Inspection of CSA (Services) Ltd

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 March 2022

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

Information about this provider

CSA (Services) Limited (CSA) is part of the Credit Services Association, a trade association that represents the debt collection and debt purchase industry. CSA provides apprenticeships in credit control, debt advice and collection, compliance and risk, and counter-fraud investigation. Apprentices are located throughout the country with a range of high-profile employers, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Bank of England and several local authorities.

There were 209 apprentices in training at the time of the inspection. Around two fifths were on the level 4 regulatory compliance officer standard. The remaining apprentices were on a range of standards, including level 2 credit controller and collector, level 3 advanced credit controller and debt collector, level 3 debt adviser, level 3 compliance and risk officer, level 4 counter-fraud investigator and level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist.

CSA works with one subcontractor, the International Compliance Association (ICA), which provides training for professional qualifications integrated into several apprenticeships.

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

Apprentices develop increased confidence and expertise as a result of the high-quality training that they receive from CSA's experienced and knowledgeable tutors. Most apprentices achieve their apprenticeships and are highly valued by their employers. They contribute significantly to their employers' businesses and take on more responsibility, which results in them progressing to more senior roles.

Apprentices gain a useful overview of and helpful contacts within the regulation and compliance industries, due to CSA's expertise and position as the industries' representative body. This helps apprentices make well-informed, independent decisions about their careers.

Apprentices appreciate the flexibility of online learning. They enjoy plentiful online opportunities to discuss work practices with other highly motivated apprentices from different companies. They develop a deep understanding of good practice in their own work and a broad appreciation of the applications of compliance and regulation in other sectors.

Apprentices feel safe while studying and at work. They develop considerable expertise in relation to complex safeguarding issues they may encounter at work. For example, apprentices in debt collection know how to spot signs of domestic abuse in their clients and how to signpost them to sources of further help.

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

Leaders and managers work collaboratively with employers to plan and teach a challenging curriculum that meets the skills needs of the debt collection, debt purchasing and compliance sectors. Employers contribute effectively to curriculum planning and most support their apprentices well. Apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours as a result.

Leaders and managers have established a culture of high expectations, characterised by ambitious curriculum content, high standards of integrity and professional behaviour, and effective support for apprentices, staff and employers. Apprentices are prepared well for their whole careers, not just for their current jobs.

Apprentices develop a strong understanding of the fundamental principles underpinning regulation and compliance, as well as the application of these principles to their own sectors. This is because tutors teach the fundamental principles thoroughly before encouraging their application in particular contexts. As a result, apprentices are able to move on to roles in sectors outside of their immediate discipline, if they choose to do so. For example, a level 6 apprentice moved from a research assistant role to a more senior policy analyst role in an allied profession.

Most tutors have an extensive, highly credible industrial experience that they use skilfully to enable apprentices to learn about complex, current issues in debt management, risk and compliance. For example, apprentices are currently developing expertise in relation to economic sanctions against Russia.

Tutors helpfully emphasise the functions of regulation and compliance in a democratic context. They use relevant examples that equip apprentices well for challenging work roles. For example, apprentices learn about modern slavery, workers' rights and immigration. Apprentices working in agricultural compliance are taught to look out for extra beds in agricultural buildings and to be alert to instances of child labour. Trading standards apprentices learn about the risks of human trafficking in connection with nail bars. Apprentices use their knowledge well to uphold the rule of law and identify and protect those at risk. For example, one apprentice used what she had learned to rewrite her organisation's modern slavery policy.

Apprentices learn valuable new communication skills that help them to enforce rules and regulations while maintaining high standards of professional behaviour, including respect for clients from diverse backgrounds and with different viewpoints. For example, apprentices apply their new conflict resolution skills effectively to challenge any discriminatory practices relating to gender roles. Apprentices in credit control and collection develop strong empathy and negotiation skills which enable them to deal sensitively with vulnerable customers experiencing financial hardship.

Apprentices, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, appreciate the effective and caring support that they receive from their tutors. Most apprentices who need extra help make the same progress as others.

Tutors teach apprentices valuable techniques such as debriefing with supervisors and colleagues. This helps apprentices to look after their mental health in work contexts that are often characterised by considerable stress and challenge. Most apprentices use these techniques effectively to develop resilience and maintain their equanimity.

A small minority of apprentices find it difficult to combine challenging training with demanding work roles. This includes some of those on the level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist apprenticeship, the level 4 regulatory compliance officer apprenticeship and the level 3 compliance and risk apprenticeship. In some cases, this is because the examination timetables set by professional bodies clash with other apprenticeship and work deadlines. Sometimes, ICA staff use approaches to teaching that emphasises engagement at the expense of secure learning of the curriculum. In these cases, apprentices do not learn key information before moving on to the next topic. In a few cases, apprentices are expected by their employers to study in their own time and are not given sufficient time off the job. When their workload is unmanageable, apprentices lose confidence and motivation, and some do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders, including those who have responsibility for governance, understand most of CSA's strengths and weaknesses and take effective action to remedy the latter. For example, they have rapidly improved the quality of education in mathematics and English. They recognise that they now need to improve the integration and teaching of professional qualifications where they are part of the apprenticeships.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff, employers and apprentices receive appropriate and effective safeguarding training. Apprentices learn how to mitigate risks at work effectively. For example, they learn how to comply with standard operating procedures when processing highly sensitive information in fraud investigation cases.

Leaders and managers have effective safeguarding policies and procedures in place, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. The few safeguarding incidents that occur are dealt with effectively.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the capacity of those responsible for governance to offer challenge and support, by enhancing their understanding of the quality of curriculum and teaching.
- Support apprentices and their employers to manage apprentices' workload, by tackling weaknesses in curriculum planning and teaching in subcontracted provision and by ensuring that all apprentices have enough time to study away from their usual place of work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1278692
Address	2 Esh Plaza Sir Bobby Robson Way Newcastle upon Tyne NE13 9BA
Contact number	01912 170775
Website	www.csa-uk.com
CEO	Chris Leslie
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	International Compliance Association

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of learning and development, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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 online 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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