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Mr Terry Weston
Chief Executive
The Engineering College
Monks Ferry
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Dear Mr Weston

Short inspection of The Engineering College

Following the short inspection on 14 and 15 June 2017, 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 Engineering College was judged to be good in October 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

You have continued to ensure that trainees and apprentices receive a good standard of education and training. Apprentices benefit from teaching, learning and assessment which are of a good standard. The large majority of apprentices achieve their apprenticeship by the planned end date. The vast majority of current apprentices make at least the progress of which they are capable and develop new skills that their employers value.

The large majority of current trainees on the traineeship programme make good progress on their qualifications, with almost two thirds progressing to advanced apprenticeships in engineering following the completion of their intermediate programme. The remaining trainees either gain employment without training or undertake another course with a different training provider.

You, the trustees and your managers have successfully rectified most of the areas identified as requiring improvement at the previous inspection. Despite a slight decline in the very high achievement rates at the previous inspection, you and your managers have made good progress in maintaining good achievement rates. More than three quarters of apprentices complete their programme within the planned timescale. The quality of feedback that trainees and apprentices receive has improved, assisting them to make better progress in their studies and swiftly develop new skills that their employers value.

You and your managers have placed an increased focus on the promotion of equality and the celebration of diversity. A higher proportion of applicants from

under-represented groups, such as females, now apply to the college to begin a career in engineering. Furthermore, more than one third of trainees and apprentices now attend the college from disadvantaged backgrounds to develop their engineering skills and forge a career in the engineering sector. The celebration of diversity has been strengthened considerably through the implementation of a learners' council to celebrate diversity in the community. An extensive range of posters around the college promotes diversity in modern Britain. Trainees and apprentices take part in various charitable activities enthusiastically to support those in the community who are less fortunate.

You and your managers have ensured that teachers integrate English and mathematics into traineeship and apprenticeship programmes successfully. This enhances trainees' and apprentices' existing skills and develops new ones that employers in the engineering sector require. Trainees and apprentices are more employable as a result of having more highly developed skills in English and mathematics.

During the inspection, members of the college observation team made mostly accurate judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, their recording of observations is not sufficiently evaluative to allow them to set clear actions for teachers to enable them to improve their practice. This results in teachers not receiving the help they need as they strive to become outstanding practitioners. Furthermore, you have not ensured that moderation meetings are recorded. Consequently, senior leaders and trustees cannot monitor the consistency of the judgements made or hold observers to account to improve their practice.

Safeguarding is effective.

Senior leaders and managers have maintained the effective safeguarding arrangements since the previous inspection and revised them in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. This ensures that trainees and apprentices are safe in workshops at the college and that they feel safe in their workplace. Trustees, senior leaders, managers and staff continue to place a significant emphasis on safeguarding and health and safety in the high-risk environments in which trainees and apprentices learn and work. The two designated safeguarding officers receive regular training at the appropriate level to enable them to support trainees and apprentices and to carry out their role at the college responsibly.

Managers carry out appropriate recruitment checks and keep accurate records. Through mandatory training, staff know how to maintain safe working practices and are very clear how to report any concerns about their trainees' and apprentices' safety.

Senior managers ensure that staff, trainees, apprentices and employers receive appropriate training and advice in relation to pertinent intelligence received from local agencies including Merseyside Police and the local safeguarding board. For example, staff, trainees and apprentices recently received training on the risks associated with drugs and narcotics following many incidents reported in the local

media about the use of the 'legal high' spice. Managers also provided the opportunity, which many accepted, for trainees, apprentices and employers to attend a theatrical production, in collaboration with the local safeguarding board, about the signs of exploitation and the actions individuals should take if they have any suspicions.

Managers complete checks of apprentices' workplaces on a regular basis to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that apprentices are safe. Teachers instil the importance of health and safety in engineering by completing extensive safety checks prior to commencing practical activities, which apprentices diligently follow on the job.

While trainees have an appropriate understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, the knowledge that apprentices acquire at the start of their programme is not reinforced sufficiently throughout their apprenticeship. This results in a few apprentices not having an appropriate understanding of the dangers of these important issues.

Inspection findings

- Trustees are highly committed and ambitious for the college to be a centre of engineering excellence in the north west of England. They possess a range of skills and experience, representing the stakeholders of this Group Training Association. They use their skills and experience competently to support and challenge senior leaders to improve the performance of the college continuously. However, they do not receive sufficiently useful information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to allow them to hold managers to account as they do for many other aspects of the business.
- In 2015/16, more than three quarters of apprentices completed their apprenticeship within the planned learning period, which is significantly above the national rates for similar providers. There are no significant gaps in achievement or progress between different groups of apprentices. The vast majority of current apprentices make at least the expected progress on their apprenticeship. The small minority that are not making good progress receive support from teachers and assessors to help them to catch up.
- Trainees make good progress on their qualifications and develop new skills, with two thirds of all trainees progressing to apprenticeships in engineering. The remaining one third progress to employment or further education courses at other training providers.
- Senior leaders and managers have been successful in ensuring that trainees' and apprentices' attendance and punctuality have improved since the previous inspection. Managers have been successful in instilling good behaviour when in the college and the workplace. Staff, trainees and apprentices agree expected standards of behaviour at induction and issue a detailed code of conduct, which learners agree to follow at all times. Consequently, there are very few instances of inappropriate behaviour. Attendance and punctuality are high.
- Teachers ensure that the integration of mathematical skills in lessons is effective.

Apprentices develop the skills they need to be effective in the workplace and to achieve their qualifications. For example, on mechanical engineering courses apprentices draw conical developments, calculate energy loss and efficiency, and determine electrical resistance to high levels of accuracy.

- Apprentices' use of English, particularly spelling and grammar, is mostly to a good standard. Employers value apprentices improving their skills in the use of English. This greatly supports apprentices in their career and future employment prospects. For example, apprentices working with a local shipbuilder are expected to use and spell technical terms correctly and to ensure that spelling, punctuation and grammar are to a high standard.
- Senior leaders and managers have introduced successful strategies since the previous inspection to increase the number of females recruited to the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes. These have included the rebranding of the provider to 'The Engineering College' and encouraging female apprentices to attend career events at schools to promote women in engineering. Recently, one of these apprentices has become a regional apprenticeship ambassador, promoting engineering apprenticeships to females. These actions have contributed to the gradual increase of applications from females onto traineeship and apprenticeship programmes in engineering since the previous inspection.
- Since the previous inspection, managers and staff have developed further strategies to promote trainees' and apprentices' awareness and understanding of diversity. For example, the learner council focuses on a range of highly relevant topics, including citizenship. Learners have created a good range of posters that they have placed around the college to promote the importance of citizenship in British society. Furthermore, the learner council provides good support to a local charity, which helps those who are homeless and have addictions.
- Teachers make good use of the assessment completed at the start of trainees' and apprentices' programmes to plan learning to meet their specific requirements and to ensure that they achieve their potential. For example, teachers plan learning carefully to develop trainees' skills in welding, plate development and machining, resulting in them being able to produce components to high levels of precision to satisfy the exacting requirements of employers and their supply chain.
- Teachers challenge the most able trainees and apprentices very effectively to develop higher-level skills that will make them more employable in the engineering industry. For example, teachers challenge trainees to develop higher levels of geometric skills to set out and cut irregular pieces of steel by using plasma-cutting technology, which an increasing number of local employers use in their businesses. Apprentices develop good skills in constructing complex pipe connections and angled funnels, which are skills that employers in the marine industry value greatly.
- Many teachers use a range of effective assessment strategies in lessons to ensure that trainees and apprentices make the progress in lessons that they should. For example, tutors closely monitor apprentices' performance in interpreting mathematical differentiation. They diligently monitor their progress and offer helpful feedback relating to the principles used in the lesson. However,

in a small minority of theory classes, teachers make poor use of questioning techniques to assess trainees' and apprentices' ongoing learning, knowledge and understanding.

- In practical lessons, apprentices make good progress in improving the quality of their work through the guidance and support of well-qualified industrial experts, who provide effective oral feedback to help apprentices improve further. Consequently, welding apprentices' welds become increasingly stronger and meet the exacting standards of their employers and their qualification.
- Teachers provide effective oral feedback to trainees and apprentices to aid their understanding of key aspects of knowledge and skills required to be a skilled engineer. Most assessors confirm the aspects of their work that meet the required standards. Where trainees' and apprentices' work does not meet the standards, assessors work hard to develop their skills to ensure that they are competent in the particular discipline. Consequently, the standard of most trainees' and apprentices' practical work improves over time.
- Senior leaders and managers have not been successful in improving the rigour and accuracy of the observation of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection. College observers do not routinely record teachers' progress in achieving the actions set following observations carried out in the workplace. The process for observing teaching, learning and assessment in the college is not rigorous enough. In too many instances, observers' comments are not sufficiently evaluative and do not consistently focus on the progress that trainees and apprentices make in lessons. Consequently, the feedback that teachers receive is not helpful enough to support them to improve their practice and enhance the standards of teaching, learning and assessment further.
- The moderation arrangements to monitor the quality of observations of teaching, learning and assessment are not rigorous enough. Although managers indicate that there are appropriate arrangements for moderation and that moderation takes place regularly, there is no documentary evidence to support these claims because observers do not record their meetings or discussions.

Next steps for the provider

Senior leaders, managers and trustees should ensure that:

- teachers and assessors reinforce the initial training that apprentices receive at induction about the risks of radicalisation and extremism and ensure that their knowledge and understanding are extended continually throughout the apprenticeship programme
- observers focus on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment together with the progress that learners make when observing lessons and ensure that teachers are supported to improve the quality of education and training that trainees and apprentices receive
- those responsible for governance request clear and concise reports on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and ensure that senior leaders and managers are held to account for the swift improvement of teaching, learning

and assessment throughout the college

- teachers and assessors challenge all trainees and apprentices and use appropriate assessment techniques consistently to make sure that they make the progress of which they are capable.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills 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, we were assisted by you, the chief executive officer, as nominee. We met with trustees, senior leaders, teachers and assessors. We observed sessions in the college, made visits at apprentices' workplaces and reviewed trainees' and apprentices' assessed work. We obtained trainees' and apprentices' views in face-to-face interviews when observing classes. We reviewed key strategic and policy documents, including those relating to strategic planning, lesson planning and assessment, quality assurance, performance monitoring and safeguarding.