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Mr Lee Lawson
Assistant Training Manager
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Dear Mr Lawson

Short inspection of Lancaster Training Services Limited (LTS)

Following the short inspection on 20–21 July 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 September 2011.

This provider continues to be good.

You have ensured that learners continue to receive good education and training. All staff work tirelessly to support learners to develop their skills to enable them to be productive in employment, which employers appreciate greatly. Tutors and support staff have very good working relationships with learners and their employers. Staff promptly identify when learners are making slow progress, and take positive action to intervene and support them to catch up. Consequently, the vast majority of learners complete their apprenticeships and progress to permanent employment. Managers took decisive action when they identified a decline in achievement rates in 2014/15, resulting in rates improving significantly in the current year with more than eight out of 10 learners achieving their qualifications within their planned timescales.

You have not fully resolved all the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. You have improved the collection and analysis of progress monitoring and you use this to have a good overview of the performance of all learners at LTS. You have improved the engagement of learners and employers in your self-assessment process. You have implemented the recommendation for progress reviews to be part of the cycle to quality assure teaching and learning. Conversely, overall and timely achievement for intermediate apprenticeships saw a decline in 2014/15. There is still a gap in achievement between this group of learners and those completing advanced apprenticeships in the current year. You do not ensure that progress reviews identify

clearly what skills learners need to acquire and by when. Your staff focus principally on the minimum requirements of qualifications rather than challenging most-able learners to develop advanced skills. You have not improved the proportion of learners who access your apprenticeships who come from under-represented groups, in spite of recruitment strategies that you have implemented since the previous inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your senior leadership team continue to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and protect young and vulnerable learners. Designated safeguarding officers are trained to the appropriate standard and their roles are well publicised throughout the organisation and discussed at progress reviews with employers. Managers operate appropriate recruitment and selection checks for the staff they employ, and keep accurate central records of disclosure and barring scheme authorisations. Managers have strengthened the organisation's policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and, more recently, the 'Prevent' duty. Staff are fully aware of the procedures that they must follow should a safeguarding disclosure be made. On the infrequent occasions when disclosures are made, managers thoroughly investigate reported concerns and work closely with other partner agencies to ensure the safety and welfare of learners. Managers and staff receive a wide range of appropriate training on safeguarding and 'Prevent' topics: for example, they are trained about cyber bullying, risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, child sexual exploitation, e-safety and abusive relationships. Learners receive good care throughout their studies. In the workplace, you provide employers with a detailed and useful guide that sets out their roles and responsibilities linked to the 'Prevent' duty. Tutors carry out detailed health and safety risk assessments in all learners' workplaces. Therefore, learners work in settings where suitable precautions and control measures are in place to minimise the risk of incidents occurring. However, further work is required in precisely setting out the specific arrangements of how learners' safety will be monitored while accessing information technology resources at the training centre.

Inspection findings

- Since the previous inspection, the management committee and senior management team have continued to provide clear direction and effective strategic leadership. A highly appropriate set of values underpins the work of LTS. The overarching mission statement is very clear and focuses well on meeting the needs of learners and working with the local community and regional businesses. Leaders and managers communicate their high expectations through a detailed and well-informed business plan that provides challenging targets and clear objectives to support company growth and meet the workforce development needs of employers. However, the targets set in relation to apprenticeship performance and standards are less detailed than those related to other business targets. Consequently, the monitoring of these targets by senior managers and the management committee is less precise and requires further development.

- Teaching, learning and assessment are effective. Tutors effectively plan learning programmes to ensure that learners acquire appropriate practical, theoretical and employability skills to allow them to be productive in the workplace. However, on too many occasions, targets set in progress reviews disproportionately focus on meeting the minimum standards of the qualification, as opposed to extending learners' skills and knowledge to make them more productive in the workplace. Similarly, apprentices who have already attained the required level of English, mathematics, and information and communication technology are insufficiently challenged to develop these skills at a higher level.
- Learners receive good support from well-qualified tutors, assessors and employer mentors at their place of work, which they greatly appreciate. Tutors promote the use of a work-based learning manual to link theory taught at off-the-job training to experiential learning in the workplace. Learners also enhance their skill repertoire through additional employer-based training. For example, intermediate apprentices can acquire advanced skills of alloy welding, which are not included in the apprenticeship programme but are key skills required by employers.
- The proportions of learners who complete their programme within the planned timescales are high. Attainment for advanced learners is excellent: almost all learners achieve their qualification within the planned timescales. Intermediate apprenticeships, which account for the majority of all learners, are good, with more than three quarters of all learners completing their qualifications within planned timescales. Almost all learners gain permanent employment on completion of their apprenticeships and the large majority progress to advanced apprenticeships.
- Learners make very good progress on their programmes. Managers have recently invested in a system to monitor the progress that learners make on their apprenticeships more closely. Where learners do not make good progress, tutors intervene, work with employer mentors and implement effective support to ensure that learners improve their performance and achieve their short- and longer-term targets within planned timescales.
- The arrangements to quality assure and continuously improve training and the learners' experience are effective. The self-assessment process makes effective use of data to support judgements. It is evaluative and identifies areas for improvement clearly. Tutors contribute to the process through meetings that take place at regular intervals throughout the year. Learners' views are gathered and acted on appropriately, although few employers contribute to the process. Managers accurately identify key strengths, including those related to teaching, learning and assessment, but a few key areas for improvement, such as progress against recommendations identified at the previous inspection, are understated.

- Since the previous inspection, the quality improvement process for teaching and learning has been developed further. Managers observe teaching and learning sessions frequently and continue to make reliable and accurate judgements in the classroom, on workplace assessments and at progress reviews. However, the teaching observation system does not routinely identify how the quality of teaching, learning and assessment can improve further. Observers do not provide sufficiently detailed feedback that sets out precisely the improvement needed and timescales when the improvement will be completed by.
- The company continues to operate effective systems to monitor the performance of staff. Staff receive clear performance objectives that focus on the learning experiences and interests of learners. They are clear about managers' expectations, particularly in focusing on high learner achievement and improving teaching, learning and assessment.
- LTS's approach to equality and diversity is good. Learners receive good training during their induction that promotes well key aspects of equality and diversity. Learners' understanding of inclusion and tolerance is reinforced effectively during monthly 'hot topics' discussions and during progress reviews. Tutors successfully create a harmonious learning environment that learners greatly value. However, in a majority of cases, trainer assessors do not record in sufficient detail the ongoing development of learners' understanding of these themes.
- Tutors do not sufficiently plan or record advice or guidance that they provide to learners. Advice and guidance provided to learners are sporadic and not appropriately documented. Consequently, insufficient personal development targets are set in progress reviews in relation to personal goals and career objectives.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- tutors set and record challenging targets in assessments and progress reviews to ensure that all learners, including the most able, are challenged to extend their skills for all aspects of their programme including English, mathematics, and information and communication technology
- tutors provide and record good-quality and impartial information, advice and guidance at all stages of the apprenticeship programme to assist learners in progressing their career and achieving their personal goals
- operational targets set in relation to apprenticeship performance are sufficiently ambitious to maintain a strong and unrelenting focus on high apprenticeship performance, ensuring that all learners achieve in line with their potential
- managers use the findings from the observation of teaching and learning to identify particularly good practice and the best ways to support and challenge learners, especially those at higher levels

- managers develop and implement new and innovative strategies to engage under-represented groups to engage in apprenticeship programmes at LTS.

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

Paul Cocker
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors were assisted by the provider's assistant training manager, as nominee. Inspectors met with members of the leadership team, tutors, support staff, employers and learners. Inspectors observed sessions in the workplace and reviewed learners' assessed work and portfolios. They reviewed key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to lesson planning and assessment, quality assurance and performance monitoring, safeguarding and curriculum planning.