

Durham County Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		7–11 October 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Too few learners on mathematics courses finish their studies and gain a qualification.
- Not enough teaching, learning and assessment are good or outstanding. Too often all learners work at the same pace and level in class whatever their individual needs or abilities. This means that some learners make slow progress.
- Tutors do not plan English and mathematics sessions well enough to meet the full range of learners' needs and some learners sit for long periods without learning very much.
- Tutors of other subjects miss opportunities in class to help learners improve their English and mathematics skills. When marking written work tutors do not always give learners feedback on their spelling and use of English to help them improve.
- Managers do not use quality assurance procedures well enough to improve teaching, learning and assessment across the provision, including the programmes delivered by other training organisations on their behalf.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Success rates have improved and are high for the large majority of learners.
- Good advice, guidance and support have increased the take-up of loans for those aged over 24 and helped learners progress to higher-level courses.
- The service has improved the range of courses it offers to better reflect local and national priorities and encourage people who have not traditionally taken part in learning to join classes.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop strategies to monitor and improve retention and achievement across all courses, including subcontracted provision, and particularly for the small number of courses that are performing less well.
- Improve the use of teaching observations to drive improvement by: focusing more closely on the impact that teaching has on learning and achievement; giving tutors more detailed guidance on what they need to do to improve their teaching; and building in more formal arrangements to measure the improvement that tutors make.
- Raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by increasing the range and variety of teaching activities in all programmes, including the effective use of peer and group learning, to stimulate learners' interest and help them learn.
- Extend the use of information and learning technology in all programmes, including the use of the virtual learning environment, to help learners towards more independent learning.
- Extend the range of assessment methods used to support and challenge learners and increase their rate of progress. Include as appropriate the use of constructive written feedback, and the use of audio and video recording.
- Make better use of results from initial and diagnostic assessment to plan learning that challenges each learner and helps them make faster progress.
- Promote the value of diversity and cultural difference through teaching, learning and assessment by sharing good practice and by building opportunities into the planning and delivery of all programmes.
- Take more opportunities across all courses to develop learners' English and mathematics skills through classroom activities and through constructive feedback on written work.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good. The vast majority of learners achieve their learning goals. The provider's data show a significant improvement in success rates for classroom-based adult learning since 2011/12. Retention rates have also improved over the same period and are high. Success rates for workplace learning are also high and improving.
- However, success rates on some long courses require improvement. In particular, success and retention rates for learners at intermediate level in functional skills in mathematics are too low. For apprentices, the completion of qualifications by the planned end time has been low but is now improving. This has previously affected a very small number of learners, but with the planned growth of apprenticeships in the service's provision, it is important that Durham County Council's Adult Learning and Skills Service (Durham ALSS), the service, sustains this improvement.
- Many learners have overcome considerable personal barriers to achieve their learning aims, some from particularly low starting points. For example, the vast majority of learners on a programme designed to re-engage vulnerable young people not in employment, education or training are achieving well.
- Across all programmes, learners make good progress in the development of their personal and social skills, including confidence in their capacity to learn, and to interact with others. For some, newly acquired skills such as the confidence and ability to travel independently are a big step forward. Other skills, such as numeracy and familiarity with workplace practices and expectations, multi-tasking and coaching, enhance learners' employability more directly. On

specialist programmes to re-engage with young people, learners develop a good range of personal and employability skills, but do not sufficiently develop their skills in English and mathematics.

- Durham ALSS has identified some gaps in the achievement of different groups and has taken action to close these. These include raising the low success rates on a sign language course for learners with a hearing impairment and improving the retention of male learners on a numeracy course.
- A growing proportion of learners progress to further learning and some directly to employment. About a sixth of learners move on from non-accredited to accredited courses, and a similar proportion progress to higher-level courses offered by the service. An increasing number of learners on the employability programme targeted at vulnerable young people progress to further learning or into sustainable employment. The majority of this group are moving on to further education or employment. The service recognises the need to increase the proportion within this group that move on to sustainable employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. Although many learners benefit from improving success rates, a significant number of learners at higher levels in mathematics and English do not yet make sufficient progress. Learners benefit from high expectations from tutors who are generally keen for learners to succeed.
- Not enough teaching and learning are good. Where teaching is good, learners develop skills through a range of thoughtfully-prepared activities that help learners share ideas and learn from each other. For example, learners on employability courses develop good knowledge and skills through tasks that help them explore different working environments. In information and communication technology (ICT), tutors make good use of interactive learning technology to develop and assess understanding of topics such as text formatting and manipulation of graphics. Tutors bring topics alive by using examples and exercises relevant to everyday life and employment aims.
- Teaching and assessment are less successful in sessions where learners capable of more-challenging activities and faster progress work at the same pace and level as the rest of the group. In mathematics and English sessions, tutors do not plan well enough to meet the range of learners' needs and some learners sit for long periods without learning anything new. The variety of learning resources and teaching methods that tutors use is too narrow to capture the interest of learners at different levels. Too little use is made of learning technologies.
- The promotion of independent learning is inconsistent across subject areas and requires improvement. In programmes to develop teaching and learning support in schools a virtual learning environment resource gives learners access to a range of additional distance electronic learning programmes that add value to the programme. However, the use of the virtual learning environment is not widespread across all subject areas. ICT courses provide video clips of software instructions for different levels courses allowing for highly effective distance learning and revision.
- A good range of initial assessment strategies ensures that learners are placed on courses at the appropriate level. In ICT, the initial assessment of vocational skills helps tutors to plan learning that builds on this previous skill attainment. However, initial assessment is not used well to plan personalised learning activities for the development of English and mathematics skills. Individual learning plans contain personal targets for learners but too often tutors fail to update these.
- The quality of learners' portfolio work is of a good standard. Learners provide a good range of evidence to support their claims of competency in different subject areas, such as including photographic evidence to record learners' involvement in community projects, examples of learning resources they have made to help children in schools and good use of video technology to record outcomes from media courses. Procedures to verify the quality of assessments are

good. Learners’ written responses to assessment questions are comprehensive and detailed. Tutors provide constructive feedback on learners’ work towards qualifications.

- However, tutors’ and assessors’ feedback to help learners improve and develop English and mathematical skills is of inconsistent quality across subcontracted provision and across direct provision for learners taking employability and entry level ICT courses.
- The quality of assessment strategies is inconsistent across subject areas. In some subjects for example, tutors make too little use of targeted questions to check the learning of less confident and vocal group members. Assessment is rigorous in ICT, in courses to support learning and teaching in schools, and in administration and business management. However, too little use is made of administration and business management technology. The use of reflective journals on some courses, including supporting teaching and learning in schools, improves learners’ understanding of the progress they have made.
- Advice, guidance and support are good. Drop-in services in local libraries have improved local residents’ access to pre-course information. Learners generally have a good knowledge of the content of courses as a result of information from the course prospectus, the internet and telephone enquiries. Help with loan applications has increased the take-up of loans for those aged over 24. Advice and guidance have increased learners’ progression to higher-level courses.
- Skilled staff work with learners with diverse and wide ranging needs and meet these in many subject areas. However, too few lessons meet learners’ differing abilities and range of needs in mathematics and English, which is a significant part of the provision. Teaching and learning do not sufficiently develop learners’ knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues.

**Foundation learning English and mathematics
19+ Learning programmes
Community learning
Employability**

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement. This is reflected in the success rates for functional skills in English and mathematics, which require further improvement. Across all programmes, learners make good progress in the development of their personal and social skills.
- Tutors are welcoming and approachable and are particularly good at motivating learners and helping them to overcome any initial fears they may have about returning to learn. Tutors develop positive relationships with learners, who gain the confidence to ask questions and to work effectively with other group members. Learners enjoy their lessons and work with focus and concentration.
- Learners aged 16 to 24 on employability programmes benefit from lively and interesting sessions and good individual coaching that challenges them and promotes their capacity to learn independently, to assess their own progress and to plan further learning.
- In too many lessons, tutors make insufficient use of a variety of learning resources to enhance and extend learning and rely too much on the use of paper-based handouts and exercises. These can be dull and repetitive for learners and do not always meet their range of learning needs effectively. Too little use is made of technology to support teaching and learning, for example, mobile telephone technologies, video clips, digital recordings, 3D imaging and specialist software. In a minority of lessons, tutors talk for too long and do not make sufficient checks on the progress that individual learners are making.
- In functional skills, tutors do not plan well enough to meet learners’ different needs in English and mathematics. The work set for learners of higher ability is not challenging enough, so that some learners do not make as much progress as they should.
- Tutors use initial and diagnostic assessment well to identify promptly and clearly learners’ starting points in English, mathematics and personal skills. These are carefully recorded. However, tutors do not make sufficient use of this information to plan personalised learning effectively. This adversely affects the progress made by some learners.

- Tutors make good use of feedback to praise learners. This builds their confidence and encourages them to go on learning. Assessment of learners’ written work is generally thorough and meets external requirements. However, when marking learners’ work, tutors and assessors miss opportunities to develop learners’ use of language by drawing attention to spelling or grammatical errors and helping them understand how they can improve their work further.
- The use of individual target-setting varies across different groups of learners. In some groups, tutors and learners make skilful use of very specific targets, which support teaching and learning well. In other groups the use of targets in individual learning plans are less helpful for learners in enabling them to make good or better progress.
- Tutors on employability programmes do not routinely encourage and support learners to develop their English or mathematical skills within their main programmes. Not all tutors are sufficiently aware of how important this work is in enhancing employability skills.

Administration and business management Apprenticeships Other work based learning	Good
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- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and this is reflected in good outcomes and retention. For the vast majority of apprentices assessments are particularly well managed and they progress well. In other programmes, teaching and learning very effectively extend the learners’ knowledge and skills and meet their diverse needs. A small minority of work-based learners and apprentices have progressed too slowly. However, managers and assessors have intervened rapidly to improve this.
- Tutors very effectively engage the majority of learners in classroom sessions using a well-planned mix of methods such as small-group work and discussions. Learners enjoy their learning sessions and acquire valuable knowledge about working with people respectfully. Learners on management courses particularly benefit from reflecting on their performance. Highlights from learners’ experiences include learning how to successfully undertake a feedback exercise with work colleagues to gain a deeper understanding into their management style.
- Assessors working with apprentices set high expectations for the standard of learners’ work and are very thorough when assessing it. Learners’ work is of a high standard and is very well presented. Learners benefit significantly from extensive discussions about their planned tasks and learn creative ways of working. For example, one learner that prefers visual ways to learn has designed some helpful posters about important health and safety aspects of office equipment for her colleagues.
- Assessors working with apprentices have a good, caring yet challenging rapport with learners. Tutors of other courses have valuable experience which learners particularly welcome. Adult learners greatly appreciate the time tutors take to allow them to discuss their experiences and learn from each other.
- In apprenticeship programmes, assessors do not seize all opportunities to carry out impromptu assessment or skills coaching. Learners are too often directed by assessors to ask their employers or mentors to help when a brief teaching session would be effective. For example, to help learners gain the confidence to answer telephones.
- Work-based learning assessors do not make enough use of technology to support learning and assessment. For example, learners do not use online resources either to make learning more fun or to extend their learning. Assessors do not make enough use of the good digital recordings of their often extensive discussions with learners, which provide good evidence.
- Assessors record learners’ starting points accurately. They agree learning priorities with learners and make these clear to employers. Learners following apprenticeships and work-based learning programmes regularly negotiate clear short-term targets with their assessors. Employers agree with learners and assessors the specialised units that are relevant to learners’ job roles.

- Information, advice and guidance for potential and actual learners vary in quality. A large majority of learners are able to make well-informed decisions about which course and options to follow. However, a small minority of learners find their course is at too low a level and does not match their needs.
- Assessors diagnose work-based learners' and apprentices' English, mathematics and ICT needs accurately and use the results very effectively to provide good individual support. Older learners have found this support to be especially helpful in obtaining their qualifications. All learners on other courses benefit from an initial assessment of their English and mathematics skills and are given information about courses.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of equality and diversity and safeguarding matters at the start of their courses. However, they do not retain this understanding and they cannot recall important aspects that might affect them personally. Assessors reinforce health and safety good practice well through their observations of learners' workplaces.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Durham ALSS has a clear strategy that reflects national priorities for community learning and the council's vision to be 'altogether better'. The strategy ensures that managers focus well on developing effective community-based learning that contributes to social inclusion, promotes economic security, widens participation and encourages learners to continue learning and prepare for employment.
- The council's comprehensive review of the service in 2012 led to significant reorganisation and review of key policies and procedures. Service managers have improved the scope of provision to focus more clearly on meeting local and national priorities, and have improved outcomes for learners.
- Managers make effective use of regular teaching observations to identify key strengths and areas for improvement. However, observers do not say clearly enough how tutors can apply their teaching skills better to make sure that learners achieve and exceed their learning goals.
- Managers make good use of the outcomes of observations, data about how well learners achieve and independent feedback about the quality of learners' work to monitor tutor performance, identify their training needs and set priorities for wider staff development. Where tutors do not meet expected standards, managers intervene appropriately. However, managers do not monitor the success of these interventions effectively. This means that the capacity to drive improvements in teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent across programmes.
- Self-assessment is regular and robust. Service managers gather the views of users through course reviews, evaluations, video feedback, and through a learner forum. They use these views well to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of self-assessment. The quality improvement plan sets clear targets for development and provides good evidence of how the quality improvement process raises standards.
- Where the rate of improvement is slow, service managers take action to develop capacity through coaching, professional development and performance management. The self-assessment report captures the service's strengths and areas for further improvement appropriately, but is not succinct enough.
- Durham ALSS uses subcontractors well to target the recruitment of residents that do not traditionally take part in learning and of other priority groups across the county. Learners benefit from a wide range of learning and skill development programmes. Managers give good, and valued, support to subcontractors so that they can meet their targets. However, procedures for monitoring subcontracted provision do not focus sufficiently well on standards of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers make good use of commissioning to meet the requirements of employers and national priorities and of learners' emerging needs and interests. Service managers and subcontractors

make effective use of feedback from learners and employers to develop their learning programmes. For example, service managers extended the contract for a learning programme to include first aid and manual handling training to better prepare learners for work in health and social care.

- The service takes equality and diversity seriously. Durham ALSS ensures that target groups, which include some very vulnerable learners, participate in learning and achieve well. This includes learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, older learners, young people leaving care and those who are unemployed. However, tutors do not sufficiently explore issues of equality and diversity in classrooms or in work places.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The service meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Managers, staff and subcontractors promote the health and safety of learners effectively. Learning takes place in safe environments. Managers prioritise and manage health and safety effectively through routine monitoring of provision. This makes sure that managers are able to deal in an appropriate way with the very small number of complaints and cases of harassment and bullying that occur.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)


Durham County Council

<p>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</p> <p>1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate</p>	Overall	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation learning	3
Foundation English and mathematics	3
Administration	2
Business management	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Local Authority							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0							
	Part-time: 5,123							
Principal/CEO	Ms Linda Bailey							
Date of previous inspection	March 2008							
Website address	www.durham.gov.uk							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	202	N/A	105	N/A	128	N/A	43
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	7	23	4	17	N/A	NA		
Number of learners aged 14-16	0							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	208 on programme as of 03/10/13							
Number of employability learners	18 on programme as of 03/10/13							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency/European Social Fund							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The Cornforth Partnership ■ J and K Training Ltd ■ Nigel Brough – Bespoke Training Solutions Ltd ■ Bishop Auckland College ■ 1st in Training ■ Pattison & Milburn ■ Northern Rights Community Interest Company ■ SkillShare North East Ltd ■ Children North East 							

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- City of Sunderland YMCA Foyer
 - City of Sunderland YMCA Foyer
 - Foundation of Light
 - Fane Ltd
 - Derwentside Training

Contextual information

Durham County Council is the sixth largest local authority by population in England and home to around 513,000 people. The county covers an area of 223,260 stretching from the remote rural North Pennine area in the west to the more densely populated East Durham coastline. With 12 major centres of population, there are around 250 settlements including rural villages, small and medium towns and the historic city of Durham. Data from the Indices of Deprivation (2010) indicate that in 2008 there were over 85,000 residents on a low income and almost 45,000 people of working age, workless. There are around 27,000 income deprived people aged over 60 and about 20,000 children in poverty.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jan Smith HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Quality and Curriculum Co-ordinator as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012, Part 2*:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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