

# Inspection of CIPFA Business Limited

Inspection dates: 9–12 November 2021

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this provider

CIPFA Business Ltd is a subsidiary of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), specialising in training professionals to work in public finance. Their members work throughout the public services, in national audit agencies, major accountancy firms, local authorities and other bodies which manage public money. CIPFA Education and Training Centre (CETC) is the training arm of the organisation. CETC teaches apprenticeships, as well as a range of privately funded qualifications.

At the time of the inspection, there were 561 apprentices on the level 7 accountancy/taxation professional standard, 14 on the level 4 professional accountancy/taxation technician standard, 18 on the level 4 counter fraud investigator and 29 on the level 3 assistant accountant standard.

A core component of the level 7 apprenticeship is the CIPFA professional qualification.

All apprentices are adults. CIPFA does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices find their studies challenging as they quickly learn the fundamentals of financial accounting that underpin much of their work. Trainers have extensive experience of public sector finance. They teach apprentices to understand the relevance of what they learn to their jobs.

Employers, trainers and work-based learning coaches teach apprentices about the importance of ethics in their work. Apprentices learn how their roles as practitioners extend beyond an ability to understand processes related to finance, accounts and audit. For example, they know how to present an argument for or against a decision to council members.

Apprentices appreciate the customised nature of their programmes, which the apprenticeship team adjusts to reflect apprentices' prior knowledge and experience. They study different combinations of units and choose from various styles of teaching and learning, such as in-person teaching, webinars and self-study. Apprentices value the chance to revisit topics taught through recorded webinars.

Many apprentices, in particular those employed with local authorities, gain a thorough understanding of the impact of financial decision-making on services provided through their placements in different departments. They learn of the impact of finances on areas such as housing, welfare, libraries and community support.

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

Leaders and board members have a very strong commitment towards responsible stewardship of public money. They ensure that this principle lies at the heart of their apprenticeships. Leaders and managers work highly effectively with employers. They design the curriculum for each apprentice to reflect precisely the needs of the sectors in which they work. As a result, apprentices gain detailed knowledge of public sector accounting and finance.

Leaders and managers adapted successfully to the changes forced on them by the pandemic. They swiftly moved all training to be remote. While this allowed most apprentices to continue seamlessly with their studies, apprentices and staff realise that the quality of the learning experience has fluctuated over the period of the pandemic.

In lessons, trainers present information clearly and explain terminology with examples relevant to both public sector and non-public sector employers. As a result, apprentices know how to apply the subject matter they learn, and they understand how it relates to a range of possible employment situations. They become proficient at tasks such as running ledgers, double entry bookkeeping and reconciling accounts. They know how to prepare and present financial appraisals to

inform procurement decisions. They gain essential professional skills, such as how to draft reports and make presentations to stakeholders.

Staff identify accurately apprentices' prior knowledge and experience at the start of the course. Coaches make good use of early assessments to plan realistic learning goals for apprentices. They accurately identify where learners are exempt from modules and which sessions they do not need to attend.

Trainers help apprentices to consolidate the new knowledge they learn. They identify accurately the topics apprentices struggle with through formative assessments. They use this information to demonstrate effectively step-by-step examples of how, for example, to do accounting calculations.

Work-based learning coaches provide good support to apprentices to help pace them through their studies. Coaches liaise effectively with employers to make sure that over the course of the programme, apprentices gain broad and relevant experience, linked to what they learn. They make sure that apprentices understand how themes such as democracy and adherence to the rule of law apply to their jobs. Apprentices appreciate the importance of diversity in the workplace. As current and future managers, apprentices recognise the significance of what this means in their roles, for example when recruiting staff.

Coaches do not have enough knowledge of what apprentices learn in lessons. As a result, they are not fully able to explore with apprentices how the specific subject content that they have learned might be used in the workplace. Coaches do not record in sufficient detail the knowledge and skills that apprentices learn through their jobs. On occasions, coaches do not provide sufficiently clear guidance to apprentices on their possible career opportunities.

Much of the assessment for the apprenticeships is through examinations for the CIPFA professional qualifications. Apprentices mostly feel well-prepared for these examinations and the majority pass at the first attempt. For apprentices who do not pass their examinations, trainers and coaches do not provide adequate feedback so that they know which aspect of the examination they struggled with, and where to focus their revision when they retake the examination.

Leaders and managers have put in place suitable ways to standardise their work and to evaluate and improve the quality of training on the apprenticeships. Managers support and encourage coaches and trainers to sustain their professional development and training. Leaders recognise the need continually to improve the quality of training as this has moved to being online.

Much of the teaching is through all-day webinars with large numbers of participants. A minority of apprentices find these sessions challenging. They find it difficult to remain focused on their studies. They miss the opportunity to learn from each other, to share their experiences at work, and to challenge each other through, for example, considering different work-based scenarios. As a result, they are not able to understand further the application of what they learn to different work contexts

beyond their own. For a minority of apprentices, their punctuality to these sessions is poor.

Staff provide effective support for apprentices who fall behind in their studies. For a few apprentices, especially those who work in local authorities, this slow progress is due primarily to disruption to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Apprentices receive good one-to-one support. Staff offer apprentices the opportunity to join other cohorts of apprentices when they come back from a break in learning.

The Students and Members Board provides effective governance oversight of the apprenticeships. The board has good representation from CIPFA's council, membership, student body and experts outside the organisation. Board members set a very positive culture regarding high standards in the quality of apprentices' experiences, and in their well-being.

Senior leaders provide board members with comprehensive reports on the apprenticeship programme. As a result, board members are knowledgeable about the development of the curriculum. They understand how teachers adapt subject content to meet the evolving needs of the employers with whom they work. They are very aware of the priorities for improvements.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Board members and senior leaders have established a positive culture regarding safeguarding for all their apprentices. They ensure that work-based learning coaches are vigilant about noting any concerns among their apprentices, and reporting these as necessary. They have suitable and up-to-date policies and procedures.

Staff receive suitable and frequent training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding lead and the four designated safeguarding officers have suitable and up-to-date training.

Work-based learning coaches ensure that apprentices know how safeguarding applies within their workplaces and jobs. For example, apprentices have a good awareness of risks related to data breaches.

Leaders have up-to-date safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty risk assessments. They maintain good contact with local agencies and are well informed about new or emerging threats. They use this information effectively in order to update their risk assessment and provide revised guidance to staff and apprentices.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders should further improve the quality of online training sessions to ensure greater engagement by apprentices and to enable them to understand further the application of their knowledge to different work settings.
- Trainers should provide feedback to apprentices on their examinations so that they know what gaps they have in their knowledge, and how best to prepare for the next examination.
- Leaders should ensure that work-based learning coaches are consistent in how they record the knowledge that apprentices have learned, and are consistent in the guidance they give to apprentices about the careers opportunities the apprenticeship gives them.

## Provider details

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<b>Contact number</b>	020 7543 5600
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cipfa.org">www.cipfa.org</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Sarah Shreeves
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	N/A

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of training services, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection 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 apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

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