

Inspection of New College Durham

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 November 2022

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

Information about this provider

New College Durham is a large general further education college that provides part-time and full-time courses from entry level to level 3 and apprenticeships from level 2 to level 7. It also offers a range of community-based courses and projects. The college provides academic and vocational learning programmes for young people and adults, with apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 4,400 learners, of whom around half were enrolled on education programmes for young people and half on adult learning programmes. There were approximately 1,000 apprentices. The college works with eight main subcontractors to provide specialist apprenticeship provision and adult learning programmes across the north east.

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

Learners and apprentices demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and participate well in lessons. They take pride in their work, which in most instances is of good quality and clearly presented. Adult learners in catering produce photographs of the steps that they follow when preparing food in training kitchens to proudly showcase what they have learned. Learners on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are keen to contribute in class and know that when they pronounce words incorrectly, staff will support them to improve their pronunciation and help them to construct phrases accurately.

Learners and apprentices demonstrate appropriate behaviour in lessons and communal areas. They are respectful, polite and courteous. Learners feel valued and listened to during the many high-quality interactions that they have with college staff. For example, in enrichment sessions, learners in health and social care discuss sensitive topics about sexual health, including how to be aware of signs that may indicate an unhealthy relationship, such as coercive control.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at the college. They know how to report any concerns to staff and are confident that they will be listened to. Learners value on-site security and know that bullying and harassment are not tolerated. They are confident that any negative behaviour would be challenged. Learners with high needs demonstrate an appropriate understanding of how to stay safe. They know not to disclose personal information to people they do not know, including not sending inappropriately explicit images or messages.

Learners and apprentices enjoy participating in a comprehensive enrichment programme that helps them discover their interests and talents beyond their main programme of study. Learners attend a wide range of activities, such as creating props for a local theatre group and personal fitness activities, including volleyball, foot-tennis and badminton. Adult learners on ESOL courses volunteer at food banks and take part in cultural visits to York where they learn about British history. Learners enter local, national and inter-college skills competitions.

Attendance is too low in a few subjects on education programmes for young people. Leaders are taking appropriate action to improve this. They clearly identify the learners who do not attend well enough and ensure that support is in place to help them to catch up, by putting on extra lessons. However, despite some early signs of improvement, attendance in a few subjects for learners aged 16 to 18 years on full-time level 1 programmes and on English and mathematics functional skills courses remains too low.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers engage very successfully with a wide range of relevant stakeholders to understand the skills needs of the local, regional and national economy. They work closely with combined authorities, local county councils and local enterprise partnerships to ensure that their priorities are integral to the college's short, medium and long-term plans. The college is the lead provider for the North East Institute of Technology, working with several other colleges. This collaborative work has led to the inclusion of new course content relating to the pharmaceutical industry, technical manufacture and digital skills training.

Leaders work very effectively with specialist subcontractors to provide highly relevant training for staff, learners and apprentices in emerging technologies such as electrode manufacture and retrofit construction. Leaders recognise that emerging technologies in the engineering and manufacturing sectors, such as autonomous vehicle maintenance and servicing, do not yet have clearly defined training pathways. They work closely with their subcontractors and with large vehicle manufacturers to design and deliver training that meets these needs.

Leaders actively involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of the curriculum. Their involvement results in effective training programmes that meet employers' needs. For example, leaders gathered feedback from the local police force about the need to prepare staff better for night shifts. They then introduced additional training in collaboration with the police to ensure that learners are better prepared for working at night.

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

Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision to be one of the leading providers of training and education in the north east. They have introduced new programmes and redesigned many aspects of the existing curriculum to meet the current and future skills needs of the region. Leaders work very effectively with partners and subcontractors that develop and provide specialist training, such as courses in hydrogen heating systems and firefighter apprenticeships. Managers in motor vehicle partner with large automotive manufacturers to enable them to teach learners about newer industrial technologies, such as how to isolate batteries safely in electric vehicles prior to servicing and repairing them.

Leaders have invested in a range of high-quality resources for learners and apprentices. They understand that learning is more effective when resources replicate realistic working environments. Managers in health and social care identified a severe shortage of skilled employees in the sector. College leaders responded quickly by setting up a simulated residential setting for learners to develop the occupational skills needed to work in care homes. On the level 3

firefighter apprenticeship, staff teach apprentices using high-quality digital simulations of fire emergencies that replicate real-life situations involving the police, ambulance staff and the general public.

Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced in their roles. They continue to improve their skills through sharing best practice and by attending a range of external training. Staff in catering take part in skills competitions alongside their learners. Learners appreciate the fact that teachers have up-to-date industrial experience. Learners in catering, for instance, value the experience that teachers bring from working as head chefs.

Teachers plan and sequence the curriculum effectively to ensure that learners develop their knowledge and skills over time and can apply them in increasingly complex activities. In GCSE English, staff plan and revise the curriculum each term, based on the progress that learners make. They focus on the key areas for improvement highlighted at each assessment stage. Learners on courses in information and communication technologies plan, design and complete basic spreadsheets to build on their limited previous knowledge of such subjects. They learn how to further analyse basic data information and build more complex formulas into spreadsheets so that they are able to design bespoke digital solutions for clients.

Teachers use a range of effective teaching methods to develop learners' skills over time. These include simplifying learning into smaller topics, enabling learners to grasp key concepts well. Teachers and assessors use real-life examples to teach apprentices the techniques required for double-entry bookkeeping. They use digital whiteboards well to illustrate the steps that apprentices need to follow when compiling customer tax returns. In level 2 autocare, tutors provide apprentices with several opportunities to repeat tasks, such as taking measurements from an oil gauge until they master the technique. As a result of effective teaching, learners and apprentices gain confidence, produce good-quality practical work and develop the high-level technical skills needed in their vocations.

Most teachers use assessment well to identify how successfully learners are progressing. Teachers use a range of quizzes and questions to help learners recall information from previous learning. In level 3 health and social care, teachers use questioning very well to check what learners know and remember. They require learners to expand and consolidate their answers regarding contraindications of prescribed medication for dementia patients and the potential negative impacts of cognitive behaviour therapies. However, in a very small number of cases, such as on a level 2 barbering course for adult learners, teachers do not use assessment effectively enough to check learners' skills gaps.

Teachers skilfully integrate vocational English and mathematics skills into topics. For example, teachers in level 3 fashion ensure that learners develop the mathematical knowledge and skills that they need to progress to further study and employment. They teach learners about accurate measurement, proportion, scaling and

perspective. Learners apply these confidently in the production of scaled models and pattern blocks.

Staff use their knowledge and experience to provide learners with high needs with effective support that helps them to develop their knowledge, confidence and self-esteem. They use information from education, health and care plans to set relevant targets for most learners, enabling them to develop, reinforce and consolidate key knowledge, skills and behaviours. However, in a few instances, staff set targets that are too broad or vague, and this impacts on learners' ability to identify clearly their key areas for development. On specialist courses for learners with high needs, a few staff use learning resources that are not age-appropriate.

Learners and apprentices benefit from many opportunities to consider their career options. Teachers and specialist careers advisers provide learners with impartial careers advice and guidance at different stages in their learning. Monthly careers sessions include industry talks, interviews, volunteering and guest speakers. As a result, learners and apprentices have a good understanding of potential career routes.

Leaders provide teachers with an extensive programme of training and support to help them improve their teaching practice. They have implemented a proactive coaching model so that staff are fully involved in their own professional development as teachers. Managers carry out frequent checks on the quality of teaching and provide comprehensive feedback to teachers on how they can improve their practice. Staff value this support highly and take pride in their teaching skills.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas that require improvement across the college. They undertake effective quality assurance activities, including frequent curriculum reviews, to ensure that learners and apprentices benefit from a good quality of education and to assure themselves that learners and apprentices are making good progress. This has resulted, for example, in a significant improvement in the quality of teaching on functional skills courses.

Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. They challenge leaders appropriately to improve weaker aspects of the provision. The governing body is made up of highly skilled and knowledgeable members who have a clear understanding of their role. Governors have held roles as headteachers in schools and in local councils, and most are active within large local businesses. They have defined roles across the various college committees, such as leading on quality, finance and safeguarding.

Leaders provide a range of useful services to enhance staff well-being, such as on-site health drop-in sessions during college hours. However, a few staff are unhappy about their workloads and the increased pace of change at the college. Leaders are aware of this and hold frequent staff forums to enable them to understand more fully the issues affecting staff at work. They respond sensibly to feedback from staff to improve their working arrangements, such as flexible and hybrid working hours.

Leaders have accurately identified that achievement for learners on education programmes for young people has declined and is too low on level 1 foundation learning programmes, in functional skills mathematics and in a few other smaller vocational areas. They have implemented a range of intervention strategies to address low performance, such as increasing oversight of performance through monthly quality review meetings with managers, visits to lessons and checks on curriculum content. However, it is too early to determine the effectiveness of these actions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have carried out appropriate safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding lead and the three deputy designated leads are trained to level 3 in safeguarding. Leaders provide staff with frequent, themed safeguarding training. They hold best-practice events with their subcontractors and other partner organisations to provide them with insights that are relevant to safeguarding across the region.

Leaders take appropriate and effective action to keep learners and apprentices safe. They deal sensitively with disclosures and referrals, and act swiftly to address any concerns. In the few instances where there are suspected sexual harassment or physical violence claims against learners, these are escalated quickly and referred to the police or social services.

Leaders know that local risks such as knife crime, county lines, drug gangs and lone terrorist activities are potential threats to their learners and apprentices. They invite guest speakers from organisations such as the police and the NHS into college to talk to learners about the risks to them in their community.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve attendance for learners aged 16 to 18 years, particularly for those on level 1 programmes.
- Identify the reasons for low achievement on level 1 programmes for education for young people, including in functional skills level 1 mathematics, and act swiftly to ensure that a higher proportion of learners achieve their qualifications.
- Ensure that staff teaching learners with high needs set consistently helpful targets and use age-appropriate learning materials at all times.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130659
Address	Framwellgate Moor Centre Framwellgate Moor Durham DH1 5ES
Contact number	01913754000
Website	http://www.newdur.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Andy Broadbent
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	June 2009
Main subcontractors	Eden Training Academy Limited Orangebox Training Solutions Limited Magpie Training Limited JPR Trade Skills Limited Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority Lomax Training Services Limited Durham Combined Fire and Rescue Authority Rhino Training Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the deputy principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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

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