

Inspection of Nottingham College

Inspection dates: 29 November to 2 December 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
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	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Nottingham College is a very large general further education college. It operates from several sites in Nottingham city centre, with substantial sites in Basford, Ruddington and Stapleford, as well as at Nottingham Science Park. Community courses for adults take place in smaller, local venues. The college offers classroom-based courses in all major subject areas, from entry level through to higher education, as well as apprenticeships.

At the time of the inspection, approximately 6,300 young people, 8,000 adults and 1,600 apprentices studied at the college. Most young people study full-time courses, between levels 1 and 3, in a wide range of subjects. A small number of young learners are aged 14 and 15 and study part-time courses at the college. Adult learners mainly study part-time courses in mathematics, English, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and access to higher education. The majority of apprentices follow apprenticeship standards at level 2 or level 3 in business, construction, health and care, or engineering and manufacturing.

The college also works with six subcontractors. They mostly offer part-time courses to adult learners.

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

The large majority of learners and apprentices have positive experiences at Nottingham College. They find that the courses they study meet their needs and that the college environment is calm and safe.

Managers and tutors select appropriate topics for learners and apprentices to study during their courses. This means that, in most cases, learners and apprentices develop the skills and knowledge they need to make progress in education, or to secure and sustain employment.

Tutors also consider the personal skills that learners and apprentices need for their future careers and teach these well. For example, learners who study performing arts or art and design at level 3 learn how to develop resilience to cope with setbacks in their future studies and employment.

Leaders and managers work hard to develop links with an array of employers so that most courses offer learners and apprentices good-quality preparation for work. Level 2 customer service apprentices, for example, benefit from a well-planned curriculum that closely reflects the industries in which they work. In a minority of cases, managers do not yet use employer links well to inform the curriculum that young learners study.

Managers with responsibility for adult learning courses develop strong links to the local community. This supports adults to successfully return to formal study after they experience significant health and well-being difficulties. Managers also work effectively with community organisations to meet the English language needs of those new to the UK, such as refugees.

Young learners often complete social action projects while at college, which help them to raise money for local charities. They understand how to be responsible and active citizens.

As a result of their studies, apprentices become more confident when at work. For example, those who study carpentry successfully complete more challenging work tasks without the need for supervision.

Adult learners also develop character and confidence. Those who study mathematics manage their household budgets more effectively. Adult ESOL learners book healthcare appointments independently and help their children with schoolwork.

Learners and apprentices feel safe when they study at the college. They rightly find that staff take safeguarding concerns seriously.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders have taken effective steps to address the previously limited engagement with employers and stakeholders in Nottingham and the region. They engage widely with other education institutions, local government and local employers to understand local and regional skills priorities and needs. This proactive approach means that the college has a reputation for being a responsive and trusted partner within the local and regional skills offer.

Leaders and managers work effectively with the local council, local enterprise partnership and private training providers to create learning and skills opportunities that support the local economic recovery plan. They also work well with stakeholders to design and deliver courses in the community for disadvantaged people. For example, they successfully co-produce short courses on anxiety, anger management and building confidence with the NHS Recovery College to support people who face mental health challenges.

Leaders also work with stakeholders and other education providers to develop courses that lead to valuable progression routes. For example, partnership work with a local university means that learners can move from sports courses at college on to degree-level courses in football sports science, which include work placements at a professional football club.

College staff work well with most employers to meet their skills needs by adapting and designing courses and apprenticeship standards. In painting and decorating, tutors actively engage with relevant employers to design specific skills sessions. However, in a very few curriculum areas, employers are less engaged in the design of the curriculum. In these cases, employers discuss sector skills needs with college staff, but they do not directly influence the content of the curriculum.

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

Most tutors plan the courses that they teach effectively. As a result, learners study topics in an order that helps them to build their knowledge and skills over time. For example, level 3 automotive repair apprentices learn how to correctly use basic hand tools before they move on to study specialist equipment. Learners who study brickwork at level 1 study health and safety, units of measure and the marking out of work areas before they undertake practical tasks.

In the large majority of cases, tutors plan appropriately ambitious teaching activities. This helps both learners and apprentices to develop substantial new knowledge and skills. However, in a few cases, tutors have less ambition for learners. In level 3 applied science, young learners do not develop their knowledge beyond the basic requirements of the course.

Most tutors have good levels of subject expertise, which they use effectively in their teaching. They keep their subject expertise up to date through links with industry. For example, tutors on the level 3 motor vehicle maintenance and repair apprenticeship attend employer-run training on current industry practice. In a few cases, for example in health and social care, tutors identify that they need to undertake more training to remain up to date.

Managers and tutors set clear ground rules for behaviour and attendance in classrooms and workshops. During lessons, tutors build effective relationships with the large majority of learners. In the few instances where there are issues with low-level poor behaviour, tutors quickly and appropriately respond to these. As a result, learners have a positive attitude towards their studies, demonstrating respect for both their tutors and their peers.

In the large majority of cases, tutors teach well. They provide well-planned and interesting lessons. For example, in A-level psychology, tutors blend interactive technology with group discussions and peer working to make complex information more intelligible to learners. However, in a small number of subject areas, teaching is less effective. In lower-level GCSE English classes, tutors do not break new topics into manageable chunks of learning. This makes it difficult for learners with low levels of prior achievement to understand complex new topics.

Tutors also take appropriate opportunities to practise new knowledge and skills with learners. In ESOL lessons for adults, tutors use repetition to help learners grasp difficult phonological topics, such as the various ways to pronounce 'ed' on the end of verbs in the past simple. Young learners who study professional catering courses at level 2 practise making dishes on multiple occasions over a period of time so that they refine their skills. On a few courses for young people, such as level 3 business, tutors do not provide sufficient opportunities for learners to practise applying new skills and knowledge.

The majority of tutors use questioning, quizzes and workbooks well to check that learners have understood topics. Tutors on level 3 childcare and education and level 3 business courses use questioning and written assessment activities well to check learners' knowledge. However, in some subjects, such as access to nursing, tutors do not use assessment effectively enough to check learners' knowledge.

On specific courses for learners with high needs, tutors have relevant qualifications and expertise. They use appropriate resources to provide bespoke courses that challenge learners to develop their knowledge and skills. Specialists in areas such as behaviour management and personal care provide staff and learners with additional support. This helps learners to develop their independence and to move on to higher-level courses.

However, too many young learners with high needs do not receive appropriate support when they study vocational courses. Managers and tutors do not plan effectively enough to address these learners' support needs. Due to staff shortages,

learners do not consistently receive the support that they require during vocational lessons.

The large majority of adult and young learners successfully pass their courses. Adult learners on ESOL courses achieve particularly well. Leaders rightly acknowledge, however, that in a minority of cases too few young learners pass their qualifications successfully, particularly at level 2. The majority of adult apprentices successfully complete their final assessments. However, too many young apprentices who study level 2 carpentry and joinery or vehicle maintenance leave their courses before they complete these assessments.

In most cases, learners' written and practical work is of a good standard. For example, young learners who study A-level geography produce well-written assignments that refer appropriately to relevant theory and contain good use of technical terminology. Adults who study stained glass making on community learning courses produce practical work that is of a very high standard. Apprentices who study level 2 customer service deal with customer complaints more effectively at work, because they have a thorough knowledge of relevant legislation.

In a few subjects, learners' written work is not good enough. For example, too many young learners who study GCSE English produce work that is of a low standard.

The large majority of learners and apprentices develop the skills and knowledge that they need to move on to positive education or employment destinations. Those who want to study at university develop effective study skills. Functional English, mathematics and ESOL learners develop the skills they need to become more active participants in society. The very large majority of apprentices remain in employment at the end of their courses.

In many subjects, young learners demonstrate a sound understanding of fundamental British values. They link British values to their college studies, and to their wider lives. In a minority of cases, adult learners have a less thorough knowledge of how British values apply to their lives.

Most learners and apprentices benefit from effective, impartial careers information, advice and guidance. Careers advisors support learners and apprentices well to develop skills linked to their future career aims. As a result, most have a thorough knowledge of the options available to them after their course. However, adults who study community-based courses do not consistently benefit from useful careers information, advice and guidance.

On most courses, learners and apprentices attend at good rates. However, in a small number of curriculum areas for young learners, such as construction, foundation learning and GCSE mathematics and English, learner attendance is too low.

Leaders have placed a considerable focus on altering the culture at the college after many years of change and turmoil. To help with this, they focus on staff needs and concerns more than in the past. Leaders include staff in the planning of the college's

future strategic direction. In the large majority of cases, staff feel positive about this.

Leaders have a clear intent to develop the skills of managers. They provide a comprehensive training package that includes courses for senior leaders, middle managers and those who want to take their first steps in management. Leaders also ensure that tutors can access sufficient training to develop their teaching skills. In many cases, tutors identify the positive impact that this has had on their lessons.

Leaders focus closely on the quality of the courses that they offer. They use detailed quality assurance procedures to monitor this and take appropriate action whenever they identify concerns. However, in a few cases, quality assurance processes are too complicated. Consequently, it is difficult for leaders and managers to identify the key priorities for improvement.

Managers with responsibility for subcontracted courses closely monitor these, to ensure that they are of a high quality. They conduct frequent reviews with subcontractors and use thorough management processes to monitor performance. As a result, subcontracted courses are of a good quality.

Governors have professional backgrounds and knowledge that suit their roles well. During governance meetings, they scrutinise well the information that leaders and managers present to them. They identify accurately how recent changes at governance and senior leadership levels have led to considerable improvements in the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff with responsibility for safeguarding undertake suitable training. As a result, there is adequate safeguarding coverage across the college's numerous sites.

Leaders ensure that there are appropriate safeguarding policies in place - for example, regarding the safe use of college IT equipment, or for on-site visitors.

There are also thorough procedures for reporting safeguarding incidents. When learners and apprentices disclose a safeguarding concern, staff respond appropriately.

There is comprehensive safeguarding support at the college's campuses for 14- and 15-year-old learners. For example, behaviour mentors are visible in the college's communal areas, and offer these learners support when required.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that learners with high needs who study vocational courses benefit from appropriate, bespoke support that meets their needs well.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that all young learners and apprentices achieve their courses well, particularly those who study at level 2.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130776
Address	Nottingham College City Hub 111 Canal Street Nottingham NG1 7HB
Contact number	0115 9100100
Website	https://www.nottinghamcollege.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Janet Smith
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	14 to 17 January 2020
Main subcontractors	GRA (GB) Limited Derby Business College Expressions Academy of Performing Arts Pathway First Limited The Skills Network White Rose School of Beauty and Complementary Therapies Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of teaching and learning improvement and innovation, 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.

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