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Outstanding curriculum provision in construction: West Suffolk College

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Brief description

West Suffolk College has a well-planned curriculum that provides learners with skills and knowledge in addition to their main qualification aim. It prepares them well for the world of work and introduces them to new and developing technologies.

Overview – the college’s message



‘Ensuring that courses meet the needs and interest of learners and employers is central to our curriculum planning. I am delighted that West Suffolk College has been chosen to deliver education and training courses for the nuclear energy industry and for environmental technologies. These areas are essential to our local economy and are of national importance. We will continue to invest in developing our staff and resources to provide the best possible education and training for our learners.’

Ann Williams, Principal

The good practice in detail

The right curriculum is essential to ensure the success of learners and this means continually reviewing it to ensure that courses are appropriate and meet identified needs. At West Suffolk College this commitment started with the Principal. She sent out a clear message which was supported by significant financial investment to secure new premises for construction, with room to expand and further develop the curriculum. It is clear to see why construction was judged [outstanding when it was last inspected](#) by Ofsted.

Enabling learners to sample different courses

Ensuring that learners are on the correct course is vital if they are to stay motivated and engaged. A well-planned curriculum that enables learners to sample different courses prior to selecting their main qualification aim is a good way of achieving this. So how does the college do it?

Effective links with local schools enable students in Years 10 and 11 to experience construction education and training courses. Students are able to choose from a wide variety of courses and sample many different occupational areas before choosing to complete a foundation level certificate in their chosen specialism. Many students then choose to enrol on a construction course when they leave school, often in the same discipline but at a higher level.



For learners who are interested in a career in construction and who have not previously attended the college, specialist staff are available to provide initial advice and guidance. The college also provides many opportunities during the year for learners to complete taster sessions. These enable prospective learners to experience the different courses available and to undertake practical activities to help to decide if they wish to progress and enrol on a qualification course.

Open days, career events and advice and guidance sessions are offered throughout the year to provide opportunities for prospective learners to speak to a vocational specialist or to try their hand at some practical or course related activities.



The result of enabling learners to sample different courses and of providing detailed specialist initial advice and guidance prior to enrolling on long qualification courses are learners that are committed to their course, are genuinely interested and thoroughly understand the content and expectations of their course. These key ingredients generate two significant results; happy learners and high success rates.

Working with partners to enhance the curriculum

Good links with industry professional bodies, employers, suppliers and manufacturers can significantly enhance the curriculum and be a valuable resource that enhances the learning experience. How does this work at the college?

Strong links with employers, manufacturers and suppliers have been developed. Teaching staff are well known and respected by local employers because they communicate well and provide high levels of service. The college effectively promotes learners' achievements which raises the profile of the college and develops its good reputation. A good example is the awards evening for construction learners where achievements are celebrated.

The college seeks employers' views about course content and incorporates additional activities for learners to equip them with the skills they will need for work. For example, learners in brickwork benefit from a 'thin joint block system' demonstration to learn how to work using this construction method. Good links with employers, suppliers and manufacturers significantly enhance the curriculum in other ways. Learners benefit from employers as guest speakers



and from opportunities for site visits and work placements. Links with suppliers and manufacturers are equally beneficial as learners get to see, use and work with the latest tools, materials and equipment.



Investing in the future

Technology continues to advance and learners need to be aware of the latest developments. Sustainability is a key consideration in construction and learners need to know about the rapidly developing sustainable technology that is being used in the industry in which they are intending to work.

Providing relevant and useful additional learning opportunities alongside learners' main qualification aim can significantly enhance employability skills and enable learners to develop a wider range of skills and knowledge.

Staff keep abreast of the latest developing technologies and are encouraged to do so by managers. The college has invested significantly in developing and enhancing the construction curriculum and new technologies play a key part in those developments. A Nuclear Academy to provide training for operatives who will work within the nuclear energy industry has been established and has gained approval to be a delivery centre for a National Skills Academy for Environmental Technology.

The college also works with employers and manufacturers to design training courses to up-skill the current construction workforce and to equip new entrants to the industry with the skills and knowledge necessary to design, install, maintain and repair the new and rapidly developing technologies that are becoming an important part of the construction sector.



College background



[West Suffolk College](#) is a medium-size general further education college with its main campus located in the market town of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. The college offers general and vocational education and training in all sector subject areas from entry level through to higher education level. The college has beacon status, is a centre of vocational excellence in management, health and social care, and in construction and holds the Training Quality Standard in seven vocational areas.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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