

Northern College for Residential Adult Education

Specialist designated institution

Inspection dates		17–20 June 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding-1
	Previous inspection:	Outstanding-1
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Outstanding-1
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is outstanding because:

- A comprehensive package of excellent support ensures that all students achieve their potential regardless of personal barriers to learning such as disability, a history of substance misuse, previous offending behaviour or low educational attainment.
- Students' achievements and successes are outstanding. All groups of students progress and perform equally well despite their starting points.
- Students develop outstanding personal, social and employability skills. Diploma students rapidly acquire academic and research skills that prepare them well for university.
- Inspirational tutors provide exceptional challenge and support which transform the lives of students and their families. Students develop good independent study skills and an appetite for lifelong learning.
- Inspirational leadership and governance have helped the college to realise its ambitious vision of providing outstanding adult residential and community education. As a consequence, it has helped to empower and transform the lives of individuals, families and communities.
- Outstanding assessment ensures that students progress at a pace that stretches and challenges them. The quality of written feedback on marked work is exemplary.
- The college's outstanding partnerships with trade unions, local authorities and third sector organisations have helped it to meet students' needs and transform communities and neighbourhoods, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas.
- Governors have an excellent understanding of the college's mission. They use their wealth of experience to support and challenge the college's senior leadership team to provide an exceptional residential learning environment.
- Tutors make exceptionally good use of interactive learning technologies and social media to help students learn. The college's virtual learning environment and innovative library services are integral in developing students' functional skills, as well as their research and study skills.
- Progression into further or higher education and employment is very good. The majority of students on the Access diploma programme have progressed from short courses and almost all diploma students go on to university study.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- No significant improvements required

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The proportion of students who achieve their learning goals is very high. On the college's one year full-time residential Access to higher education diploma course, success rates have been high for the last three years, though they dipped slightly in 2012/13. The wide and eclectic range of residential short courses that the college runs throughout the year also has very high success rates. Achievement of learning objectives for students on non-accredited courses is very good. ▪ Students' starting points are exceptionally diverse. Almost all have multiple and complex barriers to learning as a result of financial difficulties, family problems, medical and mental health difficulties, or a history of offending behaviour or substance misuse. Despite this, almost all make good progress relative to their starting points. ▪ No significant gaps exist in the performance of different groups of students. In the past year, the college identified underperformance for male students but this gap is now closed. Students with additional learning needs do as well as, and sometimes slightly better than, those without. ▪ The development of students' personal, social and employability skills is outstanding. The rapid acquisition and further development of academic skills, essential to their prospects of success at university for Access diploma students, is impressive. Diploma students quickly develop writing, research and independent learning skills. They can, after the first semester, make independent and effective use of library resources and are able to look up confidently works of reference, internet sites and academic journals and articles to support their assignment work. ▪ The proportion of Access diploma students who progress into higher education is very high. All students who completed in 2013/14 have received an offer of a place to study at university. College data on the destinations of former students show that the majority of them complete their degree and proceed into employment in the teaching and learning sector, the civil service, health care, social and community work, and other roles contributing to the promotion of social well-being. The college's short-course programme is particularly successful in helping students to decide to apply for a place on the diploma course. ▪ Students who enrol on the diploma course with a history of mental ill-health or substance misuse receive tailored support to help them manage their condition well enough so that they can complete the programme and move on to higher education. For example, one student, who at the start of the programme presented with Asperger's syndrome and dyslexia, was painfully shy and unable to interact with others. With carefully managed help and support, she is now socially confident, able to participate in social and academic discussion and is currently reading psychology at university. ▪ For students on all programmes, the pace of skill development is remarkable, and is substantially attributable to the outstanding support from tutors, managers and support staff. Students on short courses develop confidence and understanding quickly; many report how well they have been able to apply their learning when they return to work. Many students become lifelong learners as a result of their participation on college courses. ▪ The development of students' English and mathematics is good. On short courses, teachers skilfully integrate essential skills in English and mathematics with the taught subject. Access students develop high-level functional skills because tutors skilfully integrate study skills early in 	

the programme and then continue this support through a combination of discrete and in-class additional help.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment lead to very high success rates and particularly strong development of lifelong learning skills. The excellent support provided by tutors and the student services team helps students overcome immense personal barriers to learning.
- Tutors inspire and challenge students exceptionally well. Learning activities that stretch and challenge students are evident in most lessons. Tutors plan learning for individual needs exceptionally well and as a consequence, students make excellent progress. Inspectors confirm students' claims that their tutors' strong belief in, and commitment to, their achievement is a significant motivating factor.
- Support for students, particularly for those with a disability, is outstanding. Tutors promptly identify support requirements and ensure that students benefit from any necessary assistive technology or adaptation. Support workers thoroughly assess all students taking longer courses for any learning support needs such as dyslexia. Once enrolled, students benefit from an exceptionally good range of learning resources, including computer tablets so that they can organise their work, write notes more easily and use visual techniques such as mind maps.
- Students who live in the college's student accommodation receive good care and support from staff on duty in the evenings. They create an informal environment which helps students to settle in and make progress. Students receive feedback on their homework during the evening if they want it, which helps them to make rapid improvement in their work.
- Written feedback to students is outstanding. The detail for assignment briefs is clear and students know exactly what they need to do to improve, regardless of the grade they have received. Students are very clear about their action points. Tutors give verbal feedback in sessions that motivates and further builds students' confidence.
- Tutors make use of a highly effective range of assessment techniques to identify accurately the right course for each student to ensure that they have a highly individualised learning plan with challenging targets. Self-assessment tools presented in a visual format are particularly effective for helping students to identify the personal and social skills they are developing, compared with their original starting point.
- Information, advice and guidance are outstanding. Prospective students receive detailed pre-course information from college outreach workers, through the college's website and from a range of external partners that support the college's learning programmes. A highly effective induction prepares students fully for their course. The student progress committee is very effective in identifying those who may need extra support and guidance. They also receive advice and guidance on progression from the National Careers Service.
- Tutors and managers are highly successful in ensuring the use of 'my learning space', an effective shared electronic portfolio for tutors and students to record and review regularly all learning and assessment processes. Assessment processes stretch and challenge students to ensure they progress and achieve well. Students record their targets and use the detailed feedback from tutors to make further improvements and develop their skills.
- Tutors are very well versed in the use of interactive learning technology and apply these skills well in sessions. This very effectively engages students and has a strong positive impact on their confidence as well as meeting their preferred learning style. Tutors use the college's virtual learning environment effectively to help students develop their independent learning skills exceptionally well.
- Students develop their English, mathematics and functional skills extremely well. Tutors fully integrate the development of these skills into sessions as well as the student's personal targets. Students who were previously not able to use a computer now use computers in their daily lives.

Library staff provide outstanding support and individual mentoring to develop further students' English and information technology skills.

- The promotion of equality and diversity through the curriculum is very good. Tutors meet students' individual needs extremely well for all aspects of their learning. They deal skilfully with naturally occurring opportunities to promote equality and diversity in sessions. Tutors and support staff display a wealth of information and posters, some designed by students, that promote diversity and a better understanding of disability. Students enthusiastically participate in a broad range of enrichment activities including ukulele classes, walks, sporting activities, meditation and relaxation techniques.

Social sciences

Outstanding

Community learning

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding, as reflected in the consistently high success rates on the Access diploma course. Tutors have exceptionally high expectations of all their students, irrespective of previous background or educational achievements. Engagement, care and support are outstanding. Students come to Northern College from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds.
- All students are encouraged to aspire to be the best and to achieve their potential. Tutors provide students with the tools that they need to succeed in their chosen career. Tutors are passionate in their enthusiasm for promoting academic achievement and independent thinking. They inculcate in students a desire for attaining the highest levels of academic excellence.
- Tutors' lesson planning is exemplary. Lesson plans clearly identify strategies for meeting the needs of each student. Tutors encourage students to learn on their own and to develop critical thinking and research skills, for example by challenging them to research their own answers to difficult and complex topics.
- The library is an outstanding resource. Library staff help Access students with academic research, writing bibliographies and using the internet for research. Tutors make good use of their subject knowledge to relate topics to students' experiences. In lessons on social policy, students participate in debates about the UK's health and welfare services and in sociology classes, students examine a wide range of theoretical explanations for poverty and welfare dependency.
- Tutors are highly skilled and passionate advocates of adult learning. They understand students' diverse and individual learning needs and they work exceptionally hard to help students improve their life chances. Students rightly comment on the transformative impact of learning on them as individuals and on their family and communities. Diploma students are often the first in their family to receive a university education.
- Assessment is outstanding. Prospective students attend an open day where they meet tutors and former students. They receive detailed guidance about studying at the college and the personal and financial implications of doing so. Students are actively but sensitively encouraged to disclose a disability or any medical or mental health problem they have, so that tutors can identify and diagnose potential difficulties promptly and make appropriate support arrangements.
- Information, advice and guidance arrangements are excellent. Prospective Access students receive detailed and honest advice before they enrol on the diploma course. Many benefit from attending a preparatory course to help them cope with the demands of the diploma. Once on course, students receive regular counselling and advice about careers, university courses and future options. Tutors provide exceptionally good support with university applications and personal statements.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning is outstanding. During the first semester on the diploma programme, tutors deliver a series of themed sessions that

celebrate and reinforce equality and diversity. Students are respectful of tutors and of each other. The very diverse backgrounds of students help to create a shared and supportive aspirational culture. Students' independent project work frequently includes detailed and insightful analyses of diversity, often drawing on personal experience.

- Tutors use tutorials very effectively to record and monitor progress and achievements. Individual learning plans are thorough and contain detailed learning targets that tutors review regularly. The provision of additional help for students with dyslexia and for whom English is a second language is outstanding. Specialist tutors produce exceptionally detailed and individually tailored learning plans to help these students achieve.
- Tutors record progress reviews, initial assessment results and tutorial records on electronic software to which other tutors have access. This provides exceptionally detailed and useful information to identify the extent of each student's progress towards achievement, as well as any obstacles that might impede them. Tutors regularly attend student review meetings to identify and support any student at risk of not achieving.
- Students receive frequent, detailed and constructive feedback which helps them to improve. Tutors use the results of initial assessment effectively to plan learning and support. Students produce high quality work which demonstrates sound independent learning skills and familiarity with academic referencing and conventions. In the current year, diploma students produced exceptionally well-researched projects on the Spanish civil war and the rise of fascism, the history of the Irish home rule movement and an assessment of the efficacy of custodial sentencing on repeat offending.
- The development of students' English and mathematics skills is good. Correction of students' spelling, punctuation and grammar is exceptionally thorough and helps students to prepare for higher-level study. Former students speak articulately about how well Northern College's promotion of academic study skills prepared them for university study. Access diploma students develop good mathematics skills through studying for a GCSE or attending functional skills lessons in mathematics. In 2013/14, the Access team added non-accredited discrete mathematics classes to support further students' development of numeracy skills.

Community development

Outstanding

Community learning

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding, as reflected in the very high success rates and achievement of learning objectives on community development courses. The standard of students' work is excellent, preparing them extremely well for their next course, employment, or higher education. For example, a student on an adult education teaching course delivered successfully a 'micro-teaching' session to his peers on the use of the guitar. The student demonstrated high levels of confidence, as well as social, intellectual and employability skills.
- Tutors are particularly successful at motivating, challenging and supporting students to develop their knowledge and to become independent learners. Tutors expertly instil a 'can do' attitude to learning. For example, in a lesson on stress management, students successfully demonstrated a transformation of self-worth and raised confidence levels which gave them the tools to identify triggers for stress and to manage stress effectively.
- Students take charge of their own learning and have at their disposal an impressive choice of support mechanisms. For example, the college library, which has won several national awards, has a multifaceted approach to learning support. It provides excellent academic guidance and pastoral care, as well as helping with academic referencing and internet research.
- Tutors are highly qualified, experienced and passionate about transforming individual lives through an outstanding day and residential educational experience. They plan and deliver lessons that inspire students to make significant gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. High quality resources and imaginative use of computer tablets and social media effectively

promote students' critical thinking skills. Tutors use an innovative approach to digital literacy through extensive use of the virtual learning environment. Tutors create a professional and purposeful atmosphere in which to learn. Additional learning support is exceptional and readily available to those who need it.

- The development of students' English and mathematics skills is outstanding. Imaginative teaching methods motivate and involve students in learning and enable them to make excellent progress. Tutors very effectively integrate English and mathematics within lessons. They pay careful attention to correcting students' work to help them develop a high standard of writing skills.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is exceptional. Expertly planned lessons integrate equality and diversity themes into lessons and students demonstrate a particularly good understanding of equalities. Tutors take every opportunity to promote, reinforce and further develop students' understanding of equality and diversity. For example, students are successfully encouraged to be tolerant and have mutual respect for others who may have difficulties with mixing and learning with other people. This prepares them well for living and working in diverse communities.
- Initial assessment processes are highly effective and personalised to ensure that students enrol on to a suitable course with relevant targets that meet their needs and aspirations. For example, in the first session of an adult numeracy course, students receive expert guidance to help them identify their own strengths and areas for development through a range of non-threatening and accessible numeracy tasks. High quality short-term targets ensure students are always aware of what they need to do next in order to improve their skills. Monitoring and review of students' progress encourages them to stay focused and to achieve high standards.
- Assessment feedback is detailed, constructive and challenging. It identifies clearly areas for improvement and encourages students to be self-reflective and responsible for their own progress. Written feedback is detailed and inspires students to achieve high grades. Outstanding peer assessment and self-assessment empowers students to be more independent. For example, in a trade union studies lesson on communication and campaigning, peer assessment was exceptional in encouraging students to think for themselves and to be more independent in their approach to working with union members and employers.
- High quality information, advice and guidance ensure that students are well informed and prepared for their next steps. Students receive extensive guidance before and during their course. They value highly the support and guidance on progression routes, career opportunities and employment they receive from tutors and support staff.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Outstanding and inspirational leadership has helped the college to realise its ambitious vision to provide outstanding adult residential and community education for the empowerment and transformation of individuals and communities. Governors, staff, leaders, managers and partners are passionate advocates of high-quality residential adult education.
- Managers and tutors set exceptionally high standards across every aspect of the provision and are exemplary role models for students. A significant number of tutors and support staff are former students of the college. Managers support tutors very well with clear opportunities for professional development and training. A significant number of tutors receive financial support to study for relevant postgraduate degrees.
- Governance is outstanding. Governors have a wealth of experience and expertise, which they use very well to challenge effectively the college's senior leadership team. Governors are particularly tenacious in their scrutiny of data relating to the college's curriculum areas, financial health and staff performance. They understand how to interrogate data and to follow up specific lines of inquiry to ensure that they have a comprehensive grasp of how well the college is performing.

- Northern College has outstanding partnerships with trade unions, local authorities and third sector organisations. These partnerships ensure that learning programmes successfully meet the needs of students and transform communities, particularly in areas of significant deprivation and worklessness. Programmes are planned to ensure good progression opportunities so that students develop confidence and study skills for employment or higher education. The college has recently enrolled three students on to its traineeship programme and provided each with a well-managed individualised programme to develop their work readiness.
- Managers are very quick to respond to requests from partners to provide flexible and often bespoke programmes to meet the specific requirements of individual students, often with complex needs. Managers and staff have an excellent understanding of local communities and neighbourhood groups and are highly regarded and valued by the organisations they work with for the significant transformational impact they have on students and communities.
- Northern College makes excellent use of stakeholder feedback to improve the quality of provision. Self-assessment processes are very thorough and managers, staff and governors know their provision very well. Managers and governors continuously review and update the college's improvement plan. Ambitious and challenging targets are set to develop and maintain very high standards. Staff, managers and governors make excellent use of accurate management information to enable trends and patterns to be identified quickly.
- The performance management of staff is good. Tutors and managers have yearly appraisals and mid-year reviews. Objectives are discussed and performance against key performance indicators, including outcomes and quality of teaching and learning, are monitored well. Appropriate actions are recorded and professional development activities agreed and arranged. Those who do not meet the required standard during their probationary period receive support to improve, but where improvements are not made, timely decisions are made to terminate their employment.
- Teaching and learning have improved through robust monitoring processes. The sharing of best practice between teaching staff is particularly good. Observations carried out by college observers provide reliable and very useful developmental support, which tutors value. Internal developmental observations, combined with external graded observations identify areas for development and agreed actions for tutors.
- Managers have successfully introduced and implemented an effective strategy for the promotion of students' English and mathematics skills. As a consequence, students develop good functional skills that help them to make the transition from college to university and from one college programme to another.
- Equality and diversity are promoted and reinforced very well. Learning resources are monitored thoroughly to ensure they are fully inclusive. Managers and governors use data particularly well to monitor the participation and performance of groups of students. They have used effective strategies to successfully reduce the few performance differences between different groups.
- Managers are diligent in ensuring that resident and non-resident students are equally valued and supported. They have made adaptations to premises to ensure easy access for students with reduced mobility and those with visual impairment. A prayer room is available for students. Students, many of whom have never previously travelled away from their local communities, make good use of the extensive grounds and magnificent buildings to take time to reflect and relax while learning.
- The college meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Safeguarding is promoted well to students, staff and visitors through posters and quick reference guides attached to identity badges. Students feel safe on college premises.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
Outcomes for learners	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Social sciences	1
Community development	1

Provider details

Type of provider	Specialist designated institution							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,158							
Principal/CEO	Jill Westerman CBE							
Date of previous inspection	November 2006							
Website address	www.northern.ac.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	906	N/A	534	N/A	260	N/A	89
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		3		3			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	2,318							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ N/A 							

Contextual information

Northern College, a registered charity, is one of four adult residential colleges in England. The college delivers most of its provision from its base at Wentworth Castle near Barnsley. It works with partners in the trade union movement, as well as local authorities, universities and the voluntary and community sector. Most courses are residential and have a focus on education for individual and social transformation. Accredited courses are available from entry to level 4. Students come from across England, the majority from communities in Yorkshire and the Humber. Many have experienced multiple barriers to learning including substance misuse, ill health, and low educational attainment. In addition, courses are offered for those who work with organisations that support socially excluded and marginalised groups. Yorkshire and the Humber has a higher unemployment rate and lower economic activity rate than the rest of the country. Barnsley in particular has a high proportion of adults with no recognised qualifications.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jai Sharda HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the vice-principal (academic) as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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