

Gateshead College

Progress monitoring report

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| Unique reference number: | 130551 |
| Name of lead inspector: | Ken Merry, Her Majesty's Inspector |
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| Type of provider: | General further education college |
| Address: | Baltic Campus Quarryfield Road Gateshead NE8 3BE |

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Gateshead College was last inspected in January 2020. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and governors have worked effectively to address the college's significant financial weaknesses. They have taken appropriate action, such as undertaking a college-wide review of the staffing structure to reduce operating costs and identifying surplus property within the college estate that can be sold. They have worked closely with the funding agency and commercial lenders to ensure that they have a sustainable recovery plan in place. As a result, the college's financial position has been stabilised.

Leaders now place sufficient emphasis on the overview and monitoring of apprenticeship provision. They hold curriculum managers to account for the quality

of apprentices' training and they closely monitor apprentices' progress through recently introduced processes. As a result, curriculum managers are more aware of the apprentices who are making less than expected progress and take swifter action to ensure that these apprentices catch up. However, this improved focus on apprenticeship provision is too recent to have had a full impact.

Governors now receive frequent and accurate information about the financial and quality performance of the college. The recent introduction of specific performance indicators means that governors are now better able to hold leaders to account for the performance of the college. The recent appointment of several new governors with education and finance experience means that board members have a better understanding of the college and can challenge leaders more effectively about areas of concern. For example, governors now receive and scrutinise monthly management accounts to ensure close oversight of finances.

Leaders continue to focus on maintaining the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive. While most learning is currently provided online or remotely, leaders monitor closely the attendance of learners and apprentices at sessions. However, arrangements to monitor and evaluate the quality of online and remote learning require further development, so that leaders can be assured that it is of a consistently high standard and that learners make good progress.

Staff have access to a wide range of training, personalised support and examples of good practice to develop and enhance their skills in teaching online and remotely. However, a few tutors still require further support and training to improve their confidence and skills.

Learners joining the college complete 'tech checks' to ensure that they have the appropriate technology to enable them to access online and remote learning. Where necessary, learners receive equipment and access to technology to support their learning through discretionary bursary funding. Learners who are studying practical, skills-based subjects receive support with their remote learning through the supply of specialist equipment, such as drawing boards in engineering and the ingredients to make a set recipe in professional cookery.

Teaching staff review the order in which they plan to teach key topics. For example, in construction and in hairdressing, tutors prioritise skills development sessions to ensure that learners gain the core practical skills that they need. In early years, tutors teach underpinning knowledge units at the start of the programmes rather than alongside external work placements, so that learners will have more time available to complete their placements when COVID-19 restrictions allow.

Staff responsible for careers advice and guidance have adapted the support that they provide in response to the restrictions caused by the pandemic. They use technology to provide advice to learners through, for example, the use of video calls. They provide support to learners and apprentices about how to conduct themselves during online interviews in recognition that many employers and universities are not currently conducting face-to-face recruitment activities. Staff encourage all learners

and apprentices to develop a career plan at the start of their programme and provide careers guidance to them throughout their programme.

Leaders maintain strong relationships with partner organisations. They work very effectively with local businesses to ensure that the curriculum offer is responsive to regional skills needs and employment opportunities for local people. Leaders develop innovative training programmes for employment opportunities that require a high level of skill, such as the PlanBEE programme in architectural design, which is led by a consortium of employers.

Staff adapt safeguarding approaches to ensure that learners and apprentices are safe, including when not attending the college. Staff complete frequent learner welfare checks by telephone to ensure that learners have the support that they need. Staff receive appropriate training to support learners in challenging circumstances. As a result, staff completing checks on learners can recognise when they might need to take further action to support learners in need.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- continue the recovery from the financial difficulties that the college faces, while maintaining the quality of education that learners and apprentices receive
- sustain the implementation of the new arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the apprenticeship provision, so that a much higher proportion of apprentices successfully complete their programmes within the expected timescale
- further develop the process for monitoring the quality of online and remote teaching to ensure that it is of a consistently high standard and that learners make the progress expected of them.

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