

Inspection of Birmingham City University

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 March 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Birmingham City University (BCU) is a large provider of higher education and training in Birmingham. It has two substantial sites in the city centre and Edgbaston. The curriculum includes a wide range of apprenticeships from level 3 to level 7. Nearly all apprentices study at levels 5 to 7. At the time of inspection, there were 1,400 apprentices. The university offers 19 different apprenticeship standards and works with 406 employers. The largest group of 940 apprentices study at levels 5 and 6 in subjects linked to nursing, medicine and healthcare. Approximately 300 apprentices study business management or building and construction at levels 6 and 7. Fifty apprentices study engineering and manufacturing technologies at levels 6 and 7. There are smaller numbers in the areas of education and training. All but 14 apprentices are currently aged 19 and above.

The university uses two subcontractors, Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust, who provide education for the nursing apprenticeships.

The university delivers Skills Bootcamps in climate literacy and sustainable futures. Twenty-one learners were studying on this short course.

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

Apprentices develop new knowledge and skills in vocational curriculums that prepare them well for progression in their careers. They benefit from a well-planned curriculum that reflects current industry practice and standards. Apprentices rightly value the good teaching and appreciate the high-quality facilities in which they learn. Employers recognise the contributions apprentices make to the efficient running of their organisations.

Learners studying on Skills Bootcamps benefit from a helpful induction. They know what to expect and therefore stay on the course. Learners value the breadth of their course, and the expertise of lecturers and visiting speakers. Learners design and solve their own individual professional challenges. They gain the confidence to extend their professional practice to include reference to economic and environmental sustainability.

Apprentices develop relevant professional behaviours for the sectors in which they work. Apprentices demonstrate integrity, emotional understanding and ethical decision-making as they relate to specific professions. Across all sectors, apprentices become more confident and resilient, because of the teaching and support they receive.

Leaders create a respectful, safe and welcoming environment. Apprentices and learners enjoy their time at the university. They attend well. Apprentices, including younger learners, study without any concerns of bullying or harassment. Apprentices and learners feel safe.

Too few younger apprentices discuss the nature and importance of healthy relationships. A minority of apprentices understand how to apply their understanding of the dangers of extremism to their professional roles.

In a minority of apprenticeships, apprentices do not place sufficient importance on achieving the apprenticeship qualification.

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

Leaders and managers have selected curriculums that meet the needs of local and national employers. For example, leaders have developed curriculums that respond to the national shortage in highly qualified fire safety engineers. After the Grenfell fire incident, and the Fire Safety Bill 2020, leaders have prepared a curriculum that explains the relationship between the design of buildings and the risk of fire.

Leaders and managers plan and sequence the curriculum well for apprentices and learners. In the level 6 chartered surveyor apprenticeship, lecturers explain the basic concepts of a property valuation. They then teach the use of industry software and the application of complicated legal rules. In the Skills Bootcamp sessions on climate literacy, lecturers start with the foundational topics that enable an understanding of

climate change and sustainability. They then require learners to complete a more complicated challenge. Learners remember what they have learned and how they will use this knowledge at work.

Curriculum leaders and lecturers work closely with employers. They meet frequently with apprentices in three-way reviews to make sure there is a clear link between on- and off-the-job training. For example, in the nursing associate apprenticeship level 5, apprentices move from theoretical discussions about cannulation to practical training. They then insert tubes into patients accurately in the hospital. As a result, apprentices remember what they have learned, and improve their skills swiftly and apply them in the workplace.

Lecturers across apprenticeships have a wealth of experience in their sectors. They participate in regular professional development activities, which improve their teaching skills. Lecturers use effective techniques to help apprentices remember what they have been taught. They focus well on helping apprentices to learn key technical terms. Lecturers on the nursing associate apprenticeship level 5 ask apprentices to recall learning about patient-centred care, such as dignity in death, when practising end-of-life care at the end of the course.

Lecturers ensure that apprentices develop and use their mathematical and English skills throughout their apprenticeship. In the fire safety engineer apprenticeship, lecturers teach apprentices how to communicate clearly in written reports. They demonstrate how to complete complex numerical calculations to assess risk.

Lecturers use written and practical assessments to help apprentices improve over time. They check what apprentices have learned and correct any misunderstandings swiftly. In most cases, lecturers give apprentices helpful feedback on their practical and written work. This helps apprentices understand how they can improve. For example, on the level 7 internal audit professional apprenticeship, apprentices produce written reflections on the topics they have covered. Lecturers provide helpful feedback that corrects misconceptions.

Leaders act swiftly to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). On the level 6 nursing apprenticeship, staff quickly identify apprentices with dyslexia. With the permission of the apprentice, they share information with the employer and provide plans so that apprentices can participate fully in their apprenticeship. Apprentices with SEND make progress that is at least as good as their peers.

As a result of high-quality training, apprentices gain valuable new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Most apprentices produce work that matches industry standards. Apprentices move on to higher level jobs or gain promotion at work. However, leaders do not collect detailed and comprehensive information about the destinations of apprentices or learners on completion of the course. As a result, they are not able to report fully on the impact of their work.

Most apprentices achieve their apprenticeship. However, leaders do not ensure that enough apprentices achieve on the chartered surveyor and internal audit professional apprenticeships.

Staff provide apprentices with extensive careers education, information advice and guidance. Apprentices understand their career options. Lecturers are well informed about the careers in their sectors. Lecturers cover these topics well within the curriculum.

Lecturers, particularly in nursing apprenticeships, teach apprentices how to maintain and improve their mental health. Leaders communicate internal and external sources of help for those who struggle with their mental health.

Leaders have managed the growth in apprenticeships well and improved the quality of education. They have invested in staff and introduced new quality improvement processes. Curriculum leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of their courses. In most cases, this leads to rapid improvements. In a small minority of apprenticeships, leaders do not use information well enough to bring about rapid improvement.

Leaders work with two carefully selected subcontractors in nursing. They have effective long-standing arrangements to manage these partners. Apprentices progress well and have access to a range of high-quality placements.

Governors support and challenge leaders to maintain and improve the quality of education. They have an accurate understanding of the quality of education and plans for this provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Plan and teach a personal development curriculum that better prepares apprentices for life in modern Britain.
- Ensure that more apprentices on the chartered surveyor and professional internal audit apprenticeships complete and achieve.
- Monitor the destinations of apprentices, and learners on Skills Bootcamps, after they have completed their studies to enable a full evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculums.
- Improve curriculum leaders' use of information when they are monitoring the impact of their actions on the quality of education.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133788
Address	University House 15 Bartholomew Row Birmingham B5 5JU
Contact number	01213315000
Website	www.bcu.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Vice-Chancellor Professor David Mba
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	5 to 8 February 2019
Main subcontractors	Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy director of student and academic services, 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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