

Inspection of Derwentside College

Inspection dates: 4 to 7 October 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Derwentside College is a general further education college in Consett, County Durham. It provides education programmes for young people, adult learning courses and apprenticeships. Currently, there are 306 learners on education programmes for young people and 268 adult learners, all studying on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. In addition, 1,624 apprentices are studying on programmes at level 2 to level 5, with the majority working at level 3. Derwentside College works with three subcontractors.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners and apprentices demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They show mutual respect, cooperate effectively and are keen to learn. For example, on access to higher education programmes, learners demonstrate high levels of commitment and ambition to achieve the grades necessary for entry to university. Apprentices speak positively of their programme and how it is enabling them to learn new skills and knowledge, and is preparing them for their next steps.

Learners successfully gain new knowledge and skills on their English and mathematics courses due to the quality of teaching that they receive. Staff use effective strategies to provide support in class to address misconceptions, including inaccurate grammar and punctuation. As a result, learners improve their writing and grammatical skills. They can use punctuation appropriately and accurately identify aspects of writing such as rhetorical questions and emotive language.

Learners and apprentices attend well and are punctual. In the very small numbers of instances of non-attendance, staff ensure that learners and apprentices catch up with missed work and remain on track.

The large majority of learners and apprentices have a reasonable understanding of issues that prepare them for life in modern Britain. They gain a good understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy and the rule of law. Apprentices on the level 4 children, young people and families standard, for example, understand the importance of the rule of law in terms of legislation and how it relates to quality standards, policies and regulations in residential children's homes.

Teachers and trainers ensure that learners and apprentices develop their knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe, including working safely. Young learners on hairdressing programmes, for example, are aware of how to protect themselves from local risks, including the risk of drink spiking. Apprentices learn a range of health and safety topics at the start of their apprenticeship, which prepares them well in their work settings, particularly those working in dangerous settings, such as building sites.

Learners and apprentices benefit from participating in a range of skills competitions and trips, which contribute positively to their personal development. On the level 2 carpentry and joinery apprenticeship standard, apprentices participate in competitions such as SkillBuild, as part of the WorldSkills initiative. In addition, joiners have visited Germany for a two-week residential stay, where they developed traditional hand-craft skills.

Staff provide effective careers advice to learners and apprentices. For example, learners in access to higher education benefit from guest speakers from local universities who provide specific advice about applications and interviews as well as detailed information about the range of employment opportunities available on

completion of higher-level study. As a result, they are well prepared for their next steps and able to make good choices.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work well with a range of local, regional and national employers to meet their skills needs. They support employers well to ensure that people gain the skills and behaviours they need to be successful in life and to gain and sustain employment. Leaders work with job centres and employers to identify staff shortages and skills gaps in the local region and plan sector work-based academy programmes (SWAPs), which have been successful in supporting unemployed adults to get back into work. For example, they have helped the North East Autism Society to design SWAPs to fill job vacancies which are difficult to recruit to.

Staff work well with employers to design and adapt apprenticeship standards to meet employers' needs. They offer a much-needed apprenticeship in roofing to meet growing local demand in the construction industry. Major national housebuilders, such as Persimmon, use the college to train their roofing apprentices.

Leaders rightly recognise that there is more work to do to encourage young people to attend the college to gain the skills that they need to take advantage of local and regional job opportunities. A high proportion of young people are not in employment, education or training and, in order to access training, some young people have to travel to other colleges outside the area.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have in place a clear annual strategic plan that identifies challenging and aspirational objectives and targets up to 2026 and covers all aspects of the provision. They monitor progress against the plan, identifying accurately where additional actions are needed to enable them to achieve objectives and targets. Progress towards objectives in the plan are also carefully monitored by the board.

Leaders and managers promote positive values and a supportive and inclusive culture throughout the college. Staff enjoy working at the college and are well supported by leaders and managers to do well in their job roles. As a result, there is low staff attrition, with staff typically staying in employment at the college for a long time.

Leaders have in place a comprehensive quality improvement process that focuses on how well staff enable learners to develop new knowledge and skills. This includes teaching and learning days, standardisation meetings, learner visits and 'deep dives' into curriculum areas. Leaders take appropriate account of the outcomes of quality assurance activities and provide relevant support and intervention to improve

practices. Leaders maintain effective oversight of subcontractors' activity to ensure that this provision is of a high standard.

Leaders have invested significantly in the college's resources to enhance learners' experience and ensure that learners have access to the most current resources. These include industry-standard resources that replicate those in professional working environments. For example, leaders and managers have invested in new hair and beauty salon facilities so that learners have access to high-quality and current equipment that prepares them well for working in the sector.

Managers work closely with employers to meet their needs. For example, a request from an employer to focus on mental health and autism spectrum disorder led to these topics being included in the delivery of the level 3 lead adult care worker apprenticeship. Training consultants meet with workplace managers when they visit employers to discuss how the content of the apprenticeship programme can be improved to meet employers' needs. Managers have set up recruitment academies to aid recruitment to shortage areas within local health trusts, such as health care assistants.

Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that enables learners and apprentices to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they require to progress to the next stage in education, training or employment. Staff plan and sequence the curriculum effectively, to help learners and apprentices transfer their new knowledge to long-term memory. For example, training consultants are mindful of training that apprentices do in the workplace and take account of this when they plan off-the-job training.

Leaders and managers appoint staff who are well qualified and experienced to deliver their programmes and provide learners and apprentices with high-quality teaching and relevant information. Staff benefit from a useful induction process that ensures that they understand their roles and are appropriately supported and challenged. As a result, they feel committed to the college and its vision and aims from the start of their employment. Leaders and managers ensure that staff continue to improve and enhance their pedagogical skills and their industry knowledge. Staff access a wide range of professional development opportunities, including five 'back to industry' days a year, to maintain occupational competence.

Most teachers successfully develop learners' skills and knowledge. On the access to higher education course, learners quickly develop their skills in academic writing, note-taking, presentations and referencing, to support them in their studies and at university. As a result, they develop their confidence and readiness for higher education. However, in a few cases, teachers do not reinforce knowledge well enough as learners move from one level of their study to another. For example, on level 3 hairdressing courses, younger learners struggle to use correct terminology or recall how to carry out tests and record results, which were topics they had covered on earlier courses.

Learners with additional needs are identified swiftly, and appropriate support is put in place to meet their needs. All learners meet learning support staff at enrolment for an initial interview followed by a more thorough interview while on programme. As a result, detailed support plans are in place and shared with all parties concerned to ensure that learners with additional needs are well supported and that staff are fully aware of their needs. Learning support assistants work effectively in the classrooms and workshops to create a supportive environment. They liaise well with curriculum staff to ensure that they know the content of the sessions and what their specific role will be. Learning support assistants make frequent checks on learners' progress and understanding during lessons. As a result, learners with additional needs are comfortable expressing concerns about their learning and asking questions to clarify and secure their own understanding.

Staff recognise that many adult learners have been out of employment for a long time, which may have had a negative impact on their confidence and resilience. They focus first on confidence-building before moving on to teaching specific vocational and employability skills. As a result, most unemployed adult learners improve their chances of success at interview and a high proportion progress into employment or to other positive destinations.

Apprentices take pride in their work and are enthusiastic about what they are learning and how they are able to apply this learning to job roles. As a result of effective on- and off-the-job training, most apprentices make good progress in learning new knowledge and skills. For example, employers with apprentices working towards level 2 carpentry and joinery report that apprentices are developing skills beyond what they expected. In addition, apprentices who need English and mathematics qualifications make good progress, and a high proportion achieve their qualifications.

Until recently, staff had not monitored the progress of apprentices well enough, particularly on the level 3 adult care worker apprenticeship. They had not provided sufficient support for apprentices who had fallen behind in order to help them catch up, and, as a result, a significant minority of apprentices are now past their planned end date. The recently appointed manager for this area is fully aware of the improvements required and is taking action to improve the quality of monitoring and support, which is beginning to have a positive impact.

Leaders and managers have in place an appropriate governance board that meets frequently and whose members are fully aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses. A recent review of governance suggested various initiatives, including developing specialist roles on aspects such as safeguarding and teaching and learning. However, these initiatives have only recently been introduced, and therefore, it is too soon to measure their impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers ensure at recruitment that all staff are qualified to the standard expected, are safe to work with young people and vulnerable adults, and have the right to work in the United Kingdom.

Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate statutory training. This includes annual training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty to ensure that staff have the most recent guidance. Consequently, staff are able to support their learners and apprentices well with related issues, should any arise, and escalate any concerns to the appropriate staff at the college.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They benefit from mandatory sexual consent training, and they report that bullying, harassment and sexual abuse are not tolerated. Learners and apprentices know who to contact if they have any concerns and are confident that instances of bullying or harassment would be dealt with swiftly.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Encourage more young people living locally to attend the college to gain the skills that they need to take advantage of local and regional job opportunities.
- Ensure that improvements in the monitoring of apprentices' progress and the support that is provided for apprentices who fall behind are sustained.
- Improve communication with employers to increase their involvement in apprenticeship progress reviews.
- Ensure that all teachers check that learners have fully acquired the knowledge and skills that they should have gained during previous courses so that they can identify and address any gaps in learning.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130658
Address	Front Street Consett County Durham DH8 5EE
Contact number	01207 585900
Website	www.derwentside.ac.uk
Principal and CEO	Chris Todd
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 April 2016
Main subcontractors	Delta North Vision Training Awitt Group

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal for curriculum and quality, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the further education and skills inspection handbook and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Glenise Burrell, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Philippa Firth	His Majesty's Inspector
Joanne Stork	His Majesty's Inspector
Sue Slassor	Ofsted Inspector
Rhys Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Keen	Ofsted Inspector
Priscilla McGuire	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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