

Bracknell Forest Community Learning

Local Authority

**Inspection dates**

9–12 February 2016

Overall effectiveness**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too few learners achieve their qualifications.
- Learners' individual targets do not identify what they need to do to improve in sufficient detail.
- The approach taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning has not yet been effective.
- Managers' self-assessment of the provision does not accurately identify all the areas which require improvement, or take into account the views of tutors or learners.
- Tutors rely too much on learners' assessment of their own progress and achievement and do not always check that learning aims have been met.
- Learners' awareness of British values and the dangers of extremism are insufficiently well developed.
- There is too little support for learners to develop their English and mathematics skills while studying other subjects.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers have a good awareness of the needs of local employers and the community, which they use to inform the range of courses on offer.
- Learners enjoy their learning and develop good practical skills.
- Learners develop self-confidence and social skills that enable them to participate more fully in wider society.
- The excellent facilities and learning environment in the open learning centre where most of the courses are held.
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) learners enjoy developing their English skills in the informal tutor led 'English café' and many then join more formal ESOL and English courses.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Bracknell Forest Community Learning service (BFCL) is part of Bracknell Forest Council, a unitary authority in Berkshire. The head of community learning and skills manages the service and reports to the chief officer learning and achievement. The large majority of the courses take place at a well-resourced open learning centre, with others held at community venues, children's centres and schools, and through two subcontractors.
- The large majority of BFCL learners are enrolled on non-accredited community learning courses, with a small minority on courses which lead to qualifications. The primary focus of the courses that lead to qualifications is preparation for life and work and short vocationally based employability courses.
- Bracknell Forest is one of the least deprived boroughs in England but has a number of less affluent areas.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve learners' progress and achievement by setting more detailed individual learning targets to help them make swift progress from their starting points.
- Ensure that learners are clear about the commitment they need to give to courses, particularly those that lead to qualifications, by setting high expectations for attendance and punctuality.
- Ensure that managers' observations of the quality of teaching and learning focus more effectively on learning and the progress learners make.
- Improve the rigour of the process to evaluate learners' progress and attainment in each learning session by ensuring that learners' self-assessment of their progress is always validated by tutors.
- Integrate the development of learners' English and mathematics skills and their awareness of British values and the dangers of extremism more effectively into their courses.
- Ensure that managers' self-assessment of the quality of the provision identifies all areas for improvement accurately and includes the views of learners and tutors on what is working well and what needs to be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not yet been successful in improving the success rates for the small number of learners taking English and mathematics functional skills courses. The achievement of these qualifications has remained low since their introduction two years ago. Where learners have had to withdraw due to personal circumstances, many have been able to achieve unit awards rather than the full qualification. Expectations for learners to attend learning sessions and to arrive on time are not yet high enough and this slows their progress. Too few learners are successful on preparation for life and work courses.
- Managers review the quality of teaching and learning in learning sessions on at least an annual basis, through graded lesson observations carried out by trained observers. However, observers focus too much on what the tutor does rather than on the impact they have on learning and the progress learners make. As a result the extensive feedback observers provide to tutors to help them improve is ineffective. Where tutors have not been able to improve sufficiently they have been not been given further courses to teach.
- Managers provide appropriate training for tutors, many of whom are sessional and deliver just a few learning sessions each year. Recent events have included training in the 'Prevent' duty and how to improve the recognition and recording of the progress that learners make.
- Managers' self-assessment of the quality of the provision requires improvement. The evaluation of the provision does not yet capture the views of tutors or learners. Although the self-assessment report identifies a range of strengths and some areas for improvement, it is overgenerous in its assessment of the current quality of the provision. Targets within the quality improvement plan do not link clearly to the areas identified as requiring improvement in the self-assessment report and are insufficiently precise to ensure that targeted and measurable action is taken.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the service works closely with a wide range of partners and this has helped to meet community needs very effectively, for example, providing courses for Age Concern volunteers to enable them to support computer skills development in the retired community. In addition, the two subcontractors train a wide range of volunteers and provide community learning courses to help meet the needs of those in sheltered housing and in housing association tenancies.
- Staff promote equality of opportunity and the importance of valuing diversity well and as a result learners benefit from a supportive, safe learning centre in which they value and enjoy learning. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity and British values is not yet consistently good because, although tutors have been trained in these issues, they are not always confident enough to develop learners' understanding effectively.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The community learning management board, comprising an elected member and senior managers, meets regularly and reviews the performance of the service well. The ability of the board to understand the performance of the service has improved recently because of improved analysis of the vast array of data that they receive in preparation for board meetings. This has provided a clearer picture of what is going well and where improvements are required and enables them to challenge and support the service effectively. A very recent restructuring of the community learning service has provided additional capacity to analyse and use data more effectively.
 - The board has provided clear direction on retaining the breadth of the provision to meet community learning needs through working with partners, should funding levels be reduced.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Managers ensure that appropriate safeguarding checks are made on staff and they maintain comprehensive, up-to-date records. The safeguarding lead is trained to the appropriate level and all staff have received safeguarding training. They are aware of their responsibilities and what to do if any concerns are identified. Detailed records of any concerns or complaints are kept and these show that appropriate action is taken. Staff have also been trained to make them aware of their responsibilities for helping protect learners from the risk of extremism and radicalisation.
 - Learners are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including online, and many have an understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Not all tutors are yet confident enough to raise learners' awareness and broaden understanding during lessons but the learner handbook covers the issues well and there are informative posters throughout the learning centre.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- In too many lessons, tutors do not plan activities effectively. Tutors do not always use the results of initial assessment, or routinely identify learners' aspirations for the learning session, to agree individual learning goals with learners or to plan learning. Targets focus too much on the session or course outcomes and lack sufficient detail. In too many cases they fail to identify the purpose of the learning in relation to the learners' aims and aspirations. Consequently, learners cannot monitor their own progress and develop good independent learning skills. For example, targets which are too broad make it difficult for tutors and learners to assess reliably whether they have been achieved.
- Tutors' initial assessment of learners' English skills is thorough and used effectively to plan learning on English and ESOL courses. Tutors use online learning resources well to target learners' skills gaps and provide evidence of progress in English; these resources also support learners to develop independent learning skills.
- Individual learning plans for very short courses meet the needs of learners and tutors well. Learners self-assess their confidence levels at the beginning and end of the course. For longer courses, the learning plans are not effective in tracking and recording progress over time or enabling learners to redefine or set new learning targets.
- Tutors use their expert vocational skills well, ensuring that learners develop good practical and craft skills, for example, in a computer workshop learners produce accurate and useful budgeting spreadsheets. In ESOL lessons learners develop language skills that improve their ability to communicate well in everyday situations. For example, they make medical appointments and understand what the doctor says. Tutors and volunteers provide prompt, effective and sensitive support for learners.
- In the better learning sessions tutors use technology well to support learning. For example, in a literacy lesson the tutor effectively used a film clip to demonstrate the use of persuasive language and in an ESOL lesson learners worked as a group to sequence a set of instructions correctly. However, too many tutors do not use technology effectively, using it for little more than text-based on-screen presentations.
- Learners studying employability skills have access to supportive individual coaching that enables them to practise interview skills and techniques. National Careers Service advisers provide in-depth advice and guidance to support learners with career choices, information on the local employment opportunities and advice on further courses to help them achieve their aims.
- All learners have access to information technology 'drop-in' workshops which provide the opportunity to practise recently acquired skills or to develop new skills. For example, a learner has undertaken a number of modules on using internet search engines; this has enabled her to pursue her passion for genealogy effectively.
- The recording of learners' progress is weak. Tutors do not use reviews to assess learners' aspirations, to identify further learning opportunities or to set increasingly challenging targets.
- Tutors' verbal feedback in learning sessions is good and provides learners with positive reinforcement of their learning which they find motivational. In the better learning sessions, tutors use questioning effectively to check learners' knowledge, but use it less well to probe and confirm their understanding.
- Managers use information about current local employment opportunities well to inform curriculum planning and course content, for example, the development of retail courses to meet the needs of the local area town centre regeneration.
- Learners feel safe and understand the arrangements to protect them and how to make complaints. Staff and learners create an environment of mutual respect.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

- Learning programmes support learners well to develop self-confidence and the skills that enable them to participate in wider society. Learners appreciate the opportunity to learn and make friends in a supportive learning environment. This is particularly important for those who had previously felt isolated in their communities. Learners enjoy their learning, value the time they spend in the open learning centre, and take pride in their work.
- Learners treat each other with respect and provide good peer support. Their learning and standard of work is generally appropriate to their level of study, although more-able learners are not always sufficiently challenged. When these more-able learners finish tasks they have to wait for others to catch up without being challenged by tutors to make more progress through completing more complex tasks.
- Although learners develop personal and social skills well during their courses, tutors do not ensure that they have sufficient opportunity to develop other work-related skills. Outside of formal English and

mathematics sessions, too few tutors help learners develop their English and mathematics skills or help them understand the value of these skills in the context of work and their everyday lives. The learners who do have the opportunity to learn these essential skills through their vocational or community learning courses enjoy the experience and a small number progress onto English and mathematics courses, for example, parents on the courses held in schools to enable them to engage in and support their children's learning.

- Managers and tutors do not promote the importance of good attendance and punctuality sufficiently well. As a result, too many learners do not develop these important skills. Low attendance and poor punctuality by a minority of learners impedes learning during community learning sessions, although tutors are adept at minimising the disruption caused by late arrivals. It also slows the pace of learning for learners taking courses to help prepare them for employment and prevents them developing these important work-related behaviours.
- Learners benefit from effective impartial careers advice as part of employment-related programmes. A representative from a local college also visits regularly and provides good signposting of progression opportunities.
- Learners feel and are safe, and are aware of what action to take if they have concerns. Posters promoting online safety and the dangers posed by radicalisation and extremism are clearly displayed. However, learners' awareness of these issues is not yet sufficiently developed by tutors during learning sessions.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Overall achievement for the small minority of learners on courses that lead to qualifications has remained at similar levels for the last two years. For the low numbers of learners on English and mathematics functional skills courses, success rates remain below those being achieved by similar providers. Success rates for learners on the short vocationally-linked employability courses, such as retail, are similar to those achieved nationally. Success rates for learners on preparation for life and work courses remain too low and require improvement.
- The large majority of learners are enrolled on community learning courses and most make good progress. However, too often their learning aims are not well enough defined for learners or tutors to use them as a robust measure of achievement. Most learners develop good practical skills and much of their work, in art and calligraphy for example, is to a high standard.
- Learners enjoy their learning. However, tutors do not always sufficiently challenge more-able learners to make the best possible progress given their prior experience and ability. Many of the learners on employability-related courses have been out of work for some time and have significant barriers to learning. Nevertheless, many make good progress which improves their prospects of finding work and a small minority gain places in further training or education, or secure employment, on completion of their courses.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,165
Principal/CEO	Timothy Wheadon
Website address	www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
		63		94				
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ Bracknell Forest Homes							
	■ Involve							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Mark Shackleton, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of community learning and skills, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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