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Mr Alan Smith
Chief Executive Officer
NITAL Ltd
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of NITAL Ltd

Following the short inspection on 7–8 December 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in December 2012.

This provider continues to be good.

Trustees, senior leaders and staff have successfully maintained the good quality of provision seen at the previous inspection. You have set a very clear strategic direction for NITAL by establishing, in October 2015, your own well-equipped engineering skills training academy. This allows you to provide practical and theoretical engineering training for local young people. You currently provide a broader range of apprenticeships with different subcontractors than at the previous inspection, for example in health and social care and hospitality, in order to help learners raise their aspirations.

Although the proportion of learners who successfully complete their qualifications has fallen slightly since the previous inspection, the achievement rate for apprentices is still high. A significant proportion of apprentices progress from level 2 to level 3 and the vast majority remain in sustained employment at the end of their apprenticeships.

Trustees, senior leaders and managers have a very good overview of the apprenticeship provision. A small academy board supports the main board of trustees effectively. This structure ensures the maintenance of NITAL's clear strategic direction, provides a good understanding of the performance of the apprenticeship programmes and ensures that staff focus on improving apprentices' experience.

Since the previous inspection, you and your managers have maintained your

excellent relationship with local employers and continue to make good use of your national connections with similar training organisations. You are keen to fully exploit the potential of the new academy and are discussing future collaborations and researching new engineering apprenticeship opportunities.

Safeguarding is effective.

Trustees and senior managers have taken effective action to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that apprentices feel safe in the training centre and the workplace. The chief executive officer is the designated safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty officer and trained appropriately. All safety and safeguarding issues are recorded and actioned rigorously. Staff are diligent in checking the health and safety of apprentices' places of work. Apprentices have a sound understanding of what they need to do if they are harassed, bullied or have concerns. Managers have implemented their obligations under the 'Prevent' duty with suitable staff training and training for apprentices. Appropriate risk assessments and visiting speaker policies are in place. The promotion of British values, particularly in the subcontracted provision, is not fully developed.

Inspection findings

- The planning of teaching and learning is effective and develops apprentices' practical skills and understanding of related theory well. Tutors ensure that apprentices work at their own pace in off-the-job classes, offering effective one-to-one coaching where apprentices need additional help and challenging the most able to undertake more complex tasks. Apprentices work well to achieve the high standards set by tutors and make good progress in classes. They work confidently using a range of machinery competently and adhere to the high safety standards expected by tutors and employers. As a result, they develop the good practical skills required to be effective in their respective job roles. The significant investment in off-the-job training facilities gives further flexibility to plan and deliver practical skills such as a range of welding styles and techniques. This has led to significant improvement for the quality of apprentices' experience and employers in particular have welcomed this move.
- The large majority of apprentices develop highly relevant vocational skills designed to meet local and national skills shortages and support their employment prospects. They make good progress throughout their programmes and demonstrate professional behaviour and standards in the workplace as well as in practical and theory sessions. Apprentices enjoy their training, value the skills they develop and demonstrate good attendance, punctuality and respectful behaviour. The support they receive from their well-qualified and competent tutors and assessors is good. Apprentices appreciate the high expectations and clear advice and guidance they receive that allow them to progress onto higher levels. Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and most learners have an awareness of the threat of extremism and radicalisation.
- Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of mathematics. For example, Railtrack apprentices demonstrate mathematical skills well when calculating the

volume of ballast required to repair sections of track. Mathematics theory sessions integrate English skills highly effectively. For example, in a session on variable dependents the tutor asked the class the difference between dependents and dependants. This led to a discussion about verbs, adjectives, nouns and pronouns. Preparation for apprentices' next steps is good. For example, at the end of the level 3 programme, an extensive mathematics course is available for apprentices who plan to go on to level 4. Apprentices demonstrate good information and communication technology skills in building their portfolios and in their use of computer-aided design. The standard of English in portfolios is good and tutors challenge apprentices' use of English appropriately.

- Progress reviews for apprentices are good, and consequently they make good progress. Reviews in health and social care identify skills development particularly well. Assessors and subcontractors monitor apprentices' progress well. In consultation with employers, assessors ensure that workplace activities are available for apprentices to develop the right personal and workplace skills to achieve their targets. Most assessors negotiate appropriate aspirational targets with their apprentices. Assessors provide clear and helpful verbal feedback so that learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve. In a few instances written targets do not focus well enough on personal behaviour and skills development.
- Senior managers monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the subcontractors systematically. Monthly meetings between the provider and subcontractors are effective in monitoring compliance and performance. Subcontractors' resources for teaching are of a good standard. For instance, Railtrack apprentices have the use of a section of railway that they can use to maintain and replace track and sleepers. Subcontractors are required to provide self-assessment reports; this information informs the evaluation of apprenticeship programmes effectively. Achievement rates for subcontractors are challenging and a minority have achieved their target for success rates in agreed timescales. As identified in your self-assessment report, you have yet to complete the planned observations of the subcontracted provision. A significant number of records of observations fail to identify clearly the key strengths and weaknesses observed.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- observations of teaching, learning and assessment are undertaken systematically for all tutors and assessors and that key strengths and weaknesses and their impact on learning are clearly identified
- written feedback to apprentices is developmental and clearly identifies what they need to do to improve
- targets set for apprentices identify the skills and personal development they need to develop to make good progress
- all apprentices, particularly in the subcontracted provision, have a good awareness of modern British values and the dangers 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

Bob Hamp

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors carried out the inspection, assisted by the chief executive officer as nominee. We met with apprentices, a trustee, senior leaders, managers, tutors and assessors and we visited subcontractors and employers. We reviewed key documents, including the most recent self-assessment report and development plan, data relating to the performance of apprentices currently on programmes and documents relating to safeguarding. We considered the views of apprentices, employers and subcontractors.