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Dr Chris Payne
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Training Services Limited
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Dear Dr Payne

Short inspection of Independent Training Services Limited

Following the short inspection on 3 and 4 October 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 March 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your staff have successfully sustained the high levels of achievement of your apprentices and the good progression made by your learners on study programmes that were identified at the previous inspection. At the time of the previous inspection, many of the improvements that you had made to secure these positive outcomes were very recent. You have now consolidated these gains and have a clear plan for how you want to improve them further. You have enhanced your ability to improve through your approach to self-assessment, which you run as a continuous process throughout the year. This enables you and your managers to identify and tackle emerging areas of weaknesses quickly and effectively.

The ethos of your organisation shines through in the high level of support and care that you provide to young people with very challenging backgrounds to engage them in training and education, and in the continuous commitment and effort that you then put into keeping them on their programmes. The standards of behaviour of the great majority of these young people, and their obvious enjoyment in their learning, are very impressive.

You and your managers work well with a wide range of partners to develop a curriculum that is responsive to the priorities of employers and the needs of your learners. You have established productive links with the two local enterprise partnerships covering the Sheffield and Leeds regions through your role on their provider committees. This has informed your decision to introduce apprenticeships in accountancy to meet the skills gaps in the local financial services sector. You and

your managers have responded successfully to the requests of various local authorities to target young people who are not in education, training or employment by opening new centres in Doncaster and Mansfield, with plans for further expansion. You have prepared well for the delivery of apprenticeships through the employer levy funding, and have recently signed up your first apprentices to follow the new standards programmes in health and social care.

You and your managers have been largely effective in tackling the main areas for improvement found at the previous inspection, but a few areas still need further work, and some new areas have emerged that need to be addressed.

Safeguarding is effective.

All staff ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, and they take appropriate actions to safeguard learners.

A nominated trustee from the board and the experienced lead safeguarding officer promote a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the organisation. Managers have developed policies and procedures that exceed the requirements contained in the guidance for this type of provider, such as the level and frequency of Disclosure and Barring Service checks and the maintenance of a comprehensive central register.

Managers and staff have developed effective relationships with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and Safeguarding Adults Board in all of the local authority areas where they deliver courses, and make frequent use of local 'Prevent' duty coordinators to deliver staff training. Staff act decisively when they identify safeguarding concerns, and refer them swiftly to the appropriate authorities. As a result, they protect from harm young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

Managers update constantly the 'Prevent' duty implementation plan. Most recently, they have revised the arrangements for locking down centres in the event of a terrorist threat, and they have advised all staff and learners to follow the national advice to 'run, hide and tell' following the latest attacks.

Despite a concerted focus on raising the awareness of learners and apprentices about the risks of radicalisation and extremism, some groups of apprentices, particularly those in business administration and retail and enterprise, are unable to recall the discussion of these issues at reviews or from their induction.

Inspection findings

- The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications overall and within their planned timescales has remained high since the previous inspection. There was a decline in the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications within their planned timescales in 2016/17, but both overall and timely achievement rates remained well above those of similar providers. Despite these high overall

levels of achievement, there are gaps in achievement between apprentices in different subject areas. Apprentices on health and social care programmes, who make up a large proportion of the total number of apprentices, perform well. However, not enough apprentices on business administration and retail and enterprise programmes complete their qualifications within their planned timescales.

- The proportion of young people on study programmes who achieve their qualifications has increased since the previous inspection. It is now higher than the proportion at similar providers. This is due to an improvement in the achievement of English and mathematics functional skills qualifications. The progression of learners from these programmes into further education, training and employment is high, despite a slight decline in 2016/17. Managers track the destinations of learners effectively, and use this information to plan changes to the curriculum. These include the withdrawal from offering qualifications in warehousing due to the lack of progression at work for young people in this sector.
- Managers have improved the way they plan study programmes since the previous inspection. They now use detailed information on the attainment and the personal circumstances of each learner more effectively to plan their individual programme of study. The majority of these learners' prior experience of education is episodic, many of them having left school early or having been absent for long periods. As a result, they have few or low-level qualifications, and not many of them have specific career goals when they start courses. Managers and teachers design programmes that develop their learners' employability skills, and enable them to try out various vocational options on well-designed work-experience placements with a wide range of employers. Staff carry out effective exit interviews with learners to plan their next steps. Staff are skilful at managing learners' expectations, enabling them to make realistic choices about their careers.
- The great majority of tutors are now skilled at developing the writing skills of learners on study programmes. Through tutors' comments on marked assignments and helpful verbal feedback in lessons, learners are able to improve the quality of their written work to reach the expected standard for their level of study.
- Despite managers' introduction of a more effective system to monitor attendance, and the swift interventions of pastoral care staff, the attendance of learners on study programmes is too low. A minority of learners do not arrive on time for lessons. A few teachers finish their lessons too early, which does not set a good example for learners who need to develop the discipline of timekeeping.
- The great majority of apprentices develop new skills and knowledge that add value to their employers' businesses and enable them to progress at work. Trainers establish apprentices' existing vocational skills accurately when they start on their programmes. Apprentices then take additional units, such as those on understanding dementia and infection control in health and social care, to help them fulfil their job role. Employers report that apprentices bring new skills acquired through their qualifications into their businesses. For example, business

administration apprentices applied formulas to update financial and project management spreadsheets across a company.

- Managers and trainers now use the electronic tracking system introduced at the time of the previous inspection effectively to monitor the progress of apprentices. As a result, trainers are able to identify quickly those apprentices who are not making expected progress and intervene more decisively to help them get back on track. Apprentices are able to use the system to check how much progress they have made and what still remains to be completed. As a result, the proportion of apprentices finishing their qualifications within their planned timescales has increased.
- Trustees and senior leaders have reduced the number of subcontractors they work with to increase their control over the quality of the provision. Managers identify and support effectively any remaining subcontractors whose performance is declining or not improving rapidly enough. Where there is no sign of improvement, managers terminate contracts and support learners well to enable them to complete their qualifications.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- managers and trainers raise the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications on business administration and retail and enterprise programmes to the same high level as those achieved by apprentices in health and social care
- all staff maintain a relentless focus on improving the attendance of learners on study programmes
- managers and tutors set and enforce higher expectations about the punctuality at lessons of learners on study programmes
- tutors on study programmes do not end lessons early and plan enough activities to ensure that learners continue their learning for the full duration of the lesson
- managers and trainers reinforce the awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism among business administration and retail and enterprise apprentices.

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

Yours sincerely

Dr Charles Searle
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors were assisted by the chief operating officer, as nominee. They held meetings with a range of managers, tutors, trainers, learners and employers. Inspectors carried out observations of teaching, learning and assessment, and conducted walk-through observations of courses to explore particular themes. They scrutinised learners' work and assessment records, and key documents relating to the provider's strategy and implementation plans, self-assessment and improvement plans, and safeguarding records. Inspectors considered the views of learners and employers through discussions during lessons visited and through telephone conversations.