

Organisation name	New College Durham
Inspection date	30 November 2021
Current accreditation status	Accredited
Reason for spot check	Routine: newly accredited institution

Recommendation

We recommend continued accreditation. The next inspection now falls due in 2025; there are no grounds for bringing this forward.

Changes to the summary statement

No changes need to be made to the summary statement, apart from adding the date of this inspection.

New summary statement

The British Council inspected and accredited New College Durham in January 2020 and November 2021. The Accreditation Scheme assesses the standards of management, resources and premises, teaching, welfare, and safeguarding under 18s and accredits organisations which meet the overall standard in each area inspected (see www.britishcouncil.org/education/accreditation for details).

The English language teaching department of this college of further education offers courses in general English and ESOL Skills for Life for adults (18+) and young people (16+) and for closed groups of adults (18+) and young people (16+).

Strengths were noted in the areas of strategic and quality management, student administration, premises and facilities, learning resources, course design, learner management, teaching, care of students, accommodation, and leisure opportunities.

The inspection report stated that the organisation met the standards of the Scheme.

Updated summary inspection findings

None.

Organisation profile

Inspection history	Dates/details
First inspection	January 2020
Last full inspection	January 2020
Subsequent spot check(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent supplementary check(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Subsequent interim visit(s) (if applicable)	N/a
Other related non-accredited activities (in brief) at this centre	N/a
Other related accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a
Other related non-accredited schools/centres/affiliates	N/a

Student and staff profile	At inspection	In peak week: <i>November</i>
Total ELT/ESOL student numbers (FT + PT)	139	139
Minimum age (including closed group or vacation)	16	16
Typical age range	16–70	16–70
Typical length of stay	1 year	1 year
Predominant nationalities	Syrian, Kurdish, Iranian, Brazilian	Syrian, Kurdish, Iranian, Brazilian
Total number of teachers on eligible ELT courses	10	10

Total number of managers including academic	1	1
Total number of administrative/ancillary staff	2	2

Premises profile

Address of main site	Framwellgate Moor, Durham DH1 5ES
Additional sites in use	N/a
Additional sites not in use	N/a
Sites inspected	Framwellgate Moor

Introduction

Background

The English Language Centre (ELC) is part of New College Durham (NCD). It was first inspected and accredited in January 2020 and this was a routine spot check inspection of a newly accredited provider.

Preparation

The inspector was sent relevant documents and viewed the college website in advance. She spoke to the ELC curriculum manager (ELCCM) prior to the inspection to check the availability of key staff, and to manage practical and technical aspects of the inspection as it was to be conducted remotely. The college was aware in advance of the week in which the spot check would take place, and the actual day was confirmed the night before, together with an outline programme for the inspection.

Programme and persons present

The inspection took half a day. It began at 10.30 and finished at 16.30, with a break in proceedings caused by technical issues. The inspector had meetings with the ELCCM and the homestay recruitment and accommodation officer. Brief focus groups were held with teachers and students, although the students' meeting was unfortunately cut short because of technical issues. A live video tour of the school premises was carried out, and a range of documents was checked and discussed. The inspector conducted a brief round-up session with the ELCCM before concluding the spot check inspection.

Findings

Management

The college has been restructured since the last inspection, and a new principal and deputy principal appointed. All schools have been reconfigured, and the ELC now comes under Sixth Form, ELC, Sport and Uniformed Services, the head of which school is also a new appointment since the last inspection. The ELC team remains relatively stable. The ELCCM has responsibility for ESOL and EFL, and manages a team of teachers, each of which is also a course leader for their class. The ELC is integrated into wider college systems, including human resources, and supported by college staff as required. Signed contracts, copies of qualifications and references were seen for the two newly recruited teachers.

The restructuring has not negatively affected the ELC; rather it is perceived as a positive change, particularly since all three new senior appointments are felt to be very interested in and supportive of the work of the centre. Communications remain robust and effective, and systems for continuing improvement, drawing on student feedback collected in a wide variety of ways, as well as other sources, remain in place.

During lockdown periods in the past 18 months, the centre was able to maintain its full ESOL provision by moving to online tuition, although EFL numbers were very low throughout. The ELC has submitted a self-evaluation for online provision. Currently, all classes are back to face-to-face teaching, with online used as a back-up where students are unable to attend in person. There are plans to offer online EFL programmes in the future.

Student administration is handled locally or through the international office, depending on the course involved. Students clearly receive ample information and advice in making their course choices.

College publicity has been rebranded since the last inspection. Information on the ELC is in a downloadable document on the main website, and covers all relevant criteria.

Premises and resources

There have been no significant changes to the premises, which are of a high standard and well maintained with good facilities, since the last inspection. At the time of the spot check some building works were taking place on the college campus; these will lead to improvements. The ELC now has four designated classrooms. Large screens in each classroom facilitate hybrid classes where one or more students join online if unable to attend in person.

The level of learning resources remains very good, with full access for ELC students to the college library and tailored support, as well as self-access facilities and resources in the ELC. These have been significantly augmented through the purchase of specific online materials, and improvements and additions have also been made to the virtual learning environment (VLE), to further support online learning and to facilitate materials sharing for teachers. Students continue to benefit from very good learning support including tutorials.

Teaching and learning

Courses and the approach to course design are essentially the same as at the last inspection, but there have been some adjustments, including the provision of catch-up classes because of the pandemic. Good training and support was provided for teachers in making the transition to online teaching during lockdown periods, and the college technology team is very responsive.

Academic management is dealt with by the ELCCM and by the teachers as course leaders for their own groups. Teachers in the focus group felt that the administration related to this role was substantial, and particularly challenging for teachers paid on an hourly basis.

Arrangements for continuing professional development are good, with college-wide as well as local, subject-specific provision. Regular observation takes place.

Welfare and student services

The ELC is well integrated into international and wider college support systems and the class tutor role has a pastoral element to it. Students in the focus group, although only able to speak briefly because of technical issues, nonetheless managed to convey an extremely positive view of the centre and the support they receive. The ELC arranges a limited amount of homestay accommodation for EFL students and school groups; the majority of ESOL students are settled in the UK. Appropriate systems are in place, and at the time of the inspection there were no students in homestay. A range of college enrichment activities is organised, including monthly excursions, with links to the curriculum as far as possible. Arrangements for information, security and risk assessment are all good.

Safeguarding under 18s

At the time of the inspection, there were seven under 18s in the centre, all were in supported accommodation. There is a comprehensive college safeguarding policy, and the safeguarding team has remained the same since the last inspection. Levels of training are appropriate and safeguarding is a standing item in weekly team (ESOL and EFL) meetings.

Action taken on points to be addressed

Management

M10 At present the college does not renew suitability checks every three years.

Addressed. All staff likely to be in close contact with ELC students have renewed suitability checks and a rolling programme for renewals every three years has been introduced.

Safeguarding under 18s

S4 The college does not routinely check staff suitability every three years.

Addressed. See above.

Teaching and learning

T10 Formal observation and action planning do not always take place on an annual basis.

Addressed. Formal observations now take place and records of these were seen.

T13 Written course outlines and learning outcomes are not routinely made available to students.

Addressed. Aims are displayed in classrooms and weekly work with outcomes is posted on the VLE.

Conclusions

From the evidence seen during this spot check, the overall provision continues to meet the standards of the Scheme. All points to be addressed from the last inspection have been addressed and the centre has managed to maintain its systems and standards through the pandemic and a college restructuring.
