

Colchester Institute

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number: 130674

Name of lead inspector: Rebecca Perry, Her Majesty's Inspector

Inspection date(s): 11–12 December 2019

Type of provider: General further education college

Address: Sheepen Road
Colchester
Essex
CO3 3LL

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Colchester Institute was inspected in November 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Colchester Institute is a large general further education college with three main sites. The largest is in Colchester, with smaller campuses in Braintree and Clacton-on-Sea. In addition, the college has four 'learning shops' throughout Essex for unemployed adult learners. The college provides a wide range of vocational 16 to 19 study programmes for around 3,600 learners, of which almost half study at level 3. They have 1,600 apprentices and a similar number of adult learners. The college has a small provision for learners with high needs.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that the quality of education improves so that learners understand and apply key concepts fluently to their learning? Significant progress

Governors and leaders responded swiftly and effectively to the findings from the previous inspection. They have an effective structure for ensuring improvements in the quality of education. As a result, the proportion of young learners who achieve their qualifications has increased significantly.

Governors are instrumental in working with leaders to ensure that staff development activities have an impact on improving the quality of education, particularly for young people. Governors have a good understanding of the quality of education within the college and know its strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, they challenge leaders effectively.

Teachers value highly the professional development which leaders have organised for them. They recognise the positive impact this has had on their practice. Teachers have improved methods to check learners' understanding and depth of knowledge. For example, they regularly test learners' recall of previous learning at the start of lessons. As a result, learners have a greater understanding of key concepts.

Managers have considered the essential skills which learners will need to be successful in different professional and vocational sectors. Teachers plan learning carefully to cover these concepts at the beginning of learners' programmes. This allows sufficient time for learners to practise key ideas and concepts repeatedly

throughout the programme. For example, in brickwork teachers ensure that learners understand the importance of plumb and the technique of gauge at the beginning of the course. This means that learners ensure their brickwork meets industry standards.

Leaders have invested in additional resources to secure further improvements in the quality of education. For example, the new media hub at Braintree provides excellent facilities, including high-specification computers, virtual reality software, and a fully functioning television studio.

What progress have leaders and staff made in selecting and sequencing the curriculum so that learners develop new knowledge and skills and work towards defined end points, including their next stage of education, training or employment? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum offered at the college. They have consolidated courses at the Clacton and Braintree sites and created specialist centres, linked to specific skills needs in those communities. For example, the digital media provision meets regional and national skills shortages in programming, coding, games design and visual effects. Leaders ensure that they maintain the close links between the adult learning shops and the local job centre staff, who advise managers on emerging skills gaps in their areas.

Teachers ensure that the content of the curriculum enables learners to build on their existing skills. Learners successfully recognise how to apply their knowledge and skills to their current stage of learning. For example, learners in business understand the impact of market forces on different business types and understand fully the factors that affect this concept.

Learners wishing to attend university receive very effective support for the application process. Learners benefit from a range of additional activities that prepare them for the world of work. The quality of education is enhanced by visiting speakers and relevant trips and visits. For example, learners on digital media visit New York to consider television and film sets and locations. However, not all learners take part in relevant work experience.

Too few learners know about their future skills development or steps needed to achieve their long-term goals. While many know the careers available to them within the sectors they are studying, very few know how to achieve their personal aspirations. Learners know about formal careers advice available to them through the college. However, teachers do not give clear guidance to learners on the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their career goals.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that teachers and assessors use assessment to inform teaching, check learners' and apprentices' understanding and help them gain, extend, and improve their skills?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have put in place effective strategies to assess learners' existing knowledge and skills, and to track their progress. Effective staff development enables teachers to accurately identify learners' starting points. Curriculum managers and course teams use evidence gathered from a range of assessment activities, such as scheduled course work or skills tests, to accurately identify learners' overall progress. As a result, staff plan and teach programmes closely matched to learners' abilities. Staff ensure that learners quickly and progressively develop new skills and knowledge in their subjects.

Learners produce an appropriate standard of work to their level. Most teachers probe learners' understanding effectively through day-to-day assessment of learning, and provide effective real-time feedback in class. This helps learners gain new knowledge and accurately apply this to their practical and theoretical work. Teachers effectively assess learners' skills and knowledge through formal assignment work and provide very useful feedback. Learners value the feedback both through formal assessments and through immediate verbal feedback in class. As a result, learners recognise, and act on, what they need to do to gain new skills.

Too few teachers ensure that learners develop their skills in written English. Too many teachers, particularly in construction trades, do not help learners with poor existing skills in writing. Learners do not improve their writing, and repeat the same errors. As a result, few younger learners on level 1 and 2 programmes develop or demonstrate effective written communication skills.

What progress have leaders made in supporting adult learners to gain valuable employability skills and understand what they need to do to reach and succeed in their chosen career or next phase of education or training?

Significant progress

Leaders have very carefully considered the needs of unemployed adults and wider adult learners in their curriculum plans. As a result, they have redesigned the purpose of adult learning shops and work closely with the local job centre.

Leaders have invested in specialist adult learning environments to target key groups within the community. The energy skills centre at Harwich and the adult construction skills centre at Clacton help unemployed learners with significant barriers to employment gain new skills and confidence. This motivates and enables individuals to progress onto higher level apprenticeships and better equip them for the world of work.

Managers ensure that they track and monitor learners' destinations closely to accurately measure the impact of the programmes provided. Learners enjoy their courses and the high-quality online resources they use. The good help and guidance learners receive ensure that most are successful in their learning and move into employment. Adult learners on other programmes within the college gain valuable new skills and knowledge. For example, those studying accounting learn the theoretical skills required to be successful in their existing or intended careers in the sector. They recognise and develop the skills they need to progress in the industry.

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