

Inspection of Burnley College

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 March 2025 and 4 to 5 June 2025

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

Burnley College is a general further education college based on one campus in Lancashire. Leaders provide education and training in a wide range of academic and vocational areas for learners and apprentices from entry level to higher education.

At the time of the inspection, just over 4,100 learners were studying education programmes for young people, with around 640 studying at entry level or level 1, 700 at level 2, and just over 2,700 at level 3, including on A levels and T levels. The largest numbers of learners are in A level and on vocational courses in priority areas such as health and social care, science and mathematics, construction, creative arts, digital skills and media, business, and engineering and manufacturing technologies.

There were around 1,200 adult learners, studying courses from entry level to level 4. The largest areas are English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English, mathematics, access to higher education (HE), counselling, accounting and construction. A few adult learners study Skills Bootcamps in robotics or leadership and management.

There were 998 apprentices. Just over two-thirds study at level 3, with the remainder studying at levels 2 to 6. The largest numbers study in high-priority skills areas such as engineering and manufacturing technologies and the construction trades.

There were 94 learners with high needs. Most study on academic and vocational courses for young people. A few learners with high needs study on a supported internship.

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

Learners and apprentices thrive, grow in character and broaden their outlook on life at college. They benefit from the nurturing and supportive environment that staff provide. Learners and apprentices have a sense of belonging and enjoy studying at the college. They work diligently in classroom and workshop sessions. Learners and apprentices arrive prepared and ready to learn. They develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their next steps into further education, higher education and employment.

Tutors have high expectations for learners' behaviours and attitudes to learning. They align their expectations to the college core values and to the professional behaviours and industry expectations needed for success. Learners and apprentices wear appropriate uniform and equipment, such as lab coats in sciences, steel toe-capped boots in construction, and physical education kit and dancewear in sport and performing arts. They are motivated to achieve and do well in their studies. Learners and apprentices are proud of what they learn and the work that they produce.

Most learners and apprentices attend well and are punctual. However, on a few courses, attendance remains too low. Where attendance falls below the college expectations, learners and apprentices are reminded of the importance of attending in readiness for employment. Tutors routinely monitor, track and intervene with targeted actions to help learners attend more often.

Young learners, including those with high needs, benefit from taking part in an extensive range of meaningful and relevant work experience, trips, visits, clubs and societies. Course-related enrichment is timetabled, has high participation rates, and enhances learners' vocational experience while providing the opportunity to explore new interests. Learners who join the dance academy put their new skills into practice with a full performance at the end of their training. A-level learners benefit from attending the book club and film club. Learners across the college participate in recreational and competitive sport. In vocational areas, learners benefit from work experience. A few gain work experience opportunities in Seville, Madrid and Prague through the Turing scheme and RISE International.

Adult learners gain the new knowledge and skills that they need for both work and life. Adults on ESOL courses swiftly develop the language skills that they need to communicate more effectively. They develop the confidence and competence to arrange medical appointments, talk with teachers about their children's education and apply for jobs. Learners on the access to HE in health professions course rapidly develop their academic writing, referencing and critical-evaluation skills in readiness for university study. Adult learners make excellent progress from their starting points.

Apprentices benefit from an ambitious curriculum. They routinely develop significant new knowledge and skills for work. Many learn skills which extend beyond the requirements of their apprenticeship, giving them additional knowledge and skills that make them valuable employees. Apprentices on the business administrator

apprenticeship enhance their skills using software management tools. They learn about change management and lead projects at work. Carpentry and joinery apprentices learn additional skills in interpreting advanced technical drawings and calculating scales.

Learners with high needs study more independently, demonstrate initiative in their learning and at work, and rely less on additional learning support to achieve their goals at college. They develop the social skills, study skills, independence and confidence that prepare them for adulthood and their next steps. Learners with high needs learn to express their opinions clearly and to advocate for themselves.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They know how to raise any concerns about their safety and security and feel comfortable speaking to staff. Learners and apprentices are confident that any concerns they raise would be dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers collaborate exceptionally well with a range of relevant stakeholders to understand and respond to the skills needs in local, regional and national priority sectors such as advanced manufacturing, health and social care, construction and engineering. Leaders use the information and intelligence they gather to plan a vibrant curriculum to meet these priorities. Stakeholders highly praise the contribution that college leaders make to meeting their skills priorities.

Leaders work closely with the Chamber of Commerce and key employers using the local skills improvement plans to support the region's wider skills and recruitment needs. They respond to employer demand quickly, introducing welding, solar panel and heat pump installation training in response to an immediate and future skills need in the construction, manufacturing and engineering sectors.

Leaders are very responsive to the needs of the community. They work with Jobcentre Plus to provide employability skills training, as well as bespoke forklift truck and performing manufacturing operations training for key shortage sectors, to get unemployed adults into work.

Leaders and managers have set up highly effective skills advisory boards in curriculum departments to involve employers and stakeholders in the design and delivery of the curriculum. They make sure that the content of the T level in design, manufacturing and engineering is relevant and meaningful. Employers and industry representatives help tutors to tailor the construction apprenticeship to meet the needs of industry. They include valuable additional qualifications to enable apprentices to gain up-to-date skills such as electric vehicle charger installation.

As a result of the highly collaborative work that leaders and staff carry out with employers and stakeholders, learners are well prepared for work and gain new knowledge and skills using the most up-to-date equipment and technology.

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

Leaders plan ambitious curriculums to meet the local, regional and national employment priorities while making sure that learners and apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their next steps. Leaders prepare learners and apprentices well for further academic study and success both in life and in the world of work. However, the level 3 curriculum for young learners has not been ambitious enough. In previous years, too many young learners were incorrectly dropped down to one-year courses when they did not complete their two-year course. They did not gain the qualifications they set out to achieve. Leaders have recently reorganised and planned the curriculums to ensure that a greater proportion of young learners complete their full two-year level 3 course.

Leaders have worked with stakeholders to design and invest in state-of-the-art facilities across the campus. Learners and apprentices benefit from access to facilities that replicate what they will experience at work or in higher education. Cyber security learners and apprentices use a cyber-wall to create and defend cyber-attacks in real time. Esports learners use high-specification gaming machines to develop their roles as players, trainers, shoutcasters and content creators. They compete professionally in a national esports league. T-level health learners practise in the safe environment of a simulation suite before work experience on hospital wards.

Tutors carefully plan and teach courses so that learners and apprentices remember what they have been taught. Adult learners on Skills Bootcamps in leadership and management study and reflect on their own personal skills. This links them to leadership models before applying their new knowledge to the creation of high-performing teams using newly acquired skills in effective communication and relationship building. Installation and maintenance technician apprentices learn about electrical fundamentals and health and safety. They apply this knowledge to practical safety lock off and isolation procedures as well as the completion of on-site risk assessments.

Tutors have the experience and qualifications to teach their subjects well. Leaders have a systematic and well-considered approach to developing tutors' subject knowledge and teaching skills. Tutors benefit from training activities to develop questioning techniques, enhance their awareness of neurodiversity and improve the structure of lessons. They maintain their vocational competency through industry insight days and retain professional registrations. Many A-level tutors are examiners. Tutors in healthcare update their subject knowledge by working on a maternity unit and attending caesarean sections. Tutors attend subject-specific conferences and

work with awarding bodies to develop their curriculums.

Tutors use information about what learners and apprentices already know and can do to plan teaching and learning effectively. They routinely check learners' and apprentices' progress from their starting points and revisit learning to clarify misconceptions and fill gaps. Most learners and apprentices who remain in learning make at least their expected levels of progress.

Tutors explain topics well and present information clearly so that learners and apprentices understand what they are taught. They use a variety of strategies to promote learning. In GCSE English, tutors use the point, evidence, explanation, link (PEEL) formula to explain how to effectively use language and structure to interest and engage the reader when writing text. In access to healthcare professions, tutors methodically break down aspects of pregnancy such as trimesters, development of the foetus, and physical changes in the mother, to make learning stick.

Tutors mostly use assessment effectively to identify gaps in knowledge and to inform teaching. Young learners attend booster sessions to help them to improve their subject knowledge. On ESOL courses, tutors routinely challenge learners to reconsider and reconstruct responses to questions which helps them to develop their grammar and sentence structure. Installation and maintenance electrician apprentices recall the different steps in the continuity of using final circuits and the types of testing needed in commercial and domestic properties. However, in a few instances, teachers do not fully check what learners and apprentices remember, slowing their progress.

Tutors mostly provide learners and apprentices with useful feedback to help them improve their work. In performing arts, tutors frequently film learners' performances and provide critiques via video feedback. Learners routinely act on feedback to improve their practical performance through, for example, using systematic repetition to improve articulation and pronunciation of 'th'. However, a few learners and apprentices do not receive sufficient high-quality feedback to improve their written work.

Most young learners achieve their qualifications and move on to further learning or employment. A high proportion of those learners who progress to higher education gain entry to their first-choice university course. Adult learners achieve very well. Most apprentices achieve their apprenticeship. However, only a small proportion achieve merit or distinction grades.

Learners and apprentices receive highly effective careers guidance to help them plan their next steps. Learners receive help with university and job applications, attend education and job fairs and benefit from a wide range of specialist career-related or sector-specific visiting speaker events and masterclasses. Learners and apprentices gain a clear insight of their future options. Most know what they want to do next and receive the help and support they need to reach their destinations.

Leaders use effective quality assurance processes. They have implemented teaching and learning standards which underpin training, development and the focus of departmental deep dives and learning walks. Performance indicators, such as learners' progress, attendance and destinations are reviewed as part of a continuous quality cycle to help leaders identify where they need to make improvements to the quality of education learners and apprentices receive.

Inaccurate individualised learner records were submitted by the provider which inflated the qualification achievement rates for young learners on level 3 vocational and A-level courses. This misled key stakeholders, such as learners, parents and the local community about how well learners achieved. Although governors bring extensive professional expertise to the board, they have limited experience of the further education and skills sector. For too long, those responsible for leading and governing Burnley College did not question exceptionally high achievement rates or ensure that internal policies and processes were robust enough to manage the risk of inaccurate achievement data. Very recently, some leaders and governors in the college proactively reported the issue to the Department for Education and the FE Commissioner.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Strengthen the governing board with those with experience of the further education and skills sector.
- Strengthen the systems and processes that leaders and governors use to ensure accurate qualification and achievement data are recorded and reported.
- Provide consistently effective checks on learning to identify gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge and skills to inform teaching.
- Provide high-quality developmental feedback so that learners and apprentices know precisely what they need to do to improve their work.
- Improve the attendance for those learners who do not attend often enough.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130735
Address	Princess Way Burnley Lancashire BB12 0AN
Contact number	01282 733373
Website	www.burnley.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Karen Buchanan
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	23 to 26 November 2021
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

At the first inspection, the team was assisted by the deputy principal, 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, meeting the leaders and governors and examining the provider's documentation and records.

An additional visit was carried out to gather further evidence to ensure that the evidence base was complete in line with the Ofsted Gathering additional evidence protocol <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection/gathering-additional-evidence-to-secure-an-incomplete-inspection>. For the additional visit, the inspectors were assisted by the acting interim principal, the former deputy principal, as nominee.

Inspection team

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