

Inspection of University College Birmingham

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 May 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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	Good

Information about this provider

University College Birmingham (UCB) is a higher education institution based in Birmingham in the West Midlands. Further education learners account for approximately one third of the total learner population. At the time of inspection, there were 1,254 learners on education programmes for young people, 236 adult learners, and 637 apprentices. Twenty-one learners were in receipt of high needs funding, all of whom were in mainstream education. Learners and apprentices study across a variety of vocational sector areas at levels 1 to 6. UCB currently works with one subcontractor, providing a component of their level 5 nursing associate apprenticeship. This subcontracting arrangement will come to an end when the remaining apprentices complete their apprenticeship.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning and are proud to be a part of the university. They learn in calm, respectful and inclusive environments, where opinions and perspectives are welcomed. As a result, they display positive attitudes to their learning and are motivated to achieve.

Learners and apprentices value the support they receive from staff and recognise how this support enables them to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Teachers support them to develop high levels of confidence throughout their programmes and apprenticeships. For example, level 5 nursing associate apprentices gain confidence to undertake tasks such as inserting nasogastric tubes and provide critical and end-of-life care for their patients.

Attendance for most learners is very high. Where attendance is not at the level that leaders aspire to, they have put strategies in place to improve this, which is having a positive impact.

Staff support learners and apprentices to develop and display vocationally relevant behaviours, which helps to prepare them for their next steps. For example, learners on level 3 beauty therapy are taught to adhere closely to health and safety standards, such as using skin analysis processes. Consequently, learners develop a deep understanding of industry-standard working practices early in their programmes.

Teachers promote a positive and inclusive culture, which is valued by their learners and apprentices. Learners benefit from a safe space where they are empowered to debate and voice their opinion when exploring topics of life in modern Britain, such as cultural diversity, mental health, knife crime and the risks of sexual exploitation. As a result, learners and apprentices develop good social and cultural awareness of diverse communities and different viewpoints and immerse themselves in other cultures.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They know how to report concerns and are confident that they would receive support if they needed it.

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

Leaders and managers articulate a clear rationale for the curriculum they offer. They have aligned their further and higher education curriculums to provide progression opportunities for learners and apprentices from levels 1 to 6. The courses and apprenticeships they have chosen, in response to local and regional needs, include digital, cyber security, engineering, nursing, and sustainable construction. The University continues to offer courses in hospitality and catering. However, these now represent a significantly smaller proportion of the overall courses offered.

Managers and teachers ensure that curriculums are contain highly relevant content, which is logically ordered and provides learners and apprentices with opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, level 5 coaching professional apprentices first learn what coaching is and what it means to be a coach. They then move on to more complex topics, such as learning about theories of self-awareness and learning about coaching models such as Whitmore's 'GROW' model. Learners and apprentices build on prior learning and increase their understanding of key concepts over time.

In almost all cases, learners and apprentices have access to high-quality resources to support their learning. For example, adult learners studying level 3 beauty therapy access a simulated salon and spa environment, which develops their workplace knowledge and their communication with clients. This allows them to practise and develop their vocational skills in realistic and safe learning environments.

In the majority of cases, teachers use assessment of learners' and apprentices' prior knowledge to plan teaching effectively. Level 3 sport and exercise science teachers very effectively plan their teaching using learners' starting points at the start of the course and at the start of each new module. However, in a minority of cases in some other subjects, the results of these assessments are not used as effectively to plan learning. Where this is the case, learners' and apprentices' progress from their starting points is not as rapid as their peers.

Staff from different departments collaborate effectively to ensure that learners with high needs can fully participate in their chosen learning programmes. Learners are supported by dedicated assistant support workers, who challenge and guide them to complete learning tasks in lessons. As a result, learners with high needs access all their intended curriculum, gain their qualifications, and develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to support their future independence.

Leaders recognise a significant challenge in recruiting qualified and vocationally experienced teachers. They have adopted a strategy of employing new staff with significant vocational expertise and providing them with development opportunities to become teachers. As a result, the number of teaching vacancies within the provider is currently decreasing, providing stability to learners and apprentices where the shortages exist and providing a more consistent learning experience.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners on study programmes, including learners with high needs, have access to high-quality, meaningful work experience opportunities. Staff work closely with parents of learners with high needs and prospective employers to ensure that placements are appropriate, accessible and suitably challenging. This enables learners to practise the skills they have learned in an appropriately challenging work setting.

The majority of teachers use assessment effectively to check learners' and apprentices' understanding and inform or adjust teaching and support if required. Most learners and apprentices develop knowledge rapidly and improve their work

over time. However, in a small minority of cases, feedback on assessments is not timely or developmental enough to ensure that learners and apprentices know what they need to do to improve their work.

Leaders and managers have appropriate procedures in place to manage and monitor the quality of education they provide and that of the small and decreasing subcontracted provision. Managers understand their areas for development and are taking steps to respond to them. However, as some of the steps put in place are quite new, the full impact cannot yet be seen.

A significant number of learners demonstrate commitment to their education beyond their course. For example, sport learners have arranged a multi-sports event for local primary schools. Creative studies learners at all levels were involved in aspects of the recently hosted Commonwealth Games in the city, and learners from culinary disciplines compete in nationally recognised competitions, such as the International Salon Culinare Skills competition.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that there is consistent approach across all curriculum areas in supporting the development of learners' and apprentices' English and mathematical skills. For example, a significant proportion of learners who are required to take mathematics GCSE examinations are not successful in achieving their potential. Consequently, a minority of learners and apprentices do not develop their English and mathematics skills throughout their learning. Leaders and managers have taken actions to improve the performance of learners in these areas. However, as these actions have only been put in place in this academic year, it is too early to measure the impact of these initiatives.

Leaders ensure that teachers use the curriculum well to develop learners' and apprentices' understanding of how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy. For example, learners on adult learning programmes participate in activities that help them to develop their physical fitness by participating in a 'couch to 5K' weekly activity, in which they increase their walking distance incrementally each week.

Leaders provide learners and apprentices with effective careers advice and guidance so that they are very clear about the career opportunities available to them. Learners have access to careers and next steps guidance from qualified careers advisors as part of the university's 'HIRED' programme. As a result, most learners and apprentices have a clear understanding of their options and how to meet their aspirations, with many planning to move to higher education programmes within the provider. However, a very small number of learners with education, health and care plans are less well informed of the progression options available to them outside of the university. Consequently, a very small minority leave without a clear transition plan in place.

Leaders identified that their strategy to further strengthen leadership of their further education courses required the focus board of governors on further education to increase. Consequently, since the previous inspection, there have been changes to

the board to allow this focus to take place. As a result, board members now represent extensive expertise in further and higher education and industry, sharing leaders' aspirations for all learners and apprentices.

Governors have a broad understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of further education and receive regular updates on progress. Governors are active in supporting and challenging leaders on the quality of education that they provide.

Learners studying vocational courses develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their studies. As a result, the large majority achieve their vocational qualification goals and progress successfully to their next steps.

Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours, which is valued by their employers. For example, one headteacher articulated how, after completing the level 5 coaching professional apprenticeship, their staff were able to orchestrate a positive shift in organisational culture for the school. As a result, apprentices have a positive impact in the workplace, and many achieve promotion or increased salaries during their learning.

Most apprentices are supported well by teachers to prepare for their end-point assessments. For example, they undertake mock tests and practical activities and receive detailed feedback from teachers, which supports them to prepare for their final assessments. As a result, a significant number of apprentices achieve high grades at the end of their apprenticeship.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have developed an effective culture of safeguarding, which extends to all further and higher education learners and apprentices. They have appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy, who oversee safeguarding arrangements.

Leaders have in place appropriate policies and procedures to record, report, and refer safeguarding cases. The DSL and deputies handle these cases appropriately, referring cases through their established links to external agencies where appropriate.

Leaders have in place appropriate procedures for the safe recruitment of staff.

Staff undergo detailed training on subjects such as 'Prevent' duty, fundamental British values, and safeguarding, and they are regularly updated by the DSL on local and national issues.

Throughout their time at the university, learners develop their understanding of healthy relationships. They discuss topics such as consent, banter and misogyny and the values they should demonstrate as they mature into adulthood.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices systematically develop their English and mathematics skills throughout their programmes.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices receive timely and useful feedback on their work, which allows them to understand where they need to improve.
- Leaders should ensure that learners with high needs who are moving away from the university are supported with effective transition arrangements to move on to their next steps.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133785
Address	Summer Row Birmingham West Midlands B3 1JB
Contact number	01216041000
Website	https://www.ucb.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Michael Harkin
Provider type	Higher Education Institution
Date of previous inspection	3 to 6 October 2017
Main subcontractors	University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the executive director, further education quality enhancement and sixth form lead, 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

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