

# Inspection of Learning Curve Group Limited

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 August 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Education programmes for young people	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Learning Curve Group is a national training and education provider. Since 2004, it has grown significantly to become one of the largest and most diverse providers in the country. It provides a wide range of online adult learning programmes, education programmes for young people and apprenticeships, with 53 delivery sites across the country.

At the time of inspection, 1,317 adult learners were attending flexible and online courses from level 1 to level 3 in a wide range of curriculum areas. The largest of these were the level 2 certificate in understanding children and young people's mental health, the level 3 certificate in the principles of special educational needs and the level 2 certificate in understanding autism. There were also 177 adult learners and nine younger learners attending the provider's specialist academies, studying a wide range of courses from entry level to level 2. The largest cohorts at the academies are on the level 2 diploma in hairdressing, the level 2 award in preparation for military service and the level 1 certificate in enterprising skills and employability. There were 1,497 apprentices in learning, on programmes from level 2 to level 5 in more than 50 different apprenticeship standards. The largest of these are digital marketer, adult care worker and business administrator.

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

Learning Curve staff set high expectations for learners and apprentices regarding their behaviour and conduct. Learners and apprentices demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. They are highly motivated and keen to progress and achieve on their programmes, and to improve their knowledge, skills and behaviours. They understand how the skills and knowledge that they gain will benefit them in their future employment opportunities. Adult learners work through their course materials in a timely manner and enjoy their learning. They value being able to work at their own pace. Apprentices are motivated to do well and are keen to receive feedback on their assignments and to submit them on time.

Apprentices demonstrate a professional approach to their work. Employers comment on their value to the business and their willingness to take on additional responsibilities, such as managing the waiting list for patients in an NHS trust. In the workplace, employers describe how apprentices become more independent, proactive and autonomous.

Learners benefit from high-quality learning environments, both in centres and online, that support their engagement in learning well. Learning academies are located in busy town centre areas that are easy to access. Tutors manage learning in online lessons well through, for example, directing questions to involve learners, interweaving independent and group activity and facilitating appropriate turn taking.

Learners and apprentices attend their programmes well. Tutors and coaches monitor attendance closely. Coaches monitor apprentices' attendance and completion of off-the-job hours at frequent reviews. As a result, apprentices know of any concerns with their attendance and are held to account to improve it. Most younger learners attend regularly and on time. Adult learners accessing face-to-face training in the academies attend well.

Many learners and apprentices participate in a wide range of additional activities, including competitions, social action projects and volunteering. Apprentices often win local, regional and employer awards and raise money for local and national charities. Many learners and apprentices take on volunteering roles, such as supporting people who are homeless and those who have mental health issues or disabilities.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and know who to contact if they have any safeguarding concerns. They have a very good understanding of the potential risks to their own safety, including gang crime, cuckooing, risks when out socialising in bars, bullying at work and sexual harassment. They also have a very good awareness of how to stay safe online and, particularly, the importance of having strong passwords. Most learners and apprentices have a good understanding of the risks related to radicalisation and extremism and how it can affect them in their lives.

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

Leaders have a very clear rationale for the curriculum that they provide. They work closely and effectively with a wide range of stakeholders and make good use of labour market information to identify and develop a curriculum offer to meet local needs and to re-engage in learning people living in the most disadvantaged areas that they serve. Leaders collaborate closely with stakeholders to develop new courses and qualifications that are responsive to local strategies for growth.

Leaders and managers have in place a well-sequenced curriculum. Dedicated internal authors write the content of courses, and then subject specialist staff review the plans and materials and ensure that courses are well designed and sequenced to meet the needs of learners, apprentices and employers.

Leaders and managers have created a working culture that successfully promotes personal and professional development. Staff highly value their role in the business and are very proud to work for the organisation. They use a self-professed title of 'purple people' to refer to themselves, linked to the organisation's logo colour.

Tutors are well qualified and experienced in the subjects that they teach and assess. They frequently update their knowledge and take many opportunities to share good practice. Annual teaching and learning strategies include peer observations, road shows and conferences. Tutors use their knowledge and experience well to plan learning that enables learners and apprentices to develop their skills, knowledge and behaviours over time.

Tutors ensure that learners and apprentices are provided with clear information and guidance at the start of their course. They use information gathered at initial enrolment well to ensure that learners are on the right course. Those learners who do not have the required skills are offered alternative courses and a plan to get them on their chosen path.

Learners benefit from high-quality online learning with access to first-class support, resulting in high levels of achievement. Tutors assess the progress that learners make frequently and thoroughly to identify strengths and gaps in learning. They successfully encourage learners to use subject-specific technical vocabulary. Tutors carefully question learners in sessions to ensure that they fully understand the taught content before moving towards completing their assignments and demonstrating their newly acquired skills. On the level 3 counselling course, learners demonstrate their new knowledge and practical counselling skills through participating in innovative role-play situations.

Tutors provide learners and apprentices with very helpful feedback that enables them to improve their work through identifying areas for improvement and signposting to webinars and other resources which learners can use. Learners also receive feedback on how to develop their knowledge and understanding of related topics, including British values, and on applying their understanding of safeguarding.

Leaders and managers provide training in well-resourced specialist academies across the country that enable individuals, who are furthest away from the labour market, to learn in high-quality learning environments close to where they live. Staff model highly professional expectations in the academies and, as a result, learners conduct themselves professionally and courteously. Staff help learners to become responsible and active citizens by providing a range of useful additional activities and resources. Learners benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities to raise their awareness. For example, learners in construction have restored a historic building, picked litter in a local cemetery and polished war memorial plaques. They have made trestles and work benches for their workshops and picnic tables for their social space. Learners from the military academies participate in selling poppies and raising funds to support people living in Ukraine.

Coaches set clear expectations for apprentices at the start of the programme to achieve the highest grade possible, by outlining the requirements to achieve a distinction at end-point assessment. Managers and tutors ensure that apprentices receive high-quality on- and off-the-job training through group and individual sessions and through high-quality workbooks and online materials which support independent study. Apprentices benefit from having workplace mentors and the opportunity to work shadow experienced staff. Most employers attend tripartite reviews. However, a few do not attend these reviews and are less well informed about the progress that their apprentices are making.

Managers employ specialist English and mathematics coaches, who provide effective teaching to most learners and apprentices who need to achieve functional skills qualifications. However, a few young learners and apprentices who are nearing the end of their programme have not made the progress necessary to achieve their qualifications in these subjects. The very few apprentices who have not yet passed their English and mathematics examinations have not been able to complete their apprenticeship.

Tutors provide learners and most apprentices with effective and ongoing careers advice and guidance. Learners benefit from a well-planned careers programme that begins with taster sessions to ensure that they are on the right course. During their course, the support that learners receive ensures that they are prepared well for their next steps. However, skills coaches do not ensure that apprentices who have decided not to pursue a career related to their current job roles receive impartial careers information, advice and guidance.

Tutors support learners and apprentices well, and encourage them to take pride and care in their work, which is presented clearly and professionally. In their assignments, learners and apprentices provide clear links between theory and practise and refer to research that they have carried out. Most learners and apprentices remain on track and achieve their qualifications in a timely manner. On completion of their courses, a high proportion of learners and apprentices continue their studies, progress to further or higher education or employment, or secure promotion at work.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders promote a strong safeguarding culture and implement effective safeguarding arrangements, which are consistent with the policies and procedures in place. Safeguarding training for staff is comprehensive. All staff are appropriately trained, including board members. Safeguarding referrals are dealt with appropriately and swiftly.

Leaders have in place well-trained designated safeguarding officers in all teams and all geographical areas. A dedicated safeguarding senior board meets quarterly and includes two members of the executive board. The safeguarding board updates the overall executive board on safeguarding matters. Leaders recruit staff who are safe to work with learners and apprentices. The recruitment team are qualified in safer recruitment and follow the procedures well.

Learners and apprentices feel safe and most are aware of the risks of extremism and radicalisation and how to report concerns should they arise. Teachers discuss risks and areas of concern in the local community, such as crime in the area and gang activity. Learners and apprentices benefit from use of an app designed by staff through which they can alert the senior team at any time about safeguarding concerns. They appreciate the various ways in which they can raise any concerns and are confident that staff will respond immediately and appropriately.

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

- Ensure that all learners and apprentices who need to achieve functional skills English and mathematics qualifications benefit from effective training and are prepared well for their examinations.
- Ensure that all apprentices benefit from impartial careers advice, information and guidance.
- Continue to improve employers' attendance at tripartite reviews for apprentices.

## Provider details

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<b>Contact number</b>	01388 777129
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.learningcurvegroup.co.uk">www.learningcurvegroup.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Brenda McLeish OBE
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24 March 2014
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Not applicable

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief executive officer, 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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