

Inspection of Exeter College

Inspection dates:

29 November to 2 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Education courses for young people	Outstanding
Adult learning courses	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Exeter College is a large tertiary college located in the city of Exeter. The college offers a broad range of academic, technical and vocational courses from entry level to level 6. The largest subject sector areas are science and mathematics, arts, media and publishing, languages, literature and culture, preparation for life and social sciences. The college provides education and training at thirteen campuses, all of which have a specific curriculum focus, such as The Centre for Creative Industries campus and The Devon and Exeter Construction Training Centre.

At the time of the inspection, around 6,640 learners aged 16 to 18, 880 adults, 1,800 apprentices and 235 learners in receipt of high-needs funding were studying at the college. More than three quarters of learners aged 16 to 18 study at level 3. Most adults study at levels 1 and 2. Apprentices study a wide range of standards-based apprenticeships, such as carpentry and business administration, at levels 2 and 3 and operations and departmental management at level 4. Most learners in receipt of high-needs funding study on academic and vocational courses, with around a fifth studying on courses specifically designed for them at entry level and level 1.

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

Learners and apprentices learn substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours quickly. They can recall their prior learning exceptionally well. This is because of the high quality of teaching they receive from their teachers and trainers. For example, learners studying A-level law study content on human rights to reflect on and explore their life experiences and to significantly increase their understanding of the modern world. Learners studying mathematics at level 3 learn how to carry out complex calculations using formula such as binomial expansion and trigonometric equations.

Learners and apprentices treat each other and the college staff with high levels of respect. Teachers and other staff are excellent role models; they are professional, friendly, very supportive and work tirelessly to meet the needs of their learners and apprentices. Staff establish a highly effective culture of valuing all members of the college community. Learners and apprentices, in turn, respond extremely positively to this. As a result, they are polite, considerate people, who are very well prepared for the next stages in their life.

Learners and apprentices learn in calm and highly aspirational learning environments. This is because teachers have very high expectations of them and plan teaching sessions extremely well. As a result, learners and apprentices develop high levels of motivation and attend learning sessions frequently. Those who have far to travel, are well supported so that they are punctual at college. Learners and apprentices work hard to succeed in their learning and at achieving their qualifications, and very high numbers achieve the goals of their curriculum. Apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours extremely well and very quickly become competent to complete complex tasks with very little supervision.

Learners and apprentices develop extensive knowledge beyond the requirements of the course they are studying. Teachers deliver the personal development topics in the curriculum very effectively through a range of different methods and media. For example, learners learn how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views, which they can recall in detail. They also learn, often in depth, about healthy relationships and mental health awareness. Learners significantly develop their confidence and resilience over time because they do not fear making mistakes or asking staff for help. Learners take part in the many opportunities provided by college staff to develop their talents and interests. For example, learners benefit from a range of external trips, such as a visit to Rome, to enhance their knowledge and attendance at clubs.

Learners and apprentices take advantage of the well-planned and numerous opportunities for encounters with the world of work. They have frequent access to and are supported well by a dedicated careers guidance team. Teachers and tutors share their well-informed industry insights and their knowledge of progression to higher-level study and better jobs with learners and apprentices. Learners find this guidance very useful, and it gives them an insight into what to do after they finish their course.

Learners feel safe on college campuses. This is because college leaders and staff have created a positive environment and a culture where bullying and harassment are never tolerated. Learners and apprentices demonstrate highly respectful attitudes towards all aspects of college life. Learners feel very comfortable talking to teachers or other staff about their concerns or worries.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers identify exceptionally well the key skill areas that employers need within the locality and in the wider region. They contribute significantly to the digital sector in the region and to the need for retrofit construction skills in the local area. Leaders and managers engage very effectively with a wide range of employers in vital sectors such as transport, health, and sport. Leaders and managers at the college have developed a very strong partnership with leaders at the University of Exeter. They work together highly effectively on several strategic and important projects, including the Exeter City Council drive for net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and other initiatives to align the curriculum and help raise the aspiration of all learners.

Staff at all levels work highly collaboratively with important stakeholders, including local authorities, the city council, and chambers of commerce, to understand the local economy, job market and priorities. Leaders and managers have particularly strong links with the Heart of the Southwest Local Enterprise Partnership. They use this relationship effectively to work innovatively with other important regional providers, such as Bridgwater and Taunton College, on a shared curriculum offer.

College staff engage very productively with employers and other stakeholders in the decisions made about the content of the curriculum. Furthermore, there is a significant minority of courses at the college that have a curriculum that is skilfully co-designed and co-taught with industry experts, including in sport and catering. Leaders and managers ensure that college staff benefit greatly from employer and stakeholder contacts through regular industry updating and other professional development activities.

Leaders and managers respond rapidly and work creatively with stakeholders and employers. They organise swiftly the tailored courses and training required to meet identified industry needs. For example, staff worked constructively with Devon County Council to meet the needs of non-English speaking residents of the area. Leaders and managers quickly recognised the challenges for Ukrainian refugees and created custom-made packages to support this community and help them become active citizens. As a result, leaders and managers ensure that their relationships with stakeholders are successful in improving the opportunities for those in the community who are the most disadvantaged.

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

Leaders and managers have developed an ambitious vision for the education and training that they provide. They help to meet the needs of learners, apprentices and employers in the city and region exceptionally well. For example, courses designed to help learners progress into competitive professions, such as medicine and dentistry, courses that reintroduce young learners back into education and courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) for adults, help them integrate well into their new communities.

Leaders and managers have a well-informed and strong rationale for the curriculum that they have developed at each level. For example, level 1 courses provide entry points for a profession, such as in cookery or motor vehicle. English and mathematics courses at level 2 help to improve learner access to employment, and music and German at level 3 and the International Baccalaureate help to retain important provision in the county and to give learners entry to higher education. As a result, learners and apprentices can take part in a full range of progression options, whatever their starting point.

Governors are highly committed to the vision, mission and values of the college. A core number of governors have been board members for several years and possess a detailed and accurate understanding of the college. Governors know the college very well, make frequent visits, and use their roles on the quality and standards committee extremely effectively to understand the college's strengths and weaknesses. This ensures they have a particular focus on the quality of education at governor meetings. As a result, governance is highly effective, with the breadth of skills necessary to support and challenge the college leadership team effectively.

Leaders and managers use a highly effective process to improve teachers' subject and teaching knowledge. Teachers and other staff receive focused and beneficial professional development. For example, teachers have time set aside for them to ensure they can maintain a current working knowledge of their subject area. They also receive specific training on how to become better teachers, which is planned carefully and taught well. As a result, teachers' knowledge and skills build consistently over time, which improves the quality of education for learners.

Teachers set learners and apprentices demanding individualised targets that motivate them to improve. Learners and apprentices are determined to achieve the best possible outcomes for themselves. For example, teachers align well the curriculum for maintenance operations at level 2 to current industry practice and pace. Because of the level of challenge, a high proportion of learners and apprentices achieve high grades, progress well to their next steps and complete their courses as highly competent practitioners in their subjects.

Teachers sequence the content of the curriculum highly effectively. They identify learners' starting points with care and meticulously plan the content of the

curriculum to ensure that learners and apprentices develop new knowledge and skills quickly. For example, adult health and social care learners discover about the heart and circulation systems in biology before learning about the effect of stress on the cardiovascular system in psychology. Aerospace engineering learners visit local employers that specialise in aircraft maintenance early on in their course to see how aircraft components are maintained in industry. This provides them with context for later learning. As a result, learners and apprentices develop the substantial new knowledge and skills they need to be successful.

Teachers are highly skilled practitioners and have extensive levels of subject knowledge. For example, on the carpentry apprenticeship standard, when discussing complex shapes, like segmental arches, the teacher provided apprentices with relevant industrial examples to enhance their understanding. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and use excellent industry-relevant resources effectively to enrich learning and bring it to life for the learners. For example, learners studying music use a wide range of very well-equipped rehearsal and performance spaces. As a result, learners' and apprentices' knowledge deepens with these real-life working examples.

Teachers use highly effective teaching techniques and present information clearly. Teachers link questions skilfully to build knowledge and correct any misconceptions and use discussions effectively to deepen learners' and apprentices' understanding. Teachers structure lessons carefully and sensibly, building in frequent, valuable sessions that recap prior learning. Teachers and support staff intervene swiftly and effectively to support any learner or apprentice who falls behind in their studies. As a result, they learn what they need promptly, and if they fall behind, they are supported to catch up quickly.

Teachers check thoroughly and frequently what learners and apprentices are learning. They use effective assessment expertly to identify and fill gaps in learning. Their feedback is clear and constructive, which helps learners and apprentices to understand in detail how to improve their work further. As a result, learners and apprentices know what they are doing well and exactly what and how to improve.

Teachers ensure that learners and apprentices develop all the knowledge and skills they need to enable them to produce their best work. For example, learners studying music produce outstanding musical compositions that show a developing mastery of musical techniques. Learners studying site carpentry produce drawings of a professional standard and quality. As a result, learners and apprentices produce high-quality written and practical work, and in many cases, this is above the standard expected.

Work-based tutors engage extremely well with apprentices' employers. This ensures that the apprentices get full access to their training entitlement. Apprentices complete their high-quality off-the-job training, which links appropriately to the effective training they do at work. Consequently, apprentices make exceptional progress in learning new knowledge and skills.

Leaders and managers ensure employers support apprentices well to put their new learning into practice in the workplace. They ensure that apprentices have numerous opportunities at work to expand on their new skills, knowledge and behaviours learned at college. For example, apprentices studying the auto care technician standard begin their learning by shadowing staff at work, before taking on more complex tasks such as steering, suspension and brake repair and then moving on to full car servicing. Apprentices develop the skills they need to be highly effective and quickly become valued members of their workplace. A significant number take on additional responsibilities at work early on in their training.

Leaders and managers have designed relevant and highly ambitious curriculums for adults. They provide adults with the essential skills to enable positive progression to higher levels of study and support their successful integration within the community. For example, digital essential skills courses provide learners with the skills needed for employment. Access to higher education courses enable learners to progress on to university, including competitive courses within healthcare, such as paramedic science, midwifery, and physiotherapy. As a result, the education and training opportunities for adult learners support their interests and the local and national priorities highly effectively.

Most learners with high needs study on academic and vocational courses and apprenticeships. Many learners receive highly effective support from their teachers and support staff. For example, in sport, support staff divide tasks into manageable segments for learners. For apprentices studying business administration, their teachers and workplace staff make the necessary office adjustments to ensure they have a quiet area to focus on their work. As a result of such thoughtful adjustments, apprentices and learners make progress at least in line with their peers. However, for a small number of learners with high needs who study on courses specifically designed for them, leaders and managers have not ensured that the curriculum is sufficiently challenging and ambitious, and it is not individualised well enough to meet each learners' needs. As a result, the provision for learners with high needs is good.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, managers and staff have developed a very effective culture of safeguarding. This helps to ensure that staff quickly identify learners and apprentices who need help and those most at risk of not successfully completing their studies. Staff provide learners and apprentices with suitable support and have effective reporting systems in place to aid swift remedial action. Leaders and managers follow safer recruitment processes appropriately.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSL are well qualified and trained. They are supported effectively by a team of well-being advisors and tutorial area managers. The learner safeguarding and well-being staff work carefully with

staff in all college departments to ensure that learners and apprentices are supported suitably and are well informed about a wide range of safeguarding concerns and mental health themes. All staff are trained well in a range of safeguarding topics. They take part in frequent mandatory training.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers need to ensure that the course specifically designed for learners with high needs is sufficiently challenging, ambitious and individualised, to meet each learners' needs.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130645
Address	Hele Road Exeter Devon EX4 4JS
Contact number	01392205222
Website	www.exe-coll.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	John Laramy, CBE
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	20 January 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, as nominee, and deputy CEO, as the skills nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider’s most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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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