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Blackpool Unitary Authority

Community learning and skills

Inspection dates	27–28 June 2017 and 4–5 July 2017

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

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Tutors do not set sufficiently challenging targets on non-accredited courses to ensure that learners make the progress of which they are capable.

- Managers do not record and monitor data well enough on learners' progression. This prevents managers from being able to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision in meeting learners' needs, improving their well-being or helping them to progress into employment.

- Managers' self-assessment is not sufficiently accurate or rigorous. Action plans for improvement lack challenging targets.

- The majority of tutors do not promote effectively learners' understanding of current issues to help them be better prepared to live and work in modern Britain.

- Learners' attendance on the majority of courses is too low.

- Learners do not receive useful and appropriate guidance routinely to help them know how to progress to the next stage of their learning or to employment.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers and staff create inclusive and supportive learning environments that welcome diversity, promote equality and successfully encourage vulnerable adults to make their first steps back to learning.

- Managers work effectively with a wide range of community partners to provide learning for many adults who are at risk of social exclusion and who would benefit most from participating in learning.

- Tutors use effectively activities that interest and motivate learners, who often have challenging personal circumstances, to participate enthusiastically in lessons and to develop a range of useful skills.

- Learners on accredited courses progress well and achieve their qualifications.

- Tutors skilfully integrate the development of learners' English and mathematical skills across the large majority of non-accredited courses.

Full report

Information about the provider

■ The community learning and skills service within Blackpool's unitary authority is part of the directorate responsible for resilience in its communities. Courses are offered at approximately 50 outreach venues including libraries, children's centres, schools, partners' premises and social services centres. The service also works with two subcontractors to provide learning to specific groups of adults. More than three quarters of courses do not lead to formal qualifications (non-accredited courses).

■ Blackpool is ranked the most deprived local authority area in England. It has a total population of around 141,700 and is one of the most densely populated local authority areas. Almost 21% of the working-age population claim out-of-work benefits compared to a national level of 11.2%. Around 13% of residents claim employment support allowance compared with a national average of 6.2%. Substance and alcohol misuse in Blackpool is considered high, with alcohol-related deaths ranking the second highest in England for males. Referrals of high-risk domestic abuse cases are three times the national average. Approximately 36% of adults have no or low qualifications and 30.1% of children live in low-income families.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

■ Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by improving tutors' ability to set meaningful, measurable and, where appropriate, ambitious targets for learners so that tutors are better able to plan, track and evaluate learning and measure learners' progress more accurately.

■ Ensure that managers capture timely and reliable data on learners' destinations and progression to inform their planning and the evaluation of the extent to which the provision meets the needs of learners and the local community, and helps learners gain employment.

■ Improve the rigour of self-assessment by ensuring that managers' evaluation of the provision is sufficiently accurate, that they use performance data to inform their judgements and that improvement plans have clear and measurable targets.

■ Ensure that tutors promote learners' knowledge and understanding of British values so that learners know how the values apply to their personal experiences and circumstances.

■ Further improve attendance by closely monitoring and recording attendance issues and providing support to learners to improve their attendance, including those on drop-in sessions, where appropriate.

■ Ensure that learners receive timely and appropriate information, advice and guidance on their next steps into education, training or employment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Requires improvement**

- Leaders and managers have not maintained the good-quality provision identified at the previous inspection. The self-assessment report does not recognise fully the effect of weak practices on learners' achievements and progress. Managers do not have a secure and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Targets within the quality improvement plan do not link clearly to the areas that managers have identified as requiring improvement and are insufficiently precise to ensure that targeted and measurable action is taken. As a result, learners, the vast majority of whom have multiple barriers to participating in education and employment, do not improve their life chances as much as they should.

- Managers have not developed and implemented sufficiently reliable arrangements to evaluate and improve the quality of learning. Managers focus too much on what tutors are doing rather than evaluating the effect that teaching is having on learners' progress, skills development and acquisition of knowledge. As a result, the feedback that managers give to tutors is too positive and does not allow them to improve their practices swiftly enough.

- Managers have identified that the quality of targets that tutors set for learners on non-accredited courses is not good enough. However, they have not acted swiftly enough to improve tutors' skills in setting targets for these learners. As a result, they do not know precisely the progress that learners make in lessons and over time. Consequently, the data that managers use to report learners' achievement on these courses is not accurate enough.

- Managers collect a wide range of data about different aspects of the provision, for example about the proportion of learners on different types of courses. However, they do not have sufficiently reliable information on how well learners progress to their next steps in education or employment after the completion of their courses. As a result, managers cannot evaluate fully or modify the provision sufficiently to increase the number of learners who progress to further learning or employment.

- Managers have not ensured that tutors have received sufficient training to equip them to promote effectively the values that help learners to be better prepared to live and work in modern Britain.

- Performance management is improving. Managers have introduced a new approach to performance management that links appraisal, outcomes from lesson observation activities and staff development to give a comprehensive overview of staff performance. However, managers do not set staff specific enough targets relating to their roles to allow them to improve their individual performance.

- Managers are increasingly more focused on improving learners' attendance. Despite early indications of improvement, expectations for learners to attend learning sessions and to arrive on time are not yet high enough.

- The management of subcontractors is effective. Managers select carefully subcontractors who can provide courses that the service does not offer, or who can work with particular groups of learners. For example, one subcontractor provides courses in English for

speakers of other languages and courses that allow learners to progress to their next stage of learning, such as in catering and customer services. Another subcontractor offers courses specifically for women who have had challenging personal or family circumstances.

- Managers are successful in developing learning environments that inspire fair treatment and respect for individuals. Learners from different backgrounds, and who have a wide range of experiences and personal difficulties, benefit from learning and working together. As a result, they are better prepared to work with people of different backgrounds in Blackpool.

- Managers are successful in recruiting learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to courses. As a result, many learners feel less socially isolated, and a significant number report that they have improved their physical or mental health.

- Managers have developed good partnerships with a significant number of organisations to ensure that learners with unsettled lives or long periods of unemployment make their first steps back to learning. As a result, a significant number of learners are new to the service, and most have little previous educational attainment. The vast majority of learning centres used by the service are located appropriately in the areas of greatest disadvantage, which improves engagement with learners.

The governance of the provider

- Governors have a broad range of skills and experience that reflect the needs of the service and its learners well. They demonstrate a high level of commitment to developing the provision and have a clear understanding of the contribution of the provision to improving the life chances for learners in Blackpool.

- Governors work collaboratively and closely with managers to develop the future strategy and ambitions of the service. However, governors have only recently enhanced arrangements for the scrutiny of the service's performance, and the head of service has not had an appraisal meeting or performance targets set for two years.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Managers and tutors benefit from a wide network of support services for safeguarding. They work closely and effectively with the safeguarding team within the adult social care service, other agencies and partners to ensure that learners are safe.

- Leaders carry out appropriate recruitment checks. Staff know how to ensure and maintain safe working practices and how to report any concerns about learners' safety.

- Learners know how to keep themselves safe. They receive detailed information and advice at induction or at their drop-in session on how to keep themselves safe and what they need to do if they have a concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment   Requires improvement

- Tutors do not set sufficiently challenging or measurable targets for learners on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications. Tutors do not use information about learners' starting points or their progress well enough to plan learning that is sufficiently challenging for the most able learners or is broken down into small enough steps for learners who have more complex needs. Too often in lessons, all learners work at the same pace and level, using the same learning resources.

- Tutors' feedback on learners' progress on non-accredited courses lacks specific information to guide learners on what they have done well and how they can improve further. Feedback from tutors, both verbally and on learners' assessed work, provides good encouragement and praise. Too often this does not identify the skills learners have developed or how well they are progressing.

- Learners who attend non-accredited drop-in courses do not move on to other courses routinely. While tutors initially assess the needs of these learners well, they are unable to identify further learning opportunities or to set increasingly challenging targets over time. As a result, managers are unable to monitor the value of the drop-in services on improving the life chances of this group of learners, as the destinations of these learners are largely unknown.

- Learners on English and mathematics accredited courses benefit from accurate assessment of their starting points. As a result, learners are on courses at the right level and the vast majority achieve their qualifications.

- The majority of tutors use activities well to interest and motivate learners, who often have challenging personal circumstances. Consequently, learners participate enthusiastically in lessons. They develop a range of useful skills that they apply to their personal and working lives. For example, in a functional skills English lesson, learners were able to articulate how they use their reading skills to understand use-by dates on perishable foods and have learned to enjoy reading newspapers.

- In the majority of lessons, tutors integrate English and mathematical skills effectively into teaching and learning. Learners in an information technology lesson demonstrated that they have improved spelling, punctuation and grammar in their written text and can enter simple formulae into a spreadsheet. In a drop-in cookery session, learners demonstrated their English and mathematical skills through reading the recipe and analysing quantities of ingredients required if they were to double the number of people eating the meal.

- Tutors are well qualified and experienced. They use their expertise well to involve and sustain the attention of learners in lessons. Tutors are very aware of learners' difficult circumstances and nervousness about returning to learning. They ensure that learners feel confident in contributing to lesson activities. As a result, learners work well collaboratively and benefit from good peer support.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare   Requires improvement

- Managers and tutors do not promote the importance of good attendance well enough. Learners' attendance is often sporadic and this hinders their progress towards the achievement of their learning goals.

- Too few learners benefit from appropriate advice and guidance. Less than a third of learners on non-accredited courses receive formal information and advice on careers options and the next steps in their learning. Tutors provide guidance for individuals who wish to progress to another course. However, for those learners who complete a number of non-accredited courses, learning plans are not effective in tracking and recording progress over time. As a result, tutors' advice gives insufficient focus to learners' longer-term aims and progression opportunities.

- Learners who are ready for employment do not benefit from participating in purposeful work-related activities that would enhance their employment prospects. Learners on employment-related programmes do not have the opportunity to get involved in practical work situations. This is preventing them from applying the knowledge, skills and work-related attitudes that they have been developing on their course.

- Learners behave well in lessons and show respect for their tutors and each other. However, tutors do not promote effectively learners' understanding of British values. As a result, learners' knowledge of what constitutes British values and how they apply to their personal experiences and circumstances is not good enough.

- Supportive and dedicated tutors enable learners on community and family learning courses to overcome many complex barriers to learning. As a result, learners become more confident and independent. A small proportion of learners have begun to take their first steps to employment.

- Tutors develop learners' personal and social skills well. Learners report how their programmes have given them a fresh start and are helping them to develop self-confidence. For example, learners on an employment-related programme, who have been unemployed for long periods due to differing complex personal circumstances, are developing interpersonal and communication skills that are raising their self-esteem. Learners on a family learning programme produce creative and colourful posters to help their children understand punctuation. Some of the posters have been adopted by the school and are used to support the development of children's literacy.

- A very small number of learners who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported effectively through the 'Project Search' initiative to gain employment. Tutors support these learners well through carefully chosen work placements to help them develop the skills required to progress to employment. Learners take great pride in their achievements, and their improved communication and attitudes are recognised and welcomed by their parents and employers. The vast majority progress to sustained, paid employment.

- Learners appreciate the safe, inclusive and accessible learning environments provided by the service. They feel safe and understand the arrangements that are in place to protect them.

Outcomes for learners   Requires improvement

- The arrangements for monitoring learners' progress and outcomes on non-accredited courses are not rigorous enough. Too often, targets are not sufficiently defined for learners or tutors to use them as a robust measure of achievement. In too many instances, learners self-assess their start and end points, and tutors' comments in

learning diaries do not relate specifically enough to learners' overall aims.

- Data on learners' progression is incomplete. In 2015/16, the destinations of too many learners from non-accredited courses was unknown. As a result, managers are unable to monitor routinely the effect that learning has on learners' achievement and progression. However, of the known learner destinations, managers are able to state precisely how many learners progress to a higher-level course, gain employment or progress to a different subject, for example English and then mathematics, at the same level.

- Achievements on accredited English and mathematics courses have improved significantly over the past three years and are now just below those for other similar providers nationally. This is due, in particular, to tutors assessing more effectively learners' starting points. As a result, learners enrol on courses that are more appropriate for their needs and personal circumstances.

- The standard of learners' work on accredited courses is high. Learners make at least the progress expected of them and a significant minority of learners progress to the next level of learning.

- There are no significant variations in the performance of different groups of learners on qualification-based courses.

- Learners who attend well enjoy their learning and gain good skills and confidence. As a result, they become more independent in their everyday lives.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50737
Type of provider	Community learning and skills
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,448
Principal/CEO	Mr Mike Taplin
Telephone number	01253 477000
Website	www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Education-and-schools/Adult-Learning/Adult-learning.aspx

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+
	1	188	-	19	-	-	-	-

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 to 16	-
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Blackpool and the Fylde College UR Potential

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality, curriculum and life skills manager, 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 and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and partners; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Suzanne Wainwright, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Brenda Clayton	Ofsted Inspector
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Shahram Safavi	Her Majesty's Inspector

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