

# Northumberland College

General further education college

## Inspection dates

27–30 November 2018

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>	16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Apprenticeships	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for learners	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Provision for learners with high needs	<b>Requires improvement</b>
		Full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			<b>Good</b>

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Until very recently, governors failed to identify and stop the decline in the quality of the college's provision and the deterioration in its financial position.
- Leaders and managers do not use performance management effectively enough to secure improvements in teaching, learning and assessment and better outcomes for students and apprentices.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently effective across different subjects on study programmes.
- Too few students achieve their qualifications in land-based, engineering and retail subjects on study programmes.
- Too few apprentices achieve their overall qualifications; those who do achieve take longer than planned.
- Students who have high needs are not set challenging enough work on vocational courses to enable them to develop the skills that they need to prepare for adult life.
- Too many students on study programmes and apprentices do not attend their lessons often enough, particularly in English and mathematics. As a result, students do not make good progress in these subjects.
- Too many teachers and support staff do not challenge the poor behaviour of students on study programmes; as a result, these students are not being prepared well for the workplace.

### The provider has the following strengths

- The new senior management team has acted decisively to stabilise the college's finances and have begun to tackle the main causes for the deterioration in the quality of the provision.
- The behaviour and attendance of 14- to 16-year-old students have been transformed and are now good.
- The great majority of adult students progress to the university of their choice, into further education, or into employment on completion of their courses.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Northumberland College is the only general further education college in Northumberland. It offers vocational study programmes, apprenticeships, adult learning programmes, provision for students who have high needs, and a programme for a small number of full-time 14- to 16-year-old students. It has five campuses, including the two main sites, at Ashington and the specialist land-based provision at Kirkley Hall. The college has just launched a consultation about its proposed merger with another college in the north east.
- Northumberland is one of the largest and most sparsely populated counties in England. It has high levels of social deprivation in the south east of the county. The majority of students enter the college without grades 4 to 9 in GCSE English and mathematics.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Governors should support fully senior managers' implementation of actions to improve the quality of the provision and the financial position of the college; they should hold senior managers to account for the impact of these actions.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that their management of staff performance focuses on securing improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for students and apprentices.
- Leaders and managers should be more self-critical and evaluative of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across study programmes, so that they can identify and implement actions that will improve the provision to a consistently high standard.
- Leaders and managers should identify the reasons for the decline in achievement on land-based, engineering and retail subjects, and implement actions to increase the proportion of students achieving their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers should accelerate the pace of implementation of the recent improvements that they have made to the delivery of apprenticeship programmes, so that more apprentices complete their qualifications within their planned timescales.
- Teachers need to have more ambitious expectations of students who have high needs on study programmes; they should set students more demanding work to increase their opportunities of securing employment.
- Leaders and managers need to make sure that students understand the importance of English and mathematics to their future careers; teachers and assessors need to intervene swiftly when students and apprentices fail to attend English and mathematics classes, so that support measures can be put in place to improve their attendance.
- All staff need to challenge more robustly the poor behaviour of students in all areas of the college, and managers need to set clear targets for students to improve their behaviour through appropriate and consistently enforced disciplinary procedures.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Until the recent appointment of a new senior executive team, leaders and managers failed to identify and arrest the decline in the quality of the provision and the deteriorating financial position of the college. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in some of the largest subject areas in study programmes fell, and the achievements for apprentices slipped below minimum standards.
- The new senior executive team has acted decisively to stabilise the college's finances. It is steering the college towards a merger with a preferred partner, aimed at maintaining the provision for the benefit of students and employers across the county. Senior managers have identified and begun to tackle the causes of the deterioration in the quality of the provision. As a result, there are early signs of improvement. For example, the number of students and apprentices withdrawing early from programmes has reduced compared with this time last year.
- Until very recently, leaders and managers have held an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the progress that students make. They have relied too heavily on the findings of observations of teaching, learning and assessment carried out by external consultants who have not identified key weaknesses and wide variations in the quality of teaching practice.
- Leaders and managers have implemented quality assurance arrangements that have been too focused on compliance rather than quality improvement. They have been more concerned about meeting the requirements of awarding bodies rather than identifying actions to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not used management information well enough to evaluate the performance of different subject areas and groups of students. As a result, they have been slow to tackle the decline in the proportion of students achieving their qualifications in land-based and engineering subjects, and the lower achievement of adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities compared with that of students without these difficulties.
- Leaders and managers do not use performance management effectively enough to secure improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. Appraisal records and probation reviews concentrate on process and support rather than on what teachers and assessors need to do to improve their practice.
- The new principal has carried out a thorough restructure of his senior and middle management teams that has improved communication and collaborative working across the college. Academy managers and teaching staff have been empowered to take decisions to improve the quality of the provision for which they are responsible, and they now have higher expectations about the performance of their students.
- Leaders and managers have successfully repaired the reputation of the college among external partners. Employers and public-sector agencies had started to lose confidence in the quality of the college's delivery. They are now much more willing to send their employees to the college to be trained and to recommend the college to other organisations.

## **The governance of the provider**

- Until very recently, governors did not provide sufficient challenge to senior leaders to ensure that they tackled the decline in the quality of the provision and the deteriorating financial position of the college.
- Since the appointment of a new senior executive team, governors have received improved information to hold the team to account for its actions, and they have confidence in its accuracy. The recent introduction of a curriculum and quality committee has enabled governors to have a better understanding of the college's strengths and the areas that need to improve.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Students and apprentices feel safe while attending the college, in their workplaces and in their everyday lives.
- All managers and staff have completed the required safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. Those responsible for safeguarding work diligently with external agencies to provide support for students and apprentices. For example, safeguarding officers have effective arrangements in place to report immediately to the local authority any children looked after who do not attend college to enable their location to be traced.
- The college has a very effective online system for reporting safeguarding concerns and incidents. Managers use data about trends in concerns well to inform the regular refresher training that they put on for staff.
- A high proportion of students are aware of the risks that they face from extremist groups and possible radicalisation. However, they are less aware of the potential risks from 'county lines' set up by drug dealers, and the way that they have spread into rural counties.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across different subject areas on study programmes and for apprentices is not consistently high.
- Too many teachers and assessors on study programmes and apprenticeships do not use the information collected about students' and apprentices' starting points well enough to plan and deliver teaching sessions that meet the differing needs of students and apprentices. In English and mathematics lessons, this results in teachers setting the same tasks for students with different starting points, so they are too easy for some and too difficult for others.
- Teachers use a limited range of assessment strategies to monitor the progress of students. They do not use questioning effectively to check students' understanding and to build their knowledge. Too often, they allow the more confident members of the class to shout out answers and dominate discussions. As a result, teachers fail to check the progress of the less vocal and less confident students, who do not get the chance to contribute.

- Teachers and assessors do not use progress reviews well enough to develop the wider skills and knowledge of students and apprentices. Reviews on study programme are too focused on the achievement of qualification units, and do not provide helpful feedback to develop students' wider social and personal development skills. Assessors do not use reviews to inform apprentices about how they can apply the skills and knowledge that they acquire through off-the-job training and how they can improve their skills and knowledge further.
- The pace of teaching and learning is too slow for the ability of the students in too many study programme lessons. In land-based and engineering provision, two large subject areas, dull and uninspiring teaching results in too many students becoming bored and distracted. As a result, students make slow progress.
- Too few students on study programmes are encouraged to extend their learning outside the classroom to develop their independent learning skills. Many courses do not appear on the college's virtual learning environment. The content of those that are represented is often uninspiring, containing assignment briefs and resources already used in the classroom.
- Students do not benefit from high-quality teaching resources in all subject areas. In several areas, facilities do not replicate current professional and industry standards. For example, the fabric and seating in the hairdressing and beauty therapy salons on the Ashington campus are dated and worn out, and equipment on some land-based courses was not working during the inspection.
- The great majority of teachers and assessors use their up-to-date knowledge and experience of their vocational areas to develop the technical skills and knowledge of their students and apprentices well. For example, students on study programmes become skilled in brickwork, cookery and motor vehicle repairs. Adult students develop skills in horticulture and engineering.
- Teachers use their skills effectively to provide motivating learning to the large majority of adult students and full-time 14- to 16-year-old students, with the result that these students make good progress.
- Students benefit from an effective range of support services that their teachers and support staff provide. This enables many of them to overcome barriers to learning and stay on their programmes. Support for the increasing number of students with mental health problems is particularly effective.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

### **Requires improvement**

- Too many students on study programmes do not develop or demonstrate many of the core attitudes and behaviours that they need to progress further in their education and to be successful in the workplace.
- Too many students behave poorly and use inappropriate language in the college's social areas, lifts and in a very small proportion of lessons. Staff do not challenge these students robustly or quickly enough.
- Attendance at lessons is too low on study programmes and apprenticeship programmes. Attendance at English and mathematics lessons is particularly low. Lateness to lessons is not consistently challenged by teachers. As a result, students are not prepared well for

the world of work.

- Too many students and apprentices do not make progress in developing their English and mathematical skills to a higher level in specialist and vocational lessons. Teachers do not plan and deliver activities that consistently allow students and apprentices to apply and reinforce the functional English and mathematical skills that they need for work.
- A high proportion of students and apprentices develop the practical skills, technical knowledge and language that they require for their chosen career or job. For example, students are regular entrants in national skills competitions, winning top three places in arboriculture, barbering and nail art.
- Students benefit from a range of enterprise- and work-related activities that develop their confidence and extend their social interaction with peers and the wider community. For example, students from construction are completing the refurbishment of the local sea cadets' headquarters as part of their course.
- Staff provide effective and impartial careers advice throughout students' time at the college. A wide range of taster and enrolment events enable students to pick the most appropriate subject and level of qualification, with opportunities to switch course if they need to. Advice and guidance towards the end of programmes help students to decide their next steps. As a result, a high proportion of students progress to their chosen destinations.
- Students and apprentices feel safe while attending the college. They work safely in practical lessons and realistic working environments. Students know to whom they should report safeguarding concerns.

### Outcomes for learners

### Requires improvement

- Although overall achievement on study programmes improved in 2017/18, the achievement of students on programmes at levels 2 and 3, which make up half of the total, declined. Too many students, and more than in previous years, did not achieve their qualifications in subjects such as engineering, land-based and retail.
- Despite a small increase in the overall proportion of students on study programmes achieving their English functional skills qualifications in 2017/18, fewer succeeded at levels 1 and 2 than in the previous year. Too many current students continue to make slow progress towards the achievement of their qualifications at these levels.
- In 2017/18, far too few apprentices achieved their qualifications, and too many took too long to succeed, particularly those aged 16 to 18. Too few apprentices achieve their functional skills qualifications.
- Managers have not been effective in improving sufficiently the achievements of adult students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties, which are lower than those of their peers.
- The proportion of adult students achieving their qualifications increased significantly in 2017/18. Adults on short employability courses progressed into employment in high numbers. The great majority of adults on access to higher education courses moved to the university of their choice.
- Managers have taken effective action from the beginning of this academic year to reduce

the number of current students on study programme and apprentices withdrawing early from their programmes by ensuring that they are on a programme at the right level. As a result, the great majority of students on study programme and apprentices are making the progress expected of them at this point in the academic year.

## Types of provision

### 16 to 19 study programmes

### Requires improvement

- The college has 1,280 students on study programmes, which accounts for half of the college's funded provision. Nearly two thirds of students are on programmes at levels 1 and 2. Students work towards vocational and technical qualifications in 14 sector subject areas.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently effective in all subject areas. Teachers too often set activities that do not stretch the most able students. They do not ensure that all students understand the material being taught. For example, too much theory teaching at level 3 focuses on preparing students for tests and does not help them to develop independent study and research skills.
- Teachers do not support students in developing their written work to the standard expected for the level at which they are studying. For example, in level 3 carpentry and joinery, students produced hand-drawn floor plans that were technically at too low a standard. Teachers do not assess this work or provide helpful feedback to enable students to improve.
- In mathematics classes, too many students struggle to develop the required knowledge and skills and, therefore, make slow progress. Teachers move too quickly through the syllabus before students understand the subject matter. Progress is impeded by poor attendance and punctuality in many of these lessons.
- Teachers do not use individual learning plans effectively to monitor progress or set goals for students. The great majority of targets set in plans focus on the completion of qualification units with very few references to the development of English, mathematical or wider personal development skills.
- Most students participate in relevant and useful enterprise- and work-related activities. However, in a small minority of curriculum areas, not enough opportunities exist for students to participate in work experience with external employers. The college no longer funds Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards, so students cannot gain access to construction sites for work experience.
- The great majority of students develop good practical and technical skills that prepare them well for future employment. For example, students on level 2 construction programmes build cavity-wall structures that are set out correctly to acceptable tolerances. Level 1 motor vehicle students test brake discs to ensure that they are roadworthy.
- The great majority of students produce work that is appropriate for the level of study. For example, in hospitality, teachers successfully encourage students to work quickly and effectively to prepare meals for paying customers in an environment that simulates the



world of work. However, the quality of many students' written work is too low.

- Managers ensure that study programmes are accessible to young people across the whole of the large, sparsely populated county. Programmes are available from entry level to level 3 in locations across the county.

## Adult learning programmes

**Good**

- The college has 1,065 adult students. The largest strand of adult learning is employability training. Other strands include vocational training, which adult students undertake alongside students on study programme in most subject areas, and access to higher education programmes.
- Teachers use their teaching skills effectively to motivate students, many of whom are returning to learning for the first time since they left school. They establish the starting points of their students accurately and devise programmes that enable students to achieve their learning objectives through a series of small steps. For example, on a welding course, teachers devise individual activities for students working at three different levels in the same sessions.
- Teachers develop students' knowledge and understanding through the effective use of questioning techniques. They check learning frequently and provide constructive feedback that enables students to improve their skills. Teachers combine the development of practical and theoretical skills well in subjects such as hospitality and horticulture.
- Teachers draw on their vocational experience and qualifications to develop students' skills and knowledge. For example, teachers of countryside management applied their own experiences of the 1987 storms to examine ecological recovery. Employability teachers use real case studies of safety incidents on building sites to develop students' understanding of health and safety.
- Students develop strong employability skills and boost their self-confidence through vocational sessions that enable them to understand the expectations of employers and to prepare themselves effectively for the world of work. For example, students on level 2 health and social care courses carry out work placements where they can apply in the workplace the safeguarding practices that they have learned.
- Most students enjoy their learning and take pride in the work that they produce. They behave courteously and responsibly. They show respect to teaching staff and their peers, work well together, and provide support for each other when carrying out learning activities.
- In a minority of sessions on the access to higher education programme, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge to students to develop their independent learning and research skills. As a result, a small minority of students are not well prepared for this level of study.
- Attendance in a small minority of subjects is too low, notably in welding and health and social care.



## Apprenticeships

## Requires improvement

- The college has 523 apprentices on programmes based on frameworks and 213 on standards-based programmes. Nearly a half of apprentices are aged 16 to 18. Level 2 programmes account for 422 apprentices, with 297 on level 3 programmes and 17 on level 4 programmes. The great majority of apprentices are on programmes in construction, engineering and land-based studies.
- The new senior executive team has implemented a radical restructure of the management and delivery of the apprenticeship programme to tackle the rapid decline in the proportion of apprentices achieving their qualifications and the proportion doing so within their planned timescales. These changes have reduced the proportion of apprentices withdrawing from programmes early, particularly by ensuring that apprentices are now on the right level of programme.
- The legacy of previous poor management means that too many apprentices on framework qualifications are still making slow progress towards the completion of their qualifications. When these apprentices were recruited onto programmes, assessors did not identify accurately enough their prior knowledge, skills and qualifications, including in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. As a result, too many apprentices on framework programmes have not developed new skills and knowledge well enough.
- Assessors do not provide feedback on apprentices' written work that is sufficiently developmental. Too often, they do not challenge or correct apprentices' poor use of English. As a result, apprentices do not know how to improve their work and often repeat the same mistakes.
- Curriculum managers do not ensure that all apprentices can access functional skills classes because they often plan them to coincide with practical or theory skills development classes. This means that apprentices' overall progress is slowed in the development of both their functional skills and their practical skills.
- The great majority of apprentices who started after the new management team took over the running of the apprenticeship programme now attend their sessions and are making the progress expected of them.
- A growing proportion of apprentices develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours, particularly those who have started standards-based programmes. Qualified and vocationally experienced assessors assess apprentices' starting points thoroughly and pass on their technical knowledge well. For example, an assessor with experience of laying industrial carpets showed his apprentices how to ensure that no lines can be seen when carpets are joined together.
- Assessors work well with employers to ensure that the theoretical knowledge gained in classrooms can be applied in the workplace, and employers provide effective on-the-job training. For example, a garage owner enabled his apprentice to use advanced engine machine systems to isolate faulty parts in a vehicle and then replace them.
- Managers and assessors have improved the way that they track and monitor the progress that current apprentices make. They identify early those apprentices who are at risk of falling behind and intervene swiftly to support them to catch up. As a result, the great majority of current apprentices on standards-based programmes are making the progress

expected of them.

### Provision for learners with high needs

### Requires improvement

- The college has 87 students who have high needs, 52 of whom are on a foundation programme at entry/level 1 and vocational programmes at levels 2 and 3 at Kirkley Hall. The other 35 students are on vocational programmes at the Ashington campus.
- Teachers on vocational programmes do not have high enough expectations of students who have high needs. They do not set students sufficiently challenging work because they do not use information about the specific achievements of students with which to plan their next steps. The lack of specific learning aims slows the progress that students make.
- Too often, teachers on vocational programmes do not provide feedback following assessment that helps students to understand what they do well and how they can improve the skills that they need to develop to achieve their targets.
- Teachers and support staff on vocational programmes do not review the specific behaviour and knowledge that students develop. They are too quick to guide students on tasks that they may have been able to achieve with greater independence or at a higher level.
- Students studying on foundation programmes successfully develop and practise skills that they need for independent living. They work cooperatively with staff and peers, enabling them to improve their communication skills, make personal choices and travel independently.
- Teachers plan and deliver learning activities that support students on foundation programmes well to carry out a wide range of practical activities. This helps students to develop work-related skills to an appropriate standard and develop effective organisational skills. For example, students take responsibility for cleaning the small animal pens in the zoo at Kirkley Hall.
- Teachers and support staff use a variety of strategies to reduce students' anxieties and manage behaviour effectively. They work well with students with complex needs to support them to prepare for adulthood.
- Students demonstrate a good awareness of personal health and safety. They routinely wear personal protective equipment during practical sessions and move safely around the campuses.
- Leaders and managers use the funding for students who have high needs to provide speech and language therapy. Specialist communication resources, such as bilateral hearing aids and assistive technology, support students to remain on programmes and make progress towards their personal development targets.

### Full-time provision for 14- to 16-year-olds

### Good

- The college's provision for full-time 14- to 16-year-olds is based in its Career College. The college has 16 students aged 14 to 16. Leaders have taken a strategic decision to end the provision when the current cohort of students have completed their second year. As part

of the statutory curriculum, 10 students are studying rural tourism and six are studying engineering.

- Leaders and managers have taken effective steps to tackle the very poor student behaviour that resulted in too many students in 2017/18 making slow progress. New specialist staff were appointed to lead and teach in the Career College from the beginning of this academic year. As a result, students' behaviour has been transformed and students now demonstrate maturity in their approach to their studies.
- Managers have developed effective behavioural strategies that teachers have adopted and apply consistently. As a result, attendance has improved significantly and there have been no exclusions so far this year compared with five in the previous year.
- Students develop good employability and technical skills on their vocational programmes. Students on motor vehicle courses learn how to service cars, and students on the tourism programme develop an understanding of marketing and customer service through placements in the commercial shop at Kirkley Hall. Students understand the importance of punctuality to their future employment prospects.
- Students make good progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Teachers make effective use of vocational sessions to develop students' practical use of English and mathematical skills.
- Students receive effective careers advice that enables them to decide on their next steps. The great majority of students have already identified that they want to progress to higher level courses in motor vehicle, travel and tourism, small animal care and construction.
- Support for students is highly effective. The college has dedicated teams on both campuses made up of learning support workers, emotional and mental health officers, and careers advisers. They communicate well together to ensure that support is instantly available when needed. Managers use the pupil premium appropriately to support the transport needs of students.
- Students feel safe. They have their own dedicated and monitored spaces on both campuses. Support assistants escort students during breaks and at lunchtimes.
- Teachers do not consistently check or correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors either in students' work or through feedback on assignments. As a result, students continue to repeat the same errors in their written work and do not master the spellings of technical words used in vocational subjects.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	130773
Type of provider	General further education college
Age range of learners	14+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	6,200
Principal	Ian Clinton OBE
Telephone number	01670 841200
Website	<a href="http://www.northumberland.ac.uk">www.northumberland.ac.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	314	141	419	367	530	286	17	271
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	236	186	97	200	1	16		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	16							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	87							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal, curriculum, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Charles Searle, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Hunsley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tracey Mace-Akroyd	Her Majesty's Inspector
Debra Forsythe-Conroy	Ofsted Inspector
Derek Williams	Ofsted Inspector
David Sykes	Ofsted Inspector
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Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Gillian Forrester	Ofsted Inspector

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