

Prospects College of Advanced Technology

General further education college

Inspection dates

15–18 November 2016

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders work very productively with a range of high-profile and major employers to ensure that the apprenticeship provision is very responsive to industry requirements and skill shortages.
- Recent arrangements for improving the quality of provision and teaching, learning and assessment ensure that a high proportion of current apprentices make good progress.
- Apprentices gain valuable knowledge and skills by working to high industry expectations and standards.
- The large majority of rail engineering, aviation and electrical engineering apprentices and study programme learners develop their mathematical skills well in lessons.
- Apprentices and learners are very respectful towards each other and staff, and they behave very well around the college and in their workplaces.
- Assessors and employers coach and support apprentices well; as a consequence, the large majority progress swiftly to tackling more complex work tasks in the workplace.
- Attendance levels are high and almost all learners and apprentices are punctual to lessons and assessment activities.
- Most apprentices and learners benefit from working with highly experienced teachers and assessors; they gain good practical skills and, as a result, enhance their value in the workplace.
- Teachers and instructors do not plan effectively to meet the specific needs and abilities of all study programme learners and as a consequence, too many do not make good progress.
- Too often, apprentices' and learners' targets, and the reviews of their progress, focus solely on assessment and qualification completion and not on their development of skills, knowledge and further understanding.
- Too few apprentices and learners have a good understanding of British values or the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Prospects College of Advanced Technology (PROCAT) is based in Basildon, with a smaller construction delivery centre on Canvey Island, Essex. The college was established in 2014, having transitioned from independent learning provider status. PROCAT is a specialist further education college with a strong focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics and provides training for 1,304 apprentices and 376 learners on 16 to 19 study programmes. Just over two thirds of apprentices follow programmes at advanced level.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should ensure that teachers and assessors review more effectively the progress apprentices and learners make, and that targets set and the feedback given challenge and inspire them to improve their work more swiftly.
- Leaders should make sure that teachers and instructors use all information available to them to plan teaching, assessment and learning to meet the needs of their learners in order for them to make more rapid progress.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices and learners have a sound understanding of British values and the threats and risks posed by extremist groups.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors have set an aspiring vision for the college which links well to the needs of the engineering and construction sectors on a local, regional and national level. Leaders have embarked on an ambitious programme of change since incorporation, designed to improve the quality of provision and ensure that all apprentices and learners achieve their career aspirations.
- Leaders' recent arrangements for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are now securing a positive impact on learners' outcomes. Leaders have recently introduced a revised process for driving improvement through quality assurance with a clear focus on the quality of provision and outcomes for learners. Consequently, current apprentices and learners are making good progress.
- Managers' understanding of the characteristics of teaching, learning and assessment is improving the quality of teachers' practice at a rapid pace. The most recent recordings of managers' evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment demonstrate that they now offer greater accuracy in the feedback they provide, with a strong focus on the progress that apprentices and learners make.
- Leaders' self-assessment and evaluation of provision recognise most of the fundamental areas requiring improvement identified by inspectors. Leaders have recently implemented actions swiftly to secure sufficient improvement in the quality of the provision. Leaders have recently appointed new managers to lead the improvement process; well-considered and robust plans have been recently introduced and are now raising the standard of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for learners. Leaders have established the capacity to secure further improvement.
- In 2015/16, managers did not identify sufficiently gaps in achievement between learners and the progress different groups and those studying different subject areas were making. Managers now secure accurate data to identify the impact of improvement actions and to ensure that they intervene in a prompt manner when apprentices and learners do not make the progress expected of them.
- Leaders have intervened swiftly to improve the performance of their subsidiary company and subcontractors, where too many apprentices historically failed to achieve their qualifications. Improved management and auditing arrangements are now in place. Consequently, leaders have removed underperforming subcontractors and no longer contract with those not performing to expected standards. Apprentices with subcontractors now make better progress.
- Leaders work highly effectively with a good range of national employers in key sectors of British industry such as rail, engineering and aviation. In partnership with employers, managers plan and organise training to meet employers' needs well and where necessary secure co-investment in the specialist equipment and resources needed to achieve high-quality, realistic work-based learning environments for learners. Managers have recently started to use their good links with employers to develop workplace learning opportunities for learners on study programmes.

- Leaders, managers and governors have established very productive partnership work with employers. This has led to the development of excellent opportunities for learners and apprentices to progress into employment, often with high-profile employers, for example Transport for London, Crossrail, Honeywell Instruments and Bombardier. Leaders also have a long-established relationship with the local enterprise partnership and the local council in meeting the demand for skills development in the local area.
- Leaders and managers have established a working environment where high standards of behaviour and conduct are commonplace for all apprentices and learners. Apprentices and learners are respectful with each other and to staff. Apprentices and learners demonstrate positive attitudes to their studies and in their workplaces.

The governance of the provider

- Governors and senior leaders focus well on the impact of teaching, learning and assessment and on outcomes for learners. Board members provide appropriate challenge to senior managers and hold them to account through the monitoring of key performance indicators of the recently developed information dashboard.
- Board members play a central role in the setting of the strategic direction of the college and are ambitious for the future of the organisation. Their broad range of expertise and skills is utilised well to ensure that they have an accurate understanding of the organisation's current strengths and areas for improvement. Governors recognise that the organisation has gone through a period of significant change and expansion, and as a result, they have worked with the principal to establish a new senior management team that now provides the college with the capacity and expertise to drive improvement forward swiftly.
- Governors have secured strong financial stability for the college and as a consequence, have been able to invest extensively in industry-standard equipment and resources that the learners use effectively to develop their skills and widen their experience in preparation for the real world of work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Apprentices and learners say that they are safe and feel safe at college. They demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe at all times, including in practical workshops and on employers' premises. Staff place a high priority on developing realistic workplace awareness of risk; apprentices and learners demonstrate this understanding well in lessons. Apprentices and learners are aware of the support and lines of communication available for them to report any instances of bullying, harassment or concern. Staff respond effectively to any issues raised and work closely with external agencies such as the local authority's social care designated officer to support safeguarding.
- Effective safeguarding policies and procedures underpin leaders' approach to promoting the safety and well-being of all learners. All staff and governors have received training, and appropriate safe recruitment checks are made at appointment.

- All staff, including subcontractors, have completed appropriate 'Prevent' duty awareness training. However, teachers and assessors have yet to ensure that apprentices have a robust understanding of British values and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment enable the large majority of current apprentices to make the progress of which they are capable. Apprentices and learners gain valuable practical work skills from using excellent practical training resources in subjects such as engineering, aviation and construction.
- Teachers and assessors use their pertinent subject knowledge and industry experience well to enable the large majority of current apprentices to develop good understanding, knowledge and skills that add considerable value to the workplace and that employers value highly.
- The teaching of theoretical concepts is not as effective as the teaching of practical skills. Too often, teachers do not consolidate learners' understanding of key concepts and principles before moving on to a new topic. As a result, too many learners do not grasp nor apply relevant theory confidently.
- Teachers and assessors determine apprentices' starting points well. They use this information to agree long-term targets, aligned to good information, advice and guidance on apprentices' and learners' career aspirations. However, too often, short-term target-setting and feedback do not encourage apprentices and learners to improve their performance or make more rapid progress.
- Apprentices and learners studying at level 3 apply their mathematical skills in practical lessons effectively. For example, they use Pythagoras' Theorem to calculate side lengths of materials to design their own tools. Engineering and construction apprentices demonstrate an adept understanding of mathematical skills at work; for example, they deploy precise measuring skills before cutting materials while repairing roofs on buildings successfully. However, teachers of GCSE mathematics courses do not enable their learners to accelerate their skills sufficiently in order to problem solve confidently.
- Teachers challenge the large majority of apprentices to produce a good standard of written work in their assignments. The majority of assessors promote successfully the importance of English skills within industry settings. As a consequence, apprentices make good progress in improving their English skills. However, in a minority of instances, information provided by teachers and assessors contains spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
- Apprentices and learners develop their speaking and listening communication skills effectively to present information in different contexts confidently. For example, apprentices working on simulated railway tracksides understand fully the need for precise and timely verbal communication and the importance of being safe when working on live railway lines.

- Not enough teachers challenge learners following study programmes to make good progress in advancing their English skills. Too many teachers do not provide learners with precise guidance on how they can structure and improve their writing for different purposes and audiences. Not enough learners studying on the IGCSE courses demonstrate good use of critical analysis skills in their written English work.
- A large majority of engineering apprentices achieve high grades in their assignment work and technical qualifications. Their written work is good. However, a minority of teachers do not reinforce subject vocabulary. Teachers do not challenge apprentices and learners following sports programmes to achieve high grades and improve their higher level thinking skills. As a result, too few achieve to the level of which they are capable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices and learners are motivated, take pride in their work and contribute well to their lessons and practical activities. A large majority of apprentices demonstrate high standards in their work activities and are valued members of employers' workforces. They adopt a positive attitude to their studies and work tasks. Apprentices and learners are well behaved, work productively together, demonstrate good interpersonal skills and show high levels of respect for each other and staff at the college.
- Attendance levels are high and apprentices and learners are punctual to lessons because the large majority of teachers and managers set high expectations for attendance and punctuality.
- Apprentices' standard of behaviour is exemplary. They enjoy their off-the-job learning, and gain good practical skills to do their job well. They contribute effectively and are valued members of their employers' workforces. For example, during the replacement of a built-up bituminous roof, the apprentice quickly evaluated the task and measured, marked out and cut new material before positioning and securing it to a high standard.
- A high proportion of engineering apprentices and learners demonstrate the use of good mathematical skills. They are confident and work to high levels in engineering where mathematics is a key element of their training. However, too few level 1 and level 2 study programme learners develop their skills sufficiently to achieve A*–C passes in their GCSE mathematics qualifications.
- A good proportion of apprentices and learners benefit from the opportunities to gain additional qualifications. For example, construction learners gain the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card and motor vehicle learners achieve refrigerant handling qualifications to enable them to work on vehicle air-conditioning systems.
- Apprentices produce good practical work to the expected level that meets their qualification aims. However, too few apprentices and learners benefit from the setting and achieving of challenging targets required to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Targets set for or by learners include very few personal, social or skill-based development targets.

- Apprentices and learners say that they are safe and feel safe in the college and their workplace; they know whom to report to if they have any concerns. Apprentices conform to strict health and safety regulations in their workplaces and ensure that they and their colleagues work safely at all times. For example, during the repair of a roof, apprentices wore the appropriate personal protective equipment and adhered to prescriptive safe systems of work at all times.
- The large majority of apprentices and learners demonstrate a good understanding of diversity in society, the workplace and Britain. However, too many do not have sufficient understanding of British values and the threats from radicalisation and/or extremism.
- Staff provide good careers advice and guidance that enable apprentices and learners to make informed decisions about their career aspirations and next steps. Study programme learners take part in a wide range of activities at the college in the months before they start their programme. For example, they attend practical skills workshops where teachers assess their dexterity and attitudes to learning to confirm their programme and career choice. Careers advisers guide learners skilfully on work readiness and job interview preparation. As a result, a large majority of learners are well prepared to move on to the next level of learning, an apprenticeship or employment.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Leaders' data for 2015/16 indicates that a high proportion of apprentices achieved their programmes. In 2015/16, the large majority of engineering apprentices achieved their qualifications, and apprentices studying construction improved their performance to around that of similar providers. In the current year, the large majority of current apprentices make at least the progress expected of them. This includes most apprentices following sport and leisure programmes, who now make good progress; in previous years, too few completed and achieved their qualifications.
- Leaders' data for 2015/16 indicates that the proportion of learners following study programmes who achieved their qualifications improved to around that of similar providers. However, in the current year, not enough learners are making good progress and too few excel.
- While males continue to outperform their female peers, and those who have disabilities fare worse than those without, leaders' data for 2015/16 indicates that they are reducing significantly the achievement gaps between these groups of learners.
- A majority of apprentices improve their oral and written English skills well. However, not enough learners taking up study programmes improve their English skills sufficiently. The proportion of learners who achieve A*–C grades at GCSE English remains low.
- A large majority of apprentices and learners studying at level 3 improve their mathematical skills sufficiently in lessons. However, too few learners studying at levels 1 and 2 are challenged to develop the higher level thinking skills they will need to study and achieve high-grade passes at GCSE mathematics.
- A very high proportion of apprentices progress at the end of their programme into sustainable employment; for example, into the rail engineering, construction and aviation industries with high-profile employers across the country. The majority of apprentices studying at intermediate level progress to advanced-level programmes.

- A large majority of study programme learners progress to either a higher level of study, an apprenticeship or meaningful employment.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The college provides 16 to 19 study programmes in engineering, transportation, building and construction, and sport, leisure and recreation. The most popular programmes are engineering and construction. Learners study at a range of levels from level 1 to level 3 with good progression pathways available to apprenticeships. At the time of the inspection, there were 58 learners on level 1 programmes, 211 on level 2 and 107 on level 3 study programmes.
- Teachers and instructors do not plan teaching, learning and assessment routinely well to meet the needs of all learners in order for them to make good progress and reach their potential. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment on 16 to 19 study programmes is variable across the different subjects and levels and too many learners make slow progress.
- Too few learners in 2015/16 participated in appropriate work experience on vocational study programmes. However, managers have plans in place to ensure that all current learners benefit from work-experience placements by building on the productive partnerships with employers in the apprenticeship provision. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of work experience as too few learners have taken it up as yet.
- A majority of learners gain good work-related practical skills through the excellent practical training resources throughout the college. This learning is reinforced through regular college events involving guest speakers and visits to employers. For example, motor vehicle learners improve their understanding of the demands of the world of work through visits to well-known vehicle manufacturers and local enterprises in the vehicle maintenance industry.
- Too few teachers plan techniques and approaches to enable all learners to excel. In too many theory lessons, all learners carry out the same task to the same level at the same time, slowing the progress of the most able learners and preventing them from accelerating their understanding and enabling them to realise their potential. In a minority of practical and theory sessions, learners benefit from well-planned lessons that challenge them to augment their knowledge and understanding.
- Target-setting by teachers and assessors for the majority of learners is weak and does not galvanise them to work hard, excel or improve their work sufficiently. Teachers do not agree or monitor routinely the targets set by learners. Consequently, the large majority of targets that learners set themselves focus on the completion of units or qualifications and not on their skills development. Teachers do not effectively review the progress learners make and, as a consequence, a majority of learners are not aware of the progress they are making or what they need to do to accelerate their development.

- Learners do not make sufficient progress in their IGCSE and functional skills English lessons. Activities and tasks do not provide sufficient challenge and do not focus on gaps in understanding and knowledge to meet the specific needs of learners. Too often, all learners work at the same task at the same level irrespective of ability or starting point. Consequently, too few gain sufficient knowledge and skills to improve their use of spoken and written English fluently.
- The progress learners make in the majority of GCSE mathematics lessons is too slow. In a minority of lessons, teachers plan challenging tasks that facilitate their learners to apply their understanding and problem solve effectively. However, too often teachers do not design teaching, learning and assessment that motivate learners to grasp fundamental concepts and principles and to apply these fluently to arrive at the correct answer. Too often, learners struggle to master basic approaches to solve common mathematical problems and as a result, make insufficient progress.
- Learners are confident and talk articulately about their practical learning and skills development; the large majority have clear aspirations to progress to apprenticeships and employment. Learners benefit from good advice and guidance and this enables a majority to progress to further study or employment. However, too few are aware of the progress they are making towards the completion of their theory qualifications or the achievement of high grades.

Apprenticeships

Good

- At the time of the inspection, 1,304 apprentices were following programmes in rail engineering, electrical engineering, construction and sport, leisure and recreation. Around two thirds study at advanced level and just over half of the apprentices on programmes were aged 16 to 18.
- Managers, teachers and assessors, in partnerships with employers, provide flexible and challenging learning programmes for apprentices that enable the large majority of current apprentices to make at least the progress expected of them.
- Teachers and assessors use their subject knowledge well to plan and provide good practical training using very good resources which accurately replicate apprentices' workplaces. Teachers and instructors explain content clearly and effectively, enabling apprentices to make good progress in practical sessions. For example, rail apprentices at intermediate level use the excellent rail simulation workshop to lay tracks and install electrical systems adeptly. They work to high industry standards and safely demonstrate good team-working skills when installing signalling and points cabling and switchgear.
- Assessors and employers coach and support apprentices well at work. Employers ensure that apprentices have regular supervision to enable them to be more effective in their job roles; as a consequence, the large majority of apprentices swiftly progress to tackling more complex work tasks. For example, an apprentice at advanced level is trusted to manage a contract for ongoing maintenance of food service units for a national rail service provider. This includes frequent communication with the customer, scheduling and costing of works.

- A large majority of apprentices improve their mathematical skills effectively in achieving their vocational qualifications. For example, in an advanced mechanical principles theory lesson, apprentices were able to utilise the principle of moments in static equilibrium to calculate increasingly complex upward forces on two supports.
- The standard of apprentices' practical and assignment work is good. A large majority of engineering apprentices achieve high grades in their technical qualifications. For example, in an electrical engineering lesson, apprentices constructed a printed circuit board from a given design and deployed a variety of relevant resources to solder, fault find and undertake electrical measurements skilfully.
- Assessors do not set targets routinely to enable apprentices to deepen their understanding of the subject and enable all to make swift progress. Too many targets focus on the completion of criteria to achieve units and qualifications and not on further knowledge and skills development. Too few targets distinguish between the long- and short-term development priorities for apprentices and too many are not specific enough to enable apprentices and employers to understand what apprentices need to do to make more rapid progress.
- Not enough assessors feed back promptly or provide sufficient detail to ensure that apprentices understand what they have to do to improve their work; this inhibits the progress of a minority of apprentices. For example, assessors did not provide sufficient contact with apprentices in their final year of working with a large rail employer. Consequently, the employer's leaders are concerned that their apprentices' development of knowledge and skills slowed considerably and at such a vital stage of their apprenticeship training.
- Teachers, instructors and assessors do not facilitate all apprentices to improve their written English skills well through their vocational teaching. For example, too many advanced apprentices submit written assignments that are poorly structured and that contain numerous errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Too many teachers and assessors do not identify or correct routinely apprentices' errors in the spelling of technical words and terminology.

Provider details

Unique reference number	141084
Type of provider	Further education college
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,922
Principal	Mr Neil Bates
Telephone number	0800 3893589
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)	58	–	207	4	107	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	246	139	504	409	–	6		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	TXM Academy Semester Learning and Development Mosaic Spa and Health Clubs Freedom Leisure Training Aspire Sports Health and Fitness Ltd							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of learning, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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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Judy Lye-Forster	Her Majesty's Inspector
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