

Inspection of Gloucestershire College

Inspection dates:

8 to 11 November 2022

Overall effectiveness**Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Gloucestershire College comprises three campuses, in Gloucester, Cheltenham and the Forest of Dean. At the time of the inspection, approximately 2,000 learners aged 16 to 18 years, 3,500 adult learners, 1,600 apprentices and 320 learners in receipt of high-needs funding were studying at the college.

Leaders have developed a range of academic, vocational and higher education courses, and apprenticeships, from entry level to level 6. This includes study programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 years, traineeships, digital boot camps, T-levels and foundation and honours degrees.

At the time of inspection, the college worked with one subcontractor who provide higher-level apprenticeship degree programmes.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy studying at the college. Leaders have created a strong culture of mutual respect and high expectations. Learners and apprentices have a positive attitude towards their learning. They behave well, provide helpful support to each other in lessons and respond well to the direction given by tutors. Learners become confident and independent learners.

Learners and apprentices value the high levels of support they receive from their tutors and student mentors. Most tutors plan, sequence and teach the curriculum effectively. As a result, learners learn the new knowledge, skills and behaviours that prepare them well for further education, training and employment. For example, learners studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) develop swiftly their reading, speaking and communication skills and can now access local community services such as shopping and their doctors, as well as prepare for their final educational assessments.

Tutors have strong subject-specialist knowledge and extensive experience of working in industry which they use well to inform the teaching of learners and apprentices who develop a good standard of practical skills. Learners and apprentices develop the knowledge that they require for work by studying a curriculum with relevant content. For example, as a result of feedback from industry leaders, tutors now teach the latest computer programming language to cyber degree apprentices.

Learners and apprentices are supported well by tutors and student mentors to fulfil their learning potential. Most tutors use learners' starting points effectively to plan learning. Tutors set learners helpful learning targets to support them to address their gaps in knowledge. In most cases, learners are supported well by staff to close the gaps quickly. However, learners with high needs do not study an ambitious curriculum that includes knowledge-rich content and takes account of what they already know and can do when they begin studying their course.

Learners and apprentices develop and practise their vocational skills in industry-standard learning environments, often using the latest equipment. Staff form effective partnerships with employers where, at their most effective, employer involvement in the implementation of the curriculum enriches the learning for apprentices. For example, in engineering, the curriculum is designed with employers to ensure apprentices have the skills required for local hi-tech industries such as atomic energy, aerospace and healthcare technology. This ensures that they learn the skills that employers want and need.

Learners and apprentices enjoy well-planned interactions with employers, such as guest speakers who support them to deepen their knowledge about work and their career choices. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to take part in external activities, such as site visits and work experience, to help develop further their wider skills and behaviours for work. Additionally, the majority of learners and apprentices do not receive sufficient careers guidance to support them in understanding how to progress to further education, training or into work.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders work effectively at a strategic level with a range of external stakeholders. This has enabled leaders to respond well to the local skills needs in cyber, construction and engineering by developing further the curriculum offer for apprentices. For example, employers such as Renishaw Plc inform the content of the engineering apprenticeship curriculum; the University of the West of England have collaborated with leaders and developed new cyber degree apprenticeships; organisations such as Cheltenham Borough Council, the Department for Work and Pensions and Gloucester City Council work with leaders to develop adult learning programmes in response to unemployment, and community organisations, such as Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, help leaders meet the learning needs of young Syrian and Afghanistan asylum seekers by working together to develop ESOL programmes.

Senior leaders involve stakeholders in construction, engineering, finance, professional services and cyber security in the design and implementation of the curriculum. As a result, most learners study a curriculum that has a well-informed content that helps to meet the local skills needs. For example, leaders worked with Gloucestershire Hospital NHS staff to develop the new health and science curriculum, including work placements for learners. However, in a few subject areas, such as business and art and design, managers do not involve stakeholders sufficiently well in the planning and/or teaching of the curriculum. As a result, not all learners receive the education and training that maximises their employment opportunities.

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

Leaders and governors have high expectations for their learners and apprentices. They identify improving social mobility and supporting disadvantaged learners as the key drivers for the range of provision that the college now offers. Leaders are highly committed to the community that they serve and provide educational and training opportunities that otherwise would not exist, such as the Dene Magna Sixth Form Centre in the Forest of Dean. The commitment of leaders to this centre has helped to raise the aspirations of the young people living in this area, by providing them with high-quality academic education and vocational training.

Leaders and governors are suitably focused on providing their learners with the opportunities to gain the skills they need for employment. They work well with employers and key stakeholders at a strategic level to identify appropriate curriculums to meet learners' needs. Leaders have developed an innovative business centre (Hub8) based at the Cheltenham campus, which is aimed at introducing learners to specialist cyber organisations. Consequently, learners work alongside employers to understand future regeneration projects, such as the development of

the Golden Valley Park for cyber industries, where learners gain a valuable understanding of the impact of developments on local infrastructure such as housing and the construction of roads.

Leaders monitor the quality of courses and, when necessary, use this information effectively to help curriculum managers make the necessary improvements. Leaders use a wide range of key performance indicators to evaluate the progress that learners make in learning the curriculum. Leaders provide the majority of staff with effective training, such as industry updates, which they use well to support learners and apprentices to achieve their curricular goals. However, a minority of staff do not use the learner progress monitoring system well enough. As a result, leaders' understanding of the progress learners make over time is limited, and the opportunity to identify and take remedial actions is missed.

Most managers and tutors use their strong relationships with local industry leaders and other stakeholders effectively to identify and teach learners key curriculum content. They ensure that the curriculum contains the relevant skills and knowledge that learners and apprentices need to move on to higher-level courses or employment in their chosen sector. For example, in ESOL, tutors work well with local charities to understand the needs of the different nationalities in the asylum seeker and refugee populations. Tutors in carpentry develop quickly apprentices' ability to hang doors and fit skirting boards and stud partitions to high standards so that they can undertake these tasks at work early in their apprenticeship.

Many curriculums include well-chosen content that goes beyond the confines of awarding body requirements. For example, in hospitality, tutors train learners to prepare vegan and plant-based menus because employers say their customers demand these. In information technology, learners work with mentors in local companies to learn industry practitioners' approaches to designing games. However, in a small number of areas, such as adult mathematics, tutors do not sufficiently consult stakeholders, such as Jobcentre Plus, on the curriculum content that will most benefit the learners. Many learners aged 16 to 18, and those with high needs, do not get enough work-related learning to extend their knowledge and experience of their chosen vocational sector.

A feature of many curriculums is the effective emphasis on developing learners' confidence through curriculum content that develops the skills that local industries need. For example, in education programmes for young people, staff offer opportunities to learners who have little experience of the vocational area in which they want to work and structure the curriculum well to introduce them to this new discipline. As a result, learners on the multi-skills course explore a wide range of construction skills before specialising in areas such as plumbing. Adults who are unemployed or in low-wage jobs progress into employment or better jobs as a result of short, well-targeted courses such as computer confidence at work, where adult learners develop essential digital skills for the workplace.

Disadvantaged learners and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and study vocational programmes make good progress in learning new

knowledge because tutors know them and understand their barriers to learning well. Staff take effective steps to reduce these barriers. However, in a small number of cases, particularly for learners with high needs, the curriculum does not offer learners the training to achieve their potential. In some aspects of mathematics and level 2 arts, subject leaders have clear ambitions for their learners, but these are not consistently achieved through the curriculum. In level 3 business and engineering, leaders have not built, and tutors do not teach, a curriculum that is sufficiently focused on the jobs and careers their learners may progress into, because they do not have sufficient links with local businesses. In catering, apprentices do not benefit from high-quality, well-planned training.

Tutors use their extensive experience of working in industry not only to create a relevant and valuable curriculum but to bring their lessons and resources to life with contemporary examples and projects that reflect the work learners aspire to do. In most cases, tutors are adept at presenting information to learners in a way that helps them to understand, assimilate and apply it in lessons, workshops and the workplace. Tutors identify clear curricular goals and build a curriculum that takes learners through a series of well-designed activities on their way to achieving these goals. As a result, most learners understand the key concepts of their subject and master the skills they are taught in vocational areas. In a few areas in education programmes for young people, such as early years level 2, mechanical engineering level 3 and functional skills, learners do not understand fully the content they are taught.

Tutors check frequently learners' understanding of what they have been taught. They use a wide variety of well-chosen assessment methods in lessons to do this. They also use more formal assessments to provide learners with valuable feedback on what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. Apprentices are well prepared for their final assessments by tutors; therefore, most are successful.

Tutors' feedback helps learners to raise the standards of their work after initial attempts and drafts, through sensible targets and careful monitoring of learners' progress on meeting these. While tutors instinctively help learners develop skills such as confidence, self-reflection and resilience, the teaching of these along with understanding how to keep themselves safe and well is often not built into the curriculum, and learners' progress in developing them is not monitored by leaders. As a result, managers and leaders do not know how well or how frequently these are covered by tutors and understood by learners.

Because curriculums are generally well planned and well taught, most learners succeed in learning new knowledge and skills, gaining their qualifications and progressing on to their next steps. In ESOL, nearly all learners progress to higher-level studies and in access to higher education, all learners progress to higher education. However, the curriculum for those learners with high needs is not sufficiently ambitious or individualised. Tutors do not use learners' starting points or the strategies in learners' education, health and care plans well enough to enable learners to access clearly presented information that meets their needs, nor supports them to develop new knowledge and skills to prepare them for their next steps. For

example, learners assessed as working at entry level 3 on arrival at college have made little progress after three years of study and have not had the opportunity to explore their work ambitions.

Although learners' and apprentices' overall rates of attendance are high, attendance at English and mathematics lessons and a minority of education programmes for young people are low. As a result, a few learners and apprentices studying English and mathematics do not develop the knowledge and/or achieve the qualifications they need to support their learning.

At the time of inspection, leaders developed further their existing plans to rapidly improve the curriculum for learners with high needs, and the wider personal development of all learners, addressing key areas for development. These include improving learners' and apprentices' access to effective, impartial careers guidance, providing additional opportunities for work experience and increasing their knowledge of fundamental British values, keeping themselves safe from radicalisation, healthy relationships and staying mentally and physically healthy. The action plans identify well the measurable impacts, timescales and staff accountability linked to securing rapid improvements to better support learners in developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress to the next stage of their education, training or employment.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at the college and know who to contact if they have a concern.

Leaders have ensured that the staff responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained. They have established strong links with external agencies, such as local authority safeguarding professionals, which they use effectively to support learners or apprentices with safeguarding concerns. Leaders and managers have put in place safeguarding policies and processes which are appropriately detailed. However, leaders identify rightly the need for additional training for staff to ensure they understand when to refer safeguarding concerns, follow up on historical safeguarding disclosures from learners and monitor the impact of staff training and the implementation of safeguarding processes. At the time of inspection, amendments to the safeguarding policy and processes were made by leaders to provide further assurance of staff's knowledge. An item for discussion of this theme at the next meeting of governors was also confirmed.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and governors must improve systems for monitoring the impact of safeguarding training on staff's knowledge and the implementation and reporting processes.

- Leaders and governors must improve swiftly the quality of the curriculum for learners with high needs so that they are taught the skills they need to progress rapidly to the next stage of their education, training, employment and lives in their local communities.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that all learners and apprentices, including learners with high needs, have additional opportunities to develop further their understanding of health and well-being, take part in additional enrichment learning activities and external work placements and receive high-quality careers education, advice and guidance.
- Leaders and managers must implement strategies to improve the attendance of learners studying on a minority of programmes, particularly English and mathematics, to maximise the learning outcomes for all learners.
- Leaders, managers and tutors must involve employers in the development of all curriculums to ensure tutors are planning, sequencing and teaching a relevant and ambitious curriculum content that meets the skills needs of all learners.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130683
Address	Cheltenham Campus Princess Elizabeth Way Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL51 7SJ
Contact number	01452563451
Website	www.gloscol.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Matthew Burgess
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	20 September 2016
Main subcontractor	University of the West of England

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal, as nominee, and the principal, as skills 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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