

United Learning FAQs

ABOUT UNITED LEARNING

Q. Who are United Learning?

We are a national group of over 90 schools. Our aim is simply to provide excellent education, preparing young people to make a success of their lives.

Since our foundation in the 1880s, as part of a national movement to provide education for girls and young women, we have been a values-led organisation. Asked, in the early 2000s, at the start of the Academies Programme, to become involved in solving the greatest modern social problem in education – failing schools in the country’s most deprived areas – our trustees looked back to the founding principles of the charity and quickly decided to step forward.

As well as taking on schools in challenging circumstances, we have a strong track record in supporting good and outstanding schools which join us to continue to prosper. All our schools contribute to and benefit from the significant breadth and depth of expertise evident within the Group.

We consider United Learning to be a national group of local schools. Our schools reflect the needs of their local communities – context matters, and one size does not fit all. Our Heads run schools and make decisions in the interests of what is right for children and young people. We are united in putting children first and our scale gives us significant capacity to get behind schools and support them to succeed. We also develop capacity and collaboration through clustering activities at the local level, complementing national networks and CPD provided by the Group.

We have four strategic aims which are to be:

- **Great places to learn** – because of their educational quality, their development of the whole person and the preparation they offer for life, the pastoral care they offer and the quality of the environment and relationships.
- **Great places to work** – because they offer an excellent professional experience, high quality relationships with students and other colleagues, excellent professional growth and opportunities, and a high-quality working environment and resources.
- **A great Group to join** – because of the quality of support we offer schools with compliance, the ‘back office’, education and school improvement and the high-quality collaboration between schools.
- **A great contribution beyond the Group** – to local communities, the national education system and the wider world.

As part of being great places to learn and to work, our schools share a set of common principles which we call our **‘Framework for Excellence’**. These five principles are meaningful and common:

- **The best from everyone.** Our goal is to bring out the best in everyone – so we must expect the best from everyone.
- **Powerful knowledge.** We aim to empower young people to be the authors of their own life story, through giving them the knowledge and understanding they need.
- **Education with character.** We seek to develop the whole person – so that young people’s cognitive development is matched by their roundedness and maturity.
- **Leadership in every role.** Every adult in school is a leader – we want them to have agency and take responsibility – and for young people to do so too.
- **Continuous improvement.** However good we are, we can be better, and we take conscious steps to become so.

We believe this approach is well aligned with that of Conisborough College and that we are well-placed to support staff in delivering on the school’s stated goal ‘for our young people to go onto become successful leaders, employees, citizens and family members’

HOW UNITED LEARNING SUPPORTS SCHOOLS

Q. What central support is provided to schools?

Our secondary education team comprises experienced Regional Educational Directors – all of whom have led successful schools in a range of contexts – and a network of subject advisors who work directly with Heads of Department and teachers to develop excellence in their specialism. All our schools benefit from half-termly meetings with their Regional Director, with additional support provided according to their specific needs. We place an emphasis on our leaders visiting other schools in the Group and beyond, and welcoming others into their school to observe and learn from existing strong practice.

This approach is reflected in support for staff at all levels. We support schools to develop their in-school CPD, supplemented by a high-quality central offer which encompasses support for trainees and early career teachers; leadership development for experienced teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and head teachers; and programmes for support staff. We also encourage collaboration as a platform for school improvement.

Our overall approach is successful because it is underpinned by a collaborative focus on developing strong relationships: between the Regional Director and school leaders; between subject advisors and HoDs/subject specialists in school; between central management functions and school support staff and between staff in clusters at the local level. In this way, we think schools have the best of both worlds – access to high-quality support and challenge from expert practitioners, but who tailor their approach for each individual school, and recognise that it is staff in school who make decisions in the best interest of their students and communities at the local level.

Q. How does United Learning support the curriculum across its schools?

We have undertaken a lot of work collaboratively with input from hundreds of teachers across the Group to build a shared entitlement curriculum. We have developed schemes of work plus teaching and assessment materials to support the teaching of this core curriculum (including lesson-by-lesson resources in some subjects, which are available to teachers in our schools to use as appropriate).

Q. How do students benefit from the school being part of United Learning?

Through the significant level of curriculum and teaching support, our students benefit from an excellent standard of education. Beyond the classroom, we support all our schools to offer a full range of extracurricular activities through our 'Pupil Charter'. Schools have opportunities to take part in many group-wide activities – including access to the Group's Sports Ambassadors, Scholar's Club lecture series, competitions and Group-wide performances. In the past few years, we have worked in partnership with the Royal Opera House and held performances at the Lyceum Theatre, the Olympic Park and Southwark Cathedral in London.

Q. Is there support for other aspects of managing the school?

Yes. Our central team includes finance, HR, estates, health and safety and IT professionals. All these colleagues support schools to work effectively in the interests of students.

Q. Can you demonstrate successful outcomes in Lewisham for schools that have become part of United Learning?

Yes. Students at Sedgehill Academy now achieve, on average, a grade and a half higher than they did before the school joined the group. This is based on the improvement in the school's Progress 8 score. The latest published data for 2021/2022 shows a P8 score of +0.51 meaning on average that students achieved half a grade better at Sedgehill than their academic peers across England. This picture has improved markedly since 2018/19, when the school's P8 score was -0.87.

(The P8 score takes a student's grades and compares their progress from KS2 SATS to GCSEs with students with similar academic starting positions. This is a key measure which is reported to the Department for Education alongside GCSE results. If a school has a positive score of 1 this means that students achieve on average a grade higher than their peers; conversely, a negative score of 1 means students achieve on average a grade lower than their peers.)

GCSE results have also improved: the percentage of students achieving grades 7-9 in 2018 was 1%; for the latest set of published results this measure is now 21%. In addition the grade 5+ (strong pass) for English and Maths at Sedgehill has improved from 24% in 2018 to 55% in 2022.

CONISBOROUGH COLLEGE AND UNITED LEARNING

Q. What will happen to the name?

The school will continue to be called *Conisborough College*.

Q. What will happen to the uniform?

There are no plans to change the uniform.

Q. Will the school retain local representation via a governing body?

Yes. While the trustees of United Learning are ultimately accountable for the educational and financial performance of our academies, at the local level, trustees delegate governance to Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) at each school, each of which has places for parent governors.

LGBs play an important role in our governance structure. We know that local governors have a strong understanding of their school communities and, as such, our LGBs have real powers to support and challenge what happens in their school.

We therefore expect the LGB to retain a strong presence in the day-to-day life of the school, helping to monitor educational provision, financial planning and management, health and safety, parent / community engagement and so on.

Q. What will happen to those who are entitled to Free School Meals?

Eligibility for Free School Meals will remain exactly the same as now.

Q. My child is supported by the Resource Base - how will the plan to join United Learning affect arrangements?

Existing arrangements will remain in place for those whose children benefit from the support provided by the Resource Base. We plan to support the school to continue developing this provision in line with a shared commitment to delivering success for every student.

Q. Will there be changes to the staffing structure in Conisborough?

There will be no changes as a direct result of the transfer itself. The Headteacher will be line managed by a Regional Education Director and it will be for local leaders to determine whether any changes are needed to staffing structures within the school.

Q. Will staff be forced to work in other United Learning schools?

No. Staff cannot be forced to undertake work in other schools on either a permanent or temporary basis. Staff are occasionally *asked* to provide support to other schools within the Group but will do so only by agreement and on a voluntary basis (they must also have the agreement of their home school). We find that staff do request opportunities to work in different schools for their own professional development, but this is never mandated.

UNITED LEARNING CURRICULUM

Q. To what extent do teachers and curriculum areas have to follow the United Learning shared curriculum?

We have undertaken a lot of work collaboratively with input from hundreds of teachers across the Group to build a shared entitlement curriculum. However, our approach to our common curriculum is that it should be irresistible, not mandatory. While we are very confident in the quality of the resources we have to offer, we don't compel schools to shift wholesale to our curriculum if what they're already delivering is at least as strong as our common curriculum.

We will hold discussions with colleagues in school to ensure that the curriculum is as strong as the common curriculum and what changes, if any, are required to achieve this. We don't specify the order in which materials are taught within a year.

Q. How are students assessed in Years 7-9?

All schools are required to do common end-year assessments in Years 7-9. There are optional mid-year assessments.

Q. Is there a common system for reporting to parents/carers and how does this work?

The school will continue to provide reports to parents/carers as they do currently.

Q. Are there roadmaps for the curriculum in Years 10-11?

No. The reason for this is that we do not prescribe exam specifications (although most of our schools do follow the same specification in many subjects) and support schools with whichever specification they use.

Q. What is the United Learning approach to Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG)? Do all academies have their own Careers Advisor/Employability Manager?

We have a centrally employed Strategic Careers Lead who works with schools to support effective CEIAG. All schools are expected to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks (and to go beyond them where they already do so). Provision and leadership for CEIAG is locally managed by schools.