

Inspection of Code Nation Limited

Inspection dates:

28 to 31 March 2022

Overall effectiveness**Inadequate**

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Apprenticeships

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Code Nation Limited is an independent learning provider based in Chester and Manchester. It provides training for the digital sector and has had a contract to deliver apprenticeships since October 2018. The first group of apprentices started their apprenticeship in January 2019. All apprentices are on standards-based programmes. Training is carried out through a virtual learning environment supplemented by face-to-face skills coaching meetings.

At the time of the inspection, there were 79 apprentices in learning. Sixty-nine apprentices were working towards the level 4 software developer apprenticeship and 10 apprentices were on the level 4 cyber security technologist apprenticeship.

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

A minority of the software developer apprentices experience poor communication and frequent disruption to their learning. Apprentices are not kept informed of changes in staffing. Apprentices are often delayed from achieving their personal goals, securing internal promotions or being able to access wider career opportunities to become software developers.

The majority of apprentices experience inconsistencies in the quality and timeliness of feedback that they receive from instructors. Many apprentices do not understand what they need to do to improve their work, such as higher-level English skills. Managers recognised that the quality of feedback that apprentices receive was poor. They have recently introduced new procedures to provide better quality feedback. However, these procedures are not yet fully implemented.

Software developer apprentices, employed during the COVID-19 pandemic by the provider as 'innovation developers', have their learning disrupted. This is due to them being required to support instructors on the delivery of the same apprenticeship that they are studying. They frequently spend almost half of their working week assisting with training of other apprentices. This significantly impedes their learning.

Most apprentices have a positive attitude and enjoy their learning. However, software developer apprentices that require specialist developer qualifications rely on their own independent research to prepare for their examinations. Many of these apprentices do not complete their qualifications on time and require several attempts to pass.

Most apprentices develop some of the new knowledge and skills they require in their jobs. Cyber security apprentices learn to write blog posts on securing digital workplaces and are able to support their families with the technical skills they learn. However, a minority of software developer apprentices do not always develop the technical skills and coding languages their employers need.

Most apprentices value the support they receive from their employers. Apprentices integrate quickly into their roles at work. Software developer apprentices take on new responsibilities at work, such as full stack software projects.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear strategy for the curriculum that they offer. In response to local and national employers' skills needs they provide apprenticeships in cyber security and software development. Leaders and managers work with stakeholders, such as employers and combined authorities, to design and review the curriculum. They develop logically sequenced cyber security and software developer digital bootcamp curriculums that apprentices attend at the start of their programme. However, leaders and managers do not ensure that they plan a

curriculum beyond the 12-week bootcamp that is suitably structured so that all apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that the programmes that they offer meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. Apprentices do not receive an individualised curriculum based on what they already know and what they need to learn. Apprentices do not receive sufficient training to help them to make swift progress throughout their apprenticeship. A minority of apprentices experience delays in completing their final assessments, in part due to only receiving one hour of support from a mentor per month. Around one-third of software developer apprentices make slow progress due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Leaders and managers have recently implemented new processes to improve the training that apprentices receive. It is too early to see the full impact of these changes.

Leaders and managers do not recruit all apprentices with integrity. A small minority of software developer apprentices are recruited following the completion of a self-funded digital bootcamp, which costs them many thousands of pounds. They are then expected to attend the same training, which is funded through the apprenticeship levy, from which they do not learn any further substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Leaders do not ensure that there are effective plans in place to coordinate on- and off-the-job learning. Many apprentices do not have the opportunity to practise the skills that they have developed in the digital bootcamp or master them at their employers' workplace.

Leaders, managers and instructors do not use the results of assessments of apprentices' prior knowledge and skills effectively to plan a challenging curriculum for apprentices. Software developer and cyber security apprentices all follow the same programme of learning whether they have prior experience and skills or not. This means that apprentices who have prior knowledge and experience do not develop the substantive new knowledge and skills of which they are capable. Apprentices who have no prior experience of software development learn fundamental coding that they can use in their workplace.

Leaders, managers and instructors do not provide sufficient training or guidance for apprentices to improve their knowledge and skills. Too often, apprentices are expected to complete self-study activities without any guidance from their instructors. For example, apprentices who require support to improve their English and mathematical skills are merely provided with past examination papers and online resources to prepare them for their assessment, with no tuition or assistance from staff.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that there are effective plans in place for apprentices to catch up when they fall behind in their studies. The majority of apprentices become frustrated with the progress that they are making and the lack

of support from mentors. A small minority of apprentices are making slow progress on their programmes.

Leaders and managers have not yet rectified many of the weaknesses identified at the previous monitoring visit. Leaders do not ensure that they have appropriate skills and experience of apprenticeships to improve the apprenticeship provision.

Employability leads provide apprentices with informal careers information, advice and guidance and structured employability sessions to help them make appropriate career choices. Apprentices have opportunities to attend career presentations from employers about careers for software developers and cyber security specialists.

Leaders have recently recruited staff that have the appropriate industry expertise, technical skills and qualifications to teach apprentices. Cyber security instructors keep their industry knowledge updated by attending local networks that support them with new operating systems. Instructors complete useful professional training to improve their teaching skills, such as questioning and session-opening techniques.

Staff have high expectations of apprentices' behaviour. Apprentices are aware of the importance of conducting themselves professionally at work and in the virtual learning environment. For example, cyber security apprentices recognise the need to be courteous and professional with customers that have concerns about security breaches. Attendance and punctuality are good at online sessions. Apprentices demonstrate respect for their instructors and peers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders place a high priority on safeguarding. Staff clearly understand their responsibilities to safeguard apprentices. The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are appropriately trained. The DSLs use their links to external agencies and partners to help staff and apprentices access additional help, such as mental health support.

Leaders ensure that staff are recruited safely. Staff receive regular training and updates on safeguarding and safeguarding-related matters. Apprentices feel safe. They know how and to whom they should report concerns. Apprentices apply their knowledge of health and safety in work. They use what they learn about online safety to help their children stay safe online. Apprentices complete training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. A minority of apprentices find it difficult to recall what they have learned such as radicalisation and extremism.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should identify what apprentices already know and can do at the start of the programme and use this information to provide an individualised curriculum

so that all apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills on their apprenticeship.

- Leaders should monitor apprentices' progress with rigour to identify apprentices who are not making their expected progress. Where apprentices fall behind, leaders should set clear targets for apprentices to swiftly catch up so that they can complete their apprenticeship on time.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices receive high quality on- and off-the-job training so that they can gain and master substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their apprenticeship.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices' work is marked accurately and on time, and that feedback helps apprentices to improve their work and achieve their full potential.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices are effectively prepared for their final assessments, so that they have a clear understanding of the requirements and the high-grade opportunities available to them.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices are supported to improve their English and mathematical skills to their highest level.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2539252
Address	The Vault 8, Boughton Chester CH3 5AG
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Website	www.wearecodenation.com
Principal/CEO	David Muir
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, 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 learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and employers, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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