

Cumbria County Council

Community Learning and Skills

Inspection dates

30 January – 2 February 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Senior leaders and managers have been relentless in successfully eliminating the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Many learners develop very effective personal, social and employability skills, including improved confidence and self-belief through good-quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Learners benefit from effective guidance and coaching from skilled tutors that assist them to progress to their next steps.
- The large majority of learners make good progress on their courses, gain new skills and acquire new knowledge, which helps them to realise their personal targets and move to their next steps.
- Too many learners on accredited courses in 2016/17 left their courses early and did not achieve their qualifications.
- A small minority of learners do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders and managers have not yet implemented an effective English and mathematics strategy to ensure that learners enhance consistently their existing skills and experiences.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Cumbria County Council provides services for England's second largest county. Over half of its population are based in rurally isolated communities, compared to a national rate of 18%. At the time of the inspection, the organisation had 3,077 learners, with more than one-third of these unemployed or from disadvantaged groups. Courses are provided in six geographical districts across the county, with courses aligned to meet the requirements of these communities. The large majority of learners attend courses in community venues. A very small proportion of learners attend courses that lead to a qualification.
- The unemployment rate in Cumbria is significantly lower than that of the north-west of England and the national rate. The proportion of residents with a level 2 qualification or above is slightly above that of the north-west of England and broadly in line with the national rate. The proportion of pupils in the county who achieved English and mathematics with a grade 9 to 4 is above that of the north-west of England and significantly above the national rate.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should implement an appropriate English and mathematics strategy. Tutors should ensure that these subjects, where appropriate, are fully considered when planning learning to enhance learners' existing skills and experiences.
- Leaders and managers should continue to focus on reducing the proportion of learners who leave their courses early, to ensure that the significant progress made in 2017/18 is maintained.
- Leaders, managers and tutors should improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring the results of assessments completed at the start of the course are used to tailor courses to meet the requirements of all learners so they make the progress of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders, managers and governors have been successful in their efforts to deal with the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. They have implemented wide-ranging managerial and staffing changes and have developed successfully a culture of high expectation and mutual respect.
- Senior leaders, managers and governors have developed a very clear vision and strategy to revitalise the service. These changes have a beneficial impact on raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and improving learners' achievements. Senior leaders and managers successfully design courses that support county council and local enterprise partnership priorities very effectively. As a result, learners acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding that improve their employment opportunities and career prospects, in addition to improving their personal effectiveness and well-being.
- Senior leaders and managers have developed very good partnerships across the county. They work closely with local councillors, Jobcentre Plus, schools, voluntary organisations and children's services to help them to identify and respond to specific employability and learning requirements. They are committed to ensuring that learning programmes are responsive to meet specific requirements in the six very diverse council areas, for example providing specialist-skills courses to support self-employment, such as jewellery-making, for micro-businesses in South Lakes.
- Senior leaders and managers manage the performance of staff effectively. The annual appraisal process provides a good opportunity for all staff to review the quality of their work and the contribution they make to the service. Managers deal with staff underperformance swiftly. Underperforming staff receive good support to help them improve. Leaders and managers begin capability proceedings when the required improvements do not take place. Staff who continue to underperform leave the service.
- Subcontracting arrangements are good. The annual procurement process is stringent. Leaders and managers monitor subcontractors' performance rigorously and hold them to account for learners' progress and achievements. Subcontractors whose performance does not meet the required high standards lose their contract. Subcontractor staff benefit from the good support and guidance given by senior leaders and managers. They value the partnership group meetings in which they share good practice and discuss strategies for recruiting learners and engaging them as fully as possible in learning.
- Senior leaders and managers have implemented an effective observation of teaching, learning and assessment system. The judgements of those that observe lessons are accurate and result in clear actions to help tutors improve their teaching practice. Advanced practitioners provide good support to tutors to help them improve through useful coaching and mentoring sessions.
- Learners have access to community provision in local learning venues, which they find particularly convenient. Learning venues are welcoming environments where tutors promote equality and inclusion very effectively.
- Targeted professional development and training sessions tackle key developmental themes, such as setting actions for learners to improve their knowledge and skills or for

tutors to improve the use of individual learning plans. Leaders, managers and tutors have good access to accurate and up-to-date data to enable them to monitor learners' attendance and retention. However, managers have not sufficiently ensured that tutors record and monitor learners' progress consistently.

- The self-assessment process is very thorough and managed skilfully. Senior leaders, managers and tutors have identified accurately the strengths and areas where improvements are required. Improvement plans are clear and concise and apportion responsibility for improvement to specific individuals across the service. These actions are meticulously monitored, which has resulted in significant improvements at the service since the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders and managers place a high priority on developing learners' English and mathematics in all courses. However, as they acknowledge, they have not yet produced an overall strategy to guide staff in the detailed and consistent implementation and inclusion of these essential subjects in all courses.
- Learners receive effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) before, or at the time of, enrolling on a course and when required afterwards. However, too few staff have received substantial IAG training. Consequently, the quality of IAG is not improving rapidly enough. External organisations provide careers guidance but, as the provider acknowledges, a more consistent approach to careers guidance is required.

The governance of the provider

- The governors, who are senior council officers, are enthusiastic about the service and the beneficial impact it is having on the lives of adult learners throughout the county. They have a clear vision for the service and are very strong advocates of adult learning.
- Governors have very varied and relevant experience. They challenge insightfully and support effectively senior leaders and managers. They monitor carefully the management and impact of the service. As senior leaders and managers acknowledge, additional external governors are required to bring an external perspective to board meetings.
- The terms of reference of the community-learning programme board are very relevant to local requirements. They reflect the vision of the service, which is 'strengthening and sustaining the people and communities of Cumbria through the power of learning'. As governors are aware, their roles and responsibilities need further clarification so that identified named governors lead aspects of the board's work and accountability is strengthened.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff who work with vulnerable adults are checked prior to employment. The designated safeguarding officer and the deputy designated safeguarding officer are appropriately trained and experienced. The procedures for dealing with safeguarding disclosures, or related disclosures, are clear and specific. Staff deal with any disclosures speedily and efficiently, ensuring that learners receive prompt support.
- All staff, including subcontractors' staff, complete annual safeguarding training. Learners demonstrate an awareness of e-safety and the dangers associated with the internet and

social media. Leaders and managers place a high priority on ensuring that safe learning environments are available to all learners. Learners and staff know whom to talk to if they have a safeguarding or safeguarding-related issue. Learners are aware of the 'Prevent' duty and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Qualified tutors use their skills and experience successfully to create engaging and inclusive learning opportunities and resources. Learners are motivated, eager and enjoy their studies. Tutors who work for subcontractors benefit from the council's professional development programme, which assists tutors to enhance their teaching practice and to prepare learners more effectively for the world of work.
- Learners benefit from effective guidance, coaching and experience of vocational and subject experts who support them to develop effective practical and vocational skills. For example, learners on dressmaking courses develop the practical skills needed to make clothes for themselves and their family members, helping to reduce pressures on limited household budgets. A few learners use their dressmaking skills as volunteers in their local communities, making nativity costumes for local schools or repairing altar linen and kneeling cushions for local churches.
- Learners develop effective personal, social and employability skills in lessons, which provides them with the skills to achieve the targets that they have set for themselves at the start of the course. For example, learners on information technology courses develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe online. They learn how to use parental controls and permissions when using mobile applications and social media, as well as developing an understanding of how to spot fake news and how to avoid online fraud.
- Many tutors incorporate mathematics into lessons that effectively develop learners' applied numeracy skills. For example, learners on an upholstery course develop their calculation and measurement skills to cut fabric accurately, while parents on family learning courses develop a good understanding of how best to support their children's learning of mathematics. Family learning tutors empower parents and carers with the current terminology and techniques, which mirror those used in their children's primary schools, so they are able to support their children with homework tasks.
- Tutors regularly check and assess learners' work. The majority of learners benefit from specific and helpful feedback from friendly, caring and supportive tutors. This support is particularly beneficial for learners who lack confidence and have low self-esteem. For example, learners returning to education increase their self-confidence, self-awareness and aspirations to enable them to progress to higher-level courses and back into employment.
- Most tutors take care to create safe and inclusive learning environments where learners develop, learn and grow in confidence. Learners with additional and high needs benefit from good levels of support. Tutors identify learners' specific support requirements promptly, and use a range of appropriate support strategies to ensure that learners make swift progress towards their learning goals and aspirations.
- Tutors do not always use the results of assessments of learners' starting points to set

challenging work. Consequently, tutors do not always develop learners' individual skills and knowledge further. This leads to a minority of learners not making the progress of which they are capable.

- Tutors often grasp opportunities to promote and nurture learners' understanding of the importance of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. A small minority of tutors do not sufficiently extend learners' understanding of wider diversity issues when valuable opportunities present themselves in lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners enthuse about the development of their confidence, self-belief and self-esteem. Learners who have not been engaged in meaningful employment for some time are very appreciative of the opportunities that tutors provide. For example, art-therapy learners improve their self-esteem and now feel more confident when meeting new people for the first time.
- Learners receive useful information, advice and guidance prior to, during and on the conclusion of the course. This ensures that they are on the most appropriate course to meet their personal aspirations. Consequently, most learners progress to their intended destinations, whether that be further study, employment or apprenticeships.
- Learners benefit from helpful information to improve their well-being. Learners on a beginner's cookery course prepare a healthy pasta bake successfully and discuss the health imperatives of eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly in achieving and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- The large majority of learners develop useful mathematical skills in their lessons that tutors effectively contextualise into the subject that they are studying. For example, learners on a beginners' drawing course develop their understanding of geometry, shape and ratio to develop their skills in drawing with more accurate perspective and proportionality.
- The majority of learners make good progress in developing new and highly useful written, oral and speaking skills, which has a demonstrable impact on their lives. For example, learners benefit from gaining the skills and confidence to complete an application form that has resulted in them gaining an apprenticeship at the local council. Other learners acquire skills in the use of persuasive language, such as emotive words and rhetorical questions. This enables them to draw more effectively on these skills when trying to persuade others to adopt a particular viewpoint. However, not all learners gain these skills due to inconsistent practice across the service.
- Learners are appreciative of the new skills that they acquire and the knowledge they gain in developing their digital skills. Art learners benefit from having access to up-to-date hardware and software in art classes that allow them to view and annotate their art in a digital form and compare and contrast their work. Other learners appreciate the opportunity to use computers, laptops and mobile electronic devices to develop their information technology skills.
- Many learners have an awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. For example, learners on an intermediate drawing course speak confidently of the importance

of not giving out personal details or responding to phishing emails that they have received. Learners feel safe and are aware of who they contact should they have any concerns about their own or anyone else's safety. They receive information on induction about the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and are aware of the different forms in which this could present itself.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- In 2016/17, the proportion of learners who completed their courses successfully increased, and is now high. Current learners make good progress on their courses, developing relevant skills that assist them to achieve their personal goals and aspirations. Learners who have recently completed courses at the service greatly appreciate the skills that they have acquired in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and employment-related skills. These courses have given learners the self-belief and confidence to progress to further learning, apprenticeships or employment.
- The large majority of current learners make at least the progress expected of them. They develop new skills and acquire pertinent knowledge and behaviours that help them to progress to their next steps. For example, learners who need to enhance their employment skills attend courses in vocationally relevant courses in areas such as business administration, English and mathematics. The majority of learners swiftly develop the skills they need to gain meaningful employment and acquire a job at the end of their course.
- Almost all learners on non-accredited programmes progress either to employment, further education or an apprenticeship. Learners enthuse about how they have improved their confidence, self-belief and motivation, which has resulted in them learning new skills that employers need. Consequently, the large majority of learners who left the service in 2016/17 gained purposeful and sustained employment.
- English and mathematics functional skills achievement rates improved in 2016/17 when compared to the previous year, and are now high. The vast majority of learners who stay on their courses until its conclusion pass their examinations in English and mathematics. However, too many learners in 2016/17 left their course early. Similarly, more than a quarter of learners in 2016/17 left their GCSE English and mathematics courses early, which is too high. Conversely, for those remaining learners who complete their course, almost all pass their examination and the vast majority improve the grades that they had previously attained.
- In 2016/17, around one quarter of learners on accredited courses left their courses early. Consequently, they did not achieve their qualifications or acquire the skills they need to attain their personal goals. Managers identified this as an area of concern in their most recent improvement plans and the proportion of current learners who leave their courses early in 2017/18 has reduced significantly.
- The large majority of learners' work is to a good standard. Learners on arts and crafts courses produce a range of felt-based products to high standards, including small bags, purses and sleeves for portable electronic devices. Many of these items are sold, which benefits local charities.
- In 2016/17, subcontractor performance was poor. Over a third of learners did not achieve

their qualification. West Cumbria Trades Hall Centre's performance was particularly low, with around two thirds of learners not achieving their qualification. Leaders and managers no longer contract with this organisation. The progress of current learners at subcontractors is good, where learners develop highly relevant new skills that assist them in attaining their personal goals.

Provider details

Unique reference number	51448
Type of provider	Community learning and skills
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	7,300
Senior manager, learning and skills	Amanda Towers
Telephone number	01228 606060
Website	www.cumbriaadulthoodeducation.org

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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	17	3,077	7	405	0	15	–	–
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 whom the provider receives high-needs funding	14							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<p>The Appleby Heritage Centre Limited Carlisle College Growing Well Ltd West Lakes Academy Barrow & District Disability Association Millom Network Centre Ltd NC Training (trading as Cumbria Training Centre) Groundwork North East (trading as Groundwork NE & Cumbria)</p>							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior manager, learning and skills, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the council'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

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Dilys Taylor	Ofsted Inspector

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