

# AUDIT COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2022

## REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PARTNERSHIPS)

### A.2 PROGRESS UPDATE FOLLOWING OFSTED INSPECTION OF CAREER TRACK (Report prepared by Debiannne Messenger)

#### PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

##### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Audit Committee with a progress update on the organisation's improvement actions following the Ofsted inspection of Career Track in November 2021, the last Audit Committee report of 31 March 2022 and the update on 30 June 2022.

##### 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 3 and 5 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 24 December 2021. The findings of the report graded Career Track as 'Requiring Improvement'. Following this grading, the organisation implemented a comprehensive Development Plan to address the improvement areas identified by Ofsted.

An internal Development Group was 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. The Internal Audit Manager and Executive Projects Manager were part of the Development Group to represent the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer in their overarching governance roles due to the findings of the Ofsted Report.

To date the Development Group have met five times and following significant progress were able to sign off the Development Plan at the last meeting in June 2022.

With the recovery phase / improvement changes now complete, Career Track are returning to Business as Usual and the Development Group have recommended the membership is revised to align with a governance required by Ofsted for the ongoing provision of all apprenticeships.

This report updates the Audit Committee on the progress since the last Audit Committee meeting on 30 June 2022.

## RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Audit Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of this report; and
- (b) continues to approve the Development Plan and endorse 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 through the following priorities:

- Develop and attract new businesses;
- support existing businesses;
- more and better jobs;
- education - for improved outcomes.

Career Track's vision is to be recognised as a 'Good' provider of apprenticeships; engaging learners in the development of workplace knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable them to actively contribute to the economic, health and social wellbeing of the district:

- To educate, engage and inspire;
- to inform, advise, support and mentor;
- to establish and maintain high quality standards in apprenticeship training;
- to safeguard and promote the welfare of our learners.

### 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 (£5K) 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 has been 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 learner<sup>1</sup>. 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

<sup>1</sup> 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,

approximately 18 to 24 months. However, it should be noted that this could be earlier or as late as 36 months from the date of inspection.

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. It should be noted that Career Track has moved from monthly monitoring with the ESFA to a more light touch quarterly meeting with the contract manager.

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. Since this communication Career Track have received full support from all of its stakeholders.

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 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 – the next Cabinet report is due on 7 October 2022. In addition, information sessions have also been provided to Members via All Member Briefings.

However, in light of the view of Ofsted, additional measures have been put in place. The establishment of the Development Group is one such measure. In addition, a Career Track Governance Board has been established from the Development Group and is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for the service. The Board have met five times with the first formal governance meeting planned in October 2022.

## **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](http://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 groups 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 47. 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 RoATP by the end of January 2022 which was extended to the end of April 2022. Career Track was successful in their application and continues to be an 'approved provider' on the government's register of apprenticeship training providers.

## **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 contact has now been extended to December 2022 for 24 hours per week. 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) were utilised for their professional help and advice for policy and curriculum development.

This support has enabled Career Track to develop a new curriculum, which fully meets the requirements and expectations of Ofsted. The curriculum covers the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the standards, including personal development which covers safeguarding, British values, career development and health and wellbeing. Employers are involved in creating the right curriculum for their apprentice – all starts now undertake the new curriculum.

SDN are supporting Career Track with consultants/professionals who also work alongside and train Ofsted Inspectors. In addition, their services were used to support the completion of the RoAPT application<sup>2</sup>. SDN have recently completed a review of the Development Group to assist in shaping a more formal governance approach for the Career Track Apprenticeship provision.

Career Track will seek to follow the AELP (Association of Employment and Learning Providers) Governance Code. It is based on the following expectations of good governance:

- Putting the learner, apprentice, and employer first;
- promoting high expectations and ambitions for learners, apprentices, and staff;
- listening to learners, employers, and staff;
- promoting inspirational training, teaching, and learning and assessment;
- creating a safe environment for learners and apprentices to train, learn and develop;
- providing strong strategic leadership and challenge to the senior team;
- demonstrating accountability to all stakeholders, including publishing accurate and timely information on performance;
- ensuring the achievement of equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the organisation.

Under the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework it is a requirement that an apprenticeship training provider follows the Further education and skills handbook criteria for governance, as identified in the AELP Governance Code.

The aim of the Tendring District Council (Career Track) Apprenticeship Governance Board is to achieve effective governance, that:

- Sets the tone from the top and ensures that delivery matches up with an organisation's values and ethos;
- provides strategic direction and control to Career Track by creating robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational outcomes and financial performance;
- requires confidence and ability to challenge conventional wisdom, ask tough questions and nurture strong relationships.

Cabinet will continue to hold overall responsibility for the function of Career Track with the Portfolio Holder chairing the Apprenticeship Board creating robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational outcomes and financial performance.

As previously stated, the service has formally launched OneFile, a training software package for the administration and management of apprenticeships. OneFile is used by at least 50% of all apprenticeship providers as it supports the learners more effectively and enables the provider to better monitor and ensure effective delivery of the curriculum. Career Track are now able to fully personalise learning, improve quality and increase engagement with their apprentices and employers, using the OneFile eportfolio software.

Our first stakeholders briefing enabled Career Track to share the success of OneFile and the curriculum and resulted in positive feedback from those who attended. All apprentices (and their supervisors and mentors) are using OneFile (dependent on where they are in their

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<sup>2</sup> SDN supported Career Track in its 2019 RoAPT application.

apprenticeship programme) and the benefits are already evident. A second briefing is planned in the Autumn term.

The agreement 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 regular monthly meetings 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 meetings have moved from monthly to quarterly following the progress that has been made.

The full Development Plan can be seen in the Appendix. The Development Group was been formed to monitor the work and ensure that the targets set against the Ofsted report are being met. The Development Plan is almost complete, with a small number of activities left to complete and identified by the RAG rating.

A Career Track self-assessment report and its accompanying quality improvement plan is now drafted and will soon replace the development plan as the monitoring tool for quality, progress, development and achievement, This is an expectation of Ofsted and when complete will be shared with them and the ESFA.

#### **FURTHER HEADINGS RELEVANT TO THE REPORT**

None

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION**

None

#### **APPENDICES**

Appendix – Development Plan