

Inspection of United Colleges Group

Inspection dates:

10–13 December 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Education programmes for young people	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

United Colleges Group (UCG) is a large general further education college, formed in August 2017 by the merger of the College of North West London (CoNWL) and City of Westminster College (CWC). The group operates from five sites across London. The largest sites are in Paddington and Willesden. It also has sites in Maida Vale and Wembley, and a construction skills centre in Kings Cross. The college operates a theatre in Marylebone.

UCG offers education programmes for young people across a broad range of subject sector areas. The largest areas are preparation for life and work and health, public services and care. At the time of the inspection, there were around 4,030 young people on study programmes. Approximately half of young people study at level 3 with the remaining learners split equally between levels 1 and 2. There were approximately 4,630 learners on adult learning programmes. The majority of adult learners study courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). UCG had approximately 1,000 apprentices. The majority study health and care, construction and engineering and manufacturing technologies. A small number of apprentices study business, administration and law. There were 311 learners with high needs. At the time of the inspection, the college worked with five subcontractors.

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

Most learners appreciate the support that staff at UCG provide. They speak positively about the work they do and the knowledge that they develop in their subjects. Learners have access to high-quality resources across the campuses so that they can gain the skills and knowledge required by future employers. For example, apprentices at the construction skills centre value using the latest technology in surveying techniques.

Staff develop good links with employers so that learners see the relevance of learning to their future careers. However, too many learners, particularly those on education programmes for young people, do not participate fully in lessons so that they can make the most of their time at college.

Since the merger of the two colleges, a significant number of senior staff left, and there are many new staff. There has been disruption to specific courses, and the management of these courses is not yet effective enough. On education programmes for young people, too many teachers do not explain concepts well or challenge learners enough. Consequently, younger learners frequently do not gain proficient skills and knowledge or do well enough to pass their qualifications.

Staff understand the complexities and challenges that learners face in inner-city London. They take substantial measures to ensure that learners come to a safe environment. For example, at the Paddington Green campus skilled staff, many trained in youth work, help to create a calm and orderly environment so that learners interact positively with each other. Learners and apprentices demonstrate respect for each other and for staff. They feel safe at the college and within their workplaces.

Most learners improve in confidence and self-esteem. Learners with high needs find the support that they receive helpful to improve their life skills and their physical well-being. Learners, particularly those straight from school, improve their independence. Adult learners and those with high needs receive good support from their tutors and feel well prepared for further education, employment or training.

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

Following the merger of CoNWL and CWC, governors took effective action to set up a new leadership team. These senior leaders have put in place middle management, but not all managers are yet proficient in their roles. Too many middle managers responsible for education programmes for young people do not have a good enough understanding of the curriculum that they manage. They do not monitor effectively how well learners achieve or know what actions they need to take to improve the curriculum that they lead. They have not secured enough talented teachers in media, English, mathematics and science.

Governors and senior leaders monitor and evaluate the curriculum well. As a result,

they have a good understanding of the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision and what they need to do to improve. Senior leaders have taken steps to reduce the number of subcontractors they work with. They check subcontracted provision to make sure it meets their learners' and apprentices' needs. They know from their evaluation of provision the reasons for weaker performance.

Leaders have set up a comprehensive staff development programme to enhance teaching practice. Teachers have improved how they create a positive learning environment, and as a result, learners' behaviour in classrooms and around the college is good. Staff working with learners with high needs have improved their knowledge of sensory impairment and epilepsy.

Teaching is not good enough on courses for younger learners. Teachers do not consistently challenge younger learners to extend their knowledge or apply it to new situations. As a result, learners in too many subjects, such as business studies and science, do not remember or understand topics that they have previously been taught. Many teachers on these courses do not organise their teaching well. Nor do they assess learners' gaps in their knowledge and skills effectively to understand what aspects of the course content they need to reinforce. Learners are confused about what they are learning and find it challenging to build on their knowledge and skills, and too many are not achieving the level of knowledge and understanding of which they are capable. For example, too many A-level learners do not gain their qualifications.

Teachers on courses for learners with high needs are experienced and knowledgeable. They help learners to improve their English and mathematics. They help learners retain and apply knowledge and skills, so they become independent. For example, learners recall and apply different mathematics calculations to manage the costs of running a fruit stall. They benefit from reinforcing this on well-planned work experience.

Teachers on adult courses are adept and experienced at knowing what their learners from diverse backgrounds need to move forward with their studies. They give learners confidence, so they have the aspirations to go on to higher levels of education. They prepare learners well for their next steps by helping them improve gaps in their knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Adult learners on ESOL programmes improve their confidence levels in spoken English, and as a result, they gain more independence in their daily lives. Teachers ensure that construction learners gain appropriate skills and most gain employment or go on to higher-level study.

Leaders and trainer assessors ensure that the curriculum aligns with apprentices' work and teaches them what they need to know by the end of their apprenticeship. When they are working, engineering apprentices practise tasks that help them to remember what they have been taught. Apprentices on adult healthcare programmes apply what they have learned well to work safely with clients. Assessors prepare learners well for their assessments at the end of their apprenticeship. Assessors and employers encourage construction apprentices,

working on prestigious sites in London, to aim for high grades.

On a small minority of apprenticeships, staff do not take account of what apprentices know and can do. For example, qualified and experienced plumbers take the whole gas installation programme when they already have most of the knowledge and skills. Too many construction apprentices take longer than planned to achieve their qualifications.

Managers do not plan English and mathematics well enough in a few curriculum areas. Apprentices who need to improve their knowledge and use of English and mathematics do not receive enough support. Teachers do not provide learners with high needs the opportunity to take external qualifications.

Too many learners and apprentices do not attend their taught sessions frequently enough. Not enough teachers challenge learners' and apprentices' poor punctuality. It disrupts teaching and learners are distracted. Managers have put strategies in place to rectify this, but these have not yet had enough impact. Teachers on sports and public services courses ensure that learners are motivated and attend their classes frequently.

Most tutors work effectively with employers so that learners gain a good understanding of work. Young learners attend useful work placements or do relevant work-related activities. Tutors and work coaches give proper support to learners on foundation courses so that they gain suitable work placements that help them to make informed career choices.

Staff provide learners with appropriate careers advice and guidance and most learners progress onto employment or further study. The majority of apprentices on adult care programmes stay in work and many gain promotion. Most learners on access to higher education courses go on to university. However, too few learners on education programmes for young people progress onto higher levels of study or higher education.

Staff focus successfully on learners' personal development, and on promoting positive behaviours. For younger learners, staff have an effective tutorial programme through which learners are informed about, and discuss with maturity, the risks that surround them. Staff bring these issues to life by inviting prominent external speakers to work with learners so that they know of dangers such as county lines and knife crime. Learners have developed the confidence to make the right choices to keep themselves safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate checks to ensure that staff are safe to work with learners, including those with high needs. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Staff responsible for safeguarding work effectively with local organisations. They provide support for learners who

make disclosures and enable them to remain safe.

Staff ensure that learners have a good understanding of safeguarding issues in the local area and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Learners know how to keep themselves safe while at college and in their daily lives. Youth workers work skilfully with learners so that they are confident to discuss personal issues. As a result, learners feel safe within the college and their workplaces.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should train middle managers so that they know how to improve their curriculum areas. Leaders should ensure that middle managers know the strengths and weaknesses of their curriculum area and how to improve it.
- Teachers on education programmes for young people should ensure that learners gain new knowledge and can recall and apply that knowledge. They need to plan and teach a curriculum for learners that is challenging, so learners achieve the outcomes they expect to.
- Assessors and teachers need to improve how they develop learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics skills. They must ensure that staff enrol learners onto the right level course. Managers need to ensure that apprentices achieve their English and mathematics qualifications.
- Leaders and teachers must take action to improve learners' attendance. Tutors should ensure that learners do not arrive late for learning sessions and disrupt the learning of others.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130423
Address	25 Paddington Green London W2 1NB
Contact number	0207 7238 826
Website	www.ucg.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Stephen Davis
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	3 June 2013
Main subcontractors	Community Systems Mercia College Limited The Skills Network Limited University of Westminster Qualified Education Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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 observing 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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