Cognitia Consulting Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Nick Crombie, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by ESFA and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Cognitia Consulting Limited's (Cognitia) head office is based in south Wales, although all of its apprentices are based in England. Since October 2018, it has offered one standards-based programme, the safety, health and environmental technician apprenticeship at Level 3, which takes 24 months to complete. It is one of very few providers in the country to do so. At the time of our visit, 26 adults were following this apprenticeship. All are employed and working with large and small public and private sector employers throughout England.

Training staff have always taught apprenticeships exclusively online. This approach to teaching and learning predates the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?	**Insufficient progress**

Leaders have not ensured that they are meeting all the requirements of apprenticeships. They, and apprenticeship staff, recognise that their expertise in planning, organising and monitoring an apprenticeship programme has not been, and is not yet, good enough. They are keen to make improvements, but the impact of their actions so far has been patchy and, in too many cases, nil. For example, they recognise that there is no meaningful quality improvement strategy or process in place and that governance arrangements are not well developed. The curriculum is not ambitious enough for all apprentices because it is not being implemented logically or in ways that take full account of their prior skills, knowledge and experience. They know their apprentice commitment statements are cursory and incomplete but have yet to improve them. Apprentices, employers and training staff are not adhering to their parts of the current statements.

With very few exceptions, employers are not closely involved in managers' planning and teaching of the apprenticeship. This hinders apprentices' progress. One employer

commented that he had had no contact with Cognitia staff since the apprentice started.

Around half of apprentices either need functional skills assessments or need to achieve qualifications in mathematics, English and/or ICT to complete their apprenticeships. However, they cannot because managers are still seeking a replacement functional skills organisation to contract with.

Leaders recognise that the initial cohorts of apprentices experienced enrolment practices and training that did not meet the apprentices' or employers' needs and, as a consequence, a high proportion withdrew from their qualification. The enrolment process is now more rigorous, and apprentices are all new to the sector. New training staff are beginning to implement improved support for apprentices' learning. Data on recent cohorts indicates substantially fewer have left early, but it is too early to tell if such a reduction is sustainable.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? **Insufficient progress**

Leaders recognise that the quality and consistency of training for apprentices is not good enough. They have appointed new training staff, but it is too early to judge the impact of their work.

The majority of apprentices who started their apprenticeship within the past 18 months become more positive about their training over time and are making at least reasonable progress. Apprentices who have been in training longer are often less complimentary.

The majority of apprentices develop and apply substantial new theoretical skills, such as their understanding and application of legislation and regulations in the workplace. However, too many say their practical skills are less well developed because their employers are not all directly involved in the apprenticeship and do not give them enough opportunities in their workplace. Nevertheless, most apprentices state they are improving their career chances through the apprenticeship.

During their first year, apprentices attend one day online training sessions every fortnight, which most enjoy, and attendance is good. These sessions cover the knowledge and behaviours elements of the apprenticeship. The following week is used for a related essay or research project, but staff do not monitor apprentices' completion of this work. Far too many apprentices either do not complete this written work or submit it late.

Apprentices did not have access to online resources for a two and a half month period, ending only recently, while the provider switched from one online resource system to

another. This delayed apprentices' progress. Apprentices' development was further interrupted when their trainer was furloughed.

Apprentices in the second year of their programme do not receive scheduled online training but contact their trainer whenever they need to. However, these apprentices do not currently have targets or deadline dates for completing portfolio evidence. Most are behind in submitting work and do not know when their end point assessment will take place.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? **Reasonable progress**

The provider has an appropriate safeguarding policy in place. Staff are clear about how to report issues to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL has completed safeguarding training to level 3 and all staff have completed online training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' strategy. Leaders conform to safe recruitment practices, using a professional human resources consultant who ensures that appropriate pre-employment checks are completed.

All apprentices are adults. The great majority of apprentices know who to speak to if they have any concerns. By its nature, the apprenticeship programme covers health and safety in the workplace very thoroughly. All apprentices say they feel safe.

Apprentices do not learn about online safety but complete online learning courses in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' strategy and equality and diversity as part of their induction. The topics are not revisited during their apprenticeship programme, and consequently apprentices only have a basic understanding of these topics.

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