

Ada National College for Digital Skills

Further education provider

Inspection dates

9–12 October 2018

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Learners and apprentices make good progress, quickly learn new skills in computer science and acquire a good breadth of knowledge of the digital technology industries.
- Learners receive excellent careers guidance and a very high proportion of learners who complete their course successfully move on to the next level of education, training or jobs in the sector.
- Senior leaders and governors are relentless in their ambitions to establish the National College for Digital Skills as a sector leader in its field.
- Governors and senior leaders have successfully focused on raising participation rates among women and those from deprived backgrounds in digital skills training.
- Leaders, managers, governors and staff have been highly successful in involving a wide range of employers in designing the curriculum and in providing work placements and professional coaches to learners, to ensure that the programmes comprehensively address the needs of industry.
- Teachers are highly experienced and enthusiastic and use their industry knowledge to motivate learners and provide valuable insights into the world of work.
- Apprentices make a significant contribution to their employing companies, many of which are prestigious ones.
- Teachers use the high standard of teaching resources well to engage students.
- For the first cohort of study programme learners, too few stayed to the end of the course.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ada, The National College for Digital Skills (Ada) is one of five new 'national colleges' established by the government. The college is named after Ada Lovelace, a nineteenth-century pioneer of computers and programming. The founders chose the name to emphasise their desire to promote and develop learners' interest in digital industries, and to attract more women into the profession, as they are under-represented in the industry.
- The college operates out of two campuses in Tottenham Hale and Wood Green in north-east London. Managers recruited the first learners onto a two-year level 3 study programme in September 2016, and the first cohort of level 4 apprentices in May 2017. The first cohort of learners on study programmes completed their programmes in the summer of 2018. At the time of the inspection, the first cohort of apprentices were in the final few months of their programme, and starting to prepare for their end-point assessment.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- To improve teaching, learning and assessment further, leaders and managers need to ensure that:
 - teachers take better account of the different skills and knowledge that learners have at the beginning of their programme, and ensure that learners receive tasks that are suitably challenging
 - teachers improve their skills in using strategies to deepen learners' understanding of topics
 - teachers promote equality and diversity better in lessons.
- Ensure that all apprentices have frequent reviews and that assessors accurately monitor and record apprentices' acquisition of workplace skills and behaviours.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders and governors have successfully achieved their aspiration to establish a specialist college for digital skills. They have also fulfilled their goal to recruit learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and to recruit more females to study for a career in the computer science industry. They have deliberately chosen to locate the college in an area of significant deprivation in London and have overcome substantial challenges to find suitable premises.
- Managers have taken effective action to increase participation and to overcome early difficulties, which led to poor retention of learners in the early stages of the study programme. Through an extensive programme of schools liaison, they have started to attract learners from across London for the sixth-form provision, and have recruited a high proportion of learners from the most deprived areas.
- Quality assurance processes are good. Senior leaders and governors correctly recognise the strengths and the key areas for improvement of the organisation, and the challenges they face as they grow. Managers have started to implement suitable actions to address weaknesses in the quality of provision. It is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these actions.
- Senior leaders meet their requirements to provide learners with impartial careers advice exceptionally well. Managers have a particularly innovative approach to work experience and careers guidance for those on study programmes. This reflects their core focus on enabling learners to develop an in-depth understanding of the industry.
- Managers monitor staff performance effectively. All staff have performance targets linked to the college's objectives. Managers have taken appropriate action to address any underperformance of teachers. Managers provide a suitable programme of staff development in response to need.
- Most learners on the study programme who have not previously gained a grade 4 or better in GCSE English and/or mathematics make good progress and successfully achieve these qualifications. In addition, teachers encourage those learners who have already attained a qualification at level 2 in mathematics, to take core mathematics at level 3.
- All members of staff contribute to an ethos across Ada that positively encourages diversity and is welcoming and friendly. Teachers do not tolerate any bullying or discriminatory behaviour. Members of staff support vulnerable learners well, including the small number of learners with education, health and care plans. These learners make good progress.
- Managers have secured high-quality accommodation, equipped with industry-standard equipment. Staff use these well to prepare learners appropriately for the digital skills industry.
- Managers are right to recognise that they need to do more to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are of a consistently high standard on study programmes. They have recently developed a new teaching and learning policy that includes reviews of teachers, peer observations and weekly opportunities for learners to talk about any

concerns. This has not yet had time to bring about significant improvement in rectifying the identified pockets of weakness.

- Managers of the study programme provision have not been able to evaluate the overall progress of learners, because they have not captured learners' starting points in sufficient detail. New arrangements are in place for the new cohort of learners, but it is too early to evaluate their impact.

The governance of the provider

- Governance is highly effective. Members of the governing body have a wealth of highly relevant experience and knowledge of the industry. In response to a recent audit, new appointments have strengthened the educational skillset of the board.
- Since the inception of the college, governors have provided clear strategic and financial oversight. They have supported leaders and helped to steer the college at various stages of its development. They have also added significant value in establishing and strengthening employer links. Governors were influential in helping to attract essential start-up funding for the college.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers have put in place relevant policies and procedures. They provide a suitable range of training to staff, which covers safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values. Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment procedures and maintain an up-to-date single central register, which covers all staff and employment coaches. Managers check all apprenticeship employers to ensure that apprentices are in a suitable and safe environment.
- Staff provide learners with relevant key information on safety and welfare at induction. Teachers reinforce this, primarily through the programme of personal, social and health education. Learners say that they feel safe and have a strong awareness of cyber security. The police have been involved in briefing learners about local safety. However, an early cohort of apprentices does not have sufficient recollection of safeguarding arrangements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Managers and teachers create a purposeful learning environment, in which learners and apprentices enjoy their studies and make good progress. Learners are punctual and apply themselves diligently, both in scheduled lessons and personal study time.
- In most lessons, teachers design tasks well to develop learners' curiosity and deepen their conceptual understanding. Teachers plan and deliver most theory lessons well to ensure that learners develop the ability to understand complex problems and apply problem-solving techniques effectively. For example, mathematics learners critique and identify solutions to various geometrical challenges.
- Teachers plan and arrange assessments on study programmes diligently, to ensure

learners develop the skills needed to perform well in practical and written assignments. Teachers track and record learners' progress accurately. However, teachers are occasionally too vague in identifying clear targets or timescales for improvement.

- Teachers set work frequently and they assess and return it in a timely manner. Teachers prepare learners well for examinations and provide additional revision sessions for those who wish to increase their grade. On occasions, feedback to learners does not provide sufficient clarity on next steps, or correction of grammatical errors.
- Teachers on study programmes have good industrial expertise and teaching qualifications. Managers encourage teachers to keep up to date with their professional and vocational skills through the college's employer network and by participating in national technology events. All apprenticeship trainers are current industry practitioners.
- Teachers and trainers use imaginative teaching methods to develop learners' autonomy and self-confidence. For example, on apprenticeships, trainers encourage apprentices to research independently or work together with peers to find solutions, rather than being dependent on trainers to provide the answers.
- Occasionally in lessons, teachers do not challenge learners when their responses to questions are relatively superficial. At times, they pose general questions to the whole group rather than testing a learner's insight and understanding of a topic. As a result, teachers do not test sufficiently whether all learners deepen their knowledge or understanding.
- Learners on study programmes display a basic awareness of equality, diversity and British values. However, teachers do not regularly promote a better understanding of these issues in lessons.
- Assessors do not capture sufficient detail about the progress apprentices make in developing their skills and behaviours. As a result, apprentices are, on occasions, not fully clear about their priorities for development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Leaders and managers have skilfully used their outstanding links with employers to design study and apprenticeship programmes to address the specialist needs of the industry, and to meet the developmental needs of the learners. They structure the programmes highly effectively to help ensure that all learners prepare extremely well for employment and the world of work.
- All learners arrive promptly and suitably equipped for lessons. They are highly motivated and actively engage in lesson activities. Learners demonstrate highly professional attitudes and behaviour. They are committed and enthusiastic and work hard in lessons.
- Learners develop excellent knowledge in their specialist field of digital skills. Staff create excellent opportunities for all learners to develop a broad range of wider skills such as independence and team-working, presentational skills and problem-solving. Learners enjoy and benefit from this range of approaches.
- All learners receive excellent industry-related guidance and experience. Apprentices work for high-profile companies in the digital industries. Study programme learners

have multiple opportunities to take part in projects designed and influenced by professionals from industry. Each learner also receives dedicated one-to-one support and guidance from a professional mentor. This creates invaluable opportunities for each learner to gain unique insights into job opportunities and the world of work, specifically customised to their own particular interests.

- Learners on study programmes receive excellent careers advice and guidance. Teachers make learners aware of the full range of options available to them on completion of their course, including how to progress to university, secure placements on apprenticeship programmes, or move on to the world of work.
- Learners on study programmes take part in an extensive programme of personal, social and health education and develop a deep insight into themes such as mental health and well-being. They also take part in a good range of clubs and extra-curricular activities such as yoga, badminton, board games and basketball. They thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to spend a modest amount of time each week engaging in leisure activities, as part of their broader personal development.
- Learners who need to take GCSE English and/or mathematics qualifications as part of their study programme receive good support to maximise their chances of achieving a high grade.
- Learners feel safe and are aware of how to keep safe. They also know about internet safety, and potential risks associated with the misuse of social media. Learners know whom to go to when they have concerns about their safety or welfare.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners on study programmes make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. In the first year of the study programme, a significant minority of learners withdrew and did not proceed to the second year of the course. Teachers and managers provided support and guidance to those learners who decided to leave, to assist them to identify suitable alternative education and training that met their needs better. Managers analysed and identified the reasons for this low retention. As a result, they strengthened the selection and recruitment process of learners. Staff now ensure that learners have the appropriate abilities and interests to succeed on the course. As a result, nearly all the learners who remain on the programme make good progress.
- In 2018, study programme learners made good progress, and all learners who completed the programme achieved their vocational qualifications in computer science. In addition, most learners who took A-level examinations alongside their vocational courses were successful.
- No apprentices have been on their programme long enough to take the end-point assessment. Nearly all the apprentices who started the programme remain on course to achieve. The vast majority of apprentices make very good progress on the foundation degree they take alongside their apprenticeship. Many learners produce work of a merit and distinction standard. They acquire the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to carry out their roles competently. As a result, several apprentices have already converted their 'fixed-term' apprenticeship contract with their employers into permanent contracts.

- On completion of their study programme, a very high proportion of learners move on to the next level of their education or training, or to a job in the digital skills industry. In 2018, the majority of learners progressed to university, but a significant minority progressed to a higher-level apprenticeship programme, often gaining employment with high-profile employers.
- Most learners on study programmes who take GCSE English and mathematics qualifications achieve a grade 4 or better in these subjects by the time they complete their study programme.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The college has approximately 130 learners on study programmes, all of whom study at level 3. All learners study for a diploma or extended diploma in computer science. Many take one or two A levels alongside their diploma, from a selection of related subjects including mathematics, physics, graphic communication and business studies. The curriculum meets the principles of the 16 to 19 study programme.
- Teachers plan and deliver teaching, learning and assessment skilfully and to a high standard. Learners grow in confidence, make good progress and develop a broad range of useful specialist skills.
- Teachers provide very clear practical guidance and verbal feedback to learners. Learners know what teachers expect of them. In a small minority of instances, learners do not receive sufficient guidance on how to identify and correct errors in their written and spoken language. As a result, commonly occurring errors in spelling and punctuation remain evident in learners' work.
- Teachers successfully encourage learners to develop their wider skills, such as communication, independent working, initiative and teamwork. For example, teachers instruct learners to work in small teams to plan and deliver a media project to share at the college assembly. Learners work enthusiastically and creatively towards completing this task.
- Teachers frequently adopt a peer-learning approach, when they advise less confident learners to glean information on a topic from more assured and knowledgeable members of the group. This helps encourage a strong sense of support and sharing of ideas between group members. It also helps to ensure that all learners develop their insight and confidence.
- Staff track learners' progress and evaluate their performance frequently. However, they do not always identify individual learners' starting points in enough detail. Teachers focus their attention effectively on those learners who are less confident and who make slower progress. This helps to ensure that all learners achieve their potential.
- Teachers deliver a high-quality programme of personal, social and health education. This helps learners to extend their understanding of a range of current topics, such as staying safe and conditions related to mental health. Teachers do not maximise opportunities to broaden learners' understanding of equality and diversity and the significance of these themes in the digital sector.

- Learners have excellent opportunities to develop insights into their chosen industry and develop valuable work-related skills. They gain this insight from a range of strategies such as partaking in live industry-led projects, attending topical presentations, mentoring from industry professionals, and work placements. Learners also receive intensive support and careers guidance, which inform their future career and higher education options. On completion of their study programme, most learners move on to suitable apprenticeships or to higher education courses.
- Learners feel very safe at college and have a good understanding of how to keep safe in the wider community. For example, they learn from representatives of the local police how to travel safely around the local area. Not enough learners are fully aware of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation early enough in the course.

Apprenticeships

Good

- The college has approximately 125 adult apprentices. A wide range of companies, predominantly in London, employ them. All these companies use digital technologies as a core component of their business. All apprentices work towards a level 4 apprenticeship in digital skills. They also take a level 5 foundation degree in digital innovation alongside their apprenticeship. The apprenticeship programme meets the principles and requirements of apprenticeship standards.
- Representatives from high-profile, prestigious employers were closely involved in planning and developing the new apprenticeship. Consequently, the skills apprentices develop meet employers' needs.
- The trainers who work with the apprentices have very good experience of their specialist sector. They set challenging and ambitious work-based projects and support apprentices well to design and create technical solutions to business problems. Trainers develop apprentices' programming and independent learning skills particularly well, by using very effective teaching methods. For example, if apprentices struggle with a programming problem, trainers encourage them to research a solution themselves. They then seek advice from peers and finally ask their trainers. This results in apprentices developing good skills in researching solutions, fostering mutual support and solving problems.
- In the workplace, trainers, assessors and managers ensure that apprentices take on relevant tasks so that apprentices can develop the right skills. For example, an apprentice working for an investment management company used a programming solution to analyse and report on data derived from different trading platforms. This helped inform monthly reporting. Due to the success of this project, the company now uses the solution more widely.
- Apprentices develop communication, business and entrepreneurial skills well. For example, they develop their organisational skills, learn how to work well in teams, improve their business language in emails and develop presentation skills. These are all skills that they then use with increasing effect in the workplace.
- Apprentices feel safe. They behave in a respectful and professional manner. They are clear about the progress they make in acquiring the underpinning knowledge through the foundation degree component of their programme.

- Assessors carry out frequent performance reviews of apprentices' progress in the workplace. However, they do not maintain sufficiently detailed progress records, particularly in relation to the development of work-related skills and behaviours.
- Apprentices who have joined recently have a good understanding of British values and are aware of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation. However, apprentices who joined in 2017 often struggle to recall their knowledge of these issues in any detail.
- While apprentices have an adequate understanding and appreciation of safeguarding, a minority of apprentices are not fully conversant with the college's approaches and systems associated with safeguarding. Assessors do not reinforce apprentices' understanding of safeguarding sufficiently when assessing in the workplace.

Provider details

Unique reference number	143540
Type of provider	Further education provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	173
Principal/CEO	Mark Smith
Telephone number	0203 1050 125
Website	www.ada.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	129	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	3							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and telephone calls 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.

Inspection team

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Joyce Deere	Ofsted Inspector
Darrell Bate	Ofsted Inspector
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