

# Inspection of The College of West Anglia

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 March 2025

## **Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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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	Good

## **Information about this provider**

The College of West Anglia is a large general further education college operating from sites in King's Lynn, Wisbech, Cambridge and Downham Market.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,527 learners on education programmes for young people on a range of academic, vocational, professional and technical courses from entry level to level 3 in all 15 subject sector areas. This includes T-level courses in childcare and health. There were 1,203 adult learners on a wide range of courses, including Skills Bootcamps in construction and engineering and 782 apprentices. Most apprentices are training on level 2 and 3 qualifications in engineering or construction. There were 405 learners with high needs enrolled onto study programmes across the different college sites, most of whom are on dedicated provision.

At the time of the inspection, leaders work with six subcontractors.

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

Learners with high needs thrive in the college, they achieve well and develop friendships. Many left secondary education early, so began their journey at the college with no previous qualifications. Teachers provide effective support, which enables learners to achieve formal qualifications, such as GCSE English and mathematics, as well as a range of vocational qualifications. Alongside their academic studies, learners are provided with the skills and environment to feel safe, accepted and have a sense of belonging.

Learners develop a range of knowledge, skills and behaviours that support their success. Learners on education programmes for young people develop English and mathematic skills that prepares them well for their future. For example, learners on T-level health learn how to calculate blood pressure, take body measurements and record findings on a report. Learners on level 2 equine work as scribes for competitions, measure horse feed requirements and calculate the distance between equipment and pole height for horse shows.

Adult learners increase their confidence and are prepared effectively for their next steps. Adult learners studying functional skills mathematics, many of whom have been out of education for a long time, are taught the fundamental mathematic skills by their teachers that they need to move on to further study or employment. Adult learners on access to higher education (HE) medicine, develop research and presentation skills, which supports them in positive progression to university.

Apprentices develop the understanding and professional behaviours that they use productively in the workplace. Level 2 engineering operative apprentices learn to weld on a range of equipment, including those not available in their workplace. They quickly develop their knowledge and practical skills, which they can apply in a range of scenarios and contexts. Most apprentices remain in permanent employment at the end of their apprenticeship.

Leaders and staff have created a welcoming and inclusive environment for learners and apprentices. Learners from the LGBTQ+ community value the highly respectful culture that supports and allows them to be themselves. They appreciate that staff and peers across the campuses use their chosen pronouns and chosen name, which is representative of their identity.

Learners and apprentices take part in a wide range of purposeful and interesting enrichment activities. This includes a variety of relevant trips, for example level 2 hairdressing learners attend masterclasses in prosthetics. Level 3 animal management and adult dog grooming learners visit international dog shows. Staff celebrate and champion the success of learners and apprentices across a wide range of internal and external competitions, where they are encouraged to develop their interests and talents. For example, level 2 equine learners enter dressage competitions and level 3 electrical installation apprentices compete in the World Skills UK competitions.

Staff have developed a supportive and encouraging culture, where learners and apprentices develop the positive traits that they need to flourish. Through personalised support, a tailored curriculum and therapeutic approaches, such as being 'trauma informed', learners and apprentices develop their confidence and resilience. For example, learners with high needs who cannot talk to strangers or avoid busy rooms, develop the confidence to talk to unfamiliar adults and peers, and push themselves to explore busy environments.

Learners and apprentices, including those with high needs, feel safe at the college due to the care and expertise of teachers and wider staff. Learners and apprentices know who to contact if they have a concern and trust that swift action will be taken by their teachers. They appreciate the presence of dedicated security staff around the college sites and the measures in place to secure their safety. Apprentices feel safe at work and when attending off-the-job training. Where learners and apprentices raise concerns, staff take prompt action and make appropriate referrals.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have established highly effective strategic relationships with a range of key stakeholders, which enables them to clearly understand the needs of the region, particularly in terms of upskilling. Leaders respond positively and rapidly to ensure that the curriculum offer meets the diverse needs of their learners and apprentices. Leaders work with relevant key stakeholders, including employers, local councils and employer representative bodies. The college and its senior leaders are held in high regard by key stakeholders, including local members of parliament.

Senior leaders took an active role in the development of two local skills improvement plans and supported the local skills improvement fund in areas, such as green skills, advanced manufacturing and digital. They lead on the Future Technicians project, which focuses on technical skills shortages in the life sciences sector and environmental sciences. In response to growing demand for green skills in the region, leaders work very closely with employers and key stakeholders in their development to provide training opportunities in areas, such as renewable energy, water efficiency and environmental technology. Leaders have established an advisory board to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, such as exploring the retro-fitting installation of air source heat pumps in homes.

Leaders have in place a curriculum offer that successfully contributes to meeting skills needs across the region and beyond. They provide apprenticeships in response to the specific needs of employers and have clear progression routes to employment from education programmes for young people. Leaders ensure that they provide a flexible suite of adult learner courses that are responsive to skills needs and learner demands. Most teachers involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of the curriculum, however, this is less developed in a few courses.

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

Leaders and managers have developed a broad curriculum offer to meet the needs of the local and regional communities that they serve. They carefully select courses that prepare learners and apprentices well for their next steps and help them to move closer to their career aims. Leaders offer specialised courses in priority sectors, such as green skills, health services and agri-tech. Leaders and managers equip learners and apprentices with skills for employment and career preparation, ensuring that they develop the competencies they need to be successful in their next steps.

Leaders, managers and teachers sensibly plan courses in a logical order that helps learners and apprentices to incrementally build on their skills and knowledge over time. Teachers use their subject expertise to prioritise key topics at the start of the programmes. For example, on level 2 animal care, learners begin with an understanding of basic behaviour in small animals before moving on to normal behaviour. They then explore how to identify the signs of stress in small animals before applying this in practical observations of small animals.

Teachers support learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. For example, in level 1 carpentry learners are set personalised, incremental targets that breaks down their learning into manageable chunks. These are communicated effectively to learning support assistants, who provide support to ensure that learners develop their independence and take ownership of their work. Learners and apprentices are provided with the tools and resources they need, such as ear defenders, coloured overlays, readers and scribes.

Staff provide useful and relevant careers information, advice and guidance, which enables learners and apprentices to make informed decisions about their next steps. Learners and apprentices attend a wide range of events and activities, facilitated by the college. For example, learners and apprentices attend a range of careers fairs with representatives from universities and local employers in addition to individual meetings with careers advisors, where learners and apprentices identify the skills needed for their chosen career.

Young learners participate in purposeful work experience, which helps them to develop skills, build character and gain insight into their chosen industry. For example, learners on A-levels complete work experience to enhance their learning. This includes working in solicitors, hospitals and more widely with charities, such as the National Trust. Learners develop their communication and teamwork skills while increasing confidence in their abilities.

Teachers use a range of effective teaching methods to help learners and apprentices learn new things. This includes group discussions, quizzes, positive modelling and peer work, such as think-pair-share. After giving clear explanations for key concepts,

teachers skilfully use activities to enable learners and apprentices to recall and remember their new knowledge.

Learners and apprentices value the subject expertise that teachers have that brings their learning to life. For example, adult learners on the engineering Skills Bootcamp recognise the development of their skills in computer aided design systems and how they apply these at work. They attribute these skills to the high levels of knowledge and expertise demonstrated by their teachers.

Most teachers use assessment effectively to check what learners and apprentices know and can do. Teachers make sure that learners and apprentices master basic skills before applying these to more complicated tasks. For example, in level 2 dog grooming, teachers use quizzes, crosswords and mock exams effectively to check adult learners' understanding of key knowledge and terminology, such as dog anatomy. However, in a few instances, teachers do not check that learners have understood key concepts taught before moving on.

Most teachers provide useful feedback that supports learners and apprentices to improve their written and practical work. Learners and apprentices use this feedback to identify mistakes, make appropriate corrections and improve the standard of their future work. However, in a few instances, feedback to learners and apprentices is not specific enough and does not highlight errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. A few learners and apprentices are not clear on what they need to do to correct and improve their work.

Leaders rightly recognise that, across several courses, too many learners and apprentices leave their programmes early. Leaders are acutely aware of the problems which cause this and have implemented effective actions for improvement. Although the proportion of young learners and apprentices who complete their courses is improving, this still remains too low.

Learners and apprentices who remain on their course, achieve their qualifications and move on to positive destinations. Most young learners progress on to employment or further study. Most adults complete their course, achieve their qualification and secure positive destinations to their preferred next steps. Apprentices who complete their training remain in permanent employment and gain further responsibilities, pay rises and promotions. Learners with high needs achieve very well and most progress into further areas of study at the college.

Leaders and managers carefully select and work with subcontractors in the wider area to meet the specific needs of their learners and apprentices. Most of the subcontracted provision provides bespoke programmes to support vulnerable learners, many of whom are not able to attend the main college sites. Subcontracted partners provide education programmes for young people, adult learning programmes and apprenticeships. Leaders and managers have effective processes in place to monitor the quality of the provision provided by their subcontractors.

Governance processes are effective. Governors are highly trained, experienced individuals from a variety of backgrounds, including finance, education and health. Governors have effective oversight of the quality of the provision at all college sites and subcontracted provision. They use their breadth of experience to provide support and rigorous challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account. Governors ensure that the college remains responsive to local and regional needs.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Increase the proportion of learners and apprentices who complete their courses and achieve their qualifications.
- Provide learners with useful feedback so that they know how to improve their work.
- Train teachers to use assessment effectively to check what learners know and can do.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130763
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<b>Contact number</b>	01553761144
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.cwa.ac.uk">www.cwa.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	David Pomfret
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 to 10 January 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Action Community Enterprises Solutions 4 Polymers Limited The Norwich School of Hair and Beauty The Skills Network Family Action Pilot IMS

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy CEO, 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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