

Inspection of Ruskin College

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 November 2023

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

Information about this provider

Ruskin College has a long history of providing education to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to learn. The college was established in Oxford in 1899 and was acquired by the University of West London in August 2021. Since then, the college has developed adult learning provision, provided at the college site and in a range of local community centres. The college also works with trade unions to provide face-to-face and online courses to train their representatives across the country.

At the time of the inspection, there were 326 learners enrolled, all of whom were over 19 years of age. Of these, 125 learners were studying trade union studies courses at levels 1 and 2, 176 were studying community learning programmes and 25 were studying access to higher education (access to HE) programmes in social science, nursing or health and social care. Most studied short courses lasting up to 10 weeks.

The college has been visited twice since the previous full inspection and has been found to be making progress in the areas identified for improvement.

Ruskin College does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Most learners value the inclusive culture that staff create. This helps them to focus on their studies. Learners appreciate that staff understand their needs and personal circumstances, which helps to create a supportive learning environment. Learners welcome opportunities to share and learn from each other's personal and professional experiences. For example, most trade union learners enjoy the online community of learning, where they meet with other professionals. As a result, most learners broaden their knowledge of real-life work in a collaborative environment.

Learners benefit from a wide range of effective opportunities across all programmes. These develop their characters, confidence and independence skills. As a result, most learners learn how to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy, and they develop useful and appropriate study skills.

All learners develop new knowledge and skills that are essential to their personal and professional lives. For example, learners on community learning programmes develop essential digital skills to break down barriers to modern life. They develop confidence and links with their communities through learning creative skills, gardening and cookery skills. They value their time at the college, and most recognise how it supports their well-being and, where appropriate, provides them with a purpose.

Learners studying access to HE develop the technical and vocational knowledge they need to be successful in their next steps. As a result, most learners pass their qualifications with high grades and move on to university. However, in a small minority of cases, learners are not supported to gain the essential qualifications they need in mathematics so that they can take their next steps quickly.

Learners understand their rights and responsibilities as respectful and active citizens. For example, they develop their understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion. Consequently, all learners and staff recognise and celebrate diversity and are generally polite, respectful and courteous to staff and each other. On the very rare occasions when learners' behaviour falls below the high standard expected, leaders and staff take sensible action to resolve this.

Learners feel safe at college. They know how to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremist views. They appreciate the welcoming and supportive environment that staff create.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and trustees work with a range of relevant key stakeholders to gain an understanding of skills needs locally, regionally and nationally. They rightly recognise Ruskin's areas of expertise and choose to focus their work in these areas. Leaders

work in partnership with trade union leaders to ensure that the curriculum is closely aligned with their needs. For example, they have recently adapted the content of equality and diversity programmes to include information on neurodiversity, in response to growing interest in this subject.

Leaders work well with community groups to understand the skills needs of their clients and local residents. They use this effectively to inform the content and delivery of many programmes to best meet the skills requirements of community residents. For example, leaders work with community groups that support those who face disadvantage, such as asylum seekers and refugees, to offer English for speakers of other languages in community venues where there is growing demand. As a result, learners who might otherwise not be able to can access learning.

Leaders liaise with other education partners as part of the local skills improvement fund project to understand the needs identified in the local skills improvement plan. They work closely with the University of West London to ensure that the access to HE programme prepares learners well for their following degree. However, leaders work with a limited number of local employers. They do not capitalise sufficiently on the relationships with unemployment organisations to ensure that they continue to provide training to meet the skills needs of the most disadvantaged.

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

Leaders have selected a wide and ambitious curriculum to meet a range of adult learners' needs. They have developed courses to support learners at all points in their education to actively engage in education, providing opportunities to progress from further education to higher education and work. In the past year, they have developed new courses, such as digital skills, to help learners beginning their journey to bridge the gap in their learning. Leaders support learners well to overcome barriers to learning. They ensure that learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified well and supported to progress and achieve in line with their peers.

Staff are highly qualified, experienced and passionate about their subjects. For example, in access to HE (social science), teachers sympathetically share challenging content around prejudice, developing positive and inclusive discussions. Through sometimes challenging topics, they present information clearly and sensitively. They use a range of effective techniques to support learners to gain valuable new knowledge and skills and bring the subjects to life.

Most staff use assessment consistently to identify learners' starting points and adapt learning so that they build on their previous knowledge and skills. Most teachers use effective methods to assess learners' progress through questioning and discussion in the classroom, homework assignments and formal assessment tasks. Learners benefit from useful feedback that helps them to improve their work. However, a small minority of staff in community learning programmes do not recognise or

record learners' progress sufficiently to plan and develop learners' knowledge further.

Leaders ensure that learners have access to high-quality careers information, advice and guidance to help them prepare for their next steps. Learners studying access to HE value discussions with specialist staff, who help them to understand the options available to them and support them to write personal statements. Leaders have recently appointed a highly qualified careers specialist, who has expert knowledge of the local area, including education and employment opportunities. However, it is too early to see the impact of this appointment on learners' progression.

Leaders and trustees are increasingly well informed about the quality of provision, which enables them to evaluate and drive improvement. For example, they have monitored improvements to ensure that safeguarding is effective and challenged leaders to ensure that learners' well-being is also supported effectively. However, leaders and trustees do not know enough about the progress and achievements that students on community learning programmes make during their courses so that they can use this to develop opportunities for learners to progress further.

Leaders ensure that staff are provided with a wide range of appropriate training, such as essential training in safeguarding, cybersecurity and equality, diversity and inclusion. Leaders have identified the need to develop staff's pedagogical and subject expertise through the outcomes of quality assurance. However, they have been too slow in providing this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the consistency of use of assessment in community learning programmes to recognise and record learners' progress and achievements.
- Identify and provide appropriate continuous professional development opportunities for teaching staff to improve their pedagogical skills.
- Improve leaders' and trustees' knowledge of the progress and achievements of learners studying community learning programmes.

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	11 to 14 October 2022
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the university secretary and academic registrar, 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

Emma Leavey, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Richard Kirkham	His Majesty's Inspector
Carole Wilson-Frizzell	Ofsted Inspector
Mel Coleman-Clements	Ofsted Inspector
Roland White	His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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