

Inspection of Cambridge Regional College

Inspection dates: 24 to 27 January 2023

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	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Cambridge Regional College is a medium-sized general further education college based in Cambridge. Following a merger with Huntingdon Regional College in 2017, the college operates from the main site in Cambridge and a smaller site in Huntingdon.

A broad range of vocational and technical courses across most sector areas are taught at the college. At the time of the inspection, there were 2,689 students on education programmes for young people and 2,703 adult learners. Most adult learners are taught on standalone courses, with a small proportion taught on study programmes for students aged 16 to 18. There were 697 apprentices, most of whom are on standards-based qualifications, with a very small proportion of apprentices completing framework qualifications. Most apprentices are in construction and engineering. There were 546 learners with high needs. Just over half of learners with high needs are taught in the 'Supported Learning' area, and the remainder are taught vocational and technical qualifications. There were 144 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The college works with three subcontractors to deliver adult learning.

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

Students and apprentices highly value their time at the college and the friendships they forge while they are there. They feel that the college is welcoming, and they enjoy going to college. They recognise the high-quality support that they receive from their tutors in meeting their learning goals, gaining qualifications and managing their lives. Adult learners benefit from professional tutors who teach them and help them to gain a better understanding of the workplaces they plan to enter. Adult learners on short courses complete learning that helps them to understand complex life challenges.

Students and apprentices say that they feel safe and that they enjoy the diverse nature of the college. They feel that teachers and assessor trainers treat them fairly, listen to their views and allow them to express their ideas freely. Students use the knowledge and skills they learn at college productively when they attend their placements. As a result, they understand how their courses are helping them to be successful in gaining future employment. Students and apprentices feel that the work teachers give them is demanding. They enjoy the challenge of the work and the new knowledge and skills they gain. They are appreciative of the time that teachers and assessor trainers spend with them in helping them to understand their work. Students on education programmes for young people feel that their lessons are interesting and thought provoking. They appreciate the balance of theory and practical work that ensures they remain motivated and keen to learn.

Students, apprentices and adult learners feel safe at college. Many report that they gain confidence and become more resilient during their time at college. Teachers challenge and encourage learners with high needs enthusiastically. As a result, they are highly motivated to do well at college, gaining confidence and becoming more independent. Students on supported internships benefit from useful work placements that help them to gain the skills they need to enter the workplace.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers work with stakeholders highly effectively. Leaders judiciously position themselves on numerous strategic and operational advisory boards in the region. They listen actively and influence local and regional skills strategies. For example, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority values its strong relationship with the college to develop a curriculum that meets future workforce needs in sectors such as health and social care, construction, hospitality, and green skills.

Leaders and managers make excellent use of relevant information and intelligence, swiftly adapting the curriculum in response. For example, feedback from a local

hospital trust highlighted that students are not as well prepared for interviews as they could be. As a result, leaders have added more interview techniques and practise to the curriculum. Stakeholders and employers have high levels of confidence in the curriculum meeting their needs. Employers use the college as a provider of choice.

Leaders and managers evaluate frequently the effectiveness of the curriculum intent, design and content so that it meets the needs of employers and stakeholders. For example, senior leaders have successfully made a collaborative bid for funding to develop specialist resources for green technology. These include the use of immersive technology to share resources across the region. As a result, learners locally and regionally will be able to use improved learning resources to better develop skills in this key growth sector.

Leaders and managers have invested significantly in improving the technical and vocational skills of staff. Staff use their high levels of knowledge and skills effectively to provide relevant training and education for their students and apprentices. Employers and stakeholders recognise this and have confidence in the subject content that students and apprentices learn.

Leaders and managers have high expectations regarding the contribution that employers and stakeholders make to the design and implementation of almost all curriculum areas. For example, Sanger Wellcome Institute work with tutors of students with SEND to deliver a curriculum that enables students to build planters to attract insects, which students monitor. This helps students to develop numeracy skills, identify species and understand the concept of basic genetic analysis.

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

Leaders and managers have a clear intent: to provide a curriculum that enables students and apprentices to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their future careers. Leaders collaborate effectively with employers and stakeholders to meet the needs of employers locally, regionally and nationally. For example, leaders have responded swiftly to the need to increase the capacity in courses for speakers of other languages, reflecting the increase in refugees and asylum seekers in the local area.

Managers and teachers plan and develop the curriculum carefully so that students, apprentices and adult learners develop their knowledge and skills incrementally over time. For example, in access to health professions, teachers ensure that adult learners understand ethics early on so that they can apply that knowledge to future research modules. In level 1 culinary arts, students learn basic knife skills and then use these to complete more complex tasks, such as filleting fish or deboning chickens. Students use these skills confidently to work in the college restaurant and in their work placements.

In most curriculum areas, managers work collaboratively with employers to plan programmes that develop the skills and knowledge required by employers. Apprentices in carpentry receive additional practical training on flat roofing to meet the need for this onsite. In public services courses, the fire service, police and army help to plan the curriculum. They develop fitness units that prepare students for the fitness tests they need to take on entering the services. Assessor trainers work with employers to ensure that apprentices learn the skills and knowledge they need, and employers contribute appropriately to apprentices' reviews. As a result, apprentices understand how the skills they gain in college support them in the workplace. Leaders have reduced the subcontractors they work with so that they focus on skills development in specific sectors and the local enterprise partnership priorities. Leaders have ensured that students and apprentices have access to high-quality resources that reflect those used in industry - for example, in hairdressing, carpentry, and electrical workshops.

Teachers and assessor trainers ensure that students develop relevant new knowledge and skills. In level 1 carpentry, students applied their knowledge of joints to repair window frames, using mortise and tenant joints. Assessor trainers ensure that students complete work to a high standard. For example, they ensure that students meet the industry standard tolerance levels. In level 3 engineering, apprentices learn how to use hand tools, lathes and milling machines so they understand the principles of manual engineering. They then progress on to more advanced engineering techniques, such as using automated and programmable machines.

Staff have high expectations of students, apprentices and adult learners to make good progress and achieve their qualifications. As a result, students and apprentices produce written and practical work of a good standard. Teachers and assessor trainers promote professional behaviours so that students and apprentices are prepared well for work. In level 2 carpentry and joinery, teachers ensure that students are accurate in their practical work and maintain their tools and equipment to a high standard. Staff on hairdressing courses expect students and apprentices to demonstrate professional behaviours when working in busy salons.

Students and apprentices benefit from staff who are highly qualified and experienced in the sectors they teach. Many staff continue to work in the industry and use their expertise to help students understand the environment in which they plan to work. They use real-life scenarios to promote discussions and create case studies. Students enjoy and benefit from gaining a strong understanding of their future working environments.

Most teachers assess students' and apprentices' skills thoroughly at the start of their courses. They use this knowledge expertly to plan suitable learning programmes to meet the needs of individual students. In courses for speakers of other languages, teachers plan for adult learners to develop their skills in English and to understand life in modern Britain so that they can better connect with their communities. Students with high needs benefit from highly individualised programmes, preparing them for independent living and employment. In a minority of apprenticeships in

engineering, where apprentices have prior experience, assessor trainers do not take sufficient account of this. Consequently, on occasion, apprentices repeat topics that they already understand.

Staff, including those working in subcontracted provision, benefit from a broad range of relevant and useful staff development opportunities. Leaders focus resolutely on developing the teaching skills of teachers and assessor trainers in marking and standardisation. Managers support staff appropriately to update their professional skills. For example, members of the catering team attend workshops in specific techniques, and they link with hotels to upskill themselves in relevant fine-dining skills. Most staff have relevant teaching and assessing qualifications.

Teachers employ a broad range of effective and interesting teaching strategies to ensure that students, apprentices and adult learners understand key concepts. Teachers check learning skilfully to ensure that students remember what they have learned and can apply their knowledge and skills to new situations. Teachers, including those on subcontracted provision, provide helpful feedback to students on their written work. They provide frequent and detailed feedback so that students and adult learners know what they need to do to improve. As a result, most students make good progress.

Too often, teachers and assessor trainers do not support students and apprentices to improve their English skills. Teachers and assessor trainers do not routinely correct students' and apprentices' spelling, grammar and punctuation. In subcontracted provision, teachers provide helpful feedback to adult learners on how to improve their English. Teachers on access to higher education courses help adult learners to develop higher level skills - for example, in understanding command verbs and in using appropriate referencing in their assignments. Students and apprentices gain a good understanding of technical language, which they use confidently, both at college and in the workplace. Teachers and assessor trainers support students and apprentices skilfully to develop their mathematics skills. Apprentices on construction courses learn how to calculate the quantity of paint to purchase and how many wall tiles are required to cover an area. In level 1 culinary arts, students weigh ingredients accurately while in the kitchen.

Most students, apprentices and adult learners attend their vocational lessons. Leaders have put in place a range of practices to improve students' and apprentices' attendance. However, too many students and apprentices do not attend their English and mathematics lessons frequently enough. Too many students do not attend their tutorials or their English and mathematics lessons on time.

Most teachers provide students and apprentices with effective careers advice and guidance so that they understand what they can do when they have completed their courses. They benefit from comprehensive guidance on how to apply for jobs or to progress on to higher education. A very small minority of students and apprentices, particularly on motor vehicle and hairdressing at level 2, do not benefit from detailed careers advice and guidance early enough in their courses.

Most students on education programmes for young people participate in a wide range of enrichment activities. Level 3 sports students run sports teams and take part in placements abroad. In construction, students take part in regional skill building competitions and preliminary rounds for World Skills competitions. Apprentices do not benefit from a sufficiently broad range of enrichment opportunities.

Teachers and assessor trainers provide students and apprentices with very good support. Assessor trainers use frequent reviews to swiftly identify apprentices who require additional support. Where apprentices fall behind, personal development coaches provide additional support until apprentices have caught up with their work. Students with high needs receive good support in vocational areas. For example, students with hearing impairments benefit from dedicated interpreters in the classroom. However, too many learning support mentors in supported learning do not use their skills effectively to provide timely support for students. They often do not gauge accurately when they should put help in place. As a result, they either intervene too early, meaning that students do not have sufficient time to complete their tasks, or mentors do not support students swiftly enough.

Highly skilled and experienced governors have a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the college. They receive appropriate, detailed reports on the quality of education and provide robust challenge to the senior leaders to secure improvements swiftly.

Leaders and managers have taken effective actions to improve the quality of provision since the previous inspection. They have appropriate checks in place to ensure that subcontracted provision is of a high quality. They accurately assess their strengths and areas for improvement and assiduously focus on securing improvements. As a result, a high proportion of students and adult learners complete their qualifications successfully. Although too many apprentices leave their courses early, a high proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship achieve high grades. Most students studying English and mathematics improve their GCSE grades.

Students, apprentices and adult learners feel safe in college. They know who to report any concerns to and understand their responsibility to keep their peers safe. Students and apprentices have a good understanding of safe working practices, and they apply these well in workshops and their workplaces. Most students and apprentices have a sound understanding of life in modern Britain. They understand the importance of respectful relationships, tolerance and the need to adhere to legislation in the workplace and their everyday lives. Most students and apprentices have a good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have created a strong culture of safeguarding. They have put in place relevant policies and procedures, which they use to keep students and apprentices safe. Leaders have established a comprehensive safeguarding team, including a link governor. Staff responsible for safeguarding are qualified appropriately for their roles. They ensure that staff receive training and frequent safeguarding updates. Staff understand the safeguarding risks in the local area. Leaders monitor attendance of vulnerable groups robustly to ensure that students and apprentices are safe if they are absent from college. Safeguarding staff have put highly effective measures in place to support students and apprentices with mental health issues.

Leaders have established rigorous safer recruitment processes to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Managers should ensure that learning support mentors in supported learning use their skills appropriately to support students who need it. Staff need to gauge accurately when they should intervene to provide support so that students can make good progress.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that students attend their English and mathematics lessons frequently and that they arrive at their lessons on time.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that teachers and assessor trainers correct students' and apprentices' spelling, punctuation and grammar consistently so that students and apprentices develop high level English skills to prepare them appropriately for future employment.
- Leaders and managers should take appropriate action to ensure that apprentices recruited on apprenticeship programmes remain on their apprenticeship and gain their qualifications.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130610
Address	Science Park Campus Kings Hedges Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB4 2QT
Contact number	01223418200
Website	www.camre.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Mark Robertson
Provider type	General further education
Date of previous inspection	4 to 7 February 2020
Main subcontractors	The Skills Network Back to Work Complete Training Limited Cambridge Community Arts

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, quality improvement, 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

Lynda Brown, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jonny Wright	His Majesty's Inspector
Ruth Harrison	Ofsted Inspector
Nicole Tampin	Ofsted Inspector
David Gartland	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Louise Preston	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Frear	His Majesty's Inspector
Shane Langthorne	His Majesty's Inspector
Sambit Sen	His Majesty's Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Richards	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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