

# Dudley College of Technology

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130475

**Name of lead inspector:** Richard Deane HMI

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**Type of provider:** General further education college

**Address:** The Broadway  
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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/or 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

Dudley College of Technology is a large general further education college, which operates in Dudley and Brierley Hill. The majority of learners who attend the college live in the boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell and the wider region of the Black Country. At the time of inspection, there were 4,891 learners on education programmes for young people, 2,072 adult learners, 2,477 apprentices following apprenticeship frameworks and standards-based programmes, and 150 learners in receipt of high-needs funding. More than 50% of young people study programmes at level 3. Of the apprentices, 67% study at level 3 or above. Recent growth at the college has been in subjects such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

### **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 staff report that they reacted quickly to the college closing as a result of COVID-19, moving most classroom teaching online. Leaders supported staff to adapt their practice by creating a wide range of online support days for them to use technology for teaching, including pedagogy for online teaching. Although successfully engaging with most learners, leaders say that there remained a minority of young and adult learners who struggled in accessing and using electronic devices for learning.

Leaders worked with governors to plan a return to 'business as usual'. Governors worked with managers on areas such as staff training, risk management and technology for learning.

Leaders collaborated with the West Midlands combined authority and employers to adapt the curriculum to meet local skills needs. They created a range of online provision for adults including warehousing, engineering, accounts and computer-aided design. They also maintained supported internships for learners who have high needs.

In September 2020, leaders recognised that learners might have significant gaps in their learning due to disruption of their previous course of study. They introduced a six-week induction to check thoroughly learners' starting points and ensure that – if necessary – they would be able to transfer to the most appropriate course to meet their needs. The induction focused on developing learners' interest in future careers, social skills, resilience and well-being.

On return to classroom teaching in June 2020, leaders say that one of their most challenging issues was to enable learners' access to specialist resources for them to develop their practical skills. Consequently, they changed timetables. In motor vehicle and construction, learners moved to intensive block-release weeks in workshops, helping them to hone their skills in readiness for assessment.

Where possible, leaders report that apprentices who have been furloughed, who are on a break in learning, or who have been made redundant have been able to continue with their learning or transfer to an appropriate course to complete their studies.

**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?**

In response to college closure in March 2020, managers selected staff to become online learning champions. They learned about digital tools for virtual teaching and communication and shared this learning in their teams. They were subsequently able to provide ongoing support to colleagues and learners, to access and engage with online sessions. Leaders and managers say that they monitored closely teachers' performance to ensure that teachers continued to receive the appropriate support and that teaching standards remained high.

Managers report that a new tracking system helps them to monitor learners' and apprentices' progress and their engagement with online learning sessions. Teachers say that learners' engagement and attendance across the college are very high and that students are keen to learn. Although, as expected, they experienced some behavioural issues at beginning of term because of learners' isolation, staff ensured that little disruption occurred as a result.

Teachers have changed the curriculum significantly, prioritising learners' well-being at the start of the academic year. They discussed learners' feelings and emotions – particularly about the effects of the pandemic – to help them re-engage and feel safe at college.

Managers say that some of the enforced changes have improved the curriculum and will continue. For example, as a result of arts staff using digital technologies for communication, visitors – who would not normally attend in person – were able to attend the college 'Arts Festival'.

Teachers used digital communication tools to stream live classroom sessions to learners who were self-isolating. As a result, they were able to engage in groupwork or discussion with their peers. Teachers also recorded sessions to allow learners who were absent to catch up.

Leaders recognised that most learners who have high needs required further support to access online learning sessions. Therefore, they provided training to these learners and their parents, helping them to continue with their studies.

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

As the country entered lockdown, the college remained open for those learners identified as being vulnerable, for example those learners who had recent safeguarding referrals. These learners received weekly contact from 'key workers' to ensure their welfare.

Leaders continued to provide support to those students who access free school meals. An enhanced daily allowance was paid to these students.

Teachers and staff had access to a wide range of training and support. For example, students continued to receive tutorial sessions, which were re-ordered to focus on online safety and 'netiquette' – respectful posting online.

On return to college, staff and learners completed an induction including the physical changes that would be in place around college campuses, for example one-way systems and hand hygiene.

Senior safeguarding staff continued to attend various external safeguarding meetings. This helped raise awareness of prominent safeguarding issues as a result of the pandemic, for example mental health and well-being.

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