

# Inspection of Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority

Inspection dates:

28 September–1 October 2021

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Education programmes for young people

**Good**

Adult learning programmes

**Good**

Apprenticeships

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Inadequate

## Information about this provider

There are an estimated 256,600 people living in the Stoke-on-Trent unitary authority. Over the last 10 years, there has been an increase in international migration into the city, with the largest increase being among young adults aged 20 to 35. The skills profile shows that 12.4% of people aged 16 to 64 have no formal qualifications. Just over 25% of local people are qualified to level 4 and above. Around 7% of employers say they have a vacancy due to a skills shortage.

The employment, learning and skills department (the service) is part of the housing, development and growth directorate. Approximately 80% of funding is allocated to adult learners. Most of the adult provision is non-accredited, with just a minority gaining formal qualifications. There is a very small cohort of learners on study programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships. The service offers a range of daytime and evening courses across seven venues within the city.

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

Learners and apprentices are eager to learn to achieve their career and life aspirations. They work well with each other in learning activities. Most learners' attendance is good. However, due to a limited curriculum offer, not all learners are able to access the curriculum they need.

Learners demonstrate a high level of respect for all staff, visitors and each other. They develop in confidence and feel well prepared for work or for their next level of learning.

Learners and apprentices can take additional courses, for example in mental health and well-being, alcohol abuse, anger management and assertiveness. These help to develop their understanding and awareness of mental health issues.

Most learners receive a well-planned curriculum that develops their knowledge over time. The best curriculums build in complexity as learners' confidence and knowledge grows. However, this is not the case for learners in mathematics, or for apprentices.

Too few apprentices receive the time they need away from work to study. Due to teacher absences, some apprentices have missed lessons. As a result, apprentices often have to complete work independently and study in their own time.

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

Council leaders understand clearly the educational and skills needs of the region. They work with partners on local skills and education boards. They have also completed their own local skills needs analysis with employers. However, leaders of the service have not used this knowledge and understanding to create an effective curriculum plan. As a result, the curriculum offer is not comprehensive enough to support the needs of the wider community, meet the intended aims of the service, or fill the identified local skills and educational gaps. However, the quality of the education that is in place – with the exception of that for apprenticeships – is good.

Service leaders' approach to quality assurance is not effective. They use a range of isolated and fragmented activities, such as reviewing achievement rates, observations of classes and learning walks, to assess the quality of learning. However, they do not bring the results of these activities together to produce an overview of the quality of the service as a basis from which to improve the provision. For example, service staff use a classroom observation to test the quality of subcontracted provision. They do not factor in additional relevant information or take into account learning over time. Consequently, leaders make a judgement on a small element of the course. As a result, they are not clear on what is good or poor provision or what they need to do to improve.

Leaders consider carefully the workload and training needs of staff. They use regular one-to-one meetings to discuss issues with work, general well-being and training.

When they identify a training need, they provide the most appropriate support. Leaders have introduced “Well-being Wednesday”, where teaching is not timetabled, to allow staff the time to work together on projects. Leaders track teaching hours and caseloads and have set reasonable targets for these. This results in most staff feeling their well-being is considered.

Governors set high expectations for the service area. They hold regular meetings to discuss and analyse performance statistics. They share information with the authority’s most senior leaders. However, the information governors receive does not enable them to have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. As a result, governors cannot be certain that their actions will support improvements, or that they are able to hold appropriate leaders to account.

Teachers plan the curriculum well in English and for traineeships. They make appropriate links between skills. They build on prior knowledge and expand from basic to more complex information. Teachers in traineeships include a good balance of personal development and employability skills. As a result, most trainees move into employment and apprenticeships. Most learners in English achieve their functional skills qualifications and make good progress from their starting points. However, in mathematics, the curriculum plan is merely a list of topics taken from the qualification’s specification. Learners spend less time reinforcing learning and find it more difficult to see connections between topics.

Teachers make sure that the right learner is on the right level of course, given their previous qualifications, experience and career aspiration. Teachers on apprenticeships use this information to arrange the teaching of topics appropriately. For example, they focus first on areas such as managing teams or project planning, as these were the most urgent to their role. However, not all apprentices receive the time away from work to study. In some cases, due to teacher absence, apprentices did not receive teaching for a long period of time. As a result, some apprentices have to learn independently and complete their work at home.

Teachers use assessment and homework well to check on learning. In most adult learning, teachers develop an appropriate mix of learning resources. They provide laptops when needed. They give clear explanations. Through questioning, they identify what learners know, understand and need further help with. Learners within health and social care learn and use the appropriate subject vocabulary. For example, they use terms such as ‘empowerment’, ‘proportionate’, ‘prevention’ and ‘accountability’ and apply these appropriately to the care sector. Within mathematics, the teacher has developed short videos that explain important concepts. These are available for learners to access when they need to refresh their understanding. Teachers provide support for the large majority of learners who need to catch up or have particular learning needs. As a result, most learners make good progress.

Teachers are experienced and well qualified. They have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to support learning for adults, young people and apprenticeships. In some cases, they have a background in careers education and can support employability aspects of courses. External specialist tutors teach subjects

such as mental and sexual health and fire and food safety. As a result, learners benefit from learning from knowledgeable and experienced teachers.

Teachers create a positive, calm and organised learning environment. In traineeships, they do this by agreeing a set of rules for behaviour. Teachers then consistently apply these in lessons. Learners are comfortable to contribute to sessions, discussions and activities. Teachers manage potential behavioural issues effectively. They avoid any distraction and allow learning to proceed. This results in learners who are keen and eager to learn, working well with each other and participating in all learning activity. Most learners' attendance is good.

Learners receive information about modern slavery, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values within induction sessions. Teachers develop materials and use quizzes to assess the short-term memory of learners. However, information about these topics is not placed in a local context. As a result, too few learners are able to identify how the concerns impact on themselves and struggle to recall the knowledge that could enable them to stay safe.

Learners receive a range of information and support to help them in their next steps. Leaders work with several agencies and teams to provide learners with careers advice. The national careers service attends the venue once a fortnight. They use alternative telephone interviews when needed. Learners also have access to extra services, such as the job, enterprise and training team, within the authority. 'Prospects' also support with aspects of initial advice and guidance. Engagement teams run dedicated lessons for careers advice and initial advice and guidance. As a result, learners understand their career aims and feel well prepared for work and are confident to apply for jobs.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have generated a culture of safeguarding. They have a detailed understanding of their local needs. They use case studies of local situations and videos to train staff and teachers. Teachers undergo training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty at induction and then annually. Leaders have appointed highly skilled safeguarding champions to support each service area. The safeguarding champions support staff when dealing with safeguarding referrals. They ensure the incident log is completed in a timely way and all the relevant information is captured.

Leaders check the incident log for emerging trends. Once they identify an issue, they put in place the appropriate training. For example, leaders noticed that young people in the area were starting to inhale laughing gas as a recreational drug. They implemented training to ensure staff could recognise the signs of the use of this drug. As a result, staff understand how to recognise and tackle current and local safeguarding concerns.

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

- Leaders and governors must ensure service leaders put in place an education and skills plan. This plan needs to be appropriate to resolve the local educational and skills shortage, be reflective of their vision and support the wider needs of the community.
- Service leaders must make sure that quality assurance measures provide an accurate overview of the service, from which they can then make informed decisions on how to improve the quality of education.
- Service leaders need to make sure that governors receive reliable and precise information, so that governors can support the service to improve and hold the appropriate leaders more fully to account, when needed.
- Leaders must make sure that all apprentices receive the time they need away from work to study. Apprentices must have access to planned teaching sessions.
- Teachers – in mathematics in particular – must make sure that when planning the curriculum, they take a holistic view of learning into account and seek to build learners' knowledge incrementally over time.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	54636
<b>Address</b>	Civic Centre Glebe Street Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HH
<b>Contact number</b>	01782 236892
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stoke.gov.uk/site/">www.stoke.gov.uk/site/</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mark Connell
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11–14 June 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Changes Health and Wellbeing Kreative Foundations

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the post-16 learning 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 visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

## Inspection team

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