

Inspection of Nelson and Colne College

Inspection dates: 10 to 13 December 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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

Information about this provider

Nelson and Colne College Group was formed in December 2018 following a merger between Nelson and Colne College and Accrington and Rossendale College. The college consists of two main sites in Lancashire.

At the time of the inspection, there were 2,301 young people aged 16 to 18 years on education programmes for young people. Learners were enrolled on a range of academic and vocational courses, including T Levels, from entry level to level 4 in most subject areas. Over half of young people study courses at level 3. The college received funding for 122 learners with high needs. There were 3,421 adult learners enrolled on courses from entry level to level 6. Most adults were enrolled on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and tailored learning programmes. There were 512 apprentices studying on apprenticeships from level 2 to level 4.

Most education programmes for young people are offered at the sixth form centre at the Nelson and Colne College site. The sixth form centre offers A-level and vocational courses in a broad range of subjects. This site also offers part-time adult learning courses, including access to higher education, ESOL, English and mathematics. Apprentices attend off-the-job training sessions at the sixth form centre. Most learners who receive funding for high needs study across a range of

courses that are tailored to meet their individual needs, including supported internships and the steps to success programme.

Vocational qualifications for young people are offered at the Accrington and Rossendale College site. These include construction and motor vehicle industry trades. Adult learning courses at this site include English, mathematics, ESOL and a range of courses such as hair and beauty, railway maintenance and access to higher education. Apprentices attend off-the-job training sessions at this site. A few learners who receive funding for high needs study at the Accrington and Rossendale College site.

Lancashire Adult Learning offers a wide range of courses including some that lead to qualifications. Courses are mainly offered at community venues across Lancashire. Courses include caring for children and young people, horticulture, supporting work in schools and colleges and essential digital skills.

The college group works with three subcontractors, Lancashire Combined Fire Authority, North Lancs Training Group Ltd and Learning Curve Group Limited. Subcontractors offer specialised courses for young people and adults, including employability courses.

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

Learners and apprentices feel that they are part of a big family. They say that being a learner or apprentice is a mix of learning, growth and opportunity. It is a time to face challenges, like managing deadlines and balancing responsibilities, but these experiences help build valuable skills. They feel that the college is an environment where they can grow academically and socially, and prepare for their future careers.

Leaders ensure learners who are care experienced receive highly effective tailored support so that they remain on their courses and achieve their qualifications. Teachers and support staff work closely with these learners to develop an individualised support plan, which includes financial support to cover the costs of attending college. Careers advisers work skilfully with care leavers in their early weeks at college to ensure that they are on the right course to meet their needs and aspirations.

Learners and apprentices participate in a wide range of high-quality activities. They attend clubs and organised activities that complement their courses or benefit their local communities. For example, young learners who want to study law or medicine attend Latin club to help them to understand legal and medical terminology in preparation for future studies. Apprentices take part in competitions, often achieving national recognition such as the champion for paper hanging in painting and decorating and adult care apprentice of the year for the end-of-life champion role.

Adult learners attend a monthly book club where they discuss books with local authors and foster a love of reading. Learners with high needs work in a community garden and organise bingo sessions for a local group with visual impairments. Learners participate in a wealth of activities for enjoyment and positive well-being, such as archery, poetry, female only sports and crochet.

Young learners benefit from well-planned work experience placements. T-level health learners attend placements on the maxillofacial unit at a local hospital and work with the district nurse team. This provides learners with the information and highly relevant experience to make informed decisions about applying for specialist routes in district nursing and dental hygiene and therapy. Young learners, most of whom have not travelled outside of the United Kingdom, have the opportunity to attend European work experience placements in Germany, Italy and Malta.

Adult learners are highly successful in achieving their individual goals and qualifications. On ESOL courses, they learn to become more active citizens and hold conversations with neighbours, family and friends and make and attend health appointments. Access to higher education learners on health pathways gain places at university to study degrees leading to careers in the health and social care sector.

Most apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they apply skilfully in the workplace. For example, business administrator apprentices accurately, confidently and respectfully use preferred pronouns of he and him, she and her, and they and them when working with clients, customers and colleagues.

Apprentices respect gender identity and understand how this supports diversity in the workplace.

Tutors, support staff, managers and therapists communicate very well to ensure that learners with high needs benefit from a supportive and ambitious curriculum. They work closely to provide exceptional support for academic, therapeutic or vocational learning, as well as to provide support for other topics such as personal hygiene. Learners develop their skills quickly and achieve their goals. Consequently, almost two thirds of learners with high needs undertake voluntary work while they seek employment. Over one third move into paid employment.

Learners and apprentices benefit from extremely high-quality careers advice and guidance. They talk to their teachers about careers related to their subject and attend one-to-one sessions with well-qualified and knowledgeable careers advisers. Young learners receive excellent advice and guidance from their very first contact with the college.

Learners and apprentices learn about important topics such as emotional regulation; mental health; healthy relationships, including topics such as sexual harassment, sexual consent and sexual violence; drugs and alcohol awareness. Learners know how to keep themselves safe, including from the threats of radicalisation and extremism. Learners feel safe and know how to report any concerns that they may have.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a strong contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders make highly effective links with a wide range of relevant stakeholders such as local NHS health trusts, Industry Construction Boards and Lancashire County Council. They understand and prioritise local and regional skills needs and use this information to strategically plan and shape their curriculum offer, respond to skills shortages and support the borough's wider recruitment needs. For example, leaders deliver a broad range of adult learning programmes that meet local needs across the county to re-engage adults into education and to reduce social isolation and deprivation, and improve mental health.

Leaders collaborate exceptionally well with a wide range of employers and other relevant stakeholders. Leaders work collaboratively across the pan-Lancashire college group to ensure that the future needs of important industries such as the digital skills and cyber security, health and social care, engineering and manufacturing sectors are met. They have introduced T levels in all these subjects. Staff work effectively with employers to develop tailored training and education programmes. They use the expertise of employers and stakeholders to inform their curriculums and to provide learners and apprentices with the future skills they need. For example, stakeholders teach masterclasses with learners on engineering courses to ensure that learners develop the skills they will need for future study or the workplace.

Leaders have arranged for teachers and employers to work together to plan and teach courses. In health programmes, employers teach learners about suicide prevention and mental health awareness to provide learners with useful skills when they are on work placements.

Leaders have developed a five-year curriculum innovation plan to provide a pipeline into Lancashire's businesses to meet future skills needs, particularly in the digital and cyber sectors. With the relocation of the National Cyber Force to Lancashire, the college's status as a CyberFirst Gold organisation, and a high-quality digital offer across the provision, leaders ensure that they meet the needs of the Lancashire economy.

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

Leaders have designed curriculums that are highly ambitious and help learners and apprentices to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. For example, adult learners on tailored family learning on the early years, education and childcare pathway firstly study family English and mathematics and subjects such as robotics and coding with their children in community settings. They continue to build on their learning and develop and apply their knowledge and skills when they study a level 1 or level 2 qualification in support work in schools and colleges. Consequently, many adult learners improve their confidence significantly and find jobs or volunteer in schools. Young learners on the digital production, design and development T level learn about emerging technologies and business environments in their first year. The knowledge they gain in year one helps them to learn and apply more complex knowledge and skills in year two, such as when they write project proposals.

Teachers make highly effective use of teaching strategies such as discussions, questioning, case studies and practice assessments. They use very clear explanations and instruction. For example, teachers on the adult learning level 2 support work in schools and colleges course teach learners key concepts about special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as the different aspects of neurodivergence. They use case studies to help learners identify a range of techniques so that learners can provide tailored support for the children they work with.

Teachers routinely check and consolidate learning so that learners and apprentices build their knowledge over time. Learners and most apprentices acquire significant new knowledge and skills and produce work of a high standard. Learners, including those with high needs, and most apprentices retain knowledge in their long-term memories and make exceptional progress from their starting points.

Most teachers accurately and routinely monitor the progress that learners make from their starting points. They use assessment exceptionally well. Teachers frequently and systematically check and consolidate learning through, for example, oral questioning, quizzes, essays and short answer papers to make sure that learners and apprentices have a secure understanding of topics. For example, on the

level 3 access to higher education health pathway, teachers use online quizzes to test learners' understanding of enzymes, specifically the bonds in enzyme structures. Teachers and learners receive immediate feedback from the quizzes and these assessments help teachers to identify specific areas where learners have gaps in their learning. Teachers adapt their teaching and revisit topics where necessary. Young learners, adult learners and learners who have high needs make exceptional progress.

In a few instances, teachers do not effectively monitor the progress that apprentices make from their starting points. Teachers do not support these apprentices well enough to quickly develop their knowledge and skills and apply these in the workplace. While leaders and managers are aware of how much progress most apprentices have made, too many apprentices have fallen behind in their learning. Managers do not always support teachers to intervene quickly enough to enable apprentices who have fallen behind in their learning to catch up swiftly. Achievement in a few apprenticeships is too low. Leaders and managers have put in place actions to improve the quality of training that these apprentices receive. It is too soon to see the impact of these actions.

Most teachers provide highly effective and developmental feedback to learners. Learners act on this feedback swiftly to improve their work. As a result, the quality and complexity of learners' work improves over time. However, in apprenticeships, feedback is occasionally not specific enough to enable apprentices to improve their work quickly. In a few instances, such as on the level 2 early years practitioner apprenticeship, feedback highlights that apprentices' work is too brief to achieve a merit grade but does not identify the areas that need to be improved.

Leaders have created an exceptionally inclusive culture across the college group. A strong sense of community surrounds the college. Staff feel that they are recognised for what they do well through staff awards and praise from senior managers. Staff enjoy working at the college and feel proud of what they achieve with their learners, apprentices and wider communities.

Leaders manage their subcontracted provision highly effectively. They conduct frequent and rigorous quality assurance activities with their subcontractors. These activities include observing the live masterclasses run by staff, scrutiny of learners' work, learner survey discussions and checking of outcomes against contractual agreements. Leaders monitor the quality and performance of subcontractors very closely and meet with them frequently to challenge performance and set actions for improvement. Consequently, the quality of subcontracted provision remains consistently high. Leaders continually review the offer from their partners and ensure that it is tailored appropriately and based on the needs of the local region.

Governance of the college is extremely effective. Board members receive detailed information from leaders and managers to enable them to provide scrutiny, challenge and support for priority curriculum areas. Board members understand the strengths of the provision and focus on supporting areas for improvement. They meet with learners, apprentices and curriculum managers in areas identified as

having low performance. They use these meetings to confirm that actions are having the desired impact. Board members are aware of the interventions in place to improve the quality of training for the few apprenticeships where achievement is low. They recognise that there is still work to do to improve their apprenticeship provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130738
Address	Scotland Road Nelson Lancashire BB9 7YT
Contact number	01282 440200
Website	www.nelson.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lisa O'Loughlin
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	15 to 18 March 2022
Main subcontractors	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority North Lancs Training Group Ltd (The) Learning Curve Group Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the group executive director-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

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