

Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service

Inspection report

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Type of provider: Local Authority
Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community
Learning Service

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Information about the provider

1. Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service (the service) is a shared service between Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. It is hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council and is located in their Sustainable Communities Directorate. The service leads a consortium of partners who collaborate to provide part-time learning opportunities in Bedfordshire for businesses and individuals. It employs 42 full-time equivalent management and administration staff and approximately 180 active sessional tutors.
2. Bedfordshire, excluding Luton, has a combined population of 410,900, with individuals of minority ethnic heritage comprising around 12 percentage points. It is a mix of rural and urban communities and is generally affluent, but has pockets of deprivation in parts of Bedford, and east and south Bedfordshire.
3. Most programmes provided are entry to advanced level, with teaching qualifications at levels 4 and 5. Courses are taught in a variety of settings, with up to 145 venues utilised, including adult learning centres, schools, community and employer premises. They are available during the day, evening and weekends for most of the year. In 2009/10, a total of 5,472 learners were enrolled. The majority were learning for social and personal development, with 1,722 learners taking accredited qualifications (excluding functional and key skills). Around two thirds of all learners were new to the service, compared to one half of learners in the previous year. Some 13% of all learners were of minority ethnic heritage and 5% of learners declared a learning difficulty and/or disability.

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: Further education (16-18)	31 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Learning for qualifications Learning for social and personal development	1,557 part-time learners 3,744 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	140 part-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Learning for qualifications	Grade
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	2
Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	2

Learning for social and personal development	Grade
Crafts, creative arts and design	2
Family Learning	2

Overall effectiveness

- Staff have worked hard since the previous inspection and made significant improvements. The overall effectiveness of the service has improved from satisfactory to good. Outcomes for learners are good and the standard of their work is high. The proportion of learners completing their course successfully is above the national average. Learners develop good personal and employability skills. They enjoy their studies, feel safe in all venues and many make a positive contribution to the local community.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. Tutors plan their sessions well and use a broad range of activities to make their classes interesting. They take great care to meet the needs of each individual learner. However, too many tutors fail to use information and learning technologies (ILT) to make their lessons even more stimulating and give learners important digital skills. The

progress of learners is monitored well overall, but the targets they are set are sometimes too general. Strong partnership work and careful planning by staff have led to a broad range of programmes being available, including those aimed at encouraging learners traditionally reluctant to join classes. Learners receive effective information, advice and guidance to ensure they join the right course. They receive a satisfactory level of support when in class.

6. Leadership and management are good. Managers communicate well with part-time tutors and know their service well. Comprehensive management information is collated, although its use for monitoring performance is not always effective. Procedures for safeguarding are good. All groups of learners achieve equally well. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory, but it is not carried out sufficiently in all programmes. Accommodation is generally satisfactory. The service offers good value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are high for accredited and non-accredited courses. They show a consistent trend of improvement and are significantly above national averages in many subject areas.
- All groups of learners within the service, including those of minority ethnic heritage, have high success rates. Individuals with learning difficulties and/or disabilities perform particularly well. Many learners benefit from the development of employability skills.
- The standard of learners' work is high. Learners feel safe and take great enjoyment from their studies. They develop self-confidence and self-esteem which helps them in their personal and family lives and to gain jobs. Many make a positive contribution to their local community.
- Teaching and learning are good. Successful classes are well-planned, take good account of learners' personal goals, and offer an appropriate level of challenge through a range of interesting activities. However, ILT and the service's virtual learning environment are used insufficiently. Some assessment and target setting is good, although learners' individual targets are too general in many cases.
- The broad range of programmes is good. It is responsive to local needs and national priorities. Partnership work is good. Effective collaboration with partners has led to the successful development of provision in areas of disadvantage and where need is identified for particular communities.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Information, advice and guidance are effective and ensure learners are placed on the right course. Learners are supported well in classes and those with additional learning needs receive appropriate help.
- Leadership and management are good. The shared service between councils works well, delivering effectively against strategic plans with a good level of review and scrutiny. Curriculum management is generally good, with managers

working well with tutors to improve the quality of provision. The service delivers good value for money.

- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. Trained staff understand their roles well and provide good information for learners. The service manages procedures, policies and staff checks effectively. Health and safety procedures have improved since the previous inspection.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All groups of learners achieve equally well. Social and educational inclusion is good. However, the service does not have plans to measure the effect its actions may have on specific groups of learners or promote equality and diversity within teaching and learning sufficiently in all subject areas.
- Self-assessment processes aid quality improvement. The largely accurate annual report uses a good range of evidence, including comprehensive user views. The associated quality plan and routine quality reviews help improvements. Comprehensive management information data are collated, but it is not used effectively to set and monitor service-wide targets.
- Since the previous inspection, the service has improved and successfully tackled areas for improvement highlighted in the report. Outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all now good. Most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been addressed effectively. The service has good capacity to improve further.

What does Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and learning more interesting and varied by making better and more consistent and effective use of ILT and the service's virtual learning environment.
- Sustain and further improve the achievements of learners by ensuring all individual learning plans contain targets that are specific, measurable and reviewed thoroughly by tutors and learners.
- Ensure that the improved data systems are used more effectively to set and monitor service-wide targets in key areas such as staff training, learners' attendance rates, the timely completion of observations of teaching and learning, and the completion of individual learning plans.
- Extend the promotion of equality and diversity across and within the curriculum, particularly in teaching and learning, the sharing of good practice, staff development and setting and monitoring targets.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the skills they develop that help them to gain employment or to progress in their job
- meeting new friends, developing social networks and feeling part of the community
- developing confidence and self-esteem to help them manage their finances better and use computers to communicate with distant relatives
- the helpful and knowledgeable tutors who understand the learners well
- the freedom they have and how they can learn from their mistakes and laugh about them
- the involvement of families in learning so that the whole family can learn together.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the IT resources in some centres and the outdated software
- the amount of careers advice sessions which are too few
- not having a refreshment break in two-hour classes
- the insufficient number of courses in some centres and the few evening courses for those who work.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Since the previous inspection in May 2008, staff have made a considerable effort in addressing the weakness identified in the report. Inspection outcomes have improved in nearly all aspects from satisfactory to good, except the promotion of equality and diversity which remains satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning has improved through the revised procedures for observing classes and staff training. Outcomes for learners have increased significantly in the past two years and are now good. Health and safety is no longer an area of concern. A wealth of management information data is now available to senior managers. It is used well to report the service's overall performance, but it is not yet exploited fully in the setting and monitoring of internal improvement targets.
8. The comprehensive and generally accurate self-assessment process is linked to a well-managed quality improvement plan, and supported by regular improvement activities at course level. These factors indicate that the service's capacity to sustain the trend of improvement is good.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

9. The proportion of learners completing their course successfully has increased consistently over the past five years. In 2009/10, the overall success rate for courses leading to an accredited qualification was 87%, up from 79% in 2008/09, and for non-accredited provision it was 96%, compared to 93% in the previous year. Retention rates for learners are very high and the headline figure for all accredited courses in 2009/10 was 97.6%, significantly above the national average. Success rates are above the national averages for eight of the eleven subject areas taught, in some cases significantly so. Overall and timely success rates for Train to Gain learners are very high and significantly above national figures.
10. All groups of learners achieve well. Success rates are high for both male and female learners. They are above the overall service and national averages for all minority ethnic groups represented in the service. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed as well as other learners. The introduction of dedicated entry-level accreditation for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities resulted in a dramatic improvement in the success rates for these learners, from 54% in 2008/09 to 89% in 2009/10.
11. The impact of the service's work on the broader outcomes for learners is good. Learners greatly enjoy studying and levels of satisfaction are very high. They feel safe in all the venues used by the service. The standard of learners' work is high. Many learners increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, benefiting them in their family and personal lives, and often giving them the ability to

support their children with schoolwork. They develop employability skills that help them to gain jobs. Progression rates between courses within the service and elsewhere are high. Enterprising project work enables learners to make a positive contribution to the community. For example, arts and crafts learners raise considerable funds for charities at home and abroad through floristry, photography, card-making and art exhibitions. However, this is not the case in all subject areas.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

12. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Tutors adopt a broad range of different approaches to motivate and inspire learners. In most classes learners participate with great enjoyment in lively sessions. Learners make rapid progress and develop their skills and knowledge very well. They value the experience and expertise of tutors and achieve good standards of work. The supportive and productive atmosphere enables the more able learners to help and support others, while learning themselves. Learners work well together, regardless of whether they come from different backgrounds or are working at different levels. Tutors offer effective individual support.
13. The use of ILT in classes varies widely. In the best examples, learners use ILT imaginatively, but too many tutors fail to use it and recently acquired ILT equipment remains underused. A minority of classes are dominated by tutors, with insufficient discussion to test the understanding of learners or reinforce their development of skills.
14. Tutors systematically record learners' progress on both accredited and non-accredited courses. The use of initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners are encouraged to reflect and record the skills they are developing in the recently improved individual learning plan. However, the effectiveness of assessment and target setting is too variable, with both good and poor practice evident, often within the same subject area. For example, the recording of learners' progress and achievement sometimes does not focus sufficiently on learning and targets are not specific, measurable and timebound.
15. The improved procedures for the observation of teaching and learning are having a positive impact on developing and improving the quality of provision. Observation records are detailed and the grades awarded matched those awarded by inspectors. However, some observations do not focus sufficiently on the progress of learners and their attainment, with too much attention paid to what tutors are doing. Peer support and mentoring are available to those tutors whose formal observation is graded no better than satisfactory. This provides them with good opportunities to improve and share good practice.
16. The broad range of courses meet the needs and interests of learners very well. They include those suitable for beginners to higher levels of accreditation. Curriculum planning and development are good. Provision is highly responsive to both local and national needs and initiatives. Very effective use is made of

learners' views and local intelligence in helping to plan provision. In family learning, good use is made of external funding to target provision at local priorities; for example, the inclusion of learners from a wide range of minority ethnic communities and those who are workless. As well as discrete courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, these learners can benefit from inclusive learning opportunities in mainstream classes.

17. Partnership work is good. Partners appreciate the open and responsive approach of staff and their willingness to share expertise. Work with employers is flexible and training is arranged to fit changing shift patterns. Very good administrative support is provided for partners in Train to Gain contracts. For example, staff provide help with completing paperwork and formulating individual learning plans.
18. The service works successfully with partners to engage with groups whose circumstances have made them hard to reach, identifying their needs and providing programmes to meet them. One partnership has resulted in the provision of ESOL classes for local Bangladeshi women and a further numeracy course is being developed for this group. The family learning curriculum is enriched by the close work with school staff. Collaboration with a provider of outdoor activities and leadership training has led to an increase in the recruitment of males for family learning programmes. Tutors have provided further help to this partner to meet the challenge of working with older learners.
19. Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Staff place great importance on ensuring that learners are on the most appropriate programme. Learners report on their own literacy and numeracy skills at induction and can refer themselves for further testing. Learners who join literacy, numeracy and language courses undertake formal assessment and receive good support. Staff use information about learners' skills effectively in most individual learning plans.
20. Information, advice and guidance is integrated effectively into all stages of the programme. Revised course information leaflets ensure that learners fully understand course requirements and the skills they need to complete successfully. The service's Nextstep contract provides formal advice and guidance at induction, during the learners' course and, when they request it, at the end of their programme. In addition, less formal arrangements are in place.
21. Learners are generally well supported in classes. Many classes are comprised of mixed ability learners and additional learning support is used effectively to help learners progress, regardless of the level at which they are working. Tutors know their learners well. Support workers assist learners who have particular needs effectively and adaptive technology is provided for learners who need it. Financial support is available for course requirements and child care for all learners who apply and who qualify. However, the service does not effectively support the translation needs of some learners in family learning.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. The service operates through the model of a host local authority taking the lead on delivery for a partner council. This model is working well, with very good communication, clear responsibilities and an effective degree of scrutiny. A very extensive range of council plans cascade down broad objectives for the service. The service's senior management team skilfully translate these broad aims into business plans with practical targets. The service rightly tries to be innovative to meet changing requirements, but with mixed successes. For example, computing provision has extended its range of courses, but too many arts courses were publicised recently and then cancelled, and enrolments in Skills for Life programmes fell, despite having increased recruitment targets.
23. The operational management of curriculum areas is generally good. Managers have clear responsibilities and work successfully to improve the quality of their programmes. Communication with part-time staff is good and tutors feel they are part of the service and have a role to play in improving things. Tutor forums and individual support are used well to maintain an understanding of service and programme requirements. Local area offices play an important role in managing routine operations and maintaining links with learners.
24. After the previous inspection, there was a proper emphasis on using staff training and development to improve reported areas of weakness. Training also meets the needs identified through discussion with managers, observations of teaching and learning and service-wide priorities. However, this aspect is not monitored rigorously and it is difficult for managers to analyse what the response has been to planned initiatives, and what group and individual work remains to be done. A virtual learning environment is being developed to enhance learning, but it is not yet extensively used.
25. Improving procedures for safeguarding has been a notable focus for the service for the past few years and this aspect is now good. Clear policies and procedures are in place, including the effective completion of vetting of staff who are risk assessed as requiring checks. Training and development ensure staff are well aware of their role. Nearly all learners receive clear and helpful guidance on potential problems and how to obtain help, although this could be more clearly put across in courses where learners have limited English. Health and safety, an area for concern at the previous inspection, is now dealt with effectively.
26. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Managers regularly review data relating to different groups of learners and no difference in achievement exists between groups according to gender, ethnicity or disability. Staff are identifying and increasingly meeting the needs of groups of hard-to-reach learners and those with particular needs in local communities. An example is the Touch and See arts programme which helps visually impaired learners back to work. Family learning provision is available in local venues throughout the county. The large majority of staff have undertaken relevant

safeguarding training in the last two years and relationships between staff and learners are respectful.

27. A comprehensive and clear single equalities policy is published on the service's intranet. However, the service does not have an equality and diversity action plan and it does not carry out impact assessments, for instance to analyse the potential effect of curriculum changes. The service is continuing to use the equality and diversity impact targets set in 2008. The effectiveness of the promotion of equality and diversity within teaching and learning across the curriculum is variable and insufficient in a minority of subject areas.
28. Procedures for engaging with users are good. Staff work with a range of forums and groups to gather information and improve programmes. Peer reviews are used well to monitor performance and provide challenge. Learner feedback is gathered well and used effectively in course reviews. Some groups of learners pilot initiatives, such as revised induction arrangements and assess the clarity of course information sheets. Staff liaise effectively with employers, providing information on learners' progress and potential developments in provision. Family learning gathers and shares feedback with relevant partners well.
29. The annual self-assessment process uses a broad range of evidence and is largely accurate in its judgements. Importantly, it leads to an extensive quality improvement plan that is monitored regularly. The plan is supplemented by routine improvement activities and reviews at curriculum level. The service uses the observation of teaching and learning as an important part of quality improvement and, although there are still aspects to improve, it is having a positive impact on the provision.
30. Management information data are now more readily available and used more effectively than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Staff extract and analyse data well and it is used effectively to report the service's overall performance to the council. However, the increasing wealth of data are not always used effectively at service level by managers to set and monitor specific targets in such areas as: staff training, accurate completion of individual learning plans, overall learners' attendance rates for subject areas or the timely completion of observations of teaching and learning.
31. Effective joint council working aids the effective use of resources. Accommodation is satisfactory and used to provide cost-effective local training, although not all venues are ideal for teaching and learning, particularly in terms of the availability of ILT. Staff restructuring and reductions have helped reduce overheads. A considered approach to such things as the range of programmes, learners' fees, and class size are helping balance learner's needs with an economic approach. The range of provision and good learners' outcomes help improve local employability skills. The service provides good value for money.

Learning for qualifications in employment

Other learning for qualifications in employment provision considered as part of the main findings but not separately graded: *childcare; retail and commercial enterprise; languages, literature and culture; education and training; business; and Train to Gain.*

Information and communication technology (ICT)

Grade 2

Context

32. The service provides courses in ICT from entry to intermediate level. In 2009/10, 320 learners studied for qualifications, 14 learners studied for qualifications related to their employment and 397 studied courses for personal and skills development. Specific programmes are provided for learners who are new to ICT or who lack confidence and experience. Courses are offered in local and community venues such as libraries, schools and community centres.

Key findings

- Success rates are high. In 2009/10, they were 93% for learners studying a qualification for employment, compared to a national average of 75%, and 85% for learners studying for other qualifications, well above the national average of 75%. The achievement of learning goals for learners on courses that do not lead to a qualification is also high.
- Many learners develop good ICT skills and progress onto higher level courses. They build self-confidence and self-esteem. Learners really enjoy their learning and are very keen to participate in lessons. As a result of the skills they develop, learners benefit from a number of gains, including finding employment, taking a greater part in digital Britain and communicating with family and friends.
- Learners demonstrate a very good awareness of e-safety and feel safe and confident using ICT and the Internet. They are well aware of the health and safety aspects of using ICT and work very safely. In addition, learners have a good knowledge of general health and safety, such as travelling safely to classes. Learners' attendance rates are very good.
- Teaching and learning are good. Classes are planned and managed well by knowledgeable tutors. Tutors give clear explanations to develop understanding, using analogies and learners' previous experience well. Learners are fully engaged and learn co-operatively with each other. Tutors use a broad variety of activities and maintain the interest of learners.
- In less effective sessions, learners are not involved enough in the development of their understanding and tutors dominate discussions. Some handouts use over-complex language and have an excessive amount of text. Screen-shot printouts are often in black and white and not easy to understand.

- Assessment for learning is satisfactory overall. Inspectors saw some outstanding marked work. Even learners awarded full marks still had useful points for further improvement. However, too many comments were just motivational. Individual learning plans have some examples of excellent feedback on how learners can improve their learning goals and develop their skills, but some plans are not completed in sufficient detail.
- The curriculum is tailored well to the needs of learners. Courses ranging from entry to intermediate level are offered in a broad range of ICT subjects. Options for beginners in ICT give a variety of access and progression routes, depending upon need and skills. The entry level provision is particularly good for bridging gaps in learners' knowledge and helping them to progress.
- Close collaboration with a number of partners enhances the learner experience. Staff are looking continually for new partnership programmes to widen participation and provide additional support for learners. For example, after liaison with a group in Luton, support to learn ICT is being given to people with visual impairment. Existing partnerships are used well to maintain and improve success rates.
- Learners receive good care, guidance and support. Advice and guidance are good. Initial assessment is by interview. Support for learners outside of classes is good. Staff take extra care to ensure learners are aware of how they can get help and support, with many examples of specific support to help learners.
- Curriculum management is good. The focus on learner success is very strong and their progress is monitored thoroughly. Communication among staff is good, with staff fully involved and informed about all issues. Staff training ensures that staff are given the skills they need to meet the changing needs of the provision and the learners.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Data are analysed in detail and there are no significant differences in learners' success rates for different groups. Staff compile clear action plans to widen participation. Promotion in classes is satisfactory, although in some cases staff are not sufficiently well informed about learners' needs.
- The ICT self-assessment report is very detailed and accurate. Staff are involved fully in the process of review and assessment of provision. Course and session evaluation sheets are used well to identify issues and improve the provision. At meetings staff discuss these issues in detail. Learners' views are sought, but not always used sufficiently well in planning improvements.
- Overall, resources are satisfactory. Personal computers are fit for purpose and, in most cases, learners use adjustable chairs appropriately. Software used is, in many cases, not the current version. Given the success rates and other strengths, the service provides good value for money.

What does Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by engaging learners more in discussions when developing their understanding, and share the good practice

that exists in assessment to ensure all learners' marked work contains comments to help improvement.

- Promote diversity and equality issues more strongly in classes by placing a greater focus on learners' needs and make more effective use of learners' views to improve provision.

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Grade 2

Context

33. In 2009/10, there were 767 enrolments on Skills for Life courses, around one half on programmes leading to accreditation from entry to intermediate level. Almost 20% of learners are men, 30% have a minority ethnic heritage and 12% declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. Courses are held at adult education centres, primary schools, hostels, partner premises, a library and one employer's workplace. The subject area is managed by one Skills for Life programme manager and two curriculum managers and there are 13 tutors.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Retention and success rates are high and improving. Retention on non-accredited provision in 2009/10 was well above the national average. The success rate for learners on accredited provision was high at 86%. However, a small cohort of learners underperformed on intermediate level literacy and numeracy courses.
- Good attainment of skills leads to improved social and economic wellbeing. Learners demonstrate increased self-confidence in supporting their children with homework. They also use numeracy skills developed in class to save money, for example when shopping or working out how much material they will need for home improvement tasks.
- The development of employability skills in all areas of the curriculum is particularly good. Skills like writing a curriculum vitae and employment interview techniques give ESOL learners the confidence to apply for jobs. Skills acquired in classes help other learners take on new responsibilities at work. For example, some learners have progressed to training for a career working with disabled children.
- Teaching and learning are good. An appropriate range of teaching methods and learning activities are used, with good group work and peer support. Equality and diversity issues are a feature of many sessions and the awareness of learners is high. However, there is an over-reliance on text-based resources. ILT is used mainly for individual research or revision, not to inspire learners or to develop learners' digital skills. The virtual learning environment is used insufficiently.
- Tutors plan well for classes, ensuring individual learners' targets are linked to their personalised social and employability needs, as identified at initial assessment. These targets are reviewed and updated regularly. Tutors' comments are positive and build learners' confidence by focusing on their personal strengths. However, there is very little use of cameras to record the progress of learners.

- The range of provision is satisfactory to meet learners' needs. Learners are aware of the various internal progression routes available. Partnership arrangements are used effectively to provide convenient locations for some courses. A few bespoke courses have been taught in the workplace and for a housing association wanting its tenants to improve their understanding of tenancy agreements. However, insufficient courses are available in the evening and the geographical spread of courses is quite limited.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Individual support for learning in class is generally good. Staff give reliable information and advice on wider issues, such as immigration regulations for ESOL learners. Tutors in other subject areas are now better able to recognise a learner's need for numeracy and literacy support following training. They also have access to suitable learning support materials or a support worker, if required.
- Curriculum management is satisfactory. The regular communication and strong individual support from curriculum managers are much appreciated by tutors. Staff training opportunities are frequent and relevant to their needs. However, there is insufficient strategic focus on developing provision by exploring alternative sources of funding. The significant reduction in enrolments this year has not been tackled adequately.
- Procedures to safeguard learners are good. Security at all venues is good. Risk assessments are up to date and signs are posted where there is a potential hazard. Tutors explain safeguarding policy and procedures carefully to learners and there is good awareness of support mechanisms for victims of abuse.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. A high proportion of learners belong to minority ethnic groups. Tailored ESOL provision meets the needs of the local Bangladeshi and Iranian communities. Unwaged dependants on ESOL courses benefit from greatly reduced course fees. Learners interact very well with classmates from different backgrounds and experiences. However, men are under-represented in the provision.
- The use of learner views to inform course planning is good. Tutors regularly gather learner feedback and suggestions at the end of sessions and during one-to-one reviews. Course content is negotiated with learners to accommodate their preferences and needs. Requests by learners for a change in course schedule and venue are met wherever possible.

What does Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Improve the richness of teaching and learning by developing the use of ILT as an interactive learning tool in the classroom and increasing the use of the service's virtual learning environment.
- Extend and enrich the range of provision and ensure recruitment targets are met, including increased participation by men, by developing more strategic approaches towards obtaining alternative sources of funding and more targeted marketing methods.

Learning for social and personal development

Other learning for qualifications provision considered as part of the main findings but not separately graded: *childcare; retail and commercial enterprise; health, sport and fitness; languages, literature and culture; and education and training.*

Crafts, creative arts and design

Grade 2

Context

34. In 2009/10, there were 3,115 learners on 133 programmes, with 6% on accredited courses. The sessions are held throughout the day and evening and Saturdays. Courses for beginners and intermediate level are non-accredited, with accredited courses provided at foundation and intermediate levels. Non-accredited courses run for ten weeks and recently introduced short courses run between one and five sessions. Subjects covered include, photography, sugar craft, upholstery, jewellery, fashion painting, drawing and pottery. The subject area has a full-time curriculum manager and between 40 and 52 part-time tutors.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are good. Non-accredited courses have very good success and attendance rates, and those leading to qualifications have good retention and a year-on-year improvement in success rates.
- Learners achieve a good standard of work. New learners gain skills and techniques quickly and can progress through to accredited courses. In a session for stained glass, the more experienced learners were producing work to a high standard and giving the finished products to friends and family.
- Learners develop good personal and social skills. They gain the confidence to join in peer critiques and support their fellow learners. Many learners work with hazardous substances and they are very diligent in their working practices, using safe working practices. All learners say they feel safe.
- Teaching and learning are good. Tutors are well qualified and many are practitioners in their chosen subject. Tutors plan for sessions well and manage the different abilities of learners skilfully. They use well-executed demonstrations to inspire and extend the learners' knowledge. However, there is little use of ILT to enhance the learners' experience.
- Overall, assessment is good. Individual learning plans are completed comprehensively and used to good effect by learners to improve their standard of work. However, tutors do not always use these plans as a teaching and learning tool. For example, photographic evidence is not used to full effect to demonstrate the progress being made by learners.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of subjects and progression routes for learners, many who are new to the service, meeting their needs and interests

well. Venues for these sessions are spread widely across the local area, in schools and community centres. Learners made good use of an empty shop owned by the local authority to hold a photographic exhibition.

- Learners enjoy the enrichment activities provided, such as entering the Victoria and Albert museum 'Inspired By' competition, and trips of special interest for photography learners. Many make a positive contribution to the community. Some learners have progressed from the family learning programmes to arts and crafts courses, benefiting from being able to leave their children in the nearby crèche.
- Good partnership work focuses on encouraging the participation of learners who are traditionally reluctant to join courses or who might find it difficult to attend. This includes those linked to the local primary trust, housing associations, elderly learners and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in day care centres. Many of these learners progress to attend general programmes.
- Good curriculum management identifies issues and problems quickly and appropriate actions are taken to bring about continuous improvement. The self assessment report is broadly accurate. Procedures for judging the quality of teaching and learning through observation have improved greatly and lead to accurate evaluations.
- Communication with staff is effective and tutors hold regular team meetings. Part-time tutors feel involved and are well supported, with many training opportunities. Staff are aware of safeguarding procedures. They work hard and good practice is shared formally and informally across the subject areas.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All groups of learners perform equally well and there is no achievement gap. However, in sessions for learners on non-accredited courses, there is insufficient focus on exploring and celebrating cultural themes. Participation by males is low.
- Good accommodation is provided for most courses. The studios are large and well lit and the standard of equipment is satisfactory. However, there is insufficient ILT equipment in some centres.

What does Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Embed more exciting and innovative teaching and learning strategies by exploring and using ILT within sessions and developing the service's virtual learning environment.
- Improve procedures for recording and evaluating the progress of learners, including the use of more photographic evidence to demonstrate the progress of learners and the development of their skills.
- Increase the number of male learners by developing strategies and more targeted marketing that broaden the appeal of the provision to men and encourage them to participate.

Family learning

Grade 2

Context

35. Family learning provision includes courses in family literacy, language and numeracy, the wider family learning fund and wider family learning. Three partner organisations are commissioned to deliver some courses and others are taught by tutors employed directly by the service. Classes are taught in libraries, children's centres, neighbourhood centres, schools and other community settings. There are 18 part-time tutors, supported by a curriculum manager and a programme manager. In the current academic year, there are 702 learners, of whom 79% are females, 2% declared a learning difficulty and/or disability and 31% are of minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. In the current academic year, learners' retention rates are 97% and of those taking accredited learning programmes, 89% achieved the qualification.
- Learners make good progress in using the skills and knowledge they have gained to support their children's learning. They gain a better understanding and knowledge of the school curriculum and of the teaching and learning methods used in schools. Some learners progress on to other courses and gain qualifications, such as foundation and intermediate levels in numeracy and intermediate level child care.
- Learners derive much enjoyment from their classes and produce a high standard of work. Many learners go on to participate more fully in school and community activities. Learners feel safe and welcome attending the community venues with which they are familiar and employ safe working practices during adult-only and joint sessions with children.
- Learners gain information about healthy cooking and eating. Many learners find financial-awareness courses very useful in helping them to understand how to manage their finances better, as well as shop more effectively. Some learners improve their confidence and self-esteem and undertake voluntary activities to use the skills they have gained.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good. Sessions are well-planned and contain varied activities to engage learners, as well as meet their different learning needs. Tutors are well-qualified and very knowledgeable. They engage with learners well and provide them with much positive feedback and encouragement.
- The recording of learners' progress and achievement is not always focused sufficiently on learning. Comments by tutors and learners on individual learning plans do not always evaluate learners' progress towards agreed group or individual learning goals, or the skills gained.

- The broad range of courses meets the needs of learners well. Family learning provision includes courses on arts and crafts, cooking, child development, literacy, numeracy, information communication technologies and money matters. Programmes are run at different times and venues to enable parents to attend during school hours or in the evening to suit their family circumstances.
- A wide variety of taster events and courses engage learners from diverse groups, particularly those from areas of high social deprivation. Successful initiatives have increased the participation, retention and achievement of male learners. Weekend visits are arranged to country parks and museums for added interest. However, there are fewer opportunities for older members of the wider family network to participate.
- Partnership working is good. Strong collaboration takes place with local organisations to extend the family learning provision. This has increased the engagement of fathers and hard-to-reach groups such as the families of offenders. Strong and productive partnerships ensure a consultative approach is taken when planning provision across the county.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Tutors provide learners with information on progression opportunities, as well as how and where to access support for personal needs such as benefits. Guest speakers, including benefit advisers, are invited to provide help and information. Learners support their peers well, for example, older parents support teenage parents. However, some learners would benefit from a wider availability of interpreters in classes.
- Curriculum leadership is good. The management team have re-focused the strategy and vision for the future of family learning. Good communication occurs between tutors, including the use of e-mail. The team meet once a term at the tutor forum. Meetings are held with partners to consider strategy and planning of the programme, as well as to monitor service level agreements for commissioned courses. Staff have ample opportunities to develop or enhance their skills.
- Procedures for safeguarding learners are satisfactory. Tutors carry out risk assessments stringently, and health and safety and safeguarding risks are minimised. Staff are trained on child protection procedures and the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.
- The promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Learners from deprived areas are encouraged to enrol, and males and learners belonging to minority ethnic groups are well-represented. However, learners from different groups often fail to interact with each other in classes, thus not contributing well to community cohesion.
- The self-assessment report is generally accurate. Inspectors agreed with most judgements. Partners, staff and learner views are sought and used to compile the self-assessment report. Self-assessment and monitoring reports are shared with partners and staff and they contribute to improvement plans.

- Most accommodation is suitable, with some excellent or good facilities. However, some rooms are cramped, particularly when joint activities are taking place with adults and children. Also, in some venues only children's furniture is available for adults and access to ILT equipment is limited. Learning resources are satisfactory, although some text-based materials are copied poorly.

What does Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Improve the recording of learners' progress and achievement by ensuring comments from tutors and learners are evaluative and link closely to group and personal learning goals.
- Increase the participation of older wider family members by developing strategies for ensuring they attend appropriate programmes with other family members.
- Extend the interaction between learners of different minority ethnic groups during sessions by developing tutors skills and techniques, thus further promoting equality and diversity and community cohesion.
- Improve the quality of accommodation and resources by using suitably sized rooms, appropriate furniture for adults, increased access to ILT equipment and improving the quality of learning materials.

Information about the inspection

36. Five of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the head of service as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the service's most recent self-assessment report and business plans, the previous inspection and monitoring visit reports, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
37. Inspectors gathered the views of learners through group and individual interviews, and e-mails. They looked at questionnaires learners had completed on behalf of the service. They also visited learning sessions and assessments.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Bedfordshire Adult Skills and Community Learning Service
Learning types: 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Social and personal development:** all adult safeguarded provision; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Social and personal development	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	0	0	0	0	0
Part-time learners	3,394	23	1,699	1,462	210
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
How well do learners progress?	2				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
Do learners feel safe?	2				
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3				
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2				
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
Leadership and management	2	2	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a				
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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