



2022 - 2024

college prospectus

raising aspirations
and improving lives

www.espa.org.uk





Welcome from our Principal

Thank you for your interest in ESPA College.

As a leading specialist college for young autistic adults, we offer the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills so that you leave us equipped to thrive in the workplace, continue your studies, make better choices or simply live a more independent life.

Our College is lively, diverse and vibrant and meets the needs of a wide range of learners across the autism spectrum. We look forward to working with you and your families and promise we will work tirelessly to nurture, challenge and inspire you.

Patrick Cahill,
Principal, ESPA College

Our approach

As we support learners across the autistic spectrum, each College site has tailored its approach to meet the needs of learners with similar abilities and need.

College learners are supported to achieve academic and vocational qualifications ranging from Entry Level to Level 3.

Our residential sites provide a youthful, homely environment that ensures learners gain more independent living skills and enjoy an extended curriculum with the support of experienced and qualified Residential Learning Support Workers.

We can offer a range of CQC registered residential accommodation to meet the varied needs and requirements of the learners in both Sunderland and Newcastle.

The College offers each learner a bespoke, innovative and creative curriculum. All of our planned activities and learning sessions are designed to be engaging, enjoyable, individualised and challenging. We aim to develop the whole person and blend our autism specific core curriculum with a broad range of academic subjects. Teaching and learning occurs in a variety of ways, many of which are community-based. Work experience, employability skills, enterprise and independence feature highly within our study programmes.

Our College teams are supported by a highly skilled and experienced Multidisciplinary Team whose input significantly improves learner outcomes. Learners also have access to our Counselling Service, providing individualised support and guidance that can enable individuals to overcome some of their personal challenges.

The learners' time at ESPA College ends with a magnificent celebration at their graduation ceremony. This annual end of year, high profile event showcases the skills and confidence gained by learners and allows family and friends to celebrate together.



'It is a massive weight off your shoulders, knowing staff understand your child's behaviour'

PARENT 2022



Our Specialist Autism Curriculum

Emotional Literacy

This programme supports learners' development and understanding of their autism. It explores their emotions and the impact this can have on themselves and others. This can help learners to live a more fulfilling, rewarding and independent life. The specialist programme can include peer support, social skills groups and individual counselling.

Recognising that many learners have had difficult or negative experiences in the course of their education and life; we place a strong focus on developing self-esteem, confidence and self-belief.

The Emotional Literacy curriculum explores and includes:

- Awareness of self and impact on others
- Positive thinking and increasing motivation
- Self-esteem
- Decision-making
- Goal-setting and planning for the future
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Taking personal responsibility
- Team building and supporting others
- Men's/women's issues
- Empathy
- Exploring aspects of gender, sexuality and relationships
- Self-presentation
- Resilience

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)

We promote the development of behaviour self-management as an essential component of each learner's programme. Learners work with staff to formulate their own behaviour support plans, enabling them to become more independent and confident. Interventions are always positive, sensitive and individualised. There is clear evidence of exceptional learner achievement in this area. All staff are trained in non-aversive approaches to working with learners with challenging behaviour.

Social Communication

The College teaches social communication skills within discrete classroom-based sessions and includes speaking and listening themes such as, 'conversational skills', 'social rules' and 'relationships'.

These skills can be further extended and developed in a range of more informal settings such as social, leisure and community environments. We encourage the use of mobile technology as a communication aid and learning tool, recognising the importance of functional communication to help learners self-manage their lives and/or behaviour.



'We have seen massive improvements in our daughter's behaviour and levels of understanding, all due to the help and support she has received in college'

PARENT 2021

The Broader Curriculum



Functional Skills

Literacy and numeracy courses are tailored to the individual learner's needs following diagnostic assessment. Learners are able to develop their skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening in everyday life. Formal qualifications in functional Maths, English and ICT are offered. They can be taught in College and in the wider community, often embedded throughout the curriculum.

Creative Arts & Digital Multimedia

In this area, all learners are encouraged to develop and fine tune skills across a range of creative genres, including: painting, drawing, 3D art and sculpture, jewellery making, filming and editing, photography and music technology. Learners build confidence and self-belief through participation, performance, exhibiting and co-ordinating a wide range of creative projects.

Music & Performing Arts

Is for learners of all abilities who have an interest in the world of performance. The projects focus on enhancing self-esteem, confidence, creative thinking and communication through the medium of music, drama, theatre and performance.

Lifeskills & Independence

We focus on developing realistic and important daily living skills. This includes cooking, shopping, budgeting, social skills and community awareness, alongside independent travel skills for journeys relevant to the learner such as travelling from home to college or a work placement.

Employability Skills

All learners have the opportunity to develop a range of real life skills where they can be taught about interview techniques, personal presentation or completing job applications. Learners can put these skills into practice during their work experiences. Current placements include conservation work, retail, museum curator, hospital laboratories and radio stations, alongside local restaurants and cafés.

Enrichment: Leisure, Sport & Social Skills

All of our learners are encouraged to take part in different sport, leisure and fitness activities. Most Friday afternoons can be spent developing core skills with group enrichment activities, often chosen and organised by learners.

'The college offers a broad and varied curriculum which is tailored to fit learners' individual needs and interests and motivates them to learn.'

OFSTED 2016

Duke of Edinburgh

The College offers its learners the opportunity to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award at 3 levels, Bronze, Silver and Gold. The Award allows learners to gain valuable experience and develop many essential life skills through participation in a wide range of practical, physical and work-based activities. The 4 main components of each Award require learners to:

- Develop a new SKILL (i.e. photography, art, independence)
- Improve PHYSICAL health and fitness through involvement in sport and exercise
- Develop work based skills and make a personal contribution to the local community through a range of VOLUNTEERING opportunities and
- Gain a wide range of social and personal skills through the planning and participation in an EXPEDITION.

Work based learning

Vocational Enterprise and Supported Internships

Developing skills for work and a more independent life

We encourage our learners to experience a range of different Vocational or Enterprise opportunities.

Vocational Enterprises provide an opportunity for learners to develop specialist interests and skills; learn about budgeting, marketing and grow social skills and confidence. Recent Enterprises have included Pizza Sales, Breakfast Clubs, Car Washing and Tuck Shops.

This can equip learners with a set of skills to promote greater work-based independence.

Learners can develop the work skills needed to prepare them for employment, including apprenticeships or Supported Internships.

All learners must access employability skills, work experience and the autism specific core curriculum.

Inputs and training can include manual handling and health & safety, while voluntary work related training may take the form of short courses.

The programme aims to maintain functional skills by embedding literacy, numeracy and ICT into all aspects of learning where appropriate.

This will be done in a practical fashion to reflect the wider aims of the programme.

Vocational enterprises are run across all ESPA Colleges and can be accredited by ONE Awards.



'Learners are well prepared for work placements.'

OFSTED 2016



Supported internships – What are they?

A supported internship is a personalised study programme based at one of our key employer's premises. The programmes are designed for young people with autism with a range of learning needs; equipping them with work skills for the future which match their talents and aspirations.

The programmes involve on the job training provided by the employer and college job coaches, supplemented by a range of Functional Skills and Travel Training.



Multidisciplinary Team

Subject to approval from local authority commissioners learners have access to the ESPA specialist Multidisciplinary Team

ESPA employs a diverse MDT, all of whom are highly skilled and experienced autism specialist clinicians. The team provides direct support to individuals and works with staff teams to ensure we consistently provide each person with specialist, individualised, person-centered support.



The MDT work across the College.

- Occupational Therapist and MDT Co-ordinator
- Access to a Clinical Psychologist
- Speech & Language Therapist
- PBS Specialist
- Counselling Team

However it does not replace local community health and clinical teams who often remain the responsible professionals. In these situations our MDT can work in partnership and offer, if required, their professional expertise.



Consultants for ESPA

- Educational Psychologist
- Psychiatrists

We also employ the services of two Consultant Psychiatrists who provide highly responsive clinical intervention and management. Their specific roles include:

Specialist clinical support covering autism, associated conditions and disabilities, epilepsy, behaviour management and mental health.

They maintain an oversight of referrals and provide professional opinions and advice.

Work in liaison with GPs to ensure comprehensive and integrated clinical plans.

Provide 24 hour on-call support within emergency procedures.

'The specialist multidisciplinary team provides learners with highly effective, individualised support.'

OFSTED 2016

Case Studies: A & J



A

When A started at North Rye he lacked any belief or self-confidence and described extremely difficult experiences at school. Excelling in ICT, he was initially enrolled on Computer Science Level 2 at a local GFE College; however he was withdrawn by his family owing to initial problems and anxiety. He had a very successful first year at North Rye, achieving all of his qualifications and carrying out valuable work experience setting up a website for Whickham Hermitage Gardens.

In his second year he followed a combined programme where he enrolled on the level 2 Computer Science at a different GFE and, despite initial anxieties, A attended well without any support from ESPA. He successfully completed this course and was offered a place on the level 3 course.

In addition to this A volunteered to take an active role in the North Rye Open Evening, giving visitors a guided tour and also contributing to the Newcastle ASD Conference.

He spoke in front of 30 unfamiliar adults and was interviewed about his time at ESPA and experiences of his condition. In May 2017 he was offered a position with Project Choice and he chose to take this up in September 2017.

'I honestly have a child who cannot wait to come to college. He loves it, he talks at home and tells me everything - he never used to'

PARENT 2022

J

When J originally started at North Rye he was recovering from a spell of significantly poor health. He had a history of difficult behaviour and absconding. J spoke very little and had missed some of his education due to ongoing health issues.

Originally from a mainstream school he responded well to the small groups and ASD specific approach available at North Rye. He continued to flourish with improving attendance, educational achievement, improved self-confidence and developing communication.

Within his first year there was only one minor instance of inappropriate language and one instance of absconding. During the last academic year J successfully completed a

work placement in the horticulture base of Hextol. He also visited three other providers when considering a transitional placement before finally choosing a joint programme shared between Trinity Solutions Gardening Base and ESPA.

There were no instances of absconding or inappropriate behaviour during 2016-2017 and J continued to achieve academically and socially. J now travels independently around his local home area and willingly offers to get other students drinks when he's ordering at the café.

Meet the team

Principal – Patrick Cahill

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as the Principal of ESPA College.

I have worked in specialist education for over 20 years, starting my career in ESPA as a Learning Support Assistant. Since then I have successfully undertaken a number of roles including Tutor, College Coordinator and Assistant Principal. In 2014 I moved to The Percy Hedley Foundation and spent some time working as Standards Manager and Acting Head of College. I am passionate about the amazing work of our teams in College and I take great pride in a strong track record of improving outcomes for learners.

I am immensely proud to be the Principal of ESPA College and will work tirelessly to raise expectations and aspirations for our young people.

When not busy with work I enjoy spending time with my wife and three daughters. I also have a keen interest in football and have been trying to master the guitar for the last 30 years!

We are always here to help in any way we can. I look forward to hearing from you.



Quality Verifier – Dawn Jamieson

Once I'd completed my time at university in 2000, I started my career at ESPA College as a Learning Support Assistant. I subsequently completed a PGCE which gave me the opportunity to become a tutor - my main specialism and interests being Drama & Performance. After completing the Level 4 Certificate in Leading the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Level 5 Diploma in Management and Leadership; it piqued my interest further in areas of quality improvement and standards. I work across all four college sites to monitor practice and support staff in areas of assessment, curriculum and quality. In addition to this I work as a Further Education and Skills Inspector, specialising in high needs learners. When not at work I enjoy spending time with my two daughters.



Funding Manager - Mike Smith

I began my work in the autism field in 1986 working as a classroom assistant / supervisor at the Tyne and Wear Autism Society. I joined ESPA (originally CAP) in 1989 working on the care side and was lucky enough to gain experience working across many of the sites. I was also registered manager at Autism North's first site back in 1998 while still in role at ESPA running the Admissions Department - which I continue to do to this day as Funding Manager.



Some of the ESPA College team

Left to right: Mike Smith (Funding Manager), Patrick Cahill (Principal), Beverley Hamilton (Secretary/PA), Chris Strong (College Manager), Jordan Vetch-McAllister (Assistant College Manager), Dawn Jamieson (Quality Manager)



Becoming a Student

The College year starts in September and we welcome applications all year round.

ESPA College considers all applications individually and we are able to offer full-time and part-time places using a range of funding sources alongside partnership placements and local GFEs.

We actively welcome all applications in accordance with our Equal Opportunities Policy and Equality and Diversity Schemes.

The application process

ESPA College accepts referrals from Connexions, Social Services, other relevant social authority contacts, health professionals and parents.

Whenever possible we gather EHCPs, reports and information from relevant sources such as the prospective learner, their family, school and other professionals involved.

This information is reviewed by the Admissions Team and members of the Multidisciplinary Team, as necessary, to identify the most appropriate educational site.

Prospective applicants are invited to attend an assessment visit.

If a suitable educational programme can be offered, all written reports and documents are sent to the individual's Connexions Adviser or Local Authority contact.

When written confirmation of funding is received then ESPA College will confirm the place and a start date is given.

Please note, ESPA College is registered with NE12 and as such follows their processes for admissions to college for prospective learners.

All learners will be sent a 'Welcome Pack' that contains all of the essential information that they will need before starting college.



If you or someone you know wants further information on what ESPA College can offer or on how to apply you can make an enquiry through our Admissions Department:

By telephone:
0191 510 2611 or 0191 516 5080

By e-mail:
admission@espa.org.uk

'Staff provide learners with highly effective feedback within lessons and during tutorial sessions..'

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contact us

Admissions Department

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Funding:

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Admissions Co-ordinator:

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College Principal

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