

Yeovil College

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 130805

Name of lead inspector: Helen Flint, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 2 to 3 December 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 and apprentices in this period, including learners 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

Yeovil College is a tertiary college based on a campus near the centre of Yeovil in the county of Somerset. Around two thirds of its 3,200 learners are aged 16 to 18 and are enrolled on study programmes including A levels, or apprenticeships. Most learners study level 2 or level 3 courses. Adult learners study on full- and part-time courses or apprenticeships, up to level 5. A small proportion of learners receive high-needs funding.

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?

At the beginning of the pandemic, senior leaders identified their priorities as the well-being of learners and staff, maintaining learners' progress and supporting the local community. Before the first COVID-19 restrictions, leaders worked with staff, learners, parents and other stakeholders to prepare for a move to online teaching and learning. Initially, leaders and staff used whatever online learning software and computer equipment available to them to achieve this.

Leaders developed several COVID-19-related procedures and policies to enable learners to continue their learning entirely remotely. These were adapted to allow a controlled and safe return of staff and learners to college. Leaders had a deliberate strategy to get certain learner groups back into college. They prioritised the return of learners who were on foundation courses or had additional learning support needs. They included learners who needed to complete practical assessments or who were on A-level courses.

Managers communicate frequently with staff, learners, parents and employers. Employers told us that information provided by college staff was useful in helping them to support their apprentices. Almost all apprentices remained employed. Leaders and managers work closely with the local council to provide support for people who have lost their jobs or are at risk of losing them because of the impact of the pandemic on the local economy.

The pandemic has accelerated leaders' strategic plans to become a more digital college. Over a short time period, leaders have made substantial investment in new technologies for staff and learners, using funding available from the Institute of Technology. This will enable future learning to include a blend of remote, online and face-to-face working as a permanent option.

Over the summer, staff did much work with school leavers who were planning to attend the college in September 2020. Staff provided these learners with online information and advice to help them choose courses and provided them with a learning programme prior to starting.

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?

Most teachers had no experience of teaching online and found it a steep learning curve initially. They told us that they and learners adapted swiftly, and that disruption to learners' progress was kept to a minimum. Teachers recognise and value the training the college is still providing in effective techniques for online teaching and learning.

Staff identified learners who struggled to study remotely and planned support accordingly. Some vulnerable learners were encouraged to attend sessions in person while their teachers were teaching their peers online. Many learners without internet access were allocated a socially distanced workstation at the college so they could access online lessons. Learners who lived further afield were provided with college laptops. Staff took equipment such as art kits and hairdressing blocks to learners, so they could practise their practical skills at home.

All learners, including most apprentices, now spend a proportion of their time at college while also continuing to study remotely. Their time in college focuses on developing practical skills, while most theory, including English and mathematics, is learned using remote taught sessions. Learners who study vocational subjects such as construction, engineering, and hair and beauty now have online theory classes followed by home-based research, and then attend whole-day practical sessions at college. Most apprentices attend college for more days in the week than before the pandemic.

Teachers' assessment of students' learning and progress online and face to face is largely unchanged. A few apprentices have had delays to their end-point

assessments due to COVID-19 restrictions. Managers check students' progress by visiting virtual and college-based lessons and interrogating learner records. Leaders run student surveys. The most recent survey indicates that most do not feel their learning has been substantially disrupted or impaired. Managers note that students' attendance online and at college has improved. Teachers comment that dealing with the common adversary of COVID-19 has increased staff and students' sense of community and belonging.

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

Leaders ensure that staff are kept updated with safeguarding and well-being issues. This includes how to teach safely online. Staff discuss relevant issues such as county lines, radicalisation, sexual awareness and mental well-being regularly with learners. Managers keep records of staff completion of mandatory training and the required regulatory checks.

Learners we spoke to are aware of the potential risks of the internet and ways that they can keep themselves safe. Learners' access to the college's virtual learning environment and remote lessons is password protected. Learners understand leaders' expectations while working online.

Learners and staff told us they were confident to return to college because of the decisions made by college leaders. They felt that college managers had reacted swiftly to the positive COVID-19 cases that have occurred so far. Learners know whom to report safeguarding, COVID-19 or well-being concerns to, and are confident that they would receive appropriate support.

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