

Cambridge Regional College

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Sambit Sen, Her Majesty's Inspector

Visit dates: 3 to 4 December 2020

Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Science Park Campus
Kings Hedges Road
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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

Cambridge Regional College is a general further education college. Following a merger with Huntingdonshire Regional College in August 2017, it operates from two campuses. The largest is in Kings Hedges, on the northern outskirts of Cambridge; the other is in Huntingdon.

The college provides a wide range of vocational and academic qualifications. It currently has 2,800 students on 16 to 18 study programmes, 3,500 adult students and 1,095 apprentices. It works with several subcontractors who offer a range of adult courses. It teaches 500 students with high needs.

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?

Senior leaders and managers have stated that the welfare and well-being of students and staff has been their priority. Leaders and managers have put a range of measures to make the college COVID-19 secure. They have communicated regularly with students to make them aware of the requirements.

Leaders and managers aim to deliver two thirds of teaching face-to-face and one third online. Where they have recognised that this model does not work for students they are quick to adapt it.

Managers have worked with the local authority and other healthcare professionals to help students with complex needs. They have proactively identified the transition arrangements for these students. This has helped teachers to provide the right help

and specialist equipment. The proportion of students with high needs at the college has increased from last year.

External partners, such as the Combined Regional Authority, told inspectors that they appreciate working with leaders to meet the skills strategy for the local economy. Senior leaders and managers have designed courses that meet some of these skills gaps. For example, new courses to help people into self-employment.

Managers continue to use established quality systems to monitor and review the quality of teaching. Managers say that they are making better use of online technology to complete these activities. This has helped collaborative working between teachers and managers.

Managers have continued to provide careers advice and guidance to students and apprentices. During the first national restrictions, leaders put in place online careers appointments. Managers say these were well received and extremely popular with students. Managers recognise the importance of continuing to provide the right guidance during these difficult times.

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 the first national restrictions, leaders worked with teachers to move teaching online. They provided relevant training to help teachers develop their online teaching skills. Managers say that students and staff have received the widespread use of online technology positively. Managers would like to continue to use this tool for other activities such as team meetings, employer activities and staff professional development.

Leaders have been responsive to the needs of adults that have emerged because of the pandemic. Leaders have invested in a range of short adult courses in collaboration with Job Centre Plus. These courses help adults to retrain, upskill and move into new sectors of employment.

Managers highlight that teachers have amended courses. Teachers have done this based on the starting points of their students. For example, in business, English and mathematics, teachers cover examination skills first to help students prepare for examinations held early in the academic year. In more practical courses, such as construction, teachers have brought forward practical skills training to minimise the impact of potential future national restrictions.

Managers emphasise the use of assessments to identify students' skills and knowledge gaps. Managers are confident that teachers identify students' knowledge and skills, and adjust their teaching appropriately. They say that students are making good progress as a result.

Managers and teachers identify the challenge in ensuring that all students have access to the technology needed to learn. They have provided much information and technology equipment to students. Students benefit from dedicated spaces on both campuses where they can access their learning online.

Teachers say that attendance levels are similar to previous years. For most courses, attendance for online learning is at least as high as it is for face-to-face sessions. Webcams in all classrooms record lessons. This allows students to continue in learning if they must self-isolate.

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

Students and apprentices know how to stay safe at the college. They understand the need for the COVID-19 restrictions that leaders have put in place and are happy to follow these. Apprentices understand the safety requirements at their employers' premises. Students and apprentices are clear about teachers' expectations for their online behaviour.

Managers and teachers have developed safeguarding and welfare resources that are adapted to the needs of their students and apprentices. They use college internal communication portals to inform and educate students about topics such as healthy relationships, mental health and e-safety. Students say that these resources have supported them during difficult times.

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