

Inspection of Colchester Institute

Inspection dates: 17–20 May 2022

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

Information about this provider

Colchester Institute (CI) is a large general further education college. It has two main sites in Colchester and Braintree. It also has a smaller engineering training facility in Harwich. CI has four 'learning shops' for unemployed adults located in Colchester, Braintree, Clacton-on-Sea and Dovercourt. CI provides a wide range of vocational 16 to 19 study programmes for around 3,700 students. Of these, almost half of the students are studying at level 3. CI has around 1,200 apprentices and 1,800 adult students. There are 83 students with high needs. CI has a large English speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision. CI has four subcontractors.

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

Students and apprentices feel valued and well supported by the staff. They feel respected and treated as adults. This makes them enjoy studying at the college and motivated to learn.

Apprentices value the expertise of the teaching staff. Teachers use their industry experience to set challenging tasks and projects. This supports apprentices to make swift progress to develop new skills and knowledge. They can apply the skills and knowledge they learn in their workplace.

Young students, including those with high needs, are ambitious about their future aspirations. They enjoy a broad range of enrichment activities at the college. This builds their confidence and makes them prepared for their next steps.

Adult students gain valuable skills that they use in their everyday lives. For example, ESOL students develop effective speaking and listening skills over time. They develop these skills at a pace based on their individual needs, for example being able to book appointments and communicate with their children's teachers.

Students and apprentices feel safe studying at the college. They feel cared for by staff and value the mental health and well-being support available. This includes access to counselling and therapy sessions. Students are confident that staff will take swift action to deal with their concerns.

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

Leaders have implemented a well-designed curriculum at the college's various sites. For example, leaders provide high-quality adult 'learning shops' to meet specific local needs. Adult students who are long-term unemployed and socially disadvantaged are well supported. They develop their mathematics, English and digital skills. This supports them to gain employment in healthcare, construction and transport logistics.

Governors provide effective support to leaders. Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. They have frequent contact with leaders and take an active role in what is happening at the college. They take swift action to work with leaders to target identified weaknesses. This has resulted in continuous improvements in the quality of education and training.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have continued to provide high-quality training for staff. Managers make accurate assessments of staff training needs within their curriculum area. Managers put in place effective staff training for teachers and learning support practitioners (LSPs). As a result, teachers develop effective teaching and assessment skills over time. For example, teachers skilfully use probing questions to assess students' deeper knowledge. New teachers develop their

confidence to plan and teach effective sessions. This is because of the effective training and mentoring programme leaders have established.

Students benefit from high-quality resources and facilities. Teachers skilfully use these resources to provide students with a professional learning experience. Level 1 professional cookery students work in an industrial kitchen. This helps them understand what it is like working in an employment setting. Level 3 media students have access to a new media hub. This hub provides high-tech computers, virtual reality software and a fully equipped television studio. In health and social care, students benefit from an immersive suite. This allows them to experience the noise and environment in a hospital or a care home. As a result of these experiences, students gain a good understanding of professional behaviours in their subject areas.

Leaders have a good oversight of the quality of training provided by their subcontractors. Leaders have carefully partnered with subcontractors to provide specialist provision. For example, leaders provide a level 5 human resources (HR) higher apprenticeship. This meets the local demand for HR professionals. Leaders make frequent checks on safeguarding and the quality of training subcontractors provide. As a result, students receive high-quality training and make good progress.

Apprentices develop good knowledge and skills from an ambitious and well-planned curriculum. For example, engineering students can interpret complex electrical system drawings. They support their colleagues at work to manufacture components to precise tolerances. Carpentry apprentices can safely use the power and hand tools on projects. This has resulted in apprentices gaining further responsibility. These apprentices take part in the refurbishment of architecturally important buildings. Carpentry apprentices understand the importance of reducing the wastage of materials. They know how to follow health and safety regulations to dispose of waste.

Managers ensure that apprentices and employers are clear on what to expect from the curriculum. Managers work effectively with employers to plan training for apprentices. For example, training plans for carpentry include teaching about cladding and the use of nail guns. This enables students to have the relevant key skills that employers need.

Vocational teachers do not use initial assessments effectively to develop students' English and mathematics skills. Vocational teachers do not provide enough opportunities for students to master English and mathematics skills. They do not consistently correct English errors in students' written work. For example, in level 1 vocational courses, teachers do not provide students with strategies to improve their spelling. This does not support students in swiftly developing the English skills they need for their next steps.

Students and apprentices know how to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy. They know how to maintain an active lifestyle. For example, health and social care students have learned about the impact of smoking and excessive

consumption of alcohol. They understand how the consumption of high calorific foods can negatively affect their health. They maintain a healthy lifestyle by accessing college sports facilities.

Students have good attitudes towards their studies. They have good attendance and punctuality in their vocational classes, but in a few curriculum areas, attendance in English and mathematics is low. Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve English and mathematics attendance, but it is too early to see any impact.

Students with high needs receive good support from teachers. Teachers maintain effective links with local agencies, parents and carers. This ensures that students' transition into college is effective. Students progress onto vocational courses and gain the skills they need to live independent lives.

Students with high needs enjoy a well-planned curriculum. The planned curriculum is flexible and tailored to their individual needs and aspirations. For example, students have access to good enrichment activities, such as working in a greenhouse. Students develop teamworking skills and learn how to sell products. They become more confident in speaking and communicating with others. However, leaders do not provide supported internships for students with high needs.

Vocational teachers are not always able to help students with high needs effectively. They are not able to provide appropriate strategies to support these students in lessons. As a result, vocational teachers do not have a detailed understanding of how to support students with specific learning disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder. Leaders are taking steps to deal with this issue, but it is too early to see any impact. LSPs, however, have the specialist training they need to provide effective support.

Most students and apprentices receive good-quality impartial careers advice and guidance. This supports them to plan their next steps. Managers plan a wide range of enrichment opportunities beyond students' vocational qualifications. However, young students, particularly at level 1, do not receive effective careers education. These students do not understand the range of careers available to them. They do not have enough access to work experience or other work-related activities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding leads are well trained. They work with multidisciplinary agencies to ensure that students get appropriate mental health support. Staff promote a culture of inclusion and tolerance. For example, students who identify as non-binary feel that the college is inclusive. Staff do not tolerate peer-on-peer abuse or any form of harassment. Students feel confident to report concerns to any member of staff should the need arise.

Students and apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety, for example using protective equipment at their workplace when using cutting tools. Young students and apprentices have a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism. They know about the local risk that can affect them in their personal lives.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that level 1 students receive effective careers education, information, advice and guidance to plan their next steps.
- Leaders must provide high needs training for vocational teachers so that they can provide effective support to students.
- Teachers must consistently develop students' English skills. Teachers must ensure that students produce high-quality written work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130674
Address	Sheepen Road Colchester Essex CO3 3LL
Contact number	01206 712000
Website	www.colchester.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Alison Andreas
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	6-9 November 2018
Main subcontractors	Learning Curve Group Limited ABA Procurement Ltd Blue Sky Professional Development Ltd Essex Combined Fire and Rescue Authority

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive vice-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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Michael Worgs, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sambit Sen	Her Majesty's Inspector
Claire Griffin	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Williams	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Goodwin	Ofsted Inspector
Nick Holbrook-Sutcliffe	Ofsted Inspector
Nicki Adams	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Giles	Ofsted Inspector
Jaswant Mann	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Brown	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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