

# Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council

Local authority

**Inspection dates**

22–25 November 2016

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

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Adult learners on courses without formal qualifications do not have clear, detailed and demanding learning targets, so it is difficult for them to know what progress they have made and what they need to do to achieve further.
- Management of the subcontracted provision requires improvement. Council managers do not monitor robustly the quality of the adult learning provision or the accuracy of learners' achievement data at the subcontractor.
- Senior managers do not have an accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and which aspects require improvement.
- Council leaders and senior managers do not receive accurate and reliable information about the quality of the provision and thus are not able to provide sufficient challenge to the subcontractor to improve.
- Tutors do not match their teaching well enough to individual learners' abilities and experiences. Consequently, too many learners do not achieve as well as they could.
- Tutors do not ensure that learners have a good understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism which they might encounter.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Tutors support learners well to improve their confidence and help them to overcome the many issues they encounter so that they can participate effectively in learning.
- A good proportion of learners progress to accredited courses and employment.
- Tutors ensure that learners from different backgrounds and cultures work well together and learn from each other.
- The working partnership between the council and many organisations, including employers, benefits learners significantly.
- The subcontractor has been very successful in recruiting learners who are at high risk of poverty and/or social exclusion.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council's community learning is part of the council's Place Directorate. For the last 15 years, the council has subcontracted all its provision to Bolton College as part of a long-term agreement. A manager in the council manages and monitors this contract.
- Almost all courses offered by the subcontractor do not lead to formal qualifications. Most courses are in English, mathematics, basic information and communication technology (ICT), employability and some English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Learning takes place in four community centres, schools and libraries.
- In Bolton, around a fifth of the population are of minority ethnic heritage. About 40% of residents live in neighbourhoods that are among some of the most deprived areas in England. The proportion of the population who do not have qualifications is higher than national rates and around a quarter of people are economically inactive.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Liaise with and monitor the work of the subcontractor more effectively, to improve the quality of adult learning. To do this, ensure that:
  - the responsibilities of the council's staff and the subcontractor's staff are clearly defined, recorded and reviewed regularly
  - managers develop a robust process for evaluating their management of the subcontractor's contract and their progress in achieving the council's goals
  - managers devise with the subcontractor a robust self-assessment process
  - managers monitor the subcontractor's evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and learners' performance, as well as the impact of the subcontractor's actions on outcomes
  - council leaders set clear targets for recruitment to courses and for the progression of learners to further courses and employment and ensure that appropriate provision is delivered to meet these targets.
- Ensure that the council's elected members receive detailed and reliable information about learners' achievements and the quality of provision, so that they can challenge senior managers to improve.
- Make certain that the subcontractor improves the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that tutors:
  - take account in their planning of learners' starting points, experiences and ambitions, so that learners, including the less able and most able, achieve as well as they can
  - set clear and ambitious targets for learners and use these to assess and monitor learners' progress accurately, so that learners are aware of the progress they have made
  - are confident and skilful in discussing the risks of radicalisation with learners.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Council leaders and managers do not have an accurate view of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have not paid sufficient attention to ensuring that learners have an accurate understanding of the progress they are making. Council leaders and managers have not scrutinised learners' achievement data. Consequently, they are not aware of its unreliability and do not have an accurate view of the impact of the provision.
- Management of the subcontractor requires improvement. The council and the subcontractor, Bolton College, have a long-standing partnership to offer provision for adults in Bolton. However, many aspects of subcontracting arrangements and partnership working are intertwined; consequently, accountability is not clear. As a result, too many aspects of contract management are not clearly set, recorded or formally reviewed. For example, senior managers have not set clear and ambitious targets for the number of learners to progress to accredited courses and/or employment. Until very recently, the council and the college did not have a common understanding about whether targets refer to the number of learners who start on courses or the number of courses that learners take. The monitoring and evaluation of the contract are unreliable.
- Arrangements to monitor the quality of the provision lack rigour. The council relies too much on the subcontractor's quality arrangements and does not scrutinise sufficiently the subcontractor's findings about the quality of its provision for adults. The council's evaluation of the quality of lessons is not formally recorded. Consequently, the council is unable to monitor the improvements made or to challenge the subcontractor to improve the quality of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of its quality assurance.
- Managers have not ensured that the subcontractor's self-assessment of adult provision is accurate. They have an over-optimistic view of the quality of the provision. Consequently, the improvement action plan does not ensure swift improvements.
- In response to the council's priorities, the subcontractor has very successfully recruited learners from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, many of whom face multiple difficulties which inhibit their participation in learning. The subcontractor's managers have acted well on feedback from stakeholders and partners, and developed a provision that learners find interesting and valuable. Learners make informed choices about the most suitable courses to join from the wide range available. For example, a high proportion of learners progress from taster courses to longer courses and successfully complete their programmes. Many of the courses offered help learners to develop the skills that employers seek. They also enable learners to increase their families' prospects, by improving the attendance of their children at schools, participating in parents' evenings and helping their children with homework.
- The council and the subcontractor work in effective partnership with many organisations, including Jobcentre Plus and employers. This benefits many learners. Through effective partnerships, managers have set up 'sector-based work academies' which significantly increase learners' chances of getting a job with specific employers. In 2015/16, a number of employers took part in this initiative and a high proportion of learners who started on these programmes gained jobs.

- The subcontractor's staff promote fair treatment and respect for individuals well. Learners with a wide range of cultural experiences and backgrounds benefit from working together and learning about each other. As a result, they develop a culture of tolerance and become better prepared to meet and work with people of different backgrounds. Most tutors are highly competent and confident in promoting democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

### **The governance of the provider**

- Managers do not provide the elected members with a reliable and detailed analysis of the quality of the provision and learners' performance. As a result, the elected members do not have a sound oversight of the provision to challenge the council's senior managers for improvements.
- The elected members have a clear understanding of the contribution of the provision to improving the life chances of learners in Bolton and they focus well on the priorities for the provision. For example, they expect the provision to increase the prospects of learners gaining employment. However, they do not set clear targets to monitor and evaluate how well this is done.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The subcontractor's managers ensure that all staff are appropriately checked for criminal records and any safeguarding concerns. Tutors receive regular training on their responsibilities to keep learners safe and to report any concerns. Managers keep a detailed record of any safeguarding concerns, and the actions they have taken, and inform the council appropriately.
- Tutors have received appropriate training about their responsibility in preventing learners from becoming involved with extremist views and radical ideologies. They are effective in raising learners' awareness of how to stay safe. However, tutors are not always confident in discussing all aspects of the risks that learners can encounter, for example when working online.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Requires improvement**

- In lessons, tutors do not take sufficient account of individual learners' starting points and do not match their teaching techniques to learners' ability and potential. Too often in lessons, all learners work at the same pace and level, using the same learning resources. Tutors do not ensure that the most able learners have sufficient work at higher level to develop their skills and knowledge further. Tutors do not provide the less able learners with suitable work to ensure that they grasp the subject matter. Consequently, these learners struggle to keep up.
- Too many tutors are not effective in checking learning in lessons. Their overuse of questioning to a whole group allows some learners to dominate when giving answers. This leaves other learners out altogether. As a result, tutors do not know which learners have understood the topic, and on occasions tutors move to a new topic too quickly.

- On too many courses, tutors do not ensure that learners have sufficiently detailed learning targets which reflect their abilities and enable them to be clear about their progress and achievements.
- Tutors on practical courses do not ensure that learners can extend and apply their mathematical skills. They do not plan relevant activities that reinforce the development of learners' mathematics skills, or use opportunities which arise in lessons.
- Tutors are very confident in helping learners to understand different cultures and in supporting them for working and living in Bolton. In lessons, tutors use learners' different cultural backgrounds effectively to illustrate, compare and contrast different views and practices. However, tutors are less confident in discussing issues relating to sexual orientation.
- Tutors identify learners' starting points through accurate initial assessment and consequently learners are on courses at the right levels. Tutors are particularly skilled at working with learners who lack confidence and for whom enrolment on a course and participation in learning are significant steps. A number of learners act as community learning ambassadors to provide helpful individual advice to learners. With their help, tutors create nurturing and welcoming learning environments. As a result, learners settle in quickly and feel comfortable in their learning groups.
- Tutors are very aware of learners' difficult circumstances and nervousness about returning to learning. They ensure that learners feel safe to contribute to lesson activities and share experiences. As a result, the vast majority of learners stay on their courses. Learners work well collaboratively and benefit from good peer support. As a result, they develop positive attitudes to learning and enhance their confidence.
- In practical lessons, learners benefit from demonstrations by vocationally skilled and experienced tutors, with clear step-by-step explanations and work that models industry standards and expectations. Tutors ensure that learners have good opportunities to practise their skills and receive individual coaching and feedback on practical skills development. Consequently, learners produce work of a high standard, for example in floristry and in cake decorating. Speakers of other languages improve their English skills successfully.
- In practical lessons, tutors skilfully integrate and promote the effective development of technical language, for example the use of key terminology in cookery and information technology. In floristry, learners are able to recall the Latin names of plants.

### Personal development, behaviour and welfare

### Requires improvement

- Learners are too often not well prepared for study when they come to lessons. Many learners do not bring the work they have already completed or they have folders that are untidy and poorly organised. Consequently, they are unable to refer and respond promptly to tutors' feedback about what they can do well and what they need to do to improve their work.
- Learners do not benefit soon enough from information, advice and guidance about other courses they can attend. In too many cases, they do not receive information, advice and guidance until the end of their courses. As a result, the large majority are not sufficiently aware of opportunities for further learning or training and cannot plan effectively for their future development or career.
- Too many learners are not sufficiently aware of ways to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Tutors do not ensure that learners' understanding of the risks of involvement

with extremist political and religious views is good enough. As a result, they do not understand well enough how to protect themselves and others from these risks. However, learners feel safe when attending lessons that are delivered in community venues.

- Learners demonstrate good awareness of and respect for each other's cultural differences. Learners from different cultural backgrounds work together well in lessons. Learners who work voluntarily as community learning ambassadors to encourage other people to join courses have a sound understanding of factors that can contribute to prejudice and discrimination. They recognise that it is important not to make assumptions based on a person's appearance.
- Learners develop their self-confidence well. As a result, they feel more able to interact effectively with other people in their local communities. Many learners say that they go outside their homes more often since they have started coming to lessons.
- Learners understand the importance of attending lessons regularly and punctually. Attendance is good in the large majority of lessons and most learners arrive on time.

## Outcomes for learners

## Require improvement

- On courses that do not lead to qualifications, managers have not ensured that the subcontractor's arrangements for recognising and recording individual learners' progress and achievement are reliable. On these courses, tutors have not defined clearly what learners need to do to be successful. Consequently all learners who attend are told that they have achieved.
- The most- and least-able learners do not make the progress that they should.
- Only a very small minority of learners have already achieved any formal qualifications before they start their course. In 2015/16, the proportion of learners on accredited courses who achieved their qualifications was good.
- In 2015/16, around a third of learners improved their prospects significantly. After completing their courses, these learners started on 'first step' courses with formal qualifications, or gained jobs. A further third returned and studied on courses without formal accredited qualifications. However, the remaining third of learners who had completed their courses did not continue with their education or gain jobs.
- A significant number of learners develop new skills which help them to improve their lives. Learners become more experienced in debating issues, such as the values that a community should accept. Learners on family learning courses develop a better understanding of the support their children need to improve their achievement in school.
- Most learners develop a range of skills that are useful in the workplace and in everyday life. Learners on ICT courses are able to use spreadsheets to record data and know how to comply with data protection legislation. Learners on cookery courses are able to weigh and measure ingredients accurately, and to calculate and compare the costs of purchasing products at different shops.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	50766
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,500
Director of Place	Stephen Young
Telephone number	01204 333 333
Website	<a href="http://www.boltoncommunity.org/">http://www.boltoncommunity.org/</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	N/A	450	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	N/A							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Bolton College							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by Bolton Council's Unit Manager (Community Learning, Employability 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.

## Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Brenda Clayton	Ofsted Inspector
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Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector



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