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Russell Prince
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Dear Mr Prince

Short inspection of Stockport Engineering Training Association (SETA)

Following the short inspection on 22 and 23 June 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 February 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders and managers have maintained good-quality apprenticeship provision for engineering apprentices in the Greater Manchester area. SETA has reduced its reliance on subcontractors; it no longer works with those subcontractors whose apprenticeship outcomes are poor. SETA now delivers the technical certificates for the apprenticeship frameworks in its own training centre and in employers' workplaces and to a good standard. Consequently, current apprentices are making good or better progress towards achieving their qualifications. SETA continues to offer a good range of engineering qualifications; these meet learners', employers' and regional needs well. The introduction of higher national certificates provides a good progression route for advanced apprentices.

Managers have made improvements to the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. In 2014/15, the success rate for the small number of intermediate apprentices improved but remained lower than the national rate. The provider's data for the current year projects a further improvement in outcomes for intermediate apprentices. Achievement rates for advanced apprentices are good and reflect the high national rates in engineering. Too many apprentices still take longer than planned to achieve.

Managers are aware of the areas that require further improvement and development. However, on occasion these need to be articulated more specifically with defined targets in managers' quality improvement plans. Managers have not yet made sufficient progress in using data to monitor the impact of their actions to raise standards.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Managers and staff give high priority to health, safety and security in the training centre. Staff and employers ensure that apprentices follow safe working practices. SETA recently ensured that all its own staff have up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Updated training on safeguarding is an objective for all staff in their annual appraisals.

Staff handle apprentices' welfare issues appropriately, such as by adjusting apprentices' attendance to enable them to attend medical appointments. Managers deal promptly and effectively with complaints, concerns or issues and maintain detailed records.

Managers have made a reasonable start in complying with the 'Prevent' duty. They have ensured that all staff, including board members, have completed training about the 'Prevent' duty. Managers have developed training sessions for learners on British values that encourage lively discussion and debate around topical issues. Learners demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Senior managers have not yet fully implemented all aspects of the 'Prevent' duty. Managers have not established partnerships with other organisations in order to assess fully the risk of learners being radicalised and to develop an action plan. A policy about assessing the suitability of visiting speakers is in development. Policies on the safe and secure use of information technology are appropriate and are closely monitored.

Inspection findings

- The self-assessment report correctly identifies most of the strengths and areas for improvement. However, the report is long, complex and repetitive. Managers are aware that the report does not provide a clear, succinct overview of the quality of the provider's work. Leaders and managers complete the actions set out in the quality improvement plan. However, they do not make sufficient use of management information or data to evaluate the impact of their actions or measure progress against their improvement objectives.

- Managers continue to manage the day-to-day operations of the organisation well. Arrangements for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment are well defined and managers use these observations effectively to monitor closely the performance of staff, particularly those new to the organisation. The evidence and feedback to staff from their observations are not yet used to share best practice with colleagues. The observers do not always focus sufficiently on learners' progress and skills development when reviewing the quality of the sessions they observe.
- Most staff have completed their annual appraisals and have clear objectives to improve the quality of their teaching and assessment skills. Managers are still not making effective use of apprentices' achievement and progress data to establish key performance indicators and targets to monitor or challenge the performance of individual staff.
- The range of engineering programmes offered has increased and SETA now offers higher national certificates to advanced apprentices on completion of their programmes. Links with employers continue to be very strong and SETA is responsive to requests for additional training to meet specific business's needs. Employers and SETA staff carefully review and agree the specific vocational units and adjust how the apprenticeship programme is delivered to meet employers' requirements. The quality of the apprentices' training and assessment is enhanced through the close working relationships between employers and SETA.
- During the inspection, employers and apprentices expressed high levels of satisfaction with the programmes offered and the quality of the training and assessments in the training centre and in the apprentices' workplaces. Regular meetings between assessors and employers allow for effective discussions about apprentices' development of industry skills to a high standard. Apprentices value and benefit from the good feedback they receive from their workplace supervisors and SETA assessors. The formal reviews of apprentices' progress are regular and useful, but the recording of apprentices' development needs is insufficiently detailed to act as a useful reminder of what skills need improving.
- Leaders and managers have invested in information and learning technologies to support learning and skills developments required by employers. Learners use technology well to provide evidence for their qualifications. They are confident in producing documents to a high standard, with imported graphs and images. Apprentices make good use of electronic portfolios to gather and store evidence. Staff use the electronic portfolios well to monitor closely apprentices' progress.
- Managers do not monitor the assessments and progress of advanced-level apprentices towards achieving their vocational qualification in their workplace sufficiently closely. Assessments on the advanced apprenticeship programme do not start early enough and apprentices are at risk of not completing their qualification within the planned timescale. Too many advanced apprentices have already passed their expected end dates.

- SETA's reliance on subcontractors has reduced and it now only works with one subcontractor. Managers hold regular meetings with their remaining subcontractor. These meetings and the regular submission of progress reviews allow SETA managers to monitor closely learners' progress. Minutes of the meetings do not record the outcomes of the checks on the quality of subcontracted provision conducted by SETA managers. Managers have taken action to improve further the management of their subcontractor. For example, a new annual due diligence process has been introduced to raise the standard of delivery by the subcontractor for 2016.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and managers should ensure that:

- the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan focus clearly on the key strengths and areas for improvement to have maximum impact on improving standards
- management information and data are analysed and used well to set targets for staff, learners and employers
- the records made during the observations of teaching, learning and assessment are more evaluative and focus on the impact tutors are having on apprentices' learning and that good practice is identified and shared with staff
- the reviews of learners' progress are recorded in more detail so that learners and employers have a clearer overview of apprentices' skills attained and those they still need to develop or improve
- they implement all aspects of the 'Prevent' duty guidance as soon as possible
- they monitor closely the progress advanced apprentices are making towards achieving their vocational qualifications in their workplace so that staff can intervene early when an apprentice's progress is slow.

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

Joy Montgomery
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector conducted this short inspection with assistance from the centre manager as nominee. We spoke with staff, employers and learners in the training centres and workplace. We observed training sessions, scrutinised learners' files and reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence relating to the programmes and safeguarding.