

Inspection of Cogent Skills Training Limited

Inspection dates: 4–7 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Cogent Skills Training Limited (CST) began to receive public funding for training apprentices through the apprenticeship levy in August 2017. Previously, CST trained apprentices for other training organisations as a subcontractor. CST offers apprenticeship training in three vocational areas. These areas are life and industrial sciences, business management, engineering and manufacturing. Leaders have a clear mandate from their parent organisation, Cogent Sector Skills Council, to provide high-quality training to the science industry. Apprenticeships are offered at levels 2 to 5. The company currently has 64 levy-funded apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships. Around half of the current apprentices are enrolled on science and laboratory technician apprenticeships. The provider works with employers across England.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices appreciate the opportunities that their apprenticeship gives them. They develop appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviours linked to their job roles. Apprentices are committed to achieving their qualification and produce work of at least the standard expected for the apprenticeship.

Apprentices feel safe in their workplace and at CST. They know who to contact should they have any safeguarding concerns and ably follow safeguarding procedures.

Apprentices' knowledge and skills improve significantly during their programmes and they become more productive at work. Level 3 team leader apprentices plan projects more effectively and deal with operational issues more confidently.

Apprentices, after a period of less effective training, prior to the new provider monitoring visit, now enjoy their training. They have confidence to contact tutors and assessors regularly through telephone calls, emails and web conferencing when they require support.

Apprentices are well prepared for their end-point assessments. Many are provided with opportunities to practise tests and professional discussions, leading up to their assessment, that help them pass their end-point assessment. All apprentices have completed their programme on time.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have taken appropriate action to improve the quality of education since the previous monitoring visit. They have put in place an experienced sub-committee that advises and holds leaders and senior managers to account. Leaders now have a better oversight of the quality of education and the progress that apprentices make on their programme. Where apprentices make slow progress, leaders ensure that apprentices receive intensive support to help them catch up.

Leaders, managers and assessors have developed a well-thought-out curriculum that meets the needs of most employers. The content is taught in a logical order to ensure that apprentices learn and remember the key principles they need to know in preparation for their end-point assessment. Seven learners have completed their apprenticeship standard on time. However, too many have not achieved their targeted grades due to assessors and tutors not providing a good enough standard of education and training for apprentices.

Assessors do not use the results of assessments that apprentices complete at the start of the programme to plan their learning. This results in assessors not challenging apprentices enough to achieve their potential. Too often assessors settle for apprentices producing work of the minimum standard as opposed to motivating them to produce work of a higher level.

Assessors are not effective in supporting apprentices to improve their work. While assessors identify improvements through progress reviews and the assessment of apprentices' work, they do not always ensure that apprentices make the improvements they need to achieve higher grades. For example, level 5 operational management apprentices continue to make the same mistakes. They make spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and referencing expectations are not consistently implemented in assignments.

Apprentices develop a broad range of additional skills throughout their apprenticeship. For example, they develop their research, critical thinking and debating skills through their off- and on-the job learning. This helps them to solve problems in the workplace and put forward their points of view on a concise and confident manner.

Leaders have been too slow to put in place arrangements to support apprentices in their ongoing career choices. While they have begun to put training in place for staff and workplace mentors, it is too early to see whether these initiatives have had any impact on improving the careers guidance for apprentices.

Leaders' management of subcontractors is not good enough. They place too much focus on compliance checklists and financial targets. They do not place enough emphasis on the quality of education that apprentices receive. At some of these subcontractors, tutors do not check that apprentices fully understand the concepts being taught before moving on to the next topic. For example, in an HND chemistry session, tutors do not check apprentices understanding of the differences between transitional, rotational and vibrational energy before moving on to thermodynamics in more detail.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate policies and procedures which are used well by staff. Staff swiftly report any concerns to the safeguarding lead who diligently and takes appropriate action where required.

The designated safeguarding lead and staff have received appropriate training to allow them to execute their roles effectively. Apprentices state that they feel safe in their workplaces through extensive health and safety checks carried out by CST alongside their employer.

Leaders have not developed any relationships with external agencies to identify the risks that apprentices may encounter in their communities where they live and work. While apprentices receive training on safeguarding and the risks associated with radicalisation, they are not advised of the specific risks that they may encounter where they live.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve assessors' use of assessments completed at the start and throughout the programme to plan a curriculum that challenges all apprentices to develop substantive new knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Ensure that assessors provide concise and useful feedback to help apprentices to improve the standard of their work and achieve higher grades.

- Implement the provider's careers advice strategy so that apprentices can make informed decisions about their next steps in the sector.
- Identify the local risks in relation to the potential threats by radicalisation and extremism. Assessors should use this information to provide training to apprentices to help them understand the risks that are prevalent in their locality.
- Improve the management of subcontracted provision. Leaders should make sure that they place a substantial focus on the quality of education as opposed to financial and compliance checklists. Leaders should ensure that all apprentices receive high-quality training that helps them to be successful in their careers.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1278586
Address	Unit 5 Mandarin Court Centre Park Warrington WA1 1GG
Contact number	01925 515 200
Website	www.cogentskills.com
Principal/CEO	Mr Nick Durrington
Provider type	Not for profit organisation
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Bury College St Helens College RJG Technologies Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships – operations and analytics, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider’s most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners’ work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider’s documentation and records.

Inspection team

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