

# Inspection of Bridgwater and Taunton College

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 November 2024

## Overall effectiveness

**Outstanding**

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

## Information about this provider

Bridgwater and Taunton College (BTC) is a large, general further education college based in Somerset. It has three campuses at Bridgwater, Taunton and Cannington, where the National College for Nuclear (NCfN) is based.

Leaders offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses, from entry to degree level.

At the time of the inspection, there were nearly 3,200 students on programmes for young people, including 329 receiving high needs funding. Students also study T levels in health, digital, management and administration, education, construction, creative and design, legal, engineering, and accounting.

Approximately 2,000 adult students, mostly studying part-time courses in subjects such as horticulture, counselling, construction, and English and mathematics, were enrolled. Around half of adult training is taught online in health, education, and business-related subjects. Recently, the college began offering online Skills

Bootcamps in leadership and management for adults, with 12 students enrolled at the time of the inspection.

The college has around 2,500 apprentices across levels 2 to 6, studying fields such as construction trades, health professions, nuclear science, automotive trades, and land-based apprenticeships, with nearly half aged 16 to 18. More than half of all apprentices study at level 3.

Leaders subcontract adult and apprenticeship provision to seven subcontractors.

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

Students and apprentices thrive in the highly supportive and professional culture that leaders and teachers create. Teachers at all three campuses motivate students and apprentices to excel by setting ambitious personalised goals for students to aspire to and diligently support students to achieve them. This contributes to the very high achievement of students and apprentices and prepares them well for their next steps in education or employment.

Staff model professional behaviours exceptionally well. This supports students and apprentices to develop securely the knowledge they need to be successful in their workplaces and further study. Students and apprentices are proud to study at BTC. Staff know their students and apprentices very well and ensure comprehensive development of their work-ready and study-ready behaviours.

Students and apprentices study in settings that accurately mirror the technology and layouts found in modern workplaces. Teachers make excellent use of these facilities to prepare students for current and future employment settings. For example, level 3 plumbing and heating apprentices gain hands-on experience installing hydrogen-enabled boilers and air-source heat pumps, replicating the emerging technologies they will begin to encounter in customers' homes.

Students and apprentices enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities that enhance their social skills and build confidence in essential employability skills, such as communication and teamwork. These opportunities to develop their talents and interests are of exceptional quality, resulting in high participation in activities, such as charitable events, sports, and initiatives like the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Combined Cadet Force.

The wider curriculum enhances students' and apprentices' resilience, confidence, and independence. For example, nursing associate apprentices develop greater assertiveness, learn to speak up for patients and become stronger advocates for patients in their care. Students also develop their character through initiatives like the tutor group challenge, where they fundraise creatively, raising significant sums for local charities during the college's 'Raise and Give' day.

Leaders make highly effective use of their extensive network of employers to provide younger students with ambitious work experience opportunities, such as placements in NHS physiotherapy and professional sports settings. These experiences enhance the curriculum and help students make well-informed decisions about their future pathways.

Adult students, including those facing significant disadvantages, are taught a diverse and extensive curriculum. Leaders work closely with employers, industry stakeholders, and community organisations to ensure the curriculum is highly relevant and meets the training needs of the local area. For example, managers and teachers work with a local employer to create a Skills Bootcamp to teach employees' important feedback and communication skills, successfully reducing workplace conflict.

Apprentices benefit from highly qualified and experienced industry professionals, who support them to succeed in their studies. Staff build strong relationships with employers to ensure apprentices gain the skills they need to excel in their roles and achieve their qualification.

Students with high needs benefit from an ambitious, individually tailored curriculum that develops independence and prepares them effectively for adulthood and employment. Staff create exceptional opportunities, including employer-led supported employment courses, that equip students very well for their next steps. Highly qualified and experienced staff provide tailored support, resulting in consistently high achievement levels for students with high needs, often exceeding those of their peers.

Staff ensure that students and apprentices are safe, well supported, and fully prepared for future success. They provide a secure and welcoming environment and challenge any inappropriate behaviour swiftly and effectively. This fosters a strong sense of safety and well-being among students and apprentices.

## **Contribution to meeting skills needs**

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Senior leaders work exceptionally well with their stakeholders, such as Somerset County Council, Somerset Chambers of Commerce and educational partners, including the South West Institute of Technology, to provide a curriculum offer that is closely aligned with the local skills improvement plan. Leaders and managers make excellent use of labour market intelligence and work effectively with employers to meet the training needs of large-scale projects in Somerset. For example, they help to meet the skills needs of the nuclear energy and engineering sector for Hinkley Point C nuclear power station through strong partnerships with EDF Energy and the Mechanical, Electrical, and Heating Alliance. Senior leaders ensure the college is well positioned to meet future training demands in Somerset, including being the lead training provider for employers at the Gravity Smart Campus. Staff

work closely with stakeholders, such as Agratas and the University of Bristol to design future curriculums to meet green energy and digital skills needs.

Leaders and managers successfully involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of curriculums to ensure they meet both local and national training needs. Leaders and managers respond quickly to community demands by offering courses, such as degree apprenticeships and T levels. For example, staff help to meet the training needs of the health and care sector through strong collaboration with the University of the West of England, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust, NHS Somerset Integrated Care Board, Somerset Training Hub, and Somerset Care.

Leaders and managers work very effectively to meet acute skills needs. Staff provide a responsive and inclusive curriculum by collaborating closely with local partners, such as Barclays Bank, Bridgwater Chamber of Commerce, and Taunton Chamber of Commerce. Staff offer community-based courses that support local volunteers, such as those in the carnival club, as well as Skills Bootcamps to help adults improve their career prospects. For example, staff very successfully provide a curriculum that meets an identified need to support local women to gain employment. Leaders and managers use the local skills improvement fund to work with employers, such as Baileys Digital Classroom, to provide digital training for students with high needs.

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

Leaders create a diverse and inspiring curriculum offer that is ambitious for all. Highly inclusive courses meet local and national skills needs exceptionally well and powerfully tackle social disadvantage. For example, staff work in partnership with British Gymnastics to plan and teach the level 2 community activator coach apprenticeship. Apprentices are supported financially to achieve recognised coaching qualifications, helping them to gain work as professional gymnastics coaches and further develop their careers. Leaders provide students with a wide range of course options to suit their existing knowledge and skills, including a comprehensive suite of level 1 and 2 courses. This includes a level 1 automotive maintenance diploma that teaches students the practical skills and professional behaviours they need to start work in a garage, and a level 2 professional cookery technical certificate that teaches students the skills they need to join a commercial kitchen. Online and distance learning courses make training more accessible for adults. They improve their knowledge in subjects such as understanding autism, and children and young peoples' mental health.

Managers and teachers diligently sequence individual curriculums exceptionally well. Students and apprentices build on their existing knowledge, skills and behaviours incrementally and are set suitably demanding targets. For example, level 3 performing arts students focus on technique acquisition in year 1 before combining song, dance and acting skills in musical theatre productions in year 2. This prepares students well for conservatoire and higher education courses. On level 3 animal management courses, young students learn early on the principles of health and safety, animal welfare, nutrition and wider skills, such as communication and

teamwork. This prepares them well for their exciting placement activities that take place early in year 1.

Students with high needs are expertly supported by well qualified and experienced staff, providing curriculums that focus firmly on preparation for adulthood and routes to employment. For example, staff work with employers to provide supported employment programmes that teach students the work-ready behaviours they need to start work. Staff skilfully adapt the Duke of Edinburgh programme to meet the specific needs of students with high needs so that they can participate in every level of the award. The community projects element of the award helps students to develop life skills, such as resilience, communication and independence, while also building students' confidence and self-esteem. These experiences contribute to exceptionally high numbers of students with high needs taking up paid work and higher levels of study on completion of their courses.

Leaders ensure that teaching across all aspects of training is of the highest quality. They carefully recruit teachers with strong subject knowledge and industry expertise. Effective professional development supports teachers to, for example, make creative and innovative use of digital technologies to enhance the learning experience for students. This is particularly useful for students with speech and language difficulties, who use tablets to communicate their contributions to the class, motivating them to take part in lessons and removing their barriers to learning.

Skilful teachers use a range of highly effective teaching strategies to help students and apprentices to remember what they have learned. For example, hospitality students rotate between theory and practical activities, such as starters, main courses, and desserts, to maximise opportunities for practising important skills. Level 3 nuclear engineering teachers break down challenging content, such as complex criteria for component design and production. They skilfully link this to previously taught knowledge around computer-aided design techniques. Level 5 nursing associate apprenticeship teachers use role play to help apprentices develop critical behaviours, such as empathy and how to interact with patients and colleagues. This approach fosters apprentices' independence in their work and students' fluency in their studies.

Leaders and managers provide highly effective support for teachers and learning support assistants to ensure their specialist knowledge remains current in their industries and subjects. For example, level 5 nursing associate apprenticeship trainers complete bank nursing work to keep their vocational skills up to date. They apply this knowledge to create realistic simulations using the latest techniques and equipment found in hospitals. Learning support assistants working with students on the level 1 automotive course complete a level 2 course themselves to support their understanding of the curriculum area.

Teachers and assessors use assessment consistently well. They check students' and apprentices' knowledge and skills and accurately measure their progress. Teachers and assessors provide comprehensive and useful feedback on students' and

apprentices' written and practical work. Students and apprentices know what they need to do to meet and exceed their targets. For example, level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeship trainers use apprentices' individual starting points well to adapt lessons to recognise what apprentices know and can do already. Apprentices are highly motivated by effective and frequent progress reviews with their trainer assessor and employer.

Staff prepare students and apprentices exceptionally well for their next stage of education, employment, or independence. For example, apprentices take part in industry speaker events and inspirational residential placements that raise their aspirations and teach them about their chosen fields. The vast majority of students and apprentices achieve their qualifications, many with high grades. This enables them to accept places at their chosen universities, gain promotions and move on to paid employment. For example, the majority of students with high needs who complete supported internships with EDF move into paid employment.

Leaders and managers prepare students and apprentices very effectively for future success in education or training. They provide unbiased and relevant careers guidance and support for their next steps. For example, young people studying T levels in health gain valuable work experience across a range of wards, such as oncology and midwifery, to inform their career direction in the healthcare field. Students with high needs studying the pathways programme receive careful support from a well-qualified job coach, with a work placement aligned to their long-term aspirations.

Governors' expertise in education, healthcare, and digital transformation enriches strategic planning and decision-making. Their well-structured processes, such as frequent meetings and scrutiny of key performance indicators, ensure rigorous oversight and continuous improvement. Governors balance challenge with support for leaders. They foster a culture of collaboration and improvement, benefiting students and the community while meeting statutory responsibilities, like safeguarding and 'Prevent' duties.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130803
<b>Address</b>	Bath Road Bridgwater Somerset TA6 4PZ
<b>Contact number</b>	01278455464
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.btc.ac.uk">http://www.btc.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Andy Berry
<b>Provider type</b>	General further education college
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	5 to 8 March 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	The Skills Network Limited Learning Curve Group Limited Devon and Somerset Combined Fire and Rescue Authority Somerset Skills and Learning CIC The Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority The Colleges' Partnership Limited The Women's Work Lab C.I.C. Lantra

## Information about this inspection

The inspection 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, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

Sarah Alexander, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul James	His Majesty's Inspector
Terri Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Alex Howarth	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Caunter	Ofsted Inspector
Jojo Kingsbury-Elia	Ofsted Inspector
Gavin Murray	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Wardle	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Lane	Ofsted Inspector
Matt Hann	His Majesty's Inspector
Edd Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Lowenna Bradley	His Majesty's Inspector



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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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