

Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority

Local authority

Inspection dates

17–20 October 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	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too many adult learners do not attend their courses regularly and on time; consequently, they do not develop the skills and knowledge to progress.
- Adult learners on courses without formal qualifications do not have detailed and demanding learning targets based on their starting points. As a result, they do not know accurately the skills that they develop and what they achieve.
- The proportion of adult learners, learners on study programmes and apprentices who achieve their qualifications, and do so within the planned time, is not high enough.
- Leaders and managers do not collect and use accurate and timely data to identify areas for improvement and take effective actions to tackle them.
- Managers do not have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment and have been too slow to improve the quality of the provision for most learners.
- Council leaders and senior managers have not managed staffing changes well enough to ensure swift and sustained improvements in the provision; outcomes for most learners require improvement.
- Council leaders and senior managers do not receive detailed and reliable information to be able to hold managers to account for making improvements, ensuring that the provision meets the strategic priorities of the council and the needs of the most disadvantaged residents of Stoke-on-Trent.

The provider has the following strengths

- Current apprentices receive a good quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment.
- The large majority of learners who attend regularly, many with significant barriers to participation in learning, improve their confidence and self-esteem and are motivated to improve their daily lives.
- Learners and apprentices know how to keep themselves safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Tutors use examples relevant to learners' and apprentices' lives and experiences to ensure that they develop a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of modern Britain.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Employment, Learning and Skills Section (the service) is part of Learning Services, in the Children and Family Services Directorate of Stoke-on-Trent, a unitary authority in the West Midlands. The service offers adult learning, apprenticeships, traineeships and study programmes. Approximately 80% of the funding is allocated for provision for adult learners. During the week of inspection, only a few learners were on study programmes, and there were no trainees.
- Around 30% of households in Stoke-on-Trent have two or more indicators of disadvantage; this is higher than the national rate. Some 20% of households with dependent children do not have adults in employment. Stoke-on-Trent is ranked as the fourteenth most deprived local authority area in England; approximately 15% of adults do not have any qualifications.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who attend regularly and on time by ensuring that:
 - all tutors set high expectations for learners' attendance and punctuality and communicate this expectation clearly to learners
 - managers use timely information about the attendance and punctuality of learners and take effective measures to support learners who do not attend regularly and on time.
- Ensure that tutors set learners clear, detailed and ambitious learning targets; make certain that tutors use clear success measures to assess and record learners' progress and achievements against these targets, so that learners know the progress they are making and have an accurate understanding of their achievements.
- Ensure that assessors set all apprentices clear and detailed learning and skills development targets and review their progress well, so that the proportion of apprentices who complete – and do so within the planned time – increases.
- Ensure that managers collect and use data and information well so that they can monitor the provision and ensure that it meets well the priorities of the most disadvantaged residents in Stoke-on-Trent.
- Ensure that the council's elected members and senior managers receive detailed, reliable and timely information about learners' achievements and the quality of the provision, so that they can support and challenge managers to make improvements.
- Ensure that the council leaders and senior managers, when planning for staff changes, recognise the importance of an established staffing structure and prioritise the rapid improvement of the provision for learners.
- Ensure that managers evaluate the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment thoroughly and reliably, and that they use the findings from the evaluation well to improve the effectiveness of all tutors' and assessors' teaching and training.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- A long period of instability in staffing at all levels in the service has contributed to the slow pace of improvement in the quality of the provision. Council senior leaders did not ensure that they made improvements to the provision when implementing changes, especially at leadership and management level of the service. Consequently, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment for too many learners requires improvement, as found at the previous inspection. Learners' achievements have not risen to good levels across all provision types.
- The service's senior manager with responsibility for the provision started very recently with a team of managers; they have begun to put in place actions for improvement. However, too many of the actions are yet to have a full impact. To reverse the sharp decline in the achievements of learners on study programmes in 2016/17, managers have increased the number of lessons in English and mathematics for current learners. Managers are implementing new procedures to collect timely information about learners' attendance and punctuality. Currently, they do not have this information to enable them to take specific improvement actions. Managers have introduced new arrangements to ensure that tutors recognise and record accurately the progress and achievements of learners on courses that do not lead to formal qualifications. These arrangements are not yet fully effective.
- Quality improvement policies and procedures, including observations of teaching, training, learning and assessment, do not lead to improvements. This is because observers focus too much on processes and paperwork rather than on the impact of teaching and training on learners' progress and skills development. Observers' feedback to tutors is not consistently accurate and does not lead to sufficient improvements in teaching, learning and assessment practices. Leaders and managers recognise most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, and the improvement action plan is sound.
- Managers are becoming more successful in using performance management to improve tutors' and assessors' practice. They provide many useful staff development sessions for tutors and assessors. However, they do not evaluate well the impact of staff development activities on the effectiveness of teaching and assessment. For example, despite staff development on progress reviews, the learners' and apprentices' reviews are not consistently good.
- Managers use labour market information and the level of demand from potential learners to offer a wide range of courses. They have developed productive partnerships with many organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus, and employers, including local hospitals, to offer bespoke courses. They manage subcontractors well to engage vulnerable learners, such as those with mental health issues. However, managers do not use well enough information on learners who start courses to ensure that the council's priorities in engaging learners from disadvantaged groups and those who are unemployed are met. Consequently, they are not fully aware how well each course meets the priorities of the council and the needs of the most disadvantaged residents in Stoke-on-Trent. Managers have recruited too few male learners for the last two consecutive years; they are developing new courses to attract more men to the provision.

- Managers have introduced new policies and procedures to improve the advice that learners receive before they start their courses and about their next steps. There are strong indications that this revised advice and guidance arrangement has had a positive effect on learners, who are better informed about the content of their courses. For example, since the beginning of the year, the proportion of learners who have stayed on their course has increased, but it is too early for the full impact to be evaluated.
- Senior managers, tutors and assessors have ensured that learners and apprentices have a clear understanding of the importance of fair treatment and respect for individuals' differences. At the previous inspection, learners' understanding of British values required improvement. Managers have been successful in eradicating this weakness. They have worked hard to ensure that learners and apprentices develop further their values and attitudes for successful life in modern Britain.

The governance of the provider

- Elected council members and senior leaders responsible for the oversight of the service's work do not receive sufficient, detailed information about the provision. For example, they do not have accurate information about learners' performance, the quality of lessons and the effectiveness of the courses in engaging hard-to-reach learners. Consequently, they are not able to challenge service leaders and senior managers for any underperformance.
- The council-elected members and leaders have appropriate expertise to support and challenge the performance of the service.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff are appropriately checked for criminal records and any safeguarding concerns. Tutors and assessors receive regular training on their responsibilities to keep learners safe and report any concerns. Managers keep a detailed record of any safeguarding issues and the responses made.
- Tutors and assessors have received appropriate training about their responsibility in preventing learners from becoming involved with extremist groups and radical ideologies. They effectively raise learners' and apprentices' awareness of how to stay safe, including when working online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The irregular attendance and late arrival of too many learners to their lessons have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning in many lessons. Learners' irregular attendance results in those who attend regularly not receiving the level of challenge in their learning that they should. Too often, these learners have to wait for learners with poor attendance to catch up with work; as a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Tutors do not take sufficient account of individual learners' starting points, including their prior skills, to match their teaching methods to meet learners' differing needs and abilities. In too many lessons, learners work at the same level; tutors give them the same

learning tasks and objectives, irrespective of their prior attainment and potential. Consequently, the most able learners are not stretched in their learning and do not achieve their potential. The less able learners do not develop a sufficient depth of understanding.

- Tutors and assessors do not ensure that learners and apprentices have sufficiently detailed learning targets that extend them to their full potential. In many adult courses, tutors set learning targets that are too generic and which do not focus sufficiently on the specific skills learners need to develop. Consequently, teachers do not assess learners' achievements accurately and reliably. For example, the achievements of a small minority of learners who produce a high standard of work are not recorded. Not all learners are clear about the skills that they develop, the progress that they make or their achievements.
- Tutors' and assessors' feedback on apprentices' and learners' work does not provide them with enough information about how they should improve their writing. Tutors annotate learners' work with evaluations such as 'well done', without helping learners to understand what they have done well or how to improve their use of English. As a result, learners do not improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Study programmes meet the requirements. Learners benefit from appropriate work experience that helps them to be better informed about their next steps. They attend vocational training at level 1 and lessons in English and mathematics. Currently, of the seven learners on study programmes, three have started their work experience and the rest know what tutors have planned for them before the end of term. Tutors prepare learners well to understand what is expected from them when in work placements, for example behaving responsibly. So far, in the current year, most learners attend regularly and on time.
- Tutors and assessors have good subject knowledge and relevant industrial and/or commercial experience that they use to link lesson topics to the local employment opportunities. For example, they discuss how the skills that learners develop will help them to find jobs in the local supermarkets. Many tutors provide learners with useful learning resources to encourage them to practise their taught topics after their lessons.
- Tutors and assessors use a good range of examples relevant to learners' and apprentices' experience and everyday life to help them to gain a better insight into different cultures and prepare them for life and work in Stoke-on-Trent. They include effectively topics about the risks of holding extreme illegal views or taking radical actions. Learners and apprentices develop a good understanding of how to recognise potential risks that could have an adverse impact on them or their families.

Tutors are particularly skilful at teaching and supporting learners who are not confident about learning or participating in discussions. Through creating an inclusive and friendly learning environment, tutors encourage these learners to progress tentatively towards employment and improving their life prospects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too many learners do not receive sufficient encouragement to attend their lessons regularly and on time. This contributes to their slow progress; they do not improve the skills that employers seek, such as taking responsibility for reliable and regular attendance.

- Learners who do not have qualifications in mathematics or English are encouraged to develop these skills in the context of vocational areas, such as when working as sales staff in shops. However, too many learners do not become sufficiently confident, especially in using mathematics.
- The majority of learners have multiple barriers to learning and employment, such as poor previous experiences of education or family problems. Adult learners and apprentices who attend often and regularly enjoy their learning and grow in confidence and self-esteem. They demonstrate mature attitudes and behaviour and are respectful towards one another and their tutors. They understand how to work well with people from different cultures and backgrounds.
- Most learners have a sufficient awareness of their possible next steps. They are well informed about how to contact the advice and guidance staff in the service to help them with their choices, including gaining further qualifications with other providers.
- Learners are well informed about how to stay safe and to protect themselves from the risks associated with using the internet and social media sites. Learners speak articulately about how to recognise the risks and warning signs associated with radicalisation and extremism. They feel safe in the learning venues and know how to report any concerns about their safety.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- On courses that do not lead to formal qualifications, managers have not ensured that tutors accurately and reliably recognise and record individual learners' progress and achievements. On these courses, too many tutors do not define clearly what learners need to do to be successful; the only consistent expectation is that learners should attend most of their lessons. Consequently, all learners who attend regularly are considered to have – and told that they have – achieved.
- Most current learners are making the progress expected of them given their starting points. However, the most able learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Despite a significant increase in 2016/17 in the proportion of adult learners who gained their qualifications compared to the previous year, their achievements require further improvement.
- In 2016/17, the proportion of learners on study programmes who achieved declined to low levels. The proportion of apprentices who gained their qualifications, and did so within the planned time, improved. However, too many did not complete, and did not do so on time.
- The proportion of learners who gained their qualifications in functional skills and mathematics at level 1 in 2016/17 was low.
- In 2016/17, too few learners on study programmes progressed to other courses. A high proportion of adult learners progressed to further courses or employment on completion. Many apprentices gain extra responsibilities at work.
- The work produced by most learners, including learners on study programmes, is at the standard that is expected. A minority of learners, such as learners in arts lessons, produce a high standard of work. Apprentices' work is generally of a good standard.

- There are no significant performance differences for any groups of learners.
- A significant number of adult learners who attend regularly develop new skills from their low starting points that help them to improve their lives and those of their family. Learners on family learning courses develop a good understanding of what their children learn in schools and how they can help them to learn, for example by using cut-out shapes to understand fractions. Apprentices develop good work-related skills in their workplaces, such as becoming more effective in dealing with customers' enquiries and showing initiative. Learners on study programmes understand employers' expectations through their work placements.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Adult learning courses make up the large majority of the provision. Around 20% of learners on adult learning courses are on courses with formal qualifications. The service offers a wide range of courses in English, mathematics, family learning, arts, modern foreign languages and use of computers.
- On too many courses that do not have formal qualifications, tutors do not use learners' starting points well enough to plan and deliver learning activities that ensure that learners develop new skills to their full potential and progress.
- Tutors support well those learners who fall behind to catch up. However, they do not set demanding targets and learning tasks for the most able learners to help them to achieve their full potential. Tutors rely too much on learners' attainment of generic learning outcomes to monitor and record what they achieve. In too many sessions, all learners progress at the same pace as they complete the same activity. For example, in functional skills lessons that include learners with ability levels from entry 3 to level 2, tutors set learners the same task of converting units of weight and measurement.
- Tutors do not routinely signpost or correct errors made in learners' written notes and assessed work. They do not consistently provide learners with useful feedback or corrections to help them avoid repeating mistakes. For example, a group of learners used capital letters in the middle of sentences and the tutor did not comment on this.
- In the more effective lessons, tutors use their good subject knowledge to develop or improve learners' skills. They use a good range of teaching techniques, for example group work and discussions, to build upon learners' prior knowledge or experiences.
- Tutors prepare most adult learners on courses with qualifications effectively to achieve their goals, including employment or self-employment. A significant number of these learners, whose main learning aim is to improve their skills in English and mathematics, are now better prepared to achieve a qualification at a higher level than their prior attainment. The impact on the proportion of learners who will complete examinations successfully cannot yet be evaluated.
- In family learning lessons, tutors skilfully help learners to use learning resources with their children more effectively. They show parents how to make reading with children more interesting or how to help children with their writing skills. Many learners feel

confident to create learning resources for their children that they can use at home. Tutors on these courses are successful in creating a fun environment for learning that results in learners being more open about their barriers to learning and supporting their children.

- Most adult learners who study for qualifications receive good support to identify their next steps and progression options. Staff who specialise in careers guidance attend sessions at the end of accredited courses to inform learners about vacancies and career opportunities in Stoke-on-Trent. Advice and guidance arrangements for learners who are on courses that do not lead to qualifications are not yet established fully.

Apprenticeships

Good

- At the time of the inspection, 47 apprentices were on programmes at intermediate and advanced levels, mostly in business administration and sports, with a few in hospitality and catering. The council employs most of the apprentices, with the remainder working at a local football club and for private sector employers.
- The provision meets in full the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship programme. Tutors and assessors have current and relevant experience; a majority have recent experience of working in administration, sports, or hospitality and catering. They use their specialist subject knowledge and technical experience well to ensure that apprentices develop a sound knowledge and understanding of current practice in their vocational areas.
- Tutors and assessors plan off-the-job training lessons well. Apprentices attend a half-day training session every two weeks. This helps them to link practice at work to theory, thus deepening their knowledge and understanding. Tutors plan these sessions well and use a wide range of learning materials and resources to extend apprentices' understanding and skills. As a result, the majority of current apprentices are making good progress towards completion of their qualifications within the planned timescales.
- Employers support apprentices well in their training and development. For example, apprentices employed by the council benefit from the wide range of staff training and development opportunities that council employees are required to attend. Council staff who supervise apprentices ensure that they have sufficient time during the week to study and to attend functional skills classes and off-the-job training.
- Apprentices develop good practical skills that help them to progress to the next level or gain additional responsibility at work. For example, apprentices are able to use complex spreadsheets, communicate effectively with senior colleagues, plan and manage sports coaching sessions, and work with school children to develop their health and fitness.
- Apprentices develop good communication skills, especially in official correspondence and when communicating with colleagues and customers of the city council and external stakeholders. A specialist tutor of English and mathematics provides regular extra help for apprentices with their English and mathematics skills, including for those who have already achieved a good GCSE grade in these subjects.
- Most assessors use apprentices' starting points effectively to offer them the support that they need to progress. Managers and assessors monitor the performance of apprentices well and ensure that apprentices and their employers know what they need to do to complete. Apprentices receive frequent and regular visits from assessors, as well as

detailed feedback on their progress. However, assessors do not consistently help apprentices to learn how to avoid repeating mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

- Workplace supervisors and managers are involved well in apprentices' progress reviews and in the setting of learning targets. In a few instances, assessors set targets that are too broad and lack sufficient details to help apprentices to make good progress. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices do not complete their studies within the planned period.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54636
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	4,300
Strategic Manager	Julie Obada
Telephone number	01782 235797
Website	https://www.stoke.gov.uk/info/20027/adult_education

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+
	-	340	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	20	-	-	27	-	-		
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	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<div>■ Bright Futures</div> <div>■ Changes</div> <div>■ The Clay Foundation</div> <div>■ St John Ambulance</div> <div>■ Landau</div>							

Information about this inspection

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

Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nick Gadfield	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Scanlan	Ofsted Inspector
Jai Sharda	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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