

Bath College

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Bath College was inspected in October 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.

Bath College is a general further education college in Bath, Somerset. The College has two campuses one is located in the centre of Bath and the other in the Somer Valley, Radstock. At the time of the monitoring visit, around 2,100 learners aged 16 to 18, 4,900 adult learners, and 500 apprentices were studying at the college. There were around 280 learners were in receipt of high needs funding.

Themes

What progress have leaders made to improve their evaluation of the quality of education and the level challenge from governors? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection leaders have improved the information that governors receive about the quality of education so that they can support and challenge leaders more effectively. Leaders and governors rightly recognise they need timely information about the progress learners are making and how well they achieve. Leaders now present governors with up-to-date information about how well learners are attending college and achieving their qualifications. Leaders have involved governors in the development of the new performance software that leaders use to monitor the performance of teachers and curriculum departments.

Governors have improved their oversight of leaders' actions to improve the quality of education. Governors attend quality review meetings held in the curriculum departments to deepen their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of courses and apprenticeships. Governors use the insights they gain from these visits to support and challenge leaders more effectively. For example, governors seek assurance that external stakeholders are involved in the planning of curriculums and have tasked leaders to share good practice from the curriculum departments more widely.

Leaders have recently established rigorous quality assurance processes to monitor the effectiveness of the actions they have put in place to improve the quality of education. Leaders meet with curriculum managers fortnightly to monitor the performance of adult learning courses and apprenticeship training programmes. Leaders summarise the outcomes from these meetings clearly so that governors and

leaders know the effectiveness of leaders' actions. Governors and leaders rightly recognise that the quality of teaching and the proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications on adult learning courses and apprenticeships remains too low and needs to improve.

What progress have leaders made to improve the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of the curriculum?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have taken effective actions to increase the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of individual curriculums. Leaders have implemented a stakeholder engagement strategy that sets clear targets and expectations for managers to establish sustainable relationships with external partners so that learners can enhance the knowledge and skills they are taught.

Leaders have established closer links between the college's business development team and teaching staff. This has resulted in improved communications between the college and external stakeholders. An increasing proportion of curriculums have been adapted in response to feedback from external stakeholders. For example, staff who teach motor vehicle studies have codesigned with employers new service sheets for learners to use when completing mechanical checks on a wide variety of vehicles, including vintage cars, to broaden learners' knowledge. Learners studying media production spend time on placement with commercial film units that deploy low carbon practices so they gain new knowledge and skills to prepare them for future work in the industry. Learners studying hairdressing learn about the science of product creation through visits to the laboratories of a trichology company, which deepens learners' knowledge of ingredients and product testing.

Leaders have taken effective steps to improve how the college's adult curriculum responds to the needs of external stakeholders. Leaders have established strong partnerships with Department for Work and Pensions, the local authority and other agencies to provide flexible courses that help vulnerable adults, the low-paid and the unemployed gain the skills they need to find employment. Leaders have responded to feedback from stakeholders by teaching adult learners the essential digital skills they need to make online job applications, how to prepare for interviews and how to organise their curriculum vitae.

Leaders rightly recognise that the involvement of stakeholders is not yet consistently in place in all curriculum areas.

What progress have leaders made to improve the use of assessment to inform teaching, and to provide learners and apprentices with helpful feedback so that they know what they need to do to improve?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have implemented new processes to support teachers to improve the quality of assessment and the feedback they provide to learners. Leaders have employed additional teaching and learning coaches to help teachers improve their skills. Leaders have established a comprehensive digital library of teaching resources that teachers use to help them improve their practice. Teaching and learning coaches create useful newsletters that provide teachers with examples of how to improve their teaching. For example, teachers are provided with techniques to make lessons more interactive for learners and how to use questioning effectively to check what learners know and can do. While curriculum managers and teachers value the introduction of these initiatives it is too early to assess the full impact.

Teachers have improved the assessments they make of learners' abilities at the start of their studies. Most teachers use this information well to identify gaps in learners' knowledge and to identify what content needs to be retaught before new topics are introduced. Teachers ensure that most learners receive useful oral feedback that helps them to improve. Teachers ensure that most written feedback they provide to learners describes clearly what learners need to do to improve. For example, learners studying beauty courses receive precise feedback about how they need to refine their techniques for sharpening and tinting eyebrows to be able to achieve merit and distinction grades. Teachers ensure that learners studying performing arts receive precise feedback about their skills development, for example, how to improve performance skills to stand out at auditions.

In a few subjects a minority of learners receive written feedback that is superficial and imprecise and does not give them the information they need to improve their knowledge and skills. For example, learners receive feedback which is primarily congratulatory and commends them for meeting assessment criteria or completing a piece of work without describing how to further improve what they know and can do.

What progress have leaders made to improve the usefulness of apprentices' reviews so that leaders know how much progress they have made, and to inform timely intervention?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, assessors have improved the quality of the reviews they undertake of the progress that apprentices are making. Assessors have increased the number of review meetings they hold with apprentices. For example, apprentices now receive an additional review that assesses what they know and can do in readiness for their final assessment for their apprenticeship. Assessors conduct a further review with apprentices after their final assessment to evaluate what they did well and what could be improved.

Assessors monitor closely the progress that most apprentices are making, and this has contributed to an increase in the proportion of reviews completed on time. Leaders undertake audits of the reviews apprentices receive to sample the quality of

the targets and feedback assessors provide to apprentices. Assessors receive useful recommendations about how they can improve the feedback they give.

Assessors collaborate more closely with employers to plan opportunities for apprentices to gain new skills and knowledge. For example, apprentices studying plumbing were relocated by employers to another site to gain more experience of small domestic installations.

Most teachers and assessors set specific targets for apprentices to help them to improve. For example, apprentices studying bricklaying receive precise targets about how to improve how they gauge the height of the bricks and how to ensure that walls are vertical. However, in a minority of cases, teachers and assessors do not challenge apprentices to gain new knowledge and skills because they set targets that are generic, such as asking apprentices to gather more evidence or to complete tasks.

What progress have leaders made to improve the availability and participation of learners, including those with high needs, in work experience activity and work-related learning?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have increased the availability of work experience and work-related activities for learners. Leaders have improved their oversight of work experience by ensuring that staff from curriculum areas collaborate closely with the college’s business engagement team to plan work experience opportunities for learners.

Leaders have designed effective solutions to overcome barriers to work experience where regulation and legislation makes placing learners challenging. For example, leaders plan criminology weeks at the college to replicate crime and investigation experiences so that learners studying related subjects have access to industry professionals.

Teachers have increased the number of employers who visit the college to give talks to learners about jobs in their industry. For example, around 12 healthcare employers provided talks to learners about different career pathways. Learners make good use of these events to request work experience with the employers. In the creative arts, teachers liaise well with employers to set design briefs for learners so that they gain a real understanding of the industry. For example, learners studying fashion created robe designs for a yoga and fitness club and created an exhibition of garment designs inspired by local history, which was hosted by the city’s abbey.

Leaders are increasing the number of work experience opportunities for learners with high needs. Learners develop their employability skills by working in shops and through placements in the college’s internal departments such as catering, information technology support services and marketing. Leaders are developing

through partners such as the local authority, increased external placements for learners with high needs.

A small minority of learners have yet to complete work experience that is relevant to the subject they are studying. Leaders rightly recognise that too many learners in the first year of their course were instructed to use their part-time paid employment as work experience and, as a result, they did not further their knowledge of, or skills in, their subject.

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