

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure

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/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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

The National College for Advanced Transport and Infrastructure is a general further education college. At the time of the visit, all learners and apprentices were aged 18 or over. There were 133 apprentices working towards a range of standards-based apprenticeships. Apprenticeships include level 4 and 5 rail and systems engineering, civil engineering, command control, communications, operations management and project management. In addition, a further 11 adult learners study an access to higher education qualification.

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?

Although new in post when the COVID-19 restrictions were due to be enforced, the principal described actions taken to respond quickly to the crisis. Leaders say that they encouraged teachers to seek advice from regional and national specialists on how best to design and teach the curriculum remotely. As a result, teachers studied a range of training and accessed support from other colleges and training organisations to enhance their knowledge of using various software and online tools for teaching.

Leaders say that they re-organised the curriculum so that teachers focused on topics more suited for remote teaching. Initially, all teaching moved online, with a gentle move back to some face-to-face teaching – especially for subjects such as higher-

level science and mathematics – as restrictions eased during the summer. Leaders recognised the importance of enabling apprentices and learners to socialise and build relationships to increase their confidence, so they could work collaboratively during remote learning sessions. Also – as restrictions lifted – apprentices were able to focus on practical activities in preparation for their end-point assessments.

Employers state that they are well-informed about their apprentices' progress. They liaise with teachers to ensure that topics link appropriately with apprentices' work. Employers note that having access to feedback on apprentices' performance, and to an online monitoring system, enabled them to identify tasks such as project management activities to close gaps in apprentices' knowledge. They recognised that these activities helped apprentices to apply theory in the workplace. Employers commented on how well teachers adapted to teaching online and how useful recorded sessions were for apprentices to catch up or re-visit information to reinforce their understanding.

Leaders say that their governors used their experience from education and industry to support them with curriculum changes and to provide what they judge to be safe and secure physical and remote learning environments.

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?

To support teachers in using online tools confidently, leaders said that they replaced teaching observations with 'virtual learning walks'. This helped them to back teachers to develop their skills in using online tools so learners can collaborate during activities and they can check learners' understanding thoroughly.

Leaders reviewed the effectiveness of training by encouraging teachers to discuss their views on an online 'reflection wall'. They described how teachers shared teaching tips – such as the use of an online notice board – to circulate information such as links to videos, images and documents, and a new video system to improve the quality of recordings.

Teachers say that they used predominantly online communication and screen-sharing technology for teaching remotely. Some curriculum areas, such as engineering, identified specific software to teach units that would have normally been taught face to face. For example, teachers used a circuit-design package so learners could experiment with adjusting circuits and test voltage as if they were in a laboratory.

Teachers use tutorials with apprentices to identify any gaps in their knowledge. In some curriculum areas, teachers use a 'risk assessment' process to monitor apprentices' progress against the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to acquire. Teachers devise bespoke one-to-one sessions, which they say help apprentices to catch up with their work. In some instances, apprentices have moved

to different departments within their workplace to focus on the new knowledge and skills needed to meet the required standard, and for future job roles.

Leaders and managers are encouraged that most apprentices continue to attend and engage with online sessions. They recognise the additional efforts of teachers, who provide apprentices with support, often outside of normal working hours, particularly for those who struggle to study remotely. Teachers continue to provide resources and study space at college for a minority of learners who find it difficult to study at home.

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

As teaching moved online, teachers say they received a 'masterclass' in how to use a range of online systems safely. They provided learners with a 'netiquette' guide, which included tips about how to stay safe when studying remotely, such as being aware of misinformation about the pandemic. Teachers also provided additional time to support apprentices' and learners' well-being.

Leaders conducted a risk assessment in preparation for a return to face-to-face teaching. They identified a range of physical changes that were needed, such as a one-way system and hand-sanitising stations. Teachers were also requested to complete a personal risk assessment to identify any concerns about their own safety and well-being.

Leaders say they review routinely all risk assessments. For example – as a response to the most recent period of national restrictions – leaders decided to move apprenticeship teaching back to remote methods. Their aim was to reduce the incidence of transmission during sessions, and the extent of travel to college. A few learners requested face-to-face sessions and continue to attend college.

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