

Inspection of Bath College

Inspection dates: 17 to 20 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Bath College is a general further education college in Bath, Somerset. The college has two main campuses: the City Centre campus in the centre of Bath, and the Somer Valley campus in Radstock. At the time of inspection, around 2,000 learners aged 16 to 18, 2,000 adult learners, and 630 apprentices were studying at the college. There were around 350 learners in receipt of high needs funding, of whom around half were studying on programmes specifically designed for learners with high needs.

Learners aged 16 to 18 study a wide range of mainly vocational and technical programmes at levels 1, 2 and 3. Around 140 learners study T levels, and around 165 learners study the one-year foundation T-level programme. Most adult learners study part-time courses from entry level to level 2. Over half of adult learners study distance learning courses online. Around 10 learners were studying Skills Bootcamps. Most apprentices study apprenticeship standards at levels 2 and 3, the majority of whom at the Somer Valley campus. More than two-thirds of apprentices are over 19 years of age.

Bath College works with five subcontractors. These provide education and training to learners with high needs, learners aged 16 to 18 and adult learners.

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

Young learners and learners with high needs develop the skills they need to progress on to their next steps, including further and higher education and employment. This is because their teachers mostly plan and teach the content of the curriculum effectively. Too often, adult learners and apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable, and too many do not complete or achieve their qualifications. This is because their teachers have not considered carefully enough what and how to teach them, in order to help them make better progress in learning the content of the curriculum.

Most learners and apprentices enjoy their experience at the college because teachers create a welcoming and inclusive environment. Learners and apprentices treat each other and staff with respect and work well together. This is because teachers set high expectations for behaviours, including for work-related behaviours. Learners studying T levels practise these behaviours and reflect on their learning in meaningful work placements. However, a minority of young learners and those with high needs do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their employability skills in workplaces. This is because leaders and managers do not ensure that learners take part in suitable experiences.

Most learners, including apprentices and those studying Skills Bootcamps, enjoy their learning. Most have access to modern facilities, including digital and technical resources. The large majority of teachers are experienced in the subjects that they teach, and most use their experience well to enrich their lessons. Learners and apprentices develop positive relationships with their teachers, who get to know them well.

Learners and apprentices feel safe because staff create a positive environment in which bullying and harassment are not tolerated. The large majority of learners and apprentices are confident that any concerns they have will be swiftly followed up and resolved by staff. Young learners value the presence of security on site.

Young learners and learners with high needs, including those studying with subcontractors, are taught useful topics by their tutors to support their personal development. As a result, most have a good understanding of important topics such as healthy relationships and knife crime. Young learners also enrich their vocational experiences through extra courses related to their chosen vocation taught by their teachers. However, leaders do not provide opportunities for learners to discover their broader interests and talents outside of their vocational area.

All learners and apprentices are given information from staff about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, either in their induction materials or in taught tutorials. However, staff do not check sufficiently what learners and apprentices know, and they do not revisit this learning or ensure that learners know how this relates to their lives. As a result, apprentices and learners often do not remember this information well.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a limited contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have sufficient understanding of the local and regional skills need sectors. Leaders actively engage with the West of England Combined Authority, the Chamber of Commerce, the Local Enterprise Partnership, Bath and North East Somerset Council and local universities to develop programmes that meet the needs of their learners. They engage well in a wide variety of projects funded by their Adult Education Budget and through using subcontractors to provide training for the most disadvantaged, such as those who are long-term unemployed or those who need to develop their skills. Leaders have successfully developed the provision for Skills Bootcamps, working closely with employers to identify skills needs, such as welding, and designing training, to help to meet these needs. Leaders also provide English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses for local people and refugees who need to develop their English skills to settle into their communities or gain meaningful employment.

Leaders and managers have not done enough to ensure that employers are sufficiently involved in the design of the curriculum. In most curriculum areas, they do not involve stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the curriculum. As a result, too many learners do not sufficiently develop the vocational and transferable skills they need to progress to their next steps. However, leaders have successfully developed employer advisory boards in a few curriculum areas such as healthcare and digital, most notably to support the development of T levels. Through this, they have obtained appropriate feedback from employers that has positively influenced the curriculum content.

Leaders and managers have sufficient understanding of their role in contributing to local, regional and national skills needs. Through capital bid submissions, they have heavily invested to upgrade the facilities and train staff. For example, they have provided new resources to introduce electric vehicle maintenance courses, and they have invested in training staff to meet the dual professionalism expectations. In healthcare, they have two new science labs, a mock hospital ward and a new gym. These support the implementation of T levels. In digital, they have upgraded the equipment and software licensing to support their West of England Institute of Technology curriculum offer.

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

Managers and teachers of young learners and learners with high needs mostly consider the planning of the curriculum carefully. They mainly organise teaching topics in a logical order, which helps to build on what learners already know and can do. For example, GCSE English teachers first teach learners how to evaluate how successfully authors convey their message, and later teach learners to use these techniques to evaluate their own writing. This helps learners to improve their skills in writing and evaluation.

Managers and teachers of adult learners and apprentices do not consider learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge and skills sufficiently well. For example, managers of adult distance learning programmes provide all learners with the same resources and assessments and do not take account of learners' prior qualifications or experience. As a result, a minority of adult learners spend time studying content they already know, and their progress is slowed. Managers and teachers of carpentry and joinery apprenticeships do not plan apprentices' training well enough with employers. They do not coordinate on- and off-the-job training effectively, resulting in apprentices making slow progress.

Most teachers of young learners, adult learners and learners with high needs use well-planned teaching activities and present information clearly to help learners to learn key concepts. For example, teachers and support staff for learners with high needs use clear and concise instructions. They use adapted questioning well to check learners' knowledge and skills through verbal and practical responses. Teachers of the T level in education and childcare skilfully link classroom activities to work scenarios. They give learners useful opportunities to reflect on their learning, such as the importance of being objective when making observations of children. In a minority of cases, teachers ask superficial questions to only a few learners when teaching important topics such as fundamental British values.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that the teaching of apprenticeships is consistently of a high quality. For example, teachers of the L3 installation and maintenance electrician apprenticeship standard use work-related scenarios effectively to encourage discussion and debate. They deepen apprentices' knowledge of technical terminology and industry standards by encouraging apprentices to reflect on and share their own experiences. In contrast, teachers of L2 carpentry and joinery standard apprenticeships do not have high expectations of apprentices' technical drawing. They do not provide them with sufficient basic drawing equipment, resulting in poor-quality drawings. Too often, teachers of apprenticeships do not focus sufficiently well on reinforcing the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be learned.

Most teachers provide learners with useful opportunities to practise their learning to help build their long-term memory. For example, teachers of the foundation T level in digital skills work methodically through tasks to reinforce coding skills, developing more complex codes as they build their knowledge. Teachers and support staff for learners with high needs frequently revisit key topics to ensure learners practise new skills. For example, learners who were not previously confident to use public transport, through practice, now travel independently to college.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that most teachers provide constructive and useful feedback to learners and apprentices. As a result, learners and apprentices often do not know what they need to do to improve their work further. Where teachers do provide feedback, such as in level 1 beauty and hairdressing, learners do not revisit this and continue to repeat errors in later work. Therefore, teachers' feedback does not support these learners to improve. However, a minority of teachers use feedback well and support learners to reflect on their work

meaningfully. For example, teachers of welding Skills Bootcamps provide individual feedback that learners value and use to develop their skills further.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that teachers consistently improve learners' and apprentices' knowledge and skills in English and mathematics. For example, teachers of ESOL do not provide feedback on learners' written English skills when preparing them for speaking and listening exams. Carpentry and joinery apprenticeship teachers do not teach apprentices sufficiently about the difference between metric and imperial measurements and what these mean. This means that apprentices in their second year of learning do not have a clear understanding of critical construction mathematics concepts or terminology.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that apprenticeship assessors undertake useful reviews of the progress that apprentices make in their learning or set them appropriately challenging targets. Assessors do not set individual targets for apprentices that link to apprentices' areas for development. Consequently, apprentices do not know what progress they are making or what they need to do to make further progress. Leaders and managers lack the oversight of progress that apprentices make over time and therefore do not intervene quickly enough when apprentices make slow progress. Leaders have ensured that the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship have been met.

The large majority of teachers know their learners and apprentices well, including knowing the support needed by those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In most cases, this leads to appropriate levels of support, which enables learners and apprentices to achieve in line with their peers. However, in a minority of employability courses designed specifically for learners with high needs, teachers do not use information about what learners already know and can do in English and mathematics to challenge the most able learners effectively. This leads to learners not achieving as highly as their peers in English and mathematics qualifications.

Leaders and managers do not involve stakeholders sufficiently in most adult learning programmes to ensure the skills they gain are those most needed. An exception to this is the welding Skills Bootcamps. Leaders and managers have successfully involved employers, who have contributed meaningfully to the design of the curriculum. This helps to ensure that learners meet the high standards of welding they require to be employable. Employers provide access to high-quality fabrication units to inspire learners to meet high standards in their work, and they welcome applications from learners to join their businesses. As a result, learners gain the skills they need, including relevant industry standard qualifications, to gain employment successfully.

Leaders and managers work well with a number of subcontractors. Teachers at subcontractors plan and teach high-quality curriculums effectively. For example, teachers of L3 performing and production arts include industry experts from the Theatre Royal Bath, who teach learners current and relevant knowledge. They provide learners with exposure to the industry through numerous opportunities to view theatre performances. Leaders at the subcontractor Youth Connect South West

provide many positive opportunities for learners with high needs, who would otherwise not be in education or training, to develop their social and vocational skills.

Leaders and managers have developed an appropriate and varied specialist curriculum that provides a range of suitable pathways for learners with high needs, including complex sensory needs. Leaders and managers ensure that learners with high needs are appropriately supported to develop their confidence and independence. They coordinate specialist support, including speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, to ensure learners receive appropriate and timely help to meet their individual needs.

Staff place high importance on attendance and punctuality and monitor this closely. Staff follow up swiftly with suitable actions when learners or apprentices do not attend. As a result, most learners and apprentices attend well. Through the actions of leaders and managers, attendance in GCSE English and mathematics has improved, but leaders recognise, rightly, that this is still too low.

Leaders and managers plan useful careers guidance tutorials for young learners. As a result, most young learners have a good understanding of the options available to them in the future, including studying at university and employment options. Leaders provide access to careers advisors for all learners and apprentices. However, very few adults or apprentices are aware of, or use, this service. Leaders and managers do not ensure that adult learners and apprentices understand the full range of options available to them because they do not plan careers guidance appropriately into the curriculum.

Leaders and managers provide young learners and learners with high needs with a variety of opportunities to help to prepare them effectively for their next steps. For example, managers provide sport learners with opportunities to develop their coaching and communication skills through coaching younger children. However, too few young learners and learners with high needs take part in external work experience. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to practise their skills in real-life work environments.

Leaders and managers do not have sufficient and consistent oversight of the quality of education and training of adults and subcontracted provision. They do not recognise weaknesses quickly and accurately, and therefore they do not take the actions needed to make improvements. Leaders' quality assurance activities do not focus sufficiently on the quality of curriculum planning, and this is a weakness within adult and apprenticeship programmes.

Leaders and managers have started to take appropriate actions to improve the curriculum planning and monitoring of progress for apprenticeships, but these improvements are new and have yet to have an impact. However, leaders have recognised previous weaknesses in high needs provision, and managers have taken action to make improvements that are now having a positive impact on learners with high needs.

Leaders and managers use a range of well-planned activities to help improve staff teaching and vocational expertise. For example, leaders and managers provide teacher training initiatives to encourage recruitment of staff from industry. They provide current staff with 'back-to-industry' training days to maintain their knowledge of current practices. Leaders have recently introduced the 'help programme' to develop teachers' teaching skills. However, at the time of the inspection, there was limited evidence of a consistently effective impact of this programme.

Governors are kept up to date by leaders and managers on recent actions taken to improve identified weaknesses. However, leaders and managers do not provide governors with sufficient analysis of all curriculum areas, including subcontracted provision. Governors do not challenge leaders and managers sufficiently to make swift improvements. As a result, governors recognise rightly that apprenticeship provision has required improvement for too long.

Governors use their high levels of experience and expertise in a broad range of fields, including further and higher education, to strengthen and support the strategic direction of the college. They support leaders well in their initiatives to engage a range of appropriate stakeholders to develop and offer a curriculum that aims to meet the needs of small- and medium-sized enterprises that dominate the local and regional economy.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the use of assessment, taking into account what learners and apprentices already know and can do and what gaps they have, to inform future teaching.
- Improve the feedback that learners and apprentices receive so that they know what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the usefulness of reviews for apprentices to measure the progress apprentices make and provide oversight of progress to enable timely intervention.
- Increase the availability of, and participation in, work-related activities for young learners and learners with high needs.
- Improve careers information, advice and guidance for adult learners and apprentices to help them to know their options and plan for their next steps.
- Improve the effectiveness of teaching all learners and apprentices how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views and how this is important to their lives.

- Improve the evaluation of quality of provision to accurately identify weaknesses and take appropriate actions swiftly to make improvements, with appropriate challenge from governors.
- Improve involvement of stakeholders, including employers, in the design and implementation of the curriculum for all provision types.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130558
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Website	www.bathcollege.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jayne Davis
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	16 to 19 January 2018
Main subcontractors	Youth Connect South West Theatre Royal Bath Women's Work Lab Bath Rugby Foundation Bath Children's Centre

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal for quality and curriculum, 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

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