

Inspection of Colchester Institute

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 October 2024

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 | Good |

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 for adults in Harwich.

At the time of the inspection there were 4,186 students on 16 to 19 study programmes. CI offers a wide range of vocational 16 to 19 study programmes. This includes T-level programmes in education and early years and design surveying and planning for construction. Most students study at the Colchester campus. There were 154 students with high needs. Of these students, 55 were studying in the foundation and supported learning provision.

CI has four skills centres for adults, located in Colchester, Braintree and in outreach centres in Clacton-on-Sea and Dovercourt. These centres offer English, mathematics and digital courses as well as sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs). At the time of the inspection there were 1,126 adult students. Around a third of adult students study on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

The college offers a wide range of apprenticeships from levels 2 to 7. Most apprentices study engineering and construction subjects. At the time of the inspection there were 1,214 apprentices.

CI works with four subcontractors. These subcontractors offer adult courses and specialist elements of the apprenticeship programmes that the college does not offer itself. This includes procurement, human resources and operational firefighter apprenticeships.

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

Most students and apprentices speak highly of the college and their learning experience. They enjoy their time at college. Students and apprentices value the support they receive from their teaching staff. Staff support adult students with any wider support needs they may have. Adults value the advice they receive on financial support, managing anxiety and help with academic pressures. Apprenticeship staff use supportive development plans to help apprentices who fall behind to catch up and succeed.

Students and apprentices demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Students' and apprentices' behaviour is good around campuses and in their teaching sessions. Students and apprentices are respectful and courteous to college users and peers. Most students and apprentices attend their sessions. Most are punctual to sessions and arrive ready to learn. Younger students' rates of attendance at English and mathematics sessions are not yet high.

Students and apprentices benefit from high-quality teaching environments. This helps them develop the skills needed for their future careers. Apprentices studying dental nurse courses in Colchester learn in a fully equipped dentist's suite, complete with the de-contamination equipment used in the industry. Health students at Colchester use a fully equipped treatment centre with diagnostic medical equipment. Younger students studying digital courses at the Braintree campus benefit from collaborative learning spaces, technical IT suites and studios.

Younger students take part in a range of useful activities to prepare them effectively for future employment. Students on foundation and supported learning courses, including those students with high needs, participate in meaningful work experience. They work at local cafes preparing and serving snacks and meals and in stables where they learn how to care for horses and keep their stables clean. Foundation and supported learning students participate in sessions to prepare them for employment such as CV writing and interview preparation.

Apprentices develop important new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need for their future careers. Dental nurse apprentices know about tooth structure, dental decay and how to treat this. They know how to use and hold instruments effectively while observing appropriate health and safety practices. Carpentry and joinery apprentices know how to use machinery and new tools, such as cross-cut saws, rip saws and planers. Operational fire fighter apprentices develop lifesaving skills in a short space of time.

Students with high needs receive the support they need to be successful on their courses. Students value the individualised help they get from teachers and learning support practitioners. Students with hearing impairments use radio broadcast technology. This enables them to hear the teacher and their peers and participate in lessons. Students with high needs on vocational courses across the college achieve as well as or better than their peers.

Adult learners on SWAP programmes develop the professional behaviours they need to work in these sectors. Adults on construction SWAPs recognise the need to respect the public when working on infrastructure projects in local neighbourhoods. Learners on teaching assistant SWAP programmes recognise the need to be a role model for children and young people. ESOL students develop the English skills they need to live and work in the UK. They are now able to talk to their children's teachers and use the phone to make appointments, and do not need a translator when visiting their doctor.

Leaders and managers offer a range of additional opportunities for students, and apprentices, to develop their character and resilience. Through the side-by-side training scheme run by the college, apprentices train other students using skills they have developed through their courses. Dental nurse apprentices give talks to local care home workers about the importance of oral hygiene. Students, including those with high needs, advertise and organise an annual event known as 'Steps Factor' where students perform singing, dancing and comedy acts. These students become more confident and develop their self-esteem.

Most students acquire a sound understanding of fundamental British values. ESOL students visit the Town Hall. They learn about democracy and the importance of voting. Dental nurse apprentices link the rule of law to their role as a registered professional. They understand the main aspects of health and safety, and ionising radiation regulation. However, a few younger students, mainly at the Braintree campus, and a few apprentices cannot explain the relevance of these concepts to their everyday lives.

Students feel safe around the college and in their workplaces. Students are confident that staff will deal promptly with any concerns raised. Apprentices adhere to the strict health and safety requirements in their workshops. Engineering technician apprentices wear gauntlet gloves to avoid skin burns, eye and ear protection and welding masks.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

College leaders and governors have a comprehensive and extensive knowledge of their community and its skills needs. Partners value the knowledge and contributions that college leaders bring to the wide range of local and regional strategic and operational groups that they are part of. The college is a significant contributor to green skills and workforce innovation in the region. Leaders successfully integrate sustainability and environmental responsibility through their engineering and construction courses. Leaders have developed a net zero training centre. Through this centre they plan to offer training in low-carbon technologies, such as air source heat pumps and battery storage solutions.

Leaders have been agile in adapting their courses to meet the changing needs of the local community, and the local, regional, and national economies. Leaders have

developed a highly effective partnership with a very large local health trust. Health and social care students study a bespoke programme designed in conjunction with the trust. Leaders have jointly designed a level 3 biomedical science programme. This gives students additional opportunities to move on to employment in the health sector. Leaders and managers have worked with a local charity to adapt their courses to meet the needs of asylum seekers and refugees. Leaders ensure that students develop the specific English skills needed to access the wider support they and their families need.

Leaders and managers involve stakeholders and employers in the design and teaching of their courses. Maritime employers select optional units to ensure that apprentices develop the specific skills and knowledge they need for maintenance engineering in the port. The local theatre and the college share up-to-date equipment. Technical theatre students learn how to create special effects such as flying carpets in pantomimes. Engineering students use computer-aided design software to produce high-quality technical drawings. These are used by a large agricultural machinery manufacturer employer in training materials for their technicians. Leaders have prioritised working with employers and Jobcentre Plus to develop a wide range of individualised SWAPs. The construction SWAP teaches students about sector health and safety requirements. This course enables students to achieve the construction site licences needed to work on a construction site.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have worked diligently to maintain the good quality of education and respond to the areas identified for further improvement. Leaders have ensured that the proportion of students and apprentices who achieve their qualification has improved over a three-year period. Leaders have introduced a supported internship programme, and a fast-track route for level 2 professional cookery. This enables hospitality students with prior experience to make swifter progress in achieving their qualification. Leaders have trained vocational staff to support students with high needs effectively.

Staff plan and teach their courses logically so that students and apprentices gradually improve their knowledge and skills. Dental nurse apprentices learn about the requirements of being a health professional and expected behaviours from the start of the course. They learn about the anatomy of the teeth, head and neck, before learning about pathologies and treatments. In level 2 multi-media production, students first learn the basic principles of filmmaking. They learn how to capture content and start editing. Students then study more advanced coding and editing for gaming and media creation.

In most cases, staff plan ambitious courses that challenge students to improve. On level 3 professional cookery, staff plan for additional elements to the course. Students visit local farms and butcheries so that they understand the 'farm to fork' origin of food. In a small minority of level 1 courses, managers are not sufficiently ambitious for students. Students do not quickly progress to courses at higher levels.

They repeat learning at a level they have already achieved or achieve very small qualifications. A few students with high needs do not benefit from achieving accredited qualifications when they are able to.

Teachers use a wide range of carefully considered teaching strategies effectively, such as demonstration. In level 2 digital media, teachers give live demonstrations of pixel creation that students follow on screen. Teachers plan tasks skilfully to develop students' evaluative skills. T-level education and early years teachers support students to work in pairs to evaluate each other's work. Students give feedback to each other on how best to use language and repetition to support children remember and recall new concepts. In engineering technician apprenticeships, teachers encourage apprentices to undertake evaluative self-assessment of their practical work. Teachers give apprentices a simple guide to follow. Apprentices can then check their own understanding of welding faults, such as porous joints, splayed welds or gapped fillets they produce.

Teachers check that students have understood what they have learned fully. Teachers use questioning, recap learning, and use quizzes and short answer tests effectively. This helps to exemplify the most important points and reinforce learning. In electrical installation, teachers check students' understanding of cable calculations and Ohm's law. Teachers correct misconceptions and use questioning effectively to challenge students further. On the operational firefighter standard, teachers use questioning skilfully when apprentices complete practical activities based on a road traffic accident. Teachers check that apprentices can apply the theory they have learned previously. Teachers of ESOL thoroughly check their students' pronunciation and correct this whenever necessary. Teachers give useful feedback on students' vocational work. Teachers set useful improvement targets for students. Students produce work that is of the expected standard for their level or higher.

Most teachers prepare students' effectively for their vocational examinations. Vocational teachers work with students effectively to improve their skills at answering examination questions. Most students achieve their qualifications. However, in adult functional skills mathematics, teachers do not use the information they gather about students' starting points to inform their learning plans. This means students do not benefit from individualised learning that would help them to be better prepared for their final examinations. Too few adult students complete and achieve their functional skills mathematics qualifications.

Too few younger students achieve grades 4 or above in GCSE English and mathematics. In GCSE English sessions, a few staff do not concentrate sufficiently on developing students' English skills. In a few cases, teachers do not prioritise the specific English skills that students need to acquire, practice or reinforce.

Most apprentices benefit from frequent reviews of progress with employers and trainers or assessors. In a few areas, such as carpentry and joinery and engineering technician, trainers and assessors do not consistently take account of employers' views of their apprentices' progress or the skills and knowledge that apprentices are practising and developing in their workplace.

Most apprentices achieve their qualifications. On a few standards, such as senior leader, operations manager and bricklayer, too few apprentices stay on their programmes and complete their apprenticeships. Leaders are aware of the reasons for the underperformance of these standards, such as apprentices leaving once they have achieved the qualification that is part of the senior leader apprenticeship. Actions are in place to improve the proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeships in these areas.

Students and apprentices receive the effective careers advice and guidance they need to plan their next steps. This includes planned group sessions taught by experts and responsive one to one support. Apprentices and students move on to positive destinations, including employment or further education and training at the end of their courses.

Leaders and managers have excellent oversight of their subcontractors. Managers have high expectations of the subcontractors that they work with. Leaders have frequent meetings at a strategic and operational level to monitor the quality of the courses taught and progress of students and apprentices. A high proportion of students and apprentices complete their qualifications on the subcontracted provision.

Governors are highly effective in challenging senior leaders to secure improvements. Governors have a very positive and productive relationship with college senior leaders. Governors confidently request explanations and further information in board meetings, so that they have a sound understanding of the improvements the college is making.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that level 1 courses are sufficiently ambitious so that students quickly learn new knowledge, skills and behaviours and swiftly move on to higher level study.
- Ensure that reviews of apprentices' progress include sufficient discussions with employers to identify the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices develop in the workplace.
- Increase the achievement rates on functional skills mathematics courses and on the few apprenticeship courses where these are not yet high.
- Increase the attendance of students at GCSE English and mathematics sessions and the proportion of students who achieve grade 4 and above.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 130674 |
| Address | Sheepen Road Colchester Essex CO3 3LL |
| Contact number | 01206 712000 |
| Website | www.colchester.ac.uk |
| Principal, CEO or equivalent | Alison Andreas |
| Provider type | General further education college |
| Date of previous inspection | 17 to 20 May 2022 |
| Main subcontractors | ABA procurement Blue Sky Professional Development Ltd Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Learning Curve Group |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy 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

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Georgina Ager, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Lynda Brown | Ofsted Inspector |
| Emma Helkenberg | Ofsted Inspector |
| Claire Griffin | Ofsted Inspector |
| Rochelle Saneria | Ofsted Inspector |
| Maggie Fobister | Ofsted Inspector |
| Janet Smith | Ofsted Inspector |
| Rebecca Perry | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Ian Frear | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Clare Hood | Ofsted Inspector |
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| Catherine Gunn | Ofsted Inspector |
| Ann Minton | Ofsted Inspector |
| Andrea McMahon | His Majesty's Inspector |

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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