

Inspection of Northern College for Residential Adult Education

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Northern College for Residential Adult Education is a specialist designated institution situated at Wentworth Castle, near Barnsley. It provides a range of short community learning courses designed to re-engage adults in learning and a programme of longer accredited courses, most of which are at levels 1 to 3. Accredited courses include access to higher education, pre-access, digital, education and training, counselling, English and mathematics. Most courses take place at the college, including at weekends and in the evening. In addition, a few courses are based in the community. Students can attend courses on a residential or non-residential basis. At the time of the inspection, there were 176 students, the large majority of whom were on accredited courses. In the current academic year, up to the time of the inspection, 520 students have been enrolled. There have been 549 enrolments on short community learning courses, with many students enrolling on a number of courses, and 321 enrolments on accredited courses. A high proportion of students are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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

Leaders and teachers promote a culture of care and empathy in an inclusive environment where students feel valued, supported and respected. Students respond well to this culture and demonstrate a high level of respect for staff and other students. They attend their lessons well and develop the positive behaviours that they need to support their progression into employment or further study.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often arrive at the college with low self-esteem, overcome significant personal barriers to develop their skills and confidence. They improve their resilience and confidence while at the college, which enables them to take positive steps towards their long-term goals and aspirations.

Tutors have high expectations for what their students can achieve. Their encouragement and support motivates students to meet and, in many instances, exceed their personal learning goals. A high proportion of students on short community learning courses build their confidence and skills through attending a number of these courses. Many then move on to higher-level learning either at the college or elsewhere, while others use the skills and attributes that they gain to enhance their personal lives and the contribution that they can make to their communities. Most students on accredited courses gain substantial new knowledge and skills, and a high proportion achieve the qualifications that they need to pursue their career goals. Most students on the access to higher education programme secure places at universities on completion of their course.

Leaders provide an exceptional and unique environment for learning. The college is located at Wentworth Castle and adjoins National Trust gardens, to which students have access. Students value highly the relaxed and friendly ambience that pervades the college and the opportunity to enjoy the building and its surroundings. Many students attend residentially, and they speak enthusiastically about the extra benefits that this brings.

Most students have a thorough understanding of British values and speak confidently about them in the context of their course. For example, students on a mental health awareness course explain how being a democratic student means taking turns when contributing to discussion and listening to the opinions of others.

Students feel safe at the college. They benefit from studying in a secure environment. Residential students enjoy the freedom of being able to move around the college campus and the surrounding grounds, both during the day and in the evening, without risk.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders work with a number of stakeholders to gain an understanding of regional skills needs. They liaise with the mayoral combined authorities of South Yorkshire

and West Yorkshire to plan and provide courses that enable adults, including those who are furthest from the labour market, to move towards sustainable employment. They work in partnership with the National Trust and Barnsley Council, and have developed a level 1 horticulture course that contributes to upskilling adults in the local community, in line with the Barnsley 2030 strategic growth plan.

Leaders have developed a number of initiatives to meet local skills needs. They work collaboratively on the Stocksbridge regeneration project in Sheffield to contribute to its aim of improving educational attainment in the community. The college is the key partner delivering the adult skills element of the project through developing residents' English, mathematics and digital skills. Leaders also work collaboratively with a local university to provide a route into higher education. This has resulted in the planning of a foundation degree programme which will commence at the college in September 2023.

Leaders and managers engage and consult with their stakeholders as they develop and plan a curriculum that prepares students to progress to the next steps in education or employment and to meet skills needs. Employers from the health sector contribute to courses through, for example, delivering presentations about employment opportunities in the sector. However, on many courses stakeholders have limited involvement in planning and implementing the curriculum.

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

Leaders have a clear ambition and rationale for their curriculum, which aims to develop the attributes, behaviours, knowledge and skills that adults need to make positive changes in their lives and progress onto further courses or into work. They maintain a strong focus on recruiting adults from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and those who need a high level of support to re-engage with education and succeed.

Since the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, student numbers have fallen significantly, making the curriculum plan less viable. Despite this, leaders are maintaining the existing offer as they work through current financial challenges in anticipation of a more settled future. Simultaneously, they are in the process of identifying how they can develop the curriculum to meet a wider range of needs and ensure sustainability. This activity includes the Stocksbridge community project and the development of a foundation degree. Leaders continue to work in partnership with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and local charities to recruit adults who would benefit from the joining college courses.

Leaders manage staff performance effectively. All staff have a clear and helpful personal development plan which is monitored frequently. Tutors carry out a wide range of relevant professional development, including mandatory training on topics such as safeguarding and equality, training on improving pedagogical and subject-specific skills, and activities linked to objectives and actions in their personal development plan. Leaders carefully evaluate the quality of the teaching that tutors

provide. Actions for improvement and development are specific and helpful to the tutor.

Leaders ensure that staff have manageable workloads and are considerate of the well-being of their staff. Staff benefit from access to a range of courses and resources to support their well-being.

Knowledgeable and appropriately experienced governors receive comprehensive information about the college's performance and are keenly aware of the college's mission, values, strengths and challenges. They have a thorough understanding of specific areas that need to improve. They use their understanding of the college's performance well to support and challenge leaders.

Leaders do not collect sufficient information to enable them to evaluate the overall impact of their community learning programme. They gather information about progression from community learning courses to other courses, but do not have a full enough picture of how effectively the courses enhance students' confidence and resilience, improve the quality of their lives and help them deal with mental anxiety. As a result, they are not fully assured that the courses meet their intended aim. Leaders recognise this and have plans in place to gather and make more effective use of information about the impact of community learning.

Students benefit from careers advice and guidance that helps them to consider their next steps when they leave the college. Guest speakers from organisations such as the NHS visit the college to talk about apprenticeship opportunities and other progression routes. Staff from other local colleges give talks about higher education provision at their colleges as an alternative offer to university. However, until recently, leaders have not assured themselves that effective arrangements are in place to provide students on community learning courses with advice and guidance about suitable progression routes within the college. They have now put new arrangements in place for recording the advice and guidance that students receive, but it is too soon to see the impact of these arrangements.

Leaders and managers structure the college's curriculum appropriately to help students to build their confidence and skills. On the community learning forest confidence course, when building a forest shelter students learn to tie knots, develop their tool confidence and consider health and safety aspects. As a result of the course, students develop their confidence and often acquire a thirst for further learning, with most going on to a further community learning course or progressing to a longer accredited course.

Tutors plan learning carefully to enable students to acquire new knowledge incrementally, link it to previous learning and consolidate their understanding. As a result, most students progress well on their course and are prepared effectively for their next steps. For example, students on the social studies access to higher education course first learn key concepts such as prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping, and then apply this knowledge through exploring case studies and carrying out research projects. Students on the health science course first study

biology and consider issues such as diversity in the care sector before moving on to social models of health and the psychology of health. On all courses, tutors successfully integrate the teaching of English and mathematical skills.

Most students on English and mathematics courses attain their qualifications and progress to the next level of learning. Most tutors use a range of learning activities successfully to enable students to understand key concepts. For example, in English lessons, students use mini-whiteboards to repeatedly 'show and tell' their answers, while working collaboratively with other students to solve tasks with increasing difficulty. However, in a few mathematics lessons, students who have missed previous learning are not set tasks to help them catch up and make good progress.

Tutors consistently and effectively assess students' knowledge and understanding by using targeted and purposeful questions. They use recap exercises, questioning, peer assessment and written assessments to help students to remember what they have studied. As a result, tutors identify accurately the areas of the curriculum where students need to improve their understanding, give helpful feedback to students on what they need to do to improve, and provide specific support and tuition as needed.

A high proportion of students have additional learning needs. These students receive effective support from their tutors and support staff. The college provides a wide range of specialist learning and mobility aids to help students participate fully in learning and progress in their studies. Additional support provided outside lessons helps students to learn at their own pace and in their own time.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders successfully promote a culture of safeguarding. They have in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures that provide a clear account of the college's position on safeguarding and the actions that leaders, managers and staff take to keep students safe. This includes arrangements to ensure that students attending on a residential basis are safe. Leaders and managers take relevant action and provide effective support to any students who are at risk.

Leaders recruit staff who are safe to work with adults, including those who are vulnerable. Before appointing staff, they carry out appropriate checks, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks, and follow up any gaps in employment. They apply the same arrangements to contractors and governors.

Leaders take appropriate action in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. They have in place a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment which covers a range of risks relating to radicalisation and extremism. Tutors help students to learn about these and other risks in their communities, such as knife crime and the grooming of young people to deliver drugs. A few students, however, are not sufficiently aware of potential risks in the areas in which they live.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the arrangements for evaluating how effectively the community learning programme enables students to progress by rapidly implementing plans to gather and make effective use of information about the impact of this programme.
- Fully implement the new arrangements for recording the information, advice and guidance that students receive, so that leaders can be assured that all students are benefiting from the support that they need to progress towards achieving their goals and aspirations.
- Ensure that all students on mathematics courses develop their skills and make good progress.
- Maintain the strong focus on current and planned actions to secure the college's future viability.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130525
Address	Wentworth Castle Stainborough Barnsley S75 3ET
Contact number	01226 776000
Website	www.northern.ac.uk
Principal and CEO	Emma Beal
Provider type	Specialist designated institution
Date of previous inspection	17 June 2014
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, 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

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