

Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service

Local authority

Inspection dates	21-24 June 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	Requires improvement			
Adult learning programmes	Good			
Apprenticeships	Good			
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good			

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service is well led and managed.
- Partnerships linked to the service's priorities are very effective and productive.
- Community engagement is particularly good, including the way diverse groups of learners work well together.
- The development of lecturers' teaching skills is good.
- Support for learners to progress in learning and into jobs is well focused and effective.
- The development of English and employability skills helps learners in readiness for work.
- The standard of learners' work is high.
- The development of learners' personal and social skills is particularly good and learners make considerable gains in self-confidence as a result of their learning.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Achievement rates vary too much and many are low.
- The governance arrangements do not ensure sufficient scrutiny of the service's performance or provide sufficient challenge to the head of service and senior leaders.
- Managers' use of data to measure the impact of the service on learners' progress and achievement, including progression to positive destinations, requires improvement.
- Too many targets set for learners are too generic and not easily measureable.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Waltham Forest Adult Learning Service (WFALS) is the local authority's provider of adult, family and work-based learning and sits within the directorate of growth and regeneration. The service provides courses at three main centres during the day, evening and at weekends, including in a purpose-built centre at Queen's Road in Walthamstow. The service also works with partners to deliver programmes at 24 community venues, 29 schools and pre-school settings, seven libraries and job centres and eight additional venues. It provides a wide range of accredited and non-accredited learning in 12 of the 17 sector subject areas. The largest numbers of learners are taking courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and employability-related programmes amounting to 45% of all adult learners. A total of 60% of learners are completing qualification-based courses, the remaining 40% are completing non-accredited community learning programmes. There are 54 apprentices, mainly at intermediate level.
- The London Borough of Waltham Forest is very diverse, with high numbers of residents of minority ethnic origin, including the third largest Muslim community in London. About 26% of residents aged 3 years old and over do not speak English as their main language compared to 8% nationally. Approximately 18% of learners disclosed a disability in 2014/15; this was an increase of 5% from 2013/14. About one in ten residents aged 16 to 64 do not have any formal qualifications; this is higher than the London average of 7.8%.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Implement a governance system which includes a wide range of partners, stakeholders, learners and employers and provides stringent scrutiny of, and challenge to, the service.
- Review and refine the data systems used to identify and report on learners' progress and achievement of qualifications in order to provide a single, unambiguous source of reliable and accurate performance data for senior leaders and managers and improve achievement rates.
- Develop more personalised and specific targets for learners that better reflect their barriers to engagement and potential to participate in learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders, managers and staff share a clear vision of the service's purpose and values, and demonstrate very high expectations for learning programmes provided for the communities they serve. Staff are wholly committed to providing programmes which give the best possible opportunities for learners in Waltham Forest to improve their skills, confidence and employability.
- WFALS has a comprehensive and highly visible involvement in communities across the borough. The provision is well planned, carefully constructed to reflect community and individual needs and closely allied to the council's and local employment partnership's priorities.
- Partnership working between employers and key stakeholders in the borough is well developed and productive. WFALS' managers have developed good links with numerous local employers and regeneration projects which provide routes for learners into employment, work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships. Since the 2012 Olympics, WFALS has developed a particularly effective working partnership with Jobcentre Plus to offer programmes which provide employer-related and employability-based learning; this initiative includes two WFALS' staff based directly within job centres providing referrals and assessments. A community engagement officer provides very good access to, and liaison with, hard-to-reach groups in the community, creating and facilitating centre-based courses matched to their learning needs.
- WFALS is well led and managed. Senior managers have a thorough understanding of how well each part of the service is performing as a result of very close and regular monitoring of all aspects of the service. They identify promptly any underperformance or areas for improvement and put appropriate support actions for learners in place quickly. Managers use a wide range of detailed data well to monitor the programmes' performance but they recognise that the data systems they use are too complex and do not routinely provide an unambiguous and accurate overview of learners' achievements in the current and previous full academic years.
- Leaders and managers have identified measurable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning over the past year. Lecturers are now making good use of interactive learning technologies in the classroom to enhance learning. Managers have introduced and developed a new system for the observation and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment over the past year which is working well; a particularly positive aspect of this system is the opportunity it provides for professional and constructive dialogue between the observer and lecturer. Lecturers receive good training and support, where needed, to improve further following their observation. Good practice in teaching, learning and assessment is recognised and shared well.
- Curriculum managers implement thorough performance management and monitoring arrangements, supported by data, including the retention and progress of individual learners on each learning programme. This allows curriculum managers and lecturers to make quick and direct interventions with any learner identified as needing additional support. Target-setting for staff and lecturers is practical and effective, based on curriculum managers' sound understanding and assessment of WFALS' and curriculum area priorities and the service targets which need to be achieved. However, senior leaders recognise that the pace of improvement in a small minority of curriculum areas has not been fast enough and the improvement actions, including support for underperforming staff, have not had sufficient impact. Data showing learners' success in achieving qualifications in previous academic years and in the current year to date is produced by WFALS management information officers but does not reflect the data produced by curriculum managers which is more clear and more accurate.
- Senior leaders' arrangements for overall self-assessment and quality improvement planning are comprehensive and closely reflect the views of managers, teaching staff, learners, partners and employers. The annual self-assessment report is sufficiently evaluative and largely accurate. The quality improvement process is continuous throughout the year and provides senior managers with useful summaries on the range of improvements needed in each curriculum area. However, managers are not all using the curriculum area quality improvement plans well enough to identify the specific improvement actions which need to take place nor are they setting clear and incremental targets against which progress can be measured.
- Managers, staff and lecturers promote equality and diversity very well throughout the service. Managers monitor closely who is using the service to ensure that they reflect targeted learner groups. Teachers promote equality and diversity themes well in learning sessions and in each centre. All WFALS' centres are highly welcoming and accessible.

Inspection Report: Waltham Forest Adult Learning, 21–24 June 2016

- Learners with additional learning needs are supported well and achieve at least as well as their peers. Learners on ESOL, English, mathematics and family learning courses have access to free childcare, including at outreach locations. WFALS' arrangements for initial advice, guidance and support for learners are good. Learners receive clear information about course content and options. They have a good understanding of what they are studying and why, and the benefits that study can bring. Before beginning their courses learners' starting points are now assessed more accurately than in previous years and the outcomes of these assessments are used well to plan learning.
- WFALS' leaders and managers are unable to identify the impact of the service on the progress of individuals from their starting points. The current arrangements for determining learners' destinations following learning primarily provide an indication of learners' generally high satisfaction with their learning but do not provide any reliable qualitative or quantitative data about whether their learning has had any direct impact on such aspects as gaining employment, promotion, improving skills and confidence, or entering further or higher education.
- Ageing information technology and software used in classrooms are in need of renewal. WFALS' managers have not planned well enough to update the ageing computers and software used by learners in classrooms; consequently too many machines operate too slowly.

■ The governance of the provider

- WFALS lacks any formal structure for governance through a board of governors or similar which
 includes representatives from stakeholders, partners, learners and employers. While the provision is
 very closely and actively managed at an operational and strategic level by WFALS' heads of
 departments and the head of service, there is no external supervisory oversight.
- WFALS' head of service is directly line managed and held to account at council director level against challenging key performance indicators. Senior leaders and the council's lead member for adult learning appreciate that current arrangements do not provide the breadth of input and challenge that would be provided by a broader governance structure. The council intends to implement such a governance structure as a priority.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Staff have good opportunities for initial and refresher training in safeguarding and all staff are well aware of safeguarding principles and practice. Managers run appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and the DBS record is monitored closely. The relatively few instances of safeguarding referrals have been managed well by the WFALS' designated safeguarding officer and staff.
- Arrangements to prevent extremism and radicalisation are integrated well into the service's operational practice. 'Prevent' duty training, using face-to-face, online and team-based sessions has been extensive. Learners' awareness of the 'Prevent' duty programme is generally good.
- British values are promoted effectively and discretely within learning. Initiatives include a useful local learning passport which provides learners with innovative ways to learn about the history and culture of the borough and by extension that of the UK.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Lecturers develop their teaching skills well. Over the past year the service has introduced a new observation of teaching procedure which has had the effect of increasing the level of professional discussion around teaching practice and enabling better sharing of good practice. This in turn has led to a more targeted link between skills needs and staff development.
- Lecturers use a range of activities which hold the attention of learners well. For example mini whiteboards were used in a mathematics class and encouraged all learners to respond to questions. In another class, learners were able to practise their tomato plant cultivation by pruning and stringing approximately ten plants each.
- Lecturers expect learners to contribute effectively in class and be respectful of others and to work safely. They anticipate that learners will work collaboratively. Learners have a good work ethic, respond positively to this approach, and are committed to succeed in their learning and make good progress and produce good work. Learners work well within very diverse groups, for example there is often a wide range of ages working together as well as learners from different cultures. A small minority of lecturers do not always respond to the individual needs of all learners in class. In these cases, there is a tendency to manage the lesson so that there is a single pace for all without extension work for the most able learners or support for those needing specific help.

- Mid-course reviews provide lecturers and learners with a useful focus for discussion. The monitoring of learners' achievements is good. Lecturers use individual learning plans routinely but their operation varies too much. In some subjects they place a heavy emphasis on short-term curriculum targets but they are often not specific enough to be very helpful or measurable. Targets for the development of social and personal skills are too broad to support learners effectively.
- Lecturers' marking and feedback on learners' assignments are, in the majority of cases, accurate and helpful and ensure that learners understand what they need to do to improve further. However, spelling, punctuation and grammar are not always corrected sufficiently in the marking and feedback to learners.
- Lecturers are well qualified; all have, or are working towards, a teaching qualification. They are also well-qualified in their vocational area and a large majority have previous industrial experience. This enables them to provide useful progression advice and relate areas of the curriculum to employability skills.
- Lecturers make good use of opportunities to develop learners' understanding of the diverse communities in which they live and work. For example, they used poems from different cultures in an English class, and in an ESOL class films from different countries provided a vehicle for a discussion.
- The service has an effective recruitment process that provides good guidance for learners and uses initial assessment to ensure that learners are placed on the right course for them, followed by a thorough induction to the course. Learners on Jobcentre Plus courses have a skills check to inform their correct placement. Learners experience good support for their learning through a variety of approaches; for example, learning support in class, one-to-one sessions, and drop-in workshops including GCSE workshops on 10 Saturday afternoons a year. Staff are keen to support learners and go out of their way to build their confidence and develop their skills. The 'steps into work' project successfully provides progression advice on further courses or employment. Many learners obtain a voluntary work placement. Traineeship learners are making good progress in developing a range of skills, identifying their problem-solving process and looking at how this might be used in the workplace.
- Learners develop good-quality English skills. They are frequently involved in discussions and in making presentations which they do with confidence. The majority of staff are skilled at planning learning to include English skills development. The integration and promotion of mathematics is less well developed.
- Lecturers make good use of technology to assist learning. They develop, and make use of, good resources to support learning such as interactive whiteboards, videos and sound recordings. Learners frequently have access to computers in classes and also use their mobile phones to find information and record notes from the board. Physical resources for learning are good. For example, learners in fashion and dressmaking use sewing machines, over-lockers and embroidery machines. The virtual learning environment is in development.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

- Learners, including apprentices, develop good independent learning and work skills and take responsibility for their own learning and progress. They develop effective communication skills, gain self-confidence speak up for themselves and become more comfortable meeting many different people. Learners are attentive in class and develop good listening skills
- Very good partnership working with employers and a strong focus on employability has resulted in many learners gaining work. Employers report frequent contact with the WFALS and involvement in the selection and recruitment of learners for work experience and apprenticeships. Employers are involved well in supporting apprentices in their work and in their reviews of progress.
- The strong focus on English and mathematics skills development and employability is closely aligned to the local authority's key priorities and the job opportunities locally. Good arrangements to gather and share good practice are effective and improve lecturers' planning to embed these skills into all courses. The service has a very strong partnership with Jobcentre Plus to provide specific qualification-based employability courses for residents which are very successful.
- The development of employability skills, including through information and communications technology (ICT) and English courses, is good. For example, traineeship learners benefit from practical advice on how to understand and interpret wage slips. Employers are very positive about the contribution that their apprentices make to their businesses; they consider that apprentices' interests and abilities are closely matched to their needs.

- Learners are supported well in their progression to higher levels of learning and into work or volunteering roles. Lecturers and the 'steps into employment' project provide considerable help in terms of curriculum vitae and job application writing as well as help with finding job vacancies and gaining work experience placements. Approximately two thirds of traineeship learners progressed to employment, apprenticeships or higher levels of learning in 2014/15.
- Learners have a very positive experience of the adult learning service and the information, advice and guidance they receive, from both within WFALS and through the National Careers Service. Those interviewed on inspection had progressed to higher levels of learning and developed new skills in readiness for work.
- Lecturers are confident about dealing with issues relating to the prevention of terrorism and extremism with learners. Learners benefit from safe, secure and welcoming learning centres across the borough. Close attention is given to the health and safety of learners in the planning and provision of learning which is well promoted by lecturers at induction and reinforced in classes and through posters displayed around the service's venues. Learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism, as well as procedures for safeguarding. However this is less evident with apprentices.
- Accessible venues attract a range of diverse, disadvantaged and priority learner groups; for example, older people, ESOL learners, unemployed and socially-excluded residents, and those from a wide range of religious and cultural groups. Learners make good gains in confidence and learners work well in their diverse communities. They value the opportunity to mix with different age groups and with learners from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Lecturers skilfully promote and include topics in learning that relate to being a good citizen, accessing the education system and health services and develop learners' understanding of the British government. Strategies for successful integration into the local community and country are very effective. A small minority of lecturers are less confident in promoting British values across the range of provision. Apprentices participate in discussions about topical events such as the European Union referendum and use this as a platform to explore themes such as immigration, which they discuss with empathy and sensitivity.
- Lecturers and senior leaders maintain good records of learners' attendance and punctuality and deploy a good range of strategies to encourage learners to attend lessons and turn up on time. However, while the vast majority of learners attend their lessons, punctuality at evening classes is an issue and lecturers do not always challenge learners to be more punctual. Attendance and timekeeping of traineeship learners does not always demonstrate work readiness. Very low numbers attend lessons and timekeeping is poor, despite being on programme for some time.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Achievement rates vary too much and many are well below the national rates for all providers. Too few learners taking qualifications in mathematics achieve, with less than half achieving GCSE at grades A* to C last year. Too few learners taking English for speakers of other languages qualifications at entry level 3 and level 1 achieve. Qualification rates have declined over the last two years in business and employability courses.
- Learners on employability courses designed in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and local sector specific organisations are successful at achieving qualifications closely aligned to the local labour market needs and obtaining work. However, it is unclear how many progress to sustainable employment.
- Apprentices achieve well and the majority have made good progress and are now on target to achieve within their planned timescales. However only around two thirds of traineeship learners achieved their qualifications in 2014/15, which was lower than the previous year.
- Current learners are making good progress during their lessons and over time. The percentage of learners who remain in learning has increased. The vast majority of learners on community learning programmes achieve their learning goals.
- The standard of learners' work is high, particularly in creative and craft subjects with many learners winning prestigious awards and competitions. Learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities produce art work of a very good standard. They recently won a competition and were chosen to exhibit their work at the one of the Tate galleries in London. A mature learner was inspired by childhood memories and photos of his life during the Second World War and is proud of the prize he was awarded by the Tate for his art work.

- Learners are enthusiastic and excited about the creative and practical tasks they complete in class and they demonstrate good skills development. Learners make good progress in their lessons and produce good work. For example, in functional skills English lessons learners confidently make contributions to discussions using their newly acquired vocabulary.
- Senior leaders make good efforts to follow up learners' destinations on completion of their courses. From the small sample surveyed, the percentage of learners moving into employment, further education, training and volunteering roles is good. Managers have become more effective in tracking the destinations of learners and the number of learners with unknown destinations has reduced markedly this year. Although the majority of learners continue in courses with WFALS at the same level, a small but increasing number progress to higher level courses, particularly moving to qualification courses from community learning.
- There are no significant differences in the outcomes of different groups of learners; however, the proportion of learners who receive additional learning support who stay to the end of their course is higher than for their peers.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

are good

- The service very effectively targets members of the local community and works with a good range of partners. Learning centres are highly accessible, welcoming and well located in community settings to maximise learner engagement and participation.
- The adult provision has a clearly defined purpose to improve the skills of the local population and ensure that learners are prepared for living and working in the community with greater independence and improved employment prospects.
- Learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, make good progress and develop new personal, social and work-related skills. For example, mature learners in a community setting learn to use technology to access online services for the first time, they are able to shop for particular items, use new apps on mobile phones and tablets to communicate and send emails and photographs to family members.
- Learners develop a good range of skills in preparation for work; for example, learners in hairdressing courses become more confident in using various hair colouring and cutting techniques. Learners in cake decorating courses become highly skilled in using icing in varying forms and colours to decorate cakes for different celebrations. They produce work of a very high standard and are very proud of their newly acquired skills.
- Skilful teaching ensures that learners are fully engaged, sufficiently challenged and successfully achieve their learning goals and outcomes; for example, ESOL learners discuss different types of houses before being challenged to consider features and characteristics of a good home.
- Learners become used to learning collaboratively and lecturers very successfully engage diverse learner groups. They use very interactive learning activities and well-presented resources; for example, lecturers and learners make good use of technology and interesting visual resources to check understanding of new vocabulary, develop literacy skills and correct spelling.
- Lecturers' assessment of learners' starting points, backgrounds and previous attainment is good. Lecturers regularly assess learners' work which helps them improve and develop their skills. Lecturers' tracking of learners' progress and achievements over time is effective, however they do not always record in detail the specific skills developed by learners.
- Lecturers provide supportive and detailed feedback to learners. They check and correct learners' work systematically and ensure that learners understand what is required to complete set tasks and activities successfully.
- Lecturers skilfully promote and include topics in learning that relate to being a good citizen and develop learners' understanding of life in modern Britain. Lecturers are confident about discussing sensitive issues with learners and have had helpful training that equips them to assess risks associated with radicalisation.
- Lecturers do not make enough reference to learners' starting points to set specific targets and learning outcomes to ensure that all learners understand what they need to do to improve their skills and successfully achieve their qualification. Managers recognise the need to further develop lecturers' expertise in meeting learners' different learning needs as well as improving the quality of target-setting and use of learning plans across all accredited and non-accredited provision.

■ Lecturers do not fully exploit opportunities to develop the mathematical skills of learners in subject areas. The identified areas tend to be defined too generally, for example weighing and measuring, and not related closely to vocational content. A very small minority of learners are not punctual to lessons, which causes disruption to the start of learning and is rarely challenged appropriately.

Apprenticeships

are good

- Managers, staff and assessors have high expectations of their apprentices and of what they can achieve. As a result, apprentices make good progress. Managers develop good relationships with employers and apprentices that enable them to plan and provide training that meets their needs. Employers speak highly of the extensive and flexible support that managers and assessors provide; for example, by teaching aspects of essential knowledge to business administration apprentices at the start of their course, so they can apply them more quickly at work.
- Apprentices enjoy their learning and develop good skills for learning and work; they apply themselves well to their work, become more independent and take greater initiative. As a result of close collaboration between employers and assessors, apprentices are able to carry out a broad range of tasks such as collating information on the types and frequency of accidents in local schools or contributing to the running of promotional events. In a minority of cases, apprentices have been given additional responsibilities such as calculating the attendance of pupils in a primary school.
- Trainers and assessors use their up-to-date subject knowledge well to plan lessons and assessments and use a good range of teaching activities and methods to maintain apprentices' interest. As a consequence, apprentices make good progress in lessons and develop skills that reflect current industry practice, such as the use of specialised spreadsheets to generate reports. In a small minority of training sessions, apprentices make slower progress than they could because trainers do not plan lessons that closely meet their individual needs, or they ask too few questions to check apprentices' understanding thoroughly.
- Employers are very positive about the contribution that apprentices make to their businesses, and say that their apprentices' interests and abilities are closely matched to their needs. In some cases, apprentices who secure permanent employment gain promotion; for example, a former apprentice achieved a position as a registrar and now regularly performs marriages and civil partnerships.
- Managers, assessors and employers liaise effectively to ensure that apprentices make good and sustained progress. If problems arise, they are quickly identified and acted on and as a result, apprentices' work improves. For example, an assessor took prompt action when an employer identified the poor timekeeping of an apprentice. The assessor resolved the issue quickly, ensuring the continued smooth running of the business.
- Assessors' reviews of learners' individual progress are regular, frequent and include the setting of clear targets for work completion. They place a sharp emphasis on ensuring that qualification standards are met. However, in too many cases, reviews fail to identify, and set targets for, the personal, professional and social skills that would promote the development of apprentices' skills and knowledge beyond the requirements of the qualification framework.
- Assessors' and trainers' development of apprentices' awareness of aspects of life in modern Britain is good. Apprentices participate well in discussions about controversial topical events and are thoughtful and reflective in their contributions.
- Managers have an effective approach to quality assurance and improvement. They have high expectations of the standards of work of their staff and assessors. Where improvements in teaching and assessment are required, they are quickly identified and managers provide relevant professional development. Managers' systems to track and monitor apprentices' progress are thorough. Where apprentices fall behind, timely interventions ensure that the large majority catch up.
- Assessors focus too narrowly on the evidence requirements of the qualification. There is too little emphasis on ensuring assessment is meaningful and personalised. In many cases, apprentices are developing a skill set that is both broader and more precise than the qualification requires and these aspects of apprentices' development are missed in systems to record progress or target improvements.

Provider details

Type of provider

Local authority

Age range of learners

16+

Approximate number of all learners over the previous

all learners over the p full contract year 4,375

Principal/CEO

Alan Thompson

Website address

www.lbwfadultlearning.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Provider information at the time of the hispection										
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+		
	0	1,372	0	458	0	0	0	0		
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Inte	te	Advanced			Higher				
	16-18 19)+	16-18	19+	16-	16-18			
	23 13		3	9 9		0	0 0			
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+			Total			
		23		6			29			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A									
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency									
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ None									

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Rosy Belton, lead inspector Her Majesty's Inspector

Nick Crombie Her Majesty's Inspector
Heather Barratt-Mold Ofsted Inspector

Kanwaljit Dhillon Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Elliott Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of quality, 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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