

Inspection of Solihull College & University Centre

Inspection dates:

21 to 24 May 2024

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Solihull College and University Centre is a large further education college based in the West Midlands. There are three campuses: Blossomfield campus, Woodlands campus, and Stratford-upon-Avon College. These campuses provide a wide range of technical, academic, and vocational courses.

At the time of inspection, Solihull College and University Centre had 5,371 learners aged 16 to 18 across all campuses studying on vocational and academic courses. Most learners were studying subjects including health and social care, creative practice and level 1 vehicle systems maintenance. There were 254 learners studying on a range of 10 T-level or T-level transition courses.

In addition, 4,072 adult learners were studying at the time. Courses with the most learners included: counselling skills, rail engineering track maintenance, plant operations and the functional skills qualification in mathematics. There were also 59 adult learners studying across three Skills Bootcamps in the digital and creative digital subject areas.

The college trains 708 apprentices, with the highest numbers in the level 3 veterinary nurse apprenticeship, building services engineering senior technician apprenticeship and the level 2 hairdressing professional apprenticeship.

There were 84 learners in receipt of high needs funding, predominantly enrolled on vocational courses. The remaining learners with high needs were studying on courses tailored for individuals with high needs.

The college works with two subcontractors. One provides specialist construction skills courses, while the other offers specialist courses to improve the employment prospects of long-term unemployed local residents.

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

Teachers set high standards for learners and apprentices, aligning with industry needs and expectations. They also serve as positive role models. For instance, in health and social care, teachers highlight and demonstrate care, compassion, and other key values. As a result, learners and apprentices are prepared well for their next steps.

Learners' and apprentices' attendance is not yet consistently high across all subjects. Leaders and teachers have implemented measures to tackle poor attendance, including reward schemes, support for learners and increasing the involvement of parents. These measures are beginning to have a positive impact. However, in a minority of curriculum subjects, particularly those at level 1 and 2, attendance is not consistently high.

Staff encourage learners and apprentices to enjoy and value their learning. They have introduced a range of initiatives to motivate learners to achieve excellence in their chosen subjects. Learners take part in external and internal skills competitions which affirm their learning and build their confidence and aspirations. For example, filming performance and venue technician Skills Bootcamp learners have entered several film and performance competitions, giving them the opportunity to practise and learn valuable skills. Most of these learners successfully gain employment on completion of their course.

Learners benefit from the inclusive and tolerant college community that is fostered by staff. They encourage a culture where staff actively listen to learners through structured learner voice activities. This includes class representatives and an executive body. Together, learners and staff collaborate through competitions and joint projects. For example, they run a green campaign to promote recycling and environmental efforts. This approach has created a positive and respectful culture.

Staff have developed a well-planned careers programme for most learners and apprentices. Leaders work collaboratively with teachers to ensure that this is embedded within the curriculum. Learners and apprentices value the opportunities provided for them to meet with employers, universities and apprenticeship providers, which enables them to make informed choices about their next steps.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at the college. They know how to report issues and feel confident that any concerns in relation to safety or bullying will be dealt with effectively.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers take strategic and well-considered actions to identify and plan to meet skills needs and demands. To ensure the college's curriculums align with local, regional, and national skills priorities, they work effectively with a variety

of stakeholders, such as the Institute of Technology, Local Skills Improvement Fund, and Chambers of Commerce. Leaders have a keen awareness of priority sectors and use a wide range of information, including job trends and local demographics, to inform their curriculums. This proactive approach ensures that the college remains responsive to the evolving job market and community needs.

Collaboration with stakeholders is central to the college's strategy for curriculum planning and implementation. For example, in creative digital Skills Bootcamps, leaders work with employers, including high-profile theatres, to ensure the curriculum covers essential skills for theatre technicians, such as lighting, sound, health and safety, rigging, and digital video sets. Stakeholders also take part in teaching the curriculum, providing hands-on experiences that enrich learning. Adult learners gain substantial practical skills at the theatre. T-level learners in health receive direct instruction from NHS staff before their placements. Leaders ensure their curriculums align with and contribute to local skills development. They have invested in specialised resources such as construction and equine centres, health technologies, and aviation equipment. This comprehensive approach ensures that learners, including those with high needs, acquire the necessary skills, gain independence, and build social confidence, preparing them effectively for their future careers.

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

Leaders ensure learners and apprentices benefit from well-tailored curriculums. Teachers logically sequence their curriculums, allowing learners and apprentices to build their knowledge and skills over time. The sequencing of the level 2 certificate in supporting teaching and learning curriculum ensures that adult learners initially develop fundamental skills such as theories of child development before progressing to more advanced content where they apply these theories in practical contexts while following statutory legislation.

Leaders ensure learners and apprentices benefit from subject-specific industry experts who are skilled at teaching. Learners and apprentices highly value this expertise as it contributes to them developing valuable skills that improve their career prospects. For example, teachers on the level 2 hairdressing apprenticeship are professionally qualified and are provided with effective continual professional development which keeps them up to date with developments within the industry. Teachers attend regular manufacturer product updates and expert cutting sessions with a high-profile hairdressing company. This results in apprentices developing current skills which employers value.

Leaders have selected curriculums that provide learners with high needs with the opportunities they need to develop their skills in preparation for life after college. Teachers plan teaching well to ensure learners develop their communication skills to enable them to make choices and give their views and opinions. For example, on entry level living independently courses, teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs) use repetition, recall and recap alongside individual and small group work.

LSAs use techniques for individuals such as promoting counting on fingers, and encouraging using thumbs up and thumbs down to choose if an answer is right or wrong. However, managers and staff have been slow to ensure learners have the opportunity to take part in work experience. Too many learners with high needs do not develop their understanding of the world of work or the skills they need to move on into employment when they complete their course.

In a few cases, teachers do not use learners' and apprentices' starting points to inform teaching well enough. While teachers accurately measure these starting points, they do not always use this information to individualise the curriculum to take into account what learners already know. For example, veterinary nursing apprentices' prior knowledge and learning are not sufficiently considered and used to inform teaching. This results in these few apprentices making slower than expected progress as they are taught topics in which they already have a secure understanding.

Teachers use effective teaching strategies that support learners and apprentices to know more and remember more over time. In digital production, teachers effectively use the demonstration method when teaching learners techniques of how to fix bugs. Teachers demonstrate these techniques and then provide learners with sufficient opportunities to practise these new skills. Most learners and apprentices gain substantial new knowledge throughout their studies.

Teachers supply feedback that is helpful for learners to improve the quality of their practical and written work. However, teachers do not always provide apprentices with feedback that identifies grammatical issues in their written work, which results in some apprentices repeatedly making the same mistakes. As a result, a few apprentices do not substantially improve their spelling and grammar skills during their apprenticeship.

Teachers prepare apprentices well for their end-point assessment. Teachers on the level 2 hairdressing professional apprenticeship have expert knowledge of the requirements of final assessments. They use this knowledge to skilfully guide apprentices to make improvements to their practical skills, enabling them to reach their potential. Many apprentices want and know how to gain a distinction in their apprenticeship.

Leaders ensure learners on education programmes for young people benefit from focused work placements, where both employers and learners have a clear set of objectives to accomplish. Throughout these placements, teachers meet with learners and employers to assess the progress made towards these objectives. This ensures work experience is productive and prepares young learners well with skills and behaviours needed in the workplace.

Teachers ensure learners and apprentices are prepared well for their next steps. For instance, following their course, most T-level education and early years learners successfully secure a university place or employment. Almost all T-level learners achieve their qualifications.

Teachers ensure learners and apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful in their chosen career paths. Digital Skills Bootcamp learners gain substantial new technical knowledge and skills such as converting binary codes, sub net masking and hexadecimal conversion and setting up guest networks to protect other computers. This prepares learners well for a career within the digital industry.

Leaders recognise that while the proportion of learners and apprentices gaining their qualifications is increasing, this is variable across vocational subjects for younger learners. Leaders and governors have identified this as a priority. They have put in place measures to improve initial advice and guidance along with improving the support for learners at the start of their course. This has led to significant improvements on courses, including the level 3 engineering technician apprenticeship. However, on other courses it is too early to see the impact of these measures.

Governors have extensive experience and expertise in education, public services and finance. They use their experience well to focus the work of the board and senior leaders. They frequently challenge senior leaders and maintain an effective oversight of the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure all learners with high needs are given the opportunity of taking part in meaningful work experience.
- Ensure learners' and apprentices' attendance is consistently high.
- Improve the proportion of younger learners who successfully complete their studies.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130481
Address	Blossomfield Campus Blossomfield Road Solihull West Midlands B91 1SB
Contact number	01216 787000
Website	www.solihull.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rebecca Gater
Provider type	General Further Education College
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 March 2022
Main subcontractors	RMF Construction Training Limited Colebridge Trust Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant 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, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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