

Nottingham 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/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

Nottingham College is a very large general further education college. It currently provides education and training to approximately 6,300 students aged 16 to 19, 1,200 apprentices and 6,100 adult students, including over 500 adult students who fund their courses via advance student loans.

Classroom-based courses are offered in all major subject areas, from entry level through to higher education, as well as community learning courses. Apprenticeships are offered in business, construction, education, engineering and manufacturing, health and care, information technology, leisure, and retail. Most apprentices study at level 2 and level 3, with a small number of higher-level apprentices in health and construction.

The college works with nine subcontractors which provide classroom-based programmes to adults, and students aged 16 to 19.

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

At the beginning of the first COVID-19 national restrictions, leaders and managers moved teaching online. The college remained open to students with special educational needs and/or disabilities on supported learning programmes. These students could also study from home using paper resources.

When reopening the college to more students, leaders prioritised those who would benefit most from in-person learning. Students studying construction and hospitality returned to campus to refine their practical skills. Students on science courses completed laboratory activities to prepare for the new academic year.

Leaders revised the approach to teaching so that most students now receive a combination of face-to-face and remote learning. This includes live lessons using videoconferencing and activities from the college's virtual-learning environment. Students at higher levels have more online lessons as they can study more independently. Adults on English for speakers of other languages courses currently study only in person, as do students on supported learning programmes. Lecturers quickly switch to wholly remote teaching where necessary.

Where it has not been possible to visit apprentices, managers and assessors have supported employers to work with them on the practical aspects of their apprenticeships. Assessors have continued to work with apprentices on furlough to develop their mathematics and English skills. Employers report positively on the support from the college.

Leaders have moved careers advice and guidance online. During the summer, prospective students met their new lecturers virtually and were able to access course materials. More recently, students have taken part in virtual question-and-answer sessions with employers.

Leaders and managers are working to ensure that all students have computer access, for example by loaning college laptops to them. They have worked with the local authority to provide laptops to vulnerable students and arrange socially-distanced computer access for students and apprentices at college sites.

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 students?

Early on in the national restrictions, lecturers received training on remote teaching. This initially focused on using videoconferencing tools before lecturers moved onto more advanced techniques. Leaders have devised online standards which set out expectations for online teaching.

Lecturers teach students using a variety of tools and activities. For example, science students use virtual tools, quizzes and online photography portals to develop their knowledge of mapping the night sky. Subcontractors use video materials during online lessons, and construction course lecturers teach theory virtually and use face-to-face classes for practical skills.

Leaders and managers have supported lecturers to be creative where opportunities for students and apprentices to gain practical experience are limited due to COVID-

19 restrictions. On health and social care courses, lecturers use 'skills laboratories' to replicate real-life work situations. Hair and beauty students, including those on subcontracted courses, have completed simulated practical activities in readiness for working with clients. Performing arts students undertake live, socially-distanced performances.

Lecturers are using more formative assessment activities in their teaching, such as drag-and-drop activities and multiple-choice questions. Mathematics and English lecturers are carrying out frequent assessments to check for gaps in students' knowledge. Students attend additional sessions to focus on their specific needs in these subjects.

Lecturers focus on ensuring that students do not fall behind. During the summer, prospective students, and those returning to college, could access online bridging materials. Students get extra lecturer support at scheduled catch-up sessions. Managers and lecturers use progress reviews to identify students' and apprentices' academic and pastoral support needs.

Managers now visit virtual lessons as part of their quality assurance work. Lecturers say that reviews of their online lessons are constructive, and students have reported through a college survey that they are pleased with the quality of online teaching.

Managers feel that students participate in their learning and behave well. Where students are worried about attending college due to concerns over COVID-19, managers and lecturers work sensitively with them to ensure they can continue learning.

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

When COVID-19 national restrictions started, managers worked with the local authority to identify students at increased risk. Achievement coaches kept in close contact with these students and responded to concerns.

Leaders and managers identified that deteriorating mental health, and domestic violence were key increased risks. They provided staff with additional training and information about these topics. Leaders and managers also set up a virtual well-being hub for staff and students to access mental health information. Students also receive support from the college's welfare team.

Before providing online teaching to students, lecturers read the revised online teaching policy and undertook training on using videoconferencing tools safely. Safeguarding protocols, such as students only logging in to online learning with their college email addresses, are in place.

Students and apprentices have completed online training on themes such as e-safety, staying safe in college and on work placements, and the threat of radicalisation.

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