

Inspection of Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Stoke-on-Trent Unitary Authority is an independent learning provider based in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. At the time of inspection, there were three learners aged 16 to 18 following traineeships, 27 apprentices, and 202 adult learners. Of the apprentices, eight were on the level 3 business administrator, four were on the level 2 community activator coach, three were on the level 5 learning and skills teacher, four were on the level 5 operations or departmental manager, three were on the level 3 outdoor activity instructor, four were on the level 3 team leader or supervisor, and one was on the level 2 customer service practitioner. Of the adults, two were on traineeships, 53 were on community learning courses, and 147 were on adult learning courses, mainly leading to English, mathematics or teaching assistant qualifications. The provider worked with one subcontractor.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning. Their attitudes to their education and training are positive, and they are ambitious for their futures. This results in high attendance in most cases and positive and respectful relationships between learners, apprentices and staff.

Teachers support learners and apprentices to develop their confidence throughout their studies. Teachers regularly create opportunities for learners and apprentices to complete presentations in front of their peers. Learners articulate how these presentations have been instrumental in developing their confidence and have improved their communication with colleagues in the workplace.

Teachers support learners and apprentices to develop an understanding of equality and diversity. Learners and apprentices are required to explore topics such as equal pay. These activities help them build their knowledge of inequalities that exist and their detrimental effect on individuals, the community and the workplace.

Staff help most learners and apprentices to understand how to keep mentally and physically healthy. They support learners and apprentices with issues relating to anxiety and prior mental health issues. Learners and apprentices receive helpful guidance on how to improve their physical health, including advice on maintaining a healthy diet and the benefits of stopping smoking.

Learners and apprentices, including those with identified learning or other support needs, benefit from effective pastoral and academic support. Trainers and coaches provide additional learning support to help learners and apprentices overcome personal barriers. As a result, learners and apprentices are enthusiastic, enjoy their learning and make assured progress towards their individual learning goals.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. Leaders and tutors ensure that learners and apprentices know how to refer any concern regarding their personal safety. Apprentices have a clear knowledge of the signs that may indicate a safeguarding-related concern in their peers. Learners and apprentices know how to report any problems and feel confident that these will be dealt with.

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

Senior leaders articulate a clear rationale for the curriculums they offer. They demonstrate a detailed understanding of the needs of the areas they serve and have tailored their offer to target specific courses. For example, they offer English for speakers of other languages, English and mathematics courses in the areas of the city where these courses can have the most significant impact.

Leaders promote accredited courses well to young people and adults who lack the skills and confidence to find work and engage in community life. The curriculums

enable them to gain valuable skills that increase their chances of obtaining work or moving on to further education and training courses or apprenticeships with other learning providers.

Since the monitoring visit, managers have developed useful quality improvement and self-assessment measures that accurately reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. They use this information to plan development opportunities for staff, targeting those areas they identify as needing improvement. As a result, managers focus on improving the areas of provision that require intervention. However, as many of these activities are quite recent, the full impact of these measures cannot yet be seen.

Trainers and coaches carefully assess the majority of learners' and apprentices' starting points at the beginning of their course or apprenticeship. This ensures that they benefit from challenging tasks that are appropriate to their specific individual needs. However, in a small minority of cases, the starting points of adult learners are not used well enough to plan teaching. Consequently, these learners do not benefit from this approach.

Trainers and coaches are skilled in planning and teaching high-quality and interesting learning activities to young learners, adults and apprentices. They set work that builds on previous learning and challenges learners and apprentices to develop their skills. As a result, learners and apprentices are enthusiastic about their learning and are committed to their courses.

Trainers and coaches ensure that apprentices' line managers are well informed about the progress of their apprentices. Employers speak highly of the training that their apprentices receive. They are closely involved in planning on-the-job training activities to support apprentices' vocational skills development over time. As a result, apprentices make sustained progress throughout their apprenticeship.

Tutors support apprentices well to gain new knowledge, skills, and behaviours for use in their workplaces. Coaches use their professional expertise to help apprentices extend their mastery of key topics. For example, apprentices working in the local authority develop an understanding of the functions and duties associated with the delivery of a range of public services and the role of elected members who oversee their work through various scrutiny committees.

Managers ensure that learners on traineeships engage in carefully selected and meaningful work placements, which prepares them well for the world of work. Work placements are planned within the sector that learners aspire to work in, to support them to develop their skills. For example, learners who suffer from anxiety are placed within an organisation with a strong support structure to help develop their communication skills.

In most cases, trainers' and coaches' oral and written feedback to learners and apprentices is detailed, helpful and supports them to improve their work and develop their skills. As a result, most learners and apprentices know how to respond

to actions set by tutors to improve their work over time. However, in a small minority of instances, tutors do not check that learners and apprentices act upon the feedback they receive, and therefore they continue to repeat their mistakes.

Managers ensure that most teaching staff are supported to receive useful, ongoing professional development to deepen their vocational knowledge and improve their teaching practice. As a result, learners and apprentices benefit from up-to-date teaching, which helps them to prepare well for their next steps.

Managers monitor the effectiveness of subcontractors well. They undertake frequent management and monitoring activities to assure themselves of the quality of the curriculum that their subcontractor offers. As a result, managers are clear on the strengths and weaknesses of subcontracted provision.

Those responsible for governance have appropriate backgrounds and are from a variety of representative groups within the city, including further education, to be able to help shape the strategic direction of the curriculums and to hold leaders to account for the quality of education they provide.

Governors demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Since the monitoring visit, they have scrutinised the newly developed self-assessment report and quality improvement plans and provided guidance and challenge on the further development of these. As a result, governors are clearer on these areas and are supporting managers to respond to them. However, as many of these measures are new, the full impact cannot yet be seen.

Teachers ensure that most learners and apprentices receive useful careers advice. As a result, learners and apprentices are aware of how the knowledge they develop is transferrable and can be applied to a broad range of roles within different sectors. For example, learners on the level 2 certificate in supporting teaching and learning know which roles they can apply for at the end of their course and which require further study.

Teachers support learners and apprentices to develop a firm understanding of healthy relationships. As a result, learners and apprentices understand the signs of an unhealthy relationship and the importance of matters such as consent.

The large majority of young people and adults who undertake accredited courses achieve their qualifications and go on to positive destinations, such as education or employment. Most apprentices complete their apprenticeship and achieve the highest grades, and a significant majority successfully progress to sustained employment at the end of their apprenticeship.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appointed an appropriately qualified designated safeguarding lead, who is supported by five 'safeguarding champions.'

Leaders have developed suitable processes for recording safeguarding concerns and have put in place appropriate mechanisms for the referral of these concerns. They use these mechanisms well to support learners and apprentices when necessary.

Teaching staff undergo regular training on topics including safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty in an educational context. They also follow the local authority training plans to regularly update their understanding of the wider implications of 'Prevent' and associated topics.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that the starting points of all learners and apprentices are used to plan learning, ensuring that all learners and apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices are supported to act on the feedback they receive so that the quality of their work improves over time.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices are set challenging targets which support them to achieve their best.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54636
Address	Civic Centre Glebe Street Stoke-on-Trent ST4 1HH
Contact number	01782 233193
Website	https://www.stoke.gov.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lisa Lyons
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	28 September to 1 October 2021
Main subcontractors	Kreative Foundations

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant director, education and family support, 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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