

Maritime Engineering College North West (trading as The Engineering College (TEC))

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	54873
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Inspection dates:	7 and 8 February 2024
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Maritime and Engineering College North West (trading as The Engineering College (TEC)) was inspected in January 2023. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

TEC is based on the banks of the River Mersey in Birkenhead. TEC is an independent learning provider that specialises in engineering, construction and marine engineering training. The college provides apprenticeships. TEC no longer offers traineeships, nor does it work with any subcontractors.

At the time of the inspection there were 365 apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships. Almost all apprentices study at level 3, with two thirds on metal fabricator, engineering technician and engineering fitter apprenticeships. At level 2 there were six apprentices following apprenticeships in general welder (arc processes) or engineering operative.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in providing effective careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) so that all apprentices can make informed choices about their next steps? Significant progress

Apprentices benefit from thorough CEIAG and recruitment processes to ensure they are on the correct apprenticeship to prepare them for a career in engineering or construction. They complete robust application and interview processes with TEC and their employers prior to enrolment. Managers use apprentices' prior attainment, assessments of their English, mathematics and sector specific knowledge and experience to inform apprentices' pathways for training and employment.

Apprentices are well informed about their choice of apprenticeship pathway. Many apprentices benefit from taster events and traineeships that provide an insight to their chosen vocation before enrolling on their apprenticeship. Apprentices who apply directly through their employer receive the information they need to select the most appropriate pathway to meet their aptitudes and interests.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have appointed a new careers lead. They have revised the planning for and delivery of their CEIAG to ensure that apprentices receive the ongoing advice and guidance that they need to make well-informed decisions about their future careers and next steps. While leaders say that apprentices always received this advice and guidance, they recognise it was often provided ad hoc from their experienced tutors and training officers, based on their sector experience, rather than as part of a well-planned programme. They have taken steps to rectify this issue and embed a planned programme of CEIAG throughout the apprenticeship.

Apprentices benefit from useful and regular CEIAG about their potential career progressions and future pathways from tutors, training officers and employers. Apprentices know about additional qualifications, including higher national certificates/diplomas, degrees and master's degrees that will increase their value to their employers. Tutors and training officers signpost apprentices to specialist advice to explore unusual routes such as underwater welding. Apprentices know how to develop and enhance their careers.

How much progress have leaders made in involving employers in the planning and coordination of on- and off-the-job training to support apprentices to practise the skills they have developed in the workplace?

Reasonable progress

Leaders, tutors and training officers have made significant changes to how they teach apprentices the engineering and construction curriculums. They now teach apprentices in a modular approach by covering the four main engineering modules and then move on to more specialised modules. Leaders ensure that apprentices gain a deeper understanding of engineering principles. They have devised a comprehensive curriculum plan that covers on- and off-the-job training.

Leaders provide different curriculum delivery models, depending on the needs of their employers. They offer a full-time foundation year or a day-release model. Employers talk to leaders about what the curriculum should include for them and their apprentices. Employers place tradespeople at the college to co-design the curriculum. They explain how essential knowledge, skills and behaviours are taught up front, so that apprentices can perform their job role competently and safely. Leaders adjust the curriculum to meet employers' individual needs. They offer shipbuilding, operations and advanced engineering mathematics as optional modules, following requests from employers.

Training officers play a pivotal role in linking apprentices' on- and off-the-job training so that apprentices can readily practise what they learn. They set meaningful production reports so that apprentices can apply their new learning at work. Employers rotate apprentices' job roles so that they can gain the breadth of experiences that they need and practise their new knowledge and skills regularly.

Training officers review apprentices' progress with their employers every 12 weeks. They ensure that the curriculum continues to meet employers' and apprentices' needs.

Apprentices understand how their learning in college and the workplace is connected. They note how workshop resources match those in their employers' businesses and how they can frequently practise their skills.

Leaders recognise that although the changes they have made to the curriculum are already having a positive impact on their apprentices, these need to be fully embedded.

<p>What progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors and training officers use information on what apprentices already know and can do at the start of their apprenticeship, so that all apprentices achieve their potential? How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors prepare apprentices for their final assessments, so they can achieve the grades of which they are capable?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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Leaders find out what apprentices know and can do at the start of their apprenticeship. Specialist tutors use a skills scan based on the apprenticeship standard to check on apprentices' prior knowledge and skills. Tutors recognise that some apprentices may have previous experience or qualifications in engineering but often lack the relevant practical skills. Tutors set apprentices initial tasks to find out more about apprentices' prior learning. They adapt their teaching accordingly. Tutors set more complex targets and tasks to challenge more experienced apprentices. Although apprentices complete an assessment of their English and mathematics, it is unclear how this information is used by tutors to plan their teaching or support learners.

Tutors spend more time preparing apprentices for their final assessments (EPA). They have attended awarding organisation training to gain insight into how apprentices are assessed so that they can better support apprentices to achieve positive outcomes. Training officers advise employers about the EPA process and how to best prepare their apprentices in the workplace. Since the previous inspection, EPA results demonstrate that leaders' actions to improve apprentices' achievements and the attainment of high grades have been effective.

Tutors work with apprentices and employers to support apprentices to achieve high grades. Apprentices complete mock assessments using awarding organisation materials to mimic the final assessment processes and prepare them well. However, some tutors who are new to the college do not know enough about how their apprentices will be assessed at the end of the apprenticeship.

Apprentices have a confident grasp of the EPA requirements. They know the tasks they will need to complete and the grades that are available to them. They appreciate that tutors' assessment and feedback is helping them to prepare for their final assessment, for example the need to be specific when discussing materials, tools and health and safety matters. They feel supported to achieve high grades but note that the work can be very demanding.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices have a deep understanding of the risks associated with extremist views, so that they are prepared for life in modern Britain?

Significant progress

Apprentices benefit from regular training and recap on a broad range of topical issues and the potential threats posed by radicalisation and extremism. They talk knowledgeably about the local threats of knife and gang crime as well as some gun crime in the area. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe online and are aware of how to keep their digital footprint private. They know how to keep mentally and physically safe. Apprentices are aware that some of the work they do, such as Ministry of Defence work, may make their premises more at risk of terrorism. They take this seriously and understand how to protect themselves, their peers and their employers. Apprentices know to report any concerns they have to the safeguarding lead or their tutors. They feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe.

Since the previous inspection, managers have launched a new personal development curriculum made up of short modules targeting apprentices' knowledge, awareness and understanding of life in modern Britain. Apprentices study a range of content, including career development; safeguarding; the 'Prevent' duty; fundamental British values; equality, diversity and inclusion; healthy relationships; sexual health; online safety; personal finance; examination techniques; revision and study skills. All new apprentices, and the large majority of those who have been on their programme for longer, engage with their personal development programme either in their college lessons or through their online learning platform. Tutors and training officers routinely work through the curriculum with apprentices. Apprentices have an increased appreciation and preparedness for life because of their personal development programme.

What progress have leaders made in establishing quality assurance procedures to support them to improve apprentices' learning experience?

Reasonable progress

Leaders swiftly focused on the recommendations for improvement following the previous inspection. They have taken steps to ensure that they have an effective oversight of how well apprentices develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their apprenticeship. Leaders use a range of quality assurance measures

to track and monitor the progress that apprentices make, intervening more swiftly and incisively when apprentices fall behind.

Leaders and managers have developed more robust quality assurance and improvement processes to improve the apprentice experience. They complete termly observations, lesson visits and work scrutiny, talk to apprentices about their learning, and carry out weekly lesson walks to gain a clear oversight of the quality of training that apprentices receive. Leaders and managers use their findings to identify trends and areas for development that inform professional development activities for individuals and groups. Where any aspect of teaching and learning does not meet expectations, they take supportive actions to improve tutor performance.

Leaders and managers have focused time and resources into developing tutors' teaching skills. They routinely recruit new tutors who are industry and subject experts, but who may not be qualified teachers. All new tutors complete teaching qualifications. They shadow more experienced staff and team teach in workshops to develop and hone their skills before teaching their own groups.

Leaders and managers have improved their reporting of key information to governors to ensure oversight at every level of management. New governors have an improving understanding of the quality of provision. They use their extensive experience of education and training to hold leaders to account for the quality of training that apprentices receive. Leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and use their quality assurance processes to bring about improvements. Most apprentices make at least their expected level of progress, develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours for work, and achieve their apprenticeships.

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