

County Training

Local authority

Inspection dates		28 October–1 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Inadequate-4

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Insufficient numbers of learners on foundation-level study programmes progress to further education or training.
- A few teaching and learning sessions do not inspire and challenge more-able learners and enable them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Managers do not include sufficiently well the salient points captured in teaching and learning observations to make key judgements in the annual self-assessment report.
- A few staff are insufficiently skilled in promoting equality and diversity.
- Managers poorly record and collate case-study evidence about safeguarding.
- Managers took insufficiently decisive and appropriate action with regard to safeguarding in one case.

This provider has the following strengths:

- The very large majority of apprentices and learners on other vocational or non-accredited courses make good progress and achieve their qualifications or learning objectives. Learners and apprentices use the skills they have learnt in teaching sessions and from practical assessment productively and confidently.
- Staff at all levels provide care and support which is highly beneficial for a very wide range of learners such as those with challenging life issues, difficult barriers to learning and those in hard-to-reach communities.
- Assessors use their expertise and vocational knowledge skilfully to link theory to practice.
- Staff provide highly effective information, advice and guidance.
- Leaders promote a shared vision, planned and implemented diligently, focused exceedingly well on improving outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment. Performance management is robust, including for organisations providing training on behalf of County Training.
- Staff at all levels use local and county-wide information exceptionally well to deliver a flexibly responsive curriculum.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further improve outcomes for learners, particularly those on study programmes, by continuing to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all sessions. This includes improving the quality of feedback in written work and, in weaker teaching sessions, planning and implementing practice that places a greater emphasis on learning.
- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity by sharing good practice from those sessions where teachers display a mastery of integrating these aspects with learning and manage attitudes and behaviour skilfully. Follow up disseminated good practice to check the impact.
- Include salient information from observations to make key judgements which support the grades awarded for teaching, learning and assessment in the next self-assessment report.
- Improve the organisation of information to provide a better overview of safeguarding so that one system contains all the necessary details from all cases. Present clearer information to members at safeguarding meetings. Where there is a potentially serious safeguarding issue, always refer it to, and discuss with, the appropriate link agencies, particularly in instances where it is difficult to decide and managers are unsure. Confirm and record the outcome in a subsequent meeting.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Assessors, teachers and managers have enabled a sustained increase in the number of apprentices and other vocational learners that achieve their qualifications over the last four years. For example, data held by the provider indicate in 2012/13 that success rates for apprenticeships are high at 85%. Outcomes are consistently strong in community learning. Further improvement is required in increasing the number of learners progressing to further education and training from study programmes at foundation level.
- Most apprentices achieve qualifications. Two thirds of apprentices follow apprenticeships in health and social care, early years or administration and business management where success rates are particularly high and they make rapid progress. The very large majority of learners who follow courses leading to non-apprenticeship vocational qualifications in the workplace achieve their qualifications. This includes an increase in the number of learners achieving qualifications where English and mathematics are the key aim. A small minority of information and communication technology apprentices and other vocational learners do not achieve as well by comparison.
- Most learners following community learning non-accredited courses achieve their learning goals which are individualised and test the learners' development in the subject well. Learners' English and mathematical skills development in family learning is good.
- The standard of work produced by learners and apprentices across the provision is good. In one community learning project, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made well-designed, colourful art and craft banners that represented an enjoyable learning experience. Apprentices produce good analyses of cooking recipes that they have followed and the quality of the food they prepare. In a small minority of cases teachers provide insufficient comment on the quality of the written work produced by learners and apprentices.
- Generally, different groups of learners achieve well but managers keep a watchful eye where this is not the case. Managers recognised, for example, that male learners were achieving their qualifications in insufficient numbers compared to female learners and noted a key area for improvement to narrow this achievement gap. Achievement rates for male learners have increased and the gap narrowed over the last year as a result. Achievement gaps are lower than

nationally in other groups of learners and not discernible for most groups. Socio-economic data indicate that learners taking English or mathematics qualifications achieve better than those at similar providers.

- Learners demonstrate their skills development well, enabled by teachers and assessors in the workplace and the classroom. New apprentices state that they learn new skills quickly and understand the high professional expectations that employers and assessors have of them. Hairdressing and early years' apprentices benefit from responsibility given to them that provides them with the opportunity to develop their thinking and listening skills, and independence in working with customers.
- The large majority of apprentices continue in permanent employment following completion of their qualification. In health and social care and administration, employers and managers at County Training plan progressive next steps for them to take a more advanced apprenticeship. Staff go out of their way to help learners progress, in one instance enabling a learner to buy the equipment needed to progress to an intermediate apprenticeship programme.
- A satisfactory number of learners progress from community learning and employability programmes into employment or higher level learning programmes. A satisfactory number of learners on study programmes at foundation level progress into further education or employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, which is reflected in the achievement of learners and the good development of their skills and confidence across the provision. Teachers and assessors have good subject knowledge and vocational expertise, which they use effectively to enable learners to apply their new knowledge and skills in their everyday lives and in the workplace. They also have high expectations of learners and provide them with good support, which helps them to make good progress.
- In the better learning sessions, teachers use a good range of different approaches, which actively involve learners and which meet their individual needs very well. The choice and use of learning resources are good. Learners develop good skills to take responsibility for their own learning. In work-based learning, assessors and trainers enable learners to apply new learning to their employment contexts very effectively.
- Learners enjoy their learning. In family learning, learners and headteachers value highly the learning opportunities in schools, where teachers, adult learners and children engage well in a wide variety of interesting and practical learning activities, which results in them developing new skills and increasing their self-confidence. In an employability workshop, learners engaged in very effective role-play exercises. All learners made valuable contributions and both gave and received very helpful feedback on how to improve their job interview skills.
- In less effective learning sessions, teachers do not plan sufficiently for the diverse needs of learners, who all work at the same pace and level, despite their differing levels of ability and skills. Teachers spend too much time talking and make too much use of presentation slides and paper-based learning resources. Not all learners get sufficient opportunities to participate fully and it is not always clear what learning is actually taking place.
- A key priority in 2012/13 was to secure improvements in initial and diagnostic assessment and these now provide clear and helpful information on learners' starting points, on their skill needs in English and mathematics and, where appropriate, on any barriers to learning that they need to overcome. Teachers generally make good use of this information, with just a small minority of instances where teachers do not use this information sufficiently well in the planning of learning. Induction is satisfactory and provides learners with helpful information, but not always in a sufficiently engaging or interesting way.
- Assessment practice is good overall and in the apprenticeship provision is excellent. Practical assessment is frequent and robust, particularly in the workplace. Teachers and assessors

provide very good verbal and written feedback particularly on practical assessments. However, the quality of the marking of written work and usefulness of feedback is variable. It does not always contain sufficient information to enable learners to know how to improve or if their work is of a high standard.

- Processes to identify and to record learners' progress and achievement are effective on community learning courses. In family learning, tutors receive a helpful pack which contains all the related assessment information for use with learners. Teachers set clear targets with learners and monitor their progress well. For example, apprentices are very clear about the progress they are making, what they still have to achieve and how they will do this.
- The development of learners' skills in English and mathematics is good overall. In family learning, the transition to learners studying to take qualifications in functional skills is effective. Learners give positive feedback about their learning and their good skills development which results from motivating and supportive teaching.
- Learners, including apprentices, receive very effective information, advice and guidance, both about gaining access to learning and their progression at the end of their courses or learning programmes, which supports their development very successfully. They also receive good advice and support in relation to a wide range of personal and welfare-related matters.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching, learning and assessment varies. Most learners benefit from examples of good practice, which enables them to develop and to extend their knowledge and understanding very well. However, not all teachers plan effectively to promote equality and diversity and they do not all have sufficient skills and confidence to recognise and use opportunities for learning which arise naturally in learning and assessment sessions.

Health and social care, early years and play work Apprenticeships 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care, and early years and play work are good and this is reflected in the good outcomes and the good progress that learners make. Learners develop good practical skills which employers recognise and value highly.
- Learners benefit from good support and encouragement, which make an important contribution to them achieving their learning goals successfully. For example, a learner who experienced bereavement early in their advanced apprenticeship received valuable and sensitive support during a difficult time to enable them to keep up with the demands of the practical training and theory learning.
- Assessors are extremely motivated, knowledgeable and use their extensive practical experiences well to link theory to practice. They foster good working relationships and support learners effectively. Learners, as a result, use new skills and knowledge confidently and enjoy their learning. Teamwork between assessors, employers and learners is excellent enabling them to plan and monitor learning so that learners are certain that what they are doing in the workplace is right.
- Although learners make good progress, a few taught sessions insufficiently inspire and challenge all learners to enable them to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. These sessions often focus too closely on task completion and insufficiently on developing learners' independent learning and analytical skills.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments are good. Staff assess thoroughly apprentices and learners to check their prior attainment and skills and that their individual needs are met well. Learners with dyslexia get extra support from a range of staff to overcome their barriers to learning.
- Practical assessment practice is excellent. Assessors plan assessment skilfully, tasks are vocationally relevant and written feedback is thorough. Learners and staff methodically use

individual learning plans as working documents to check learners' progress against their goals. Assessors set realistic but challenging targets for learners, which they review regularly and discuss with learners and employers. Assessors and learners record each meeting and include new or revised targets and individual personal goals.

- Assessors provide good verbal technical feedback following observations that challenge and probe learners' knowledge and understanding of workplace practice. Assessors communicate well what learners know and what they have to do to improve. Assessors encourage learners to reflect on their work to identify areas where they can improve, and what they have done well.
- Written feedback on written work provides insufficient information for learners to develop their English skills. Teachers do not give sufficient praise when work is of a high standard nor check or correct spelling, grammar and punctuation consistently. For example, work from one intermediate apprentice, who aspires to become a qualified nurse contained significant unchecked errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- The quality of information, advice and guidance is good. Staff provide helpful and informative support that encourages apprentices to discuss ideas and formulate plans for their future development and progression.
- Assessors and teachers promote equality and diversity well during assessment feedback and formal reviews. Assessors use this opportunity to focus on the impact of equality and diversity on the individuals in their work roles. This ensures learners reflect on the effect on service users as well as challenging their own behaviours and beliefs.

Foundation English and mathematics

16-19 study programmes

19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the large majority of apprentices achieving English and mathematics qualifications and the increasing proportion of learners achieving these qualifications on other vocational learning programmes. Learners make significant gains in confidence and develop good employability skills.
- Teachers are highly effective at increasing learners' independence and confidence in applying learning. On study programmes, support workers, in partnership with English and mathematics teachers, care for learners particularly well. For example, staff perceptively and sensitively identified that a learner potentially needed reading glasses. Following subsequent confirmation at a visit to the opticians, the learner is making rapid progress in their reading.
- Staff and employers have high expectations and are adept at motivating learners. For example, one learner who had never been to school, was unenthusiastic, and initially would not make eye contact, has since achieved foundation-level qualifications in English and mathematics, is successfully working in a hair salon, and is starting an intermediate hair and beauty course.
- Teachers use their expertise and subject knowledge of English and mathematics skilfully. They make tasks vocationally relevant so that learners learn and enjoy learning. For example, an apprentice understood mean averages more easily when asked to apply his knowledge to calculating the costs of the range of haircuts in the shop where he works. In a practical cooking lesson, learners understood fractions better by using cupcake cases to work out equivalent fractions.
- However, in a small minority of lessons, planning is poor and the pace of learning is too slow as teachers talk too much, which allows insufficient time for learning activities. In a few lessons resources are insufficiently varied. A few apprentices identified as having dyslexia do not always receive the most appropriate support to help them make good progress.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments are very thorough and meet learners' needs particularly well. Reviews are frequent, comprehensive and well structured; teachers record accurately the achievements and specific skills learners need to improve their English and mathematics, which

learners understand fully. However, in a few cases, teachers insufficiently identify or record apprentices' skills, making progress difficult to monitor.

- Assessment of learning is good. Before introducing new topics, teachers carefully check what learners know already. Teachers monitor and assess learners' progress in lessons particularly well. For example, a learner who had completed a worksheet on apostrophes of possession, was asked to check the work and then to explain the reasoning for the answers. This resulted in the learner having a better grammatical understanding.
- Learners on study programmes benefit considerably from the easily available information, advice and guidance to help them make well-informed choices about work experience and possible career paths. The organisation's extensive links with experts from a range of agencies, such as health promotion and housing, provide learners with options if they have personal concerns and problems.
- Most teachers promote equality and diversity well. For example, during a progress review a teacher visiting a work placement in a nursery challenged the learners' negative perception of men working with young children and babies. However, a few teachers do not have the skills or confidence to challenge learners who express stereotypical views during lessons.

Administration, Business management Apprenticeships 19+ Learning programmes

Outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. This matches the particularly good and sustained outcomes for learners and the excellent progress they make against challenging targets. Progression to advanced level is exceptionally good and the large majority of learners gain permanent employment when they complete their apprenticeship or progress to an advanced apprenticeship.
- Assessors use their extensive expertise and vocational knowledge extremely well to impart skills and knowledge effectively to apprentices. This results in very good outcomes such as learners' increased capacity to take responsibility and good independent learning skills. Assignments are particularly effective in challenging learners and developing their knowledge of the wider aspects of their job role. For example, a group of learners undertaking management training submitted a well-considered proposal to their senior managers outlining well-conceived options to improve productivity and profit.
- Care and support are excellent. Learners engage fully with their apprenticeship, are focused and enthusiastic. They speak very highly of the support they are receiving from regular assessor visits and one-to-one coaching, and value the emphasis assessors place on their progress and well-being. Assessors use an extensive range of resources very effectively to support on- and off-the-job training stored in a centralised and accessible repository.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments are thorough and assessors use these particularly effectively to make sure that learners are on the right programme and that their learning goals and planned end dates are challenging and achievable. Assessors involve employers in integrating carefully the planned learning programme with the employer's business needs, utilising well the results of initial assessment and learners' prior attainment. Both the assessors' and the employers' aspirations for the apprentice and their job role reflect the range of skills they learn and achieve to gain their qualification.
- Progress reviews are good. Assessors plan these extremely well and control the pace of learning to suit the individual learner. Verbal feedback is constructive; teachers and assessors provide practical and informative guidance and support. Employers are actively engaged in the review process. However, there is insufficient feedback on the impact of the training in the workplace or further areas for development within their job role, including soft skills development.
- The development of functional English, mathematics, and information and communication technology skills is very good and effectively integrated with the vocational learning programme.

Additional resources support the development of learners' grammar well and where additional support is required teachers astutely refer learners to specialist teachers.

- Information, advice and guidance for learners are highly effective. Teachers guide learners well onto programmes at the correct level. During the apprenticeship, teachers frequently lead good discussions about an individual's personal aspirations, providing effective information and advice on further learning and job opportunities.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is very good. Learners receive good information at their induction and in the handbook which includes expectations and clear references to what equality and diversity means. Assessors reinforce this very effectively and develop learners' awareness and understanding at each visit and during their formal progress review. Behaviour and attitudes are very good and learners apply equality and diversity learning well in the workplace.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and managers at all levels have a purposeful shared vision which focuses on improving the learning experience. Improvement permeates everything that the service does and shows in the sustained increase in the achievement of learners over the last four years and good teaching, learning and assessment across a diverse range of provision. Plans for new accommodation will contribute well to the organisation's good sustainability ethos and provide a better environment for learning. The use and development of information and learning technology resources are particularly good.
- Performance management is robust and improves or deals effectively with performance that is less than good. Managers link the performance data from teaching sessions and learner outcomes astutely to targets. Strategies to improve teaching and learning are effective. Good use is made of observations of teaching, learning and assessment to help teachers and assessors improve. Managers are good role models and coaches.
- Quality assurance procedures and improvement plans are clear and detailed and managers monitor diligently the impact on learning. In a few cases actions to improve provision do not have clear success measures. The management of subcontractors is thorough. Senior managers define clearly what County Training expects of its partners. Subcontractors are required to provide a range of regular assurances about their performance.
- Staff fully own and take responsibility for a well-established self-assessment process. Staff across the service moderate carefully the self-assessment report each curriculum area produces. Learners' and employers' views are analysed in detail and used extremely well. The self-assessment report for the service as a whole is an accurate reflection of the quality of provision. However, occasionally the report is too descriptive and managers do not include sufficient information from observations of teaching, learning and assessment to provide strengths or areas for improvement in teaching and learning.
- Managers use data, and other sources of information, exceedingly well to understand the needs of the county. Both strategically and operationally, managers develop and maintain a flexible and responsive curriculum for local communities.
- Managers have successfully ensured that the development of learners' English and mathematics skills is good. The focus on learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent. Arrangements to develop their confidence and celebrate their achievement are good. For example, a dance group involving these learners performed a flash-mob dance in the centre of Shrewsbury.
- Equality and diversity policies and procedures are good. All staff at County Training support learners well, particularly those with barriers to employment. For example, they subsidised an apprentice to see the council's occupational health services for support about workplace adjustments. All staff receive training, although in a few teaching and learning sessions teachers are not sufficiently skilled in promoting equality and diversity.

- Staff deal swiftly and effectively with incidents and complaints and learners have clear opportunities to give their views. The service celebrates diversity well and uses a range of historical and religious events to promote discussion, for example Easter, the Paralympics and Passchendaale.
- The support for adults with barriers to learning is very strong. Staff go well beyond their duty of care. They provide very detailed and highly effective support for adults who experience extremely challenging life issues. For example, learners who are at risk of self-harm, are homeless or vulnerable in other ways. County Training is a very caring organisation, passionate about helping people.
- Safeguarding procedures are clear, detailed, and based well on the council's own procedures. The organisation meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. Staff training is thorough and appropriate for the role that they fulfil. The safeguarding steering group provides oversight for all these activities and meets regularly. Health and safety risk assessments are detailed and managers use well a very good template to help them assess risk.
- However, the recording of safeguarding case history is poor. While managers have a wide range of evidence about identified learners requiring different levels of support or action, they do not collate the information effectively to present a single coherent trail for each case. Too many safeguarding case files contained only brief initial details and no reference to further action. The spreadsheet used for recording was equally sparse and, in a few cases, contradicted what was in the case files. Managers were able to show evidence of action but this was not part of a clear record of case history.
- Leaders and managers did not take decisive and appropriate action in one safeguarding matter. The staff did not follow guidelines, and best practice, and chose not to refer the case on two occasions to the appropriate link agency, instead choosing to monitor the situation closely. Inspectors advised the provider of their serious concerns, and the provider contacted the appropriate agency.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

County Training

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	4	4	4	4	4

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	2
Early years and playwork	2
Foundation English and mathematics	2
Administration	1
Business management	1

Type of provider	Local authority								
Age range of learners	14+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 2,884								
	Part-time: 3,010								
Principal/CEO	Ms Erica Garner								
Date of previous inspection	February 2011								
Website address	http://shropshire.gov.uk/county-training/								
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	74	70	3	79	N/A	9	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
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+			
	144	188	34	213	N/A	2			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	54								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	838								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ TDS Academy■ Equitrain Limited								

Contextual information

County Training is part of Shropshire Council's Learning, Employment and Training Service within the Children's Service Directorate. It directly delivers most of its provision, has six centres and works with a large number of employers. The large majority of apprentices and learners who follow apprenticeships, learning programmes and courses at County Training live in Shrewsbury, Telford and 11 market towns. Most learners and apprentices are of White British heritage, which reflects the county's population. Unemployment in Shropshire is less than for Great Britain as a whole but in parts of Shropshire, such as those in the west midlands, unemployment is higher. Around 25% of residents hold qualifications below intermediate level. Most employment is in the service industries; a small minority of employment is in manufacturing and construction.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Steve Stanley HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Curriculum Development and Quality Manager 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. Not in scope for this inspection was the work programme provision County Training provide funded by the Department for Work and Pension. Nor was the teaching and learning delivery the organisation provides on behalf of five providers.

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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