

# Cogent Skills Training Limited

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1278586

**Name of lead inspector:** Steve Ingle, OI

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**Type of provider:** Not for profit organisation

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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 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Cogent Skills Training Limited (CST) began to receive public funding for training apprentices through the apprenticeship levy in August 2017. Previously, CST trained apprentices for other training organisations as a subcontractor. CST offers apprenticeship training in three vocational areas. These areas are life and industrial sciences, business management, engineering and manufacturing. Apprenticeships are offered at levels 2 to 5. The company currently has 106 levy-funded apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships. Around half of the current apprentices are enrolled on science and laboratory technician apprenticeships. The provider works with employers across England.

### Themes

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

#### **Insufficient progress**

Leaders and managers do not ensure that they meet all the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. The amount of off-the-job training is insufficient for too many apprentices. Leaders and managers have not ensured that all employers are fully committed to ensuring that employees receive enough time to enable them to take part in high-quality training and development activities. Employers frequently cancel training sessions. Consequently, too many apprentices make slow progress. A small minority of apprentices do not realise they are enrolled on an apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that all apprentices develop sufficient new skills, knowledge or behaviours. They have been slow to address weaknesses in arrangements to gather information about employees' prior skills and vocational experience. As a result, the information that trainers collect on apprentices' starting points is not always used to ensure that they enrol on the right programme. Apprentices have often been in their current job role for many years and too many are accomplishing little more than accrediting their pre-existing skills.

Governance is not yet effective. The governing body do not receive enough information on the progress that apprentices make in order to challenge senior managers effectively. The reports that senior leaders provide to governors do not focus on the quality of training and learning. Consequently, the governing body do not have a good understanding of apprenticeship programmes, the quality of them or whether they fully meet the principles and requirements of apprenticeships. Very recently, senior managers have introduced additional checks and processes to improve their understanding of the quality of apprenticeships and to start to rectify weaknesses. However, it is too early to assess the impact of these measures.

Senior leaders have effective working relationships with employers across the science industries. They have developed a curriculum and delivery models that reflect the needs of many employers. For example, apprentice laboratory technicians benefit from interactive and convenient online training sessions.

**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**

Managers do not ensure that all apprentices benefit from well planned on- and off-the-job training that meets their specific development and employment needs. Managers do not ensure that all employers are sufficiently involved in planning training for their employees. Where employers do provide time for off-the-job training, this often lacks structure and clarity. Trainers do not always plan sessions with employers to ensure that apprentices are able to engage in interesting and meaningful activities that develop the new skills and knowledge they need to gain.

Too many apprentices make less than expected progress in developing new vocational skills, knowledge and behaviours. Managers have only recently identified that arrangements to assess apprentices' starting points have been ineffective. As a result, trainers and assessors do not plan learning that builds on apprentices' existing skills, experience and understanding of topics.

Managers arrangements to check apprentices' progress are weak. They do not ensure that all employers have a clear understanding of the progress that their employees make. Targets set for apprentices, by trainers, do not help them to make substantial progress. Targets are often limited to completing assignments rather than helping apprentices to develop the specific knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to develop to become more competent, effective and professional in their work role.

Most apprentice laboratory technicians benefit from training that develops their understanding of chemicals, testing, contamination and specialised equipment. For example, apprentices can use specialist laboratory equipment in order to determine if

samples of used cooking oil are suitable to be reprocessed into bio-diesel fuel. Most apprentices understand the assessment requirements at the end of their programme.

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

Leaders and managers take the necessary steps to ensure that apprentices are safe. They ensure that there are safe recruitment procedures in place and carry out the appropriate checks on staff who work on the apprenticeship programme. The designated safeguarding officer is qualified at the appropriate level. Managers responsible for safeguarding understand they need to work with external agencies when necessary. Staff benefit from training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Leaders and managers implement appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. They ensure that staff and apprentices know how to report any concerns. Managers have rigorous processes in place to record and investigate any safeguarding incidents. They have a clear policy which does not tolerate bullying in the workplace. In the very small number of instances this occurred they worked swiftly with the employer to resolve the issues effectively.

There are stringent health and safety processes in place in the workplace which apprentices follow closely. Most apprentices have a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism and how it applies to them in the science industries. Apprentices benefit from support from CST and their employer. For example, CST and employers organise counselling and medical support for apprentices with mental health needs.

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