

Short inspection of Buckinghamshire County Council

Inspection dates:

26–27 November 2019

Outcome

Buckinghamshire County Council Adult Learning continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Buckinghamshire County Council Adult Learning (BAL) is part of the county council's children's services directorate. It is the main provider of part-time learning for adults in the county. Provision includes personal and community development learning, family learning, English and mathematics, English for speakers of other language courses (ESOL), vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. BAL has just started a supported internship programme for 10 learners with high needs. It currently has 1,752 learners on community funded programmes; 980 learners on adult skills funded programmes; and 134 apprentices on standards-based programmes at levels 2 to 5. It delivers courses in 170 venues across the county.

Buckinghamshire is a relatively affluent rural county with some pockets of urban deprivation. The proportion of adults with below level 2 qualifications is lower in the county than other areas in the country and the rate of employment is higher.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners develop positive relationships through their participation on adult learning programmes. Single parents and newcomers to the county value the social networks they create on family learning courses. As a result, many learners progress together as groups onto new courses.

Learners develop a passion for learning as they acquire the ability to speak and write more fluently in the English language. They use these new skills to apply for work and access local services.

Learners with high needs on internships with the local hospital and a large hotel chain make rapid and significant gains in personal confidence. They become valued members of the workforce.

Learners gain a deeper appreciation and respect for the values of different cultures through their involvement in adult learning. Younger learners have been encouraged

to register to vote following classroom discussions about the importance of democracy in Britain.

Learners feel safe and well supported while with the service. Tutors go the extra mile to keep the most vulnerable learners on courses through actions such as providing them with vouchers to local food banks.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers work very effectively with other sections of the council, external partners and employers to deliver a curriculum that addresses the main strategic priorities of the council. Newly developed internship and traineeship programmes for young people leaving special schools and the care system make a significant contribution to the council's priority to enable them to thrive and be safe.

Leaders and managers have been slow to align all the community learning funded provision to meet national policy priorities for this strand of learning. The county's large personal development programme is disproportionately used by adults with high levels of prior educational attainment. Very few adults on benefits participate on these courses. Leaders and managers have plans to address this imbalance, but it is still too early to see the impact.

Tutors plan and deliver the curriculum in a logical order to enable learners and apprentices to build their knowledge and skills so that they can retain and apply them. Family learning tutors get parents to design story sacks for their own children to engage them in reading, then teach them how to understand phonics so they can support their children's learning at school.

Tutors react well to the different starting points and experiences of their learners. They design activities that respond to the issues that learners confront in their wider lives. For example, tutors on the internship programme introduced a session on the use of appropriate language after some of the learners had been made uncomfortable after encountering banter in the workplace for the first time.

Managers ensure that tutors and assessors have up-to-date subject knowledge in the areas they teach. Most tutors have higher-level teaching qualifications. New tutors benefit from thorough induction programmes before they start teaching for the service, and receive helpful feedback following observations that improve their teaching practice.

As a result of good quality teaching and assessment, learners and apprentices develop new and useful skills and knowledge. Learners on family learning courses receive helpful feedback on their written work to enable them to move quickly from writing short sentences all in capital letters to producing longer sentences expressing complex ideas in the correct format.

The great majority of learners benefit from the information, advice and guidance

they receive from tutors. Tutors on family learning courses produce a weekly bulletin for learners, setting out the range of courses they can progress to and volunteering opportunities in local family centres. However, in a small number of ESOL classes, learners in the last few weeks of their courses did not receive any information on potential progression opportunities, so were not aware of what they could do next.

Attendance on family learning courses and in some ESOL classes was low during the inspection. As a result, learners do not benefit from the full impact of the powerful curriculums that these courses offer.

Leaders and managers identify and tackle the great majority of areas for improvement swiftly and effectively. For example, subcontractors delivering apprenticeships had their contracts removed due to the high number of apprentices making slower than expected progress. With almost all apprenticeships now being delivered directly, progress over time has improved.

Leaders and managers do not use information on where learners progress to well enough to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of all their curriculum areas.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Elected members and senior leaders within the children's services directorate ensure that BAL's safeguarding arrangements are robust and follow the most up-to-date guidance. All staff receive training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty before they start in the classroom after having been recruited and checked thoroughly. Teachers report any safeguarding concerns promptly to managers, who track each case through to its conclusion. Managers respond well to the risks that are relevant to learners, such as domestic violence, food poverty and mental health. They forge effective links with external partners to address these risks and keep their learners safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should accelerate the implementation of their plans to change the use of the community learning funding they receive from central government, so that a greater proportion is targeted towards the most disadvantaged adults in the county.
- Managers and tutors should ensure that all ESOL learners receive timely information, advice and guidance so they can plan their next steps.
- Curriculum managers need to use information on where learners progress to more incisively so they can evaluate whether courses deliver the desired impact.
- Leaders, managers and tutors need to set and reinforce high expectations about attendance at courses so that learners can benefit from the powerful curriculums being delivered.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50099
Address	Executive Director of Children's Services Buckinghamshire County Council Stowe Room, County Hall Walton Street Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP20 1UA
Contact number	01296 383109
Website	www.adultlearningbcc.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Jackie Wilson
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	26 November 2019
Main subcontractors	Adult Training Network Digital Native (UK)

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Buckinghamshire County Council was judged to be good on 3–6 November 2015.

The inspection team was assisted by the curriculum manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Charles Searle, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Higgins	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephen Masterson	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

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