

Suffolk County Council – Realise Futures

Local authority

Inspection dates		24–28 March 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Outcomes for learners are good and improving.
- Tutors motivate learners well and are attentive to their needs.
- Good support provided to learners contributes to their achievement and the likelihood of them remaining in learning or progressing into jobs.
- Efforts to engage individuals and groups who might not normally access learning are effective.
- Previously lower success rates in English and mathematics have been dealt with and are now good.
- Information, advice and guidance are generally well-embedded and help learners plan their future.
- Realise Futures provides the County Council with good strategic direction. Staff share the company's key priorities and values.
- Strategies to improve quality are very effective.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates in some accredited provision need improving.
- Not enough teaching and learning is outstanding.
- Tutors do not always plan sessions to challenge and inspire learners sufficiently.
- Data are not being used sufficiently to contribute to planning.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Raise learner achievement and success rates by further improving teaching, learning and assessment through better planning of learning and strengthening of individual target setting to challenge learners.
- Further develop the use of management information and data, refine their presentation and ensure the timely supply of information from subcontractors, to enable better decision-making.
- Strengthen the use of information learning technology (ILT) by building on existing effective classroom practice and improving access to it in community settings.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for learners are good and improving and reflect the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The vast majority of learners on courses that lead to a qualification make good progress, often from very low starting points. Those who complete courses that do not lead to a formal qualification also make good progress. Overall success rates have improved from 2011/12 to 2012/13 and are now above national averages. Learners make more rapid progress than they anticipated.
- Previously lower success rates in English, mathematics and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) have been dealt with and are now good. The overall level of participation in courses and programmes has risen in the last year. Actions such as a comprehensive review of programmes and better assessment of learners’ starting points have had a positive impact on learners.
- Tutors and support staff create an environment highly conducive to learning, where learners enjoy their courses and gain in confidence. The proportion of learners who stay to the end of their course is high and many move on to new learning opportunities within the company. Learners are able to describe the impact their respective courses have had; for example, more confident parenting, an accredited qualification or their preparedness to seek employment.
- Efforts to ensure access for individuals and groups who might not normally be attracted to provision are paying dividends. More are attending and often progress to further training, employment or community volunteering. The targeted programme, effective partnerships and joint work with subcontractors help considerably in this respect. Managers are working to better record learners’ longer-term destinations and progression.
- The number of minority ethnic learners is increasing year-on-year. Their success rates have improved rapidly and are just below those of white British learners. Tutors work tenaciously with those with a learning difficulty and/or disability and this has led to a rise in recruitment and to more successful outcomes.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, reflecting the significant improvement in outcomes for learners. The focus across the company on improving tutors’ effectiveness in the classroom

has had a positive impact on learners' achievement and motivation. Tutors are attentive to learners' needs and often go to great lengths to ensure that learners enjoy their learning, continue with their course if they face obstacles and progress to new opportunities. They succeed in getting the best out of learners.

- The majority of sessions are active and enjoyable and learners benefit from the productive rapport tutors establish with them. Tutors give clear explanations and generally check understanding at key stages. They seek feedback from learners, hone and construct questions well and are confident in trying new approaches within the classroom. These actions assist learners and help them improve. In the few weaker sessions, teachers do not manage time sufficiently well to maximise learning; some lessons overran or drew to a conclusion prematurely. Despite the obvious advantages of locating provision in local community and charity buildings, there was occasional low-level disruption to lessons by other users of the facility. Tutors did not always manage this sufficiently well.
- Assessment of learners' starting points is good. In the case of community learning this often encompasses less tangible but often personal targets linked to health, family, well-being or employment. In English and mathematics, such assessment is managed in a way that enables learners to set progressively more challenging targets for their sessions. This places the onus on the learner and works well. Not all tutors, however, display this level of confidence and competence. In a few instances, tutors convey learner targets or session aims in terms of tasks rather than of learners' skills or knowledge. This requires improvement.
- Learners comment positively on how the support provided in sessions contributes to their achievement and their likelihood of remaining in learning. Managers allocate and manage learning support effectively and volunteers are used well within sessions. Tutors are increasingly confident in creating opportunities for peer support within sessions which enables learners to work with and learn from each other. In community learning and preparation for work, informed referral procedures, for example between the company and external charities, further enhance the support available to vulnerable learners.
- Tutors and managers ensure that information, advice and guidance are well-embedded within programmes. Pre-course information is good and tutors are knowledgeable about the various progression options which are open to learners. Most courses receive a visit from the National Careers Service and learners readily turn to its advisers for direction. Tutors often allocate time at the end of a course to allow learners to explore options for further study. A minority of subcontractors do not deliver information, advice and guidance consistently well and Realise Futures is reviewing this.
- There are excellent and innovative examples of the use of ILT to support learning but, overall, the picture is inconsistent. Community venues often have inadequate facilities and learners fail to benefit much from the interactivity which ILT brings. Not all tutors are sufficiently confident in using ILT in the classroom.
- Leaders and staff successfully engage a diverse mix of learners. Commonly, tutors work with groups to establish ground rules based on respect and valuing others' opinions. Members of a group with learning difficulties and/or disabilities wore purple to mark the National Epilepsy Awareness day. This activity linked well with the previous session and triggered good debate. Such approaches contribute well, and in a very practical manner, to learners' appreciation of equality and diversity. Tutors often create opportunities within the curriculum to explore and appreciate diversity.
- Tutors have a good awareness of the need to improve learners' skills in English and mathematics. Most do this well and creatively; for instance, learners calculating the paint coverage needed to decorate walls, trainee classroom assistants producing board games for use in schools and learners using their individual learning plans as a means of practising and applying literacy skills.

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

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and lead to good outcomes for learners. Staff are ambitious for learners, have high expectations of them and work hard to help them develop their English and mathematics skills independently.
- The majority of lessons are active, lively and very enjoyable. With the support of senior practitioners, tutors have become skilled at planning interactive group activities that meet individual learners' needs and support them to learn from others. Learners learn together by undertaking tasks in pairs or teams, discussing their joint work, engaging in word or number quizzes and setting questions for other teams to answer. Learning materials are well designed and stimulating.
- A few tutors do not allow enough time for learners to complete activities, particularly warm-up activities. Not all tutors offer learners an example of what they should be aiming for. Others allow too little time for learners to work together on set tasks before offering to help. Occasionally, learners do not have enough time to complete their own assessment of their learning.
- Assessment of progress is good. Assessment of learners' starting points is comprehensive and ensures that learners are on the right course. Learners select their own targets for each lesson from a range of increasingly challenging possibilities to meet the qualification or unit criteria. Helped by tutors, learners learn to comment constructively on their own and other learners' work and to review and record their own progress.
- Tutors give frequent encouraging verbal feedback on learners' contributions in class and written feedback after each lesson. They offer support or challenge to learners' own written observations about their work and suggest specific actions to show learners what they need to do to improve further.
- Support for learners is very effective. Most classes are small enough to provide learners with good individual attention and help from tutors who are skilled and experienced at working with learners with a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The practice of getting learners to work together allows learners to help, support and challenge each other. Students in mathematics classes also improve their writing and speaking skills by working with others.
- The development of learners' information and communication technology (ICT) skills within lessons requires improvement. A few tutors are skilled and imaginative in using ILT and involve learners in its use very creatively. Although the service provides laptops and tablets where permanent facilities are lacking, not all locations have access to ICT. Where equipment is reliably in place, too few tutors currently make best use of its possibilities for enriching and extending learning.
- Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Learners find it easy to join classes. Good on-course information leads to many more learners intending to move on to further learning, having the confidence to start looking for work or applying for promotion.
- The service has created very good resources, which are highly accessible to tutors, for the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion in lessons. Standardised schemes of learning, assignments and diversity calendars, which all tutors receive, highlight many opportunities for skills work on equality and diversity. A small number of tutors use these resources to produce stimulating and engaging activities and materials which help to extend learners' experience. However, not all tutors yet feel confident enough to include activities beyond an occasional focus on cultural diversity.

Preparation for work and personal development

19+ Learning programmes Community learning

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and, as a result, most learners complete their courses and achieve accredited units. They understand the employment relevance of the skills and knowledge they are gaining and many see their learning as a step on the journey to a job. For example, learners on a 'Counselling and Listening Skills' course have aspirations to move into careers such as nursing and art therapy.
- The curriculum is effectively designed to allow learners, many of whom have very limited work experience, to make positive changes in their lives, progress from short taster sessions to longer courses and prepare themselves for employment or volunteering. Learners benefit from engaging with advisors from the National Careers Service who help them understand the progression opportunities open to them. The use of community partners as subcontractors has engaged learners who have most barriers to learning, such as the long-term unemployed, those in temporary housing or those with a learning difficulty and/or disability.
- Tutors are encouraging and give learners the confidence that they can succeed. Learners show enthusiasm for learning and clearly value the opportunity to gain accreditation, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Tutors are sensitive to the personal issues that many learners face and take practical steps, such as phoning them if they do not attend. This helps learners feel that they are vital members of the group and aids retention. In most lessons, tutors use a good mixture of individual, pair and group work.
- In a few weaker sessions, the quality of planning requires improvement. A few learners are not punctual, which delays the start, or the tutor has not planned for learners completing tasks more quickly than expected so sessions finish early, which means that opportunities to maximise learning are not taken. A few activities overran and there were instances where the pace of sessions was too slow with insufficient challenge to learners.
- Accommodation for courses is dispersed throughout the county and is sited in neighbourhoods close to where learners live. There are clear benefits from locating courses within partner premises such as theatres and day centres but, in a small minority of cases, the multi-use of such venues can disturb learning. The absence of ICT facilities in some of the venues means tutors are unable to draw upon technology to support teaching and learning, through, for example, video clips.
- Effective assessment at the commencement of a course checks on learners' skill and knowledge levels and helps measure progress by the end of the course. Tutors encourage learners to set themselves regular targets and, in most cases, give learners personalised feedback which helps them measure how successfully they are progressing towards these targets.
- Commonly, tutors make effective use of peer assessment and encourage learners to reflect on their own progress, for example by keeping reflective logs. Feedback from tutors is thorough and detailed and helps learners understand what they need to do to improve.
- Many tutors sensitively take good advantage of opportunities to develop learners' English skills; for example, helping with the spelling of technical terms such as 'effleurage' in massage courses. However, documentation used with learners, including course outlines or individual learning plans, contains occasional grammatical or punctuation errors. Learners on practical courses, such as sewing, cookery and painting, develop their mathematical skills through weighing and measuring or calculating paint coverage.

Community learning**Community learning**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, leading to good outcomes for learners. Learners make good progress, produce interesting work, develop their ideas and acquire a good range of skills and knowledge. Learners enjoy their courses and value the support they receive from tutors. High quality learning takes place in a range of accessible community venues across the county.
- The community learning programme, which comprises health and wellbeing, family learning and community engagement, enables learners to progress readily between non-accredited and accredited courses.
- Learners are actively engaged in their learning. Tutors use a good range of stimulating and interesting activities that successfully promote the development of learners' personal and social development skills, for example in health and wellbeing sessions tutors use pictures to develop learners' confidence in expressing emotion and mood. Tutors have good vocational experience which they use very effectively to facilitate the application of classroom learning to workplace settings; for example, in family learning the development of parents as in-class volunteer readers.
- A good baseline assessment helps learners establish their starting points. Individual learning plans accurately reflect and record levels of learners' competence, skills and progress. However, insufficient use is made of learners' prior learning or attainment to ensure target setting maximises individual attainment.
- Learners identify appropriate and challenging individual learning goals that are relevant to the course content and meet their individual needs, interests and aspirations. For example, many learners on the 'Working Together' course aim to gain the skills to progress to teaching assistant training. Tutors use effective end of course reflections to enable learners to assess their progress and identify progression opportunities linked to their personal circumstances and aspirations.
- Many learners are referred by external agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and charities. Tutors skilfully enable learners to develop self-reflective skills and independence. They promote strategies that enable learners to take responsibility for their own development, resulting in increased confidence and enhanced employability skills.
- Arrangements for learners to practise and improve their English and mathematical skills are well developed. In the majority of lessons, tutors support learners well. For example, classroom volunteers learn phonemes through embedded speaking and listening. However, in many sessions, learners' work is not marked carefully enough to help improve their grammar and punctuation. Tutors successfully support the development of learners' knowledge and understanding of technical terms and jargon related to the specific occupational areas.
- Resources to support learning are particularly good. Senior practitioners work very effectively with employers, key partners and subcontractors to deliver courses in community settings to engage a wider range of learners. Venues include schools and women's refuges, which, in some cases, provide the opportunity for voluntary work placements as part of the course. Tutors develop good paper-based materials to aid learning in lessons and to extend learning beyond the classroom, for example on the 'Life Stories' course, learners develop memory books helping them to reflect on previous experiences and, using their newly gained confidence and self-esteem, to plan for the future.
- Promotion of information, advice and guidance is good. Tutors give clear advice to prospective learners on course content, purpose and potential progression routes. A summation towards the

end of the course includes time to enable learners to explore opportunities for further study and employment. Learners benefit from the links made with the National Careers Service.

- Tutors promote equality well in lessons through creating group harmony and trust, enabling learners to participate and exchange personal information and experiences. Tutors promote national events, such as e-safety week by engaging parents at school gates to promote ICT courses, and National Epilepsy Awareness Day by wearing purple ribbons, producing posters with key facts and reproducing resources in purple.

Computers and technology

19+ Learning programmes Community learning

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment in ICT are good, resulting in good development of practical ICT skills. Learners, many of whom have had very little prior experience, are able to use the software with confidence after a short time. For example, in one class, learners were creating greeting cards and merging text and pictures effectively. Learners comment on their improved self-esteem and say they feel more positive about their employment prospects. In the event of learners leaving a course early, they do so for good reason, for example a new job.
- Tutors are enthusiastic, make learning enjoyable and motivate learners. Tutors are very patient with learners especially when giving individual support. They put learners at ease, are sensitive to their individual needs and gently encourage them through constructive verbal feedback. As a result, many learners make particularly good progress. Tutors ensure that, where required, learners receive good additional learning support. Newer technologies, such as tablets, are beginning to be used well in classes to extend learning.
- The programmes meet the needs of learners well. One learner stated at the start of her course that she was doing it primarily for employment reasons, saying that she did not want to work on the production line in a local factory any more. After gaining the qualification, she secured employment in an office.
- On entry level courses tutors explain the session's goals. However, too often these objectives do not identify clearly what will be learnt, only what tasks will be completed. When asked, the tutors generally have a clear understanding of what learning will take place and plan their sessions accordingly.
- In the workshop sessions, learners complete a diary at the end of every session to record what has been learnt. They record the tasks that have been completed but make little or no reference to the skills that have been learnt. Learners set their own targets for the subsequent session but these are often not checked or agreed by tutors and again the emphasis is on the tasks to be done rather than the skills to be learnt. These targets are not always sufficiently challenging.
- Many tutors are innovative in producing effective learning materials. For example, a short questionnaire to reinforce learning from previous sessions. Learners say that they find this weekly reminder very useful. Another tutor has uploaded videos online showing learners how to do particular tasks in word processing.
- Tutors assess learners' prior ICT skills well through a short questionnaire to ensure that they are placed on the most appropriate course. However, their skills in English and mathematics are not assessed. A significant minority of ICT learners progress to English and mathematics courses. Some documents given to learners have grammatical errors. Similarly, some of the comments written by learners in their individual learning plans contain uncorrected spelling errors.
- Course leaders provide learners with good information, advice and guidance, giving them useful information about the content of the programme before they start. Tutors are alert to their role

in providing guidance and are good at answering learners' questions about possible next steps. An advisor from the National Careers Service visits almost all classes to inform the learners about future options. All learners can request a subsequent interview to enable them to explore in more depth the steps they could take towards employment.

- Tutors develop an atmosphere of mutual respect in sessions. Classes have a group learning agreement which places a strong emphasis on respect. The content of workbooks has been revised recently to ensure that it reflects the diversity of the community and of learners who attend programmes.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Realise Futures' leaders and managers provide an ambitious vision and foster an environment of continuous improvement. They give good strategic direction and staff share the company's key priorities and values. The company works closely with key partners to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged within the county. Suffolk County Council now offers effective governance, which has improved through regular meetings and closer monitoring of performance.
- Operational management is good and managers have developed an organisation with high expectations of learner achievement. Staff value the good communication, open management and well-defined role and responsibilities. Leaders manage resources well, with many examples of very effective use of relevant learning materials and technology. The company has invested wisely in new staff and, through innovative and well-planned professional development, is building capacity carefully to meet its major strategic priorities. A clear focus on sustainability encourages good practice in minimising waste.
- Strategies to improve quality are very effective, particularly in addressing areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Performance management has improved and is now thorough, with appropriate targets established throughout the company. Data management is improving but managers recognise the need to rationalise and refine data analysis to ensure good use and understanding by all staff in order to produce accurate information for monitoring and planning programmes.
- Realise Futures staff, at all levels, have worked hard to ensure improvement in teaching, learning and assessment, particularly through a well-considered observation system, comprising formal, informal and peer observation and mentoring. Managers include subcontractors in this process. Tutors share a strong desire to improve quality and take responsibility for their professional development. Staff appraisal and development are particularly strong, using information from the full range of quality systems. Innovative processes, for example, 'learning pods' of small groups of staff, develop skills and motivation well.
- Management of subcontractors is effective, with a fair and open bidding process, which ensures their provision meets key priorities. Managers closely monitor the work of subcontractors to provide the most appropriate opportunities for the hard to reach. A wide range of initiatives is improving the quality of subcontractors, including joint workshops, shared training and specific support from experienced practitioners. However, data supplied by subcontractors are not always sufficiently timely to ensure up-to-date knowledge of performance or appropriately rapid intervention where required.
- Self-assessment is generally accurate and inclusive and leads to appropriate action planning. Individual curriculum area self-assessments are detailed and suitably judgemental. Staff are involved particularly well and learners' views are taken fully into account. Senior county council officers are also involved effectively in the process. Improvement planning is well managed and monitored and managers review its impact regularly. Realise Futures carefully links business planning to improvement planning and clearly aligns improvement work to organisational goals.

- Leaders plan programmes carefully to meet the needs of the community and local and national priorities. Close links with a wide network of partners and providers with good local knowledge inform planning, which is particularly effective in reaching out to more vulnerable groups. Staff have worked hard and effectively to improve the delivery of English, mathematics and ICT throughout the provision.
- Tutors actively promote equality and diversity in all programmes. This creates an inclusive and caring environment, giving good support to learners, and provides tailored learning to individuals with specific and often complex needs. Staff have good links to a wide range of support networks which they use well to ensure learners can access relevant professional advice and guidance. Tutors and learners discuss and agree expected behaviour at the start of the programme and this actively promotes respect. Staff tackle bullying and discrimination well.
- The proportion of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and from disadvantaged communities is particularly high. Managers monitor and understand differences in performance of particular learner groups and take effective action.
- Statutory requirements for safeguarding learners are met. Safeguarding training is mandatory and gives staff a good level of awareness. Well-trained safeguarding officers deal effectively with incidents, which they record appropriately. All venues are risk-assessed and health and safety practices are monitored carefully.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Suffolk County Council – Realise Futures

<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	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
ICT for Users	2
Foundation English and Mathematics	2
Employability Training	2
Community Learning	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority								
Age range of learners	19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A								
	Part-time: 7,000								
Principal/CEO	Deborah Cadman								
Date of previous inspection	January 2013								
Website address	www.clsd.org.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	0	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	N/A	1,742	N/A	491	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+	16-18	19+	
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A								
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	2,717								
Number of employability learners	1,889								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access Community Trust ▪ LimeSkills CIC ▪ Headway Ipswich and East Suffolk ▪ Age UK ▪ The Yard Project. 								

Contextual information

Suffolk County Council delivers adult skills and community learning through a subcontracting arrangement with Community Learning and Skills Development (CLSD), a division of Realise Futures community interest company (CIC). A small number of second-tier subcontractors, generally targeted at the most disadvantaged and under-represented learners, work with Realise Futures. In 2012/13 CLSD supported learning opportunities to over 7,000 learners providing accredited and non-accredited provision up to level 2. Suffolk is largely rural and has a population of approximately 730,000. Its main towns are Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft. The minority ethnic population is small at 2.8%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Tony Gallagher HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the business improvement 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 relevant 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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