

Herefordshire Council

Local authority

**Inspection dates**

18–21 January 2016

Overall effectiveness**Good**

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors, leaders and managers monitor the service well to secure high standards and improvements for learners.
- Leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction to improve access to learning for under-represented groups.
- Partnership working is outstanding and particularly beneficial for learners and the wider learning community.
- Tutors plan lessons well and use course content imaginatively to improve the personal skills and health and well-being of learners.
- Learners receive good spoken feedback from tutors which is aiding their progress, enjoyment of sessions and participation.
- Learners from low starting points significantly improve their levels of confidence, self-esteem and employment readiness.
- The vast majority of community learners complete their learning and achieve the aims of their course.
- Most learners in accredited programmes in vocational subjects succeed in gaining their qualifications.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Leaders have not ensured that analysis of the quality and outcomes of the service is sufficiently comprehensive; as a result senior managers and staff do not have a clear enough picture of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Tutors do not always ensure that written, personal targets are sufficiently detailed, making it difficult for learners to make and measure progress against them.
- Success rates in English and mathematics, while improving, are not yet high enough; teachers do not ensure that all learners are supported to develop these skills well enough.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The adult and community learning service of Herefordshire Council (the council) receives funding from the Skills Funding Agency for the provision of adult community learning courses. Around 65% of the funding is allocated to non-accredited courses. Towards the end of the 2013/14 contract year, the service commenced accredited programmes of learning designed to improve the skills of those who are seeking paid or unpaid work.
- The service provides community learning programmes in a range of subjects, located in the main towns of the county, through subcontracting arrangements with 15 partners. The skills development programmes focus predominantly on courses for English, mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT). Levels of unemployment in the county are below those in the West Midlands region, but the proportion of the population who do not have qualifications is much higher.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior managers should require written reports from other managers with more evaluative commentary on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and on learners' progress, retention, outcomes and destinations, to enable them to have a more precise and reliable view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers should improve learners' completion and success rates on English and mathematics courses by improving the quality of teaching and learning to a consistently high standard; they should also ensure that learners on other courses develop their English and mathematical skills more thoroughly and rapidly through tasks integrated into their subjects.
- Tutors should ensure that they record more carefully personalised learning aims, so that they can measure more precisely the achievements of all learners.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers set a clear strategic direction to improve access to learning for specific under-represented groups. The adult learning plan has precise and ambitious targets for the participation, success and well-being of vulnerable groups, such as learners without qualifications, unemployed learners, retired learners, disabled learners and those with learning difficulties.
- Managers and staff work extremely well with partner organisations. Partners are very clear about the council's vision and mission and can articulate clearly how the service complements and enhances their own provision. The service's strategy group, which includes partner representatives, ensures that the spread and balance of courses meets the needs of dispersed local communities and learners. Managers from the service have strong local links and are represented on the Local Educational Partnership board and the Marches skills provider network, and have productive working relationships with Jobcentre Plus.
- Leaders and managers have productive and effective working relations with subcontractors. Subcontracting arrangements are robust and well managed. Managers monitor the performance of subcontractors very closely and intervene swiftly if any concerns arise.
- Managers place a high value on staff development, to assist tutors in providing the best possible support for learners to develop their skills. All tutors are required to have a teaching qualification and are paid to attend training workshops. As a result, training sessions are well attended, highly valued by tutors and are leading to improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Managers observe all tutors annually in lessons; they use the observation records well to inform both the staff development programme and individual tutors' action plans. Observers are broadly accurate in their evaluation of teaching, but in their records they place too much emphasis on teaching processes rather than on the quality of learning taking place.
- Tutors promote an ethos of tolerance and respect within their lessons and learners are well prepared to engage positively in British society.
- Managers make good use of the quality improvement plan, which includes a comprehensive evaluation of the provision with action plans and timescales, in order to monitor the quality of provision and effect improvements. The service's latest self-assessment report has detailed data about outcomes for learners, but does not draw out sufficiently well the strengths and weaknesses of other aspects of provision, including teaching and learning.
- At the previous inspection the use of management information was an area for improvement. Managers employ a very effective contract management system, and an excellent grasp of the issues each subcontractor is facing. However, they do not formally record important information such as learners' progression to employment, thus preventing senior managers from analysing and evaluating vital aspects of the service's performance.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Elected council members provide appropriate oversight and scrutiny of the service's work and have a good understanding of the quality of provision provided by the service. They enthusiastically support the adult service and are aware of its value to other parts of the council's services, such as children's centres.
 - The elected member responsible for the service receives regular and useful briefings from managers on the adult provision. However, the annual report which elected representatives received in 2015 was less useful, as it was not based on the latest information about the service's outcomes.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Safeguarding is effective. Leaders and managers ensure that vulnerable learners are safe. All staff and tutors are appropriately checked and all have received mandatory training on safeguarding. Tutors pay good attention to health and safety in lessons and learners feel safe and know whom to contact if they have a safeguarding issue.
 - Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism within the context of the county, and have taken effective steps to help staff and tutors to implement the duties required by the counter-terrorist legislation. The vast majority of staff have received training on how to identify and refer those at risk of radicalisation and or engagement in extremist activity. Managers are aware of the need to offer further training to staff in how to integrate these themes, as appropriate, into the curriculum to raise learners' awareness and understanding.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Staff have high expectations of learners, which motivates them to achieve their learning goals. Tutors are appropriately qualified and use their experience and expertise to good effect so that learners apply their learning and see the relevance of developing new skills. Most learners take part in lessons enthusiastically and enjoy their learning.
- Tutors actively involve learners through a variety of interesting learning activities which increase their levels of ability, confidence and technical skills. In a very effective forest coppicing lesson, learners quickly developed the skills to craft small products out of wood, such as spatulas, bird baths and small bowls, which they sell to raise money for a charity of their choice. In a few lessons, tutors did not set sufficiently challenging tasks to allow the most-able learners to acquire and practise new skills and knowledge quickly enough.
- Learners develop their personal and social skills very well. Learners are better able to help their children with homework from school and communicate more confidently with their neighbours and families. Disabled learners and those with learning difficulties make particularly good progress.
- Learners frequently have good opportunities to explore and develop employability skills linked to their studies. For example, learners following child care programmes develop a deeper understanding of the skills required to care and nurture children in different child care settings, and are keen to follow a career in this vocation.
- Tutors get to know their learners quickly; they understand well the different backgrounds and needs of individuals and ensure that these are met. For example, they refer learners with mental health difficulties to additional support services; this helps learners to overcome significant barriers to learning and feel more integrated with their peers.
- Tutors provide learners with a good level of support during sessions, and often provide them with additional activities to research and explore in their own time which encourages their independence. Tutors and support staff provide individual support that meets learners' specific personal needs well. Learners develop very good working relationships with each other and with their tutors.
- Tutors involve learners in meaningful discussions in English lessons, which help them to develop confidence in speaking and listening in a small group. Learners debate and discuss topical issues such as immigration and the challenges of different cultures integrating into established communities within the United Kingdom.
- A few tutors do not focus sufficiently on the development of learners' mathematical and written English skills in vocational lessons. Learners' spelling and grammatical errors are not being routinely corrected by all tutors; tutors place too little emphasis on the importance of these skills in learners' personal lives and in a future career path. As a result, learners are not clear about what they need to do to further develop these skills.
- Tutors do not always record well the outcomes of the initial assessment of learners' skills at the start of their courses; as a result the ongoing progress of a small minority of learners is not always recorded accurately. While these learners have a clear understanding of what they intend to achieve during their courses, not all make the rapid progress required to achieve higher standards.
- During vocational lessons, tutors provide learners with frequent, constructive oral feedback and this motivates them to make good progress. However, tutors' feedback on learners' written work is too brief and does not always identify what learners have done well and what they need to do to improve.
- Tutors have established an environment within their diverse groups where learners respect each other and understand the importance of valuing the different views, cultures and backgrounds of others.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Attendance in classes is good and managers closely monitor attendance patterns well. If any classes are not well attended, managers take swift action to establish the reasons and ensure improvement.
- Learners are proud of their work and, for many, the skills they develop improve the quality of their daily lives and those of their families, and contribute to social enterprise activities.
- Learners are gaining skills that are improving their employability on adult skills courses, in particular skills in information and communication technology, English and mathematics and preparation for work. In community learning programmes learners are making good gains in confidence, health awareness and independent learning skills.
- The provision of information, advice and guidance (IAG) is good and many learners in community learning continue in courses of further learning, and if appropriate progress to longer and/or accredited

learning. Learners in adult skills development have good access to independent IAG offered by the national careers service in order to make informed decisions about their next steps to paid or unpaid employment.

- Learners feel safe and display high levels of respect for each other and their tutors. They work cooperatively with each other in class and value differences in culture and ability. Many go on to work in the voluntary sector, help other learners in future classes and engage in social enterprise activities which support the needs of the wider community.
- The development of English and mathematical skills is not consistently good for learners in all classes. Where tutors do not promote these subjects well, learners do not recognise the importance of these skills to their personal development and future employment and interests.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- Success rates are high on vocational accredited courses; the very large majority of learners gain their qualification aims. Course completion rates are very high in non-accredited programmes; almost all learners who commence a programme offered by the service achieve the aims of their course.
- Managers are working on methods to identify more successfully learners' progression rates across the whole service. Learners progress to a range of destinations including employment and increased independent living. Many learners progress from non-accredited short courses to longer courses within the service.
- Through skills development, courses successfully increase learners' well-being, particularly for those with profound learning difficulties, disabilities and mental health issues. Tutors design courses creatively which improve personal skills that increase confidence, team working and self-esteem.
- Learners undertaking accredited English and mathematics courses do not succeed as well as those nationally in similar provision. Success rates improved in 2014/15, despite the number of enrolments in the year being much higher than in 2013/14; however, problems in retaining learners throughout the course affected overall success. Managers have identified this issue and are taking appropriate actions to tackle it.
- Tutors do not record well enough learners' personal aims for the course in non-accredited learning. Though these aims are generally understood, data to establish achievement of these aims are not systematically gathered or analysed.
- The development of English and mathematical skills is not routinely done well across all of the provision. Tutors do not take up opportunities to reinforce these skills within their lessons, and do not emphasise well enough the importance of these skills within a subject context.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,452
Principal/CEO	Jo Davidson
Website address	www.herefordshire.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
		492		57				
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
		16–19		19+		Total		
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age								
Number of traineeships								
Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Maxine Mayer, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
William Baidoe-Ansah	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Blowman	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the adult learning manager, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. 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 students; 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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