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Mr James Hughes
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Dear Mr Hughes

Short inspection of GHQ Training

Following the short inspection on 28 and 29 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 November 2014.

This provider continues to be good.

Leaders and managers at GHQ Training have maintained successfully the good qualities of the apprenticeship provision identified at the previous inspection. They have done this well in the often difficult context of commercial and operational challenges. GHQ's leaders and managers continue to focus strongly on maintaining and further improving the high standards identified at the previous inspection, but recognise that a few weaknesses remain.

Current learners are making good progress towards completing their apprenticeship programmes. All learners have a very clear understanding of the progress that they have made towards completing their apprenticeship. Learners are well motivated, and keen to learn and succeed. They are developing and using new skills and becoming valued members of their employers' workforces. Off-the-job training is an effective part of learners' training. However, GHQ's managers do not currently have reliable data to calculate whether the amount of this training meets the specification for an apprenticeship programme.

Almost all learners develop their English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills to the levels required by their qualification, often from a low level. However, those who are capable of doing so are still rarely challenged to achieve a higher level, particularly in mathematics. This was the case at the previous inspection.

GHQ's partnership working with employers and stakeholders remains strong. Many employers state that they regard GHQ Training as their provider of choice. A wide range of employers in south-west England have productive, long-term working relationships with GHQ. Staff continue to place learners on appropriate programmes at the right level with suitable employers.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and appropriate action is taken to safeguard all learners. New and existing staff are trained well in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Further face-to-face training for staff is planned for the start of the New Year.

Most learners can explain what safeguarding is and actively apply its practice and principles to their place of work. Learners feel safe and know whom they should ask for help. All learners interviewed had a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe online which they apply to their work and personal contexts. The majority of learners are aware of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, managers are aware that a minority of hairdressing learners lack a detailed understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and British values, and are reviewing how best to improve it.

Employers of early years learners demonstrate good safeguarding practice, including identity checks, password systems for adults collecting children, signing-in sheets and good security relating to children's records. Staff in childcare settings do not use mobile phones while at work. Early years learners receive regular training and updates on safeguarding. These learners know what to look for as indicators that children in their care, or their parents, are vulnerable or in distress, and whom to contact if they have concerns.

GHQ's managers have ensured that its safeguarding systems and processes continue to meet expected practice. Effective links are maintained with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Very useful monthly newsletters for staff and learners include well-written and accessible features on aspects such as British values, the 'Prevent' duty and e-safety. GHQ's leaders are developing additional teaching and learning resources to further develop learners' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding, health and safety and equality and diversity.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry reviewed how well leaders and managers have managed changes and challenges in GHQ's trading and training environment since the previous inspection. They have managed both aspects well, but the impact of some changes, for example appointments of key new staff, is still work in progress. Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have regularly monitored and thoroughly reviewed the effectiveness of GHQ's programmes and taken appropriate improvement actions. The loss of a contract with one large local employer to train business administration learners and the loss of a funding stream have each been largely mitigated. The breadth of the hospitality

programme has been reduced to ensure a stronger focus on the training of those in managerial or senior positions.

- Senior leaders, managers and staff remain committed strongly to ensuring that the quality of provision, and learners' achievements, are good. Self-assessment is realistic, thorough and broadly accurate. Formal quality improvement action planning is not specific enough; the outcomes of improvement actions are not sufficiently time bound or measurable.
- My next line of enquiry reviewed whether leaders and managers had taken effective action to improve learners' achievement of qualifications and progress. While achievement rates were high on most programmes at the previous inspection, they were low on a few programmes. In the year after the inspection, the achievement rates for most learners remained high. However, they dipped the following year for learners in hairdressing and beauty therapy and business administration, falling in some cases to below national rates. Leaders' and managers' corrective actions have been effective. GHQ's data indicates an improving trend in achievement in these two subject areas during the year so far and the achievement rates on all other apprenticeship programmes remain high.
- Current learners are making good progress in completing their qualifications as a result of regular and effective training, feedback, support and assessment from staff. All learners know exactly the progress they are making in completing individual units or assignments, and what they have to do in order to complete their programme by the agreed end date.
- All learners interviewed have seen great improvements in their communication skills and self-confidence; this was confirmed by their employers. Learners are highly motivated and use very positive language to describe their experience of their programme and the quality of support they get from GHQ's staff.
- Learners can describe clearly the skills they have learned and are applying in the workplace. For example, a group of intermediate-level hairdressing learners explained how they had learned head-massage skills and could provide a far more comprehensive hair-washing service to clients. An advanced-level early years apprentice has gained a good understanding of children's emotional well-being and applied this well when working with young children experiencing emotional difficulties. Early years learners have developed the confidence to communicate sensitively with vulnerable parents.
- Most advanced-level learners are given additional responsibilities at work as they progress through their programmes. Almost all learners become full-time employees once they complete their apprenticeship. The majority are keen to advance to higher levels of learning, for example with hairdressing learners moving beyond the intermediate-level industry standard to take the advanced-level qualification, and business management learners moving from advanced to successively higher levels of learning.
- GHQ's leaders are developing a virtual learning environment to give learners access to a wide range of online learning resources to promote their learning and progress.
- My third line of enquiry reviewed whether learners are now well informed about

the themes of equality and diversity, both in their immediate working environments and more widely. Learners' understanding of the wider issues required improvement at the previous inspection. All learners interviewed during this short inspection could explain clearly what equality and diversity meant in practice and give examples of what this meant in and outside their workplaces. For example, hairdressing learners explained how they accommodate the particular and various needs of their older clients. One apprentice explained how the salon she works in makes adjustments to meet the cultural needs of a client who wears a hijab. An early years advanced apprentice explained how she made adjustments to a play activity so that a young child who has a disability could join in a game with other children. Early years learners demonstrate a strong commitment to community inclusion by celebrating a variety of religious festivals with young children and encouraging them to explore the food and traditions of people from other cultures.

- Learners confirm that GHQ's staff are sensitive and provide good emotional support to those who are experiencing health or personal issues, enabling them to complete their programme successfully. Staff ensure that training resources, including books, games and visual media, reflect cultural diversity well.
- My fourth line of enquiry reviewed how well learners' skills in English and mathematics are being developed. At the previous inspection, such skills were not being developed beyond the requirements of their qualifications, and this is still largely the case, particularly in mathematics. Very few learners who are capable of achieving higher levels in mathematics, and to a lesser extent English, actually do so.
- Learners with entry-level English and mathematical skills who are able to attend GHQ's Plymouth-based training centre are supported well to achieve the level required by their qualification. Those who cannot attend easily have to rely on online learning and support from assessors during workplace visits. All learners could identify clearly the benefits of developing their English skills as part of their learning programmes and were proud of having passed their examinations. Typically, they report that better English skills meant that they had become more confident when communicating with a range of people, including parents, children and colleagues.
- My next line of enquiry reviewed whether partnership working with employers and stakeholders was still as effective as at the previous inspection. This is still the case, with good evidence that working relationships with employers are at least as strong as at the previous inspection. Most employers have worked with GHQ for many years, with successive learners gaining qualifications and promotion and going on to higher levels of learning. Most employers reported that GHQ was their first-choice provider of apprentice training. They value the high standards that GHQ sets for learners, the regular support and training from GHQ's assessors and its thorough approach which ensures that learners develop good skills, attitudes and knowledge.
- Many learners benefit from opportunities provided by partnerships to improve their employability; for example with the intermediate- and advanced-level learners who work for an employer that is part of a wider federation of training

salons. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students help support photo shoots at a local art college, and a group of business administration learners receive regular industry updates from an external supplier.

- Leaders and managers maintain their presence and voice well with local employment partnerships, chambers of commerce and other influential regional bodies.
- My sixth line of enquiry reviewed whether staff continue to carefully and skilfully match learners to appropriate learning programmes and employers. This is still the case. All learners interviewed had received a useful detailed induction and understood what their apprenticeship entailed. All were on the right level of programme and working with supportive employers. Each learner felt that their programme was giving them the right level of challenge and skills development. GHQ's staff provide well-informed careers advice to learners following early years and administration programmes; these learners have a good understanding of relevant career pathways and further learning opportunities, but careers advice is less effective for hairdressing and beauty therapy learners.
- My final line of enquiry reviewed whether GHQ's off-the-job training is effective and enjoyed by learners. It includes a good range of practical and theory sessions. The vast majority of employers are supportive of off-the-job training and allocate their learners time for it on a routine basis, normally one day a week. Learners also have good access to their employers' own staff development programmes as well as GHQ's training. In some cases, group and individualised off-the-job training is based in learners' workplaces but takes place in a separate training area; in other cases, a special venue is booked for group work. Learners based in the Plymouth area attend GHQ's well-equipped training centre once a week.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- quality improvement action planning is specific, with targets and outcomes which are time bound and measurable
- the improving trend in learners' achievement in hairdressing and administration apprenticeships is maintained and outcomes become high or very high
- they encourage all mathematics and English language learners to achieve the levels of which they are capable and not just the level required by the qualification
- they improve the quality of careers advice for hairdressing and beauty therapy learners so that they have a good understanding of the relevant career pathways and further learning opportunities open to them.

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

Yours sincerely

Nick Crombie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Ofsted Inspectors, together with GHQ's training manager as nominee, conducted the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report, improvement plan, current position statement and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements about learners' attainment of qualifications. Inspectors met with, and gathered the views of, employers and learners following apprenticeship programmes at all levels in the subject areas offered; these views are reflected throughout the report. Inspectors met with GHQ's leaders, managers, and assessment and training staff. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.