

Bradford College

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: General further education college

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Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Information about the provider

Bradford College is a large general further education college serving the City of Bradford in West Yorkshire. At the time of the visit, there were 2,978 16- to 19-year-old learners on study programmes, 1,676 learners on adult learning programmes, and 155 for whom the college receives high-needs funding. There were 415 apprentices aged 16 to 18 and a further 603 apprentices aged 19 and above. A network of nine subcontractors delivers adult learning programmes in addition to the college's many programmes in English for speakers of other languages. A large number of apprenticeships are delivered by a wholly owned subsidiary of the college.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Leaders, managers and teachers believe that they have responded quickly to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Leaders have adapted the way in which the curriculum is delivered by setting requirements for all departments to deliver at least a third of their programme online. Staff have confidence that the adaptation to online learning is a positive development and something they are likely to continue.

Leaders and governors recognise the challenges of delivering online learning and have diverted finances to invest in computer equipment, infrastructure and software to prepare college staff for the unprecedented demand for online learning.

Governors have encouraged leaders to continue to develop their relationships with stakeholders during the pandemic. Leaders believe that they have strengthened partnerships to improve their ability to meet future skills needs. They have continued to work with sector bodies to develop a curriculum that supports developments in the hybrid transport and mobility sector.

Leaders and managers have supported vulnerable learners to return to college. Learners aged 14 to 16 and learners with high needs attended college for two weeks before other learners so they could settle into the new environment. The local authority confirms that it values this approach to supporting council priorities.

Leaders and managers recognise the challenge that the pandemic has presented in delaying learners' assessment. Managers brought learners and apprentices into the college for assessment in small, subject-defined cohorts. They believe that this approach has helped learners and apprentices to catch up with missed learning and assessments.

Employers believe that learners and apprentices have continued to develop their knowledge during the period when colleges were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions. They value the speed at which college and subcontractor staff switched learning online to respond to learners' and apprentices' needs. For example, dentistry apprentices who were placed on furlough by their employers continued their learning online and were given extra time to repeat and reinforce their learning.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Leaders and managers outlined the ways in which they have supported staff to adapt to online learning, including those who had previously been resistant to this approach. Leaders gave examples of how staff have supported each other to develop their skills in online teaching. Several teachers cited examples of the support that they have received and said that they feel more confident in the use of technology to support learning. Leaders have made links with other educational institutions and sector organisations to offer further specialist staff development in the delivery of online learning.

Staff are confident that they have systems in place that allow them to see whether learners are participating in online learning sessions. However, they realise that this does not necessarily mean that learners are learning new things. Staff have plans in place to check learners' progress over the coming weeks. They recognise that this is something that they will need to test more rigorously in future to ensure that learners make sustained progress.

Leaders and managers have adapted practical workshops to allow greater spacing among learners and apprentices. Over the summer, staff prioritised the return of learners and apprentices who needed to complete assessments. Managers and staff in early years, health and social care, and construction have brought forward assessment of practical skills where possible to help minimise the impact of any future COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders, managers and teachers changed their approach to careers advice and guidance during the COVID-19 restrictions so that learners benefited from the same

level of advice and guidance but in a different format. For example, staff filmed curriculum areas so that learners could see the practical environments virtually rather than visiting in person.

Staff provided remote opportunities for learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills during the recruitment process. Learners in music demonstrated their technical skills virtually in video calls with their tutor.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Leaders and managers described their approach to risk assessment to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and learners during the pandemic. This included adaptations to how college buildings are used. Learners and apprentices who have returned to college are aware of the new protocols to help reduce the spread of the virus. They believe that the procedures introduced by staff have helped to make them feel safe in college.

Staff explained how they consider individual learners' needs when putting support in place. They have received training on how to promote learners' and apprentices' well-being during the pandemic. They completed training on how to identify mental health concerns and how to recognise signs of domestic violence. Staff say that they know what to do when faced with these situations.

Learners and apprentices completed a full induction before being allowed into the college. They have completed training on how to stay safe online in learning and more widely, such as when using social media.

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