

Inspection of United Colleges Group

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 December 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
<hr/>	
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
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

United Colleges Group (UCG) is a large general further education college, formed in August 2017 by the merger of the College of North West London and City of Westminster College. The group has five campuses across London. The largest campuses are in Paddington and Willesden. Other campuses are in Maida Vale and Wembley, and there is a construction skills centre in Euston which opened in February 2024.

At the time of the inspection, there were 7,864 learners and apprentices across UCG. Of these, 3,006 were aged 16 to 18, 4,132 were adult learners and 414 were apprentices.

There were 312 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who have education, health and care (EHC) plans and who are in receipt of high-needs funding. Of these, 181 study on cross-college vocational and academic programmes for young learners, 104 study within the supported learning departments at Maida Vale and Willesden and 27 study supported internship programmes.

UCG teaches a broad range of courses including T-levels from entry level up to level 6. Many learners at the college, including young learners, start at entry level or level 1 and come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The largest subject areas offered at the college are English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), English, mathematics, construction, engineering, health and social care, business and information communication, and technology courses.

UCG provides a range of standards-based apprenticeships from level 2 to level 4 within the construction and engineering sector. A large proportion study level 3 refrigeration air conditioning and heat pump engineering technician and level 3 building services engineering technician apprenticeships.

At the time of the inspection, the college worked with four subcontractors to teach courses within the community. Courses are taught from entry level to level 3 in subjects such as sport, theatre arts, English, mathematics and ESOL.

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

Learners of all ages and apprentices learn in welcoming and supportive environments. For example, many young learners arrive at the college having previously disengaged from education. Staff support and encourage learners and apprentices to overcome any barriers to their success, so they can actively participate in and enjoy their education.

Most young learners enjoy a varied and challenging curriculum. Tutors plan activities such as trips and visits to enhance learners' experience. For example, music learners visit the Royal Albert Hall to understand about the design and acoustics of the building, which enhances their understanding of how sound is transmitted.

Learners benefit from well-planned and relevant work experience. For example, sports learners run stadium tours. They also plan and deliver coaching sessions to children from local primary schools. T-level digital learners develop a range of soft skills such as workplace etiquette, time keeping, and how to write professional emails while on their work placements.

For many young learners, their main curriculum provides them with valuable opportunities for success. Young learners who start their course without English or mathematics qualifications achieve higher grades than they started college with. However, too many do not achieve their English and mathematics qualifications in comparison to their main qualification. Most young learners move on to positive destinations such as higher-level courses, apprenticeships, university or employment.

Adult learners study a broad and varied curriculum that provides them with good opportunities to develop vocational, English, mathematics, personal, social and employment skills. Many learners move on to study at a higher level or gain paid employment. For example, learners who are unemployed and study the sector-based work academy programme in security to develop essential employability skills and qualifications, to help them get jobs in the security industry. Most learners have positive attitudes to learning and take appropriate steps to achieve their goals.

Apprentices enjoy their training and develop useful new knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their apprenticeship. They are taught in well-resourced environments, which provides them with a range of opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills to use new technologies. This includes working with air source heat pumps and low carbon infrared heating systems. Apprentices apply their new skills and demonstrate their new knowledge fluently and confidently in the workplace. Throughout their programme, tutors get to know apprentices well, provide them with timely support and liaise well with employers at frequent progress reviews. Most apprentices achieve their qualifications and move into meaningful careers within the engineering and construction sector.

Learners who have high needs learn in inclusive and supportive environments. Staff, including specialist staff such as learning support assistants, speech and language

therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, work collaboratively to provide effective support to learners. This means learners' individual needs are met well and they make good progress.

Learners who have high needs study a curriculum that includes well-tailored content to meet their needs and enables them to achieve their EHC plan outcomes. Throughout their programme, learners develop a wide range of new knowledge, skills and behaviours and most achieve their planned learning goals. This prepares them well for their next steps in the community, world of work or further study at a higher level. However, too few learners who have high needs on vocational and academic programmes complete meaningful external work experience. This limits their opportunities to explore the world of work within the industry area they are studying.

The attendance and punctuality of some learners and apprentices is not yet good enough. Learners and apprentices do not attend their lessons frequently enough and, when they do attend, too often they arrive late. As a result of low attendance, learners hand in work late. They are at risk of falling behind and not completing their course. Tutors reduce these risks by quickly chasing up missed work and putting catch-up sessions in place.

Throughout their time at college, learners and apprentices are supported well with adapting to and contributing to life in the United Kingdom. ESOL learners take part in shared cultural activities as they explore London together. At a subcontracted provision, for example The Arsenal Foundation, tutors use effective activities to develop learners' awareness of diversity and tolerance. In science, learners compare the political systems in different countries.

Learners and apprentices feel safe in learning and at work. They appreciate the support that staff give them and know who to report any concerns to about themselves or their peers. This is because tutors teach learners and apprentices to understand how to keep themselves and others safe. For example, learners know how to stay safe from the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. They know how to form positive relationships and how to stay physically and mentally healthy.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken highly effective action to strengthen and establish strong links with a variety of stakeholders across all curriculum areas. They have increased the frequency of engagement with employers, subject specialists and industry leaders in all high-priority and high-demand sector subject areas including engineering, construction, creative and digital, health and social care, life sciences and green sectors.

Leaders engage very effectively with a wide range of stakeholders including West London Alliance and Central London Forward. They have set up various forums including community and employer groups, and increased the range of industry-led professional development opportunities for staff. Staff provide learners and apprentices across the curriculum with considerable and varied opportunities to interact and learn from industry specialists and representatives. The curriculum offer is highly responsive and meets local and regional skills needs effectively.

Leaders have developed an extensive curriculum offer which aligns exceptionally well with skills priorities in Central, West and North West London as well as pan-London and national priorities. The curriculum includes training courses and apprenticeships in the priority sectors. Across the different curriculum areas, staff collaborate well with employers and stakeholders to inform the design and teaching of the curriculum. As a result, learners and apprentices develop the most up-to-date skills needed for industry. For example, HS2 staff and leaders co-designed a pre-employment programme for tunnelling operatives. This helps learners to gain employment, or move on to further study or an apprenticeship.

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

Since the previous inspection, leaders including governors have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of education, training and the outcomes that learners and apprentices achieve. They introduced rigorous quality assurance processes that have resulted in significant improvements. For example, the quality of teaching and learning has improved because leaders significantly invested in the training and development of staff. This has led to the majority of learners and apprentices achieving their qualifications in most subject areas.

Leaders and governors have good oversight of the college, including at subcontracted provision. Staffing disruption and recruitment challenges have led to weaker outcomes and learner experiences in a few curriculum areas such as A-levels, business, English and mathematics. Leaders have put suitable plans in place to continue to improve these areas, which are having a positive impact to improve the quality of education and training.

In most subject areas, curriculum managers plan ambitious courses of study that contain challenging content. Tutors carefully structure the curriculum so that learners can progress through levels to build their academic and vocational skills. For example, in level 2 and level 3 sport programmes, tutors initially teach learners about anatomy and physiology so that they understand how the body works before they move on to planning coaching and lifestyle sessions. Most learners and apprentices quickly develop new skills and knowledge, which they apply well in classrooms, practical workshops and at work.

Most tutors know learners' and apprentices' starting points well. They use subject-based tests and examination results to establish gaps in prior knowledge and skills before the courses start. Tutors adapt the content, pace and level of challenge of

their teaching well to meet the needs of learners and apprentices who have different starting points. For example, in supported learning, tutors carry out thorough assessments of what learners already know and can do against their EHC plan outcomes. They set appropriate targets for learners that link well with EHC plan outcomes. Most learners make progress to achieve their EHC plan outcomes in preparation for adulthood. However, in a few instances, tutors do not use the outcomes of initial assessments well enough. This means that learners and apprentices find work too easy, while others struggle to understand the content and meet assessment deadlines.

Tutors and trainers in vocational subjects have good sector experience and expertise. Learners gain up-to-date and relevant knowledge and skills from their trainers and tutors. For example, hairdressing tutors are well qualified and experienced. They have a good understanding of the hairdressing sector and maintain their own practical knowledge well. They have good links with colouring companies, which results in good opportunities for learners to study colouring on manufacturers' premises. There, they learn the latest colouring techniques and styles.

Most tutors use a range of effective techniques to teach the curriculum and check learners' and apprentices' understanding. They use questioning effectively to help learners to recall and recap their prior learning. Tutors check how learners and apprentices arrive at their answers and what other methods learners use to get to a correct response, for example ESOL tutors check learners' understanding of what was said. Tutors correct pronunciation and punctuation errors in written text. ESOL learners improve their language skills over time. The probing questions that tutors use help learners develop a deep understanding of the topics they study. Tutors use learners' work effectively to track and monitor their progress.

Managers and tutors make sure that learners with additional needs are well supported. Managers provide tutors with detailed profiles of learners' additional needs and how best to support them. Learning support assistants are an asset to tutors and learners. They help individual learners to overcome specific barriers to their learning. However, a few tutors and learning support assistants are not sufficiently trained to use a variety of strategies that help learners with SEND to succeed, for example how to support learners who have autism.

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented an aspirational supported internship programme for learners who have an EHC plan in partnership with prestigious employers, hospitals and local councils. Tutors work in partnership with employers for learners to work in job roles such as hospitality assistants, administration, logistics, customer service and museum assistants. Consequently, learners develop vital skills in real working environments such as how to use courier logistic systems. They also learn how to work in a team and follow instructions. However, too few of these learners move on to paid employment.

Tutors provide learners and apprentices with developmental and constructive feedback that identifies how they can improve the standard of their work. This

includes highlighting spelling, punctuation and grammar errors, and giving advice about how to structure assignments. For example, uniform services tutors clearly link feedback to the qualification grading criteria, so learners know what they need to do to improve their grades. Learners and apprentices appreciate the feedback they receive and most produce a good standard of work. Many achieve distinction grades.

Staff organise a good range of well-planned enrichment for learners and apprentices to explore their interests. The activities provide learners with valuable opportunities to develop their confidence, make friends and extend their talents. For example, adult ESOL learners at Wembley participate in competitions and events such as Planet Earth Games or diversity nights, where they share information about their diverse cultural backgrounds. Learners who have high needs participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. Young learners at Paddington Green enjoy a range of activities, including sport.

Tutors and careers hub staff prepare learners and apprentices well for their future steps. They provide them with relevant, timely information and activities. Careers staff provide individual guidance sessions to most learners and apprentices. Learners and apprentices attend informative careers events at the college, where they meet with staff from a range of employers and universities. This helps learners and apprentices explore different careers, so they understand what is required to achieve their ambitions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the attendance and punctuality of learners and apprentices.
- Increase the number of young learners that achieve their planned qualifications.
- Train tutors and learning support assistants across vocational and academic programmes so they have the knowledge and skills they need to teach and support learners who have SEND.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130423
Address	25 Paddington Green London W2 1NB
Contact number	02077238826
Website	www.cwc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Stephen Davis
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 November 2022
Main subcontractors	Arsenal Football Club PLC Community Systems (North London) Limited The National Youth Theatre of Great Britain The Skills Network Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the 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

Joanna Walters, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Manning	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Breheny	Ofsted Inspector
Elena Diaconescu	Ofsted Inspector
Debbie Ryle	Ofsted Inspector
Christina Christou	Ofsted Inspector
Mel Coleman-Clements	Ofsted Inspector
David Baber	Ofsted Inspector
Lois Knight	Ofsted Inspector
Julie Baxter	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Lambert	His Majesty's Inspector
Saher Nijabat	His Majesty's Inspector
Maureen Gilmartin	Ofsted Inspector
Philida Schellekens	Ofsted Inspector
Claudia Harrison	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

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

© Crown copyright 2024