

Inspection of University of Birmingham

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 April 2024

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
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| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Adult learning programmes | Good |
| Apprenticeships | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this provider

The University of Birmingham is a higher education institution based in Birmingham, West Midlands. The university has more than 38,000 students and its structure comprises five colleges: the College of Life and Environmental Sciences, the College of Medical and Dental Sciences, the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, the College of Social Sciences and the College of Arts and Law.

At the time of inspection, there were 722 apprentices across nine apprenticeship standards. There were 325 apprentices on the level 7 senior leader standard, 140 apprentices on the level 6 digital and technology solutions professional standard, 77 apprentices on the level 7 rail and rail systems principal engineer standard, 51 apprentices on the level 7 advanced clinical practitioner standard, 46 apprentices on the level 3 team leader or supervisor standard and 38 apprentices on the level 7 chartered town planner standard. The remaining apprentices were studying on level 5 operations or departmental manager standard, level 7 geotechnical engineer standard and level 7 systems thinking practitioner standard.

There were also 60 adult learners studying on Skills Bootcamps: 35 adult learners on the Drama and Scripted TV Skills Bootcamp and 25 adults on the Net Zero Together Skills Bootcamp. At the time of inspection, the University of Birmingham had recently taken the decision to pause the delivery of Skills Bootcamps.

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

Learners and apprentices highly value the training they receive. They recognise that the knowledge, skills and behaviours their tutors help them to develop prepare them well for successful careers within their chosen sector.

Learners and apprentices display positive attitudes to their learning. They are punctual and have high attendance at classes.

Learners and apprentices benefit from teaching sessions that are calm and orderly. They are attentive to what they are being taught by tutors in an environment that is conducive for learning. This results in learners and apprentices making swift progress from their starting points.

Learners and apprentices demonstrate a clear understanding of the principles of equality and diversity. They work well in culturally diverse groups and understand the importance of treating others with dignity and respect. For example, senior leader apprentices from the specialised faith cohort regularly discuss sensitive issues such as women's place in religion, reflecting on how this differs between faiths. This helps apprentices to broaden their understanding of a range of religions and cultures different to their own.

Most learners and apprentices have an appropriate understanding of the dangers posed by extremist behaviour. However, a small number of level 7 rail and rail system apprentices do not have this learning revisited often enough and as a result do not have a secure understanding.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They know who to report safeguarding concerns to and are confident that staff will address any issues they encounter appropriately.

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

Leaders have developed curriculums that meet local and national skills needs. They collaboratively work with stakeholders to identify the skills needed in specific sectors and then design curriculums that meet these needs. An example of this is in the level 7 advanced clinical practitioner standard, where leaders work closely with several NHS trusts to ensure that the curriculum develops the skilled workforce the NHS needs.

Staff have designed curriculums that are logically sequenced. For example, on the level 6 digital technology solutions professional apprenticeship, the early modules cover core concepts of competencies, such as programming, linear algebra and artificial intelligence. Apprentices then progress to applying what they have learned to projects set within their workplace. Learners and apprentices benefit from these well-designed curriculums as they help them to gain the skills they need to be successful in their chosen careers.

Staff measure the starting points of learners and apprentices effectively and use these starting points to inform their teaching. As a result, learners and apprentices make swift progress from their carefully ascertained starting points.

Leaders have provided learners and apprentices with highly knowledgeable and skilled tutors. Frequently, tutors are well-respected researchers within their academic field, who also have regular contacts with professionals working in the sector. As a result, learners and apprentices gain from classes that teach the most current industry practices and technologies.

Tutors use an effective range of teaching strategies to ensure that learners and apprentices are securing new knowledge. They use their industry expertise to inspire and teach learners and apprentices. They model professional industry behaviours very effectively. Level 7 rail and rail systems principal engineer apprenticeship tutors use group work and practical tasks such as role plays that enable learners to apply their new knowledge to practice. As a result, learners and apprentices make swift progress over the duration of their course.

Tutors provide learners and apprentices with detailed written and verbal feedback that identifies what they have done well and where they need to improve. Learners and apprentices value this feedback and use it to improve their work.

Staff support learners and apprentices effectively to develop their English and mathematical skills. Adult learners on net zero courses develop their numeracy and data collecting skills by completing a domestic energy inventory where they calculate the carbon footprint and identify ways to reduce this. Learners then build on this learning by learning how to scale up these calculations to an organisational level.

Too few learners on Skills Bootcamps move on into employment or higher-level job roles when they complete their course. Senior leaders recognise that the proportion of Skills Bootcamp learners who move on to employment is too low, particularly in the computer technology sector. As a result, leaders have recently made the decision to pause the delivery of Skills Bootcamps.

Leaders do not sufficiently scrutinise the information they have on apprentices who undertake a break in learning. While leaders keep an accurate record of the number of apprentices on a break in learning, they do not review this in detail or set action plans to improve this situation. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who undertake a break in learning is increasing.

Leaders ensure that tutors participate in focused and effective professional development. Tutors develop their subject expertise and share good practice in approaches to teaching. Leaders also develop links with other higher education institutions and share good practice. As a result, learners and apprentices experience a high standard of teaching.

Staff provide learners and apprentices with effective careers advice and guidance. Upon completing their studies, staff provide learners and apprentices with a clear

understanding of the career progression opportunities available to them. On portfolio days, staff provide careers advice to level 7 clinical practitioner apprentices, discussing potential specialisms they could advance to and how to achieve such progression.

Leaders have implemented an appropriate governance structure that is coherent and multilayered. Governors maintain effective oversight of the quality of apprenticeship and bootcamp courses they offer.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all apprentices have a secure understanding of radicalisation and extremism.
- Effectively manage and reduce the number of apprentices who access a break in learning.
- Increase the number of adult learners who gain sustained employment on completion of their Skills Bootcamp.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 133784 |
| Address | Chancellors Court Edgbaston Birmingham West Midlands B15 2TT |
| Contact number | 0121 414 3344 |
| Website | https://www.birmingham.ac.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Adam Tickell |
| Provider type | Higher education institution |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Main subcontractors | EdX Boot Camps Limited |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships delivery, 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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| Joel Dalhouse, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Martin Ward | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Ravinder Jhite | Ofsted Inspector |
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