

Inspection of Solihull College & University Centre

Inspection dates: 8–11 March 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Solihull College and University Centre operates from three main campuses: Blossomfield, near Solihull town centre; Woodlands, in the north of the borough of Solihull; and Stratford-upon-Avon. The Stratford-upon-Avon campus accounts for roughly a fifth of the full-time learners. Since the merger, the governors and senior leaders have reduced the number of satellite centres, and restructured the staffing at the Stratford-upon-Avon campus

At the time of inspection 5,155 learners were studying on education programmes for young people, and 2,641 learners were studying on adult learning programmes, mainly on distance-learning programmes. There were 780 apprentices – the large majority of whom were following standards, and 78 learners were in receipt of high-needs funding.

The college delivers vocational, academic, higher education courses, and apprenticeships from pre-entry to level 7. The college offers all subject areas, with the largest being engineering, construction, creative arts and design, animal care, business management, and health and social care.

The college currently works with three subcontractors to teach qualifications to adults, which accounted for 708 learners. A small number of learners were studying on a digital 'T-level' pathway, and a small number of adults were engaged in 'skills bootcamps'. These programmes were not in scope for this inspection.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Most learners and apprentices benefit from a culture which is caring, purposeful and professional. Managers and staff have created a secure and challenging environment for learners in which they acquire substantial new skills and knowledge during their studies.

Across the different college sites most learners and apprentices, including adult learners studying on subcontracted provision, achieve well on their programmes. They produce work of a high standard and successfully move on to their next steps.

Learners and apprentices have access to industry-standard resources. For example, apprentices studying civil engineering carry out their off-the-job training on a 'live' building site. They develop the skills they need in their daily job roles.

Most apprentices develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours they need for work. They recognise that the way in which assessors match their theoretical learning to their work practices enables them to develop the skills they need for work. Apprentices quickly become valued team members in their workplace.

Learners on education programmes for young people undertake a broad range of activities to support their learning. Teachers provide opportunities beyond the subjects they are studying. For example, staff support learners to run their own societies, such as sign-language club. Learners undertake subject-related visits and masterclasses. For example, learners on level 2 business studies visited a theme park to broaden their understanding of business within the world of work.

Learners with education, health and care plans significantly improve their skills due to the highly tailored support and teaching they receive. Learners develop their independence and flourish in their local communities.

Most learners and apprentices are confident that staff would act swiftly to address their concerns regarding bullying and harassment, including the use of derogatory language. Where learners have experienced difficulties, staff have acted quickly to tackle these through the disciplinary process. The college is a calm and respectful place in which to learn.

Learners develop their knowledge of healthy, positive, and sexual relationships through tutorial sessions. Learners on education programmes for young people cover these topics through accessing online resources supported by their teachers. During the inspection, learners stated they would welcome additional teaching on topics such as consent and harmful sexual behaviours to deepen their understanding of these risks in society.

Learners on programmes designed for learners who have high needs develop a good understanding of how to make friends and develop positive relationships. Staff teach learners to understand the dangers associated with these topics so that they keep themselves safe.

Almost all apprentices remain in employment when they complete their apprenticeship. A high proportion of apprentices gain a promotion or take on additional responsibilities as a result of their apprenticeship. Many apprentices move on into higher level apprenticeships when they complete their programme.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders, managers, and staff have high expectations for most learners and apprentices. Since the merger, senior leaders and governors have successfully tackled areas of underperformance in subjects such as engineering. Leaders have taken steps to reduce the variation in the learners' experiences dependent on the site on which they study. For example, on education programmes for young people leaders have streamlined subject teams in performing arts to share good practice and improve teaching. As a result, the quality of education and experiences for learners is high across most subjects and sites.

Following the sudden retirement and subsequent death of the former principal, governors carefully took steps to provide stability to the college. Governors, alongside the senior leadership team, have continued to focus on the business of the college. Governors use the comprehensive reporting they receive to provide significant challenge to senior leaders. This has ensured that the teaching and support for learners are of a high quality for most learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers have constructed a curriculum which is ambitious. They have successfully developed a curriculum which meets local and regional skills needs. For example, managers and teachers have developed extensive relationships with local employers such as The Royal Shakespeare Company, Birmingham Airport, and early years providers. Employers inform the development of the curriculum to reflect their individual workplace needs. Staff respond to the needs of specific employers and adapt the course content accordingly.

Leaders' and managers' recruitment of subcontractors has been well thought out. Leaders have developed partnerships with subcontractors in sectors where there is an identified local need. For example, RMF Construction Training Limited teach construction skills to adult learners who are new to the sector. Learners are successful in gaining the skills and qualifications they need to secure work in the construction industry.

Managers have put in place robust quality assurance processes to monitor and support subcontractors. Where subcontractors were not experienced in the education sector, managers quickly put support in place. Through frequent site visits and support, the quality of teaching quickly improved.

The majority of teachers sequence their teaching well. They ensure that learners gain the core components and skills they need early on in their programme. Teachers successfully plan their teaching to provide links between theory and practice in practical subjects. In level 3 performing arts, teachers have been

innovative in their design of the curriculum. Learners develop their skills and knowledge through carefully planned projects and performances. As a result, learners benefit from an interdisciplinary approach. Technicians, actors, musicians, and dancers work together on projects and produce work to an exceptional standard.

Teachers and assessors are well qualified and have strong links to industry. Assessors in veterinary nursing complete routine professional updating to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge of the sector. Teachers in uniformed public services often remain as reservists. They use their knowledge of the requirements for training for the Royal Air Force, army, and police to inform the curriculum. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of the links between their studies and the requirements for the industry in which they are planning on working.

Most teachers and assessors plan their teaching well to ensure learners develop the new skills and knowledge they need. They use resources well to enable learners to commit their learning to their long-term memory. For example, teachers teach adult learners on pre-access care courses about the circulatory system. Teachers successfully use augmented reality to develop learners' understanding of blood flow to the heart. Learners develop a good understanding of the theoretical components of their subjects and demonstrate that they can apply this to their practical skills.

Leaders and staff have high ambitions for learners with additional learning needs, including those who are in receipt of high-needs funding. Staff have designed individualised programmes, which enable learners to move on into supported internships and vocational and academic programmes successfully. Managers provide continuation of support for learners as they move between programmes. Almost all of these learners are successful on their course.

Most teachers and assessors provide learners and apprentices with developmental feedback on their work. The helpful feedback learners receive enables them to improve their standards of the work. However, on a few occasions feedback is too generic. For example, adult learners on distance-learning courses do not yet receive the feedback they need to help them to improve. Teachers do not encourage learners to improve their standards of work. As a result, learners do not achieve to the level of which they are capable.

Most learners receive helpful careers education, information, advice, and guidance. They develop new knowledge, which supports them in their wider lives and to move on into employment or further study. For example, teachers support adult learners studying on pre-access to health programmes to develop their academic writing skills. The development of these skills supports learners to move on into higher education at the end of their course.

The large majority of teachers and assessors use the information on learners' starting points well to inform their teaching. For example, in level 3 animal care, teachers use research assignments early in the programme to identify and close gaps in learners' knowledge, following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

However, in a few subjects in education programmes for young people and apprenticeships, staff do not yet use this information well enough. They do not consistently plan teaching to address gaps in learners' knowledge and skills. As a result, a small number of learners and apprentices do not achieve to the level of which they are capable.

Leaders and managers have identified learners' attendance as an area for improvement. Apprentices and learners who are in receipt of high-needs funding have high attendance. Managers have put in place interventions to improve attendance. However, learners' attendance on education programmes for young people and adult learning programmes remains too low in a few subjects, including in English and mathematics.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Learners across the different college sites feel safe. Most learners receive helpful information regarding safeguarding, safe working practices, and staying safe when working online when they start at the college. They know where to go to if they need help. At the time of inspection, learners and apprentices talked positively about the supportive relationships they have built with staff, teachers, and assessors.

Leaders undertake appropriate safer recruitment processes when staff join the college, ensuring staff have the appropriate clearances. They monitor the recruitment of agency staff, subcontractors, and volunteers in line with their policies and procedures.

Leaders have put in place adequate training for staff who are undertaking the designated safeguarding roles. However, senior leaders recognise that designated safeguarding leads and safeguarding officers would benefit from additional training to ensure they make timely decisions, and record and monitor incidents accurately.

Leaders have recently introduced a new online system for staff to report safeguarding incidents. However, this is not yet used by all staff. A few staff continue to raise concerns through emails and phone calls. Safeguarding officers then transfer this information into the central system. On a few occasions, this is leading to increased workload for staff, and inspectors identified a few gaps in the recording and monitoring of safeguarding incidents. Leaders took resolute steps to rectify these gaps during the inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders, managers, and governors must improve the oversight of safeguarding by:
 - ensuring that designated safeguarding leads and officers undertake training to enable them to record and monitor incidents accurately

- improving the training for staff to ensure they all use the central system to report and raise concerns consistently.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all teachers and assessors accurately assess learners' starting points and use this information to inform their teaching
- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers and assessors provide sufficient feedback to enable learners to achieve to the level of which they are capable
- Leaders and managers should ensure that attendance in a few subjects, including English and mathematics, improves.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130481
Address	Blossomfield Campus Blossomfield Road Solihull West Midlands B91 1SB
Contact number	01216 787000
Website	www.solihull.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Lindsey Stewart
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	RMF Construction Training Limited Colebridge Trust Limited Learning Curve Group Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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