

North Hertfordshire College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130721

Name of lead inspector: Paul Fletcher HMI

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Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. North Hertfordshire College is a large general further education college with just over 4,000 students aged 16 to 18 and around 10,000 adults. The college is located in the towns of Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth, serving a population of around 200,000 people. The college operates from five main centres and provides courses at other local venues. Around two thirds of students, by full-time equivalence, are aged 16 to 18. Of these, 40% take advanced courses and the remainder take courses at foundation and intermediate level in about equal proportions. Just over half of students are female. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups at 13% is slightly higher than the population of north Hertfordshire.
2. The college provides courses in 15 subject areas. Courses range from pre-entry to advanced level. The college also provides adult and community learning to over 3000 learners and Train to Gain programmes to over 5000 learners annually. Around 300 students aged 14 to 16 attend the college. The college enrolls just over 280 apprentices on work-based learning programmes and about 55 learners on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes.
3. The proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics in Hertfordshire is significantly above the national average. The unemployment rate in Hertfordshire is below the national level. Despite this, the college serves some areas with significant pockets of local deprivation, particularly in Stevenage. It has founder college status for the creative industries and for the financial services national skills academies.
4. The inspection included all funded learner and employer responsive provision and the following subject areas: health, social care and public services; information and communication technology (ICT); hairdressing and beauty therapy; literacy and numeracy.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - M2 Training (Horticulture, engineering, sport and leisure)
 - Opps Development (Health and social care, and business administration)
 - New Generation Services (Health and social care)
 - Flexible Training (Health and social care)
 - Construction Gateway (Construction)
 - National Consortium of Colleges (Skills for Life)
 - MSI Learning (Business administration)

6. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:

- CPL Training (Skills for Life)
- Opps Development (Health and Social Care)
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- Autavis Ltd (Motor vehicle)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to16	302 learners
Further education (16 to18)	2315 full-time learners 1841 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	265 full-time learners 1953 part-time learners
Entry to Employment	91 learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	1322 full-time learners 8564 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	6665 learners
Apprenticeships	281 apprentices
Informal adult learning	1855 learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 1
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	1
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Health, social care, early years and public services	2
Information and communication technology	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Literacy and numeracy	2

Overall effectiveness

7. North Hertfordshire College is a good college with outstanding capacity to improve. Students' outcomes have improved significantly over the last three years and are now good. Most students make good progress with the vast majority progressing to the next level of study, to university or employment. Learners on Train to Gain courses achieve their qualifications in good time but few learners on apprenticeships complete their training on time. Students feel safe and enjoy their studies. The outstanding range of enrichment activities contributes significantly to the good development of students' social and economic well-being.
8. The quality of provision is good. Most students make good progress in lessons because teachers plan their lessons skilfully and make effective use of information and learning technology (ILT). In a few lessons, the challenge for more able students is insufficient. The college provides an outstanding response to meeting the needs and interests of all users, supported by outstanding

partnerships. Students benefit from the good care, guidance and support that contribute to them reaching their potential. However, a few course teams do not set targets or monitor students' progress with sufficient detail.

9. Leadership and management are outstanding. Inspirational leadership from the principal and outstanding governance have resulted in high aspirations for excellence. Self-assessment is outstanding, resulting in very precise actions to tackle areas of underperformance. Arrangements to engage users in contributing to quality improvement are outstanding. Students are empowered and confidently influence decision-making and the development of provision. Safeguarding and equality and diversity are good and contribute to the high levels of mutual respect that permeates the college. However, the college has not conducted many full equality impact assessments. The college provides good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Most students complete their courses successfully. Students' achievement has improved significantly and success rates in 2008/09 were higher than average at all levels. Success rates on Train to Gain courses are very high with the large majority of learners completing their training in good time. Success rates for apprentices are low.
- Most students on vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level make good progress and achieve high grades. Students completing AS and A level courses achieve as predicted. Standards of work are high for most students with the majority developing high levels of practical skill and creativity. Most students progress to the next level of study, to university or employment.
- Students enjoy the college because it provides a safe, stimulating and harmonious environment in which to study and to participate in the many additional and employment-related activities. It has established a strong culture of involving students in college improvement, ensuring they make positive contributions to decision-making and democratic processes, preparing them to become active socially and economically astute citizens.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Most lessons enable students to make good progress as teachers plan a range of activities to maintain their interest and involve them actively in their learning and assessment. The majority of teachers use ILT well to improve learning. A small minority of lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for the more able students.
- Initial assessment is effective. The identification of most students' literacy and numeracy needs takes place before they start and the provision of support is very prompt. Teachers use information from initial assessment well to plan lessons. Assessment is largely effective and thorough. Progress reviews for Train to Gain learners on business administration courses do not inform them of their achievements with sufficient clarity.
- The college's approach to lesson observation is rigorous and focused on improving the quality of students' learning. Staff development activities use the

good practice identified in lesson observations well. In less effective lessons, the identification of actions for improvement is clear. Managers' monitoring of the actions is effective and prompt. Teachers receive good support to improve and develop their skills.

- The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is outstanding. The highly effective systems to engage with students, including the student parliament, ensure that the student voice plays an important part in developing the provision. The wide and varied provision enables good progression routes for students aged 14 to 18 and adults across all subject areas.
- Partnerships that benefit students are outstanding. The college plays a key role in strategic partnerships and its partnerships with employers, communities, schools and private training providers are highly effective. The excellent partnership working and flexible, responsive approach enables the provision of a wide and seamless curriculum offer.
- The good care, guidance and support help improve students' achievements and their future education and employment opportunities. Students benefit from good additional learning support and effective, informative tutorials. However, target setting and progress monitoring in a small number of course teams lack sufficient detail for students to understand the extent to which they have developed their skills.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Very clear strategic leadership from the principal, governors and senior managers provides a sustained drive for improvement across the college. Governance is outstanding. Governors enjoy a very constructive relationship with staff and students. They set and monitor demanding improvement targets. Self-assessment is outstanding, contributing strongly to quality improvement.
- Safeguarding is good. Comprehensive training for all staff supports the college as a safe environment for students and staff. The college meets its regulatory requirements and benefits from good links with external agencies. Robust procedures ensure that dealing with incidences is prompt.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college prioritises equality and diversity in its training and in its curriculum action planning. Staff and students celebrate diversity strongly throughout the college. Managers carry out initial equality impact assessments but few full impact assessments have been undertaken.
- The college successfully empowers students to contribute to improvements through the active promotion of the student voice. The student parliament is vibrant and influential. Managers use both students' and employers' views well to promote improvement.

What does North Hertfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that learners on apprenticeship programmes have their progress monitored closely so that they complete all aspects of the framework within their planned timescale.
- Maintain the drive to raise the quality of teaching and learning further so that activities and assessment in lessons meet the needs of all students.
- Share the good practice in progress reviews and target setting so that all students benefit and increase their success through effective individual learning plans.
- Ensure that initial equality impact assessments identify properly when a full impact assessment needs to take place so that potential adverse impact is minimised.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- feeling safe at the college
- the friendly atmosphere
- increasing their self confidence, skills and knowledge
- the way in which the college listens and responds to students
- the friendly and approachable staff who are keen to help
- the good teaching and encouragement to succeed
- the variety of activities in lessons
- the good additional support.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching when staff are absent or leave
- the range of visits and work experience opportunities
- access to the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) from home
- additional laptops for students requiring support
- a reduction in paperwork for learners based in employment
- the noise levels in the skills base room.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the good communication and easy access to college staff and assessors
- the range, responsiveness and flexibility of provision

- the good support for their staff
- the skills staff develop as a result of their training
- the good links between the training and job roles.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the planning of assessment and communication by a minority of assessors.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

10. The college's capacity to make and sustain improvements is outstanding. Since the last inspection, the college has secured substantial and sustained increases in success rates and made excellent progress in tackling the areas for improvement. Inspirational leadership from the principal has transformed the culture of the college to one where staff and students take responsibility for improvement and aspire to be excellent. Governors are highly effective in challenging and supporting senior managers. The college's strong focus on improving teaching and learning has led to a consistent improvement in the proportion of teaching and learning graded good or better. Managers use data extremely well to identify actions needed for improvement. Self-assessment is outstanding. Course reviews are thorough and highly effective in improving programmes. Senior managers monitor outcomes from course reviews assiduously and quality improvement plans carefully. Staff development, particularly the leadership programme for managers, effectively builds the college's capacity for continuing improvement. The strategic capability of managers and governors coupled with an extensive network of partners, maintains the college's capacity to respond positively and successfully to changes in the further education sector.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

11. Outcomes for students are good. The college's overall success rate has risen by more than 12 percentage points since 2006/07 and it is now almost five percentage points higher than the national rate. On all long courses, the college has sustained a similar rate of improvement over the same period, with almost an 11-percentage point increase in the success rate to around four percentage points higher than the national rate. For students aged 16 to 18, success rates at all levels over the same period have increased to be at least four percentage points higher than the national rate. For adults, they have increased over the same period and are now four percentage points higher than the national rate at foundation and intermediate levels. At advanced level, they are similar to the national rate. Since the last inspection, success rates for key skills have risen substantially and are now similar to the low national rate for 2008/09.
12. Success rates for learners on Train to Gain programmes are very high with the vast majority of the 2656 leavers in 2008/09 achieving their qualifications in good time. The majority of learners on advanced apprenticeships now complete the framework in good time with success rates that are higher than the national rate. However, success rates are low for learners on apprenticeships. Overall success rates for apprenticeships remain lower than the national rate for 2008/09 with a minority of learners completing in good time.

13. Students make good progress on vocational courses, developing good practical and technical skills that they apply with confidence and creativity. Overall, the high proportion of students on national diploma courses achieve better than predictions based on their GCSE scores. The achievement of higher grades on intermediate and advanced vocational courses has been significantly above average over the three years to 2008/09. The small proportion of students on GCE AS and A-level courses achieve results that are in line with their prior attainment, with average achievement of higher grades. In 2008/09, the vast majority of students progressed to the next level of study, to higher education or employment. For students on advanced level courses, almost two-thirds progressed to university. Progress for the small proportion of learners on the E2E programme has improved and the proportion of learners progressing to further training or employment is now satisfactory.
14. Students enjoy the college because it provides a safe, stimulating and harmonious environment in which to study and to participate in the many additional and employment-related activities. Staying safe is a high priority and students are empowered to challenge their peers and visitors if they do not wear identification badges. All areas convey good subject identity, exuding a strong sense of belonging to a community through the vibrant display of students' work. The college has successfully established a strong culture of involving all students in improving provision, ensuring that they make a positive contribution to decision-making and democratic processes, preparing them to become active socially and economically astute citizens. Students' involvement in deciding how to promote healthy lifestyles and sustainability is high.
15. The college works hard to ensure that different groups of students achieve their potential. It analyses data closely and takes effective action to deal with underperformance of groups, often changing how the courses are delivered to raise standards.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

16. The quality of provision is good. Students make good progress in lessons and in the workplace because the quality of teaching and training they receive is good. In the large majority of lessons and training sessions inspectors observed, students enjoy a mix of learning activities that teachers plan carefully to meet individual needs. In these lessons, students are very clear of what is required and are often involved in setting personal learning targets. The rapport between students, teachers and assessors is very good and students work well together in group and peer assessment activities. Teachers and assessors have good subject knowledge and make effective links to business and professional life. They use questioning techniques skilfully to check learning and extend students' knowledge. Most teachers use ILT confidently and imaginatively in lessons. The proportion of students using the college's VLE outside of lessons to enhance learning is increasing. In the small minority of less successful lessons, students are not sufficiently active in learning, questioning is less effective, with

a lack of challenge for the most able. The college has identified these as areas for improvement in its self-assessment report.

17. The identification of most students' learning support needs takes place before they begin their course so that appropriate support is put in place very promptly. The communication and co-ordination between teaching assistants and teachers is mostly effective. Teachers use information from students' initial assessments to plan lessons well. Students value the support they receive in class from teachers and teaching assistants. Assessment practices meet awarding body standards. Feedback on most students' assessed work helps them to improve further. Reviews of Train to Gain learners' progress are mostly thorough but records on business administration courses are not always sufficiently detailed to inform learners of their current achievement.
18. The college's lesson observation process is rigorous, focusing clearly on the quality of learning. Actions to improve teaching and learning have been effective. The sharing of good practice is effective through a range of staff development activities. Where improvement is identified teachers are supported well through a combination of departmental actions and coaching observations from the college's advanced learning practitioners. The large majority of lessons are good or better. Less effective teaching, particularly in the areas of construction and motor vehicle studies, has improved. The college is alert to the development of new approaches to teaching and learning. Specific initiatives include improving assessment techniques in lessons and exploring ways of providing learning using new media.
19. The college provides an outstanding, rich and diverse curriculum that is highly responsive to the needs of students, local communities and employers. The wide and varied provision enables coherent progression from entry to advanced level and programmes in all subject areas. In 2009/10, the well-developed Key Stage 4 engagement programme attracted 318 students aged 14 to 16. The college leads on diplomas in the north of Hertfordshire, which involved 392 students from 11 schools across eight diplomas in 2009/10.
20. Enrichment within the curriculum and through the cross-college programme contributes substantially to students' enjoyment and achievement. They develop their personal, economic and social well-being through the wide range of activities. Students make a positive contribution through their significant involvement in the development and planning of enrichment, which has led to increased and sustained participation.
21. Partnerships are outstanding. The college collaborates closely with a significant number of local and regional institutions through many partnerships for the benefit of students and the promotion of community cohesion. Highly productive links with over 1200 employers and private training providers have developed outstanding Train to Gain provision. The curriculum meets community learning needs strongly. The college's response to the current economic downturn has been to provide many training programmes to equip

those made redundant with new skills that have local currency. Very effective partnerships and the use of 77 community venues provide accessible learning opportunities for priority groups. Productive partnerships have enabled the development of bespoke learning programmes for particular groups of learners. The college successfully works in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council to engage hard to reach learners and reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training.

22. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. From initial enquiry to enrolment, students receive highly responsive and effective support to ensure that they are on the right course and that the identification of their learning and support needs is clear. Personal tutors and student services staff work closely to monitor attendance, encourage commitment and remove barriers to learning. Participation in the very effective additional learning support is high, making a significant contribution to students achieving their potential.
23. The availability and quality of personal support is very good. Students have access to many good college services, including counselling and multi-faith chaplaincy. The good provision of impartial information, advice and guidance helps students decide on their next steps.
24. The tutorial programme for learners aged 16 to 18 successfully promotes the every child matters themes, equality and diversity and supports the development of positive attitudes and behaviours. Students are aware of safety and know what to do in the event of abuse, bullying or harassment. The tutorial entitlement helps students to plan learning effectively and tutors to track performance. However, for a few course teams, target setting and the monitoring of progress in individual learning plans lack sufficient detail for students to know the extent to which they have developed their skills.

Leadership and management

Grade 1

25. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, governors, and senior managers provide very clear strategic leadership. A strong focus on students' involvement in decision-making and on the accountability of managers results in high success rates. Excellent collaborative partnerships with a range of national, regional and local agencies facilitate new learning opportunities that benefit students. The college's strategic plan and mission match national priorities closely and are founded on a set of core values that staff and students support and understand well. The culture of the college has changed in line with the principal's and senior managers' entrepreneurial and forward looking approach. Senior managers set and monitor challenging targets throughout the organisation. Leadership training for managers promotes strong ambition for improvement across the college.
26. Governance is outstanding. Governors act as critical friends to the college and provide excellent challenge and support for managers. Their recently changed

structure and working arrangements enable them to understand better the needs of students and staff. Governors' focus groups have been instrumental in increasing their ability to hold managers to account for improving provision. Governors demonstrate an excellent awareness of areas in the college that need improving, which they monitor closely. They have a strong determination to see improving teaching and learning and rising standards. Governors bring an impressively wide range of skills to meetings and reflect the community they serve. Student governors make a full contribution. Attendance at the regular monthly meetings is very high.

27. The college's arrangements for safeguarding are good. The college has clear policies and procedures relating to criminal record bureau (CRB) checks for employed staff, agency staff, governors, volunteers and subcontractors. The college has worked hard to ensure that all files are up to date and currently meets government requirements with regard to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. It is also well prepared for forthcoming changes to regulations. The college has productive links with the Hertfordshire Local Safeguarding Children Board with the deputy principal as a board member. All staff receive good training in safeguarding. Improved staff and student awareness has led to a 30% increase in the referral of incidences in the last year. Managers and staff deal with safeguarding concerns promptly and professionally.
28. The college's promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college has a single equality scheme that covers all key legislation. A group, chaired by the principal, oversees equality and diversity matters and reports bi-annually to the governors. Managers have conducted initial equality impact assessments for key policies and procedures but, very few full impact assessments. Training in equality and diversity is good including a recent event for teachers on its inclusion in lessons and specific training in managing equality and diversity for senior managers. The college prioritises equality and diversity well by requiring all managers to have an equality action plan for their area covering the college's nine core values. However, some action plans are not sufficiently specific or measurable. The promotion of activities and events to celebrate diversity and encourage community cohesion is good. However, managers do not monitor the participation of different groups in these wider events. The college monitors the achievement gap of different groups well both at college-wide and curriculum level. The promotion of equality and diversity within teaching and learning is generally good.
29. The college's engagement with users is outstanding. The college successfully empowers students to contribute to improvements. The student voice is strong and the student parliament, with a paid sabbatical president, is increasingly prominent in college life and engages a greater proportion of students each year in its activities. However, in a very small minority of subject areas involvement is low. Students value highly the direct communication with governors through the well-attended focus groups. Minutes from these meetings and those from the principal's question time lead to action plans and

improvements. Examples abound of the college's positive response to students' requests and concerns. The college has trained and involved a number of students in developmental observations of teaching and learning and a number of subject areas have successfully piloted the involvement of students in subject area self-assessment reports. Employer engagement is very good.

30. The college's outstanding self-assessment process includes staff, students and employers and the subsequent report is detailed and judgemental. Course leaders and managers use data from the college's course review system to contribute to the process. The system succeeds in standardising best practice in course reviews and allows course teams to evaluate performance and take appropriate action. Quality improvement plans are highly effective and closely monitored to ensure consistent improvement across the college. The report makes good use of data, contains detailed analysis of students' performance and provides a careful evaluation of successful teaching and learning.
31. The college has sound financial management arrangements. Managers benefit from access to good information to plan and monitor programmes effectively and allocate resources efficiently. The college is making reasonable progress in implementing sustainability measures, making productive use of students' suggestions. Success rates have risen consistently over the last three years. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health, social care, early years and public services

Grade 2

Context

32. Currently 379 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on full-time courses in child care, health and social care or public services from foundation to advanced level. A further 964 learners aged 19 or over take national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses on a part-time basis in child or health and social care funded through Train to Gain. Twenty-nine students aged 14 to 16 follow the diploma programme in conjunction with their secondary school.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good with high success rates on most courses. Success rates have been high over the last three years on intermediate and advanced level health, social care and public services courses and on childcare courses at foundation and intermediate level. Success rates on the advanced level diploma in childcare are low.
- Students make good progress. Learners on Train to Gain programmes achieve within planned timescales. Students on the national diploma in health and social care achieve grades higher than that predicted by their GCSE attainment. The proportion of students on the foundation level course for childcare achieving higher grades is high. However, the proportion of higher grades on intermediate and advanced level courses is low overall.
- The standard of students' work is satisfactory. Assessed work meets awarding body criteria and demonstrates an understanding of the linking of theory to practice. However, students rarely achieve merit or distinction grades on the first attempt.
- Students benefit from participating in the very good enrichment activities that support them to apply their skills for the good of the local community. For example, public service students undertake role-play to support the training of local police support officers in incident management. Students feel safe and value the college's security arrangements.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching is frequently innovative and engaging, with most students working collaboratively to develop skills and knowledge during lessons. Most teachers are skilled in using focused question and answer techniques to maintain interest and support learning. However, planning does not always ensure that lessons stretch and challenge the more able students.
- Very good use of ILT supports learning and provides students with effective and timely information and reminders. The recording of most tutorials and reviews is electronic and where appropriate students, parents and employers can access these remotely.

- Good partnerships support learning. Full-time students benefit from the close working relationships with employers. Employers provide a wide range of work placements, visits and guest speakers. On the Train to Gain programme the good partnerships between learners, assessors and employers provides highly effective support and ensures a very good response to the training needs of the sector.
- Leadership and management are good. Highly effective management of the Train to Gain consortium has ensured consistently high quality provision for all learners. Managers regularly review the achievement of targets with all staff and partners and observe key processes to monitor standards. Managers use students' feedback well to drive quality improvements, including sustained increases in the standard of teaching and support.
- The promotion of equality, diversity and safeguarding is good. Teachers and assessors skilfully include aspects of these in lessons, tutorials and progress reviews, through detailed presentations and displays ensuring that students have a good understanding of this area.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and the self-assessment report accurate. It is highly effective in evaluating the key strengths and areas for improvement.

What does North Hertfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Develop teaching to respond to the needs of the more able in lessons by providing learning that stretches and challenges so that these students achieve their potential.
- Review assignment briefing, guidance and support to ensure that all students understand fully how to research, develop and present their assignments so that they achieve their potential grade at first submission.

Information and communication technology

Grade 2

Context

33. The college offers full-time and part-time courses from entry to advanced level. Currently 133 students are on full-time courses and most are aged 16 to 18, taking introductory, first and national diplomas in networking. Just over 370 students aged 19 or over follow part-time courses. Fifty-five learners are on Train to Gain courses. Thirty-three students aged 14 to 16 take diplomas in IT in conjunction with their secondary school.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Students make good progress and enjoy their learning. Most learners on Train to Gain courses achieve their qualification within the agreed timescale. Retention and attendance on full-time courses is high. Success rates on the NVQ for IT users have increased substantially over the last two years and are now at the national average.
- Progression to other courses is good. Most students progress from full-time courses into higher education and in particular onto the college's foundation degree. The majority of students on other courses progress to the next level or onto other associated courses. Students with additional support needs make progress that is at least as good as other students.
- The standard of students' work is high. The majority of students make good progress based on their prior levels of attainment. As a result of this, most students on full-time courses achieve high grades. Project work is of a very high standard. For example, foundation level diploma students apply advanced animation techniques well.
- Students feel safe. Teachers give safety a high priority when planning learning. Students with mobility difficulties have contributed to developing personal evacuation plans. However, few ICT students participate fully in the college's enrichment programme.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers select highly relevant learning activities that stimulate and involve students, resulting in effective classroom management. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not assess learning sufficiently to extend students' understanding. Teachers make good use of technology to set and monitor students' progress against challenging targets. Assignment feedback is insightful, helping students to improve their performance.
- The range of courses is satisfactory. Provision meets adult learners' needs particularly well. However, the use of partnerships made through the diplomas, Train to Gain and the foundation degree is not sufficient to enhance the learning programmes for full-time and part-time students. None of the full-time students has a placement for work experience.

- Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. The use of initial assessment is good to plan for support. Induction provides learners with a good introduction to college services and facilities, especially for adult learners on part-time courses.
- Support for students with additional learning needs is highly effective and ensures that they achieve their potential. Just over one third of full-time students have additional learning needs. They benefit from good and prompt support from teaching assistants whose ICT skills are particularly good.
- Leadership and management are good. The recent successful change in management has resulted in sustained increases in success rates on courses that had previously had poor performance. Retention and attendance have improved significantly. Managers now use data very well to monitor and improve students' performance. However, the specialist IT centre that develops adults' employability skills is not fully integrated with the full-time provision in the department.
- The promotion of safeguarding and equality and diversity is good. Lesson plans have a well-considered approach to these topics as they relate to students.
- The self-assessment report is accurate. The self-assessment process includes the views of staff and those of most full-time and a minority of part-time students.

What does North Hertfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students participate more in cross-college activities and external events so that they improve their personal and employability skills.
- Make better use of existing partnerships to enhance the curriculum for all students and staff so that they have current experience of work in the ICT sector and with the latest technology.
- Strengthen the relationship between the specialist IT centre and the full-time provision so that the full range of expertise and courses is available for the benefit of all students.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

34. Currently, just over 730 students, mostly full-time, take courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy from foundation to advanced level. Three hundred and fifty-eight students take beauty and 376 take hairdressing courses. Just over 40 learners are on apprenticeship programmes, 11 of whom are taking the advanced apprenticeship.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Success rates are high on most courses with pass rates for students studying NVQ courses particularly high. However, success rates for students on part-time hairdressing courses at intermediate level are just below the low national average.
- Students work confidently, demonstrating good practical skills on advanced level hairdressing and beauty courses. The most able hairdressing students display outstanding creativity in their work. However, the skills of a small minority of beauty therapy students at intermediate level are underdeveloped, particularly in nail enamelling. Opportunities for students to experience commercial salon pressures are insufficient.
- Students enjoy college. They feel safe, understand safety in the salon and apply this knowledge well during practical activities. Informative tutorials on health and well-being have enabled them to make healthy lifestyle choices.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, students take part in a wide variety of activities that maintains their interest well. Teachers skilfully use questions to extend students' learning, making effective links between theory and practice. Students benefit from group work, skilful coaching, good individual support, peer assessment and opportunities for reflection to deepen their understanding.
- Students receive good oral feedback on their practical work. However, written feedback lacks sufficient detail. The quality of target setting and progress reviews varies considerably, resulting in students not being fully aware of the extent to which they have developed their skills.
- The very broad range of provision meets the needs and interests of students well, enabling good and vocationally relevant skills' development for all sectors of hairdressing and beauty therapy, especially those in current demand. However, teachers place insufficient emphasis on commercial salon skills, promoting product sales, repeat business and reception duties. Very few students benefit from work placements in salons.
- Care, guidance and support are good. The early identification of learning support takes place through good initial assessment. Students that take up this

support successfully complete their course. Students value the good support they receive at individual tutorials.

- Leadership and management are good, resulting in improvements in teaching and learning and success rates. Managers set and monitor course improvement targets regularly, with good analysis of data. The monitoring of students at risk is good and results in effective action plans.
- The student voice contributes significantly to securing developments in provision with managers taking prompt improvement action as a result of feedback from students. The self-assessment process is consultative and the report is accurate.
- Managers and staff carefully analyse the achievement of different groups of learners. Action has been particularly effective in closing the achievement gap between age groups. Teachers have received training in promoting equality and diversity. However, they lack sufficient knowledge to deal confidently with all the different strands of equality to prepare students for work in a very diverse sector.

What does North Hertfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that sufficient opportunities exist for students to develop commercial salon skills so that they increase their chances of employment.
- Develop the breadth of teachers' understanding of all the diversity strands so that they are more confident in preparing students to work in a very diverse sector.
- Improve the setting and recording of students' targets, progress and performance so that they have a better understanding of the extent to which they have developed their skills.

Literacy and numeracy

Grade 2

Context

35. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in literacy and numeracy from entry to intermediate level, including discrete literacy and numeracy classes, drop-in provision, and provision located in the community and the workplace. Approximately, 2355 students are enrolled on literacy and numeracy courses. Currently 650 learners are on Train to Gain Skills for Life programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Success rates are higher than the national average on literacy and numeracy courses, particularly for students aged 16 to 18, having increased substantially over the past three years. Success rates for learners on Train to Gain programmes are very high with most completing their learning within their agreed timescales.
- Students enjoy learning in the college's safe environment, with most making good progress in lessons. They significantly improve their literacy and numeracy skills, develop good team working and communication skills and greatly increase their self-confidence. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities develop a good range of skills to prepare them for the future.
- Learners in the workplace develop a good range of job-related and employability skills. In care homes, learners' improved literacy skills have enabled them to complete detailed and accurate care plans. In other settings, the quality of report writing has greatly improved.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan interesting lessons that involve students in many activities and provide good opportunities for them to work in groups and at their own pace. However, where students work at different levels in the same class, teachers do not plan lessons that are sufficiently challenging or at a pace that meets the needs of students working at higher levels.
- Learning resources are good. Students benefit from the use of well-produced and helpful handouts, materials and artefacts from everyday life, complemented by good ILT that enriches their learning. However, the use of the college's VLE is insufficient.
- The range of provision to meet the needs and interests of students and employers is outstanding. The college works very successfully in partnership with many employers, the voluntary and community sector, other training providers, schools and the armed forces, to provide extensive and wide-ranging learning opportunities in literacy and numeracy and professional development qualifications for staff working in Skills for Life.

- Guidance and support for students are good. Students receive good assessment to identify their starting points. Tutorial support is very effective. Information and guidance to help students progress when they leave their course is good.
- The quality of target setting and the reviewing of students' progress to promote learning and development vary considerably. A minority of learning targets are insufficiently challenging. Teachers, in a few instances, dominate progress reviews. The recording of students' progress is not always sufficiently detailed.
- Leadership and management are good. Curriculum management is very good, placing a strong and successful emphasis on securing improvements in provision. Team working is very effective. Teachers benefit from good professional development and regularly share resources, information and ideas. Communication with employers and learners in the workplace is highly effective. Arrangements for health and safety and safeguarding are good.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, with sharing of good practice across the literacy and numeracy teams. Curriculum design for the introduction of functional skills includes a strong focus on cultural diversity.
- The self-assessment process is comprehensive. It incorporates the combined views of all students on literacy and numeracy courses. The self-assessment report is accurate.

What does North Hertfordshire College need to do to improve further?

- Provide sufficient challenge and stretch for students in mixed level groups so that all students, and, particularly those at intermediate level, make good progress and achieve their full potential.
- Share staff expertise in setting challenging targets with students and in reviewing and recording their progress so that students' learning and development opportunities are maximised.
- Make better use of the VLE in lessons so that students benefit from access to electronic resources to extend their learning at college, in the workplace or at home.

Information about the inspection

36. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's deputy Principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
37. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
North Hertfordshire College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	3409	23	2477	909	0
Part-time learners	13213	295	1114	6072	5732
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	1
Capacity to improve	1				
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	1				
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	1
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	1	1	1	1	1
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	1				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	1				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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