful.
- As you have recognised, the system for monitoring the quality of off-the-job training requires improvement. The observers of training lessons do not evaluate the impact of teaching on the development of apprentices' knowledge well enough. A number of managers do not consistently identify strengths and weaknesses accurately. As a result, the action plans resulting from these observations do not lead to further improvements in teaching practices.
- Since the previous inspection, you and the operations director have been particularly successful in shaping the provision to reflect apprentices' career aspirations and the changes in legal employers' practices. Your staff have contributed significantly to the development of apprenticeship qualifications in legal services, in legal advice and criminal prosecution and in legal administration. You have responded well to the needs of apprentices aged 16 to 18 and have significantly increased their recruitment.
- The senior management team has implemented effective management and learning systems, such as an electronic portfolio system and a virtual learning environment that have contributed to the apprentices' good progress. Staff at all levels use these systems well to support apprentices at risk of slow progress.

- Trainers work very flexibly with apprentices and employers. They arrange visits at times most suitable to the apprentices' work patterns and workloads. Trainers adapt their training material to ensure that the training is very relevant to apprentices' current and future job roles and to employers' needs.
- Trainers review regularly the progress that apprentices make towards the completion of their frameworks. However, most trainers do not encourage apprentices to develop a deeper understanding of the topic areas other than those the qualifications require; as a result, not all apprentices achieve to their full potential.
- Most apprentices who start with lower qualifications in English and mathematics than required by their apprenticeship framework gain the appropriate qualification in English and mathematics. However, trainers do not encourage apprentices to gain qualifications in English and mathematics beyond the level that the frameworks demand. Trainers do not consistently extend apprentices' skills in the use of English and mathematics.
- Trainers use their occupational expertise well to coach apprentices in the workplace; for example, in accountancy and legal settings. They support and encourage apprentices to become more confident in taking more complex tasks or job roles.
- Trainers develop and share with apprentices clear and detailed assessment plans. They ensure that apprentices have well-organised assessments in the workplace. Trainers have productive relationships with apprentices' line managers and supervisors and provide them with frequent feedback on the progress of their apprentices.
- Since the previous inspection, the proportion of apprentices who have gained their qualifications has been consistently high. The large majority of apprentices have completed within the planned time. After the completion of their qualifications, most apprentices gain relevant employment. Apprentices in different geographical regions broadly achieve equally well. Apprentices studying for different frameworks, achieve well.
- In response to the previous inspection, managers have taken a number of actions to improve apprentices' understanding of fair treatment and respecting differences. Trainers set most apprentices tasks to encourage them to gain a good understanding of these matters; for example, an apprentice used a survey of 1,500 workers in the UK to analyse the proportion of employees who had experienced different forms of discrimination. Trainers and managers challenge robustly the apprentices who fail to respect differences. Trainers have received training on how to promote to apprentices democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. However, as the self-assessment report identifies, they do not promote these values to apprentices well enough.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers have the skills to evaluate accurately the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and training lessons and evaluate the impact of teaching and training on apprentices' learning, so that trainers develop the necessary skills to extend apprentices' understanding beyond that required by the qualifications
- trainers continue to extend the apprentices' skills in the use of English and mathematics
- trainers are confident enough to extend the apprentices' knowledge of the values which prepare them for life in modern Britain and the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

I am copying this letter to the Skills 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 the operations director, as nominee. We met you, a number of your managers, trainers and apprentices. We observed teaching and training lessons and looked at apprentices' work. We interviewed a number of your apprentices and reviewed key documents including those relating to self-assessment, performance and safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices by reviewing the comments received on Ofsted's online questionnaires and by seeking their views during on-site inspection activity.