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Mr Paul Musa
Chief Executive Officer
North West Training Council
Dunnings Bridge Road
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Merseyside
L30 6XT

Dear Mr Musa

Short inspection of North West Training Council

Following the short inspection on 1 and 2 November 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 April 2015.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, you and your leadership team, supported by an experienced and committed board of directors, have continued to focus on high-quality apprenticeships in engineering, which constitute the very large majority of your provision. You provide good opportunities for young people across the Merseyside region, including in some of the most socially deprived areas, thereby raising aspirations and training the next generation of skilled engineers.

You and your leadership team have made good progress in maintaining the high standards of apprenticeship provision found at the last inspection and in successfully tackling the most significant weaknesses. Robust performance management, together with accurate and honest self-assessment, has helped you to manage and support your weaker staff effectively. You no longer work with employers who have demonstrated an unwillingness or an inability to meet the high standards you expect from your partners. Consequently, teaching, learning and assessment continue to be very effective in helping apprentices to progress and achieve.

Achievement rates are good for all groups of learners. The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programme has remained high for the last three years. The proportion who complete by the planned end date has declined in the current year, though it remains well above national rates. In-year data for 2016/17 indicates that the pattern of high overall achievement is likely to continue. Functional skills first-time pass rates in English and mathematics are good for the relatively small number of learners who are required to take the examinations.

Current learners are making good progress. Almost all are on target to achieve by the planned end dates. Trainers review apprentices' progress towards their targets and record it accurately on their individual learning plans. Learners have a good understanding of what they have achieved and what they still have to do to complete their apprenticeship. However, targets in individual learning plans are occasionally of poor quality and do not help apprentices to understand what they have to do to progress.

The curriculum you offer has benefited from the early involvement of you and your managers in piloting the Engineering Trailblazer standards. It has also benefited from the recent launch of new employer standards in engineering, including related standards development in the food and drink sector.

You acknowledge that the new apprenticeship standards have brought with them considerable uncertainty for your apprentices in how the new arrangements for end-point assessment will be implemented. Your managers are working closely with other engineering training organisations to gain greater clarity on this issue but it is too soon to say when these matters will be resolved.

Off-the-job learning sessions at the training centre are lively and engaging. Trainers prepare learning sessions thoroughly and make good use of a wide range of accessible and well-designed learning resources and materials. Trainers are well qualified, passionate about their subject and have very high expectations of their apprentices. As a result, apprentices make good progress and achieve their learning objectives. However, in a few sessions, trainers' ineffective use of questioning techniques fails to allow apprentices to demonstrate answers with the depth and detail expected of learners on advanced engineering programmes.

Safeguarding is effective.

You and your leadership team have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action to safeguard learners is prompt and proportionate. Instructors and industrial-training managers ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety at work. Workshops are very clean and tidy and they promote good industrial practice in health and safety standards. This strong focus on healthy and safe practices has resulted in apprentices being particularly mindful of their employers' high standards of workplace safety.

Instructors review apprentices' understanding of how to keep safe regularly, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, apprentices have a good knowledge of how to stay safe from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, for example when using the internet and working online. However, apprentices' understanding of British values is less well developed.

The three designated safeguarding officers have a good understanding of how to protect apprentices from the risk of harm. They maintain an accurate record of safeguarding incidents and the responses made to them. Staff take effective and prompt actions when they identify risks or receive reports on risks to apprentices,

for example by referring apprentices who gamble to relevant organisations. All staff, including directors, receive an appropriate background check to ensure that they are suitable for their role.

Inspection findings

- You and your leadership team, including the board of directors, continue to provide staff with effective direction and professional development, which meets both their needs and those of the company in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality provision that meets employers' needs fully.
- You and your managers have a very good understanding of potential growth areas aligned to the company's niche specialism of engineering and technical training. You have developed a well-planned and responsive curriculum that takes account of local employment opportunities and the training needs of employers.
- Your company has successfully promoted a wide range of apprenticeships and worked closely with employers on newly developed apprenticeship standards. These standards address the specific skills gaps in specialist technical areas such as mechatronics, tool and die, and food and drinks manufacturing. You have managed this expansion into new areas of apprenticeship provision carefully and proportionately.
- Partnership working continues to be strong. You and your leadership team, including directors, make skilful and effective use of a wide range of external partnerships. Managers are involved in a range of employer-led stakeholder groups, which regularly review, evaluate and further develop the apprenticeship provision. Leaders, with the support of key-industry champions and the local enterprise partnership for the Merseyside region, have formally agreed plans to relocate the company's technical training centre to a new, purposely adapted training campus. This will provide apprentices with enhanced learning accommodation and a broader range of specialist technical-training resources.
- You and your leadership team provide a good range of timely information to the board of directors, enabling them to play a central role in the strategic direction of the company. Board members work closely with managers to oversee quality and performance and provide good support and challenge to leaders to improve the provision. Following recent resignations from the board of directors, you are currently recruiting new members to ensure that the company maintains its arrangements for effective independent assessment and scrutiny of its performance.
- An improved tracking and monitoring system now enables assessors to see how much progress each apprentice in their caseloads has made and to identify any potential concerns. Managers maintain a central 'at risk' register that records the details of every apprentice approaching the end of their planned period of study. These learners benefit from the focused attention and support they receive from their assessors to ensure that they complete on time.
- Assessors and trainers use their excellent sector-specific subject knowledge to check, develop and extend apprentices' practical skills, such as in creating and

assembling control panels for high-profile customers' manufacturing laser-measuring equipment.

- Trainers make good use of excellent practical resources to enthuse and engage apprentices. Theory lessons build upon practical activities and trainers plan sessions thoroughly to extend apprentices' knowledge of work activities, health and safety, and their role in industry.
- Apprentices receive good support and guidance from workplace mentors, training officers and colleagues, who use their extensive industrial experience to work closely together to ensure that apprentices make good progress. Assessors visit apprentices in the workplace regularly, providing help and guidance through carefully structured coaching and assessment activities.
- Trainers help apprentices to develop their use of mathematics confidently. Apprentices can carry out complex mathematical tasks such as calculating electrical resistance and calibrating equipment to customers' specifications. Apprentices do not develop their skills in English sufficiently. Assessors do not give enough attention to developing apprentices' skills in the use of technical terms in the workplace and in communicating with their peers.
- Managers make good use of the outcomes of observation to help trainers improve their practice. However, the observation process currently excludes the four assessors based at the company's largest employer provider. Your managers are currently rectifying this anomaly.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders, managers and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- The quality of teaching and learning continues to improve by ensuring that:
 - trainers set all apprentices clear and relevant individualised targets so that they have an even better understanding of their progress and achievements
 - trainers use a range of strategies, including questioning techniques, to challenge all learners and help them to demonstrate what they know and understand
 - the application of oral English skills is promoted effectively, including the use of industry-specific language and when communicating with others.
- Continue to work closely with stakeholders, including employers and other engineering training organisations, to gain clarity on the implementation of the revised assessment process for learners who are following an apprenticeship-standard programme.

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

Yours sincerely

Jai Sharda
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector, assisted by your head of human resources, operational quality and safeguarding as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of your most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and meetings with subcontractors to gather the views of apprentices and employers. They reviewed key documents including those related to safeguarding, apprentices' achievements and progression.