

Telford College of Arts and Technology

General further education college



Inspection dates

3–6 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

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| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Inadequate |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Inadequate |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Inadequate |
| Outcomes for learners | Inadequate |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Inadequate |
| Adult learning programmes | Inadequate |
| Apprenticeships | Inadequate |
| Provision for learners with high needs | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings

This is an inadequate provider

- Governors and senior leaders have failed to provide clear leadership and strategic direction; they have not acted quickly enough to rectify declining standards in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Apprentices make slow progress and have low achievement rates.
- Learners' attendance is very low and declining.
- Management information is not fit for purpose; as a result leaders and managers do not make appropriate improvement interventions.
- Achievement rates for learners have declined and are too low.
- Too few learners aged 16 to 18 who retake their English or mathematics GCSE, and too few adults who retake English GCSE, achieve an A* to C grade.
- Teachers' expectations of learners are too low. Assessment is too infrequent and teachers' feedback on written work is insufficiently detailed; as a result too many learners make poor progress.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners in receipt of high-needs funding and those who need specialist support make very good progress.
- Teachers and learners have access to a wide range of high-quality equipment and facilities; many teachers use these well to develop learners' practical skills.
- Leaders' and managers' effective partnership working with employers and the local enterprise partnership (LEP) has resulted in a curriculum that addresses local skills gaps well and provides learners on 16 to 19 study programmes with good work experience opportunities.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Telford College of Arts and Technology is a large provider of vocational education and training serving Telford and Wrekin. It operates from a single campus in Wellington in Telford and provides just over half of its provision in the community and on employers' premises.
- Around 19,500 learners study at the college. Of these approximately 15% are full-time learners aged 16 to 18; over 50% are adult learners, mainly on part-time and industry-specific courses; and around 30% are apprentices. About 30% of learners aged 16 to 19 joined the college without a GCSE at grade C or above in English and mathematics. Unemployment in Telford is 5.1% compared with a national average of 5.3%.
- In November 2015 the Skills Funding Agency issued the college with a 'notice of concern' as a result of an inadequate rating for financial control. An assessment by the Further Education Commissioner resulted in the college being placed in administered status in January 2016.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- In order to make leadership, management and governance more effective in improving learners' and apprentices' progress from their starting points and in the achievement of their qualifications:
 - ensure that the governing body has sufficient expertise and experience to oversee ongoing improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes
 - ensure that governors work effectively with leaders and managers to ensure that the college has a clear strategic direction and a culture of excellence at all levels
 - ensure that governors have a clear and accurate picture of the college's effectiveness and hold leaders and managers robustly to account for learners' and apprentices' progress and achievement
 - ensure that leaders and managers provide all staff with accurate, accessible and timely management information
 - use performance management effectively to tackle underperformance in all areas of the college by setting clear targets for teaching linked to improving teaching practice through professional development activities
 - increase significantly the proportion of learners who gain their qualifications; ensure that they make very good progress and achieve challenging target grades
 - improve the planning and delivery of the apprenticeship programmes, so that apprentices make rapid progress and achieve their qualification framework on time
 - improve the quality of teaching and learning in discrete English and mathematics lessons, so that learners on 16 to 19 study programmes and adults who have not previously attained GCSE English and/or mathematics at grades A* to C improve their GCSE grades and develop their skills in English and mathematics to prepare them for employment or higher levels of study
 - foster a culture of high expectations for all learners and apprentices and equip teachers with the skills they need to: incorporate and develop learners' English and mathematics skills in all lessons; plan and deliver lessons to challenge, inspire and meet learners' individual needs; assess learning effectively so that they are able to identify what each learner has learned and make appropriate and timely improvement interventions; provide detailed feedback that helps learners to improve, and set and monitor sufficiently challenging targets to promote learners' rapid progress
 - develop clear and robust mechanisms to substantially improve learners' attendance and ensure managers intervene effectively to promote greater engagement by learners and apprentices in all learning settings.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- Over the last year governors and senior leaders have failed to provide good leadership and a clear strategic vision for the college; they have been overly focused on managing the difficult financial situation faced by the college. Governors, leaders and managers have presided over a decline in the college's financial health and overall performance. They have not focused sufficiently on teaching, learning and assessment and were too slow to take decisive action. This resulted in too many learners and apprentices making poor progress and too few successfully completing their programmes.
- The very recently appointed interim principal and the senior management team recognise most of the weaknesses raised by the inspection team and have begun to make changes to improve provision quickly, including in the apprenticeship provision and in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. However, it is too early to gauge the impact of these changes.
- Management information is inadequate. The lack of precise and accurate management information has had far-reaching and detrimental effects across the college. It affects the ability of governors to challenge senior managers adequately, the ability of managers to make precise interventions to improve the quality of provision and the ability of curriculum managers to closely monitor and measure learners' progress. It has also affected the ability of learners to access accurate reports of their attendance and marked work, hindering their progress.
- Quality improvement arrangements are ineffective. The self-assessment report identifies strengths and weaknesses but is overly optimistic in its assessment of most aspects of provision. The report does not adequately reflect subcontracted provision. Without accurate data, the quality improvement plan lacks the precise detail needed to drive forward improvements.
- Managers hold regular review meetings with curriculum managers and have correctly identified underperforming courses and provision. They have begun to take appropriate improvement actions; however, it is not yet evident that these interventions are leading to rapid improvements in the quality of provision. For example, learners' English and mathematical skills have not improved sufficiently to enable them to make good progress on study programmes.
- Performance management and the appraisal of staff are weak at every level. Governors, senior managers and managers have not held each other to account sufficiently in fulfilling their duties. In the last full year the majority of staff did not receive an appraisal. Those that were completed did not focus specifically enough on the improvements needed, and did not include the findings from the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, and managers did not monitor closely enough the agreed actions. Managers have recently amended the process to address these issues.
- The management of subcontractors is weak. College staff have carried out compliance checks but have done little to monitor the quality of provision. Service-level agreements do not explicitly require the observation of teaching and learning. A recently formed management team is beginning to carry out observations and quality checks, but it is too soon to judge the impact of these visits.
- While managers and staff promote a tolerant and inclusive ethos at the college, they have not prioritised the monitoring of equality and diversity at all stages of the learning journey. Managers have recently re-established an equalities committee with a new membership. The committee does not monitor the breadth of the student experience, for instance how different groups of learners participate in college activities such as enrichment; it does not monitor how much the gaps in the progress and in the achievement of different groups are closing.
- Managers have continued to develop the college's extensive employer networks to engage learners in purposeful work experience and to support them into employment. Managers have maintained good links with the LEP and other local bodies. They develop courses which address local skills gaps. The college's employability courses are well matched to local employment needs.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - In the last year, poor management information undermined the ability of governors to provide the necessary challenge and scrutiny to senior managers. They too readily accepted the over-optimistic projections of learner numbers, projections for learners' successful outcomes and financial projections provided by the leaders and managers at the time.
 - Over that time, governors began to understand the severity of problems facing the apprenticeship programme, but they did not pay sufficient attention to the declining and poor performance of the learners on the 16 to 19 study programmes or to the declining quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Governors acted recently to change the senior leadership team and have commissioned an information dashboard to help to keep them fully informed of the college's performance. They now hold regular meetings where they discuss the quality of provision; they are demonstrating a willingness to challenge senior managers and hold them to account.

■ **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**

- Managers responsible for safeguarding respond effectively to concerns about the welfare of learners. The college has close links with local agencies and refer learners where appropriate to receive help, support or protection. Learners feel safe and know how to report concerns. Managers are responsive to local safeguarding issues and as a result have prioritised raising the awareness of staff and learners of child sexual exploitation. Managers adopt appropriate staff recruitment practices.
- All staff and governors undergo regular training in safeguarding, including subcontractors' staff. Recently the vast majority of staff also received training on tackling radicalisation and extremism and promoting British values. The impact of this training has yet to be fully realised as learners' understanding is shallow.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Lessons are dull and uninspiring, especially at level 3, and learners' attendance is low. Teachers often plan activities that rely heavily on learners developing their own knowledge through research or class discussion, but fail to equip them with sufficient comprehension of fundamental concepts or provide them with suitable frameworks upon which they can build their understanding. For example, many teachers rely excessively on unstructured internet research activities. These fail to engage learners' interest or help them to identify and absorb key learning points.
- The large majority of teachers of classroom-based learners fail to consider the individual needs of their learners when planning lessons, despite the availability of group profiles that provide information on their prior attainment. Consequently, many learners, including the most able, are not challenged enough and few make the progress of which they are capable. In most cases, learners at level 3 do not develop the expected level of knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers do not check learning in lessons thoroughly or with sufficient frequency. As a result, they are unable to identify those topics that learners find difficult and do not adjust their teaching to reinforce or revisit them. They are unable to identify accurately learners who are at risk of falling behind in their studies and therefore do not make the necessary arrangements to help these learners catch up.
- Teachers often provide feedback on learners' written work that is superficial and does not provide the guidance learners need to improve the quality of subsequent work. Although managers have implemented a marking guidance for spelling, punctuation and grammar, few teachers and assessors identify errors in learners' work or provide guidance that helps them to improve their writing.
- Teachers do not review learners' overall progress frequently enough; in most cases, when they do, their reviews lack rigour. Reviews do not result in clear academic targets that help learners to make progress in their learning; as a result, learners do not progress rapidly.
- Most teachers do not make sufficient reference to equality and diversity themes within their lessons and assessors do not make enough reference to them in apprenticeship progress reviews. As a result, learners and apprentices do not develop their understanding of these topics sufficiently and are not prepared well enough for life and work in the diverse society of modern Britain. Although managers have provided appropriate training to staff in respect of radicalisation and extremism, few teachers incorporate these subjects into their lessons.
- Teaching and learning in discrete English and mathematics lessons are very poor. As a result, few learners make good progress. Most vocational teachers do not plan for, or include, sufficient coverage of English and mathematics in their lessons. As a result, learners are unable to understand the relevance or application of these skills within their own vocational subject, and apprentices are unable to produce written work of a professional standard. Teachers' failure to include these subjects in lessons contributes to the low success rates of learners taking functional skills and GCSE qualifications.
- Staff have not developed good materials to help their learners continue their learning outside of the classroom. In many cases, they have developed a few resources for the college's virtual learning environment, which is used principally as a repository for the often low-quality presentations teachers use in lessons. Consequently, most learners are unable to make effective use of this resource for independent study.

- The large majority of learners find their teachers approachable and helpful. These teachers work well with learners who ask for help to enable them to understand topics they have not fully grasped in lessons. However, in a small minority of subject areas, including sport and public services, teachers do not provide the level of help that learners need and, as a result, learners in these subject areas make slow progress.
- Teachers and learners have access to a wide range of high-quality equipment and facilities. Many teachers use these resources well to teach a good range of practical skills; they use their vocational experience successfully to link their teaching to the workplace.
- Teachers of classroom-based courses at entry level and level 1 for both adults and learners aged 16 to 19 provide lessons that are interesting and help their learners to make good progress. Off-the-job training for apprentices successfully helps them to develop their practical skills.
- Managers and staff have developed clear and effective procedures for identifying learners' additional learning needs. Processes commence before learners enrol and, as a result, most receive additional support from the moment they arrive at college. Learners with additional needs, such as those with dyslexia, autism, and physical disabilities perform as well as their peers. Staff keep support arrangements under review and they encourage learners to become more independent. As a result, many learners improve their independence and reduce their reliance on support as they progress through their programmes.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are inadequate

- Learners' attendance at lessons across the college's provision is too low; it does not meet college targets or support the college's aim of helping learners develop a positive attitude to learning or work. Attendance is particularly poor in English and mathematics classes. Managers' actions to address low attendance are ineffective, and attendance over the past year has declined significantly. Expectations of learners and apprentices are too low. In a minority of instances teachers do not sufficiently challenge adult learners' poor punctuality.
- Learners do not develop quickly enough the English and mathematics skills they require for employment or higher levels of study. Too few teachers and assessors ensure that the quality of learners' and apprentices' written work is of a sufficiently high standard, with too many examples of poor spelling and punctuation in learners' written work. Too many learners and apprentices do not know how they can improve their writing skills.
- Too few learners benefit from impartial careers guidance to enable them to make informed choices about their future work and study options. As a consequence, not enough learners are clear about their career pathways or progression to higher level study. Learners with complex additional needs receive useful careers advice in appropriate formats and from a number of sources to help them make informed career choices. Good planning supports the more vulnerable learners make the transition into, and out of, the college.
- Learners report that they feel safe and know who to contact should they have any concerns. Learners have a good awareness of e-safety and know how to stay safe online. Learners do not have a good understanding of British values or the dangers associated with extremism and radicalisation. Teachers' integration of cultural diversity in vocational lessons and the celebration of this is infrequent and shallow.
- The large majority of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes have either completed purposeful external work experience or have clear plans to do so in the current year. Opportunities exist with a wide range of local and national employers. As a result, most learners develop valuable work-related skills that benefit them when planning their career pathways. For example, in motor vehicle and engineering courses, staff place a strong emphasis on establishing effective employer and industry links with high-profile national companies. Learners engage in high-quality work experience and as a result the majority progress to successful careers in the sector. The majority of adult learners develop good work-related skills. For example, learners who speak English as an additional language develop good speaking and listening skills, enabling them to participate well in discussions with their peers.
- Most apprentices develop vocationally relevant skills that their employers value, enabling almost all to secure permanent employment at the end of their apprenticeship. For example, learners on motor vehicle courses use diagnostic equipment well to accurately identify and repair faults on customers' vehicles. Learners with complex additional needs receive good support from staff to gain greater self-confidence and develop, to a high standard, the skills they need for independent living. For example, in cooking lessons learners learn to prepare a simple healthy meal that they can cook at home, increasing their independence.

- The large majority of full-time learners enhance their personal and social skills well through a varied tutorial programme. Learners and staff work well together in the student council to ensure that most learners attend well-publicised events that promote the benefits of healthy lifestyles, the risks associated with alcohol and drug misuse, and managing emotional health and stress. Learners have good access to specialist support, enabling them to complete good-quality curriculum vitae and to successfully develop their interview skills in preparation for progression to employment. Staff support learners effectively when they apply to higher education.

Outcomes for learners

are inadequate

- Fewer than one in five apprentices on intermediate, advanced and higher level programmes, which account for over a quarter of the provision, complete their qualifications within the planned time; this rate has declined significantly over three years. The proportion of those who successfully complete their functional skills qualifications is low.
- On classroom-based learning programmes, the proportion of learners aged 16 to 18 and adults who achieve their qualifications has declined over three years and is just below that of learners in similar providers. Most learners who start college stay on their course, but one in five do not achieve their qualifications.
- Most learners following courses in early years, information communication technology for users, and preparation for work achieve their qualifications successfully. However, too few learners do so in sport, leisure and recreation, crafts, creative arts and design, and foundations for learning and life.
- Managers have been ineffective in reducing the differences in achievement between all groups of learners; significant differences exist between the achievement rates of particular groups of learners. For example, adults achieve at a much higher rate than learners aged 16 to 18; female adults do not achieve as well as males. Too few learners on study programmes successfully gain A* to C grades in GCSE English and mathematics. Too few adults gain A* to C grades in English, but the proportion achieving at least a grade C in mathematics is higher than the low national rate. The proportion of learners of all ages who gain functional skills qualifications in these subjects has declined significantly over three years and is low.
- Most adults on subcontracted learning programmes and a minority on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses make good progress. For example, in ESOL mathematics classes for learners who have previously achieved professional qualifications in their home country, teachers place a high emphasis on the use of mathematical terminology in the workplace. As a result, learners apply their new skills and knowledge well when preparing for workplace skills assessments and for job interviews. However, adults on English and mathematics courses have poor attendance rates and teachers do not track their learning effectively over time. As a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Too many apprentices make slow progress in the completion of their qualification framework in a timely manner. For example, business administration and customer services apprentices have not yet completed their functional skills qualifications; this is well after their planned end date.
- Too many learners on 16 to 19 study programmes at level 3 make poor progress. In many subject areas, such as uniformed public services, teachers do not always support or challenge learners to produce written work of a sufficiently high standard and learners have too many incomplete tasks at this late stage of their programme. Too many level 3 learners across a large number of subject areas are not on target to achieve their target grades.
- The proportion of adults and learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who progress to higher-level studies at the college is too low. Managers are unable to measure accurately the proportion of learners that progress between course levels; even by their most optimistic assessment, the proportion is too low.
- Achievement rates for the majority of adults on subcontracted courses, which account for around a fifth of the college's provision, are high.
- Most learners in receipt of high-needs funding achieve their qualification aims and make rapid progress in becoming more independent in their everyday lives and in improving their work skills. For example, learners develop confidence to express their viewpoints when taking part in the lunchtime debating club, where they discuss current affairs. Almost all learners in receipt of high-needs funding progress to higher-level courses; those on mainstream vocational programmes, such as media, graphic design and health and social care, gain a wide range of practical skills and knowledge.
- Most apprentices continue in employment at the end of their programme and the majority of other learners progress into further education, apprenticeships or employment. Of the small cohort of learners who applied to higher education at the end of 2014/15, most received the offer of a place.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are inadequate

- Around 1,162 learners aged 16 to 19 are following study programmes from entry level to level 3 in nine subject sector areas. The largest cohort of learners is on level 3 programmes.
- Learners' attendance is very low. It has declined this year and is impeding the progress of too many learners, particularly in English and mathematics, business studies and travel and tourism. Managers', teachers' and tutors' interventions have been unsuccessful in improving attendance.
- Leaders ensure that learners who have not yet achieved a grade C or above in GCSE English and mathematics are enrolled on appropriate courses. However, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in English and mathematics lessons is inadequate; the standard of work produced by current learners is too low. Failure to plan for, and successfully address, the skills gaps of individual learners has resulted in learners making insufficient progress in the development of their English and mathematics skills.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their learning goals on level 3 courses is low; they make slow progress from their starting points as a result of poorly planned and uninspiring lessons. The pace of learning in the large majority of level 3 lessons is too slow; teachers set unambitious tasks that do not challenge learners to make the progress of which they are capable. Learners on level 1 study programmes benefit from innovative teaching that develops their employability, creative and debating skills successfully.
- Very few teachers adequately develop the independent learning skills of level 3 learners. As a result, learners are unable to self-manage their rate of work and they work too slowly in lessons. Teachers do not support learners effectively to produce work of a high standard when they are completing independent research tasks. For example, in public services and sport, learners do not have access to the support they need from their teachers when they are not making their expected progress. Learning support assistants work productively in lessons with learners who require additional help.
- Teachers do not take sufficient account of learners' needs and abilities. Although teachers have detailed information on learners' starting points, their welfare needs and their target grades, they do not use this information to plan learning tasks that are sufficiently personalised to meet the full range of learners' abilities. Teachers' expectations of the most-able learners are particularly low; they do not challenge sufficiently learners who performed well at school to reach their potential and achieve their aspirations.
- Teachers' assessment of learners' work and of the progress they make over time is weak. Teachers do not check or consolidate learning effectively in lessons. Teachers' questioning, marking and self-assessment strategies are too often superficial and not used skilfully enough to give them a clear insight into the progress learners are making. As a result, teachers are unable to give detailed and precise feedback to learners, who often do not understand how they can improve their work.
- In the majority of subject areas, teachers set targets that are imprecise and lack challenge; progress towards these targets is not monitored rigorously enough. As a result, learners find it difficult to articulate how well they are doing and what they still need to do to achieve their qualifications and meet their targets. However, target setting for the small minority of learners in art and motor vehicle is excellent and tailored well to the needs of individual learners, who have a very clear idea of their next steps in learning. They use both e-portfolios and handwritten learning journals well to monitor their own progress against clearly defined targets.
- Teachers do not take opportunities in lessons to raise awareness of diversity issues. Learners have an awareness of British values but do not understand them in any detail; teachers do too little to enhance learners' understanding of life in modern Britain.
- The proportion of learners taking up planned work experience has increased significantly on the previous year and is now good; learners speak positively about the vocational skills they are developing in the workplace and understand how these skills are relevant to their chosen careers. The best examples of this are in motor vehicle and engineering courses, where there is a strong emphasis on establishing effective employer and industry links with high-profile national companies. Alongside state-of-the-art facilities and staff who ensure they have up-to-date industry experience, this high-quality work experience has resulted in the majority of learners progressing to successful careers in the sector.
- Learners say they feel safe in college, and in practical lessons they understand and adopt safe working practices. The behaviour of learners in the large majority of lessons is positive and professional. They work very well with their peers and develop their collaborative and team-working skills well by correcting each other's misconceptions in a professional way. For example, in a level 2 session with clients in beauty therapy learners relished the opportunity to share with each other how well they had carried out eyebrow tinting techniques and what they would do next time to improve.

- The recently appointed manager responsible for study programmes has accurately identified the key weaknesses in the provision and initiated a wide range of improvement strategies. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these actions on learners' progress and on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Adult learning programmes

are inadequate

- At the time of the inspection, there were around 5,725 adult learners. The majority of learners study part-time. The college also has subcontracted provision, employability programmes, mathematics, English, ESOL, community learning and a small number of learners on full-time programmes. Too many adult learners fail to achieve their qualifications. Adult females perform significantly less well than their male counterparts both historically and in the current year.
- Teachers do not plan lessons to meet the needs of individual learners; consequently, too few learners receive sufficient challenge. Teachers' expectations for level 3 learners and, in particular, those on public services and access to higher education provision are too low. Teachers set target grades based on minimum university requirements or what learners feel they are capable of achieving, rather than on prior attainment and ambitious learning goals.
- Learners on foundation adult programmes, employability programmes and subcontracted provision enjoy their learning and make good progress in classes. Teachers plan their learning well to meet the individual needs of learners and build learners' confidence. Many of these learners successfully complete their qualifications.
- Managers do not take effective actions to improve learners' attendance; attendance data is unreliable and therefore not routinely analysed. Attendance in classes is too low and this affects the progress and achievement of learners.
- Too many learners make slow progress in their learning and in the acquisition of new skills. Teachers' planning is weak and is too focused on the completion of tasks rather than on the development of learners' skills and knowledge. For example, in level 3 accountancy classes, teachers plan to meet the needs of the most-able learners through the completion of a greater volume of work rather than by developing more advanced skills. However, in a minority of ESOL classes, teachers plan carefully to meet learners' needs, they reinforce key terminology effectively and learners develop transferable skills very well.
- Teachers do not provide sufficiently detailed written feedback for learners with enough information to help them improve their work. Teachers' feedback is often absent or made up of ticks. In a minority of cases, teachers over-praise learners, leading to learners not understanding their true levels of achievement. For example, in the portfolios of workplace learners, teachers' feedback on learners' work identifies that they have met the required criteria but fails to provide developmental guidance on how to improve further. However, in a minority of classes, such as those for supporting teaching and learning, teachers' feedback identifies what learners have done well and what they need to do to improve their work.
- Managers' curriculum planning for the delivery of English and mathematics for adult learners is poor. Too many classes include learners working towards a wide range of levels, often in English and mathematics. Tutors fail to meet the individual needs of all learners. Learners spend too much time completing worksheets independently and not enough time developing skills for life and work, such as speaking, listening, problem solving and team working.
- Teachers' target setting and their monitoring of learners' progress in lessons and over time are weak. For example, in many lessons, learners work through activities at their own pace and record what they have completed rather than working towards specific targets that are challenging, ambitious and relevant to their starting points. As a result, learners make slow progress.
- The management of adult provision is weak. Management information is inaccurate and unreliable; as a result, managers are unable to identify correctly areas of poor performance and do not take the appropriate actions to improve the provision. For example, an ESOL learner who has not attended for seven weeks was not highlighted as at risk of not achieving, using the new college tracking system. Plans are in place to address this for next year but the current cohort of learners will not benefit from these changes.
- Managers use well effective partnerships with employers, the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus, subcontractors and local labour market intelligence to develop the curriculum to meet the needs of the community and employers. For example, vocational programmes delivered through the subcontractor, Willowdene, provide ex-offenders and learners with a history of substance misuse with the opportunity to learn new skills and to re-engage with the community. Targeted sector-based work academies enable learners to develop the valuable skills needed to apply for local job vacancies.

- Currently approximately 2,200 apprentices are on programmes in eight subject areas. However, managers are unable to identify accurately the number of apprentices due to unreliable management information. The largest subject areas are: business, administration, finance and law; health, public services and care; engineering and manufacturing; and retail and commercial enterprise. Based on the best available information, approximately 20% are aged 16 to 18, 25% are aged 19 to 23, and the remainder are aged over 24. A very small minority of the provision is subcontracted to two providers.
- Trainers, assessors and managers do not monitor apprentices' progress rigorously. The majority of apprentices make slow progress and do not complete their programmes within the planned duration. The lack of accurate and reliable management information means staff do not intervene effectively to support apprentices to succeed. Managers have very recently introduced more effective tracking systems but these have yet to have a positive impact on the progress of current apprentices.
- Assessors' planning of apprenticeship programmes is ineffective. Managers do not ensure that the learning plans produced by assessors contain appropriate, timely targets for each part of apprentices' programmes to enable them to complete all aspects of their framework within the agreed timescale and to develop and apply the skills they require at the earliest opportunity. For example, too many apprentices in business administration and customer services complete functional skills qualifications too late in their apprenticeship programme, and often after the planned time.
- Assessors set too few challenging targets to encourage apprentices to make good progress. Too often targets lack detail and focus on the collection of assessment evidence, instead of assisting apprentices to plan and maximise their learning in the workplace. In too many cases assessors do not provide apprentices with sufficiently detailed guidance to help them complete their qualification by building on their knowledge and experience in a timely manner. For example, assessors set generic goals for apprentices in all areas, such as to complete functional skills and full qualifications, rather than agreeing specific staged and detailed targets that enable them to work towards achieving their qualifications.
- Assessors' expectations of apprentices are too low. Staff do not challenge apprentices sufficiently to consistently produce written work of an appropriate standard. They do not provide enough feedback to help apprentices to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Assessors provide insufficient impartial careers advice to enable most apprentices to plan appropriate further training to develop beyond their current role. However, apprentices in sectors with well-established training progression routes, such as engineering, are well supported by assessors and employers to plan further learning. For example, engineering apprentices have clear career plans at the start of their course and already intend to undertake higher-level study to enhance their technical skills and employability.
- Staff do not sufficiently reinforce apprentices' understanding of safeguarding, British values, equality and diversity and the risks of radicalisation and extremism throughout their programme or when conducting progress reviews.
- Managers have recently identified weaknesses in assessment and have now implemented a number of improvements. Assessors now assess apprentices' work with appropriate rigour and accuracy. Current apprentices now benefit from assessors' accurate recognition of their competence. However, these changes have not yet had sufficient impact on the progress apprentices make.
- Most assessors coach apprentices well in the workplace, supporting them to develop good workplace skills and knowledge. For example, a business administration apprentice developed a good understanding of presentation software with the support of her assessor. Staff promote health and safety well during training sessions to equip apprentices with good safe working practices.
- Apprentices enjoy effective off-the-job training where teachers support apprentices well to develop good practical skills and technical knowledge. For example, engineering apprentices work confidently at the college to develop good-quality machining skills that enable them to produce high-quality components and describe how they will further improve their work. Apprentices' attendance at off-the-job training is too low in a minority of lessons. For example, apprentices in one highways maintenance lesson left part-way through the day as they were insufficiently prepared and did not have the appropriate personal protective equipment to enable them to participate in practical tasks. They missed important practical training as a result.
- Apprentices develop good employability skills and confidence which enable them to make a valuable contribution to the workplace and, for a few, to take on additional responsibilities. For example, one warehousing apprentice, in addition to his standard duties, has extra responsibilities at work including developing service costings, dealing with difficult clients and planning work for colleagues. Assessors and managers engage well with employers to design apprenticeships that enable apprentices to make a good contribution to their businesses. Most apprentices go on to gain sustained employment after completing their programmes.

- The college currently has 83 learners in receipt of high-needs funding, with complex needs, significant intellectual or cognitive impairments or difficulties such as physical disabilities, sensory impairment or a severe medical condition. Of these, 21 follow mainstream vocational courses across the college at level 1 to level 3, 39 study on foundation learning programmes at entry level or level 1, and 23 attend the full-time specialist programme for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Staff have high expectations for their learners and have well-established commissioning and contract systems in place with six local authorities around the country. The college makes good use of its high-needs funding to provide high levels of effective support and to develop personalised learning programmes. Consequently, the majority of learners progressing into higher-level courses become more independent, and reduce their need for support in lessons.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum with clear and appropriate learning pathways. The new purpose-built centre has helped to successfully integrate 23 learners with severe and profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities into full-time dedicated specialist provision. Plans are in place to introduce part-time provision in the near future. The choice of accreditation, together with good access to impartial advice, helps learners to progress towards further learning, vocational training, supported employment and independent living. The number of high-needs learners who join foundation learning and mainstream vocational programmes continues to increase; learners are clear about their progression pathways.
- The college provides highly effective support and works very successfully with health and social care professionals, parents and carers to help learners to achieve effective transition into college life and develop a range of useful skills that prepare them for independence and adulthood. Staff use their expertise well to help learners to progress. Staff work closely with a wide range of external agencies and professionals to provide highly effective support, such as sensory inclusion, sign language interpreters, speech and language therapy, medical care, and support for mental health. Consequently, learners with very significant social, emotional and behavioural issues and complex medical needs remain on courses and make good progress.
- The large majority of learners make good progress during their lessons. They participate well in stimulating and well-paced activities that match their experiences and interests well. Learners develop a range of life and vocational skills, improve their social and communication skills and increase independence. Most high-needs learners progress to higher-level courses and achieve their core learning aims. Learners with severe sensory impairment make effective use of the wide range of high-quality assistive technologies to aid their progress, such as tablet computers with voice recognition technology, electronic magnifier or zoom-text software. Learners with very complex needs enjoy developing a range of life skills in the newly established discrete provision and those on foundation programmes make good progress during lessons.
- Learners participate in high-quality and individually tailored learning programmes that help them build confidence and independence. They engage well with extra-curricular activities such as the lunchtime club in which they debate current affairs and enjoy competing in quizzes. Learners build their confidence and aspirations. A small minority access supported internships, voluntary work or part-time paid employment.
- Learners develop their skills in English and mathematics well. Those studying on level 2 and level 3 mainstream vocational courses produce good-quality work and develop vocationally relevant terminology well. Those on entry-level and level 1 courses make good progress in reading and spelling and in completing calculations in everyday contexts. Most who study functional skills courses achieve the qualification.
- Learners are safe and feel safe in their inclusive learning environment. They behave well, respect staff and others, and understand how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
- Although the initial stages of assessment are thorough and staff monitor learner progress well, teachers do not routinely use the findings from assessment well enough when planning lessons on mainstream and foundation learning programmes. On a few of these programmes, teachers do not focus sufficiently on planning and target setting with support staff and learners, and do not take enough account of the needs of individual learners. As a result, teachers do not systematically set sufficiently challenging work for the most-able learners to help them to make the progress of which they are capable.

Provider details

| | |
|--|--|
| Type of provider | General further education college |
| Age range of learners | 16+ |
| Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year | 19,500 |
| Principal/CEO | Jo Lomax (interim principal) |
| Website address | www.tcat.ac.uk |

Provider information at the time of the inspection

| Main course or learning programme level | Level 1 or below | | Level 2 | | Level 3 | | Level 4 and above | |
|---|--|-------|-----------------|-------|---------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ |
| Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships) | 283 | 1,830 | 562 | 3,501 | 504 | 221 | 1 | 37 |
| Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Higher | | | |
| | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | 16-18 | 19+ | | |
| | 364 | 1,408 | 162 | 923 | 0 | 131 | | |
| Number of traineeships | 16-19 | | 19+ | | Total | | | |
| | 6 | | 0 | | 6 | | | |
| Number of learners aged 14-16 | 0 | | | | | | | |
| Number of high-needs learners | 83 | | | | | | | |
| Funding received from | Education Funding Agency (EFA) Skills Funding Agency (SFA) | | | | | | | |
| At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plato ■ JN Bentley ■ Willowdene ■ QTS | | | | | | | |

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Denise Olander, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| William Baidoe Ansah | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Russ Henry | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Maggie Fobister | Ofsted Inspector |
| Sarah McGrath | Ofsted Inspector |
| Marinette Bazin | Ofsted Inspector |
| Bryan Davies | Ofsted Inspector |
| Jason Lancaster | Ofsted Inspector |
| Tony Day | Ofsted Inspector |

The above team was assisted by the director of quality and higher education, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk

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