

# City of Bristol College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 131094

**Name of lead inspector:** Tracey Zimmerman, HMI

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

**Address:** College Green Campus  
St George's Road  
Bristol  
BS1 5UA

## 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 in this period, including those 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

City of Bristol College (CoBC) is a large general further education college with five campuses across Bristol. Additionally, it has a small residential training facility for young people to develop independent living and employability skills. At the time of our visit, approximately 2,650 students between 16 and 18 years of age were enrolled on study programmes and 3,400 adult students were studying full- or part-time courses from entry level to level 4. Around 831 apprentices were studying on apprenticeships, with the largest number in engineering and manufacturing technologies and business and administration. Around 1,400 students were enrolled with subcontractors; these were mostly adults and apprentices. A total of 433 students were studying on professional and vocational higher education programmes. Most students at the college live in the city of Bristol or nearby.

### **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 report that staff responded quickly to the COVID-19 lockdown in March. They contacted all learners swiftly to determine whether they could participate in online learning. Leaders provided laptops and/or wi-fi dongles to the learners who needed them. More recently, staff put alternative transport arrangements in place for learners with Down's syndrome, in response to changes in government travel guidance.

Leaders have made timely and sometimes difficult decisions to change the curriculum. Some adult courses have been suspended, such as fashion, but others, like accounting courses, have benefited from moving to teaching online. Managers

have implemented contingency plans which allow learners who have had to self-isolate or tested positive to COVID-19 to be supported by studying an individualised curriculum.

Managers have adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of learners and the requirements of awarding bodies. They have extended the induction period to better prepare learners for online or blended learning programmes. Teachers have made changes to the order of topics taught. For example, apprentices studying on business apprenticeships in a multinational energy company are learning project management and communicating at meetings much earlier in the curriculum, as a result of plentiful opportunities at work. Some teachers have prioritised the teaching of practical skills, with others teaching theory and knowledge first. Leaders are aware that curriculum changes can cause anxiety for learners and their families and have communicated the changes quickly.

Leaders explain that the vast majority of apprentices have continued studying their apprenticeships online. This provides apprentices with increased flexibility in how they access learning resources, and they enjoy the 'virtual' sessions with their assessors. However, leaders recognise that assessment practice has not always been effective and some apprentices have finished the apprenticeship without completing the qualification.

Leaders spoke about the impact of COVID-19 on the wider Bristol population. They are working in partnership with employers to develop programmes that support the development of the workforce in the future. They have secured funding to enable them to develop new programmes for small and medium-size enterprises.

### **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?**

Staff have adapted their use of teaching and learning methods to meet the changes in the curriculum. For example, students studying art and design participate in face-to-face practical skills training and learn new knowledge online.

Teachers report that the rapid transition from face-to-face to online learning has not always been straightforward. They feel that developing relationships with learners online is more difficult and that learners are less keen to share personal information. However, most learners say they now feel more independent, have improved their digital skills and are better able to fit their studies around their work. Even so, a minority of learners say they have not enjoyed online learning. As a result, managers are working with teachers to develop innovative ideas to make learning sessions interactive and fun.

Leaders and managers use their existing quality assurance systems to check learners' progress online. They sample the quality of teaching sessions and view learners' work remotely. Managers provide additional support to learners whom they identify are at risk of falling behind.

Learners have access to careers guidance throughout their programme. Leaders monitor closely learners who may wish to leave their course without completing their studies. They have offered guidance sessions to help learners choose the next steps in their career or education. Leaders are working to increase this provision.

Managers and teachers report that attendance across college has been varied. In some areas, such as the provision for learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities, attendance rates are high. In other areas, particularly in English and mathematics, attendance is lower than in previous years. Leaders are aware of this and are implementing plans to ensure that all learners attend fully.

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

Leaders have worked with staff to help learners stay safe, including marking out one-way systems and operating health checks at campus entrances. Learners have a good understanding of the precautions that leaders have taken and feel safe attending college.

Throughout the pandemic, staff worked to keep the main site open to support learners and their families. The safeguarding team provides learners with a weekly, confidential drop-in and talk session.

Learners know about the risks of working online. Teachers have increased their focus on teaching how to stay safe online. Information technology (IT) support staff report that they have increased the capacity of the college's IT systems, including installing firewalls, to help to maintain safe online services.

Learners can access a wide range of support services including face-to-face support, online counselling and virtual, self-help resources. Learners know who to contact if they have any concerns or worries.

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