

# Inspection of Weston College

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 December 2023

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

## Information about this provider

Weston College is a general further education college located in north Somerset. The college has three main campuses, Knightstone, Loxton and the South West Skills Campus, and four training centres based in Weston-Super-Mare: Construction Training Centre, Health and Active Living Skills, Puxton Park (animal management centre) and the University Centre Weston (apprenticeships at levels 4, 5, and 6). In addition, the college has three training centres based in Bristol, Bristol Training Institute, at the Frenchay Campus of University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) and at GKN Aerospace.

Around 4,500 adult learners, 3,600 learners aged 16 to 18, 2,000 apprentices and 500 learners with high needs study at the college. Ten learners aged 14 to 16 study part-time at the college.

Most adult learners study part-time courses at levels 1 and 2. Most of the adults that study a skills bootcamp study towards gaining a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) driving licence. The college also provides skills bootcamps in project management and in building and construction.

Learners aged 16 to 18 study a wide range of education and training programmes, mostly at levels 1, 2, and 3. Around 170 learners study T levels, and around 60 learners study the one-year foundation T-level programme.

Most apprentices study engineering, health and social care, or building and construction apprenticeships at levels 3 and 6. Over two thirds of apprentices are aged 19 and over.

Just over half of learners with high needs study foundation learning or preparation for life programmes. The other learners study a wide range of academic, vocational and technical subjects.

Leaders work with seven subcontractors who provide education and training to adult learners, apprentices and learners aged 16 to 18.

In August 2023 the longstanding principal retired, and the interim principal was appointed. There have been several other recent changes at senior leadership level.

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

Learners and apprentices, including those studying with subcontractors, learn in high-quality facilities that reflect well the workplaces and industries that most of them will move into after they complete their courses. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying a wide range of creative media subjects use the latest technology and software at the Loxton Campus. Apprentices and adult learners studying construction or engineering use industry standard equipment at the South West Skills Campus. Learners with the most complex high needs learn in a specialist sensory facility at the Knightstone Campus. Adults studying on bootcamp programmes in HGV driving use high-quality online resources that replicate the logistics industry at the Construction Training Centre. Learners and apprentices studying with subcontractors study in professional environments, such as learners aged 16 to 18 studying supporting teaching and learning at Learning for Futures. Teachers use these resources very effectively to motivate learners and apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills.

Learners and apprentices develop the professional behaviours they need to be successful in their chosen careers. This is because teachers provide them with useful subject-relevant learning experiences. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying T levels, and learners with high needs studying supported internship programmes, study curriculums that help them to know how to demonstrate the professional behaviours that employers expect when they attend work placements. Apprentices studying the nursing associate apprenticeship at level 5 learn about the importance of equality and diversity, such as the consideration of different beliefs when discussing spiritual support for end-of-life care with patients. Adults studying counselling at level 2 learn about the value of client choice for the different therapeutic activities such as art therapy.

Most learners and apprentices are prepared effectively by staff to make well-informed choices about their next steps. Staff provide them with useful careers education, information and guidance. Most learners and apprentices use this knowledge well to help them to plan their move into further training, employment or independent living. For example, learners with high needs studying on foundation programmes attend well-planned, inclusive careers fairs to learn about employment opportunities and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours to prospective employers.

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning and most attend well. They feel safe when studying at the college because staff create an inclusive and respectful learning environment. Learners and apprentices are confident that any concerns they raise with staff will be dealt with promptly and appropriately.

Most learners and apprentices study curriculums that enable them to become active citizens by developing their confidence and character. This includes taking part in social action projects or national competitions. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying carpentry at level 2 contribute to local community projects, such as the redevelopment of a local foodbank. Apprentices studying engineering

apprenticeships take part in the subject-related world skills competitions. Learners aged 16 to 18 studying A level law take part in a national criminal trial competition set in a court. Learners, including those with high needs, studying e-sports at level 3 take part in competitive video gaming at a national level. Adult learners studying counselling at level 2 improve their self-esteem by taking part in subject-related group workshops, such as mindfulness and yoga.

Most learners and apprentices study well-tailored learning programmes that meet their individual learning needs. Teachers skilfully use assessment to plan teaching that helps learners and apprentices fill the gaps in their knowledge and build on what they already know and can do.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders very successfully use well-established and highly effective stakeholder partnerships to provide a curriculum that aligns very closely with the priorities in the local skills improvement plan. Leaders play a pivotal role in the West of England Institute of Technology to help to meet regional skills needs. For example, leaders have formed important partnerships with Business West and the West of England Combined Authority to ensure that the curriculum is informed well by labour market intelligence. Leaders respond very effectively to the training needs of large regional employers, such as Airbus, and Willmott Dixon, by contributing to projects that help to improve employees' skills. Leaders work with the University Hospitals Bristol and Weston NHS Foundation Trust and the Department for Work and Pensions to create sector-based work academy programmes, such as in construction, health and social care and security. Leaders provide essential training to meet the skills needs of local small- and medium-sized businesses, such as Puxton Park (animal centre) and Thatchers (hospitality). For example, leaders have worked successfully in partnership with Puxton Park to develop a specialist training centre where they have co-designed and teach a wide range of animal management programmes.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is very well informed by using feedback from key stakeholders, such as Avon Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS) and GKN Aerospace. For example, managers have co-designed a level 3 operational firefighter apprenticeship with AFRS to meet its specific skills needs. Teachers use their close working relationships with employers to enhance the curriculum for learners and apprentices. For example, Rolls-Royce employees frequently work with teachers to teach level 3 engineering apprentices' topics such as aircraft maintenance.

Leaders understand and respond effectively to the acute shortage of skills in the South West, such as in warehousing and logistics. For example, they provide adult learners studying on skills bootcamps with the opportunity to develop essential skills and knowledge, such as learning to drive an HGV. Leaders frequently and effectively review the curriculum with regionally significant organisations, such as the National Composites Centre, The Bristol Port Company, and Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (BNSSG ICB). For example, leaders

successfully fill a local skills gap in healthcare by working in partnership with BNSSG ICB and UWE Bristol to develop a degree apprenticeship in nursing.

Leaders ensure they meet the local community skills needs very effectively by working with Jobcentre Plus and community organisations, such as The Hive, to provide adults with training that leads to better employment prospects. For example, leaders work closely with Jobcentre Plus to provide specific groups of adults with training in digital skills and courses at entry level to level 2 in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).

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

Managers and teachers sequence carefully the curriculum so that learners and apprentices incrementally build on their prior knowledge and skills. For example, adult learners studying a skills bootcamp in HGV driving take part in online driving simulations before progressing on to driving these vehicles on complex road routes. Learners aged 16 to 18 studying T-level management and administration learn the foundations of business, such as finance, before applying what they have learned to a fundraising project with Weston Hospice. Apprentices studying the aircraft maintenance fitter apprenticeship at level 3 progressively increase their knowledge of the mathematics that relates to the theory of flight. Learners with the most complex high needs studying a sensory programme are gradually introduced to different scenarios to help consolidate their knowledge of personal finances.

Teachers enrich learning sessions by sharing their expert knowledge and relevant industrial experience with learners and apprentices. For example, apprentices studying the digital and technological solutions professional apprenticeship at level 6 learn of the way artificial intelligence is currently used in industry. Learners aged 16 to 18 who study supporting teaching and learning at level 3 with the subcontractor Learning for Futures, learn useful strategies on how to better support bilingual children in the classroom. Adult learners studying electrical installation at level 2 learn from teachers' demonstrations relating to the latest industry expectations so that they can visualise how to produce work that meets the electrical regulations and standards. Learners with high needs build their capacity to self-advocate because specialist teachers help them to build their confidence in using employability skills over time. As a result, learners and apprentices gain up-to-date knowledge and develop the skills they need to be successful in their lives and future careers.

Most teachers skilfully use well-planned teaching activities to provide learners and apprentices with opportunities to practise their learning and secure it in their long-term memory. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying T-level management and administration learn, and use, leadership skills for different business scenarios, such as motivating team members. Adult learners studying ESOL frequently take part in discussions that encourage them to speak only in English. Apprentices studying the digital and technological solutions professional apprenticeship at level 6 learn the different computer programming languages before applying these to workplace projects. Learners with high needs studying foundation programmes are supported

effectively to produce high-quality work at their work placement. This means that most learners and apprentices develop their knowledge and skills at the expected or higher level.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff receive suitable training so that they can support learners and apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 studying A-level biology receive the anxiety disorder support they need, such as indiscriminate breaks during learning sessions. Adult learners studying access to higher education medical sciences at level 3 receive specialist dyslexia support so that they can achieve their curriculum goals. Apprentices studying the nursing associate apprenticeship at level 5 receive specialist support from staff to help them to improve their academic independence. As a result, most learners and apprentices with SEND receive effective support that meets their learning needs.

Managers do not ensure that all teachers provide learners and apprentices with helpful feedback on the work that they produce. A minority of teachers do not set learners and apprentices challenging targets so that they make rapid progress in learning the curriculum. For example, apprentices studying scaffolding at level 2 with the subcontractor Simian Risk Management, do not receive effective feedback from teachers, and so too few apprentices produce high-quality written work. Learners aged 16 to 18 studying A-level biology are not challenged well enough by teachers to continually improve their work. Adult learners studying ESOL programmes do not routinely receive feedback on their written work, so they do not know how to improve, and they continue to make the same mistakes.

Managers and teachers ensure that most learners and apprentices complete their programmes and achieve their qualifications. However, too few learners aged 16 to 18 studying A level and GCSE programmes are prepared well enough by their teachers to achieve high grades in their qualifications. A minority of learners with high needs studying English or mathematics qualifications do not achieve as well as their peers. Although leaders have identified these areas for improvement and taken remedial action, the impact on learners and apprentices' achievement has yet to be seen.

Most learners aged 16 to 18, and learners with high needs, study a well-planned personal development curriculum that develops their wider knowledge and skills, and helps to prepare them effectively for life at work and in the community. For example, learners aged 16 to 18 and those with high needs take part in a carefully planned and implemented tutorial programme. They learn how to stay mentally and physically healthy, about the risks associated with exploitation and radicalisation, and about fundamental British values. However, adult learners and apprentices study a personal development curriculum that varies too much in quality. For example, too few adult learners and apprentices learn enough about life in modern Britain. Too few adult learners and apprentices participate in activities that develop their wider interests and talents.

Most learners and apprentices study a curriculum that helps them to develop positive attitudes to their learning and increase their resilience and independence. For example, learners with high needs studying a foundation programme improve their independent living skills by learning how to provide self-care. Learners aged 16 to 18 studying animal management at level 3 are proud to make positive contributions to projects relating to the conservation of declining species, such as crayfish. Apprentices studying a team leader or supervisor apprenticeship at level 3 learn the knowledge and skills they need to help them to resolve conflict at work. Adults studying a skills bootcamp in HGV driving understand the importance of self-motivation and working rigorously because their teachers model the high standards of behaviour expected in the logistics industry. However, a minority of learners aged 16 to 18 studying A level and GCSE programmes are not supported well enough by teachers to develop the behaviours they need to help them to study and achieve high grades in their qualifications. For example, too few of these learners recognise the importance of using the feedback they receive from teachers to improve the quality of their work.

Managers and teachers ensure that most learners and apprentices move successfully on to their planned destinations. For example, most learners aged 16 to 18 who study a T level in health go on to study at a higher level at university. Most apprentices sustain employment on completion of their apprenticeship, and more than half gain a promotion and take on more responsibility at work. Most adult learners studying a skills bootcamp in HGV driving gain employment in the logistics industry. Most learners with high needs studying a supported internship programme successfully gain employment after completing their studies.

Governors and leaders rightly recognise the importance of recruiting and retaining high calibre and effective teachers so that learners and apprentices receive high-quality education and training. Leaders provide staff with useful professional development and training. This means that teachers continually improve their subject knowledge and teaching skills, and managers improve their effectiveness. For example, teachers in counselling learn how to use play therapy so that learning sessions are well informed by up-to-date industry practice. Managers take part in training that is carefully planned and relates well to their responsibilities.

Governors and leaders listen carefully to the feedback from staff working at all levels in the college. They respond appropriately by taking timely actions to improve staff's well-being. For example, leaders have recently appointed well-being champions to help staff manage their workload. As a result, staff feel valued and well supported by leaders and managers.

Governance of the quality of education is mostly effective. Governors appropriately challenge leaders on the quality of the educational and training experience that learners and apprentices receive. However, governors do not always challenge leaders enough on the timeliness and impact of the remedial actions taken. As a result, improvements to the few weakest programmes are too slow.

Governors and leaders have very recently improved their oversight of the quality of education provided by subcontractors. This has led to a reduction in the number of subcontractors from 10 to seven. Leaders are refocusing the use of subcontractors to meet the education and training needs for specific groups, including the most disadvantaged learners aged 16 to 18, and adult learners who are long-term unemployed or those who need to develop their skills. They have taken appropriate action to improve the curriculum and the learner experience at these providers. For example, they now ensure that teachers working at subcontractors receive the professional development they need to improve their teaching, such as individual support from the college teaching, learning and assessment managers. However, not all subcontractors, such as Simian Risk Management, implement a curriculum that is of a good quality.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Ensure that the actions taken by leaders to improve the quality of education and training programmes, including those provided by subcontractors, lead to rapid improvements.
- Ensure that all learners and apprentices, including those studying with subcontractors, receive high-quality feedback, and are set challenging targets that enable them to continually improve the standard of their work.
- Ensure that all adult learners and apprentices study a high-quality personal development curriculum.
- Ensure that all learners aged 16 to 18, and learners with high needs, are supported effectively by staff to achieve high grades in their qualifications commensurate with their ability.



## Provider details

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<b>Contact number</b>	01934 411411
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.weston.ac.uk">www.weston.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Jacqui Ford
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 December 2013
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Learning For Futures University of the West of England The Big Act Young Devon Young Gloucestershire Quality Transport Training Simian Risk Management

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal 16-19 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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