

Inspection of University of Derby

Inspection dates:

3 to 6 December 2024

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

Information about this provider

Since its previous inspection, the University of Derby has substantially increased the number of apprentices it trains, and these courses are now by far the largest element of the university's further education provision. At the time of the inspection there were just under 2,500 apprentices, accounting for about two thirds of the university's further education activity. The university also offers a range of classroom-based courses for adults, young learners and learners with high needs. Education programmes for young people and provision for learners with high needs are provided through Buxton and Leek College and account for a little over two thirds of classroom-based teaching. The remaining classroom-based courses are for adults and are taught at Buxton and Leek College, and at the University of Derby. The university subcontracts elements of its apprenticeships and education programmes for young people, accounting for around nine per cent of its further education work.

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

The university provides a welcoming and supportive environment. Staff are nurturing and enjoy mutually respectful relationships with students and apprentices. Students and apprentices feel very safe, both at the university and in their workplaces.

Most students and apprentices are satisfied with the education and training that they receive. They develop their knowledge and skills well and most achieve their qualifications. The majority have good attitudes towards study. They enjoy attending, participate with enthusiasm and work diligently. They take pride in their work.

As they progress through their studies, most students and apprentices develop their confidence. This helps them to pursue more ambitious career goals, excel in job interviews, navigate personal challenges and succeed in professional settings.

Staff work well with parents, community stakeholders and employers. They involve stakeholders in curriculum design, recognising the importance of meeting the needs of their local area. They organise helpful employer forums to support the co-design of courses at all levels and work with specialist subcontract partners to provide relevant and technically appropriate training.

Apprentices achieve very well and many gain merits and distinctions. At the end of their courses, a very large proportion continue in their roles and many move on to higher levels of study. Their training prepares them well for their next steps and future careers.

Most young students who complete their courses move on to the next level of study or into employment. Managers and staff work hard to ensure that young learners attend frequently and remain on their courses. They quickly contact parents and support agencies to help students who cause concern. This results in rapid improvements in learners' attendance and progress.

Most adult learners achieve well. However, too many of those on distance learning courses do not complete their studies. Leaders have made sensible adjustments to these courses and early indications are that these changes are effective. Most adult learners who complete their courses move on to the next level of study or into employment.

Students with high needs achieve well. Teachers receive good training to support students with high needs, and work well with learning support assistants to ensure that students receive the help that they need. Students with high needs who study vocational programmes achieve at least as well as their peers.

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

Leaders and managers consider carefully the national, regional and local context when developing courses. For apprenticeships, for example, they work with local constabularies and NHS trusts to develop courses that reflect both national regulations and local expectations. They have developed English language programmes for adult Ukrainian refugees to improve their ability to integrate and find work.

Teachers mostly plan courses well. They select appropriate content and organise it in ways that help students and apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills over time. For example, apprentice police constables learn about law, criminology and the role of the police before tackling complex topics such as intelligence-gathering. However, in a few cases, managers and teachers do not consider the curriculum carefully enough. For example, level 3 sports courses for young students do not include the breadth of topics necessary to help them to access a full range of further study or work.

Leaders and managers have established comprehensive arrangements for apprentices and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Staff produce detailed 'support passports' that clearly identify learners' additional needs and appropriate support strategies that teachers use well. Teachers work effectively with learning support staff to ensure that learners receive the help that they need in lessons.

Teachers have very good subject expertise. In most cases, they use their knowledge well to help students and apprentices to gain a sound understanding of topics, drawing on relevant examples from industry. For example, they use information about real air accident investigations to help apprentice engineering manufacturing technicians to strengthen their understanding of design concepts.

Most teachers thoroughly check students' and apprentices' understanding through questioning, discussion boards, quizzes and practical tasks. For example, GCSE mathematics teachers routinely use recall activities at the start of lessons and conduct reviews of homework, classwork and topic tests to gauge students' understanding.

Teachers use a wide array of useful and demanding practice activities, so that apprentices and students strengthen their recall of topics and become more skilled over time. For example, young students on professional cookery courses repeatedly practise techniques so that they become able to work to industry timings.

Teachers often provide students and apprentices with precise feedback on their written work that enables them to make improvements. However, on a minority of courses, such as the operations and departmental manager apprenticeship and access to higher education courses, teachers are not always specific or challenging enough.

On apprenticeship courses, staff conduct comprehensive progress reviews that employers attend. However, discussions and target-setting often focus too much on assignment completion. Where this is the case, instructor-mentors do not do enough to help apprentices and their managers to plan on-the-job activities that complement off-the-job study.

Most students and apprentices develop a sound grasp of new knowledge and skills that they demonstrate through written and practical work that meets or exceeds expectations. A high proportion pass their courses and many gain merits and distinctions in their final assessments. However, too many young students dropped out of their courses in the previous academic year, and too many adult students on distance learning courses failed to complete their studies. Managers have identified the reasons for these outcomes and have made sensible changes that are working well.

Staff mostly set clear expectations for behaviour, and most students and apprentices behave well. For example, apprentice early years educators are kind, courteous and respectful. They can describe how these behaviours and attitudes support them to work effectively with young children and the importance of using their professionalism to generate positive working relationships with parents. However, a small number of students behave less well. For example, in level 3 sport and physical activity lessons, students speak over one another and are disrespectful towards staff. Staff do not always challenge this sort of behaviour and when they do, it does not always result in a change.

Most students receive helpful careers education, advice and guidance. Staff frequently discuss potential career routes with students and apprentices. Students and apprentices also access the university's careers service for impartial careers advice and support with job and university applications. Staff provide appropriate advice and support for apprentices who are seeking promotion with their employer.

Managers have established suitable quality assurance processes, including for subcontractors. These include risk-assessed curriculum reviews, and a programme of lesson observations. They have recently improved their use of systems so that they have access to useful and timely performance data and now rapidly gain a clear understanding of any emerging areas of concern.

Leaders and managers provide staff with effective training. They encourage staff to make use of the many courses on offer within the university, such as Master's-level programmes and higher-level apprenticeships. This helps to ensure that staff are well equipped to perform their roles within the university.

Governance is effective, with a diverse governing council that challenges and supports the leadership team well. Governors have a firm understanding of the institution's strategic goals and challenges. They have access to appropriate performance data that enables them to scrutinise and challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Develop the curriculum of the few weaker areas so that it provides learners with the breadth of knowledge they need for a full range of possible next steps.
- Provide feedback on students' and apprentices' marked work that is specific and precise enough on the small number of courses where this is not the case.
- Use progress reviews for apprentices to link study and on-the-job practice more effectively.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133811
Address	Kedleston Road Derby Derbyshire DE22 1GB
Contact number	01332622222
Website	https://www.derby.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Kathryn Mitchell
Provider type	Other further education and skills
Dates of previous inspection	5 to 8 February 2019
Main subcontractors	Chief Constable of Derbyshire Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire MP-Skills (MPQC) University Hospitals Derby and Buxton Learning Unlimited Derby College Group Buxton Football Club Limited JCB Academy Trust Leek Town FC CIC West Midlands Ambulance Service University NHS Foundation Trust

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director for further education and skills, 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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