

# Cornwall College

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 130627

**Name of lead inspector:** Paul James, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Visit dates:** 24 to 25 November 2020

**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 in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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 Cornwall College Group is a very large general further education college with eight campuses in Cornwall and one in Devon (Bicton Campus). It also provides education and training in outreach centres and with many local employers and partners. The college offers courses in 14 subject areas, including an extensive land-based curriculum, reflecting the rural economy it serves.

Around 13,000 students study at the College based at general further education campuses; Camborne and St Austell and land-based campuses; and Stoke Climsland, Bicton, Rosewarne and Newquay. Highly specialist provision takes place at Falmouth Marine School, dBs Music Bristol and Plymouth, Tournament Golf at St Mellion and Lindfield, Sussex, and at the Sisna Park Engineering Centre in Plymouth.

### **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 are proud of the way they have continued to focus on improving the quality of their learners' experience, whilst dealing with the significant issues posed by COVID-19.

At the start of the pandemic, leaders developed a new communication strategy to ensure that they shared information effectively with their stakeholders. Leaders met early every weekday to review changes in government advice and restrictions, and make such decisions as necessary. Information from these meetings was then cascaded through to college teams. Leaders felt that these regular updates increased staff confidence and provided them with clear instruction and direction. Employers we spoke to during the visit reported that communication was a consistent and positive feature of the organisation throughout the pandemic.

Leaders operated a 'business as usual' approach whenever possible. They knew that face-to-face teaching was the favoured model for many learners and also identified the potential for future disruption to learning, resulting from further changes in COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, leaders directed staff to revise their approach to teaching to ensure that learners had early access to essential practical activities and specialist resources subject to conforming to restrictions.

During the first lockdown, leaders made it a priority for learners to complete their qualifications. Managers invited small groups of learners onto college sites following COVID-19 safety guidance, to access the specialist resources they needed in order to complete essential practical training. Leaders also identified that some students had skills and knowledge gaps, which extended beyond the requirements of their qualifications. In some instances, learners needed additional training to ensure that they had the skills to secure employment. As a result, once qualifications were completed, teachers continued to work with small groups of learners on developing skills which supported their career aims.

**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?**

During early summer, leaders opened several college sites to learners for whom they felt face-to-face learning was essential, such as those with specific high needs, and adult learners who needed to complete practical assessments to finish their courses. These included apprentices studying agriculture, horticulture and construction courses. Learners studying land-based programmes, who stay in residential accommodation in Bicton and Stoke Climsland, were supported to return to these campuses as soon as possible.

Staff have ensured that learners continue to learn and fill the gaps in their knowledge and practical skills caused by the first lockdown. Additional staff were recruited to ensure that learners studying outdoor activity courses could continue to undertake kayaking and climbing safely during the pandemic. Learners studying performing arts courses moved from performing in indoor venues to virtual or external venues. Managers revised transition arrangements for learners studying foundation courses so that they felt safe and confident about being on-site at college. All equine practical learning had to stop during the first lockdown, so staff checked that horses used by learners on returning equine courses were fit enough..

Teachers use similar ways of checking learners' understanding of their online learning as in face-to-face settings. They use additional online methods, such as 'chat bars', to ask individual learners questions. Apprentices' assessors track their progress online, capture what has been taught and link this to apprentices' targets for their end-point assessments.

Managers adapted their quality assurance processes to apply to remote learning. Curriculum managers participate in online and face-to-face sessions regularly to observe learning and talk to learners. Managers continue to hold routine course

reviews with staff, which look at attendance, information, advice and guidance, destinations and how well learners are making progress. Staff tell us that their expectations around learners' attendance, punctuality, conduct and participation in learning are the same for online and face-to-face classes.

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

Leaders have worked closely with external agencies to identify risks for learners as a result of the pandemic. They report a significant increase in the number of learners requiring support for issues such as a decline in their mental health or increased domestic violence.

Staff have established regular welfare checks for vulnerable learners and those participating in remote learning. They work with external agencies, so learners continue to receive essential services.

Staff have received training in how to use digital technologies safely when teaching, and in a wide range of relevant safeguarding topics.

Learners have received training in how to stay safe when learning and socialising in college, in the community and online. They have developed their knowledge of cyber bullying, data protection and the risks associated with radicalisation and exploitation.

All of the learners spoken to by inspectors knew what to do and who to contact at the college about safety or well-being concerns.

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