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Professor Val Braybrooks  
Dean of Holbeach and the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM)  
University of Lincoln  
Vice Chancellors Office  
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Dear Professor Braybrooks

### **Short inspection of University of Lincoln**

Following the short inspection on 16 January 2018 and 17 January 2018, 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 February 2014.

### **This provider continues to be good.**

Since the previous inspection, you and your leadership team, supported by an experienced and committed team of lecturers and vocational assessors, have continued to focus on high-quality apprenticeships in the food manufacturing and processing sector, which constitutes the most significant part of your provision. The leadership team of the University Academy Holbeach (the academy), to which you subcontract apprenticeship training provision, provides good opportunities for young people to join an apprenticeship programme in a wide range of vocational subjects such as hairdressing, construction and engineering.

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. Effective performance management, together with accurate and honest self-assessment, have helped you to manage and support effectively your staff and those working at the academy. Feedback from apprentices and employers indicate that your key stakeholders value the expertise and passion that you and your staff bring to the apprenticeship programme.

The significant strengths in leadership and management identified above have contributed to outstanding achievement rates for all groups of apprentices and learners. The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their programme has remained exceptionally high for the last three years. The proportion who

complete within the planned timescales is also exceptionally high.

In-year data for 2017/18 indicates that the pattern of high overall achievement is likely to continue. Functional skills first-time pass rates in English and mathematics are very high for the relatively small number of learners enrolled on adult programmes.

Apprentices and learners comment favourably on the very high quality of teaching and learning they receive and on the quality of vocational training resources at the academy. Employers provide very good support for their apprentices and as a consequence, the very large majority are committed to long-term careers with their company. Apprentices value the opportunity to progress to a degree-level apprenticeship with NCFM while remaining with their employer.

Current apprentices and learners are making at least the progress expected of them. Almost all are on target to achieve within the planned dates. Individual learning plans record and review progress towards targets well. Apprentices and learners have a good understanding of what they have achieved and what they still have to do to complete their studies.

The curriculum you offer has benefited from the early involvement of you and your managers in the piloting of the food industry Trailblazer standards and the recent launch of new employer standards in the food and drink sector. You and your staff have responded well to developments in standards-based apprenticeships and have made good progress in implementing the necessary changes. Employers value the expertise of your senior staff in helping them to implement these changes.

Though you have successfully tackled most of the weaknesses found at the previous inspection, a few still remain, as you acknowledge in your self-assessment report. For example, although apprentices continue to achieve well, a small minority do not make the progress expected of them, given their prior attainment. For these apprentices, targets in individual learning plans are occasionally too vague and fail to motivate or challenge them. It is too soon to judge the impact of the well-considered training that your managers carried out recently to help teaching staff to challenge apprentices more effectively.

Your observation of teaching and learning strategy challenges lecturers to improve further their practice. However, a few observers continue to judge too positively aspects of teaching that are no more than normal practice and a small number of observation reports do not clearly identify weaknesses that lecturers can reflect upon and tackle.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

You and your leadership team have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that action to safeguard apprentices and learners is prompt and proportionate. Lecturers and assessors ensure that apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety at work. Apprentices adopt safe working

practices and are particularly mindful of their employers' high standards of workplace safety.

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

All staff, including those working at the academy, receive an appropriate background check to ensure their suitability for their role. Appropriate arrangements for recording and responding to safeguarding referrals are in place, though none has been made since the previous inspection.

### **Inspection findings**

- Your leaders and managers know the provision well and you continue to work to address weaknesses from the last inspection and those identified as a result of internal improvement activities and through self-assessment.
- You have successfully promoted a range of specialist apprenticeships and worked closely with major employers in the retail and food manufacturing sectors on newly developed apprenticeship standards that address the specific skill needs in often highly specialist, technical areas. You have managed this expansion into new areas of apprenticeship provision carefully and proportionately.
- Your teaching and training staff, as well as those working for the academy, are highly qualified and many have recent and extensive industry experience, which they use well to motivate and enthuse apprentices. A wide range of staff development activities helps teaching staff and assessors to develop and improve their practice.
- Your engagement with employers is outstanding. You and your leadership team make skilful and effective use of a wide range of external partnerships with high-profile and leading-edge companies in the food manufacturing and processing sector. Managers regularly review, evaluate and further develop the apprenticeship provision in consultation with employers. Employers regard NCFM as an apprenticeship training provider of choice and have an exceptionally high regard for the calibre and professionalism of its leaders and teaching and training staff.
- Lecturers and work-based trainers and assessors have very high expectations of their apprentices and expect them to achieve and progress into higher education and to develop rapidly in their career. They expect all apprentices and learners to achieve and progress regardless of their previous background or educational attainment. As a result, most learners and apprentices make the progress expected of them and achieve within the planned timescales.
- Apprentices and learners receive impartial advice and guidance before and after they enrol on a programme. Employers apply rigorous recruitment criteria to ensure that they take on the most able and talented people to work for them as

apprentices. The large majority of apprentices and learners can articulate clearly their next steps and they know what they have to do to achieve their learning or career goals. However, a few apprentices receive only minimal advice and guidance during their studies and consequently, these apprentices' aspirations and career goals remain tentative and ill defined.

- You and your senior leaders have high expectations of the staff working at the academy who deliver a significant part of your apprenticeship programme. You have developed an effective framework for monitoring and assessing the academy's quality of delivery and you provide good training and support, as well as challenge, for the academy's managers when necessary. As a result, the quality of provision for apprentices attending the academy is good.
- 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 well-structured coaching and assessment activities.
- Self-assessment is a rigorous process. Your curriculum staff, including academy staff, produce a detailed subject-level self-assessment report that managers then carefully scrutinise. You make good use of a range of evidence to support self-assessment judgements and you clearly identify the strengths and areas for improvement. The self-assessment report is an accurate and evaluative document that accurately reflects the judgements made by inspectors.
- Although your managers collect extensive data about apprentices' and learners' destinations, they do not analyse this information sufficiently well. This results in managers lacking clarity about the proportion of apprentices who continue with their studies or who secure, for example, a pay rise or a promotion as a result of achieving their qualifications.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve by ensuring that:
  - all apprentices and learners receive clear and relevant individualised targets so that they are better motivated and challenged to achieve and exceed their targets
  - observers apply greater rigour in assessing the quality of teaching and learning and that they identify clear improvement actions and timescales that help lecturers to reflect upon and improve their practice
- managers make better use of the available information on apprentices' and learners' destinations to identify where learners go after completing their studies and whether they progress in their chosen career or proceed to the next level of study.
- all apprentices and learners have a good understanding of British values and of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

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**

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Ofsted Inspector, assisted by the deputy head of NCFM 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 the subcontractor to gather the views of learners and employers. They reviewed key documents, including those related to safeguarding, and learners' achievements and progression.