

Inspection of Ruskin College

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Adult learning programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Ruskin College was established in Oxford in 1899. It has a mission to foster a society where all people, regardless of their background, have access to quality education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Courses are designed to meet the needs of local residents furthest from the labour market, those who are socially isolated and those seeking a second chance at education. The college was taken over by the University of West London group in August 2021.

At the time of the inspection, there were 374 learners enrolled, all of whom were over 19 years old. Of these, 170 learners studied trade union studies courses at level 1 and level 2, 158 studied community learning programmes and 46 studied access to higher education programmes in nursing, health and social care or social sciences. Most studied short courses lasting up to twelve weeks. During the inspection, there were learners from asylum-seeker groups and other vulnerable learners enrolled. The college has one main campus and teaches at a range of local and national sites, including local community centres. Most learners on trade union studies attend courses taught online.

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

Learners are very positive about their experience at Ruskin College which, for many, is a much-welcomed second chance at education. They value the support they receive from staff and peers, and the knowledge and experience of their tutors, which make lessons interesting and informative. As a result, most learners rapidly gain and apply new knowledge and skills. Learners on community learning courses who had never cooked before now prepare healthy meals for themselves and their families. Learners on access to social sciences confidently write essays using referencing and appropriate academic language within a month of starting their course.

Learners' attendance is good and they show high levels of commitment. For example, learners on access programmes often visit the library for self-study and make good use of lesson recordings and peer discussions if they miss a class. Learners on the organic gardening course frequently attend college outside of class times to tend crops and harvest produce.

Tutors prepare learners well to be active citizens in modern Britain. Tutors model mutual respect in lessons successfully so that learners know how to critique and share ideas respectfully. Learners on trade union courses develop their understanding of the role of union representatives and how this work supports employees in the workplace. As a result, they become more confident and eager to represent their colleagues.

Too few learners on community learning programmes receive sufficient advice and guidance on their next steps. Leaders have not made sure that entry-level courses have clear progression pathways. Tutors do not support learners on these courses to know how to progress to higher levels of education. Consequently, some learners who are keen to continue their studies complete multiple courses at the same level. Learners studying access to higher education courses are well prepared for their next steps. Tutors support them effectively to complete successful applications to higher education.

Learners understand how to work safely in practical classes. For example, in the garden, they use and store equipment safely and understand the importance of washing hands after using fertiliser. In the kitchen, learners understand how to use sharp knives to prepare vegetables safely.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

The new leadership team engages well with stakeholders, including community leaders, the local enterprise partnership and education partners, to identify and understand regional skills needs. Leaders rightly recognise that they are in the early stages of development of the provision to meet these skills gaps. They have

designed a 'skills escalator' to enable learners to progress from entry-level to higher education. However, much of this work is still at an early stage.

Staff identify and engage very effectively with disadvantaged communities in the locality. They have built trusted relationships with community leaders through their work with Oxford City Council, Asylum Welcome, unemployment charities and local community groups. This has enabled leaders to develop courses that meet the skills needs of their clients, such as English for employment and cooking on a budget.

Staff have aligned programmes to meet local and national needs well. They ensure that the trade union studies curriculum meets the needs of national clients successfully. Leaders are working closely with unions to identify further training needs and develop new courses at level 3 and above. Leaders have developed access to higher education courses in sectors such as health and social care, nursing and social sciences where they identified regional and national skills needs.

Tutors utilise key partnerships with staff at the University of West London well to support learners to prepare their applications for higher education. They link with providers for progression to higher education in London, Oxfordshire and Berkshire. As a result, almost all of the first cohort of access learners moved on to higher education in relevant degrees or degree apprenticeships.

Staff work closely with local hospitals to find work placements for level 3 access to nursing learners. However, engagement with a wider group of employers to inform further development and delivery of the curriculum is currently underdeveloped.

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

Ruskin College has undergone a period of significant change since being taken over by the University of West London. Due to the newness of many of the organisational structures, leaders have not yet fully implemented a system of governance and oversight which provides effective challenge to managers around quality assurance. As a result, many actions identified in the quality improvement plan, such as implementing processes for safeguarding learners and standardising observations of teaching and learning, have made little progress.

In line with its historic tradition, leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for Ruskin College to provide education for excluded or disadvantaged learners, enabling them to transform their lives. Leaders realise this well, through a suite of community learning programmes taught in localities where there are high levels of deprivation. Learners from local asylum-seeker groups attend English language courses and job clubs, where many build the skills they need to find employment. Staff use craft courses such as silk screen printing to successfully re-engage learners who have been out of education for some time or have not had positive prior experiences. As a result, many move on to further courses or use their new skills, for example setting up a handyman business or selling handmade cards.

Leaders and managers have designed an inclusive and welcoming curriculum. This allows disadvantaged learners, from a range of backgrounds, to develop new skills and knowledge, such as cooking, craft, gardening and dance. However, on the English for employment programme, leaders do not account for learners' prior knowledge and skills. As a result, a small number of learners on this course do not make rapid progress.

Leaders and managers have planned most courses clearly and logically so that learning builds on what learners know and can do. The access to nursing course starts with cell structures before moving on to organs and systems so that topics build on one another appropriately. Access to social sciences learners learn about human behaviour in psychology, before applying this learning in sociology. As a result, most learners make good progress.

Tutors are well qualified. They have significant industry experience which they use well to inform their teaching and bring learning to life. For example, tutors in creative writing have published novels. They use their experience to explain the writing process for learners successfully. Trade union education tutors use their experience to ensure content is frequently updated to cover relevant information and legislation which learners need to carry out their roles effectively.

Tutors on most community learning courses focus highly effectively on the development of practical skills which learners can use. Tutors on gardening courses demonstrate how to build supporting structures for peas and beans and how to raise seedlings to transplant into beds. In the cooking on a budget course, tutors demonstrate how to prepare root vegetables and simple dishes such as risotto, before moving on to more complex recipes, such as chilli or apple crumble. As a result, learners, including those with additional learning needs, quickly develop relevant skills and knowledge that they apply in their everyday lives confidently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders have not promoted an appropriate culture of safeguarding. As a result, they are unable to identify and protect learners who may be at risk or need help. Leaders do not know about significant personal challenges that some vulnerable adults faced while in their care. As such, leaders are unable to help staff to keep these learners safe.

Leaders acknowledge that they have failed to follow their internal safeguarding procedures. For example, leaders do not ensure that staff are safe to work with vulnerable adults while waiting for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Leaders have not ensured that staff complete training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty and so staff do not know how to identify and report safeguarding concerns. As a result, staff develop their own individualised responses when vulnerable adults disclose concerns or issues. Leaders are unaware of the advice

given and so cannot provide sufficient oversight to ensure the support provided is appropriate.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers must swiftly develop a stronger oversight of safeguarding. They must ensure that all staff are appropriately trained to follow college policies and procedures regarding how to keep learners safe.
- Leaders and managers must follow their own safer recruitment procedures to ensure that staff awaiting DBS checks do not work with potentially vulnerable learners without risk assessment.
- Leaders should improve their assessment of learners' starting points to ensure they are placed on English language courses which provide them with the best opportunities to succeed.
- Leaders should improve the advice and guidance for learners on community learning courses, so they know how to progress onto higher levels of education.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130794
Address	Dunstan Road Old Headington Oxford Oxfordshire OX3 9BZ
Contact number	01865759600
Website	www.ruskin.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Peter John
Provider type	Specialist Designated Institution
Date of previous inspection	20 November 2012
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the academic registrar, as nominee, and the dean of academic partnerships, as skills 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

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