

Inspection of East Durham College

Inspection dates: 30 April to 3 May 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
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	Good

Information about this provider

East Durham College is a general further education college in County Durham. It provides education programmes for young people, including provision for learners aged 14 to 16, adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and provision for learners with high needs. The college has three campuses: the Peterlee Campus and Technical Academy, both in Peterlee, and Houghall Campus in Durham.

At the time of the inspection, there were 3,079 learners on adult learning programmes. There were 1,850 young people aged 16 to 18 enrolled, including on T-level programmes, and 84 learners aged 14 to 16 studying full time at the college. There were 91 learners with high needs, most of whom were studying specialist programmes. There were 313 apprentices on a range of apprenticeship standards, of whom 128 were aged 16 to 18 and 185 aged 19 and above.

The college works with one subcontractor to teach online short courses and distance learning programmes to adult learners.

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

Learners and apprentices demonstrate exemplary attitudes to their education and training. They value deeply the high expectations that leaders, teachers and coaches have for them and reciprocate by attending well, arriving punctually to sessions and engaging keenly and professionally in the tasks that their teachers set for them.

Learners and apprentices rapidly develop their confidence and resilience. Teachers and coaches support them well to realise the extent of their skills and talents, which learners showcase proudly in regional and national competitions. For example, adult learners on floristry programmes prepare and display pieces for local and high-profile national events. Hairdressing learners earn recognition and win awards in national competitions. A-level chemistry learners represent the college at science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) events at universities, where they contribute to seminars about women and non-binary people in STEM. Learners with high needs participate in sports and creative writing competitions in collaboration with learners from local colleges.

Learners and apprentices study and train in environments that replicate current and future industry practice, with teachers who are experts in their disciplines. Level 2 hairdressing teachers develop learners' skills in contemporary cutting and colouring techniques in working salons. Agriculture learners use industry-standard equipment on a working farm and experience masterclasses in using new technologies with industry experts. Floristry teachers use their status as dual professionals to expose learners to the realities of employment and the current trends in the industry. As a result, learners and apprentices develop industry-relevant skills and professional behaviours and transition quickly into the sectors for which they are trained.

Learners and apprentices are proud and active citizens within their communities, where they embody the fundamental British values that they are taught. They take part in an extensive range of social action projects to address the issues that are of importance in their own lives or of others in the communities where they live and work. Level 2 agriculture learners explore mental health issues in young male farmers and raise money for suicide prevention charities. Creative arts learners work with civic groups and the local arts council to create murals depicting local life and the community's heritage. Level 1 catering learners explore the prominence of social isolation and host afternoon tea and bingo for residents of local care homes. Consequently, learners and apprentices understand the value of diversity in society and how they can enact change to make a positive difference to the lives of others.

Learners and apprentices feel safe due to the culture of care and respect that leaders promote through all aspects of life within the college. They know that bullying and harassment are never tolerated and feel confident that should issues arise, they will be dealt with swiftly and sensitively by knowledgeable and experienced staff, many of whom are trauma-informed practitioners. Learners aged 14 to 16 benefit from safe learning environments in the college, with clear routines to help them thrive and flourish as they adjust to life at the college.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and governors understand very well the local, regional and national skills needs. They have developed purposeful relationships with a wide range of stakeholders to develop and enhance their understanding of skills priorities and how to respond to them. Leaders work closely with membership organisations and skills representative bodies, and chair local skills improvement plan boards.

Stakeholders commend leaders' agility in identifying and responding to skills priorities. Leaders modify existing programmes to ensure that they more accurately address the specific skills that employers need. For example, leaders reviewed the land and wildlife curriculum in readiness for new policy under the Environment Act 2021 and the government's 25 Year Environment Plan around flood plains. Leaders are active partners in the development of new qualifications to meet challenging local and national priorities. For example, they worked with NHS England and a local NHS trust to develop a new mortuary technician standard to meet national need.

Leaders involve stakeholders very effectively in the design and delivery of all parts of the curriculum. They use employer feedback to ensure that the teaching of relevant skills permeates the design of their programmes and approaches to how they are taught. For example, managers in catering incorporate intensive 'skills accelerators' into catering programmes in conjunction with local employers to develop earlier learners' speed and precision when working with knives.

Leaders and managers work closely with local education leaders in schools and colleges to secure a coherent local offer, with clear and inclusive progression routes aligned to learners' starting points and aspirations. They work as a consortium of local college leaders through funded projects to co-design new qualifications in healthcare science and with the Institute of Technology in relation to retrofit, matched to their areas of expertise.

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

Leaders and managers are committed to providing transformative education pathways and enriching the lives of learners and apprentices in the communities that they serve. They have developed a carefully tailored curriculum that prepares learners and apprentices well for their next steps, including those hardest to engage and furthest away from education and employment. Most learners and apprentices make good progress and achieve well.

Leaders and managers ensure that learners with high needs benefit from tailored learning pathways, including supported internships, which develop and enhance their skills and increase their independence and preparation for adulthood. For example, learners on the supported internships at Northumbrian Water acquire

knowledge and skills that enable them to take on further responsibility, in line with their job roles.

Managers and teachers sequence the curriculum logically. Level 2 agriculture teachers plan the curriculum to coincide with weather patterns and local farming calendars to enable learners to apply their learning to the surrounding land-based industries. Teachers of access to higher education programmes support learners to grasp foundation concepts such as cell structures, before moving on to apply these to concepts such as genetics and cell regulation. Consequently, learners and apprentices build and deepen their knowledge and skills over time.

Teachers use effective strategies to help learners and apprentices know and remember more of what they have been taught. Learners with high needs benefit from demonstrations and step-by-step instructions to develop their confidence in the safe handling of small animals, and when herding and weighing animals on the college farm. T-Level childcare teachers use matching activities and mini whiteboards to help learners recall operant conditioning, which learners then apply and reflect on when working with children on placements.

Teachers provide a range of opportunities for learners and apprentices to repeat and practise tasks to develop their competency and refine their skills over time. Level 2 hairdressing teachers use cutting demonstrations to highlight learners' misconceptions, such as when sectioning hair, before directing learners to practise techniques with guided support. Level 2 carpentry learners repeatedly practise the installation of kitchen units to improve their accuracy and confidence in installing to line and level.

Most teachers accurately assess learners' and apprentices' knowledge and skills and provide helpful feedback to support improvement. Teachers use probing questions to test learners' and apprentices' recall of key concepts. They use past examination questions and practical project briefs which learners complete in timed conditions so that they can adapt and apply their knowledge quickly and with increased confidence. For example, teachers on adult veterinary nursing programmes pause practical assessments to identify errors in the sequence of clinical procedures. Teachers on engineering apprenticeships use feedback to help apprentices to work with precision when completing technical drawing. Learners and apprentices respond well to the feedback that they receive and make improvements to complete tasks to a high standard. However, in a few instances, learners on distance learning courses are not sufficiently challenged to recall accurately what they have learned or to reflect on the application of their learning to the workplace.

Learners and apprentices develop the technical fluency required of the sectors in which they learn and train. Level 2 arborist learners are required to use the Latin terms for the plants and trees that they encounter in their job roles. Adult learners on level 3 veterinary nursing programmes use accurate vocabulary in parasitology, which they then apply confidently when working in clinical settings. As a result, learners and apprentices develop the professional attributes and behaviours that employers value highly.

Teachers provide helpful support for learners with additional learning needs. They use assistive technologies in lessons and assessments, such as reading pens and coloured overlays so that learners can access the resources that they need when working in classrooms and online. As a result, learners with additional needs make progress in line with their peers.

Learners and apprentices are supported well to improve their occupational English and mathematical skills. Level 2 healthcare science apprentices receive helpful feedback on the accuracy and structure of written work to help them improve the quality of their written communication. Adult learners on level 3 veterinary nursing programmes complete calculations for saline drips and use readings from temperature records to inform the clinical procedures that they complete. Those studying GCSE English and mathematics make good progress towards achieving their qualifications.

Learners and apprentices benefit from an effective careers programme, including wider exposure to the world of work. Employers visit the college frequently to share their insights into the industries in which learners and apprentices aspire to work. Learners on education programmes for young people undertake meaningful work placements and visits to see how their learning translates in the working world. For example, learners aged 14 to 16 participate in networking events with local employers. Learners on A-level and vocational programmes have frequent encounters with universities to understand the variety of pathways available to them in higher education. As a result of the guidance that they receive, learners and apprentices are well prepared for the demands of further education, training and work, and almost all progress to positive destinations.

Staff ensure that learners and apprentices have a deep understanding of issues that may cause them harm, including knife crime, substance misuse, county lines and threats posed to them when working online. They use local and national intelligence to ensure that learners and apprentices remain alert to the issues that they may encounter now and in the future, including the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. However, a few adult learners and learners with high needs on specialist pathways have a less well-developed understanding of dangers of extremism and how to remain vigilant against potential risks.

Leaders and managers are aware of the strengths of their provision and the areas where further development is needed. They use a range of measures to review the quality of provision, including that of subcontractors, such as 'curriculum health checks' and departmental reviews, and they derive sensible actions to improve provision which they identify as less effective.

Leaders and managers rightly recognise the impact that disruption to staffing has had on the experience of learners on a few A-level courses. They have implemented well-considered strategies to rectify these issues, alongside strategies to reduce the number of learners who leave their course early. However, it is too early to see the full impact of these actions.

Leaders have established a knowledgeable board of governors whose members share their ambitious vision for the college. Members help to steer the college's strategic direction and provide effective support and challenge to leaders to see that their collective vision is realised. Leaders ensure that governors have frequent opportunities to work directly with staff and learners, including in lessons, learner forums and college events, to enable them to see first-hand the impact of leaders' decisions.

Leaders and managers provide many opportunities for staff to enhance their craft of teaching and keep up to date with the professional practice of the industries to which their curriculums are aligned. For example, teachers access a range of courses through the East Durham Educator programme to understand teaching essentials and evidence-based approaches, which they implement in their classrooms. They earn badges to showcase their commitment to professional learning and are encouraged to share practice with their peers through coaching and training events, including an annual teaching and learning conference.

Leaders and managers place a high priority on the well-being of their staff. They ensure that staff have access to counselling services and facilities to support their physical and mental health, including a gym, fitness classes and a programme of social events. As a result, staff feel supported and valued by leaders and managers, and contribute proudly to the college's mission.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Continue to implement actions to improve the experience of learners on the few A-level programmes where they have encountered disruption to their learning.
- Ensure that a higher proportion of learners complete their courses on the few A levels where retention is not as high as on most.
- Ensure that all adult learners on distance learning programmes are sufficiently challenged to recall and apply what they have learned.
- Ensure that all adult learners and learners with high needs in specialist provision understand the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.

Provider details

Unique reference number	131859
Address	Willerby Grove Peterlee County Durham SR8 2RN
Contact number	01915 182000
Website	www.edc.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Suzanne Duncan
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	28 September to 1 October 2021
Main subcontractors	Learning Curve

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-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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