

# Inspection of The Colleges' Partnership Limited

Inspection dates:

3 to 5 May 2023

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

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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**

The Colleges' Partnership (TCP) head office and main administrative centre are in Blandford Forum, Dorset. It directly delivers a range of level 3 apprenticeships in digital infrastructure and a learning and skills tutor apprenticeship at level 5. The British Army uses TCP as a subcontractor for a wide range of apprenticeships. The subcontracted and level 5 programmes were not in scope for this inspection.

The great majority of its 30 digital infrastructure apprentices are following the level 3 network cable installer standard. Three are following the level 3 radio network technician, two the level 3 information communications technician and one each following the level 3 digital support technician and data technician standards. TCP employs nearly 100 people around the country. The staff team immediately responsible for its direct delivery programmes is small in number but calls upon the wider expertise of the organisation as needed. The main tutor provides technical training, as well as English and mathematics functional skills tuition, from entry level through to level 3.

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

Most apprentices are positive about their programmes of learning and the training they receive. They recognise that the expertise, commitment and effective joint working of their workplace mentors, employers and tutor means they learn and quickly implement new skills that are current and valued in the workplace. Apprentices swiftly become multi-skilled. For example, they become more confident when working with colleagues and learn how to work safely, either independently or in teams.

The tutor and employers provide apprentices with supportive verbal feedback and training, which helps apprentices master both complex and repetitive tasks. As a result, apprentices develop resilience and learn perseverance.

Apprentices feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe in a range of challenging environments. For instance, apprentices working in high security locations, such as defence settings, know how to maintain confidentiality and avoid exposing themselves to any risk of harm by not discussing their work with others. Apprentices develop their understanding of the sensitivities of working in certain environments, such as hospitals. They know to inform the client about who is on site and what they are doing.

The tutor ensures that apprentices have a thorough understanding of the specific risks to their safety from extremism and radicalisation. The tutor explores these themes successfully and in depth during apprentices' induction and their subsequent progress reviews.

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

Leaders have worked closely with employers to devise curriculums that fill nationally recognised skills gaps in the digital infrastructure sector, particularly network cabling installation. Employers' recruitment needs are being met through well-planned and carefully sequenced training. As a result, apprentices build their skills progressively. Apprentices' training enables them to gain valuable knowledge and skills, which are aligned well to achieving their current and future career aims. The small number of apprentices who have so far completed their qualifications have achieved distinctions. Apprentices take on additional responsibilities in the workplace and become more valued employees. Employers rapidly see how the training apprentices receive makes them more effective employees.

Leaders have ensured that staff with responsibility for training have extensive practical experience in their technical fields. They use their knowledge and expertise effectively to ensure apprentices learn substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Training is effective. For example, during training sessions, the tutor encourages apprentices to complete practical tasks, asking them to describe what they have done, how they have done it and why they have done it in a particular way. Apprentices explain that this 'show and tell' approach ensures they gain an in-depth understanding. Apprentices' knowledge and understanding are further developed by the tutor's deeper questioning and constructive verbal feedback. However, written feedback is too often only congratulatory and not constructive. In addition, any targets recorded are frequently mundane and neither specific nor measurable.

Leaders require staff to complete a comprehensive range of personal learning and development annually. This includes training in safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, and awareness of radicalisation and sexual harassment. Staff have good access to further professional training. For example, the principal tutor for the direct delivery provision is currently working towards a learning and skills teacher qualification at level 5.

The tutor plans an effective and aspirational curriculum, which includes time for apprentices to gain additional qualifications and skills during their off-the-job training. These are qualifications beyond the expectations of the apprenticeship standard and take place with a specialist provider during week-long blocks of training. The tutor times this training well to match employers' requirements. For example, apprentices gain essential qualifications that make them certified network cable installers (CNCI), able to work with copper and fibre. These apprentices also complete courses on working with asbestos, both in confined spaces and at height, which deepens their understanding of how to keep themselves safe while working in these conditions. In addition, they register for the electrotechnical certification scheme. On completion of their apprenticeship, this accredits their qualifications and experience so that they are licenced to work in their chosen field. Similarly, apprentices on the information communication technician apprenticeship enrol on computing technology industry association qualifications. As a result, apprentices are able to apply specialist skills in the workplace with confidence and verifiable competence.

Leaders have well-considered and established arrangements to manage staff workload and the work-life balance of all individuals. The company's culture focuses strongly on well-being, and staff retention is high. This helps to ensure continuity and consistency of staff contact for apprentices. Whole-company events provide staff with good opportunities to engage with senior managers and other staff. If managers have concerns about the well-being and mental health of a staff member, they have access to useful 'how to' guides, such as conducting stress risk assessments, an employee assistance programme offering impartial advice or referral to occupational health services. Apprentices with anxiety or additional support needs feel well looked after and supported to achieve their curriculum aims.

TCP's board members are highly experienced, senior-level practitioners in the further education and skills sector. They have a very good practical working knowledge of apprenticeships. They know the provider and provision well and understand its strengths and weaknesses. Their advice and guidance to leaders is well considered,

and they ensure that TCP's leaders fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They provide challenge and hold senior leaders and managers closely to account, using key metrics such as finance, operational factors and performance against contracts. However, minutes from board meetings do not indicate a sufficiently strong focus on continuously improving the quality of learning of TCP's apprenticeship provision generally or the direct delivery of programmes in particular.

The tutor provides apprentices with unbiased information, advice and guidance about their next steps, but this is not part of a planned programme of careers advice. As a result, many apprentices are unaware of their wider career or further study options early enough in their apprenticeship. Leaders recognise that this is an area for improvement and intend to offer ongoing, tailored advice to all apprentices from an early stage of their training.

Leaders are in the process of developing and improving their quality improvement arrangements to move away from a simple compliance model towards continuous quality improvement, evaluating impact as well as conformity to processes. This work is in progress and therefore cannot be measured at this stage. Nevertheless, leaders and managers have a good idea of what is working well and what needs to be improved. Leaders have yet to apply aspects of the new quality cycle being introduced in the other parts of the business, such as quality monitoring visits, in the direct delivery programmes. Leaders' arrangements for monitoring the quality of training at the CNCI provider currently focus too much on what happens in a training session and too little on the impact of training on learning.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

TCP's safeguarding arrangements, including its range of policies, are up to date and meet statutory requirements.

Leaders have ensured that staff have access to extensive resources and training, from which they gain detailed knowledge of all aspects relating to safeguarding in practice. Staff use this knowledge effectively to keep apprentices well informed. Leaders have ensured that staff awareness of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation is up to date and further informed by intelligence provided by a former police officer with good connections and awareness of such issues in practice. The members of the board are well aware of safeguarding matters because they are considered at each board meeting. The board receives detailed and useful quarterly reports from TCP's 12-strong safeguarding committee.

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

- Accelerate the introduction of impartial careers information, advice and guidance for all apprentices from an early stage and ensure that it continues in stages during each apprentice's programme.

- Ensure that written feedback for apprentices is constructive and target setting is specific and measurable so that apprentices are clear about how to improve their work.
- Introduce quality improvement arrangements that evaluate impact as well as compliance in the direct delivery of apprenticeships.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching and its impact on learning are reviewed routinely and in depth during each board meeting.

## Provider details

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<b>Chief Executive Officer</b>	Tony Basham
<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 quality and compliance, 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 other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Nick Crombie, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Christine Lacey	Ofsted Inspector
Paul James	His Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Alexander	His Majesty's Inspector

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