

Inspection of Access to Music Limited

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 March 2022

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	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Access to Music Ltd was founded in 1992. It now trades as Access Creative College (ACC). ACC provides education and training in seven main centres in England: in Manchester; Birmingham; Bristol; Hackney; Liverpool; Norwich; and Lincoln. The main subcontractor, Confetti Institute for Creative Technologies (NOVA Centric Ltd), delivers some 26% of the provision, in Nottingham. Other small subcontractors account for 4% of the provision.

Leaders have recently developed a new venue in Bristol. It opened to learners from September 2021. The provider acquired dBs Music Holdings Limited in August 2021.

ACC has 3,626 students aged 16 to 18 following study programmes. Some 2% are on level 1 or pre-level 1 courses, 10% on level 2, and 86% on level 3 courses. Most students study performing arts, media and communication, or sport. A minority of students continue to study English and mathematics as part of their study programme.

Some 260 adult learners share their classes with younger learners in performing arts, media and communication, and a further 60 adult learners, study Access to Higher Education courses at the dBs site in Bristol.

There are 84 students who attract high needs funding. They access creative and sporting courses from level 1 to level 3.

In February 2020, the college assumed direct contractual responsibility for a range of creative apprenticeships, from the National College for the Creative Industries (NCCI). Around 106 apprentices work across the whole of England. Some 7% are on intermediate level, 93% at advanced level. Apprenticeships are broadly evenly spread between the age groups: 16 to 18 and 19+.

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

Learners are inspired by attending the college. Learners and apprentices appreciate the knowledge and current industrial experience of their teachers and trainers, which motivates them to achieve their best. They value the new technical, theoretical, and wider vocational skills and knowledge that they acquire.

Learners benefit from learning in a wide range of high-quality practical teaching facilities, such as computer workshops, sound and recording studios, rehearsal stages, and excellent sporting facilities. Learners can borrow expensive pieces of equipment and musical instruments to extend and improve their knowledge. They are motivated by working in learning environments that match industry standards.

Most learners benefit from high-quality work experience, or realistic work-related projects. Sports students acquire an in-depth knowledge of the industry from frequent talks from sports reporters, podcasters and coaches within sport.

Learners are supported well by staff if they need help. Staff deal swiftly and confidently with any concerns students have. Students benefit from opportunities to explore their understanding of consent and healthy relationships in a mature and age-appropriate way. Adult learners are supported to balance family and academic commitments well. Learners find staff approachable and appreciate how they make time to listen to them.

Learners benefit from the strong culture of mutual respect and understanding that leaders and managers have created. Learners have a deep understanding of equality and diversity, and many demonstrate this within their work. Staff create a calm and inclusive environment in which most students and apprentices can study and learn. Learners are treated fairly.

Learners respect and support each other when working in the classroom, in small groups and in sporting teams. Learning assistants support learners who have high needs well to manage their behaviour themselves. Younger students develop their confidence and become more independent and responsible as they progress through their course. They attend activities and access online resources that promote well-being and healthy lifestyles.

Leaders work hard to establish the importance of high attendance and punctuality. Most learners and apprentices understand the importance of attendance in preparing them for employment and in supporting their learning. Teachers support students to catch up with their work if they miss lessons. Although attendance has improved since the easing of restrictions, too many learners still miss lessons.

Apprentices gain the skills they need to become competent in their job roles. They do not yet receive the quality of teaching and precise targets they need to make swift progress from their starting points.

Teachers and trainers use their industry experiences well to demonstrate to learners and apprentices the expected standards of behaviour. For example, students develop self-discipline, respect and teamworking ethos when working in bands, sporting teams or on collaborative projects.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at college and in the working environment. For example, learners on music courses wear appropriate ear protectors. Learners have a good understanding of cyber security. They know how to stay safe when using social media. Apprentices adopt safe working practices at work. Most learners and apprentices understand how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views.

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

Governors, leaders, and managers are ambitious for all learners. They recruit many learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. They work tirelessly to ensure that all learners, irrespective of background, develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to thrive in the creative and sporting sectors. In so doing, they provide exciting opportunities for learners.

Leaders and managers have a clear, rich, and well-articulated vision for the curriculum they offer. They are acutely aware of the need to provide a broad curriculum, which prepares students for the wide range of job opportunities within the creative and sporting sectors. At the same time, they teach a curriculum which matches the interests, skills and abilities of their learners. As a result, most learners gain employment in the sector to which they aspire.

Leaders and managers work well with employers and subcontractors to develop the curriculum. They meet regularly to discuss courses and how to develop them to meet the needs of the sector. Senior managers are dynamic and have expanded their curriculum wisely to reflect recent changes in the media and communication industry. For example, they have successfully introduced courses in games design and e-sports.

The board, which carries out the governance function, is highly effective. Skilled, experienced, and motivated members challenge and support leaders well to develop strategy and to improve performance. They know the college well, and accurately understand its strengths and areas for improvement.

As the college has expanded in size, and the curriculum has diversified, leaders and managers have maintained the quality of education through the effective use of management information, close management of subcontractors, and high-quality professional development and training.

Leaders monitor learners' progress, attendance, and satisfaction regularly by course and by site. In nearly all cases, their actions lead to improvements. More than 90% of learners remain on their courses, and a similar proportion achieve their vocational qualification. Although learners' attendance for the site in London is lower than on the other sites, the gap is narrowing. During the restrictions, attendance for the college fell to below 80%. Leaders have successfully improved attendance to some 86% but rightly recognise that there is still more work to do.

Leaders and managers have highly effective relationships with their subcontractors. Subcontractors participate fully in the quality-improvement mechanisms. Leaders act swiftly if issues are identified in the quality of subcontracted provision. Leaders have reduced the number of subcontractors, and those that remain perform at a good standard.

Leaders and managers design the professional development programme skilfully. They ensure that teachers maintain and refresh their industrial knowledge. Teachers and trainers continue to work in the sector. New or unqualified teachers swiftly undertake appropriate qualifications. Leaders establish frequent opportunities for teachers to understand and share good practice. As part of this programme, senior leaders have established an annual curriculum summit. As a result, teachers' subject expertise and teaching knowledge develop well. Most teaching across sites, subjects and levels is good.

Leaders and managers consider thoroughly the workload and well-being of their staff. They act swiftly to address work-related issues. They have developed new staff roles to ensure the learner experience improves. For example, they have introduced the role of pastoral managers. These additional staff allow teachers to focus upon their classroom roles and to provide specialists to support learners with their personal challenges, particularly during the pandemic.

Teachers plan their teaching carefully and logically, so that students and apprentices initially develop the essential skills and knowledge they need before moving on to more complex work. For example, adult learners on level 3 creative sound and music technology and production learn about theory and composition, before creating their own sound designs. Creative venue technician apprentices learn health and safety and electrical fundamentals at the start before moving to work independently on lighting and sound.

Teachers and trainers use their extensive skills and experience from industry to inform their teaching. They teach learners practical skills to high standards through clear explanation, demonstration, and repetition, so that the skills become automatic. As a result, learners become competent in the skills they need for their next steps in learning or employment. For example, teachers in music production are highly competent in the use of industry software such as 'Logic Pro' and 'Construct 3' and can help the learners to

achieve complex mixing and recording solutions. Within sport, learners use cameras and software to analyse their performance. This enables them to understand better the technology involved in sport, and to use it effectively to improve their performance.

Most teachers use questioning, repetition, and assessment appropriately to ensure that learners and apprentices remember what they have been taught. They also use this information to evaluate the progress their learners are making and to provide clear and precise feedback to learners. They plan further teaching where assessment identifies gaps in learners' understanding.

Most apprentices can apply what they know to the workplace well. They become competent in their job role and can work across disciplines. Staff do not consider apprentices' starting points when planning the curriculum or setting targets. Trainers ask apprentices to complete tasks without teaching the topic in advance. As result, apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable. Too many apprentices make slow progress from their starting points.

For learners who have high needs, staff work closely with community partners, such as local schools, local authorities, employers, and parents, to ensure the provision matches the needs of students. Transition into the college is smooth and effective. Managers ensure that most learners benefit from an individualised curriculum, which balances well the development of independence, vocational skills, and preparation for next steps. Teachers and support assistants work well together. Most students make good progress.

In adult learning, many learners share the same good quality of education which is offered to young people. In addition, adult learners benefit from well-designed Access to Higher Education courses. Leaders ensure that these courses develop both highly relevant vocational skills combined with appropriate study skills. For example, adult learners develop the skills to build virtual-reality games, use games engines, and learn 3D modelling techniques. They also develop advanced essay writing skills and can use the Harvard referencing system appropriately, which is very useful for progression into higher education.

Most young and adult learners achieve their vocational qualifications with a high proportion of higher grades. Nearly all learners, including those with high needs, move into higher education or paid employment. Apprentices and students in sport gain additional qualifications, such as in health and safety and coaching, which are valuable in the workplace.

Teachers and trainers do not develop learners' English and mathematics skills well enough in vocational subjects. While most teachers provide learners with feedback on their written work on spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors, they do not routinely provide learners with strategies to improve their written English skills. As a result, learners continue to make the same mistakes over time.

Leaders and managers have implemented an effective personal development curriculum for young people and adults. Managers provide a curriculum that supports the development of their learners' character well. For example, learners

develop resilience. In level 2 film making, learners make a trailer for a movie. They then submit it for peer review. Teachers support them to make and accept constructive criticism.

Leaders and managers rightly prioritise the provision of ongoing careers guidance for students and apprentices. Managers provide inspirational events and activities throughout the year to help learners identify their next steps and to gain an insight into their intended careers. Staff help learners to build up a body of work relating to their chosen industry over time. Staff adapt the advice to meet the needs of the learner. For example, there is specific and different advice for students considering higher education, self-employment, freelance work, or jobs with an employer. Most students and apprentices are clear about their next steps and most students and apprentices achieve them.

Leaders and managers provide a curriculum that helps to prepare learners for life in modern Britain. Learners understand the importance of diversity and how it relates to their intended industry. For example, in level 3 music production teachers demonstrate the diversity of the music industry by introducing or highlighting a variety of genres. Learners build a critical appreciation of the history and technical structure of music from different communities.

In level 3 games design, learners carefully consider their responsibilities in keeping themselves and others safe in the context of the industry. Learners discuss the issue of violence in video games and how this could impact on mental health. As a result, they understand the moral issue and the influential role that artists have on young audiences. As a result, learners reflect wisely on the power of the creative industry and its associated responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff responsible for safeguarding are appropriately trained, including those in subcontracted provision. They have established strong links with external agencies that they use to support students or apprentices with safeguarding concerns. They understand and are alert to local issues such as county lines, gang cultures, and suicide awareness. They take seriously issues around sexual harassment and peer-on-peer abuse.

Safeguarding staff have effective processes for recording incidents, and they take appropriate action, involving external agencies when appropriate. Staff reflect on these instances well and make refinements to procedures.

Leaders ensure that staff are recruited safely and follow safer recruitment procedures. All new staff receive appropriate training, and existing staff have refresher training to ensure that their knowledge is current.

Leaders provide appropriate physical controls on each site, and computer security for the extensive networks used by learners. They ensure safe working practices at work, including when apprentices work with electrical equipment.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers need to ensure apprentices make swifter progress from their starting points by:
 - establishing and using apprentices' starting points to plan what they are going to teach
 - ensuring that trainers provide the apprentices with the knowledge they need before setting tasks or assessments for completion.
- Leaders and managers need to ensure that all learners and apprentices improve their numeracy and literacy skills through their vocational programmes.
- Leaders and managers must accelerate improvements in learners' attendance and narrow the gaps in attendance between sites.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50313
Address	Access Creative College 50 Fountain Street Manchester M2 2AS
Contact number	07825197611
Website	https://www.accesscreative.ac.uk/
CEO	Jason Beaumont
Provider type	Independent Learning Provider
Date of previous inspection	17 to 20 May 2016
Main subcontractors	Nova Centric Limited (Trades as Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies)

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Chief Operating Officer, 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.

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