

Essex County Council

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Contents

Background information	3
Inspection judgements	3
Scope of the inspection.....	3
Description of the provider	4
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Effectiveness of provision.....	6
Capacity to improve	6
Key strengths	7
Key areas for improvement	7
Main findings.....	8
Achievement and standards	8
Quality of provision	8
Leadership and management	9
Equality of opportunity	9
What learners like.....	13
What learners think could improve	13
Sector subject areas	14
Health, public services and care	14
Information and communication technology.....	17
Arts, media and publishing.....	20
Languages, literature and culture	23
Education and training.....	26
Literacy, numeracy and language	29
Independent living and leisure skills	32
Business, administration and law.....	35
Family learning.....	38
Community development	41
Learners' achievements	44

Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Health, public services and care
- Information and communication technology
- Arts, media and publishing
- Languages, literature and culture
- Education and training
- Literacy, numeracy and language
- Independent living and leisure skills
- Business, administration and law
- Family learning
- Community development

Description of the provider

1. Essex County Council (ECC) provides adult and community learning, work-based learning for young people and Train to Gain programmes across its 12 district councils. It is also part of the APEX training consortium for the delivery of some of its work-based learning. The adult and community learning service is located in the Council's adults, health and community wellbeing directorate with libraries and adult social care. Work-based learning for young people is part of the Council's learning and development service within the human resource and customer excellence directorate and both departments deliver Train to Gain programmes. The Essex LSC funds the provision. ECC has additional funding to deliver neighbourhood learning in deprived communities (NLDC) and a nextstep contract to provide information, advice and guidance.
2. ECC adult learning service has moved from nine semi-autonomous adult community colleges to a whole service management team. Strategic planning is central with services delivered locally. The service offers part-time courses in all 15 sector subject areas plus community development programmes and family learning. In 2007/08 30,208 learners attended ECC courses, of which 19,465 were new learners and 11,879 were enrolled on accredited provision. Seventy-four per cent of learners are female; approximately 10% are from minority ethnic backgrounds; 74% are between the ages of 19 and 59; and 11% have declared a learning difficulty and/or disability. Work-based learning for young people has 78 apprentices and 13 advanced apprentices, training in four sector subject areas. One hundred and fourteen learners are on Train to Gain programmes across both learning and development and the adult learning service, 100 of whom are on level 2 programmes and 14 on level 3 programmes.
3. According to the 2001 census, Essex has a population of 1.36 million people. Approximately 3% of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Just over 17% of adults in Essex have no formal qualifications, compared with 13.8% nationally. In April 2009, unemployment was 4.8% compared with the national rate of 7.3%. ECC is the largest employer in the county.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care	Outstanding: Grade 1
Information and communication technology	Good: Grade 2
Arts, media and publishing	Outstanding: Grade 1
Languages, literature and culture	Good: Grade 2
Education and training	Good: Grade 2
Literacy, numeracy and language	Outstanding: Grade 1
Independent living and leisure skills	Outstanding: Grade 1
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2
Family learning	Outstanding: Grade 1
Community development	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The overall effectiveness of the provider is outstanding. Over two-thirds of the provision is outstanding. Achievement and standards are good with outstanding features. Success rates are good overall and achievement rates on non-accredited courses and Train to Gain are high. Learners from different social and cultural backgrounds achieve well. Learners gain in confidence and attain good personal, social and employability skills.
5. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are lively, interesting and engage learners well. The arrangements for recognising and recording of progress and achievement are satisfactory overall. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners and employers are outstanding. Courses provided in areas of deprivation make an outstanding contribution to learners' development and to community cohesion. Advice, guidance and support are good.
6. Leadership and management are outstanding. Strategic leadership is outstanding and supports particularly good curriculum management. Arrangements for staff development and training are good and actions to improve the quality of provision are outstanding. Equality of opportunity is outstanding as is partnership working.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. The service has demonstrated that its capacity to improve is outstanding. Senior managers have taken successful actions to steer the service, one of the largest adult and community learning providers in England, towards excellence. Inspection grades have improved, for example from satisfactory to outstanding in health, care and public services, and arts, media and publishing. Success rates have also improved and are now good in most areas. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and often outstanding. Inspectors judged all sector subject areas to be good or better. Most of the weaknesses found in previous inspections have been successfully resolved. Data are accurate and well presented. Staff at all levels make particularly good use of management information to improve quality and to raise standards.
8. The self-assessment process is thorough and demonstrates a clear understanding of the service's key strengths and areas for improvement. All

staff contribute to the process. Managers take the views of stakeholders into account. The self-assessment report is evaluative and broadly accurate in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. However, it is too critical in its judgements about leadership and management and in three of the sector subject areas. Quality improvement planning is excellent. Curriculum and senior managers diligently and consistently monitor improvement actions. Timescales and responsibilities are clearly identified. Staff understand the key improvement actions relating to their sector subject area and work hard to achieve successful outcomes.

Key strengths

- High success rates on work-based learning programmes
- High achievement rates for learners on non-accredited courses
- Particularly good success rates for different groups of learners
- Good teaching and learning
- Highly responsive provision
- Particularly productive partnerships
- Very good support for work based learners
- Outstanding strategic leadership
- Excellent arrangements to improve the quality of provision
- Outstanding equality of opportunity arrangements

Key areas for improvement

- Improve success rates for satisfactory FE provision
- Increase the proportion of good or outstanding teaching and learning

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

9. Achievement and standards are good with outstanding features. Success rates on apprenticeship, advanced apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes are high. Success rates are particularly high for skills for life Train to Gain learners at 93%. Success rates on short courses have improved over the last year and are now good. Achievement rates for learners on non-accredited courses are high and in 2007/08 were 90%. In-year rates for 2008/09 are high at 97%. Success rates for different groups of learners have improved significantly over the previous two years, as identified in the service's self-assessment report. Overall success rates on accredited long courses are satisfactory. Learners are highly motivated to progress and achieve as a consequence of the classes they attend. Overall, attendance is good. Learners on many courses produce a good standard of work and attain good personal, social, employability and enterprise skills. They gain in confidence and increase their self-esteem. ECC celebrates learners' successes well.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

10. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are lively, interesting, engage learners well and are often fun. The service has produced a very good teaching and learning handbook that provides an excellent guide for tutors, outlining the theory and practice underpinning the service's approach and expectations to teaching and learning. The number of lessons observed that are good or better has increased by three percentage points since 2007/08. Good, clear policies and procedures are well established to quality assure the process, as clearly indicated in the self-assessment report. Subject learning coaches very effectively support staff and share good practice. Judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are accurate and broadly reflect inspectors' findings. Good feedback is given to tutors using clear evaluative language, with comprehensive coverage of all aspects of the service's scheme.

11. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Programmes are highly responsive to the needs of individuals, families, communities and employers and to the changing social and economic conditions. Local and national priorities are carefully considered and competing claims for resources are extremely well managed. Courses provided in areas of deprivation make an outstanding contribution to learners' development and to community cohesion. ECC has been extremely successful in addressing employability. Train to Gain funding is particularly well used. In all sector subject areas, a wide range of externally accredited and non-accredited courses is available of varying lengths. Progression routes are very clearly defined and extremely well used by learners. An outstanding range of partnerships has been developed for the benefit of learners. Many learning centres have very high standards of accommodation and facilities.
12. Guidance and support for learners are good. Good pre-course information and guidance provide learners with very relevant information. Many learners have good access to impartial information, advice and guidance and they derive considerable benefit from group and individual interventions. Programme introductions and inductions are good. Work-based learning assessors give very good support to learners and regularly visit them at work. Additional learning support is well publicised in accessible formats in learning centres. Additional learning needs are accurately identified and in-class support is quickly provided. Additional learning support is extremely successful in widening participation and in helping learners to stay on programme, make good progress and achieve successful learning outcomes. A wide range of learning aids, such as large keyboards and specialist software, helps learners with physical or sensory impairments to make good progress and to succeed.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Adult and community learning	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Work-based learning for young people	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Train to Gain	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Outstanding: Grade 1

13. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers provide outstanding strategic leadership. They have taken decisive and successful actions to improve all aspects of the provision. The Council substantially restructured the service two years ago to provide a clearer focus for adult learning and to promote the Council's vision of making 'Essex a better place to live and work by developing and providing good quality adult learning.' The service managed this process very effectively with minimal disruption to learning. Staff receive clear direction from senior managers and they understand their roles and responsibilities well. The management style is open

and consultative. The service's curriculum planning is carefully allied to LSC and ECC priorities and responds effectively to identified community needs.

14. Curriculum management is good and in many areas outstanding. Managers work successfully to raise standards and improve outcomes for all learners. They work well with local communities to identify good quality learning venues and opportunities for establishing new courses to meet local needs. They know their provision well and have a clear understanding of what they have to do to make improvements. Internal communications are good and staff attend regular curriculum team meetings. Managers provide good support for part-time tutors. Managers promote the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. They take effective steps to reduce the isolation of part-time staff, particularly those in remote locations.
15. The service's arrangements for staff development and training are good. The service's detailed annual staff development plan closely matches the Council's corporate priorities. Staff appraisal and the outcomes of observation and teaching and learning inform the development plan. Part-time tutors receive pay to attend termly and annual curriculum meetings. All teachers have registered with the Institute for Learning and all have an appropriate teaching qualification or are working towards one. Attendance at staff development events is good. Many staff take advantage of courses delivered by the Council.
16. The service's arrangements for quality improvement are impressive. The service regularly carries out peer reviews with senior representatives from other adult and community and work based learning providers to share good practice and to provide constructive criticism. Quality assurance and improvement processes are frequently subject to rigorous peer review, leading to good quality procedures for raising standards. The observation of teaching and learning scheme is rigorous, well established and highly effective in raising the quality of teaching and learning.
17. The service's self-assessment process is outstanding. Tutors write self-reviews based on the performance of the classes they teach. Curriculum managers make good use of these reviews and of data, learners' feedback and quality improvement plans to produce curriculum level self-assessment reports. Senior managers carry out rigorous moderation of sector subject area reports, challenge grades and request additional information, if appropriate. The service's quality improvement group carries out a final moderation of the service-level self-assessment report. Most of the judgements in the self-assessment match those of inspectors. Inspectors awarded the same or a higher grade for all aspects of the service's provision.
18. The service makes very effective use of a range of management information data to secure improvements. Staff at all levels now demonstrate a high level of understanding of the importance and use of data to monitor and improve the quality of courses and programmes. Data are well used to set sector subject area targets. The management information system provides staff with well

presented and clear reports in graphical and tabular form, which they use for decision making during regular team and curriculum meetings. Good use is made of learners' feedback to improve the provision. Posters and public notices at the service's centres are well used to inform learners of improvements made following feedback. The service gains feedback from other stakeholders, but makes less effective use of this to improve the provision.

19. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. Arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity are very good. The service's single equality scheme is a thorough document that outlines actions taken to promote equality and diversity and raise achievement for all learners. The Council regards the service's single equality scheme as a model of good practice. Managers carry out thorough equality impact assessments to identify and minimise the risk to vulnerable groups posed by new initiatives such as increases in course fees or the removal of subsidies for particular courses. The proportion of learners from under-represented groups on service programmes exceeds that in the local community. However, the proportion of male learners is low in some sector subject areas. Managers use data effectively to monitor and raise the performance of different groups. Initiatives to increase the number of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been successful. Actions to widen participation from deprived communities have been successful in raising participation rates for older learners, the unemployed and learners from areas of high deprivation. The proportion of new learners in 2008/09 to date is high at 45%. The service, in recognising that many learners are initially reluctant to attend town centre learning venues, provides learning activities in a range of centres within the local communities and particularly in the deprived areas. Learners can study in libraries, church halls, community centres and schools. Learners in many areas are able to attend classes close to where they live. Operations managers have a good local knowledge and are careful to ensure that venues are accessible, safe and suited to learning.
20. Promotion of equal opportunities through the service's marketing and publicity materials is good. Equality matters are well covered during induction for staff and learners. Staff clearly record equal opportunities concerns on individual learning plans, end of course reviews, observations of teaching and learning paperwork and on lesson plans and schemes of work. The promotion of equality and diversity is particularly good in most lessons and across the curriculum in modern foreign languages, family learning and in provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
21. Partnership working is outstanding. The service's relations with other directorates of the Council are well established and provide opportunities for many learners. The Council is the largest employer in the county. The service energetically promotes adult learning to other departments within the Council. Links with the county's schools are excellent and contribute to the effectiveness of the family learning provision. The service is highly regarded as a learning provider. It runs a wide range of courses for Council employees. It also provides bespoke courses for local employers. Learning opportunities in the

local communities have increased with improved geographical coverage to meet the diverse needs of learners. The service's links with voluntary and community organisations have been instrumental in widening participation in the most deprived communities in the county.

22. The management of resources is good. The service provides good value for money. Retention and success rates are high on most courses. Managers carefully review classes with low numbers to decide whether they will run. Teachers are appropriately qualified or working towards a teaching qualification. Assessors and internal verifiers are competent and all have an appropriate qualification or are working towards one. Teaching accommodation is generally of a good standard. Learners have good access to learning materials. ICT facilities are available and most teachers make good use of them in learning sessions.
23. The management of procedures to record learners' progress and achievement is satisfactory overall. The service provides a detailed and helpful guide for tutors. Most tutors make good use of initial assessment results to identify learners with literacy, numeracy and language needs. Learning goals and outcomes are appropriately challenging. Learners' progress is recorded in learning plans, though the quality and extent of this recording is not consistent between different curriculum areas. Learners receive appropriate information, advice and guidance about their course and about what they can do next, before they join.
24. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The service has appropriate policies and procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Staff have received training and designated staff have responsibility for policy implementation. The service carries out appropriate vetting checks for all staff and volunteers involved in training.

What learners like:

- The well equipped centres
- 'I like working in my own time, it fits in well with shift work'
- 'Time goes by so quickly, I don't realise the time as I am enjoying it so much'
- 'This course is really important – when I get this certificate, I've got a job'
- I really enjoy being able to learn to make clothes I can't buy here easily
- 'Gaining knowledge. I feel so much more confident to speak out at meetings'
- Being treated like an adult and not being patronised
- That staff go out of the way to be helpful
- I am kept informed about my progress
- I develop personal skills such as cooking
- 'We are lucky to have this high standard of teaching'
- The crèche facilities

What learners think could improve:

- 'We'd like to do more courses in this centre'
- 'It is not always easy to travel to the centre'
- 'We should be able to pay fees in instalments'
- To be told earlier about course cancellations
- 'The length of the course has been shortened from a year to one term and as we learn much slower than others, we need more time'
- More varied summer school activities
- Advertising the courses more
- The excessive amount of form filling and paperwork

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

25. ECC offers Train to Gain, apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in health and social care. Courses are offered at levels 2, 3 and 4 in health and social care. In social care, 65 learners have enrolled on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes at level 2 and 148 at level 3. A further 237 learners are on childcare courses at levels 2 and 3 and 108 learners are on early years taster courses. Five learners are on an advanced apprenticeship. Assessment and training are carried out at work and day release opportunities exist to support both key skills and the technical certificate. On the adult community learning provision, 359 learners have enrolled on counselling courses and 1038 learners are on complementary therapies programmes. Currently 88% of learners are female, 15% are from minority ethnic groups and 5% have declared a disability. Learners study in workplaces and centres across Essex.

Strengths

- Outstanding achievement rates on early years courses
- High success rates on health and social care programmes
- Outstanding success rates on complementary therapies courses
- Good teaching, training and learning
- Highly responsive provision meeting employers and learners needs
- Outstanding curriculum management

Areas for improvement

- No identified areas for improvement

Achievement and standards

26. Achievement and standards are outstanding. In 2007/08, overall achievement rates for early years courses was 90%. In year success rates on health and social care work-based learning programmes are high at 81% compared with 69% for the previous year. On complementary therapies courses, the success rate is outstanding at 97% in 2007/08.
27. Learners gain useful communication, vocational and personal skills on their courses. On work-based learning programmes, they develop good practical skills and demonstrate increased confidence and maturity in dealing with service users. Learners on complementary studies courses develop good skills in working with clients that enable them to carry out challenging vocational

practice sessions. Early years learners work well in groups to develop ideas and skills in working with parents and children to promote healthy eating. Portfolios are of a high standard. In work-based learning, they contain a wide range of evidence and are particularly well organised and presented. On counselling courses portfolios and learning journals are of a good standard, with good self-reflection on counselling practice.

Quality of provision

28. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching, training and learning are good. Theory and practice are effectively integrated by well qualified tutors and assessors. Assessment practices are outstanding. Knowledge and technical skills are effectively developed in well planned on- and off-the-job training. Flexible arrangements for training ensure that learners benefit from good access to appropriate support. Assessors visit workplaces frequently and regularly at times convenient to the learner to explain tasks and return assessed work. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods including observation, oral questioning and professional discussion. Assignments are carefully cross-referenced against performance criteria. Clear feedback enables learners to improve. Monitoring of progress is regular and detailed. In early years lessons, tutors set challenging tasks and successfully encourage learners to reflect and share their different experiences in working with children. Complementary studies learners have access to professional resources that enable them to develop their skills in a realistic working environment. Many tutors make good use of internet based resources and encourage learners in developing their e-learning to further their understanding and knowledge.
29. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The range of programmes is highly responsive in meeting the needs of employers and learners. Links with employers are particularly good. Courses successfully meet the needs for qualified staff in care, childcare and complementary therapies. Courses are organised to ensure good progression routes are available to learners. Learners on complementary studies programmes are able to choose from a range of courses that build up their experience and expertise relevant to their personal and vocational interests. Course teams ensure that employability skills are a central focus in course delivery
30. Guidance and support for learners are good. Tutors and assessors give very good personal and pastoral support. Initial assessment successfully identifies the support required to cater for individual learning needs. Literacy and numeracy needs are very effectively met through either a personal tutor or small group sessions. For some work based learners, key skills are integrated with the programme and learners take the opportunity to gain national test certificates. Advice and guidance are thorough. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of the progression routes available to them.

Leadership and management

31. Leadership and management are outstanding. Leadership and teamwork are strong with effective communications between centrally-based managers and curriculum specialists working across the county. All staff benefit from immediate specialist support available to them wherever they are located. Quality assurance processes are particularly effective. Observations of teaching, training and learning are carried out regularly by trained staff and action plans are produced and monitored against stated targets that are constantly reviewed. Many staff have successfully developed their practice over the last twelve months. Curriculum team meetings are regular and well attended; tutors are encouraged to reflect on and share their own practice at these meetings. Learners' feedback is systematically collected to provide further evidence of course performance. The staff development programme is particularly good with extensive opportunities for professional development. Particular attention is paid to the changing requirements of awarding bodies and all tutors are kept fully up to date on changes in their subject areas. Management of assessment is rigorously carried out with very thorough internal verification and standardisation processes. Equality of opportunity is well promoted throughout the curriculum and staff are sensitive to the diverse cultural and social backgrounds of their learners. Learners understand their rights and responsibilities well. The self-assessment process is very thorough with opportunities for staff and learner consultation. The self-assessment report and resulting quality improvement plan are very effectively incorporated into the quality cycle.

Information and communication technology

Good: Grade 2

Context

32. ECC has 5,644 learners on 575 information technology (IT) courses. Of these, 1,308 learners were on 135 accredited courses, including the certificate in using IT, New CLAIT, and European computer driving licence levels 1-3. Non-accredited courses include starting with computers, improving computer skills, and introductory courses in digital imaging, web design, and buying and selling on-line. Just over 70% of learners are women. About 15% of learners on accredited programmes are over 60. The vast majority of courses are directly delivered by part-time staff, coordinated by five curriculum managers. ICT is offered in nine main centres and in over 30 smaller centres around the county. The Train to Gain provision is small with 25 learners.

Strengths

- Good success rates on adult and community programmes
- Good teaching and learning
- Well targeted courses to meet the needs and interests of learners
- Good leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient implementation of processes to recognise and record progress and achievement

Achievement and standards

33. Achievement and standards are good. The overall success rate is good at 92%. Success rates for accredited courses improved from 72% in 2006/07 to 77% in 2007/08. The success rate for long courses was particularly high in 2007/08 at 78%, significantly above the national average of 61%. Success on non-accredited courses increased from 90% in 2006/07 to 94% in 2007/08. Success rates on short courses have improved significantly. Success rates on Train to Gain courses also improved considerably.
34. Many learners have started courses at a very basic level, have made good progress and have progressed to higher levels and to specific software courses tailored to their needs. Several learners use web design skills to develop home-based businesses. Many older learners new to computers now use the internet to follow up hobbies and develop social contacts. The standards of learners' work are high. In digital imaging classes, learners manipulate images and produce outstanding work. Attendance is good.

Quality of provision

35. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are also good. In many sessions, learners and tutors display exceptional understanding and application of software. Tutors' explanations and demonstrations are clear. They provide good individual coaching. Tutors take full account of the strengths of each individual learner and the context in which learning takes place. Instruction is given in a sensitive and supportive manner and learners are able to put the new skill into practice immediately. Work is accurately marked with helpful comments. Learners work well together and tutors frequently challenge them to complete difficult tasks. Learning resources are good. Tutors produce clear handouts which are easy to follow and useful at home. Good use is made of e-learning. Tutors work particularly well with learners who have a range of disabilities, enabling them to take part fully in planned activities. A specific group of learners with visual impairment benefits from an excellent range of adaptive technology. Rooms are light, well decorated and provide a pleasant learning environment. Specialist resources are of good quality and are well used.
36. The implementation of processes to recognise and record progress and achievement is insufficient. ECC has made some progress with evidence of tutors carrying out effective initial assessment to identify learners' starting points. Individual learning plans are used effectively by many tutors to set realistic targets and monitor learners' progress. In too many sessions, however, both tutors and learners do not record progress and outcomes consistently. Reference to learning plans is insufficiently regular, particularly on non-accredited courses.
37. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Courses and programmes are well targeted to meet learners' needs. The range of courses is good and provided at convenient times and venues throughout the county. More advanced non-accredited courses are available for those who wish to develop their skills further. Single-day courses are provided in a range of software applications, providing opportunities for those who find regular attendance difficult. Many learners use their skills to enhance employment prospects. For many older learners, the opportunity to study a range of units at beginner and improver levels provides considerable health and social benefits. There are good links with ECC's business development unit, the initial advice and guidance service, the University of the Third Age, and a range of employers.
38. Support and guidance are satisfactory and information, advice and guidance ensure that learners are placed on courses at the appropriate level. Support for learners is satisfactory. Many learners are well supported by tutors through the use of email. Learners are encouraged to make good use of websites for further research and learning. Learners with additional support needs are usually referred to appropriate specialist provision and well supported in the classroom

by both tutors and other learners. Volunteer support workers assist learners in some sessions.

Leadership and management

39. Leadership and management are good. A clear direction has been set for the county with significant improvement since the previous inspection. Better access to management information has led to improvement in monitoring the progress of courses and learners. Actions have been taken to effectively coordinate the provision. The observation of teaching and learning has been used effectively to improve standards. Local curriculum managers work effectively to ensure that policies developed for the county are shared and implemented by tutors. Managers and tutors benefit from good continuous professional development. Curriculum managers support the development of tutors' skills in identifying and appropriately meeting the skills for life needs of their learners. Regular meetings are held to share good practice with actions reviewed at subsequent meetings. Tutors are regularly updated through email. The arrangements for monitoring and promoting of equality and diversity and health and safety are satisfactory. The self-assessment report process is inclusive and judgements broadly reflect inspection findings. Action planning following self-assessment leads to specific, measurable targets that are checked regularly against realistic deadlines.

Arts, media and publishing

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

40. Courses take place in 46 venues including 12 main regional centres, schools, community centres and village halls. Currently, 6,729 learners have enrolled, of whom 5,895 take non-accredited courses and 824 study on accredited courses. Courses include acting for fun, drawing and painting, soft furnishings and upholstery, bobbin lace making, circus skills, digital photography, Egyptian dance and history of architecture. A programme of self-funded courses and clubs not covered by the scope of this inspection provides progression into mainstream provision. Most courses are held for two hours each week for 10 weeks. Classes are held during the day, evenings and weekends. The curriculum is developed by a strategic manager supported by a team of six curriculum managers, each with a regional responsibility, and 126 part-time tutors. Women constitute 76% of learners; 7% of learners have a disability and 4% are from minority ethnic groups.

Strengths

- Outstanding success rates
- High standard of learners' work
- Excellent teaching and learning
- Very good development of enterprise skills to promote economic wellbeing
- Responsive curriculum development to meet learners' needs and interests
- Outstanding leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- No identified areas for improvement

Achievement and standards

41. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Learners enjoy their courses and achieve well. Success rates on non-accredited courses are high at 90% and success rates on accredited provision have risen steadily from 68% in 2005/06 to 77% in 2007/08. Standards of work are high particularly in floristry, soft furnishings, botanical painting and garden design. Level 1 garden design learners, in producing portfolios tracing the design of a garden for a virtual client, achieve a standard considerably above this level. Soft furnishings learners produce intricately designed and manufactured cushions to a near professional standard. In a botanicals painting and drawing course, all learners produce acrylic paintings to a uniformly high standard, for some after just one year's study. Learners support each other well, and in mixed ability classes, more experienced learners see helping beginners as a valuable revision exercise.

Quality of provision

42. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are excellent. Tutors successfully use their industrial and professional expertise to inform the setting of imaginative projects and assignments. In the most successful lessons, learners are challenged to produce work of the highest standard of which they are capable. Critical and analytical skills are encouraged and developed. In a painting and drawing lesson, learners evaluate in depth the work of others and provide comments that are perceptive and illuminating. The debate is expertly managed by the tutor, and additionally provides evidence for the development of literacy and language skills. Numeracy is established in many courses through measuring, calculations and proportion. In a garden design lesson, learners display advanced skills of presentation. Progress is monitored carefully on all courses and feedback is constructive. Resources are very good. Centres are welcoming, in a good state of decoration, and have a good range of specialist equipment. Wall displays often enhance learning.
43. The development of enterprise skills to promote economic wellbeing is very good. Vocationally relevant assignments encourage enterprise skills and many learners progress to freelance work and self-employment. Some accept commissions for their work in floristry and others produce cards for sale on behalf of a national charity.
44. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Enrichment activities include frequent visits to galleries and other events. ECC offers a rich and diverse range of courses in art, crafts, photography and the performing arts. Managers are proactive in seeking out new course opportunities. A range of partnerships is currently being developed with further and higher education providers and other organisations to facilitate progression and widen participation. In 2008/09, just under 2000 learners progressed on to other courses within the service, many on to accredited courses. The significant shortfall in enrolments in 2007/08, as outlined in the self-assessment report, has been successfully remedied and, in responding to the needs of learners and government priorities, targets for 2008/09 will be met. The number of cancelled courses has fallen significantly to 16%.
45. Guidance and support for learners are good. Additional classroom support is provided effectively for profoundly deaf learners enabling them to complete the qualification. Advice and guidance on progression routes are integral to many courses.

Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are outstanding. The management team has a clear vision for this sector shared by all tutors. Tutors enjoy excellent support from their line managers and communications are effective through a regular schedule of meetings, email and class visits. Very good opportunities exist to

share good practice and standardisation activities undertaken for creative craft courses have resulted in a commendation for good practice from the awarding body. Staff development is actively supported and all tutors participate in a wide range of activities. Many monitor their continuing professional development entitlement on line. The observation of teaching and learning is thorough. Actions are routinely followed up and lesson grades have improved since the process started. Equality and diversity measures to improve the gender balance have shown progress with an increasing number of males enrolled on textiles and other craft courses. Tutors are encouraged to celebrate different cultures in the production of learning materials.

47. Quality improvement is very good. Areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection have been successfully remedied, and the current quality improvement plan focuses on strengths to be developed in addition to areas for improvement. Internal verification is thorough. Managers use management information systems extensively to monitor attendance, retention and achievement data and a wide range of reports is available from the management information software. The self-assessment report is thorough and inclusive. Tutors make a good contribution through course reviews. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate in the identification of strengths and weaknesses although strengths in achievement and standards are understated.

Languages, literature and culture

Good: Grade 2

Context

48. ECC provides courses in modern foreign languages, English at GCSE and A level, British sign language at level 1 and Makaton at beginners' level. Some 4,723 learners are on 454 courses at 58 venues across the county with 76% of learners on language courses. About 70% of learners are female. Courses for beginners include Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish. Courses in French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish are available at intermediate level and at advanced level in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Just over half of these courses are accredited. Over half the provision takes place in the evening and courses are from one to 30 weeks for two hours' duration. A fractional manager and eight curriculum managers lead a team of 137 part-time tutors.

Strengths

- Good success rates on accredited courses
- Good development of language skills
- Much good teaching and learning
- Wide range of learning opportunities to meet community needs
- Good opportunities for professional development
- Good collaborative working at strategic level

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient assessment of learners' previous language skills

Achievement and standards

49. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates on most courses are good. In 2007/08, success rates on AS Spanish were 86%. Over the same period, success rates on A level Spanish courses were 79%. Success rates on other accredited language courses at levels 1 and 2 have improved since 2006/07 and are now good at 79%. These courses account for 46% of all learners. However, at level 3 success rates in 2007/08 were low at 61%. Retention rates on non-accredited courses in 2007/08 were good at 92%, an increase of two percentage points on the previous year. Learners' achievement of learning goals was particularly high at 99%.
50. The standard of learners' work is good. Learners develop good language skills. In advanced classes, they use the foreign language extensively. They demonstrate sustained and confident use of complex language structures. At lower levels, learners apply newly learned language effectively in a variety of situations. Learners' listening skills are good and they respond confidently to

questions and instructions from the tutor delivered at speed in the foreign language.

Quality of provision

51. The quality of provision is good. Much of the teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and structured. Tutors make good use of the foreign language to develop learners' skills. They emphasise good pronunciation with consistent but sensitive correction of errors. Many tutors are adept at eliciting self-correction from learners. They are skilful at integrating and contextualising grammar. In the better sessions, tutors use a wide variety of activities and resources to develop and extend learning. A strong focus is placed on equality and diversity in the choice of learning materials to address different learning preferences and challenge stereotypical images.
52. The assessment of learners' previous language skills is insufficient. Learners use an individual learning plan to identify their reasons for learning and their preferred ways of learning. In some classes, tutors assess learners' language skills informally but it is not systematic and they do not have any means of recording the information to help them plan. Language skills of continuing learners are rarely assessed. However, in some classes tutors have independently kept a record of learners' ability in each skill to enable them to measure subsequent progress and achievement.
53. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Provision is at different levels ranging from short one week courses where learners can try out a language to longer 30 week courses. Progression routes are good in most languages and 74% of learners progress to further study with the service. Courses meet community needs well and 26% of learners are new. The service helpfully provides language courses for teaching assistants in local primary schools in preparation for the introduction of languages at Key Stage 2. The family learning programme includes good opportunities for parents and children to learn languages together.
54. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Tutors provide good individual support in class. Course information states clearly the course content. Curriculum managers and tutors are available to provide more individualised information. Learners know how to access additional learning support. The arrangements for the development of language, literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. Learners receive a useful booklet containing tips for successful language learning.

Leadership and management

55. Leadership and management are good. Professional development opportunities are good and are linked to service and national priorities. Attendance at the regular team meetings and the annual staff conference is high. Priority topics for each meeting include equality and diversity and health and safety. A strong

focus has been placed on improving the use of information learning technology in the classroom. Several co-ordinators have qualified as subject learning coaches and now use their skills very effectively with colleagues to improve teaching and learning.

56. Collaborative working at strategic level is good following the restructuring of the service. Managers work closely together to ensure a more consistent approach to quality improvement. The observation of teaching and learning process is thorough. Following observations, managers produce reports and time-bound development plans that they monitor closely. They meet together to moderate the reports across the area and this collaborative approach has ensured that observations are now more thorough and the judgements more evaluative. The self-assessment process is inclusive and involves all members of the languages team. Tutors contribute through the course review process that requires them to set challenging targets for improving their performance. The self-assessment report is mainly accurate but does not identify the area for improvement found at inspection. The process for the recognition and recording of progress and achievement is satisfactory. Curriculum managers meet to carry out a sample moderation of learners' work to ensure a standardised approach. However, no moderation of learners' speaking skills takes place.

Education and training

Good: Grade 2

Context

57. The service offers a wide range of courses in education and training, including Train to Gain as part of the provision for adult and community learning; and learning and development. The largest courses include preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector with 172 learners, NVQ in supporting teaching and learning in schools with 125 learners at level 2 and 78 learners at level 3, support work in schools with 153 learners at level 2 and 38 at level 3, and the certificate for teaching assistants in early years which has 187 learners at level 2 and 125 at level 3. The area is managed by three strategic managers including the quality and staff development manager, and three curriculum managers within adult community learning.

Strengths

- High success rates
- Good standard of learners' work
- Good teaching and learning
- Very effective links with education employers
- Good programme review systems leading to improvements
- Good embedding of safeguarding in all courses

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently comprehensive individual learning plans
- Insufficiently prompt feedback on learners' initial written work
- Late introduction to study skills for some learners

Achievement and standards

58. Achievement and standards are good. The success rate for the area as a whole for the previous year was 91%. This rate has shown a considerable improvement over the previous three years rising from 67% in 2005/06, as identified in the self-assessment report. On the level 3 NVQ, and both levels of the support work in schools programme the success rate was outstanding at 100%. On the certificate for teaching assistants the success rate was good at 83% with 74% of learners gaining the award at distinction level.
59. Learners produce a consistently high standard of written work with many learners working in their own time and some producing work often well beyond the level required for their course.

Quality of provision

60. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good, as highlighted in the self-assessment report. The best lessons made excellent use of technology with PowerPoint displays that informed but did not dominate and projected live connection to the internet to illustrate points. Teaching methods are varied and differentiated to ensure all learners achieve and progress well. The service has an action plan to improve teachers' use of technology. A project to allow courses to be taught as a 'blended' programme, using technology to facilitate distance learning and blend this with a programme of lessons, has been particularly effective. ECC's programme of observation of teaching and learning had identified a steady improvement in the quality of teaching in this area.
61. The process for recording progress and achievement is satisfactory. However, individual learning plans often relate only to the aims and objectives specified in the main qualification and show little individualisation. Initial assessment often reveals other needs but these are not included in the plan. Skills for Life needs are often omitted. Individual learning plans are not used to plan and schedule a whole learning programme appropriate to individuals.
62. On courses that require moderation or verification of learners' written evidence, often a significant delay occurs in providing learners with feedback on their work. Many learners have not prepared work for assessment for several years. They are unsure about the work required and whether they will be able to succeed. Learners are unclear about the quality of their early submissions and have to start subsequent pieces of work unsure if they are repeating mistakes.
63. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. As outlined in the self-assessment report, the service has very effective links with the schools service of the county council. The county's schools standards and improvement service identifies schools with particular needs and the service makes appropriate training available to the school. The service has close working relationships with both authority funded schools and other educational establishments. The service is actively involved in the Essex Professional Development Centre. It is also a member of a group that effectively coordinates the strategic management of training in education in the county, and consists of a local consortium of colleges, the university, and other providers. The service takes an active role in local and national groups and working parties involved in the development of education and training.
64. Guidance and support for learners are good. Teachers helpfully support learners with no recent formal learning experience to become effective students. Mailings to schools, brochures, specific publications, and pre-course discussions provide effective advice and guidance about the courses to potential learners. However, insufficient information is available on the amount of work the course entails and on some courses books and study lists are given too late to help

learners. Study skills development is not an integral part of many programmes. On one course, initial study skills sessions were not part of the programme.

Leadership and management

65. Leadership and management are good. The programme review systems that lead to improvements are good. Teaching staff constantly evaluate their own performance and their personal reviews are incorporated into effective development plans that improve teaching and learning. Communications between managers and staff are good despite the wide geographical spread of the provision. Links with other organisations and with employers are effectively used to develop the programmes. Staff development and training is good, including an extensive professional development programme for ECC staff on safeguarding. Safeguarding is prominent on all course schemes of work. Teachers are very accessible and learners in this area frequently get support beyond the course requirements. Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are good. Learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities and equality and diversity are appropriately included in course content. The self-assessment report is good. It involves contributions from all staff, makes good use of management data and is an accurate reflection of the provision.

Literacy, numeracy and language

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

66. ECC has 4,072 learners on accredited and non-accredited courses to improve their literacy, language or numeracy skills at centres across Essex. Of all learners, 64% are female, 30% are from minority ethnic groups and 14% have declared a disability. In addition, 133 learners are on Train to Gain literacy and numeracy programmes. Classes are available in the daytime, evenings and at weekends. Courses range from nine to 60 hours. The provision is overseen by a strategic manager and six curriculum managers, each of whom have an area-wide responsibility and a curriculum specialism. Over 100 teaching staff are employed on a range of contracts.

Strengths

- Outstanding success rates on Train to Gain programmes
- Good retention and achievement rates
- Good teaching and learning
- Excellent range of responsive provision
- Particularly effective management of rapid development
- Thorough quality improvement arrangements

Areas for improvement

- No significant areas for improvement

Achievement and standards

67. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Eight months into the first year of offering literacy and numeracy as part of Train to Gain, the success rate so far is outstanding at 93%, equally split between literacy and numeracy. On adult and community learning courses retention rates have been consistently above 90% for the previous three years. In provision that increasingly offers accreditation at entry level and levels 1 and 2 to all learners, achievement rates are rising. In 2007/08, 78% of learners achieved a certificate. The service is on target to at least achieve this figure in 2008/09. Learners gain in confidence and demonstrate greatly enhanced communication skills. Employers value highly the increased employability of their workforce. School head teachers affirm the increased skills and confidence of support assistants they employ following Train to Gain programmes. Parents on ESOL courses can more effectively communicate with their children's teachers.

Quality of provision

68. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. ECC has a very thorough system to observe teaching and learning, the results of which matched inspection findings. A large increase in the take up of diploma-level specialist teaching qualifications and other staff development activities are now benefiting learners. Learners enjoy some very good use of multi-sensory learning and computer technology. ESOL tutors are meticulous in the feedback they give, both orally and in writing. Learners in each of the three subject areas make clear gains in vocabulary development and in some sessions show a real curiosity for how language works. Despite some instances of very effective challenges to learners' understanding, in some sessions questioning and monitoring of progress are superficial. Learning targets and reviews of progress within individual learning plans are now satisfactory overall, following action on a key area for improvement in the self-assessment report. Learning plans are actively used in sessions as a means of dialogue between learner and tutor.
69. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Learner numbers are high and increasing across the county. The service targets deprived communities and very specific minority groups. The rapidly expanding Train to Gain programme for literacy and numeracy now represents 20% of the full contract. This is supplemented by some particularly responsive and less formal employment-related programmes. Learners join short courses and tasters and infill onto longer courses at any time in the year. ECC's website highlights precisely which courses have places and how to enrol. Progression routes are well mapped out. Learners at the main centres make flexible choices about which sessions to attend to suit their needs. Many return to complete a new level in subsequent years.
70. Support for learners is good. Tutors make good use of trained volunteers and learning assistants to supplement the supportive approaches they already use. Some learners benefit from techniques which are particularly well suited to the needs of adults with dyslexia. Assistive technology is well used and growing. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.

Leadership and management

71. Leadership and management are outstanding. ECC has invested in a large and highly skilled team of managers. They are actively involved in local, regional and national initiatives. The Skills for Life strategy is well considered with good progress made to integrate literacy, language and numeracy support within each sector subject area. Curriculum planning is coherent. A higher proportion of tutors on substantial fractional contracts enables creative development. The team manages rapid development particularly effectively with the expansion of the scale and type of provision. The service makes excellent use of partnerships.

72. Quality improvement arrangements are particularly thorough. The self-assessment process is now a natural part of the team's cycle. The current self-assessment report matches the inspection findings, except that actions outlined in the detailed quality improvement plan have now thoroughly remedied the two key areas for improvement. Supportive and strong action has resulted in no teachers being graded as inadequate at their internal observation.
73. Equality of opportunity is outstanding. Concerns highlighted from data about performance by different learner groups lead to project work and partnership arrangements to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable learners. The service persists with programmes for learners, for instance young people at risk of offending, despite sometimes lower rates of overall success. Classes for ESOL learners have been maintained in the face of funding difficulties. ESOL learners are well supported at centres.

Independent living and leisure skills

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

74. Adult and community learning in Essex has 2,332 learners enrolled on part-time independent living and leisure skills courses. Of these, 1,124 learners work towards a qualification and the remainder are on non-accredited learning programmes. Just over half of the learners are male and 5% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Independent living and leisure skills offer 334 courses under four main areas: learning for living and work, learning for independent living, learning for personal development and learning for leisure. Most courses are run during the day at 41 venues. Courses are usually for 2 hours a week over 32 weeks. Tutors are predominantly part-time. Six curriculum managers manage the area and report to the strategic manager for health and care.

Strengths

- Outstanding success rates in non-accredited provision
- High success rates on accredited courses
- Excellent development of learners' skills
- Good teaching and learning
- Highly effective partnerships to promote community-based learning
- Strong, responsive leadership and management

Areas for improvement

- No identified areas for improvement

Achievement and standards

75. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Success rates at 93% on non-accredited provision are very high. Success rates on accredited provision are high with retention rates at 88% and pass rates at 99%. Learners produce work of a good standard and are successful in achieving their learning goals. Learners demonstrate excellent progress in relation to their initial starting point.
76. As identified in the self-assessment report, the development of learners' skills is excellent. Learners develop and maintain an outstanding level of personal and social skills such as communication, confidence, sensory awareness, listening and speaking. These skills help learners in their everyday lives and encourage many to adopt a healthy life style and apply their very good awareness of safe practices. Good attendance and punctuality ensure that learners fully benefit from the learning experience. Learners make excellent progress in relation to prior attainment.

Quality of provision

77. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good, as highlighted in the self-assessment report. Tutors very effectively use a variety of good teaching strategies, support staff, multi-sensory resources, adaptive technology, real life resources and ICT to encourage learners' involvement. Learners demonstrate good communication and responses to visual, tactile and auditory stimuli and successfully achieve a range of skills. Learners very effectively transfer these skills to their home environment. In-class assessments monitor progress against individual learners' targets well. Initial assessment very effectively identifies the starting point for learners who are then appropriately placed in classes according to their need. Learners have an individual learning plan that contains course specific targets. However, few targets are set for personal development. Most tutors plan lessons well. In-class support is well managed. Accommodation is good, accessible, spacious and welcoming.
78. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. Partnerships to promote community-based learning are highly effective. Partnership working, for example, with social services, health and housing and large national voluntary organisations has been highly effective in engaging learners who would not normally attend local provision. The excellent geographical spread of provision meets learners' needs particularly well. Learners move on to a very good range of appropriate progression opportunities, however, in some centres the curriculum offer is narrow. The service very successfully offers the foundation learning tier in partnership with mental health services. Work preparation courses offer real work experience. A local school very successfully provides mentors for learners to attend work-placements. Social services work in partnership with the service to ensure that a sensory awareness course for clients with multiple and complex learning needs is successful. Particularly good and regular celebrations of achievement encourage learners to demonstrate their high levels of achievement.
79. Support and guidance are good. Learners receive good information advice and guidance before the start of the course, during the course and again at the end. Learners receive a comprehensive action plan. Marketing materials are available in an extensive variety of formats and are available on request. Learners receive good quality learning support which helps with personal development and encourages them to achieve their learning targets.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are outstanding and particularly responsive to need. Managers set a clear direction leading to high levels of improvement and excellent educational opportunities. A strong quality assurance process and particularly well implemented quality improvement plan successfully drives the provision forward. The management of a large geographical area and the effective deployment of staff and resources have been highly successful. The observation of teaching and learning process is thorough. Learners' feedback is

comprehensively analysed and the service remedies any issues identified. Communication is very good and staff are supported well. Annual appraisal very effectively identifies staff development needs. Staff development is good and staff are appropriately qualified. Good practice is shared very effectively. The promotion of Every Child Matters is satisfactory and in the early stages of development. However, guidelines have been issued and training provided and tutors highlight outcomes in their lesson plans. The Skills for Life strategy is good. The recording of learners' progress and achievement is good. Peer reviews with external providers and regular moderation maintains the consistency of approach. Data are accurate and used very effectively to plan for curriculum development.

81. Equality and diversity are outstanding. Extensive numbers of learners are on programmes and of these, nearly half work towards accreditation. Many learners have been sectioned under the Mental Health Act and are from secure units. This is the first time that an opportunity to learn outside of the unit has been offered. Learners very effectively share with other learners personal accounts of bullying and harassment and demonstrate how to deal with these concerns and how to be an advocate for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
82. All staff are involved in the development of the self-assessment report. The report accurately identifies the strengths of this area. However, the grades awarded at inspection were higher than those awarded by the service.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

83. ECC offers courses in administration, accounting, bookkeeping, law and team leading. The council's learning and development service offers Train to Gain programmes, apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in administration and customer service. ECC has enrolled 31 apprentices and 16 advanced apprentices. On Train to Gain, 14 learners take NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The adult and community learning service has 177 learners enrolled on 25 non-accredited courses at six centres and 223 learners enrolled on 28 accredited courses at seven centres. Centres are sited across the county. Courses include bookkeeping, computerised accounts, law and team leader awards. Sixty-eight learners also take NVQs at levels 2 and 3 as part of the Train to Gain contract. Currently 82% of learners are female, 9% are from minority ethnic groups and 6% of learners have declared a disability.

Strengths

- High success rates on apprenticeship, Train to Gain and accredited courses
- Very high retention and achievement on non-accredited courses
- Good development of learners' confidence and employability skills
- Good use of short courses to support apprentices
- Thorough and supportive review process for apprentices
- Very good support for work-based learning
- Good curriculum management

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on law and bookkeeping courses
- Insufficient promotion of the apprenticeship programme to potential learners

Achievement and standards

84. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates for apprentices are good at 82%. Success rates for advanced apprentices improved from 66% in 2006/07 to 83% for 2008/09. Timely success rates are satisfactory at 65%. Overall success rates for Train to Gain learners are good. In-year success rates for Train to Gain learners in adult and community learning are 96% for level 2 learners and 89% for level 3 learners with 68 learners still on programme. In the learning and development service, success rates for level 2 and 3 learners are 100% with 14 learners still on programme. Timely success rates for Train to Gain learners are satisfactory.
85. Success rates on accredited short courses for 2007/08 are high at 84%, but success rates on long courses are satisfactory at 63%. For 2007/08 and

2008/09 retention and achievement rates on non-accredited courses are very high at 99% and 100% respectively. In 2007/08, success rates for GCSE law are low at 54% and very low for the certificate in bookkeeping at 42%.

86. Many learners increase their self-esteem, confidence and employability skills. They are enthusiastic and more knowledgeable about work practices and procedures. Train to Gain learners improve their knowledge and skills, which helps them in their work. Learners on computerised bookkeeping courses are able to apply what they have learnt at work very effectively.

Quality of provision

87. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning through short courses to support apprentices are good. Courses are well structured and provide good background knowledge for the technical certificate and the NVQ. Communications courses are highly effective and very helpful in developing learners' skills at work. Learners are very positive about the courses which are evaluated well and much improved following learners' feedback. Accommodation and resources overall are satisfactory.
88. Reviews are thorough and support learners at work well. Monitoring officers visit learners and helpfully highlight areas for discussion on skills, personal effectiveness and progress. Reports are comprehensive with clear targets which learners understand and own. Assessment is satisfactory. Learners on work-based learning programmes benefit from a variety of assessment methods to meet individual needs.
89. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners across the provision are satisfactory. The range and timing of the provision is satisfactory. Improvements have been made to broaden the adult community learning provision for accounting in West Essex.
90. The arrangements to guide and support learners are good. Learners in work-based learning benefit from very good support. Individual learning needs are effectively diagnosed at the start of work-based learning programmes. Literacy and numeracy support is openly discussed with learners where appropriate and apprentices also benefit from individual support provided by a full-time learning support officer. Referrals are made to external agencies where required for dyslexia support. Progression opportunities for all learners are clear, well understood and used. Assessors work effectively and flexibly to meet the needs of learners, arranging visits around shift and work patterns to meet individual needs. Assessors are also readily available to support learners by text, email and telephone. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Induction overall is satisfactory and is well planned for apprentices who have an extended probationary period to enable them to complete assessments and formulate individual learning plans.

91. Apprenticeship programmes are not sufficiently promoted to potential learners. Some learners are referred to the apprenticeship programme through Connexions. Others, however, have been recommended to the programme by friends and did not receive sufficient information about the training to help them make informed choices.

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management are good with a clear strategic direction for the provision. The learning and development service is well managed. Staff provide well structured programmes and placements for learners. The adult and community learning provision is also well managed. Communication is good with weekly and monthly meetings to review progress and set targets for improving retention, achievement and success rates. Quality assurance is good with managers focusing on data and progress to improve the provision. In adult and community learning, improvements to the curriculum and more effective planning of programmes have led to significantly improved success rates from 48% to 73% over the previous two years. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good for apprentices where concepts are well covered at induction, training courses and progress reviews and satisfactory across the rest of the provision. Health and safety aspects are covered well for all learners.
93. Staff benefit from good professional development opportunities and are able to readily access courses to update their skills. Staff appraisal systems are good and staff are well qualified with appropriate occupational experience. Observations of teaching and learning are effective and evaluative and lead to improvements. The self-assessment process is thorough, inclusive and comprehensive. Grades identified in the self-assessment report match those awarded at inspection.

Family learning

Outstanding: Grade 1

Context

94. At the time of inspection, 2,682 learners were enrolled on family learning courses at 72 venues. Of these, 1,495 learners attended family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes, while a further 1187 attended wider family learning programmes. Of these, 6% were male, 5% were from minority ethnic groups and 2% declared a learning difficulty or disability. FLLN courses include family literacy, ESOL and numeracy programmes of up to 30 hours. Wider family learning provision includes a range of programmes designed to enhance parental involvement with children's learning, development and behaviour. The family learning curriculum is overseen by the family learning strategic manager, supported by six curriculum managers. The team includes 82 teachers.

Strengths

- Very high achievement and high standard of learners' work
- Outstanding teaching and learning
- Highly responsive provision
- Outstanding curriculum leadership and management
- Very effective partnerships

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently thorough information, advice and guidance

Achievement and standards

95. Achievement and standards are outstanding. Learners develop very good personal, social and parenting skills. Most learners make good progress in developing their skills in supporting or interacting with their children, for example, in dealing with children's behavioural problems, or in helping their children with their reading or number skills. Learners develop good literacy and numeracy skills and report substantially increased levels of confidence. Many parents and carers progress to other family learning, skills for life programmes or other education or training. Many have become more involved with the school as volunteer readers or as support assistants. Achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications is excellent. In 2007/08, 90% of the learners entered, gained national certificates in literacy or numeracy. Learners make very good progress in working towards qualifications. Standards of learners' work are very high. Retention rates at 97% in 2007/08 are excellent.

Quality of provision

96. The quality of provision is outstanding. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Well-qualified and highly motivated teachers provide sessions that are well paced, interactive and challenging. Learners benefit from a very good range of practical activities and opportunities for discussion. Learners respond enthusiastically to teachers' questions, ask appropriate questions themselves, listen to each other and quickly develop new ideas. Many contribute to the direction of their learning and programmes. Teachers thoroughly evaluate their sessions. Learners and teachers use resources very well, including ICT. Parents and carers are able to make excellent use of a wide range of appropriate and stimulating resources provided by the service. Teachers encourage learners to reflect on the implications of their activities for their own and their children's learning. Learners record their progress in supporting their children at home. The provision of additional learning support is excellent.
97. The recording of learners' progress and achievement is good. Teachers use a variety of methods to capture learners' progress. Most individual learning plans contain targets appropriate to the needs of learners. However, a minority of individual learning plans do not include targets sufficiently linked to initial assessment.
98. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. The family learning team is highly responsive to the needs of learners, schools and communities. The service consults parents and carers, schools and other partners in developing programmes. Teachers negotiate the content of courses with learners. The team works very closely with partners and learners in evaluating provision and planning future programmes. The range of family learning programmes is good and serves a large number of communities throughout the county, including areas of urban deprivation as well as rural areas.
99. Support for learners is good. Teachers and managers respond quickly and effectively to requests from learners for support, for example in managing some aspects of their child's behaviour or in coping with challenging family circumstances. Teachers skilfully meet the needs of learners and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners and schools value the crèche provision which supports learners' attendance on courses.
100. Information, advice and guidance are insufficiently thorough. Initial information and advice offered to learners does not always provide sufficient detail about course content. Learners do not always receive comprehensive information, advice and guidance as their course draws to a close to help them decide on their next step in learning.

Leadership and management

101. Leadership and management are outstanding. Strong partnerships with schools, children's centres and a range of partners including the army, extended services and health visitors contribute to very effective planning. For example, the service works with the army in developing FLLN provision for the families of army personnel. Partners at local authority and local level share the service's strategic understanding of the importance of family learning within extended services and parenting. Communication between partners and the service is very effective.
102. Standards are consistently high across the family learning curriculum area and throughout the county. Regular formal observations take place for all teachers who receive appropriate support in implementing actions resulting from observations. Session observations are thorough, evaluative and demonstrate sound understanding of the teaching and learning process. Information from observations is used to aid the planning of continuous professional development. Teachers' and learners' course evaluations are used to assist managers in making improvements in the quality of provision. Staff make a good contribution to the self-assessment report, which includes most of the key strengths identified during inspection.
103. Communication between managers and staff and amongst staff is very effective. Team meetings are regular and staff are very well supported. Staff actively share good practice and resources. All staff, including those who are part-time, receive annual appraisals. Participation in a wide range of professional development opportunities, in, for example, child protection procedures or in developing knowledge and skills in e-learning, is high. The service encourages more experienced staff to mentor new staff or those wishing to develop skills in a new area.
104. The promotion of social inclusion is very good. The service successfully targets under-represented groups, for example families of members of the armed forces, teenage parents, travellers and women accommodated in a refuge. Teachers promote equality and celebrate cultural diversity through the curriculum very effectively. The service provides a good range of resources for both adult learners and children. However, some furniture is not suitable for adult use.

Community development

Good: Grade 2

Context

105. At the time of inspection, 1,033 learners had enrolled in 2008/09 on community development programmes and activities, of whom 49% had no previous qualifications, 19% disclosed a disability and 36% were men. Almost 75% of the programmes are delivered by voluntary organisations and other partners through service level agreements, with 25% directly delivered by the service. A range of programmes is provided including ICT, anger management, food hygiene, sports and crafts and training for community champions. Courses range from one day workshops to 10 week courses and aim to develop confidence and skills for learners to progress to further learning or employment and participate within their communities. The diversity and equality curriculum manager and the NLDC projects coordinator manage the programme. Tutors and trainers are employed by voluntary organisations and ECC.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' knowledge, skills and confidence
- Particularly successful engagement of learners from target communities
- Very effective partnerships

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient arrangements to support the development of teaching and learning in voluntary organisations

Achievement and standards

106. Achievement and standards are good. Learners increase their knowledge and develop skills and confidence that are very important in their everyday lives, in their community roles and for employment. In particular, learners who have not been in learning for a considerable time, and who have few qualifications, make good gains in confidence. Learners develop their self-esteem and are inspired to continue their learning, seek employment or participate in their communities. About 18% of learners in 2007/08 progressed within the service from community development activities to further learning. Parents learn new skills or update previous knowledge to support their children. Some community development activities work to reduce social isolation and improve mental health. In one session, learners took pride in sharing their skills in sewing, mirror work and jewellery making. In an ESOL class, learners described the enjoyment and increased confidence gained from speaking to students in a local school about their religion. Members of voluntary organisations acquire useful skills that they apply in their work, for example, in food hygiene and ICT.

Quality of provision

107. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better sessions tutors build on learners' personal experience well to provide very practical contexts for learning, valuing learners' contributions and developing confidence. In a food safety session, paired activities enabled learners to share prior knowledge and increase understanding. Tutors use a good range of strategies to engage learners' interest and build their confidence to develop new skills. For example, in an introductory ICT session, the tutor planned activities well for learners to experiment and enjoy themselves, reducing their anxiety about computers. In weaker sessions, the pace is slow and tutors do not challenge learners to extend their learning. Some tutors use lengthy presentations and do not check learners' understanding.
108. The planning of learning and recording of progress and achievements are satisfactory. However, much of the provision is offered as a one day event and the use of the individual learning plan is inappropriate.
109. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. Programmes and activities to engage learners are particularly successful. They effectively meet national and local priorities. Programmes are planned to attract learners who are socially excluded or lack qualifications and provide a wide range of subjects and activities. Provision is flexible, including many taster sessions, short courses and informal activities that provide a non-threatening first experience of learning. Programmes provide good opportunities for learners to develop skills for work and community roles. Courses are located across the county and are specifically targeted to areas of deprivation, providing important local access to learning. Much of the provision is delivered by voluntary organisations that provide a welcoming and less formal learning environment.
110. Guidance and support for learning are satisfactory. Staff in voluntary organisations and within ECC provide good personal support for learners. They are experienced in working with learners who are less confident and who face many barriers to learning. Learners receive satisfactory information to enable them to enrol on appropriate programmes. This information is imaginatively distributed in a variety of ways, including children's 'book bags' from school, leaflets in cafes and through voluntary organisation networks. Learners have good access to individual guidance within the service.

Leadership and management

111. Leadership and management are good. Managers set a clear strategy for the allocation of NLDC funding and the delivery of community development programmes. This strategy is understood by partners and staff. A bidding process for providers clearly sets out the service priorities and applications are considered by a panel of managers at senior level.

112. Managers use data well to carefully target provision in areas of deprivation and to monitor the performance of projects. The narrow programme offer in the south of the county identified in 2007/08 has been improved in the current year with the addition of three new delivery partners. However, managers do not use available data to monitor learners' progression within the service.
113. The service works very effectively with a wide range of partners to identify and meet learners' and community needs. In 2008/09, 75% of the programme was delivered by voluntary organisations, which use their networks well to enable the service to reach new learners in targeted communities. The service successfully increased the participation of learners who disclose a disability from 4.2% in 2007/08 to 19% in the current year.
114. The monitoring of community providers is satisfactory. Service level agreements clearly identify service and provider responsibilities and set targets for enrolments, progression to further learning and progression to Skills for Life. Contract monitoring meetings with all providers review performance and identify actions needed and support to be provided. Although reference is made to the quality of teaching and learning in monitoring documents, insufficient emphasis is placed on developing voluntary organisation staff and trainers and on improving practice.

Learners' achievements

Essex County Council Multi-remit inspection 1-6 June 2009

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by the provider from 2004 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	5			100%	
		timely	1			20%	
	05/06	overall	5			57.14%	42.9%
		timely	2			33.33%	
	06/07	overall	2			66.67%	56.3%
		timely	1			25%	
	07/08#	overall	7			85.71%	62.7%
		timely	4			66.67%	
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	34			73.17%	
		timely	14			33.33%	
	05/06	overall	40			79.59%	51.3%
		timely	21			50%	
	06/07	overall	40			74%	60%
		timely	32			50.98%	
	07/08#	Overall	27			81.82%	64.3%
		timely	24			75%	

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record (ILR)

When available and validated by the LSC

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVQ programmes managed by the provider from 2006 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain NVQ	2006/07	overall	1	100%
		timely	1	100%
	2007/08	overall	111	77%
		timely	103	60%
	2008/09 (8 months)	overall	297	82%
		timely	276	58%

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** NVQ qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider before inspection

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain skills for life programmes managed by the provider from 2008 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider skills for life rate**
Train to Gain (Skills for Life)	2006/07	overall	n/a	
		timely		
	2007/08	overall	n/a	
		timely		
	2008/09 (8 months)	overall	76	93%
		timely	64	74%

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Skills for life qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college/provider before inspection

Learners' achievements in FE funded, accredited provision offered by ACL providers

Success rates on accredited entry and level 1 (combined) and level 2 qualifications, by length, expected end year and age.

2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for GFE colleges.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	19+			Diff
		Starts – Transfers	ACL Provider Rate	National Rate	
1 long	06/07	2691	70%	72%	-2%
	07/08*	2711	71%	N/A	
2 long	06/07	1820	74%	70	+4%
	07/08*	1669	74%	N/A	
Short**	06/07	3712	65%	80	-15%
	07/08*	3102	83%	N/A	

* ACL provider data not validated (use where complete, validated and produced using proprietary software)

** Courses over 5 weeks long