

Inspection of Workers' Educational Association

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
------------------------------	-------------

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the largest charitable provider of adult and community learning in the UK. WEA works in partnership with a wide range of community-based venues and local networks to teach learners in the communities where they live and work. WEA receives funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency, the Greater London Authority (GLA) and eight mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) across England.

At the time of the inspection, there were 7,872 learners. Of these, 5,339 learners are on community learning programmes and 2,533 are on adult skills programmes. The largest areas of provision are English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), mathematics, English and digital skills.

WEA works with three subcontractors.

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

Learners have a very positive attitude to their studies. They attend classes ready to learn, participate enthusiastically and take pride in their work. ESOL learners complete weekly homework and keep their work in well-organised folders. Learners in art classes are inquisitive and readily participate in discussions, critiquing others' work during group activities.

Learners make new friends, develop their interests and benefit significantly from increased social interaction. Many learners say studying with WEA is life changing. Courses in the arts, creative industries, and health and well-being allow learners to meet with a range of people with whom they would not normally mix.

Learners participate in a wide range of volunteering activities. Learners volunteer for WEA in community outreach, classroom support, or governance roles. Learners practise their new skills in the communities they live in. For example, counselling learners provide free counselling sessions to local residents. By volunteering, learners expand their social networks, improve their physical and mental well-being, and increase their understanding of future career and training opportunities.

Learners quickly develop new skills and knowledge and produce work that is of a good standard. Learners on embroidery courses gain complex skills to create their final summer flower wreath display. In mathematics, learners gain skills that give them the confidence to help their children with their homework.

Learners feel safe in centres and online. They know how and to whom they can report concerns. Learners know the importance of not sharing personal information online. They understand how to identify if their children are becoming influenced by those who hold extremist views and how to use social media safely.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The provider makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the part they play in meeting skills needs in each of the locations where they work. They make sure that their curriculum offer mostly reflects these, with a focus on sectors such as social care, education and early years.

Leaders and managers work well with key strategic stakeholders and employers regionally and nationally, such as local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), the GLA, MCAs, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, and the NHS, to understand and identify skills needs. In Liverpool, managers are part of the industrial strategy group and the northwest business forum. Consequently, they understand well what the skills needs and shortages, and the difficulties in recruitment, are in this area. In Leicester and Leicestershire, WEA provides digital skills training to tackle digital poverty in response to needs identified by the LEP. Leaders and managers worked with the Department for Work and Pensions, Skills for Care and the NHS to develop a

healthcare pathway in Greater Manchester. Due to the success of the programme, leaders plan to teach this in five other regions.

Managers work effectively with a range of stakeholders to design their curriculum to meet the needs of specific groups of learners, communities and employers. For example, they plan courses for recent arrivals to the country, women who have experienced domestic violence, and employees in the textile sector whose first language is not English. They work with the ESOL advice service in Greater Manchester to plan ESOL provision that meets specific needs. For example, managers offer courses on writing for residents who are fluent in speaking but lack the writing skills to gain employment. However, leaders and managers need to involve stakeholders more in designing and teaching the curriculum, for example in the arts and mathematics programmes.

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

Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership at WEA. Leaders have skilfully reviewed the curriculums they teach and increased the proportion of their offer focused on adult skills, which now makes up a third of all courses. Leaders have successfully adapted how they teach. In response to the growing demand for online learning during and after the pandemic, leaders offer almost half of their training online. Learners with mobility issues and older learners living in isolation receive good support to improve their digital skills so that they can participate in online learning.

Tutors are very experienced and knowledgeable in the subjects they teach. They use a range of teaching strategies effectively to help learners understand, retain and recall knowledge. Tutors frequently link what they teach to the foundation knowledge they have previously taught. They skilfully refer learners back to previous topics during their discussions. Tutors provide clear instructions and explanations and use suitable visuals to help learners recall and apply what they learn. However, in a few cases, when setting group activities, ESOL tutors do not explain clearly to learners what they must do.

Tutors are adept at teaching online and use technology very well to complement their teaching. For example, in the interpreting level 2 course, tutors use voting polls effectively to introduce discussions about learners' answers. In arts and creative courses, tutors use overhead cameras to great effect to demonstrate intricate processes, such as fine brush strokes in portrait painting and demonstrating the chain fitting stitch in vintage embroidery.

Tutors use diverse assessment methods skilfully to monitor the progress learners make. Most tutors recap previous knowledge at the start of each session and use effective questioning to probe learners to expand on their answers. Tutors provide helpful feedback to learners. On the teaching assistant course, tutors correct common misconceptions about emergencies in the workplace, such as safeguarding concerns in schools, and clarify technical jargon that learners are unsure about. In

arts and crafts sessions, tutors give feedback to learners so that they know how to correct mistakes when using a sewing machine. Learners consolidate what they have learned and have the confidence to attempt more challenging tasks.

Most learners who start their courses with WEA complete them. Those in work say their training helps them do their jobs better, and some receive pay rises because of the new skills they have learned. Most learners on community programmes progress on to further courses. Learners with additional needs achieve in line with their peers. However, in a small minority of courses, achievement rates are not high.

Leaders provide a range of good continuous professional development opportunities for staff. Staff attend useful industry days in settings such as schools and share their recent experiences with learners to help them appreciate the real-life experiences of teaching assistants and support workers. Leaders make sure that tutors have the skills to teach effectively online.

Leaders and governors have good oversight of the quality of the training they offer, including that of subcontractors. They identify their strengths and areas for improvement accurately. Leaders use detailed data reports to determine trends and implement improvement activities where needed. For example, leaders deploy the national quality team to support English and mathematics teachers to plan assessments based on learners' starting points and help teachers prepare learners effectively for exams. As a result of the training and support tutors receive, in-year achievement in English and mathematics is high.

Governors contribute positively and provide effective challenges to the senior leadership team. They have a wide range of experience, for example in education, finance and business, which they use to good effect to hold leaders to account.

Leaders and managers are considerate of the workload and well-being of staff. Leaders provide a range of useful well-being support, such as sessions on menopause awareness. Leaders make sure that staff and their families can access health, well-being and counselling services when needed. Staff appreciate the support available to them and are proud to work for WEA.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Make sure that teaching is consistently good on ESOL programmes, leading to good outcomes for these learners.
- Work closer with employers and stakeholders to make sure they are involved in designing and teaching the curriculum.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130419
Address	4 Luke Street London EC2A 4XW
Contact number	020 7426 3450
Website	www.wea.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Simon Parkinson
Provider type	Specialist designated institute
Date of previous inspection	9 December 2013
Main subcontractors	White Rose School of Beauty and Complementary Therapies. Rotunda Ltd. Three Dimensional Training Ltd.

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of quality, estates and learner experience, 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

Paul Manning, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jon Bowman	His Majesty's Inspector
Kanwaljit Dhillon	Ofsted Inspector
John O'Connell	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Whatsize	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Gray	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Nellist	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Hughes	His Majesty's Inspector
David Baber	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024