

HCUC (Harrow College and Uxbridge College)

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Harrow College and Uxbridge College merged in August 2017 to form HCUC. HCUC has four college campuses and two small training centres situated in north-west London. Uxbridge College was inspected in 2008 and judged to be outstanding. At its most recent inspection in 2016, Harrow College was judged to require improvement.

The focus of this visit was to assess the progress leaders had made on the main areas for improvement from Harrow College's inspection. Also, inspectors looked at the progress leaders and managers had made in bringing Harrow College and Uxbridge College together as HCUC.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 7,902 learners at the college. Of these, the large majority were on 16 to 19 study programmes, the minority were on adult learning programmes, and there were 376 apprentices. The majority of learners were on courses at the Uxbridge campus.

Themes

What progress have leaders at all levels made in improving weaker aspects of teaching across the college's education and training provision?

Reasonable progress

Teachers ensure that most learners achieve their qualifications. They check learners' progress rigorously and consistently across the campuses of the newly merged college. Teachers have high expectations for their learners and strive to help them learn. They know their learners well and work hard to help them deal with any problems that might impede their learning. Learners and apprentices are positive about their learning experiences and enjoy coming to HCUC. They are well behaved around the college.

Apprentices value the support they receive from the college staff. They speak highly of the reviews of their progress, which now involve both staff and their employers. Employers and staff work in partnership well to help apprentices make progress in their learning.

Leaders have put in place sound initiatives to help teachers improve their skills. A new professional training and development programme ensures that teachers from both former colleges learn from each other's best practice. The college has identified teachers with particularly strong expertise to work closely with their colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching. Teachers welcome this support and training, and they feel that it helps them. However, a small minority are not yet confident enough in implementing what they have learned.

Leaders and teachers have made solid progress in unifying assessment systems across the college. Teachers prepare most learners well for tests and examinations. They enable learners to show their understanding and abilities in applying their learning. Learners produce work that at least meets the requirements of their learning programmes. Apprentices meet the demands of their workplaces. The college has improved the quality of feedback that teachers and assessors give to students. Most teachers' comments help learners to know what to improve or what they have done well. In a few cases, teachers do not check learners' progress well enough.

What progress have senior leaders made in ensuring that the curriculum is suitable for the learners and apprentices that the college campuses serve?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have brought the curriculums from both former colleges together effectively to shape the future of HCUC. They use pertinent information well to plan the curriculum, including feedback from partners and employers. As a result, secure evidence now informs leaders' decision-making on what new courses to run and which to close. Senior leaders take effective action where courses do not benefit learners sufficiently. They have also ended subcontracting arrangements with almost all education and training providers. This is because these courses no longer supported the strategic direction of the college. Leaders are planning new vocational qualifications and developing staff's skills to deliver them. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this work.

Leaders are developing worthwhile courses linked to employment. They are forging strong partnerships with local employers and national companies. They have set up learning programmes which respond effectively to employment available at Heathrow Airport nearby. This includes programmes at level 3 to prepare learners for work as airport staff and cabin crew. When learners have been on work placements connected to these courses, most gain employment.

The proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who go out on work placements as part of their study programme has increased, but is still too low. Leaders and managers across HCUC are aware of the need to increase meaningful work experience further.

Leaders are revising the college tutorial programme to help learners study more effectively. The revised programme is also designed to ensure that learners understand more deeply about things that affect their development and lives. Leaders have appointed additional specialist staff to work with learners who need extra help in their studies. This is beginning to have an impact on learners across the college.

What progress have leaders and governors made, following the merger, in scrutinising the quality of education and training provision?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have a clear picture of the quality of education and training provision. They have useful and precise information, which shows the performance of the two former colleges and of HCUC as a whole. Leaders at all levels use this data well. They have standardised systems to assure quality. They monitor the college's education and training provision assiduously. Managers are clear on their accountability for performance. During the merger, they maintained and improved the performance of most courses.

Staff have welcomed a recently introduced system for assessing the quality of teaching. Leaders have combined the best practice from systems to observe teaching that was in place at the predecessor colleges. The process for checking and moderating the quality of teaching is rigorous. Leaders use observation records well to pinpoint areas that need to improve. This accurate evaluation ensures that staff understand what the priorities are for improvement across the college.

Leaders have been self-critical and measured in assessing the quality of courses in both predecessor colleges. They have reviewed the performance of both accurately. The first self-assessment report for HCUC clearly reflects the historical picture and the performance of courses currently. It makes for a useful foundation for moving forward. Leaders have put in place the right actions for improvement as a result.

Governance arrangements draw effectively from governors with a wide range of expertise and experience. They receive the accurate information they need to keep a close eye on performance and hold senior leaders firmly to account. Governors are knowledgeable about the challenges the college faces going forward.

What progress have senior leaders and governors made in establishing an HCUC culture, ambition and vision, following the merger?

Significant progress

Leaders have established a strong identity for HCUC. To underpin this, staff across both former colleges have developed a set of agreed and essential shared values. These include a commitment to excellence and to having high expectations for their learners. Staff throughout the college are clear about the college's strategic direction.

Leaders are ambitious for the future of HCUC. They are updating the estate at one of the predecessor colleges to ensure that the sites of both colleges will be of the same high standard. They have also upgraded technology resources, a priority at one site.

Leaders identified early on the characteristics of the local communities both predecessor colleges serve. They have used this to set up courses that reflect the

identity of the newly merged college. The principal has set up a forum with stakeholders who provide effective oversight of these courses.

HCUC is a diverse and inclusive place to study. Learners from a range of ethnic heritages feel safe at the college and most achieve well. Learners at all college sites are respectful and courteous. Staff and learners foster friendly and respectful working relationships in lessons.

How effective are safeguarding arrangements for learners with high needs, including the response by leaders and managers to resolve any concerns and processes to ensure agency staff are safe to work with learners?

Reasonable progress

Governors and leaders have a very strong focus on safeguarding learners, including those with high needs. They have ensured that effective safeguarding policies and procedures are unified across all campuses. Learners with high needs benefit from excellent facilities and staff who are well trained to meet their individual needs. Permanent and agency staff receive frequent training and updates in safeguarding and in how to support learners with profound and multiple learning difficulties. This includes manual handling and medication training. Managers ensure that, where learners have particular support needs, staff are well trained to meet those needs. They keep records of and monitor staff authorised to work with individual learners. Managers have recently reviewed and enhanced aspects of the training and monitoring of staff.

Managers carry out thorough checks on all staff employed through agencies who support learners with high needs. These checks include interviews, during which managers see evidence of appropriate safeguarding checks and qualifications. Managers do not, however, see the original references provided to the agencies to verify agency staff's employment history.

Well-trained, experienced safeguarding managers and staff provide high levels of support to learners. They ensure that any incidents or safeguarding concerns are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Thorough records show that managers and staff take appropriate action, working closely with local authorities, parents, carers and other relevant agencies when appropriate.

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