

## **Oxfordshire Centre for Technology and Innovation**



Decked out in black, white and powder blue, City of Oxford College's new science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) centre is already humming with activity.

This high-specification facility supports training in a wide range of technological industries, including construction, engineering, IT, computing and motor vehicle industries. These facilities enhance student experience, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to go far in a range of exciting and fast-paced technological industries.

To combat present skills shortages the college has linked up with UK-wide construction firms including Skanska, Laing O'Rourke and most recently Cowley-based BMW to give students a chance to get their hands dirty in "live projects". In one of these projects, REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) set students from different colleges 'live' authentic project briefs based on genuine problems facing REME and different college teams competed to present their solutions. The inaugural competition was won by students at the new Centre for Technology and Innovation who won again two years later in one of our strongest examples of how employers can meaningfully collaborate with colleges and enrich the student experience. Up to 50 students on construction, engineering and motor vehicle courses are able to use bigger machines such as lathes for the first time in the space. Everything is moveable, including workbenches, to make the space as easy to use as possible. There is also a CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and manufacturing) workshops located in the upper floor.

Despite Oxfordshire's rich research and development traditions the area's STEM provision had historically struggled to keep up with the rapid pace of change in Oxfordshire's business base. Research in 2014 developed as part of our initial City Deal negotiations identified that less than 5% of government investment into further education directly supported STEM based subjects, whilst over 20% of our businesses were STEM based. When future funding opportunities arose through Local Growth Funding soon after we were delighted that the FE sector responded to this evidence, and we were able to invest significant capital investment into Oxfordshire's STEM provision that will support residents and businesses for decades to come – including the Blackbird Leys STEM Centre.

Financially supported by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) with a grant of £4,500,00 from the Local Growth Fund and match funding of £3,335,546 the centre is proving popular with both staff and trainees. The project began in June 2015 and opened in September 2016.

The reputation of the campus as a centre for STEM is growing, which has resulted in the successful awarding of Institute of Technology (IoT) status in partnership with Milton Keynes College and Cranfield University. This is an excellent outcome of the Blackbird Leys STEM Centre project and has resulted in the location and funding of £4,000,000 in the Oxford branch of the South-Central Institute of Technology (SCIoT) on the same site in Blackbird Leys. It is hoped that the SCIoT will become the obvious destination for anyone wanting to train and develop their digital skills, regardless of who they are, what they look like, or what stage of life they are at. Programmes in areas such as software, games and animation, and cyber security are available. Leaders have collaborated on the development of Oxfordshire's recent Digital Inclusion Strategy led by Oxfordshire County Council and are confident that the SCIoT will help complement the existing success of the Engineering provision and continue to meet business needs and drive aspiration in our communities.

In the past 6 years from 2016/2017 to 2021/22 the Centre has enabled the following number of students to gain experience and qualifications:

|   | <b>Total students from 2016/17 to 2021/22</b> |
|---|---|
| <b>Full Time students</b>   | 694   |
| <b>New Engineering Apprentices &amp; Higher National Students</b> | 139   |
| <b>Students on Courses not leading to a full qualification</b>    | 60  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>893</b>                                    |