

County Training

Local authority

Inspection dates		19-23 January 2015
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		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- a high proportion of learners, and particularly apprentices, achieve their qualification within the intended time frames
- learners progress well between levels of study and also into employment and higher or further education
- learners develop a wide range of social, personal and vocational skills
- a very large proportion of teaching, learning and assessment is good
- good tutors and assessors motivate learners well
- teaching and learning develop learners' English and mathematics skills well
- learners benefit from good information, advice and guidance (IAG) which support their learning and help their progression
- the senior management team provides particularly strong leadership and manages change very well
- the impact of the strategies for improvement introduced since the last inspection is exceptionally good
- leaders and managers work closely with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to respond very well to local and national priorities; training for health and social care is a key priority to which County Training responds very well with outstanding provision, and partnership work with other local agencies to respond to unemployment and assist people back in to work is strong
- safeguarding arrangements for learners are outstanding and are particularly well managed
- the promotion of equality and diversity across the provision is good.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- too much variability exists in learners' achievement of their qualifications between subject areas
- although the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved, the recommendations for improvement demonstrate it is not yet outstanding.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Identify and help learners to overcome barriers to achievement so that the very high success rates are replicated across all groups of learners in all subject areas.
- Improve tutors' written feedback to learners, including the correction of spelling and grammatical errors, to ensure that learners understand where they need to improve and have the skills to develop and progress to their full potential.
- Improve tutors' questioning skills to ensure that they effectively test the knowledge and understanding of each and all learners.
- Improve the quality and availability of learning materials for learners, in order to facilitate further learning and encourage independent study outside of formal lessons.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The majority of County Training's government-funded provision leads to accredited qualifications. Two thirds of current learners are following apprenticeship programmes, of which roughly three fifths are advanced apprentices. Just under a third of learners who are not apprentices are on the 16-18 study programme following the work experience route, with a similar proportion completing functional skills qualifications within the family learning provision. The subject areas with the highest number of learners are in the following order: administration; health and social care; access programmes (including study programmes); and hairdressing. These make up roughly half of the government-funded provision. The organisation continues to provide a wide range of traditional adult and community courses which are fully funded by those attending and consequently, out of scope for inspection.
- The percentage of all apprentices who successfully complete their framework is high and has risen each year for the last three years. For those on frameworks in health and social care this percentage is particularly high, however, for those working towards qualifications in administration over the same period it has fallen but still remains well above the national average. The patterns for intermediate and advanced apprentices and for most apprentices in most age groups are very similar.
- A very large and consistent majority of all apprentices who successfully complete their qualifications do so within the expected time frame. However, for apprentices over 24 years of age this percentage has fallen over the last three years, though still remains well above the national average. Almost all learners taking functional skills tests pass at their first attempt.
- The percentage of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities (LLDD) achieving their qualifications has increased rapidly from a low rate and these learners now out-perform those who are without LLDD. The percentage of male learners achieving their qualifications is rising faster than that for female learners so that the gap between them has decreased. There are too few learners from non-White British backgrounds to identify significant achievement gaps between different ethnic groups.
- Learners on all programmes develop a broad range of personal, social and employability skills. Improved English, mathematics and information and communication technology skills enhance their employability. Learners on study programmes benefit from good-quality work experience

placements; here they gain a better insight into possible vocations and develop good attendance and punctuality habits. The acquisition of simple skills, such as the ability to calculate the correct change, helps learners with their everyday lives. Some advanced apprentices are able to use their communication and coaching skills to support new intermediate apprentices in their workplaces. In several cases, learners' new vocational skills and improved functional skills have enabled them to identify improvements and efficiencies in their workplaces. Learners have raised ambitions and aspirations; for example, following success as an administration apprentice working in a medical practice, one learner has applied and been accepted to train to become a nurse.

- Progression from intermediate to advanced apprenticeship programmes is good. Many learners gain functional skills at higher levels than those required for their framework and other additional qualifications relevant to their work. In those subject areas where the nature of the industry limits opportunities to progress to the next level of qualification, many learners gain promotion or move to better jobs. The number of learners on study programmes progressing to apprenticeships, employment with or without training, or into higher or further education is increasing and is now good.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which reflects the high success and achievement rates and the good progress for learners, who also enjoy their learning. Learners benefit from well-qualified and very experienced staff with high-level skills and sound industry knowledge. Their enthusiasm and commitment translates into high expectations for their learners. They offer good support for learning and pastoral care, which motivates learners to succeed.
- Most teaching, learning and assessment is good, with some outstanding examples. Staff are very proficient and use a wide variety of methods successfully to encourage and enthuse learners. Staff use information and learning technology well during most sessions to support learning and progress and are developing good learning materials. However, across the provision, not enough of the current learning material is sufficiently stimulating to enhance learning effectively.
- Most staff use questioning techniques well to check and develop learning, particularly in assessments; however, a few ask questions in group sessions, particularly study programmes, which are too general and insufficiently focused to assess learners' knowledge and understanding. Tutors generally plan learning very well and construct individual learning plans carefully to meet learners' particular needs. Employers value the good quality of training and many offer learners good-quality employer training which supports learners' development well.
- Initial assessment is very effective and assesses learners' starting points accurately. Staff use the results well to design programmes that meet learners' individual needs and to identify additional learning support requirements. Tutors and assessors challenge learners through setting stretching achievement targets. They encourage learners to reflect on their own learning and learn independently through a wide range of online learning sources and signposting to additional materials.
- Staff encourage learners to take additional and higher qualifications, particularly in functional skills and, if their progress is good, additional vocational units. Most employers are closely involved in learners' programmes and contribute to setting clear achievement targets which learners understand.
- Assessment practice is generally very good, frequent and effective. However, in business administration assessors rely too heavily on oral questioning. Verbal feedback is generally of a high standard; however, written feedback, although usually relevant, is too often insufficient to support learning. Assessors involve employers effectively in assessment and review. Learners understand how far they have progressed and what they have to do to achieve their qualifications.

- Teaching and learning develop English, mathematics and functional skills very well, resulting in high pass rates in functional skills tests. Specialist tutors deliver good functional skills training which learners receiving additional support value and enjoy. All tutors and assessors place a strong focus on the development of functional skills. They give learners a good understanding of their importance by relating them closely to learners' work and experience. For example, a catering learner, disenchanted with mathematics at school, became motivated to study ratios and fractions in recipes. However, the marking of English in learners' work, although mostly very well done, too often is ineffective in reinforcing learning.
- County Training provides learners with very good initial advice and guidance, particularly at the start of their programmes and as they progress on to the next stage of their education or training. Learners' induction is memorable, and they demonstrate good recall of topics, such as equality and diversity, safeguarding and health and safety. Staff also offer valuable advice and support in relation to learners' personal and welfare concerns.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching, learning and assessment is generally good, with examples of very good promotion; however, in a few instances staff miss obvious and valuable opportunities in their planning and delivery to promote them further. Induction covers equality and diversity well and staff reinforce learners' knowledge and understanding during reviews, however, they do not always record this sufficiently well.
- A strong focus on safeguarding learners is evident throughout the provision with very good examples of good safeguarding practice and strong support to enable learners to complete successfully. In the study programme, careful monitoring of attendance leads to positive and effective action to follow up non-attendance. Staff ensure that learners feel safe and secure while learning and are knowledgeable about safeguarding.

Health and Social Care

Apprenticeships 19+ learning programmes

Outstanding

Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care are outstanding because:

- a very high proportion of apprentices complete their qualifications, and the majority do so by their planned end date; apprentices are able to state with confidence their future aspirations, and are clear on how they intend to put into practice the skills, knowledge and understanding they have acquired during their studies
- the very knowledgeable and experienced assessors make good use of their vocational expertise to motivate apprentices well; they illustrate key points enthusiastically to enhance and consolidate the apprentices' learning
- apprentices develop and demonstrate a range of high-level skills essential for employment in the care sector and valued by employers, including empathy, teamwork, communication, and problem solving; in one care home an idea developed by an apprentice in an assignment has now been adopted as good practice
- apprentices and employers receive very effective and valuable advice and guidance that ensures that expectations are realistic and the training is at the appropriate level to meet individual and organisational needs
- planning for teaching, learning and assessment is detailed and robust and makes best use of the time available; assessors now have tablet computers and use information technology increasingly to enhance and extend the learning experience

- apprentices benefit from rigorous assessment that routinely uses more than one source of evidence; the quality of students' work reflects the very high standards they and their assessors expect
- verbal feedback is very detailed and makes it clear what the apprentice has done well and where they can improve, including their use of English; however, written feedback is less comprehensive and does not always help apprentices recognise the strengths and areas for improvement in their work
- apprentices and their supervisors are very clear about the progress that the apprentices are making and know exactly what each needs to do for the apprentices to improve and achieve in a timely manner
- assessors integrate English and mathematics seamlessly and characteristically use naturally occurring, vocationally relevant topics to promote learning and develop life and workplace skills
- the promotion of equality and awareness of diversity is very effective; one result of this is that apprentices and assessors are respectful of each other and demonstrate good behaviour and appropriate language.

Employability training

16-19 study programmes Employability

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in employability training are good because:

- a large majority of learners progress to apprenticeships, further education and training or employment; they develop skills that are useful in the workplace, such as in hairdressing, applying their understanding of the concept of ratio when mixing hair colourings
- learners benefit from participating in work experience that matches their employment interests; almost all current learners have engaged in, or have a planned work experience placement
- most tutors use a wide range of activities well to challenge learners, enabling them to improve their employability skills; in one session, learners acquired a variety of useful telephone techniques, such as answering promptly, speaking clearly, and asking open questions to establish a caller's needs
- learners benefit from robust initial testing that identifies their starting points and learning needs accurately; tutors use the results of initial testing very effectively to place learners on courses at the appropriate level, and to set individual targets that they use well to enable learners to make good progress
- tutors use verbal feedback well to praise learners; this identifies what learners have achieved and enhances their motivation to succeed
- learners develop a wide range of useful English and mathematical skills; they demonstrate good awareness of the importance and relevance of English and mathematical skills in everyday life, such as writing letters of complaint, and in applying their understanding of percentages to calculate the cost of reduced food items when shopping with a small budget
- information, advice and guidance are of good quality; learners are on programmes that meet their needs and interests, and a large majority of learners demonstrate good awareness of opportunities to engage in further education and training.

Employability training is not yet outstanding because:

- not enough learners benefit from carefully crafted questions to check that they have understood new concepts and ideas

- learners do not always receive written feedback that includes sufficient detail to know what they need to do to make specific improvements to their work
- not enough teachers promote diversity sufficiently well in sessions; they do not routinely take naturally occurring opportunities to increase learners’ awareness of cultural differences that they are likely to encounter in working in a diverse society.

Administration	Good
Apprenticeships	
19+ learning programmes	

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration are good because:

- apprentices make good progress and a high proportion complete their qualifications, however, success rates have declined recently; most apprentices and learners progress to higher-level qualifications and sustained employment
- apprentices produce good standards of work which employers value; many apprentices acquire increased responsibilities and are promoted, for example, apprentices are given responsibility for designing leaflets to help new members of staff understand how to use e-mail correctly
- assessors plan and deliver good coaching sessions which enable learners and apprentices to develop good skills when manipulating data in spreadsheets and using Boolean principles to carry out effective searches on the internet
- assessors and employers support apprentices well; apprentices benefit from frequent visits scheduled to meet their learning needs and good-quality workplaces to enable them to develop skills
- assessors assess learners’ work frequently and accurately and many involve apprentices when identifying the learning outcomes they have met
- assessors provide apprentices and learners with good career advice and guidance at the start and end of their learning programme, which encourages them to progress to higher-level qualifications.

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration are not yet outstanding because:

- assessors lack sufficient awareness of the skills needed by a small minority of apprentices to help them improve the standard of their English and mathematics; assessors identify spelling and grammatical errors well but do not always provide apprentices with appropriate learning materials to help them improve
- learning resources are insufficiently well developed to provide apprentices with a wide variety of materials to help them develop their business and administration knowledge and skills.

The effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
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- The senior management team provides particularly strong leadership and manages change very well. The impact of the strategies employed for improvement since the last inspection is exceptionally good, so that the overall effectiveness of this provider is now good. Leaders and managers are very clear about the priorities for the organisation and communicate these well to staff. Staff are strongly motivated and well managed with a good understanding of what they need to do to contribute to the continuous improvement of the provision. Apprentices achieve at a much higher rate than normally found in this type of provision. The performance of the

study programme has also improved and the proportion of those achieving qualifications, developing valuable employability skills, and progressing into employment or further study is high. Improvements to governance arrangements are relatively new. Appropriate work is underway to strengthen governance still further and particularly broaden the representation on the board.

- Leaders, managers and staff have high expectations for learners and are very successful in raising standards of teaching, learning and assessment. However, leaders and managers recognise more is required and continue to implement ambitious strategies to improve teaching, so that more learners' learning experiences are outstanding. Staff development to improve teaching, learning and assessment is very good and benefits staff and learners. Close attention to priority areas, such as English and mathematics teaching, use of technology in learning and the development of learning in the workplace have supported significant improvements in learning and assessment. Staff develop competence and confidence to develop learners' English and mathematics skills well in most cases.
- Performance management is rigorous. Leaders and managers consistently pay close attention to the quality of the learners' experience and focus relentlessly on learning and achievement. Staff appraisal is systematic and very well organised with regular individual meetings with staff that focus on specific measurable improvement objectives with specific close attention to teaching, learning and assessment. Regular and very thorough action planning with individual staff identifies expectations and sets targets. Managers review these regularly and very thoroughly with individuals in their teams. Continuous professional development planning for individuals and across the whole staff team results in highly relevant and appropriate training and development activities from which all staff benefit. For example, staff recently attended a series of well-planned workshops, which featured opportunities for staff to discuss, reflect and learn about the risks associated with the radicalisation of young people.
- Self-assessment and quality improvement planning to sustain improvement are very thorough and very well managed and includes all staff. A process of internal and external moderation contributes much to improving programme-level self-assessment and quality improvement planning. Thorough review arrangements with subcontractors include self-assessment. Managers' use of data to inform judgements about progress and improvement targets is very good. Data collection regarding destinations of learners is good. Staff listen to what learners and other users have to say and enable them to contribute to improvements. Learners' groups contribute to programme review and self-assessment and influence changes and improvements.
- Leaders and managers respond very well to national and local priorities. County Training has gained a good record over a long period of working in partnership with other organisations including schools, to meet local needs and this continues. Engagement with the LEP, the local authority and other agencies in the community is strong and leads to higher levels of participation and good opportunities from which learners benefit. Leaders and managers are very actively engaged in determining and responding to local and regional skills needs. They work closely with the LEP and play a prominent role in the Marches Skills Consortium. The current business and strategic plan priorities align with those of the LEP and set clear objectives to expand work with employers in specific sector areas where needs are identified. Local market information is collected systematically and informs the LEP's strategic planning.
- The very good response to local needs includes provision in urban areas, such as Telford, and recognition of the significance of the geography of Shropshire, which is a particularly large county with a widespread rural population. County Training provides a number of centres across the county successfully facilitating access, particularly for young people, where transport is a major barrier to participation.
- The high number of small businesses in Shropshire is reflected in the range of employers with which County Training works, such as 'micro-breweries', a feature of the local economy. In response to local needs and working in partnership with employers, the provider has developed a new apprenticeship framework for brewing. Shropshire has a higher proportion of aging residents than other counties. Training for health and social care is a key priority to which

County Training responds very well with outstanding provision. Partnership work with other local agencies to respond to unemployment and assist people back in to work is strong.

- Leaders and managers understand well and respond successfully to national priorities. For example, they engage higher proportions of 16- to 18-year-old apprentices than generally elsewhere. The study programme operates very well and is increasingly successful in providing positive outcomes for learners. County Training works productively with a subcontractor providing a specific engineering training programme for young apprentices in skills for which there is a national shortage.
- The promotion of equality and diversity across the provision is good. Clear policies and supporting practices protect learners. Learners are well informed and protected, for example from bullying and harassment. Learners receive good induction and reinforcement to understanding that enables them to behave according to their rights and responsibilities. Leaders and managers carry out detailed analysis of data; they successfully promote parity of achievement between different groups and widen participation, including the most disadvantaged. Staff receive regular training development and updates, in order to support their work with learners. Consequently, most are confident in the way they promote equality and deal with individuals and their diverse needs.
- Safeguarding arrangements for learners are outstanding and are particularly well managed. Learners feel safe, receive very good support from staff and are protected by the good safeguarding practices. Learners know very well what to do if they do not feel safe. Staff listen and act on learners' concerns. Leaders and managers have responded rapidly and particularly well to the specific areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Reporting, decision-making and the overall management arrangements for safeguarding are of a very high standard and subject to continuous review and improvement. Strong partnership working with other parts of the local authority and the local safeguarding body supports further development. Partnerships work very well to secure learners' safety and welfare and to inform staff training and development. Staff training is thorough with regular updating and exposure to new topics such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Learners benefit from robust health and safety risk assessments, which tutors use well, resulting in a good safety record.

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	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	2	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	1	1	1	1

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	1
Employability training	2
Administration	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,665 (including unfunded learners)							
Principal/CEO	Ms Erica Garner							
Date of previous inspection	November 2013							
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+
	65	107	20	73	N/A	5	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	176	153	52	162	N/A	2		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	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	125							
Number of employability learners	9							
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"> ▪ Equitrain ▪ Idsall Academy ▪ JK Training ▪ TDS Academy 							

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 overall is less than for England, but in parts of the county unemployment is higher than the national rate. Around 25% of residents hold qualifications below intermediate level. Most local employment is in the service industries; a small minority of employment is in manufacturing and construction.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Cliff Rose HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the quality and performance 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.

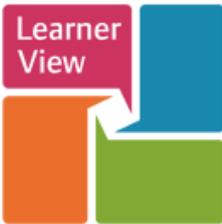
What inspection judgements mean

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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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