

AUDIT COMMITTEE

31 MARCH 2022

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PARTNERSHIPS)

A.2 RESPONSE TO REPORT OF OFSTED FOLLOWING INSPECTION OF CAREER TRACK (Report prepared by Carol Magnus)

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide the Audit Committee with an overview of the organisation's improvement actions following the Ofsted inspection of Career Track between 3rd and 5th November 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Career Track was established within Tendring District Council in 1983. Since then it has continuously provided apprenticeship opportunities within the organisation and for other employers. The Council's sustained commitment to the Career Track apprentice scheme has been a central plank of its work to develop a more skilled workforce and to "grow our own" employees of the future within Tendring.

Career Track had its first full inspection by Ofsted between 3rd and 5th November 2021. Career Track had previously had a successful Ofsted Monitoring Visit (a more 'light touch' inspection in June 2019). The full report following the November Inspection was published on 24th December 2021 and can be read in Appendix A. The findings of the report graded Career Track as 'Requiring Improvement'. Following this grading, the organisation has started to develop and implement a Development Plan to address the improvement areas identified by Ofsted.

A Development Group has been established to monitor the progress against the actions identified within the Development Plan. The Development Group is chaired by the Deputy Leader, Cllr Guglielmi in his role as Portfolio Holder for Career Track, membership of the group also includes the Chief Executive; Assistant Director, Partnerships; Internal Audit Manager and the Executive Projects Manager – Governance. The Work Based Learning Manager and Organisational Development Manager report in to this group.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Audit Committee -

- (a) notes the report and findings of the Ofsted report; and
- (b) endorses the Development Plan and the actions being taken.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

Career Track has been delivering apprenticeships since it was established in 1983. Today, its work fundamentally supports the organisation's key corporate priority of Community

Leadership by providing enhanced education and employment opportunities for the local community as well as for other employers within Essex, Suffolk and Kent.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources: To meet the requirements of the report some additional financial investment has been actioned. This is providing additional staffing capacity (£15K) and the specialist services of SDN Ltd.(up to £10K expected) The costs are being met from the carry forward held within the corporate training budget.

Additional investment is being made to introduce a software package, OneFile to improve the quality of the delivery of apprenticeships by developing a full online learning curriculum and the facility for learners to have an online portfolio of evidence of learning. The cost of licensing for OneFile and an additional learning package, known as 'Apprenti-kit' is £55 per learner¹. This investment was already planned but it has been brought forward in response to the Ofsted report.

Risk: Career Track will receive a Monitoring Visit from Ofsted anytime from seven months after the Inspection (i.e. anytime from June 2022) and a further full Ofsted Inspection within approximately 18 to 24 months. However it should be noted that this could be earlier or as late as 36 months.

If Career Track is not found to be making significant progress on the items identified by Ofsted when it has a Monitoring Visit it could be subject to a full inspection much sooner. If items identified are not being addressed to the satisfaction of the Inspectors the service could be graded as Inadequate. This grading would almost certainly result in the loss of the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Authority) contract which would consequently close Career Track.

The Requires Improvement grading does present some reputational risk and the Communications Team have a pre-prepared statement in the event a corporate response is needed. To date this has not been required and so it appears that this risk has significantly reduced.

The grading may affect the willingness of some employers to engage with the service but as most custom is achieved through recommendation and word of mouth this risk is expected to be minimal.

A communication was sent to all Career Track apprentices and the employers in January 2022 to advise them some changes and improvements will be being made following the Ofsted visit. No negative responses have been received.

Ofsted reports are filed on their website and provider grades are noted on the Digital Apprenticeship Service along with user satisfaction ratings. This means that the report is publically available should someone choose to seek it out.

LEGAL

Tendring District Council has a legal obligation to ensure that its senior managers and 'governors' are fully conversant with the legal requirements set out in the contract held with

¹ Cost of £50 per learner for Business Administration and for Customer Service. These make up the majority of Career Track apprenticeships. For the Public Service Operational Delivery Officer apprenticeship the cost of £10 per learner,

the ESFA. Ofsted consider that TDC is not meeting the standard required in this area and that it Requires Improvement.

As part of the existing governance arrangements, regular reports have been provided to Members via the Council Tax & HR Committee and to Cabinet. In addition, information sessions have also been provided to members via All Member Briefings.

However, in light of the view of Ofsted, additional measures will now be put in place. The establishment of the Development Group is one such measure. In addition, a Career Track Governance Board will be established to be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for the service. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the Governance Board will be held sometime in April or May. The format of the Board has still to be finalised and agreed.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities / Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.

No issues have been identified.

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

Career Track is the name used by TDC for its apprenticeship service.

In 2017 the government changed the criteria for providers to be allowed to deliver apprenticeships. Under the new rules, Career Track was no longer eligible to operate as a sub-contractor of Colchester Institute. To secure its future, the decision was made to apply, through the national tender process, for Career Track to gain Approved Provider status on the national Register of Approved Training Providers (RoATP). The tender application was successful.

In order to provide apprenticeships the organisation has to continue to be an Approved Training Provider with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Periodically, the ESFA announces that providers have to re-apply to remain on the Register, usually referred to as the RoATP (Register of Approved Training Providers). All approved providers are subject to inspection from Ofsted. On Inspection, Ofsted grades the organisations it inspects as Excellent; Good; Requires Improvement; or Inadequate. Its Inspection Reports are published here www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports

An Ofsted Inspection with an 'Inadequate' rating would usually result in withdrawal of contract from the ESFA. When applying to be on the RoATP providers are asked to provide information on their Ofsted rating and details of actions to address areas identified as Requires Improvement or Inadequate. The ESFA may take this into account when deciding whether to re-approve a training provider.

Ofsted group its inspections into five categories:

- The quality of education;
- Behaviour and attitudes;

- Personal development;
- Leadership and management;
- Apprenticeships.

In June 2019 Career Track successfully re-applied to continue their Approved Provider status with the ESFA. In the same month Career Track also received a Monitoring Visit from Ofsted. A Monitoring Visit is a 'light touch' visit and the report does not provide a rating. The wording in the report and the verbal feedback received, appeared to suggest the service was on the right course to gain a Good rating from a full Ofsted Inspection.

The service made a number of plans for further improvements and developments for the following year. However, these plans were not actioned due to the impact of Covid upon the organisation in 2020; the Work Based Learning Manager was seconded to assist HR in its work supporting the workforce and the remaining team managed to keep the service running and put in extra time to ensure apprentices received extra support to help mitigate isolation and potential mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

The numbers of apprentices supported by Career Track declined during 2020 as a result of the Covid Pandemic but increased rapidly during 2021 to reach and even exceed the numbers of 2019. At the time of the full Ofsted Inspection in November 2021 the numbers stood at 53 and are currently at 51. Apprentices are placed with a number of local authorities including Maldon, Epping, Braintree and Colchester and GP Primary Choice Ltd. Career Track has recently been approved as a provider for all Suffolk authorities to deliver the Public Service Operational Delivery Officer Apprenticeship Standard. In addition Career Track has apprentices with local businesses, the largest of which is Silverton's and it also provides apprenticeships for the Virtual School, Kent (run by Kent County Council).

The Ofsted Inspection in November 2021 was the first full Ofsted Inspection for Career Track since 2005 as previously it was subcontracted with Colchester Institute and therefore was not subject to inspection in its own right.

Shortly after the Ofsted inspection, Career Track received notification that it was to submit its application to remain on the RoAPT by the end of January 2022. A request was made for an extension and the deadline has now been extended to the end of April 2022.

CURRENT POSITION

Following the Inspection, Career Track has been given a rating of Requires Improvement across all areas. Although this is a disappointment there is much that is positive in the report as it has a detailed section about things that are being done well and it is especially complimentary about the dedication and care of the team for the apprentices and about the commitment the apprentices show towards their learning and development. The emphasis is now on what is needed to make things better.

The attached Development Plan (so called as this is the phraseology used by both ESFA and Ofsted) takes each of the five inspection categories and states what is being planned to address each area. As can be seen, the document identifies the key milestones and progress by using a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) system.

Initial activity focussed on setting the foundations and getting them in place. This has involved amending the hours and workload of the Training Assessment Team Leader so

that she has been freed up to dedicate time to policy and curriculum development with the introduction of the OneFile system. To enable this to happen, a temporary Training Assessment Officer role has been created for 30 hours per week until the end of July 2022. This person has taken over the apprenticeship caseload from the Training Assessment Team leader.

The services of a specialist company known as SDN (Strategic Development Network) are being utilised for their professional help and advice for policy and curriculum development. SDN are supporting Career Track with consultants/professionals who also work alongside and train Ofsted Inspectors. In addition, their services are being used to help with the RoAPT application².

As previously stated, the service is rolling out the use of OneFile, a training software package for the administration and management of apprenticeships. OneFile is used by many apprenticeship providers as it supports the learners more effectively and enables the provider to better monitor and ensure delivery of the curriculum. Effective roll out of the package will play a significant role in addressing the Ofsted concerns regarding curriculum, Safeguarding, Prevent and British Values training.

The contract for TDC (under the name of Career Track) to provide apprenticeship training rests with the ESFA. The organisation has an allocated account manager with the ESFA and the Work Based Learning Manager has a monthly meeting with him to discuss actions and progress towards meeting the improvements required by Ofsted. The ESFA account manager has approved the attached development plan and the steps currently being taken.

The full Development Plan can be seen in Appendix B. This plan is regularly updated and a timeline shows key milestone targets and progress. The Development Group has been formed to monitor the work and ensure that the targets set against the Ofsted report are being met.

FURTHER HEADINGS RELEVANT TO THE REPORT

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Ofsted Inspection Report
Appendix B – Career Track Development Plan

² SDN supported Career Track in its 2019 RoAPT application.