

Short inspection of Petroc

Inspection dates:

6–7 November 2019

Outcome

Petroc continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Petroc is a further education college which operates across three campuses in north and mid-Devon: two in Barnstaple and one in Tiverton. It serves a large geographic area of mostly rural and coastal communities. At the time of the inspection, around 2,500 learners aged 16 to 18 were studying at Petroc, almost half of them at level 3. There were just under 3,000 learners on adult programmes and approximately 800 apprentices. Around half of these adults and apprentices were studying at level 2. Forty-five learners were on traineeships and 231 learners were in receipt of high needs funding. Petroc offers courses from entry level to level 5. Leaders offer courses in most subjects, the largest of which are health and social care, construction, engineering, creative and performing arts, and business.

In addition, the college provides part-time courses for 71 learners aged 15 to 16. There is also higher education provision.

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

Learners enjoy their learning and life at college. The curriculum is successful in developing learners' academic knowledge and their personal qualities well. Those who enter college straight from school relish the relative independence they experience. They are quick to develop positive behaviours and attitudes to their learning. Learners and apprentices appreciate the respect with which they are treated by staff and each other. They feel safe at college and in their work placements.

Learners and apprentices are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of education and training they receive. They get the help and support they need from staff to do well and, as a result, many thrive and make good progress towards achieving their curriculum goals. They appreciate the subject expertise of their teachers and assessors and regard them as good role models.

Learners and apprentices benefit from a curriculum which is well designed, improves their subject knowledge and behaviours, and develops new skills. Most learners and apprentices on vocational courses develop the practical skills and technical

knowledge they need to become industry professionals. Learners gain in confidence and learn social and personal skills which prepare them well for life outside college.

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

Leaders and managers use their in-depth knowledge of the local area needs and their good links with employers to offer a well-considered, wide range of courses. The curriculum at all levels enables learners to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours which match the needs of regional employers and the aspirations of learners. For example, the engineering curriculum is linked closely to the apprenticeship curriculum so that learners can move on to these seamlessly using the prior knowledge they have gained. Senior leaders are ambitious for the strategic direction of the college. They have far-reaching plans to develop further their curriculum offer to meet the evolving nature of employment opportunities in the region.

Teachers are highly experienced in their subjects or industries. They plan a range of engaging topics and sequence activities carefully so that learners and apprentices stay interested and well motivated. Learners' attendance is good in most subject areas.

Teachers ensure that learners move from a basic level of understanding of topics and concepts to a more complex understanding. For example, learners on level 2 health and social care courses study mental health and then move on to explore how emotional well-being fits into late childhood development. In engineering and on access-to-higher-education courses, mathematical and scientific principles are taught early in the first year so that learners can use this knowledge to build on and understand more difficult subjects later. A new pre-access course ensures that adult learners without GCSE English and mathematics study these subjects and improve and learn new knowledge before going on to study their chosen access-to-higher-education course.

Most teachers check that learners remember their knowledge and can apply it effectively to learning new concepts or in practical settings. For example, teachers of apprentice accountants recap the balancing of accounts regularly. Teachers demonstrate practical skills to learners well and make sure that learners practise these skills until they are competent before they move on to new learning. Learners on level 3 music technology learn to set up equipment for live sound after clear demonstrations from teachers and plenty of practice during the first term of their course. Learners and apprentices produce high standards of work because of the teaching they receive and the high expectations of staff. Most teachers give learners very useful feedback on their work to help them improve their subject knowledge, academic and practical skills, and written English.

Managers ensure that learners receive good careers advice and guidance to help them choose relevant courses and decide their next steps after college. Learners view staff as good role models for their chosen industry or academic subject. Staff

help learners prepare well for their next step, for example work or further study. Many learners go on to subject-related university courses, employment or apprenticeships when they leave Petroc. A high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications, particularly at level 3.

Learners gain valuable experience of industry and business through work experience, volunteering, sector-related trips in the UK and abroad, and visiting speakers and lecturers. These help to broaden their understanding of employment and employers' expectations, and life in the UK and overseas.

Petroc's relatively new senior leadership team has identified the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum clearly. They receive good support from a well-informed governing board to ensure that the curriculum offer meets the business needs of local services and supports innovation. Leaders have introduced new initiatives this year designed to tackle specific weaknesses, such as developing learners' 'soft skills' and enrichment activities to support their movement into employment. It is too early to evaluate their success.

Leaders have ensured that much of the college provides a pleasant environment for learners and staff. There are good resources and facilities for learning in many of the specialist subject areas, such as engineering and health and beauty, and the learning centre. Some areas of the college, such as corridors and classrooms in the main buildings, do not match the standards seen elsewhere.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders work well with staff and external agencies to keep learners safe. Designated safeguarding leads are well qualified, and all staff receive regular refresher training. Managers keep detailed records of concerns, which they monitor carefully. As a result of a comprehensive and well-designed curriculum, learners know how to report any concerns. Staff are aware of the potential local risks to learners but have not captured these effectively in their risk assessments. Not enough learners fully understand the risks associated with extremism or exploitation.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Senior leaders need to monitor the impact of changes and new initiatives to the curriculum carefully to ensure that actions to improve are effective. This includes developing ever-swifter responses to the changing demands of local employment so that learners can use their learning, knowledge and experiences gained from the curriculum to access new opportunities.
- Managers should develop the higher-level teaching skills of teachers further so that they use their subject and industry expertise to become masters of the craft of teaching.

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum delivery is enhanced further by developing teachers' pedagogical knowledge in using their expert subject knowledge and industry expertise so that all learners learn, understand and embed key concepts in their long-term memory.
- Staff should ensure that learners develop a clear and deep understanding of how to keep themselves safe from harm in the local community and beyond.
- Leaders should improve some of the underdeveloped areas of the college to ensure that all learners and staff learn and work in an environment that is conducive to effective learning.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130646
Address	Old Sticklepath Hill Barnstaple Devon EX31 2BQ
Contact number	01271 852 521
Website	www.petroc.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Sean Mackney
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	4–5 November 2015
Main subcontractors	Northern Devon Healthcare Trust Construction Industry Training Board Group Training and Development Ltd Launceston College Skills Network Wings

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since Petroc was judged to be good in March 2012.

The inspection team was assisted by the vice-principal quality, curriculum and learners, 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 observing 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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