

Durham County Council

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		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- the Durham County Council Adult Learning and Skills Service (ALSS) success rates for nearly all learners are good and for some are outstanding
- learners develop good personal and employability skills, such as punctuality and attendance, team working, and an ability and the confidence to interact socially with others in new situations
- managers and staff very successfully deliver a highly responsive range of provision that meets local, regional and national priorities very well by their close working with local enterprise partnerships, local community partnerships and employers to improve economic well-being, health, language and parenting skills
- governance by Council leaders and managers is good at challenging leaders and managers to deliver a high-quality and inclusive adult learning service across County Durham that is aimed at learners with the most significant barriers to learning
- since the last inspection, managers and staff have successfully improved the quality of teaching and learning across all programmes and by subcontractors.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- a small minority of learners on education and training, construction crafts and business management did not succeed as well as other areas last year.
- although the overall retention rate is high, it is below the national level for similar providers for classroom learners
- the use of information learning technology (ILT) is not effectively used by all tutors to support and enhance learning opportunities
- tutors do not always sufficiently challenge the more able learners to progress more quickly
- not all tutors successfully incorporate and promote cultural diversity in their lessons.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the success rates in areas of provision that are not succeeding as well as the rest so that they are significantly higher than the national averages.
- Ensure that all tutors have the confidence to employ and use ILT in their lessons to support learners effectively and increase their opportunities to learn.
- Take action to ensure that more tutors challenge more able learners by providing more advanced activities to extend their knowledge and understanding and allow them to progress at a quicker pace.
- Develop the knowledge and understanding of all tutors in the promotion of cultural diversity so that they can prepare learners more effectively to function more effectively in a multicultural society.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- ALSS offers a range of courses aimed predominantly at adults. They provide a relatively small number of apprenticeships amounting to 1% of the total provision for both 16- to 18-year-olds and adults. A larger proportion, approximately 25% of the provision, is adult classroom-based learning including the foundation English and mathematics that this report grades. The remaining 75% of the provision is community learning delivered by ALSS and sub-contracted partners and is also graded in this report.
- ALSS very successfully targets their provision at learners from very low starting points. In 2014/15, the large majority of adult learners were below level one at the start of their learning.
- Overall success rates for apprentices are outstanding and success within planned timescales is very good. Success rates for intermediate apprentices are particularly high and all 16- to 18-year-old apprentices, representing a quarter of the total learners, achieved successfully in 2013/14.
- The overall success rate for classroom learning is good and some are outstanding. Retention rates for learners are slightly below that expected for similar providers, but achievement rates are high. Success rates on certificates at levels 1, 2 and 3 are good and on diplomas at levels 2 and 3 are excellent. Success rates on awards at level 1 are good and at levels 2, 3 and 4 are excellent. Functional skills success rates at both levels 1 and 2 are good.
- Learners produce good standards of work appropriate for the time they have been attending classes and in some cases, their work exceeds expectations. Learners enjoy their classes and particularly comment on the high levels of support they receive from their tutors. Inspectors also confirmed this.
- There are no statistically significant achievement gaps between any groups of learners. On apprenticeship programmes, the small group of seven male learners achieved better than the majority of female learners. The three learners with a declared learning difficulty and/or disability all achieved well. On classroom learning, the very small numbers of young learners achieve slightly less well than adults do. The small group of adults on levels 4 and 5 programmes last year did not achieve well but the service understands why and has taken effective actions to address the issues.
- ALSS offers and provides a good range of foundation English and mathematics courses at entry level and levels 1 and 2. These courses support learners to develop the social, personal and employability skills needed for further study or employment. Learners develop many good broader social skills to support them in both their everyday life as well as in their career

aspirations. Many develop good levels of personal confidence that also enhances their self-esteem and sense of worth. Some simple examples such as learners are supported to leave their home for a short period and be able to mix socially and maintain a conversation with someone they do not know very well. In many classes, tutors are very skilled in supporting learners with diverse and complex needs and successfully develop individual and group learning skills.

Learners report, as confirmed by inspectors, that they receive excellent support from the staff at the providers commissioned by ALSS.

- Progression of learners is good. In 2013/14, almost all apprentices progressed to a positive destination that was either permanent employment, higher education or to a level 3 programme. ALSS successfully tracks the destinations of a good proportion of learners. The number of learners staying to the end of their programme is good. The number progressing from community learning into accredited provision is high and progression between Level 1 to level 2 provision is good. A smaller proportion of learners move into full employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, as reflected in the outcomes for learners who acquire new skills and knowledge successfully and gain valuable qualifications.
- Tutors quickly get to know learners and are sensitive to the needs of those who lack confidence in their own abilities. They are skilled at recognising potential barriers to learning and they successfully create a culture and ethos that is supportive and encouraging. As a result, learners overcome any initial concerns, are highly motivated, enjoy their learning and make good progress in developing personal, social and employability skills.
- Support staff provide good assistance to learners with additional needs in lessons and this has a positive impact on these learners' achievements. Senior managers support tutors and assessors well with regular staff development events that have helped to move teaching and learning on since the last inspection. Tutors plan lessons carefully to ensure that tasks and activities are engaging and interesting. Explanations are clear.
- Questioning techniques are effective in checking understanding and promoting deeper thinking. Tutors manage discussions well and make good use of learners' contributions to explore relevant issues. During independent work, tutors cleverly identify those having specific difficulties and take appropriate action to ensure that all learners make good progress. However, they do not always provide learners that are more able with more challenging work that would accelerate their progress further.
- Tutors create welcoming and safe learning environments where learners feel comfortable, make good progress and take pride in their work. Tutors' informal progress monitoring during lessons is good. The initial assessment process accurately identifies learners' starting points. Tutors document these well in individual learning plans. Tutors set appropriate individual academic targets and although learners develop personal and social skills, they do not routinely capture and record them. Progress reviews in learning plans lack consistency and varies in both frequency and quality. Formal assessment is fit for purpose and learners' work is at least of the expected standard and often better.
- Work-based learning staff work closely with employers during the review process. Apprentices benefit from good employer support, enabling them to take part in a wide range of well-planned training activities where they develop and apply their skills at work.
- Tutors are careful to emphasise the importance of employability skills. For example, in information and communication technology lessons, the quality of the presentation of letters and curriculum vitae is well taught and illustrated with examples. Tutors are good role models and encourage students to achieve high standards of spoken English and improve their communication skills. Tutors' expectations of good standards of written work encourage learners to do their best and marking and feedback are thorough. They teach specialist terminology well and expand learners' vocabulary. The integration of mathematics skills into other subjects

requires improvement, although there are examples where tutors seamlessly incorporate them into lessons.

- Information, advice and guidance are good. Learners receive timely and appropriate information both before and during their studies so that ALSS places the vast majority on the right course at the right level, and they understand future opportunities well. This helps learners to make well-informed decisions about progression to further training, education or employment.
- The use of ILT, both in the classroom and for independent study, requires improvement to benefit learners fully. Initiatives such as the use of tablets and smartphones are beginning to enhance learning but not all tutors use them effectively. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is underdeveloped; a change in the VLE platform has hindered its use as a learning tool. Equality of opportunity is at the heart of the service's provision that provides life-enhancing courses for learners from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds. Skilful teaching for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to learn valuable life skills and promotes independence. Ground rules agreed at the start of courses ensure a culture of mutual respect. The active promotion of diversity and understanding of different faiths and cultures requires improvement to ensure that ALSS prepares learners well for life and work in a multicultural society.

Foundation English and mathematics

19+ learning programmes

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation English and mathematics are good because:

- learners make good progress in English, mathematics and in their personal skills development; for example, an entry level English class was able to explain the use of apostrophes which improves confidence and develops an in-depth understanding of the topic
- teachers support learners very well; teachers routinely tackle the problems which learners face and devise a range of effective strategies such as repetition for short-term memory issues to enable learners to successfully progress and complete their courses
- teachers make good use of relevant activities and examples which engage learners in the topic and reinforce understanding; for example, a lesson on composite area was contextualised to replacing a carpet in a room of a house and as a consequence one learner was able to accurately cost buying a carpet for her own home and so effectively budget to save the right amount of money to purchase it
- teachers prepare learners well for their assessments through their planning and delivery of learning; for example, teachers routinely use assessment criteria to inform planning and consistently reinforce assessment requirements throughout the sessions
- good oral feedback encourages learners to explore topics further and enhances their skills development; for example in a lesson on long multiplication, a teacher through effective oral feedback successfully encouraged a learner to complete a series of complex questions and record how they worked out their answers so acquiring the knowledge they needed to complete the qualification
- good written feedback in English and mathematics tells learners exactly what they need to do to improve; for example, feedback on extended writing celebrates strengths so that learners understand what they do well and highlights areas for improvement so that they know how to achieve higher standards in their work
- initial and ongoing advice and guidance is good; all learners are effectively placed on an appropriate level of study and this enables them to overcome significant barriers to achieve their qualifications and personal goals.

Teaching, learning and assessment in foundation English and mathematics are not yet outstanding because:

- the level 2 long course success rates in mathematics, for a small minority of learners, is still too low
- too many teachers do not embed individual targets to challenge learners in their sessions; for example, in a free speaking task some learners had specific targets to develop this skill but they were not used in the activity
- the use of ILT requires further development; in some classes it is well used to reinforce and enhance learning but this is not consistent practice for all classes.

Community Learning

**Community learning
19+ learning programmes**

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in community learning are good because:

- a very high proportion of learners successfully complete their courses, making significant gains in self-esteem, confidence, communication and personal and social skills. Learners are proud of work of high standards and make good progress from their starting points
- learners place a very high value on community learning and many describe it as therapeutic or life changing; some learners on a community capacity-building course progress well onto successful completion of a foundation degree course, enabling them to contribute strongly to voluntary and community organisations in their area
- support for learners is very good; teaching is very supportive and motivates learners to have high expectations of their learning and employability and to develop independent learning
- learners benefit from additional support when required including mentoring, team teaching or one-to-one tutorials or guidance sessions; in a session to improve employability for learners with specific difficulties with social interaction and communication, good support to address these difficulties has enabled them to work successfully in groups and in a retail environment dealing directly with the public
- highly motivated and committed tutors provide much inspiration leading to enthusiastic participation; good classroom management in a session for reluctant learners helps them all to contribute fully to discussions
- tutors incorporate a good range of teaching strategies to reinforce learning well; such as thorough checking of understanding, good use of praise, maintaining good learner involvement, clear and patient explanations
- tutors have a good understanding of the learners and develop trusting relationships encouraging them to make good contributions to discussions and reflect appropriately on their own experiences and prior learning; for example, in a session promoting child safety, learners shared concerns when exploring how the topics covered apply in their own homes
- learners generally have good access to information, advice and guidance about choices and progression to other courses
- courses promote safety well and in a course about use of tablet computers, learners discussed safe practices to protect their children from online exploitation
- planning for sessions includes good consideration of opportunities to embed English and mathematics; in a course about children's safety, learners applied formulas to calculate from their children's weights what amounts of household items would harm them

- ALSS promotes equality and diversity effectively during induction sessions; one course has enabled blind and partially sighted learners to document their lives and tutors use this to raise awareness in other classes.

Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet outstanding because:

- individual learning plans do not consistently include sufficiently challenging and measurable targets
- there is inconsistent recording of the considerable progress made by learners in their skills for life such as confidence and self-esteem.

Business administration

Apprenticeships

Outstanding

Teaching, learning and assessment in business administration are outstanding because:

- the overall success rates, and success rates within planned timescales, are outstanding
- very good progress is being made by current learners who are on target to achieve within agreed timescales; the standard of learners' work is very good and they present an excellent range of evidence in portfolios such as the creation of a guide for colleagues, using power point, including screenshots alongside text boxes outlining steps to follow when using a new database
- learners develop excellent work-related skills and improve their self-confidence, independence and social skills; one learner now confidently produces analyses of weekly performance information to support team leaders to improve efficiency within their teams
- assessors and workplace managers provide excellent support to learners; they inspire and challenge learners to achieve well and produce high quality work
- very good coaching and training sessions in the workplace meet learners' needs and improves performance in a range of skills; learners competently use spreadsheets to present financial information to other teams in work whose own performance relies on the accuracy of this information
- excellent use is made of interactive learning technologies to support learning and to record evidence; learners create power point presentations to present information to colleagues and use internet search engines for researching topics. Assessors use hand held devices to record assessments and 'apps on smart phones' to further support learning
- learners improve their skills in English; assessors correct work and challenge learners to improve their written work; for example, in producing memos, reports and minutes of meetings and create guidance on taking and transferring telephone calls professionally
- learners skills in mathematics are good; they receive support from assessors to develop their understanding and appreciate the importance of using these skills effectively in their day-to-day work
- equality and diversity is promoted particularly well and is good; assessors use challenging discussions and clips from social media to stimulate discussions and learners demonstrate good knowledge through their course work
- safeguarding arrangements for learners are good; staff and learners have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe and display safe working practices.

The effectiveness of leadership and management**Good**

- Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders and managers provide a very clear strategic direction that translates into good service delivery and ambitious targets for staff and learners. All staff and leaders make direct and significant contributions to the wider corporate priorities of the local authority including creating wealthier, healthier, safer and better communities for the people of County Durham.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have delivered many effective service developments particularly improving outcomes for learners and the quality of learning opportunities for the large majority of learners. The provider's data for the current academic year show good improvements in retention rates. Success rates have remained good and for some programmes improved to outstanding. Attendance on courses is good.
- Governance arrangements are good. Council leaders and managers provide effective and regular scrutiny of the service holding senior staff to account. For example, senior staff are required to report with targets and timescales to the strategic manager responsible for adult education on how ALSS is contributing to improving the level of mathematical skills across the adult population of County Durham where skill levels are historically low. The council continues to invest in the service during periods of staff cuts elsewhere. This is in recognition of the unique contribution ALSS is making to improve the skill levels and economic prospects of some of the most isolated and disadvantaged communities in the county.
- Since the last inspection leaders and managers have successfully made improvements to the quality of teaching and learning through a range of interventions, including more robust observations and regular themed short visits to classes. Observations now have a greater emphasis on how well sessions help learners make progress particularly with their English and mathematics. Individual staff are aware of their targets to improve performance including success rates, observations grades and follow-up actions from previous observations. Managers carefully monitor action plans through the staff appraisal system. This provides managers with identified areas for further staff training and development and accurately highlights areas of good practice. The opportunity for peer observations is supporting staff to try new ways of improving their practice.
- ALSS collects, analyses and uses a good range of management information to ensure it makes the necessary improvements in teaching and learning and success rates. The self-assessment process is inclusive of learner, staff and employer views and effectively links to detailed business improvement plans. The self-assessment accurately reflects the strengths of the service and inspectors agree with the areas for improvement. Identified areas for improvement translate effectively into individual business improvement plans. These are realistic, regularly reviewed with ambitious targets to bring about the necessary improvements across the service.
- Staff are good at ensuring learners' views are sought in a variety of ways including learner forums, course reviews, and learner surveys with high response rates that report the vast majority of learners are very happy with the service they receive. Staff are very responsive to learners and a number of changes have been made to the provision; for example, changes to venues, delivery times, and providing iPads to support learning.
- The last inspection identified improving the management of sub-contractors who deliver 80% of the provision across the county, as an area for improvement. Through the thorough work of a dedicated contracts team, management of subcontracted provision is now good. It involves a more robust commissioning process and detailed due diligence. Managers effectively challenge and support all sub-contractors.
- The range of provision very successfully meets local, regional and national priorities particularly targeting some very disadvantaged communities. ALSS is successfully widening participation, promoting social inclusion and providing pathways to employment. Managers place a very strong focus on supporting local projects to improve economic well-being and create opportunities for increasing access to education, training and employment particularly in isolated rural locations. For example, it successfully delivers a volunteer programme aiming to improve

economic stability, health outcomes, language development and parenting skills in local community venues. However, learners do not always know the full range of opportunities that are available in their local area.

- Senior managers are well represented on the local enterprise partnership (LEP) which is developing the local skills agenda with a focus on providing progress pathways for unemployed young people and adults with low levels of educational attainment. ALSS staff successfully engages with Durham County Council to provide opportunities for some very vulnerable learners; including care leavers to take up apprenticeships and engage in meaningful work placements and apprenticeships within the council. ALSS employment engagement staff work with a very small number of employers outside the County Council. They recognise the need to coordinate employer engagement further to avoid duplication and widening employer involvement in improving workplace skills in County Durham.
- ALSS provides a very inclusive service where it promotes equality of access, support and respect for learners at every opportunity across all provision. Staff effectively implement the comprehensive policies and procedures ensuring ALSS is fully compliant with the requirements of the Single Equality Act 2010. All staff participate in regular equality and diversity training so they are fully aware of their responsibilities toward learners in protecting them from harassment, bullying or any forms of discrimination. Thorough data analysis shows there are no discernible gaps in achievement of different groups of learners. All learners including those with learning difficulties and disabilities are encouraged to give their views and participate fully. ALSS deals with the very small number of complaints promptly.
- Good safeguarding arrangements for learners are well supported and implemented by safer recruitment practices, all appropriate checks including from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) are carefully recorded. The vast majority of learners report feeling safe. Staff have regular safeguarding training and recent updates appropriately cover the 'prevent and radicalisation' agenda. Staff are well informed about approaches to protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism and other radicalisation activities. However, ALSS has not yet prepared a written policy in relation to this.
- Staff responsible for safeguarding take any incidents and concerns seriously, investigate them thoroughly and record them confidentially. Teachers and tutors provide a caring, supportive environment for those who are most vulnerable. The authority has a close and very effective working relationship with the local safeguarding board. A thorough approach to risk assessment ensures that sub-contractors provide a secure and safe learning environment in the 100 plus community venues across the county. ALSS staff provide good updates to all external partners on e-safety.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Durham County Council

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

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation English and mathematics	2
Community learning	2
Administration	1

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5775							
CEO	Mrs Linda Bailey							
Date of previous inspection	October 2013							
Website address	www.durham.gov.uk/adultlearning							
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+
	1	1875	1	452	N/A	45	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	9	73	18	25	N/A	N/A		
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	1680							
Number of employability learners	110							
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"> ▪ The Cornforth Partnership ▪ Jack Drum Arts ▪ Nigel Brough – Bespoke Training Solutions Ltd ▪ Bishop Auckland College ▪ 1st in Training ▪ DISC ▪ Home Group ▪ Royal Mencap ▪ Northern Rights Community Interest Company ▪ SkillShare North East Ltd ▪ Acumen ▪ YMS Training ▪ Foundation of Light ▪ Fane Ltd 							

Contextual information

Durham County Council's Adult Learning and Skills Service is a local authority provider of adult and community learning. The service is part of the education team within the Children and Adult Services Directorate of the Council. County Durham is socially, economically and physically a diverse area, it is home to over half a million people making it, in terms of population size, the largest local authority in the North East and the sixth largest in England. The 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation show that 45% of the county lie within the 25% most deprived areas in England. Easington retains its position as one of the most deprived areas of England.

Fewer individuals of working age in Durham hold NVQ level four or higher qualifications; similarly, County Durham has a higher proportion of individuals with level one or no qualifications. After historically lagging behind other areas of England, achievement at of GCSE's has overtaken the national average in recent years. For example, in 2013 63.1% of students achieved five GCSEs at A* to C grades (including English and mathematics), compared to 59.2% for England.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Tim Gardner HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three 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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