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23 July 2018

Mr Kelvin Brennan
Managing Director
BL Training Limited
11 Nelson Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
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Dear Mr Brennan

Short inspection of BL Training Limited

Following the short inspection on 26 and 27 June 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 June 2015.

This provider continues to be good.

You and your leaders have addressed successfully almost all the recommendations made at your previous inspection. Most apprentices and learners on traineeships receive high-quality training and education.

You and your directors have an accurate understanding of the key strengths and weaknesses of your provision. You and your leadership team responded swiftly to reverse a decline in the proportion of trainees achieving their qualifications in 2015/16. As a result, a significantly higher proportion of trainees achieved their qualifications in 2016/17 and in the current year. Achievement on the apprenticeship programme has risen steadily since the previous inspection and is now high.

You and your directors are addressing most of the weaknesses in your provision. However, the actions for improvement identified for your Stockton centre lack sufficient precision and information to enable you and your staff to evaluate the progress that you are making.

Safeguarding is effective.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at work and in the training centres. They work safely in the hairdressing salons and barber shops that employ them and know how to keep themselves safe in their everyday lives.

Managers oversee appropriate policies and procedures that cover the key aspects of

safeguarding. They carry out appropriate pre-employment checks before members of staff start working with apprentices and trainees to ensure that there are no safeguarding concerns.

Apprentices and trainees complete helpful, good-quality workbooks on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty during the early part of their programmes. The workbooks also cover topics on British values, equality and diversity. Assessors frequently reinforce the importance of the topics covered in the workbooks in progress reviews. As a result, apprentices and trainees apply their learning well when working with colleagues and customers in the workplace.

The designated safeguarding officer and her deputy have undertaken appropriate training. Concerns about apprentices' and learners' safety are recorded in very detailed logs that include follow-up actions. All records are signed off by the designated safeguarding officer when there are no longer any concerns. Staff make referrals to external agencies and the police when necessary.

Inspection findings

- Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of the quality of the training that apprentices and trainees receive. They speak about the areas for improvement in their provision with openness and clarity. They are aware of most of the weaknesses that were identified during the inspection, and they are already taking effective action to overcome them. The self-assessment report provides an accurate overview of the provision, and the supporting company-wide quality improvement plan accurately identifies area for improvement. The lack of sufficiently precise actions for improving provision at Stockton limits the pace of improvement at this centre, and managers are taking steps to enhance the centre's quality improvement arrangements.
- Most apprentices are making good progress from their starting points. Assessors use questions well to encourage apprentices to reflect on their own progress and identify areas for improvement in their hairdressing practice. Apprentices use the provider's online tracking system effectively to monitor their progress against expectations. For many, this motivates them to work towards challenging personal targets. As a result, the proportion of apprentices aged 16 to 18 studying at advanced level and apprentices aged over 19 at all levels achieve very well.
- Although improving steadily, the achievement rate for 16- to 18-year-olds on intermediate-level apprenticeships is not yet high enough. Managers are aware of this and have taken appropriate action to improve this aspect of their provision. They have recently increased the frequency of off-the-job training to accelerate the pace of apprentices' progress. They have introduced a summer school to allow potential apprentices to sample work in hairdressing before they commit to a qualification. Both these actions are having a positive impact on the retention of apprentices who started on intermediate-level standards-based programmes in hairdressing in the current contract year, and the proportion of apprentices still in learning is very high.

- Apprentices and trainees receive highly effective careers education, information, advice and guidance throughout their programmes. Employers are heavily involved in supporting apprentices' development, and most fully participate in progress reviews. Many employers encourage apprentices to continue to advanced-level apprenticeships or to broaden their skills into barbering when they have completed their initial hairdressing training. Leaders do not limit advice and guidance to the hairdressing industry, but cover a wide range of different options that might be more appropriate to apprentices' career aspirations. As a result of the support they receive, the proportion of apprentices who remain in employment after their training is very high, with most employed in the hairdressing industry.
- Leaders work effectively with employers. They have developed an employer forum to understand better the training needs of local employers. They have used this group well to develop a curriculum to support the introduction of the hairdressing apprenticeship standards. Employers with specific expertise provide masterclasses on commercially relevant techniques to raise the aspirations of apprentices and trainees. As a result, a large number of apprentices experiment with different techniques at work and increase their value to their employers.
- Apprentices demonstrate employment-related skills well. Leaders and assessors ensure that apprentices are ready for work in a commercial environment by making the development of skills such as communication, confidence and team work a priority early in apprentices' programmes. Assessors reinforce the importance of these skills at each progress review when apprentices complete self-evaluations that encourage them to comment on their progress and set themselves targets for improvement.
- Assessors and tutors identify and develop apprentices' mathematical skills effectively through carefully selected activities that focus on realistic tasks, such as what angle to use when cutting different styles of hair or the ratios of products to use when mixing hair dye. Many apprentices show strong comprehension of technical hairdressing language and use such language with confidence. However, assessors and tutors do not consistently promote the use of accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar in apprentices' written work, and apprentices often repeatedly make the same mistakes.
- Apprentices studying at the Stockton centre make slower progress than their peers at other centres. Recent changes at the centre are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of provision. These include a newly appointed local manager and the relocation of the centre to new premises that have a more commercially relevant focus. However, the proportion of apprentices who remain on their programmes at Stockton is too low, and apprentices studying advanced-level hairdressing and intermediate-level barbering are not making the expected progress for the length of time they have been studying. Managers are aware that they need to ensure that the quality of provision at this centre improves rapidly.
- A few employers do not fully meet their responsibilities as an apprentice employer. During the inspection, a small number of apprentices were left unsupervised during their normal working day and, occasionally, employers

prevent apprentices from attending their off-the-job training because the salon needs them to work with clients. Managers have attempted to address some of these issues, but further work is needed to ensure that all employers are fully compliant.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders should ensure that:

- the proportion of 16- to 18-year-old apprentices who complete their apprenticeships successfully continues to rise by closely monitoring the impact of the actions that managers are taking
- the quality of provision at the Stockton centre improves rapidly through the setting of clear and measurable targets and frequent monitoring of progress towards achieving them
- all employers are aware of their responsibilities in relation to employing apprentices, and that managers complete regular checks on employers' compliance.

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

Yours sincerely

Ken Merry
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors were assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, quality improvement plans and the previous inspection report. They met with a range of apprentices and trainees, and had discussions with employers, as well as observing lessons and reviews. They scrutinised key strategic and policy documents, including those related to safeguarding.