

Colchester Institute

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	13064
Name of lead inspector:	Sambit Sen, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	General further education college
Address:	Sheepen Road Colchester Essex CO3 3LL

Interim visit

Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

Colchester Institute is a large general further education college with two main sites. The largest is in Colchester, with a smaller campus in Braintree. In addition, the college has five 'learning shops' throughout Essex for unemployed adults. The college provides a wide range of vocational 16 to 19 study programmes for around 3,900 students, of which almost half study at level 3. They have 1,300 apprentices and 640 adult students. The college has a small provision for students with high needs.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

Senior leaders say that they aim to teach students full time on site. However, they are flexible with their teaching models to meet the needs of individual student groups. For example, when students must self-isolate, they are able to access their study sessions and resources online.

Senior leaders presented five teaching models to managers and teachers. This allowed managers to agree a common approach that was manageable in all curriculum areas. As a result, teachers feel listened to and their subject knowledge acknowledged.

Senior leaders and managers say that they use a variety of quality assurance processes to check students' progress. For example, they review students'

assessment grades, attendance and use student surveys on a regular basis. They say this allows students to focus and make good progress on their course.

Senior leaders and managers continue to have ongoing concerns. They highlight the challenge of dealing with increased cases of mental well-being issues among students. Managers are also concerned about the potential furlough and redundancy of apprentices. Accessing sufficient industry placements and work experience opportunities remains one of their main concerns for students on study programmes.

Managers have outlined positive outcomes because of the current pandemic. They say that students are developing better independent study skills in preparation for higher education. Employers are offering more time to work collaboratively with students. For example, Marvel Films USA have linked up with media students to teach the special effects module of their course.

Leaders and managers have worked collaboratively with their local Job Centre Plus. They have designed courses to help those who have been recently made redundant, such as at a local airport. Managers have put on new courses in construction and healthcare to retrain these individuals.

What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?

Managers identify that they have adopted a blended learning approach to their curriculum where relevant. For example, they carry out remote observations of chef apprentices completing practical tasks in kitchens. Teachers complete weekly reviews through online classrooms. In addition, students continue to develop their practical skills on site at the college.

Leaders and managers work with teachers to identify and provide for their continuous professional development. Teachers reflect on and improve their online learning practice. Managers recognise the hard work and commitment teachers have put into their lessons and resources. Teachers told inspectors about weekly sharing of best practice in their teams. They value how colleagues mentor and support each other.

Teachers and managers thoroughly planned the induction programme at the start of the academic year. This helped students to adapt quickly to online learning. For example, students have learned to make good use of in-house social media platforms to communicate with their peers and teachers. Teachers expect the same high standards of good behaviour and active learning online from students as they do in the classroom setting.

Teachers stay in regular touch with employers and apprentices. Teachers use online platforms to track the progress apprentices make. Teachers and employers are working together to ensure that furloughed apprentices continue to learn.

Some students who have experienced blended learning prefer learning this way. They say that there are fewer distractions when learning from home. They like asking questions privately through the chat facility. They enjoy using various online learning tools during the sessions. They appreciate that they can access lesson resources and topics prior to the lesson. This helps them feel better prepared to contribute in the lesson.

Managers and teachers have adapted their careers advice and guidance plans to reflect the impact of the pandemic. They conduct career interviews online. They continue to encourage employers to help students develop their career plans through online meetings. Students benefit from virtual tours of employers' facilities and virtual career events.

How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?

Leaders, managers and teachers are aware of the increased impact of anxiety and mental health issues on their students due to the pandemic. As a result, they have taken additional steps to identify and tackle these issues. For example, they work with several external agencies, such as local authorities, police and parents, to provide joined-up support to their students.

Students have a good understanding of keeping themselves safe in college. They go through safety learning modules and complete assessments that test their understanding. They know who to go to if they have any concerns. Managers and teachers take extra measures to ensure that students stay safe online. For example, teachers remind students frequently about online session protocols and etiquette.

Teachers comment that leaders and managers look after their well-being. Managers have regular discussions with teachers about their workload and mental well-being.

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