

Inspection of The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure

Inspection dates:

5–8 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Inadequate
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure (NCATI) is an independent further education college. It was formerly known as the National College for High-Speed Rail. The college admitted its first apprentices in autumn 2017. In July 2019, the college changed its name to the NCATI to reflect a broader remit encompassing other forms of transport and infrastructure. The college has two campuses, one located in Birmingham and the other in Doncaster.

At the time of inspection, NCATI had 167 apprentices on roll, most being adults. All are working towards a range of standards-based apprenticeships. The large majority of apprentices are working towards level 4 qualifications in vocational specialisms such as rail and systems engineering, civil engineering and command control and communications. A very small minority of apprentices are studying at level 3 in subjects such as train driving, rolling stock maintenance, and signalling. A few apprentices are enrolled on a level 5 apprenticeship in operations management. In addition, a further 20 adult learners are enrolled on an access qualification. NCATI also operates three higher education courses, which are outside of Ofsted's remit to inspect.

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

Managers and staff do not act quickly enough to protect apprentices from harassment. They do not ensure that apprentices receive the help, protection and support that they need.

Trainers across a range of technical disciplines do not effectively plan and coordinate learning at NCATI with that occurring in the workplace. This results in many apprentices experiencing a disconnected and poor learning experience.

Most employers provide valuable, comprehensive on-the-job training for their apprentices that enables them to develop the essential vocational skills, knowledge and behaviours to become valued employees. However, college trainers are rarely involved in such matters. In many instances, college-based staff do not ensure that off-the-job training is closely linked to or synchronised with that occurring in the workplace.

Apprentices do not receive detailed or informative guidance on the expectations and demands of their course. The large majority of apprentices are unaware of their target grades for end-point assessment. In addition, apprentices do not have a precise understanding of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve merit or distinction grades for their qualification. Of the few apprentices who have graduated to date, all achieved in the planned time and gained permanent employment, but too many achieved only a 'pass' in the assessed element of their course.

Apprentices in rail, civil engineering, and signalling and control do not receive frequent or prompt feedback on their assignments or on the progress that they make. As a result, they do not know how to improve their work or make rapid progress. In contrast, the few adult learners on access courses and the small number of apprentices studying at level 5 in operational development management routinely receive good-quality feedback on what they do well and what they need to do to improve.

Apprentices value the quality of specialist facilities and resources at the college, which closely reflect the type of equipment that they use in the workplace.

Adult learners on the access course gain valuable knowledge that enables them to consolidate and refresh existing skills, and so enhance their career prospects. A high proportion move on to a range of positive destinations. However, the proportion who successfully complete their course is too low.

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

While trainers accurately assess apprentices' and learners' starting points in relation to English and mathematics, they do not use the information well enough to ensure that they can tackle gaps in their knowledge and understanding. As a result,

knowledge and skills deficits in these essential elements remain for a small minority of apprentices and learners.

The planning of learning in mathematics for engineering apprentices studying at level 4 is weak. Essential learning related to mathematics and its application to engineering, scientific and technical principles is taught too late in apprentices' learning programmes to aid their knowledge and understanding. As a result, too many apprentices have to attend additional revision classes to catch up and re-learn essential mathematical principles required for their qualification.

Trainers do not routinely use the full range of information obtained through assessments of apprentices' skills at the beginning of their courses to plan and order learning effectively. In rail, civil engineering, and signalling pathways, trainers' assessments of apprentices' starting points do not routinely take into account their prior qualifications, or what they can already do.

On technical-based apprenticeship courses, too many apprentices experience a disjointed and insufficiently ordered curriculum. Managers and trainers do not plan off-the-job training well enough. For example, apprentices in practical engineering roles, such as locomotive maintenance and repair, do not receive training in engineering skills such as hand-fitting and machining that they need in the workplace. Employers often provide this training themselves to fill this skills gap. As a result, apprentices are not always able to carry out practical roles at work as quickly as they should.

The planning of external presentations delivered by industry experts on high-speed rail and building information modelling to level 4 apprentices is not consistently well coordinated or scheduled. Trainers do not ensure that the timing of these presentations is suitably planned or synchronised with the technical modules that apprentices are working towards. This has a negative impact on apprentices' preparation for their coursework and is an example of why they make slow progress.

Technical trainers are not sufficiently adept at planning and delivering challenging learning that enables apprentices to make assured progress in their skills development. Too often, planned tasks and activities are the same for all, irrespective of the knowledge and skills they have already gained. As a result, more experienced technical apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable. In addition, trainers do not set precise short- and medium-term targets that enable apprentices to measure their attainment of new skills or evaluate the effectiveness of their learning towards end-point assessment.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from the oral feedback that they receive during planned learning activities. They respond well to these critical learning points, using them to consolidate and deepen their understanding of topics and concepts. However, written feedback – particularly for apprentices at level 4 in technical subjects – is not fully effective in helping them understand what they need to do to improve their work. In contrast, management apprentices benefit from detailed and well-structured comments from their trainers.

A small minority of apprentices do not always get enough time in their workplace to complete assignment work. Deadlines set by tutors for the submission of coursework often overlap and clash with the next planned blocks of teaching. As a result, these apprentices struggle to cope with the conflicting demands and pressures of learning and the requirements of the individual job role. In addition, too often, trainers in technical pathways do not mark and return apprentices' assignment work promptly, which further delays their progress and adds to their anxiety.

Although leaders at NCATI have taken steps to provide apprentices and learners with access to careers guidance and have employed suitably qualified and experienced staff in this area, few learners and apprentices know how to access this support. As a result, current apprentices and adult learners do not receive sufficiently effective advice and guidance about the options available to them.

Too few adult learners participate in a broad curriculum which extends beyond the narrow requirements of their qualification. This restricts learners' opportunities to understand and explore their wider interests and needs linked to their future career ambitions. Leaders at NCATI have suitable plans to address this, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of planned actions.

Leaders and governors do not use management systems well enough to inform performance and focus on improvements, including the performance of subcontractors. As a result, leaders and governors do not have a clear enough picture of learners' and apprentices' performance and do not set challenging targets to support improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Managers and staff do not act quickly enough to address safeguarding concerns when they are brought to their attention. While leaders have ensured that all staff receive suitable training in safeguarding practices and the 'Prevent' duty, some do not apply this training to contribute to a culture of watchful vigilance and effective safeguarding practice.

During a recent safeguarding incident, trainers and managers failed to recognise or take effective action to address the harmful impact of harassment being experienced by an apprentice while attending the college. Staff did not prioritise the welfare and safeguarding needs of the apprentice over the needs of others in the class.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that staff adhere to or follow internal procedures set out in the organisation's safeguarding policies. Information detailed in the safeguarding records, including the single central register, as presented to inspectors during the inspection, was inaccurate.

Leaders, including the designated safeguarding officer, do not undertake suitable checks to assure themselves of the effectiveness of internal safeguarding arrangements when concerns are raised.

As a result of ineffective arrangements for safeguarding, the learning environment within the provider does not support the appropriate development of apprentices' and learners' behaviour and attitudes.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Take urgent action to ensure that leaders and staff implement the principles underpinning effective safeguarding practice across the organisation. Ensure that the single central register is complete and routine checks are undertaken to assure its accuracy.
- Ensure that all trainers use the information they have about what apprentices and learners already know and can do to plan a programme of learning that will allow them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Rapidly improve the planning and coordination of apprentices' on- and off-the-job training so that it supports the development of their technical and vocational skills, and their progress towards achievement. Prioritise the early delivery of mathematics training for level 4 engineering apprentices.
- Provide all apprentices with detailed and precise guidance on the requirements and expectations associated with end-point assessment and details of their individual target grades.
- Ensure that leaders and managers have the information they need to evaluate performance and take prompt and effective action to make improvements. The board should set challenging targets for leaders to improve the provision as a matter of urgency.
- Ensure that all learners and apprentices are provided with detailed, ongoing information, advice and guidance that help them to raise their aspirations and plan their next steps in learning and careers.
- Managers and teachers should make sure that all adult learners benefit from access to a broad curriculum that is linked to their career needs and interests; managers should monitor the suitability and quality of this systematically.

Provider details

Unique reference number	144789
Address	2 Lister Street Birmingham B7 4AG
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Website	www.ncait.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Ms Clair Mowbray
Provider type	Further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Sr Supply Chain Consultants Limited Alstom Transport UK Limited London College of Business and Law Limited Leeds College of Building National Training Academy for Rail

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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 observing 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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