



Northern College

Self-Assessment Report

2019-20

1. Context

The demands of the modern UK workplace and the current economic crisis mean that adult learning is increasingly crucial for people of all ages regardless of their level of skills and qualifications.

Northern College is in a unique position, as the only adult residential College in Yorkshire to be able to offer essential skills for adults and employers in our region and beyond through flexible and accessible modes of delivery - evenings, weekends, blended and residential.

We have a proud and distinguished history of providing educational opportunities for those adults that have returned to learning. Much of what we offer provides a platform to engage people back into education with the aim of designing a supportive learning pathway so that every individual can reach their potential and use their learning to improve their lives both in their community and in the workplace.

We are entering our next exciting phase and have been developing our curriculum offer in readiness for the changes that the devolution of the adult education budget will bring in August 2021. In response to the challenges that Covid-19 is presenting, it is critical that we continue to development and respond to support the recovery needed in communities and in the economy.

74% of enrolments at the College in 2019-20 were from students living within the Sheffield and West Yorkshire City region areas (56% South Yorkshire and 28% West Yorkshire). Both Sheffield and West Yorkshire City regions have set out their skills and education priorities and the College is committed to the challenges laid out. Priority areas of key focus for the College include; responding to a low qualification profile within the existing population, intergenerational worklessness and the connection between health and employment, automation, and the need for enhanced planning between business and education.

Our offer to students, communities and employers consists of:

- a range of community learning programmes that provide essential support for those who are furthest away from the job market to gain confidence, acquire the skills employers want and drive a focus to apply and progress in work.
- intensive English, maths and digital skills offered flexibility to meets the needs of a range of circumstances and levels.
- qualifications at all levels that give adults an opportunity to learn the skills needed to progress through further study, and move into gainful employment at the stage they choose.
- a range of vocationally focused higher education programmes that adults can progress onto with the aim of improving their life and employment opportunities.

Our mission is to inspire positive change through adult education, and working closely with our community, voluntary and employer partners we provide outstanding teaching and learning on our campus based in the grade 1 listed Wentworth Castle and surrounded by 500 acres of National Trust gardens and parkland.

As our offer is predominantly residential, the campus is open 24/7 almost all year round. This allows us to be extremely flexible in the way we offer our programmes, enabling access to adults that may need to attend weekends, evenings or in a blended approach to work round families, jobs and life in general.

We are very proud of our outstanding achievement rates across the provision, and of the excellent feedback we get from our students.

Here's just one of the many comments recently shared with us:

'My experience at Northern College was life changing. I came from a working class family struggling in Liverpool with zero qualifications, but that all changed. I'm a deputy manager now.'

2. Leadership & Management

2.1 Leadership & Management – Strengths

- Leaders have ensured excellent outcomes are sustained across the College despite the challenges of COVID 19 resulting in an overall College retention rate of 96% and an achievement rate of 96%.
- Students achieve excellent results at all levels and across accredited and unaccredited provision (91% achievement on accredited and 97% achievement on unaccredited programmes). The College continues to offer provision from first steps engagement, through to Higher Education.
- Leaders use ambitious whole College and area based performance indicators, to monitor progress with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. As a result, students with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) achieve outstanding results.
- The Leadership team ensures stakeholder engagement is a key feature of the College improvement approach. A refocused partnership approach, built on regional skills requirements, ensures a strong local curriculum intent is evident to all stakeholders. Purposeful progression is clearly articulated for all College provision.
- Excellent community engagement enabled the College to provide education pathways for a range of community / voluntary sector groups including in areas such as upskilling volunteers and supporting the holistic development of adults recovering from substance addiction.
- Collaborative local partnerships ensure the College attracts a variety of students. Enrolments from BAME students increased 8% in 2019/20.

- The leadership team has an ambitious vision for the College and is realising this through refreshing the College structures, policies and practice focused on continuous improvement of the student experience.
- Strong course leadership ensures that teachers have the freedom to develop their own practice in line with the College Mission. External enhancement is used in a planned way to ensure vocational expertise can develop over time. In Essential Skills for example, a tailored package of professional development has led to changes in curriculum content and structure.
- Governors have a clear vision for the College focused on innovation, diversification and promotion. Governors hold leaders to account for the quality of education through approving and overseeing the Curriculum Intent, College SAR / QIP and through the Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee.
- Governors are clear about the College's legal duties and responsibilities, including any risks and ensure these are robustly fulfilled via a detailed governance framework, including a regularity self-assessment, overseen by a qualified clerk and company secretary.
- Leaders are engaged meaningfully with staff across the College. The annual QDP staff survey indicates managers are well connected to the workload of their staff and support effective workload management. The College performs well above the sector on a range of indicators including workload, communications and welfare. Significant in year improvement has taken place in relation to staff engagement with the direction and leadership of the College.
- Rapid and effective professional development to respond to the in year move to online and blended learning focused on individual CPD plans for teachers. Development has been both technical and pedagogical to ensure the quality of the student experience remained high.
- The College safeguarding culture is effective. Staff and governors are clear about roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting students including in the area of extremism. Students know who to contact if an issue arises. Safer recruitment practices are embedded as part of initial staff safeguarding training.
- Equality and diversity policies are well embedded and duties and responsibilities are understood and modelled by students and staff. In 2019-20 the College Student Union recruited an equality and diversity champion to focus on raising awareness of LGBTQ+ rights and the College introduced a chaplaincy service.

2.2 Leadership & Management – Areas for Improvement

- Centralised progression and destination information will drive the curriculum planning and development processes.
- A simplification and streamlining of admissions and enrolment processes including IAG and initial assessment will ensure all students are placed on to the most appropriate course to achieve their goals.
- Building on the whole College CPD plan a targeted approach to vocational and technical CPD for teaching and additional learning support staff will be implemented. This will ensure professional development is progressive and staff continue to develop their skills.

- The approach to teacher Personal Development Plans and appraisal will be embedded into the new streamlined curriculum management structure to ensure improvement is developmental practice led and rapid.

3. Quality of Education

3.1 Intent - Strengths

- Leaders, continue to drive forward an ambitious curriculum. A 3-year Curriculum Intent is ensuring provision is prioritised to meet local and regional needs. Developments in year 1 include the implementation of new curriculum including a Level 3 Access to Health Professions and a series of Online Micro Courses delivered during the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak. Programmes are designed in response to a fast changing landscape and in response to student feedback.
- Staff and student feedback evidences that the College mission is at the forefront of curriculum planning and delivery. Students are supported to develop the knowledge and skills required for positive change and purposeful progression. 79% of students state their studies have supported them to achieve their goals and ambitions.
- Classroom discussions, and Deep Dive activity evidences that the curriculum is planned and sequenced to build on previous teaching and learning and to provide the skills for future learning. As a result, 96% of UCAS applicants were holding a HE offer as of July 2020.
- The English and Maths curriculum, which represents 20% of the College programme provides a foundation for students and is sequenced to ensure a wide, innovative and challenging curriculum enables students to achieve from Entry Level to Level 2.
- Academic ambition is high. Students highlight during classroom visits the benefit they receive from teaching, 1 to 1 coaching and developmental feedback which stretches and challenges them.
- The College is ambitious for all students and tailors provision in order to ensure the widest range of students can benefit from the learning offer. Focused recruitment activity has continued to increase engagement from underrepresented student groups, this has, for example, led to an 8% increase in student numbers from BAME communities in 2019-20.

3.2 Intent - Areas for Improvement

- COVID 19 has amplified the need for the College short course curriculum to be developed in partnership with local and regional employers. In doing so the College will ensure student progression into work or further skills based learning shows continuous improvement.

- The intent and planning of Level 3 programmes will be refreshed to ensure skills for future employment feature on a par with higher study skills development.
- Widening access from male students remains a priority for the College. The College curriculum intent, plus tailored marketing and recruitment activity will be reconsidered in light of COVID 19 to continue to target this area.
- Building on departmental level success, the College will ensure the curriculum for all students includes a focus on the skills for successful progression through the roll out of the College skills framework.

3.3 Implementation - Strengths

- The quality of teaching and support activities are excellent across the College. Students on all types of programmes achieve outstanding results. Achievement rates in all of the College's key sector subject areas are on a par or above national rates. This is mirrored in student satisfaction with 97% of students on short course provision rate the quality of their course as excellent / good.
- Leaders construct a curriculum that is relevant to local, regional and national need. The College continued to grow innovative, bespoke provision designed with voluntary sector partners and on behalf of employer partners in 2019-20 with a focus on needs arising from the move to online delivery.
- The College is a focused, residential, learning environment where 91% of students on short courses rate as excellent / good the impact of residential study on their learning. Use of and feedback on the library, quiet study areas, and the College online learning platform are high. This supplements guided teaching and leads to outstanding quality in assignment based work.
- Curriculum builds incrementally based on prior knowledge. Students' progress from non-accredited through to Degree level provision as part of bespoke progression routes. 90% of students on short courses rate the impact of their College provision on their ability to make choices for the future as excellent / good.
- Teachers with extensive up to date knowledge support those teaching outside of their main subject area through coaching, buddying and peer observation. This proved vital during the move to online delivery, enabling teachers new to online delivery to develop and deliver courses thus ensuring a range of online provision was accessible to students.
- Teachers check understanding systematically in lessons, identify any misconceptions and provide clear, direct and sensitive feedback. This is particularly evident in the pass rates of GCSE English and Maths students for whom grade 4 and above pass rates continued to be outstanding for a 4th year running.
- The use of subject specific and general vocabulary is acquired and effectively used by students thus preparing them for further study and employment. Vocabulary is assessed formally on a range of programmes.

- Critical thinking skills are taught well and support long-term content gain. This results in 96% of Access students securing higher-level study places.

Implementation – Areas for Improvement

3.4

- Despite strong student feedback on the College’s ability to support during the COVID pandemic student achievement and retention for long courses spanning the lockdown period was lower than in usual years, dropping to current national average. Curriculum resilience planning will be a key focus for the coming year.
- A focus on good practice sharing between teachers, looking specifically at areas identified through quality improvement processes will be used to encourage and enable innovative teaching with a focus on digital pedagogy.
- Focus will be given to ensuring feedback is always developmental and provides specific stretch so all students know what to do in order to advance their learning.
- A refreshed system of additional learning support will be implemented to ensure a consistent, high quality offer is planned and sequenced to mirror curriculum expectation.

3.5 Impact – Strengths

- Teaching challenges students and enables them to excel as evidenced by outstanding levels of achievement across the College. The quality assurance of non-accredited courses mimics that of accredited provision, ensuring students’ progress and achieve equally well across the College.
- The College achieves excellent outcomes for students from disadvantaged groups. 76% of students at College are unemployed and 55% have no qualifications above Level 1 when they commence study.
- Achievement rates at Grade 4 or above on English and Maths GCSE are between 33.4% and 21.8% above the national average. This ensures students are prepared for progression to further study and have the core skills required for good employment.
- Innovative development of highly successful courses for students experiencing barriers to learning, has widened participation amongst underrepresented student groups. Achievement rates for students on preparation for life and work provision is 95.6% (9.3% above the sector average).
- Highly effective use of RARPA as evidenced at moderation is used to plan, monitor and record achievement of students on non-accredited courses leading to excellent outcomes for students.
- External quality assurance from awarding bodies demonstrate that the presentation of information and skills are systematically checked through highly effective internal quality assurance and monitoring processes, thus ensuring students make swift progress and achievement is timely.

3.6 Impact – Areas for Improvement

A new student management system (individual learning plan, attendance monitoring, additional learning support tracking) will ensure curriculum staff have excellent visibility of student progress across a student's programme of study. This will ensure the steps required to achieve overarching ambitions and goals are clear.

- Although achievement rates for all groups are above national rates, in a small number of instances achievement rates for BAME or LD groups are below the College. These areas will be interrogated and actions taken to ensure parity of achievement rates across all groups.
- A new Passport for Success will be implemented cross College ensuring all students have a clearly articulated plan, taking incremental steps forward within their education.
- A focus on distance travelled will be introduced to ensure high expectations remain a focus for all students.

4. Behaviour & Attitudes

4.1 Behaviour & Attitudes – Strengths

- An environment of respect, valuing difference and no tolerance of bullying and harassment is evident through high levels of student satisfaction with the College experience, excellent student attendance (91%) and retention (96%).
- OTLA and student feedback evidences that all staff at College contribute to creating a purposeful and engaging 24 /7 learning environment. This ensures exceptional behaviour and positive attitudes are seen across the College. Students are motivated to learn and have positive attitudes to their studies, each other and staff. In Computing peer support is used as a key feature of students learning.
- A unique setting ensures both residential and non-residential students benefit from an enabling and focused learning environment. 91% of student's state that staying at College helped their learning.
- The residential College environment supports students from a variety of backgrounds to learn together including through the Colleges extra curricula programme.
- The development of confidence is a key feature of the College skills development framework which enables students to develop their wider life skills. 87% of students reported an increased confidence in their ability and 92% in the development of new thinking as a result of their College experience.
- First steps community provision encourages students back into learning through the development of confidence and resilience. 91% of students report improved confidence as a result of their College experience.

- Expectations are high and there are low levels of behavioural issues in College. Where there are issues these are dealt with in an effective and timely manner. Clear pathways of support are available to enable students to address and evaluate behaviour.
- Student attitudes to learning are positive and engagement in self-directed learning outside of curriculum time is high. This is well supported through business support areas as evidenced in student satisfaction levels for areas such as the library, student services and the additional learning support service.

4.2 Behaviour & Attitudes – Areas for Improvement

Scrutiny of attendance and punctuality will be improved through the implementation of a new electronic recording system. This will ensure any patterns of low attendance are dealt with swiftly.

- A new pastoral drop in will ensure a responsive and agile service is available to all students, addressing any issues relating to behaviour and attitude on campus or via online study.
- Although student satisfaction with activities is high (88%) there is scope to increase the range of activities. Focus will be given to enabling students to participate in competitions, employer led and community led projects.

5. Personal Development

5.1 Personal Development – Strengths

- Personal Development is exceptional. The diversity of the College curriculum coupled with the inclusive, safe and tranquil residential environment enables students to develop a wide range of experiences, in line with their talents and interests.
- The College offers a centralised information and guidance service which offers effective support and guidance and is Matrix approved. Students make good use of services to advance learning through UCAS support and employment applications. Student satisfaction with the service has seen rapid improvement.
- 79% of students agree that their time at College has helped them to pursue their goals and ambitions. 77% of students agree that the careers information they have received has enabled them to understand the different paths available to achieve their goals.
- Within teaching and learning, teachers use the curriculum to facilitate debate and discussion to effectively engage students in their understanding of community, national and international issues, enabling students to think as global citizens.
- The College's extracurricular programme receives good feedback from students. It is well attended and covers opportunities for the development of social interests, further study, physical activity, student voice and social action.

- The College promotes students understanding of democracy, mutual respect and tolerance by means of student voice, Student Council and Student Union officer roles. Students are effectively supported to participate and make a positive contribution to the wider College function.
- Prevent, safeguarding and British values are all firmly embedded into induction. OTLA confirms that discussion and debate are a key feature of course provision and are utilised to reinforce messages about the importance of active citizenship in a diverse, modern Britain.

5.2 Personal Development – Areas for Improvement

Course planning for Prevent and British values will be strengthened across the College to ensure best practice ensures an outstanding education for all in this area.

- The College will make extended use of community and national agencies and outside influencers to support progression and personal development.
- Preparation for next steps, with specific focus on preparation for employment will be a key feature of curriculum and support service planning.