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Mr Mike Smith
Training Director
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Dear Mr Smith

Short inspection of Mainstream Training Limited

Following the short inspection on 19 and 20 September 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 provider was judged to be good in December 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, the founding directors retired and the management team, backed by a group of private investors, bought Mainstream Training Limited. A managing director oversees the Mainstream Group which comprises Mainstream Training Limited, two specialist recruitment agencies, a catering company and an accountancy practice. Since the management buyout, the leadership team has recruited a new director and strengthened the company's focus on helping the long-term unemployed into work. Almost all current learners are adults taking short employability courses. Apprentices account for around one tenth of the provision. Mainstream Training Limited also offers employability courses funded through the European Social Fund, and driver training funded by the Ministry of Defence. Both of these were out of scope for this inspection.

Leaders and managers continue to oversee and manage training programmes well. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have built on strengths and maintained the good quality of training and assessment. The new owners have improved the training facilities, environment and resources. Learners enjoy their practical training in the training centre, which provides a realistic working environment. Leaders have enhanced the security at the training centre to ensure learners' safety.

Almost all adult employability learners achieve qualifications. Achievement rates for

these learners have been very high over the past three years. The majority of adult employability learners who were contacted after they completed their courses gained a job. However, leaders and managers only know the employment outcomes for around half of all leavers. Apprentices' achievement rates require improvement, having dipped in 2015/16 and in the current year. Leaders and managers know the reasons for this but have yet to halt the decline.

Leaders and managers have dealt with some of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Leaders introduced more thorough self-assessment and quality improvement plans. Their use of data to set targets and measure or evaluate the impact of actions taken requires further work. Instructors and assessors completed staff development to improve their own levels of English. They are now more confident to challenge learners when they make mistakes. Leaders and managers have yet to introduce measures that help the few most-able apprentices to extend their English skills.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding is effective. They manage safeguarding well and give staff very effective training and updates. As a result, learners feel safe. Staff act swiftly and effectively when dealing with safeguarding concerns. Learners understand how safeguarding applies to them and the responsibilities they have for their peers, instructors and visitors at the training centre. Staff place a high priority on learners' health and safety, which has helped reduce the number of accidents and near-misses. Staff and learners discuss the dangers of radicalisation and extremism very confidently, making pertinent links with recent local and national media articles.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers set clear and precise actions resulting in rapid and effective improvements. They make good use of findings from lesson observations and interviews with learners to prioritise areas for improvement. As a result, they have strengthened many aspects of the learners' experience. Learners now receive more accurate initial advice and guidance, benefit from better-planned lessons and can easily access computers.
- Leaders and managers do not use data well enough to set targets or measure the way that provision improves. They cannot easily check whether their actions are raising learners' retention, achievement or progression rates because they do not analyse data sufficiently or accurately. For example, leaders and managers introduced free lunches to increase adult employability learners' retention rates but only monitor this at course level rather than overall.
- Staff forge very strong partnerships with a wide range of external stakeholders, companies and specialist industry organisations. They design courses carefully to support the local and regional industries that struggle to recruit qualified and experienced staff, particularly in the transport and logistics sectors. Employers often support learners into work. One employer guarantees to give work to large

goods vehicle (LGV) drivers once they gain their licence.

- Courses meet learners' and employers' needs and interests very well. Staff plan bespoke courses to cater for each learner's current and future job role and the behaviours they need to develop. Several business administration learners experience working in a variety of different departments within their company to help them identify their future career goals and become more flexible members of the workforce.
- Learners benefit from good-quality practical training. They use industry-standard resources. They develop skills and knowledge quickly through learning in a realistic environment that replicates industry best practice. In the well-designed mock warehouse, learners learn how to drive forklifts safely and competently, scan barcodes, pick boxes of real products and solve problems.
- Learners develop good occupational and employability skills. Adult employability learners develop the attributes they need to sustain employment, such as being punctual, attending regularly, being disciplined when operating machinery and working in a team. Apprentices become an asset to employers and their businesses very quickly. Often, warehousing apprentices take forklift licences early in their course so they can take on more complex tasks and responsibilities at work.
- Assessors and instructors use technology well to help learners progress. Learners receive instantaneous feedback when using online learning applications, such as those that help them prepare and practise for the LGV drivers' theory test. Most apprentices use electronic portfolios to good effect to plan on-the-job learning. A minority do not, and are unclear about the learning they need to complete between assessment visits.
- The majority of learners develop good English language skills. Instructors and assessors correct learners' grammatical, spelling or oral mistakes, and help them improve their skills. Learners become confident in using technical and commercial terminology during training and assessments.
- The small number of apprentices who already hold a level 2 English qualification are not encouraged to develop further their skills and knowledge. Assessors rarely set these learners challenging targets or learning activities to improve their language skills.
- Adult employability learners' achievement of qualifications is outstanding, and has been for the past three years. Almost all learners achieve a qualification. When any course achievement declines, managers identify the reasons quickly so they can make changes before the next course starts.
- Achievement rates for the very small number of apprentices require improvement. These have declined over the past two years. Achievements for apprentices training to drive goods vehicles and work in warehouses are very low. These are largely affected by learners who have left their jobs and do not want to complete the apprenticeship. However, business administration and customer service apprentices achieve very well.
- The majority of adult employability learners who have been contacted after they left now have a job. However, managers cannot determine the full effectiveness

of employability programmes as they only know the destinations for around half of their leavers. Progression into employment for LGV drivers is particularly high and is aided by the opportunities they have to gain temporary or permanent work through the on-site specialist employment agency.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- retention and achievement rates on the driving goods vehicles and warehousing apprenticeships are improved
- staff work with employers to monitor learners' progress more effectively
- they use data more incisively to evaluate the impact of improvement initiatives and the levels of learners' progression into employment
- instructors and assessors plan and set targets for further English learning for the most able learners and for those who have achieved the qualifications required for their apprenticeship.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Janet Rodgers
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted Inspectors, assisted by the contracts director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with leaders, managers, instructors, assessors, learners, partners and employers. They observed lessons. Inspectors reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, quality improvement plans, safeguarding and learners' achievements and progression.