

Prospects College of Advanced Technology

Further education college

Inspection dates

4–7 December 2018

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Governors, leaders and managers have not focused sufficiently on improving the quality of teachers' practice. As a result, too much teaching is not good enough.
- Leaders do not take effective actions to ensure learners and apprentices make rapid progress, deepen their knowledge and achieve well.
- Too many gaps in achievement exist between different groups of learners and between apprentices.
- Too few learners on study programmes at level 2 achieve their qualifications. Too few apprentices achieve their apprenticeship within planned timescales.
- Learners and apprentices do not have a good enough understanding of how to protect themselves from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Learners and apprentices do not improve their skills in communication and English rapidly enough.
- Teachers do not set targets that challenge learners and apprentices to improve their skills and understanding.
- Teachers' feedback to learners and apprentices does not enable them to understand how to improve their work.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders ensure that the curriculum meets known skills shortages in specialist technology and engineering pathways.
- Learners and apprentices gain good levels of practical skills that they apply well in their workplaces.
- Staff provide effective and impartial careers advice and guidance. As a result, most learners progress to employment or the next stage of education.
- Learners' and apprentices' conduct and behaviour at college and at work are exemplary.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Prospects College of Advanced Technology (PROCAT) was established in 2014 as a specialist further education college. It offers courses in transport and logistics, engineering and robotics, and construction, utilities and infrastructure. The college is based in Basildon with two further sites in Canvey Island and Ilford. PROCAT provides 16 to 19 study programmes, mostly at levels 1 and 2. The college also provides apprenticeships training, predominantly at advanced level with the majority of apprentices aged 16 to 18 years old. Approximately half are on standards-based apprenticeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors and leaders must ensure that they systematically strengthen the quality of teaching and learning by rigorously evaluating teaching and using this information to steer improvement, so that learners and apprentices achieve well, and underperformance is eliminated.
- Rapidly improve the proportion of learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications by providing swift support for those who are struggling with their studies, so they can catch up make good progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - using information on learners' starting points to plan learning that meets the needs and abilities of learners and apprentices
 - setting demanding targets with learners and apprentices that challenge them to rapidly improve their skills and deepen their knowledge
 - ensuring that learners and apprentices use technical vocabulary accurately and improve the quality of their written and spoken English
 - providing clear feedback that enables learners and apprentices to improve their work.
- Staff must ensure that learners and apprentices understand the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism and know how to keep themselves safe.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- In the past year, leaders and governors have endeavoured to secure a viable and sustainable future for the college. Previous over-optimistic planning and inaccurate forecasting of the recruitment of apprentices and adult learners, combined with poor use of resources, have resulted in significant fiscal challenge. The funding agency has issued an inadequate rating and formal notice of concern for financial health. In response, leaders and governors have greatly reduced financial losses and are now planning for a potential merger with a neighbouring college.
- Leaders accurately self-assess the quality of provision as requiring improvement. However, they do not ensure that self-assessment, planning and monitoring at all levels lead to effective actions that enable learners and apprentices to achieve well. Their self-assessment and action planning do not demonstrate that they have a comprehensive understanding of the quality of teaching, and what needs to improve.
- The small leadership team established just over a year ago has introduced and revised a series of quality assurance processes. These include establishing clear standardisation and internal verification processes while working with a limited financial capacity and a much-reduced workforce. However, these assurance processes have not yet had time to improve the quality of provision.
- Leaders and managers have implemented a revised observation process and have greatly increased the frequency of observations they conduct. They have established mentoring and advanced practitioner support for instructors. However, too many observations do not focus on the impact of teaching on learners and apprentices. Some feature contradictory judgements. Instructors whose practice is judged to require improvement are not observed again for a considerable period of time. While leaders have increased the range of staff training, observation findings do not inform staff development and leaders do not use performance management sufficiently to improve teaching.
- Leaders have restructured the English and mathematics provision and have revised the timetabling of the teaching of these subjects. This has resulted in improved levels of learners' attendance. However, leaders have not yet improved English and mathematics provision sufficiently to ensure that far more learners make better progress than previously.
- Leaders have reduced the very high numbers of staff that leave the workforce. Over time, a continual high staff turnover has adversely affected the quality of teaching and monitoring of learners' and apprentices' progress. However, in 2018, leaders' actions ensured that, for the first time in many years, all teachers across the college returned to work after the summer break.
- Leaders continue to focus on providing a curriculum that specialises in technology and engineering pathways to meet the needs of local and regional employers and some of the priorities of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. Leaders and governors ensure that the college offers many state-of-the-art resources across most of its sites to promote learners' industry-specific knowledge and skills.
- Leaders and managers have significantly increased the volume of learners enrolled on

study programmes at the college. The introduction of level 1, together with an increase in level 2 and level 3 study programmes in engineering and construction now provides clear pathways for more learners to remain on courses, and to achieve and progress to employment and apprenticeships. As a result, leaders have successfully increased the proportion of learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications.

- Partnership working with employers is variable in its impact on learners and apprentices. For example, due to a lack of expertise, tuition and support for rail apprentices caused by the high turnover of specialist staff in 2017, a large public limited company stopped working with the college for its apprenticeship provision. However, there are many employers who greatly value the knowledge and skills that instructors and assessors provide to enable their apprentices to add value to their businesses. Leaders have terminated the contracts of underperforming subcontractors. Leaders work well with a small number of remaining subcontractors to ensure that those apprentices complete their apprenticeships.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have worked diligently to help to greatly reduce the size of the college's financial burden. They now ensure that learners and apprentices are able to continue their studies. Until recently, governors did not ensure that leaders consistently exercised a careful use of public funds when providing the curriculum. As a result, the college faces a significant fiscal challenge that threatens its existence.
- Governors hold leaders to task on a range of performance at a headline level. As a result, they have a good understanding of the achievement, retention and behaviour of learners and apprentices. However, leaders do not provide governors with sufficient information that enables them to provide more robust challenge on improving teaching and ensuring that learners and apprentices make rapid progress from their starting points.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers accountable for safeguarding have put in place clear policies and procedures that are understood by staff and help keep learners safe. All staff have received safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty, and leaders have planned further training for all staff to take place shortly.
- Designated safeguarding managers record, monitor and follow up safeguarding referrals assiduously to full resolution. Leaders and managers ensure that learners who have disclosed mental health issues and those with experience of local authority care are effectively supported during their time at college.
- Leaders ensure that the college adheres to safer recruitment practices. Managers maintain accurate records of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on the college's single central record. All temporary staff employed by agencies are fully risk assessed to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults.
- Too few learners have a good enough grasp of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Too many apprentices do not have a sufficient understanding of how these

issues apply to their lives and workplaces.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Not enough teachers effectively challenge learners and apprentices to realise their potential. They do not ensure that learners and apprentices complete sufficiently demanding work. Too many teachers do not use information on their learners' starting points and workplace experiences to ensure they make rapid progress.
- In too many theory lessons, learners and apprentices do not make good progress in developing, consolidating and deepening their knowledge and skills. Teachers do not set challenging targets for learners and apprentices. Most do not effectively check learners' understanding. They use open questions that result in just a few learners responding.
- Some teachers do not promptly identify the specific needs of learners at the beginning of their programmes. As a consequence, not enough learners with additional learning needs receive the support they require to make good progress. Where support is provided, including for the increasing number of learners with education, health and care plans, it is effective in enabling learners to achieve their learning goals.
- Teachers of vocational subjects do not enable learners and apprentices to improve their English and communication skills. Too often, teachers do not explain new technical terms. As a result, learners' definitions and pronunciation of commonly used technical terms in construction and engineering are frequently wrong and not corrected by teachers. Teachers do not routinely correct errors in spelling and grammar and basic syntax in learners' and apprentices' written work.
- Too often, feedback to learners does not help them to understand what they have done well or how they can improve their work. Some learners and apprentices receive feedback on written work that is superficial and unhelpful. Too many teachers and assessors do not provide timely feedback, and this delay in returning learners' submitted work undermines its usefulness.
- Teaching staff have good subject knowledge and experience relevant to their roles. They use their expertise to ensure learners and apprentices achieve or exceed industry standards in their practical work. As a result, most learners and apprentices gain good practical skills and can understand the relevance of underpinning theory. For example, learners studying electrical installation accurately apply Ohm's Law to successfully carry out complex wiring tasks. Carpentry apprentices understand the importance of the 'snagging' process to their practice in the workplace.
- Teachers make good use of the college's well-resourced workshops and realistic working environments to enable learners to improve their skills. Learners and apprentices make good use of these resources to enhance their independent learning skills. Innovative virtual reality software enables learners and apprentices to gain specialist skills such as re-wiring a property using complex wiring techniques.
- Most vocational subject teachers enable learners and apprentices to improve their mathematical skills, particularly in practical sessions. For example, construction and engineering apprentices can confidently switch between metric and imperial dimensions when restoring historic items. They adapt metric materials to fit around original fabrications from the last century. Plumbing apprentices quickly learn to use and

transpose formulas to calculate flow rates and safety margins when working on hot and cold water systems.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Not enough learners attend their study programme lessons regularly or on time. Poor punctuality interrupts the flow of many lessons, with teachers often having to repeat instructions for latecomers. As a result, other learners have their learning disrupted and make slow progress. However, attendance at English and mathematics lessons has improved and is now high. Apprentices' attendance at their off-the-job training is also high.
- Learners and apprentices have good working relationships with their peers and staff at the college and at work. Their behaviour at the college is exemplary. However, when teaching is slow paced, learners often become bored and distracted. When they are disengaged for prolonged periods of time, they fail to remain focused on learning.
- Learners and apprentices gain new confidence and take pride in their work, particularly in practical activities. For example, engineering machinists proficiently produce specialist components for the defence industry or competently create one-off tooling for plastics injection moulding. Carpentry apprentices effectively and confidently work alongside other tradespeople on bustling, new-build worksites.
- Learners enrolled on study programmes make good use of their high-quality work placements and environments to further their knowledge, skills and understanding. Most apprentices successfully apply the skills they gain at college to their workplaces and contribute well to their employers' businesses. For example, an apprentice successfully produced a prototype for testing alarm systems on aircraft dashboards operating at different temperatures, which has been adopted by the employer.
- Most learners and apprentices acquire additional relevant skills through other activities and qualifications that form part of their learning programmes. For example, learners enrolled on engineering study programmes extend their learning in health and safety to achieve National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) qualifications. Some learners and apprentices have gained new knowledge and skills through working on prestigious projects such as the construction of the Shard in London, construction of staging and scenery for the Royal Opera House and designing engine components for the Williams Formula 1 motor racing company.
- Learners receive effective and impartial careers advice and guidance from well-qualified staff. Managers ensure that learners produce realistic and achievable career plans through tutorial sessions that effectively focus on CV writing, personal presentation and progression planning. As a result, most learners gain employment in the engineering and construction sectors.
- Learners and apprentices maintain safe working practices at the college and in workplaces at all times. They understand the importance of appropriate personal protective equipment. They handle tools and technical machinery with confidence. For example, apprentices working as stage crew for the National Archive use their accredited knowledge in safe manual handling and working at height to good effect.
- Learners and apprentices do not have a good understanding of British values or the

importance of equality and diversity in modern Britain. Teachers do not effectively promote and enable learners and apprentices to secure a good grasp of such essential issues in lessons, tutorials and enrichment events.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too many learners and apprentices do not make swift enough progress from their starting points in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Most learners and apprentices make good progress in extending their practical skills. However, too few are challenged to make the progress of which they are capable, particularly those who are most able or those with additional learning needs.
- Too few learners enrolled on study programmes achieve their qualifications, particularly at level 2. Leaders' data for 2017/18 indicates that a far greater proportion of learners achieved than in previous years. However, the proportion is low and below that seen nationally.
- Leaders' data indicates that the proportion of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeship has improved and is now broadly in line with the national rate. However, too few apprentices achieve their qualification within their planned timescales.
- Too many gaps in achievement existed between different groups of learners and apprentices in 2017/18, with too much variance between levels and age. Learners on study programmes with an education, health and care plan achieve in line with their peers.
- Too few learners following study programmes make good progress in English and mathematics. Only a small proportion studying GCSE courses improve their grades, including those with a grade 3 (formerly D) on entry. The proportion of learners who achieve their functional skills qualifications in these subjects has increased. However, too few achieve at level 2, particularly in mathematics.
- Learners' and apprentices' practical work often meets or exceeds industry standards. For example, engineering apprentices in aviation and defence contract work are able to work independently and competently on engines, transmissions and undercarriage components. However, learners and apprentices are not challenged to produce standards of written work that are above the basic requirements of their qualifications.
- Most learners progress into employment or onto the next level of study at the end of their programmes. A high proportion of study programme learners progress onto apprenticeships. Most apprentices progress to the next level of apprenticeship with the same employer or are given increased responsibility. Many apprentices gain permanent employment as a result of successfully completing their apprenticeship.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- PROCAT offers study programmes in engineering and construction with a smaller provision in transportation. At the time of the inspection, there were 342 learners studying across the three sites. The majority of learners study at levels 1 or 2, with a small number enrolled on level 3 programmes. Most study programmes provision is provided in Basildon. Leaders ensure that courses fully meet the principles of 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Teachers do not teach theory that meets the varying abilities and experiences of learners. They do not challenge the most able learners to excel, or effectively support those learners who need more help. In too many learning activities, all learners work on the same tasks in order to achieve the same objectives. Too often, teachers do not effectively check learners' understanding and enable them to make swift progress.
- Most teachers do not use assessment to motivate and enable learners to make good progress. Too many learners have a backlog of several assignments to complete at the same time and as a result, fail to produce work to a high standard. Teachers' feedback to learners does not help them to improve the standards of their work. Teachers' comments, written and verbal, are often cursory and lack sufficient detail to ensure that learners understand what they need to do improve. As a result, too many learners do not make rapid progress.
- Not enough learners improve their English and mathematical skills. Teachers do not provide mathematics teaching that challenges their learners to advance their existing skills. Teachers of English GCSE courses ensure that their learners make good progress. For example, they make sure that their learners gain a sound understanding of the purpose of metaphors, similes and pathetic fallacy when sourcing texts and book excerpts. However, teachers of English functional skills courses do not help learners identify and correct errors involving simple spellings and sentence structures.
- Teachers make effective use of good-quality resources to make learning interesting and relevant to the workplace. Workshops at all sites are well resourced, with up-to-date equipment that learners value highly and use safely. Learners' increased confidence in the use of machinery helps prepare them well for work placements and securing employment after they have completed their programmes.
- Learners produce good standards of practical work. For example, learners in the first term of studying the level 2 electrical installation course are able to competently install lighting circuits, including accurately conducting earthing and polarity tests. Learners enrolled on the level 1 multi-skills programme perform good brickwork skills, with some completing highly decorative archway projects.
- In the current year, learners have clear plans in place for participation in meaningful work placements. Learners who have already completed work experience proficiently evaluate the purpose of the new technical skills they have gained. Many learners progress to apprenticeships as a result of good-quality work experience.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection, there were 886 apprentices following programmes with the majority studying at advanced level. The largest proportion of apprentices in learning are aged 16 to 18. Approximately half of the apprentices study standards-based apprenticeships with the remainder on frameworks. The largest proportion of apprenticeships study building services, engineering, and transport and logistics with the remainder on a construction pathway. The college meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.
- Teachers and assessors do not take sufficient account of apprentices' previous skills and knowledge when providing off-the-job training at the college. They do not set challenging objectives and targets with apprentices. Targets focus too much on meeting assessment criteria rather than on developing appropriate skills and behaviours. As a consequence, apprentices do not extend their knowledge and fulfil their potential.
- Assessors coach apprentices effectively during progress reviews to further their technical skills and workplace behaviours. However, some assessors' feedback on the standards of apprentices' work is superficial and gives little insight into how work could be improved. Assessors inform apprentices when their work meets assessment criteria or requirements, but they do not provide feedback on how they can deepen their learning.
- Teachers and assessors do not focus sufficiently on improving apprentices' communication and written English skills. For example, assessors provide training for apprentices to produce the content of technical reports. However, they do not identify and correct errors in apprentices' written English within these reports. As a result, apprentices do not make swift progress in improving the standards of their written work. Some teachers and assessors do not effectively prepare apprentices for the professional discussions that are a requirement of the end-point assessments.
- Most assessors ensure that employers are effectively involved in the planning of the apprenticeship and in reviews of apprentices' progress. Apprentices benefit from high-quality training in the workplace. For example, advanced manufacturing apprentices proficiently work on research briefs set by their employers, such as replacing fleet of highly polluting vehicles with eco-friendly models. As a result, apprentices gain good skills in project management, data analysis and feasibility studies.
- Apprentices gain good standards of technical skills. For example, welding apprentices produce complex stage sets for the Royal Opera House and Royal Ballet. They help effectively maintain the vast collection of scenery and props held as a national archive. These apprentices effectively work alongside joiners and artists and meet the expectations set by their production set designers. Plumbing apprentices install and commission new hot and cold water systems in domestic and industrial settings. They understand the need to maintain water safety and know how to design systems to avoid the development of harmful bacteria such as legionella.
- Apprentices extend and successfully apply their mathematical skills in the workplace. They measure accurately, working to precise tolerances. For example, aeronautical apprentices confidently and accurately interpret engineering drawings into coordinates for numerically controlled machines.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141084
Type of provider	Further education college
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,682
Principal/CEO	Ros Parker, Principal Judith Abbott, CEO
Telephone number	0800 389 3589
Website	www.procat.ac.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	125	0	179	0	38	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	118	51	420	250	7	20		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	7							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	TXM Mosaic Freedom							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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