

Inspection of Hereford College of Arts

Inspection dates:

17 to 20 October 2023

Overall effectiveness**Outstanding**

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

Information about this provider

Hereford College of Arts is a specialist further and higher education college in Hereford, Herefordshire. At the time of inspection, there were 522 learners studying creative arts programmes, taught on two campuses close to the city centre. Of these, 485 learners were on education programmes for young people. There were 19 learners with high needs and 37 adult learners taught within the vocational programmes.

The college offers level 2 and level 3 programmes in art and design, music performance and production, performing and production arts, and creative media production and technology. The provider does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their learning. They demonstrate a consistently high level of attendance at their studies, even when they have previously struggled to attend school. Many learners choose to attend additional workshops and spend extra time practising their art outside of timetabled classes. If learners need support to attend their learning, leaders take swift and understanding actions to rapidly improve attendance.

Learners benefit greatly from a broad range of high-quality activities and events which enrich their taught curriculum. They take part in exhibitions, performances and festivals and sell their work at a pop-up shop. College staff inspire learners to aim high and succeed. As a result, a very high proportion of learners progress to their next steps, often progressing to study at prestigious institutions.

Leaders, teachers and support staff create a highly inclusive culture in the college, where bullying and harassment are not tolerated. Learners are encouraged to express their individuality both in their work and in their personalities. They develop their confidence and resilience by being challenged, encouraged and fully accepted by staff and by their peers.

Adult foundation art learners benefit from an accessible curriculum delivery. They attend additional workshops flexibly and develop their arts practice from home. This allows them to combine work or home commitments with study.

Learners develop the high-quality skills and knowledge that they need to become successful artists. They benefit from highly skilled teachers, technicians and industry practitioners sharing their knowledge and experience. For example, a local graphic artist shared his mural art with art and design students to show broader use of art in the community.

Learners work collaboratively across all levels of study and disciplines. In foundation art, adult learners work alongside higher education learners to develop their practical workshop skills. Music and performing arts learners work together to create theatre performances during the first weeks of their study. As a result, learners develop their teamworking skills, social skills and networks rapidly.

Learners study in a safe and supportive environment. They are encouraged to voice their individual needs to teachers and to their peers. For example, they raise hands and take turns to speak so discussion is not overwhelming. Learners with high needs benefit from targeted support inside and outside the classroom. Learners recognise the support given by teaching and support staff and value the opportunity to study in the college.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work proactively with a range of key strategic stakeholders, such as the Stronger Hereford board, local Herefordshire business boards and the Marches local skills improvement plans. They are active members of several strategic boards, integrating well with a wide range of stakeholders. Leaders have a well-developed awareness of key priority sector areas within the geographical areas they serve. Leaders use a range of information effectively, such as that linked to job trends and local demographics, to inform their curriculum offer.

Leaders clearly recognise how they contribute to skills needs. Leaders have a clear ambition and desire to target digital skills development within the locality and have invested strongly in resources in relation to this.

Leaders have successfully developed curriculums that support learners to develop key employability skills, such as project management, budgeting and timekeeping. These curriculums have been well informed following engagement with stakeholders and governors. As a result, nearly all learners develop skills which allow them to be successful in either their future studies or employment.

In most cases, curriculum areas in the college have been successful in their stakeholder engagement. For example, leaders and managers have engaged productively with a regional wildlife trust. Leaders have refreshed their curriculums in direct response to this, ensuring learners develop a key understanding of the importance of sustainability and biodiversity. However, stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation of the curriculums is not yet consistently strong across all areas. Leaders are taking clear actions to remedy this, including the appointment of additional senior staff to develop business enterprise. It remains too early to assess the full impact of these actions.

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

Leaders have selected curriculums that allow learners to creatively and flexibly develop the knowledge, skills and professional behaviours needed to work and study in the creative industries. They bring together the skills needed for employment and for personal and professional development. They broaden vocational skills beyond the ask of the curriculum to ensure that learners have highly developed opportunities to understand their skills and future direction.

Leaders and managers have designed and sequenced a very well-thought-through curriculum. In the first term, foundation art students are introduced to different artistic disciplines, such as 3D, textiles, lens-based and visual communication, while exploring the design cycle. As a result, students gain a firm foundation in creative competencies before applying the skills to their final projects.

Leaders ensure that they understand their learners well before the start of the enrolment process. In performing arts, they offer workshops for audition practice, multiple audition opportunities and support to ensure that learners have the best opportunity to showcase their skills and potential. They ensure that learners without previous knowledge and experience but with potential and talent are identified. Learners are supported to enrol without barriers from disadvantage, previous school experiences or additional learning support needs.

Teachers individualise their interactions with learners to respect boundaries set by those with additional learning needs. For example, dance teachers check levels of comfort in touch with learners before physically changing their positions in dance rehearsals. As a result, learners develop their confidence and feel that they are heard and respected.

Teachers expertly support students to become more confident in the use of professional, creative and technical vocabulary. They use project work to set the development of skills into real situations and contexts. Over time, learners are confident to use the vocabulary they have learned to describe their own work and to critique the work of peers.

Teachers use practical activities to highlight key concepts. In creative media, learners build their own zoetrope, which helps them understand film frame rates and depth perception. They then apply this to digital production of films. They quickly apply key principles of filmmaking to modern animation and virtual reality.

The large majority of teachers take care to check learners' understanding of key concepts carefully and effectively. In GCSE English classes, teachers successfully support learners to complete evaluations of their work and explain what they need to do to improve their writing. However, in a small minority of mathematics classes, teachers do not check on individuals to see if they understand the concepts that are being discussed. As a result, not all learners make the same strong progress.

Leaders carefully match learning support assistants' skills, knowledge and experience to the individual needs of learners with high needs. Many support staff have higher creative arts qualifications and skills. This enables them to confidently support their learners with live projects, workshop skills development and using specialist software. Learners with high needs make rapid progress in developing their skills, with individualised support.

Teachers plan assignments, some set with employers and stakeholders, which build creative confidence and skills for employment. Students produce increasingly ambitious creative products and gain valuable skills, such as planning, organising, problem-solving, teamworking and time management. For example, foundation art students work for the National Trust as part of an illumination festival to develop projection art across Croft Castle.

Leaders have created a curriculum that consistently and extensively promotes the personal development of learners. Learners are provided with many opportunities

that go beyond the curriculum. For example, music and performing arts learners are involved in their community through initiatives such as bringing music into local schools and a concert to support Hereford's refugee musicians. As a result, learners are acutely aware of why it is important to contribute actively to society.

Leaders and teachers thoroughly prepare learners for their future. They provide a well-developed and effective careers education, information, advice and guidance programme that includes interaction with employers and higher education providers. Learners who are undecided about their plans have discussions with teachers and careers advisers throughout their studies. Learners are keenly aware of the options available to them and make informed choices about their future.

A very high proportion of learners achieve their vocational qualifications. A significant number of those learners achieve high grades. Learners with high needs and additional learning support needs achieve as highly as their peers. Almost all adult learners achieve their qualifications and move on to higher education following their studies.

Learners produce work of a very high standard and clearly demonstrate in-depth knowledge, understanding and creative skills, often beyond their level of study. Creative media learners produce high-quality work in a short period of time. Learners who have had no previous experience in media produce stop-motion films using industry standard software and demonstrate sound knowledge of pre- and post-production in their first weeks of study. As a result, learners are well prepared for their next steps.

Learners develop their understanding of fundamental British values and healthy living through project work. Performing arts and music learners discuss democracy and changes to equality laws through the historical and political background of the 1990s when developing a performance of 'Cool Britannia'. Performing arts, music and arts learners developed a health, well-being and 'into nature' performance for Hereford AppleFest. Learners are effectively prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for their learners and set high targets for success. They have recently focused on improvements in attendance and high grades and have increased both significantly. Leaders ensure that feedback from learners and external stakeholders including parents and employers informs the focus on areas for improvement. As a result, they continue to improve the quality of the curriculum effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130714
Address	Folly Lane Hereford Herefordshire HR1 1LT
Contact number	01432 273359
Website	http://www.hca.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Abigail Appleton
Provider type	Further education college
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2013
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, further education, 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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