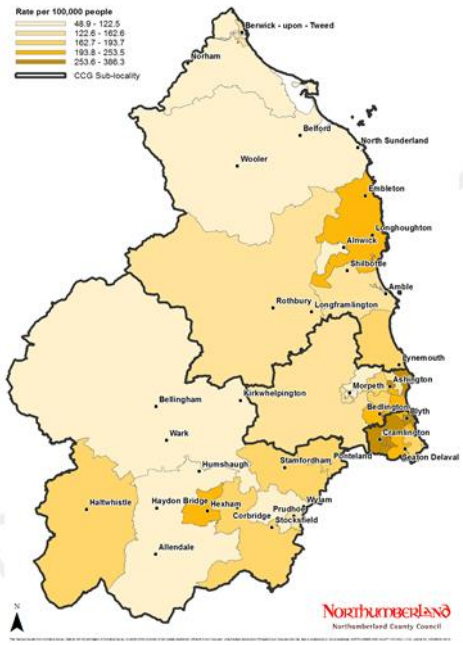
Submission in support of TEF award: January 2018

This submission is provided in support of the College's case for excellence in our TEF Year 3 application. We make the case for a Silver award, based upon the relevant metrics and the additional evidence supplied in this submission.

1. About Northumberland College

Northumberland College is a successful General Further Education College providing technical and professional training. Since 1957, the College has been highly committed to serving the people of Northumberland and since 2003 we have developed our HE offer in close partnership with both private and public sector employers.

Our aspiration for higher education is to



provide a transformative experience for students from socially and economically deprived backgrounds, and this statement will articulate how we do this, supported by appropriate qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Our main campus is situated in the more densely-populated South East corner of the county and offers courses to meet the needs of service industries such as Hospitality and Travel and Tourism which are vital to the local economy. Kirkley Hall, our land-based campus, caters for the needs of rural employers by offering a range of land-based programmes which upskill the rural workforce and also support them to become self-employed thus contributing to the rural economy. We are the only provider of higher education in Northumberland, enabling the population of this rural county to remain in the area for their studies if they wish. We are proud to be the only provider of higher education in the northerly town of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Our strong partnerships with the University of Newcastle, the University of Cumbria and the University of Huddersfield result in a high quality HE offer. These partnerships offer a range of different benefits. We work in partnership with the University of Newcastle to offer a suite of science programmes and we will be extending these with the opening of our new STEM centre. Cumbria and Northumberland have many similarities with rural hinterlands interspersed with larger towns where traditional industries have declined and there is an urgent need for higher level skills to support regeneration. Consequently, this makes the University of Cumbria an excellent partner who understands the particular needs of our county. The University of Huddersfield is a Centre of Teaching Excellence and we are proud to be a partner in their lifelong learning consortium.

The further education provision at Northumberland College was inspected by

Ofsted in May 2017. This highlighted the clear vision of leaders and governors to deliver high-quality learning programmes which meet the diverse needs of Northumberland's communities and employers. The higher education provision was last reviewed by the QAA in 2012, finding confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities and identifying two areas of good practice.

1.1 Mission

It is our mission to become an outstanding college delivering for the communities it serves with an entrepreneurial and innovative ethos. Committed to achieving positive outcomes for students via an employer led curriculum which offers both a pathway to work and a first-class experience- developing all the skills, qualities and attributes needed to succeed in the workplace.

Objectives relevant to higher education

1.1.1 Develop a series of specialist curriculum centres across campuses

Evidence of this in relation to higher education can be seen in the opening of our new STEM centre to extend HE progression routes and meet the needs of the growing pharmaceutical industry in the county.

Northumberland College £1.5 Million STEM Centre

1.1.2 Place enterprise at the heart of all the College's work and continue to develop a network of real working environments

HE students benefit from zoological gardens which are open to the public and function as a research hub for College students and University of Newcastle students. In addition, our Engineering and Science students develop their practical skills in new workshops and laboratories which help them to develop links between theory and practice. As we develop new programmes we ensure that enterprise is embedded in the content to equip our students for the world of work.

Kirkley Hall Zoological Garden

1.1.3 Increase the use of technology to enhance learning

All HE programmes have an extensive site on the VLE and, in addition, many courses are developing innovative ways of using interactive platforms such as Padlet and Google Classroom to support collaborative working and shared learning.

1.1.4 Ensure the curriculum offer is linked to the local economy and meets employer needs with pathways from 14-19 and HE

All programmes are developed in partnership with employers and meet local needs identified by Northumberland County Council Local Plan. Currently we are developing bespoke undergraduate pathways in Travel and Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management. The Northumberland Economy is heavily reliant on tourism and it is vital that we develop a workforce equipped with the higher skills required to manage facilities and attract visitors. In addition, a key priority of the local plan is to meet the needs of an aging population and our new programmes in health and social care fulfil this need. A key priority is to align our curriculum with the NELEP priorities and currently we are working with our HEI partners to expand our Engineering courses and develop our digital technology and science offer.

1.1.5 Equip our students with the skills, qualities and attributes for work

All part-time students are either already employed in the relevant sector and attend college with only a very small minority engaged in work placement. Our full-time students all carry out work experience or, in the case of Art students, work on live projects with local organisations.

Taken together, this demonstrates a strong commitment to delivering our mission through clear and practical actions.

1.2 Local and regional Context

Northumberland is a varied county with extensive rural areas of scattered populations in contrast to the more densely populated South East which has significant pockets of deprivation. It is a county of significant contrasts with areas of relative affluence such as Alnwick, Hexham and Morpeth and significant areas of deprivation in the more densely populated South East of the county

Students at the main campus are mainly drawn from this South East corner particularly from Ashington, Newbiggin, Lynemouth, Bedlington and Blyth. These towns and villages contain 14 county wards in the 10% most deprived in England. This is also reflected in the Health deprivation statistics for this area of the county with 16 wards in the 10% most deprived. Turning attention to Education, Skills and Training deprivation then we find a starker picture with 23 wards in the 10% most deprived. In addition, the northerly town of Berwick-upon-Tweed is also included in these deprived wards as regards to education, training and skills.[1]

Progression to HE is particularly low in certain parts of the county and it is significant that, out of 95 North East wards designated as cold spots for progression, [2] 23% are located in the Northumberland. Out of 14 secondary schools/academies 11 are designated as schools with lower than expected progression to HE and, within the College, 224 out of 517 Level 3 students reside in wards with poor progression. As a result, only 24% of the population hold a level 4 or above qualification and this is 4% below the national average.

These demographics demonstrate the need for the College to engage proactively with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership Strategic Plan[3] to develop the local economy through higher skills.

[1] Northumberland Knowledge Report English Indices of Deprivation 2015 Northumberland Analysis[2]

[2] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/crosscutting/coldspots/

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In addition, transport links are poor with only one main east coast rail line and no rail network. In turn, this means that the population is reliant on road transport either by car or bus and again, the infrastructure is poor with the main A1 only partially dualled north of Morpeth.

Taken together, this means that the College plays a vital role in upskilling a population which faces considerable problems in accessing the Higher Education programmes which would, in turn, result in progression to higher level employment with the resultant rise in income and economic prosperity

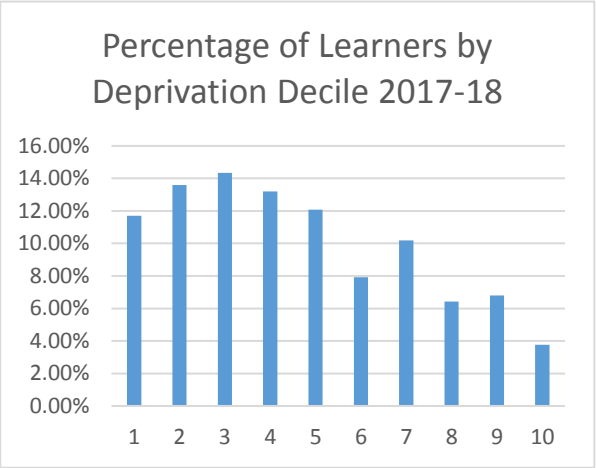
1.3 Size and nature of HE provision

Currently there are 320 HE students and this shows a significant rise from the 250 in our metrics and emphasises our continuing commitment to widening participation and inclusivity through new course offer and student engagement.

The balance of our student population has also changed and we now have 61% full-time and 39%-part time. This growth in FT is due to a commitment to providing further progression for our level 3 students and also expansion in our offer at level 6 with two new programmes for our Children's Workforce and Rural Science students. This means that significant numbers of students can complete their undergraduate studies whilst remaining in the county. In a recent student survey 60 % cited the convenience of the location as one of the main reasons for choosing to study with us as we are the only provider of Higher Education in Northumberland, with a presence in the different areas of the County.

We remain committed to offering part-time provision, as many of our students work part-time and have caring responsibilities. In response, we offer courses flexibly to meet their needs. For example, offering tuition from 5-9pm, allowing students in full-time employment to attend college. The needs of Hospitality students are met by timetabling classes on Mondays when many restaurants and catering outlets are closed. This continuing commitment to our part time students is also evidenced by the development of our new part-time Foundation Degree in Leadership and Management and is in sharp contrast to the overall decline in numbers of part-time students nationally.

Our commitment to inclusion is clearly demonstrated in the following table,



In total 51% of our current student population is drawn from Deprivation Deciles 1-4 equivalent to POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2

and, again, this illustrates our commitment to engaging with and recruiting non-traditional students from areas of low participation.
We are attempting to address the gender imbalance in our student numbers, due

[3] https://www.nelep.co.uk/the-plan/

to the high numbers of female students on our two largest programmes (Children's Workforce Practice and Animal Management). The gap between male and female students has been reduced by 3% in the current year because of the introduction of new programmes for Sport and Public Services students. These new programmes were initiated at the request of the level 3 students showing a proactive approach to meeting their needs. In addition, our continued focus on STEM programmes should further address the gender gap.

Around 10% of our students identify a learning difficulty or disability and this has remained static over the last three years. Continuation is good for this group of students and this is shown by a positive flag.

Our proactive approach to inclusion is highlighted by the external examiner for HND Art who identifies the very good attention to widening participation through the inclusion of students with physical difficulties and mental health issues.

99.2% of our students are white and this reflects the population of Northumberland which is over 99% white.

Our age demographics also demonstrate this attention to widening participation and inclusion with 32.5% aged 21 – 13, 35.4% under 21 and 32.1% aged 30+.

Overall, this demonstrates an ongoing commitment to meeting the diverse needs of our students.

2. Teaching

Outdoor Education students at the summit of Mount Toubkal in Morocco. When they undertake this challenge they also raise funds for girls in the surrounding villages to attend school.

2.1 Student Satisfaction

Our metrics in relation to teaching, learning opportunities, and assessment and feedback are extremely positive. In the most recent NSS survey results we obtained 89.4% agreement that the teaching on courses is good, against a sector average of 84.6%. When this is further broken down 95.5% of students feel that staff are good at explaining things (+6.5%), with and 89% agreeing that staff have made the subject interesting (+6%).
This is reinforced in a recent internal college student survey.
"Staff. Every single member of the animal care team and the zoo. They go out of their way to help you as much as they can and will also answer anything you have to ask them"
Foundation Degree Animal Management student
"Having been previously taught by our lecturer I was inspired to carry on with my studies"
Teacher Education trainee

In terms of learning opportunities, the student satisfaction is even higher with a score of 94% against a sector average of 83.5 %(+10.5%). All aspects of this section score around 10% higher than the sector average and students strongly agree that they have had opportunities to explore ideas and concepts in depth (95.5%) with opportunities to apply what they have learned (91.1%).

In addition, there is significant improvement in satisfaction with assessment and feedback

with 85% satisfaction against a sector average of 73%. 84% feel that marking and assessment is fair (+11%). Students also value the timely feedback (+11%) and helpful comments (+9%)

It is particularly heartening to see the rise in satisfaction with academic support which is 7.5% above sector average with 91% of students agreeing that they can contact a member of staff when they needed to (+5%). This was a negative flag in our year 2 metrics and this significant improvement demonstrates our success in resolving negative aspects and to taking proactive actions to address these.

Satisfaction with the organisation of the course is also above average (+3%) with students particularly happy with way their course is timetabled.

However, we are not complacent, recognising that overall satisfaction was only around the national average. This was due to poor satisfaction with IT resources, with only 42.2% agreeing that this supported their learning (-51%). In mitigation, the College has recently invested over £1.2 million in a Tech Refresh scheme with 1100 new PCS, 500 tablets and 150 laptops and satisfaction is much higher with over 87% of students agreeing that technology supports their learning (cross college induction survey carried out in October 2017)

The other area which adversely affected the overall score was lower levels of satisfaction with library resources including learning spaces (-7%). We take this feedback seriously and closer examination revealed that Art students felt significantly constrained by being taught beside the FE learners in a crowded environment. To address this, we have moved these students into the dedicated HE teaching and learning area and provided a large studio, practice area for graphics students and specific rooms for media make-up and photography students. As a result, student feedback has been highly positive. In addition, library opening hours have been extended to 7pm, allowing students increased access. We have also purchased further rights to academic journals and these are being well-used by the students.

2.2 Teaching and Learning Performance and CPD

All HE teaching staff are encouraged and supported to engage in continuing professional development, through a range of activities to develop their scholarship and pedagogic practice, with the ultimate aim of improving the learning experience for students. They have the opportunity to engage in post-graduate study, financially supported by the College. Eight teachers have completed Post-Graduate Certificates in Academic Practice with another four currently engaged. This means that by the end of this year 33% of the teaching staff will be members of HEA. In addition, 52% of our teaching staff are now qualified at post-graduate level and we intend to continue this process until all staff are qualified at this level. There has been a sustained and rigorous focus on the development needs of the HE community of staff and there are four designated days where they meet together to plan their development.

"A particular highlight of my study was the action research undertaken which focused on increasing the integration of technology within my teaching and programme management. Not a particular strength, and often avoided if possible due to a perceived lack of competency and fear of failing systems this led to the successful introduction of a wiki to promote peer review and assessment. This process evolved, as did the skills of the students accessing it, and there was a clear development of their ability to offer more objective, honest and critical feedback as well as offering suggestions for further developing the drafts under review."

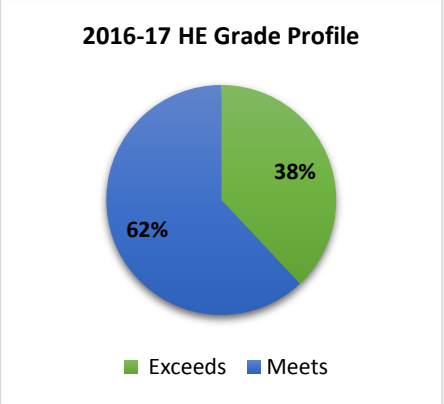
Lesley Jobson Programme Leader Foundation Degree Children's Workforce Practice

A post-graduate study with a group of our new HE teachers clearly identified that they would benefit from mentoring and also from

opportunities for peer observations and, in the current year, all new HE teachers are allocated an experienced mentor and are encouraged to participate in reciprocal peer observations.
In addition, new HE staff engage in an Education Training Foundation package (HE in FE) which allows them to meet as a group and to receive further support.

The support I received from my mentor really helped me to understand the requirements of teaching and learning at the HE level. Because of this I was able to understand and identify how to make assignments more holistic in nature, and how to ensure these would be suitable for my learners. This has helped with my confidence of creating assignment briefs, but also better informed about the levels of work required in HE
New HNC Sport teacher

All HE teaching staff are subject to graded observations resulting in a sustained focus on the quality of HE. Any teacher failing to gain either meets (good) or exceeds (outstanding) expectations is immediately contacted by one of the learning advocates, three of whom are experienced HE teachers, and their action plan is discussed and acted upon. There is a six week window of support implemented before re-observation takes place. Failure to progress would activate performance monitoring carried out by the Head of Academy. In addition, performance management of teaching staff delivering on HE programmes is closely monitored by the Director of HE. However, only one HE teacher required re-observation last year and the follow-up lesson was graded exceeds expectations illustrating the effectiveness of the support.



The following excerpts from observation records illustrate the high standard of teaching

- *All learners able to review and peer assess each other's work to improve the content and presentation, so developing their critical skills and ability to improve the quality of their work*.
  (Children's Workforce|)
- *All learners working very well independently to create their storyboards using hand drawn images.*
  (Art)
- *The session is effective in developing the independent learning skills of the learners and embedding mathematical skill development into the session*.
  (Engineering)
- *Very good progress was made by the learners who showed good levels of ability to research in situ and evaluate the installations.*
  (Art)
- *Highly supportive and challenging advice and guidance provided by the teacher that is highly effective in motivating learners and guiding their ideas development.*
  (Teacher Education – feedback from by external observer from University of Huddersfield))

The College is also one of the first twenty colleges to adopt the new Association of Colleges Scholarship Framework and we are committed to embedding scholarly research in our appraisal process. As a result, all HE teachers have at least one scholarly research target in their annual appraisal. In summary, we are highly committed to developing our HE staff and, as a result, our students are highly satisfied with their teaching and learning and, in particular, with the high levels of vocational knowledge of their teachers.

This is highlighted by the external examiner's report on HNC Engineering which identifies the high regard the students have for the professional knowledge of the staff. In addition, the external examiner for HNC Health and Social Care identifies the professional qualifications of the staff as a major strength and the external examiner for Foundation Degree Children's Workforce Practice highlights the high levels of staff awareness of the changing landscape in the children's workforce.

2.3 External Examiners

External examiner reports highlight and commend a range of good practice across our HE programmes. Identified areas of good practice include praise for practical and innovative assessment (Foundation Degree in Counselling); well-designed assessment and supportive and consistent feedback (Foundation Degree Event Management, Foundation Degree Children's Workforce Practice). Moreover, EE reports also commend programmes of guest speakers and external visits which significantly enhance the student experience (HND Hospitality Management and HND Travel and Tourism Management). The highly-developed VLE was also cited as significantly augmenting the experience of Engineering students. In addition, Art students benefit from well-planned opportunities for collaborative working to enhance their team working in preparation them for the world of work.

3. Measures of Success

3.1 Retention and Achievement

Our achievement across all our HE programmes is extremely high and the vast majority of those students who remain on programme achieve their undergraduate qualifications of choice (94%).

We acknowledge the difficulties we have experienced with retention in the past, but this is significantly improving with current retention on two year full-time programmes at 88.5% providing clear evidence of the impact of our support.

We are aware that retention for some of our part-time students is less robust (72%) as they may struggle to combine the demands of work, study and family commitments. In 2016-17 this was particularly the case for our Children's Workforce programme where many of the students were also carers and despite extensive support were unable to complete their studies, but not typical of previous cohorts with retention of 83%.

Encouragingly, our metrics show positive flags for continuation of learners with disabilities and for our male students.

We have invested heavily in supporting HE students through the appointment of dedicated pastoral mentors who work across all campuses. This is further augmented by our academic support team. We consider this to be effective in retaining vulnerable HE

students to the completion of their programmes.

"I could not have completed my programme without the support from X (pastoral mentor). In the midst of a meltdown she calmed me down and then met with me whenever I needed her and still offers support now. I have been able to move up into and am doing well now"

HND Art student

"At the start of the year I had severe depression. The support I received from staff members was amazing such as X (pastoral mentor), Y (pastoral mentor) and Z (HE teacher). X has often given up her lunch break to help me find ways of telling my parents how I was feeling. One day when I was feeling very low Z sat with me for an hour calming me down as I told her everything that had happened and how bad I was feeling. It was very selfless of her! She was great with me and helped me so much that day.

From then on she takes time to ask me how I am and also told me how well I was doing. That was part of my motivation to keep doing well. I wanted to finish her module with high grades and not let it stop me from being successful. From then on things got so much better for me and I feel I am doing well.

Animal Management student

We also offer extensive support to students with additional needs, as illustrated by the following case study.

A profoundly deaf Children's Workforce student completed level 4,5 and 6 with the College and has now progressed to study at Masters level. The teaching team ensured correct positioning in class and raised awareness with her peers who then learned to meet her needs for lip reading during their discussions. We also accommodated her hearing dog and ensured that video clips were transcribed so that she could access them. In addition, she was offered additional tutorial and support time and gained a distinction at level 5 and a first class honours degree at level 6.

3.2 Progression

Our most recent progression survey (2016 – 17 DLHE survey on 2015 – 16 graduates) shows that 68% of our students progress to employment with 56% of this group working full time. In addition, 48% progress to higher levels of study and taken together, this shows high progression rates. In addition, 91% of graduates feel well-prepared for employment with 90% feeling well-prepared for further study.

We acknowledge the negative flag against higher level progression but have recently introduced level 6 top up programmes and these allow our students to remain in the College and complete their full undergraduate studies. To illustrate the success of this an analysis of the progression data used for the metrics shows that 8 of our Children's Workforce students progressed to the level 6 top up at Northumbria University as the lengthy journey by public transport was a significant deterrent. Now that we offer this internally there are 23 students on the programme and the new level 6 land-based top up programmes have 19 students enrolled. Because of this we confidently predict that our progression to higher study will rise and, in turn, this will support progression to higher employment.

Shannon Lockard is an excellent example of progression to self-employment. She completed a Foundation Degree in Children's Workforce Practice at our Berwick campus and is now co-owner of a nursery. She states that "*The course gave me a new outlook on childcare and I am now qualified to help the children I care for learn and develop effectively. I could not have got to where I am now without the skills I developed on the course"*

Lucy Green who studied Animal Management at Kirkley Hall endorsed this programme with the following comments "*My time at Kirkley Hall was a great stepping stone to kick start my career. Through my time at the college I worked as a zoo host and then became a zoo keeper. I then worked at an animal rehabilitation centre in South Africa and then started working for the RSPCA. I was first a Wildlife Assistant at West Hatch, then an Animal Collection Officer and now I am a Trainee Inspector. My course gave me a wide range of skills and knowledge that I am able to utilise in my everyday work. This includes everything from the topics we studied which gave me an understanding of some of the animal legislation and I draw on this daily now to confidently talk to a range of different people.*"

4 Student Experience

4.1 Facilities and Resources

Students benefit from up to date, industry standard facilities.
In the Brunel building we have two fully automatic EMCO CNC machines, a Lathe and a miller, that allow learners to produce small prototype parts as part of their design or project. These machines allow products designed using MasterCAM or AutoCAD software to be produced in soft metal format (aluminium/brass). In addition, students are able to utilise the 3D printers, a laser cutter and a CNC Router to help produce prototypes. Additionally, in the STEM mechatronic lab we have pneumatic and hydraulic training facilities as well as an ABB robot which students use to produce real programmes controlled by Siemens PLCs. This allows them to build on their programming skills and fault finding capabilities allowing them to simulate real life scenarios with industry standard equipment. This culminates in students learning to programme, operate and modify a compact mechatronics manufacturing system.

Kirkley Hall Zoological Gardens, established in 2011, now holds over 200 species including some very rare and endangered stock. The centre is a member of the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria (BIAZA) since 2014 making it one of the top 100 zoos in the UK for welfare and standards. The collection holds a number of species that are part of the European Breeding Programme (EEP) including bush dogs, red-crowned cranes, squirrel monkeys, and radiated tortoises. The centre is used as a practical resource for all levels of students including level 5 and 6 for work placement and research projects. The centre offers internships for the local universities as well as a hub for research areas in the zoological field. Recent projects include the effects of visitor numbers on lemur welfare and the effects of education programmes on young adults' engagement with wildlife.

The students get real hands on experience working alongside specialist keepers in all areas of the zoo. Students can work towards cadet keepership where they gain further responsibility and skills and this can be shown in the following comment:
"*I originally came for work placement in year 2 of my studies, I loved the experience I gained here and I applied for the internship. I have gained loads of knowledge and valuable experience, I am now running and supervising a section which I love*"
Alex Year 2 student

The external examiner for HND Photography was impressed with the good facilities for these students through the provision of a commercial photography studio where they

can develop the skills required for employment. This good practice has now been extended to our new HND Graphics programme.

In addition, our Hospitality students have the opportunity to develop their practical skills in a new commercial training restaurant which is open to the public. The high standard of tuition is reflected by the student team recently winning the NECTA (North East Culinary and Trade Association) awards despite opposition from much larger colleges

Environmental Conservation students also benefit from the large estate with a number of on-going conservation and development projects. For example, the regeneration of the ornamental pond promotes wildfowl and amphibian species and has seen an increase in teal, wild mallard, and geese and moor hens nesting and feeding upon the pond. In addition, the conservation of the game bird population, with the reintroduction of pheasant and partridge populations (2015-2017) has led to an increase in populations of owls, buzzards and badgers. Planning and managing the Estate in this way has significantly increased the biodiversity and augmented the student experience and this reinforces the College's commitment to developing practical projects to reinforce the links between theory and practice

"I speak passionately about Northumberland College and Kirkley Hall. Since 2015 I have changed career from Business and Hospitality Management and have achieved level 3 extended Game & Countryside Management and I am now progressing onto FdSc Environmental and Conservation. With the help of the Head of Land based Academy at Kirkley Hall, I am working with the 14 - 16 year old local authority excluded learners and this will enable me to develop the in-depth subject knowledge I need and to eventually progress to a permanent teaching post.
Richard Batey. FDSc. Environmental Conservation student

In addition, we strive to maintain a distinctive HE culture for our students and this is reflected in the allocation of a separate HE wing at our Ashington Campus with teaching rooms, quiet study areas and a social area. At our Kirkley hall campus the HE students have a separate study centre with social space.

4.2 Employer Engagement and Links with Professional Bodies

HND Creative students have a flexible and responsive relationship with local employers and arts organisers. This includes visits to trade shows such as IMATS for makeup and the Photography Show, and contact with part-time lecturers who are also professional artists and designers. Special effects is taught by a make-up specialist who is progressing to employment on Game of Thrones. This group also work with BAIT, a local arts organisation to produce a film based artwork on the Hirst area of Ashington. The students produced props and make-up for the film and this led to one student being employed at the Edinburgh Festival last summer. BAIT also offer regular support and further training for students who have ideas about possible local arts projects. This led to students applying for funding for a mural project and several of them have progressed to BAIT to become Creative Connector arts workers.

Art students are also regularly involved with Breeze Creatives who showcase their work during the annual Late Shows in Newcastle and they are also provided with placements

with this organisation ND Photography students are involved with the Ashington District Star, a photographic newspaper created with the international photographer Julian Germain. This project has been running for two years now and involved an exhibition at Woodhorn Museum, which was also shown at Breeze Creatives for the Late Shows in Newcastle. This project has just been awarded another Arts Council grant to continue production of the newspaper for the next year.

A partnership with Newcastle City Library means that HND year 2 students exhibited their work there which offered exposure to a wider audience. Two of the photography students have subsequently set up their own businesses selling their work.

HND Creative students have regular contact with the Trend Bible https://www.trendbible.com a local trend forecasting service, Durham Creatives http://www.durhamcreatives.co.uk and are encouraged as part of their Professional Practice unit to enter competitions such as Hand & Lock http://handembroidery.com a prize for embroidery, which was won by HND Fashion & Textiles student Suzanne Treacy 2016.

Our HNC Engineering students spent a week at Thermal Fischer Ltd., a bio-medical group which had particular production problems leading to financial penalties. The students ran a Kaizan project with the help of the company's quality department and provided a very cost-effective solution to the problem. In addition, strong links with Northern Gas Networks and Taylor Wimpey lead to the students developing a clear idea of the skills and attributes required for higher level employees.

Public Services students benefit from good links with Northumbria Police and, in particular, with the training department who offer advice and guidance on the steps the students need to take to progress. In addition, the students also participate in their training events.

Northumberland County Council have identified meeting the needs of an aging population as a local priority and our Health and Social Care students contribute to this agenda through work placements at Age UK and also Mind Active.

Teacher Education trainees benefit from an active partnership with an alternative provider – Engage4All. The trainees visit this provision and benefit from talks and input from the owner. In turn, this supports the development of their behaviour management skills and one trainee has progressed to managing one of their centres.

Our Environmental Conservation and Horticulture students develop an in-depth understanding of regeneration though links with Clean and Green from Durham County Council.

We are an approved teaching establishment for British Horse Society and able to run BHS exams from our centre. We have also hosted assessor training days for them. Our students gain exposure to industry relevant qualifications both on site, and attend CPD days hosted by the BHS as circumstances allow. We have also had BHS representatives visit to discuss welfare.

The College equine unit also runs a British Eventing Horse Trials annually, which gives the students the opportunity to be involved in the preparation and running of an extremely well received one day Horse Trials – not only supporting business/marketing and entrepreneurial skills, but also provides opportunities to see and assess fitness and performance.
Coaching is supported by Alnwick Ford Equestrian which has very kindly permitted groups of students to attend to observe several top class coaches holding clinics. Further similar support has been received from Benridge Equestrian Centre.

Our Arboriculture students have access to the Arboriculture Association who provide them with free membership. This is on the basis of our corporate membership. Students also have access at a reduced cost to the numerous courses put on by the association around the country, and the association's national conference and show. Membership also allows them to receive quarterly news and scientific journals.

Animal Management students are actively involved with Northumberland Wildlife Trust through data collection relating to red squirrel conservation. Students are directly involved with setting camera traps in woodland (offsite). This year students will be setting offsite camera traps and a camera trap at Kirkley Hall. Students will also be reporting data back to NWT directly, which forms part of a national annual survey. In addition, students sometime choose to make use of external links to support their investigative projects. Current students are working alongside Blue Reef Aquarium, Newcastle Council (Jesmond Dene Park) and Cotswold Falconry Centre.

In summary, our students benefit from an extensive network of contacts with professional associations and employers throughout Northumberland and further afield in the North East. In turn, this offers valuable opportunities for the practical application of their understanding and strengthens links between theory and practice. Furthermore, it supports their progression into employment.

4.3 Student Voice

This is embedded in a number of ways. We have already discussed NSS results but in the current year we intend to develop this further by running an internal on programme survey in the spring term.

In addition, all students complete module evaluations and these are presented and discussed at programme meetings and interim boards. Any identified issues are then added to the programme action plan and this is monitored and reviewed. We also ensure that all external examiners spend extensive time with the students and the positive feedback received has been referred to previously.

We have trialled a number of different systems of consultation over the past five years including group meetings with student representatives and formal cross- college meetings however, these were always poorly attended. In response to this we have developed a unique system which meets the particular needs of our students. We have appointed a system of Lead Student Representatives who meet with all classes each term. They then produce an overall report which they present at the HE Strategy Group. Currently, this is working effectively and is producing some excellent feedback. When issues are identified then the relevant manager follows this up and the student representatives are updated. On the rare occasions of significant problems then the Director of Higher Education further engages with the class to resolve any issues.
Examples of this proactive engagement are:-
Year 1 Foundation Degree land-based students Kirkley Hall expressing some uncertainty about referencing despite a focused module on this. As a result, an additional half day session was allocated with a number of tutors offering one to one support and advice. Students now feel more confident.
Art students expressed unhappiness with the accommodation which was shared with younger learners. Following this we renovated a range of rooms in the HE centre to provide studios and practice offices and they value this.

Richard Batey – our lead student representative has identified that 71% of issues identified in term 1 have already been resolved and the rest are currently being actioned. Most of them concern practical issues such as rooming or timetabling and the students are highly satisfied with their teaching and learning.

Our leading student representatives have provided the following endorsements.

"The tutors offer a first class learning experience, within the Land Based industry, either through lectures or practical delivery their delivery and demonstrate differentiation through meeting our different need. Their teaching style embeds confidence and support to all the learners and they offer excellent lesson content that is relevant to the industry, with high-quality learning resources. The location lends itself to hands-on learning, enables the learners to feel supported and empowered with the process of learning and it is evident the tutors are passionate and committed to all learners and their success; their passion can be infectious and this is evident with the high standard of assessments which the learners produce. Most learners find the process of studying within a new location unsettling and worrying, as a mature student myself I knew Northumberland College would equip me with the tools and knowledge to make the transitional process of study more successful, giving me the best opportunity to thrive, explore and achieve my aspirations. They act on student concerns quickly and take on board our feedback and address issues. I endorse this submission and the College's bid for silver"

Richard Batey Lead Student Representative

"Findings relating to the HE courses offered at Northumberland College, reflect the high standard of teaching which, is tailored to meet the individual needs of the students, offering a learning environment that is clearly inclusive. To further evidence this, it is felt that learners are respected and valued. Students make use of tutorials offered and they feel this enables them to plan/ structure their time effectively as well as offering personalised learning.
In terms of progression, students reported that modules are taught in a way which, is understandable and related to learning objectives. For the students currently in employment, this has allowed them to work in a more professional manner, with a greater understanding of their role. For students looking for work they feel they are supported to find placements and believe that there confidence has increased due to the knowledge gained through directed learning and the standard and availability of both online and physical resources, such as e-books, journals and the college library.
Although, initially some student feel that the transition to higher education to be a stressful time, students are aware of, and have used the college services provided to deal with any concerns.
I endorse this submission and the College's bid for silver."

Bronia Brooks – BA Hons Children and Families and Lead HE Representative.

We would like to confirm that all student and staff statements and exemplars have been freely given. We have also taken care to disguise the identities of the students who endorsed the support given during very difficult personal circumstances. Animal management and art are large programmes with over 40 students enrolled so anonymity has been preserved. Both students were insistent that we included their statements and are happy to confirm this.