

Somerset Skills and Learning

inspection report

Unique reference number:	54460
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Information about the provider

1. Somerset Skills and Learning Service (the Service) operates in the Resources Directorate of Somerset County Council. The Service provides lifelong learning opportunities throughout the county. It delivers learning opportunities to approximately 14,000 learners each year and is one of the largest providers of work-based learning apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in the county. The Service's adult learner provision includes learning for qualifications in preparation for life and work and learning for social and personal development including family learning and community development offered through first steps provision and neighbourhood learning in deprived communities (NLDC). Young learner provision includes Entry to Employment (E2E). The service also delivers European Social Fund (ESF) programmes. The Service operates through 18 community-based centres across Somerset.
2. A group manager leads the Service supported by four senior managers, ten curriculum managers and five organisational performance managers. Programme leaders and lead tutors with specific curriculum expertise support around 300 tutors/assessors.
3. The Service's overall mission is to 'provide excellent services that are accessible, responsive and sustainable to ensure Somerset is a healthy and vibrant place to live, work and visit'.
4. The county has a population of 525,800 with just over 24% aged 60 or over. The proportion of residents of minority ethnic heritage, including foreign nationals, is 4.8%. The unemployment rate in the county is currently 4.6% which is below the current national rate. Somerset ranks as 110 of the most deprived authorities in England. Around 68% of its working age population attain NVQ level 2 and above, which is just above the national rate. The proportion of Somerset school leavers who achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is 49%, which is comparable to national figures.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Young learner provision	75 part-time learners
Further education (16-18)	
Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment	185 part-time learners
Adult learner provision	
Learning for qualifications	60 full-time learners 1,250 part-time learners
Learning for social and personal development	9,700 part-time learners
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	913 learners
Apprenticeships	537 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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Aspect	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Learning for qualifications	
Preparation for life and work	Grade 2
Learning for qualifications in employment	
Business administration and law	Grade 3
Learning for social and personal development	
Community development	Grade 2
Family learning	Grade 2

Overall effectiveness

5. Many learners gain in confidence and self-esteem from their participation in education and learning and, for some, this has a profoundly positive effect on their lives. Benefits gained by learners include a sense of well-being, the development of skills and better prospects for employment. Where courses lead to qualifications, the large majority of learners pass. However, too many work-based learning learners take too long to gain their qualification.
6. Staff prepare thoroughly for their teaching sessions. They plan a variety of tasks to keep learners motivated and interested. In some subject areas, tutors do not use technology sufficiently to enliven and promote learning. Learners very much enjoy their learning and appreciate the efforts made by staff to ensure their safety. A broad variety of programmes are available to help learners develop literacy and numeracy skills, improve their social and personal skills and enhance employment prospects. Staff form very strong partnerships with community groups and other agencies to ensure even more opportunities are available for learners. They provide strong personal support to learners.

Although most learners have plans with individual learning targets, many of these targets are too general and in too many cases lack personal goals.

7. Managers have a clear idea of the way the Service needs to develop and they are supported ably by elected councillors and senior managers of the local authority. Staff understand the strengths and weaknesses of their Service. They have established rigorous safeguarding procedures to ensure learners are safe. Equality and diversity issues are given a high priority and many disadvantaged learners are encouraged to participate in courses. Projects bring together individuals from across the county and this enhances community cohesion. Managers ensure budgets are controlled tightly and the Service offers good value for money. Since the previous inspection, the Service has improved the quality of provision and raised standards. The capacity for making further improvements is good.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates for courses leading to qualifications are high and often above national figures. They are satisfactory for courses providing qualifications in employment, but show wide variation between subject areas and learners often take too long to gain the qualification.
- Learners enjoy their courses and develop a wide range of good personal and technical skills. Employed learners improve their prospects for promotion. Many learners are stimulated to make a positive contribution to the communities in which they live. Learners feel very safe attending sessions.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching sessions are planned well. A wide range of activities engage the interest of learners. Information learning and technology (ILT) and the Service's virtual learning environment (VLE) are used well in some subject areas, but their use is inconsistent across the Service as a whole.
- Procedures for the observation of teaching and learning are comprehensive and have led to better teaching. However, when teachers have areas for development highlighted, actions for improvement are not always clearly identified.
- Assessment practices are satisfactory. The Service has improved the recognition and recording of learners' progress and achievement (RARPA). Individual learning plans are in place for the large majority of learners, but too many learners' targets lack detail and fail to encompass personal learning goals. Also, many learners on programmes for social and personal development feel individual learning plans are an administrative chore and not useful for them.
- Outstanding partnerships focus very effectively on a wide range of communities across Somerset and are of great benefit to learners. They enhance the range of provision, which meets the needs and interests of people across the county well.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Staff provide good personal support to learners. Employers receive good advice and guidance on training

matters. Some administrative procedures for prospective learners wishing to join courses are unclear and not coordinated very well.

- Senior managers set a clear strategic direction for the Service. Effective scrutiny and challenge are provided by the adult learning advisory group comprising elected councillors and senior managers of the Service.
- Curriculum management is good, with clear communication and regular team meetings. However, there is insufficient monitoring of key performance indicators such as learners' attendance and progression rates.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Work to widen social inclusion is particularly successful. Many disadvantaged learners are encouraged to participate successfully in education and training for the first time.
- Procedures for safeguarding learners are good. Comprehensive staff training has raised the awareness of safeguarding issues to a high level among staff.
- Staff listen to and treat learners' and employers' views very seriously. In response to learners' concerns, staff change things wherever possible. Quality assurance procedures are rigorous. The self-assessment process is accurate. The Service offers good value for money.

What does Somerset Skills and Learning service need to do to improve further?

- Increase learners' outcomes on learning for qualifications provision, particularly the completion rates within the allocated time.
- Ensure all learners have specific, measurable and challenging individual targets to improve the way staff assess learners' progress.
- Ensure key performance indicators, particularly learners' attendance and progression rates, are collated, monitored, analysed and acted upon.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further by ensuring areas for development highlighted by the observation of teaching sessions are clearly identified in individual action plans.
- Extend the existing good practice in ILT to all subject areas.
- Improve pre-course and administrative procedures to ensure prospective learners receive sufficient information about the content of courses and venues.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the different ways in which learning enhances their lives
- the high quality of the teaching and training
- accessible classes in high-quality local community venues
- staff at centres who are polite and welcoming
- the wide range of courses available

- the strong support for learners with particular specialist needs.

What learners would like to see improved:

- procedures for enrolling and communication regarding other aspects of course administration
- the amount of paperwork on some courses which affects our lessons
- a higher frequency of assessment in the workplace.

Summary of the views of employers and partners as confirmed by inspectors

What employers and partners like:

- the very good links with community groups and agencies that ensure provision meets local needs
- the individual support that assessors give learners
- the way in which assessors plan their work to fit in with workplace requirements
- the very responsive and supportive nature of the Service.

What employers and partners would like to see improved:

- the accuracy of dates and times for off-the-job training so they can plan better for learners' absences from work
- the amount of contact between assessors and learners' line managers at work
- the opportunities for networking and capacity-building amongst community development providers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. The previous inspection judged the overall effectiveness of the Service to be satisfactory. It is now good. The Service has improved the quality of provision and raised standards of learners' performance. Areas for concern reported at the last inspection are now largely rectified. Quality assurance arrangements are applied much more consistently. Procedures for the observation of teaching and learning have been developed considerably and are now comprehensive, although action planning for identified weaknesses needs to be collated into action plans more systematically. The self-assessment process is rigorous and accurate. Operational management is good, although the monitoring of some key performance indicators such as learners' progression and attendance rates is insufficient.
9. The needs of learners and employers are being met very well. The improvements identified have taken place while maintaining the broad range of provision. Senior managers have a realistic understanding of the challenges facing adult education and training in Somerset and are taking sensible decisions to ensure the sustainability of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. The standard of learners' work is high. Learners enjoy their learning, in some cases for the first time in their lives. They make good progress in achieving their personal and social goals, growing in confidence and self-esteem. Learners develop good technical knowledge and skills. Community development programmes have given individuals the ambition to tackle projects and tasks that many thought were beyond them when first joining the course. In many cases their employability skills are improved and this opens up new career opportunities. Some learners on family learning courses overcome adverse personal circumstances to achieve regular attendance to sessions and complete weekly homework activities with their children. Learning for qualifications programmes provide learners with skills and qualifications relevant to their work. They develop a better knowledge and understanding of their job roles.
11. Learners' success rates are high on courses leading to qualifications. In 2008/09, the overall long course success rate was 77% and for short courses it was 88%, some 4% and 7% above the national averages respectively. Success rates are well above national averages for learners on intermediate courses and just above for learners on foundation programmes. Success rates are satisfactory on accredited literacy and numeracy programmes which make up the largest proportion of the learning for qualifications provision. They are very high on accredited community development and family learning courses. Men and women achieve equally well, as do learners with a disability. Progression rates for learners on E2E programmes have been consistently high for the last three years and particularly so for those who also enrolled on the pre-E2E introductory course.

12. Outcomes for learners on courses leading to qualifications in employment are satisfactory overall. Train to Gain overall success rates have risen over the last three years from 67% in 2006/07 to 75% in 2008/09, but they are still below the national average of 83%. However, they have improved to date in 2009/10 to 81%. Success rates within the allocated time were low from 2006/07 to 2008/09, never rising above 50%, but they have improved to date in 2009/10 to 56%.
13. Overall apprenticeship success rates were just below national averages in 2008/09, having fallen in successive years from 2006/07. The weakest performance is on level 2 apprenticeships. Success rates within the allocated time improved dramatically from 21% in 2006/07 to 53% in 2008/09.
14. Learners feel very safe attending sessions. Tutors are knowledgeable about health and safety in the classroom. Careful risk assessments are made of all venues which are often situated in isolated rural areas. Parents and carers attending family learning programmes appreciate how staff train their children to keep themselves safe. Work-based learners have safe working practices reinforced well through induction and reviews.
15. Learners make a positive contribution to the communities in which they live. Community development initiatives focus on deprived areas and engage local residents successfully. Learners develop community involvement skills and learn how to set up social enterprise groups. Many learners value the differences that individuals bring to group work. They use their training to make a positive contribution to community cohesion and frequently help to set up community-based projects themselves, passing on their skills to others. Parents and carers participate in volunteering programmes in schools to assist teachers to manage challenging classes. Many older learners state that attending sessions helps them to keep active and to value their community more.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. The proportion of good and outstanding sessions has risen steadily over the last three years and the amount of inadequate teaching has decreased. These were areas for improvement at the last inspection. Very good use is made of ILT, such as e-learning and distance learning, to overcome the challenges presented by a geographically-dispersed learner cohort where otherwise it might not have been possible for them to take part in learning. However, the use of ILT is underdeveloped in some subject areas. Many tutors arrange good enrichment activities outside of teaching sessions which add value and broaden cultural awareness. Employers involve themselves fully in the training process on work-based learning programmes. New teaching staff and those with development needs are supported well through lesson observations, mentoring and peer review.
17. Assessment practices are satisfactory. The Service has made significant progress since the last full inspection to improve RARPA across many areas of

its provision for social and personal development. The Service has a thoughtful and empathetic approach to the paperwork for recording learning outcomes and progress. Many tutors have responded constructively to the challenges of assessing their learners in ways that learners do not perceive as bureaucratic. Some tutors keep very detailed and useful records of their learners' progress against specific individual learning outcomes, particularly in subject areas such as arts and languages. In community development and family learning provision, initial assessment and target setting are insufficiently detailed. Although staff have worked hard to change learners' views about the importance of assessment, too many adults on courses for social and personal development still do not understand why tutors need to monitor and record their progress and achievements. This is particularly true for older learners and those re-enrolling on courses. In work-based learning, assessors support work-based learners well.

18. The range of provision to meet the needs and interests of people across the county is good. The Service caters well for the contrasting needs of very different groups of learners both geographically and by age group. It has a deliberate strategy of focusing its provision in isolated rural areas where there is no other existing provision. Courses promote social inclusiveness and community cohesion very effectively. Community development and family learning provision successfully engage learners from areas of deprivation. Employers express high levels of satisfaction with work-based training which takes place to fit in with learners' job roles and working hours. A series of networking days have enabled employers to discuss their training needs and give their views for improving the provision.
19. The Service's outstanding partnerships have had a significant impact on many learners across the county. Collaborative work brings together community groups and agencies very effectively to offer integrated and imaginative partnering arrangements. The Service takes the lead in coordinating communication between a wide range of education and training providers to plan curriculum pathways and to avoid duplication of provision. The Service is extremely responsive and flexible to requests from prospective partners and is able to provide a very extensive range of customised solutions for partners who face challenges in bringing what are often small groups of learners together from very rural communities. The development of partnerships with employers for work-based learning is particularly strong.
20. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners appreciate the good personal support they receive and the extra lengths tutors go to in supporting them. Staff celebrate learners' achievements well.
21. Learning advisers, trained in giving information, advice and guidance, provide useful and impartial advice to learners on progression opportunities. Disability project workers and support workers give good assistance to learners with particular needs. Employers receive very good support and advice and guidance across a broad range of training matters. Course information leaflets are detailed and contain helpful information, such as what to bring to the first

lesson. However, some learners are unclear about what to do to enrol on courses and find it difficult to obtain accurate information about programmes. The centralisation of some administration and enrolment functions has led to problems in communication with individual centres. Managers are aware of this issue and have commissioned a report to identify the main areas for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. Senior managers have set a clear strategic direction for the Service within the context of local needs. The Service plays a key role in developing learning and skills provision across the county. Strategic plans are derived appropriately from local area agreements and national priorities. Plans are monitored regularly by senior managers and actions are taken when necessary. The head of the Service chairs the county's adult learning forum and good links are maintained between different council departments, educational and training providers, and voluntary and community groups. The Service is currently reviewing all of its priorities in the light of recent changes in funding to ensure its provision provides value for money and is sustainable in the long term.
23. Effective scrutiny and challenge of the Service's performance are provided by the adult learning advisory group which is composed of elected councillors, with senior managers in attendance.
24. Curriculum management is good. Managers communicate well with staff across the county. An informative newsletter is produced regularly; course and management teams meet frequently. Despite a restructuring of staff taking place currently, morale remains high. Staff at all levels are fully committed to serving the local community. The management structure for work-based learning provision is clear. Team working is strong and mutually supportive. All staff undergo performance reviews. The effective use of management information was an issue in the last inspection and it is now greatly improved. However, learners' attendance and progression rates are not collated centrally. This lack of information on key performance indicators makes it difficult for managers to judge fully the effectiveness of subject areas.
25. Effective staff training has raised the skills of staff and bespoke training is organised when the need arises. Specific training events are evaluated, but the overall impact of the Service's training programme is not reviewed systematically by managers.
26. Procedures for safeguarding learners are good. The Service meets all government requirements for children aged up to 18 and vulnerable adults. A single central register records Criminal Records Bureau checks which are carried out for all staff and volunteers. Where programmes are sub-contracted to other organisations or learners are on work placements with employers, safeguarding checks are part of the service level agreement. Safeguarding policies are comprehensive and reviewed annually by a safeguarding group which coordinates and promotes this work. Extensive staff training has taken place,

including bespoke online training to raise awareness of safeguarding issues. Staff are very well informed about safeguarding procedures. Two designated senior members of staff have overall responsibility for safeguarding, one for children and the other for vulnerable adults. Their roles are publicised widely and they have developed close links with relevant agencies for making referrals. Stringent risk assessments are carried out to ensure activities and venues meet all necessary health and safety standards.

27. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. A coordinating group ensure that relevant policies and procedures are in place. The Service meets all government requirements. Detailed equality impact assessments have targets for the participation of specific minority ethnic groups represented within the county. The attainment of learners is analysed according to ethnicity, gender and disability and no group underperforms compared to the rest. However, despite the best efforts of managers to recruit staff of minority ethnic heritage, the ethnic profile of staff is lower than that of the county's residents and learners.
28. Much good work is carried out to widen the participation of groups who do not traditionally engage with the Service. The widening participation team raises the profile of this work through attendance at staff team meetings and liaison with local community groups. Recent celebration events include a cultural fun day with the South Somerset Muslim Women's group and a fun and skills day held as part of the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller history month. Specific activities are arranged to encourage the participation of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Accessibility for learners with restricted mobility is good in the vast majority of venues. Men-only programmes are raising the engagement of men in family learning. Very effective work is carried out with learners who have mental health issues.
29. Arrangements for capturing and acting upon the views of learners and employers are good. End-of-course questionnaires are used by course teams to inform the self-assessment report and are collated into an overall analysis. Staff take the views of learners very seriously and often make arrangements to accommodate them. For example, times of sessions are changed for the convenience of learners, alternative venues are found and changes are made to the curriculum. Outstanding partnerships play an important role in improving community cohesion throughout the county. Close engagement with employers has led to responsive and flexible provision. A successful series of networking events provides information and updates on training matters and gives employers the opportunities to exchange views and identify training needs.
30. Quality assurance procedures are good. Arrangements for quality assuring training delivered by subcontractors are adequate. Curriculum managers hold meetings with employers three times a year to discuss learners' progress and the management of training. An annual 'health check' questionnaire is completed during discussion with employers which covers matters such as safeguarding, health and safety, and equality and diversity. Observation of teaching and learning procedures are stringent and have led to improvements

in the quality of provision. Teaching staff receive detailed and accurate feedback. However, action plans to improve the quality of teaching sometimes lack specific and measurable targets.

31. The self-assessment process is accurate and inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and areas for development highlighted in the self-assessment report. However, the direct involvement of employers, learners and part-time staff in self-assessment is not well developed.
32. The Service offers good value for money. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Accommodation is generally of a high quality and well resourced. Budgets are tightly managed with monthly reviews of expenditure and income. Actions are taken to increase the cost effectiveness of provision, for example courses with a low number of learners are closed or merged. All proposals for new programmes are subject to an estimation of cost to ensure their economic viability, although this may be waived where the educational need is clearly identified.

Learning for qualifications

Preparation for life and work

Grade 2

Context

33. During the inspection, discrete literacy and numeracy courses had 159 learners attending and there were 103 learners on E2E courses. Literacy and numeracy provision is located at nine centres and E2E at five centres across the county. Courses are provided from entry level 2 to intermediate level. Literacy and numeracy courses are managed by two part-time curriculum managers, supported by one full-time and ten part-time teaching staff and three support workers. The E2E programme is managed by a full-time lead tutor working with the foundation team leader and seven full-time and seven part-time teaching staff.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Achievement rates for literacy and numeracy courses have improved over the last three years, and retention rates have remained static, giving an overall success rate in 2008/09 of 77% which is satisfactory. Progression rates for learners on E2E programmes are good, with 57% moving on to further education or apprenticeships.
- Learners on all courses feel safe in and around the learning centres. Staff have created a welcoming and friendly environment. Learners feel valued and respected.
- Attendance on some numeracy courses is weak and below 50%. Some learners are enrolled on courses without any assurance that they can commit to regular attendance. Lateness by learners is not always challenged by tutors.
- The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory for literacy and numeracy provision and good for E2E. Most lessons are well planned, with tutors injecting suitable pace and providing a broad range of active learning strategies. However, in some lessons insufficient attention is given to meeting the needs of individual learners, particularly where there is a wide range of abilities.
- Initial and diagnostic assessments are completed regularly, but assessment outcomes do not inform and influence teaching sufficiently. Diagnostic assessment correctly identifies those learners needing additional support and this is readily provided.
- All learners have an individual learning plan which is used effectively to track and record learners' progress. Most of these contain targets for the curriculum, but the personal goals of learners are rarely included and so progress in their personal development is not recorded.

- Support for learners is good. Staff on E2E programmes provide good pastoral care and successfully encourage learners to take on new challenges. They work closely with learners to monitor and review their progress well.
- Learners on literacy and numeracy courses receive helpful guidance about progression opportunities and some make very good progress. For example, one numeracy learner with additional learning needs has progressed from entry level 2 through to intermediate level over the past few years.
- Effective partnerships have been forged with local employers and organisations. These have extended the range of vocational experience available to learners. A 'Grow Your Own' garden project, developed in partnership with a local employer, enables E2E learners to design and build their own garden. It recently won the education business partnership award for best employer/provider partnership.
- Leadership and management are good. Strong leadership on E2E programmes provides good strategic direction, ensuring that recruitment to the E2E programme is fully inclusive. Management information is used well to understand variations in the performance of courses across the county and effective improvement actions are instigated when necessary.
- Procedures for safeguarding are good for young people under 18 years of age and vulnerable adults. All staff have taken part in appropriate training. For example, all teaching staff on E2E courses have undergone training to provide advice to young people on appropriate behaviour that will help maintain their sexual health.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. In E2E sessions, equality and diversity issues are discussed in the classroom and understood well. These issues are addressed if they arise in literacy and numeracy sessions, but they are not promoted vigorously enough by staff.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Judgements are broadly similar to those found by inspectors. Quality assurance procedures are good. The observation of the teaching and learning process is robust.

What does Somerset Skills and Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve retention rates so that more learners on literacy and numeracy courses are able to complete their courses successfully.
- Improve the quality of lesson planning to ensure that the needs of individual learners are met.
- Broaden the content of individual learning plans to include personal targets.
- Ensure that equality and diversity are promoted more vigorously during teaching sessions.
- Extend procedures for monitoring attendance, and deal with poor punctuality, by establishing procedures to encourage learners to arrive on time and attend more regularly.

Learning for qualifications in employment

Other learning for qualifications in employment provision considered as part of the main findings but not separately graded: *health and care, information technology and administration*.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

34. At the time of inspection, 112 learners were on work-based learning provision in business and administration. Of these, 30 were advanced apprentices, 33 were apprentices and 49 were on Train to Gain programmes. Some 91 learners were training for business administration and the rest were working towards qualifications in management, team leading, customer service, accounts and business improvement techniques. Of the learners last year, 80% were women, one percent belonged to a minority ethnic group and five percent had a declared disability. Learners are assessed in the workplace and train at centres across the county.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are satisfactory. Overall framework success rates for both apprenticeships and Train to Gain were 74% in 2008/09, which is satisfactory for the former but below national figures for the latter. Success rates within the allocated time were low for apprenticeships at 57% and particularly low for Train to Gain at 44%, but these have improved significantly within the last six months and are currently satisfactory.
- Learners develop good personal and employability skills. They improve their confidence, timekeeping, organisation and telephone skills, as well as job-specific skills such as customer service, use of information technology packages and data protection. Many learners gain additional short qualifications in the workplace.
- Learners' progression rates are good. The majority of apprentices gain permanent employment or promotion at the end of training and around 25% progress to higher-level courses.
- Learners feel safe and treat each other with dignity and respect. They understand what constitutes bullying and harassment and know how to report inappropriate behaviour. They act safely and responsibly. Some apprentices take part in community activities, for example refurbishing a scout hut.
- The quality of teaching, training and assessment is good. Assessors provide good coaching on their regular visits to the workplace and at drop-in workshops for key skills and portfolio building. Well-experienced and qualified trainers use a variety of theoretical and practical activities to engage and motivate learners. Learners participate well in discussions and enjoy sharing their commercial experiences with others, taking back new ideas to their own workplaces.

- Initial assessment is satisfactory and identifies those learners requiring support with literacy, numeracy or dyslexia. Adequate support is given both individually and in group sessions. Assessment practices on NVQ courses are thorough and assessors provide constructive feedback to learners on how to improve.
- Assessors review learners' progress well, but do not always set specific, short-term, challenging targets against which progress can be measured. Where employers are involved in reviews, they motivate learners to make faster progress towards their qualification by providing extra support and training opportunities.
- Assessment is flexible to meet work patterns and most learners use electronic portfolios which they can access online. Resources are satisfactory at all centres, but the use of ILT and the Service's VLE are not promoted sufficiently to learners.
- The range of programmes meets learners' and employers' needs well. Learners can progress from NVQ levels 1 to 3. They are matched closely to work placements. Support for key skills is provided at locations across the county to reduce travel for learners.
- Good partnership working benefits learners. Staff have strong and well-established collaborative arrangements with local authorities and schools for apprenticeship training. Train to Gain programmes enable adult employees to update their skills. A partnership with a local leisure trust very effectively prepares trainees for administration and management roles.
- Advice, guidance and support are satisfactory. Trainers and assessors give good support to learners for personal and work issues and they can be contacted readily by email and telephone. Learners are generally given effective initial advice on the most appropriate NVQs to match their job. However, some Train to Gain learners are placed on programmes at a lower, and so less challenging, level than that which they are capable of achieving.
- Curriculum management is satisfactory. Staff development is good. Team members regularly share information and lines of communication are clear. Staff morale is high. Employers, however, do not always receive sufficient advance notification on when their staff are required for off-the-job training and assessment.
- The promotion of equality and diversity during induction, training and progress reviews is satisfactory. Trainers and assessors reinforce equality and diversity issues at induction and during the programme. Staff carry out rigorous risk assessments of work placements and receive regular training in equality, diversity and safeguarding issues.
- Quality improvement procedures are good and have led to improvements, which are beginning to improve success rates. These improvements include better lesson planning, more rigorous monitoring of learners' progress, more thorough internal verification procedures for the assessment of learners' work and greater use of e-portfolios. Quality assurance procedures for subcontracted provision are satisfactory.

What does Somerset Skills and Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates by monitoring learners' progress closely, setting challenging and specific targets in progress reviews and improving opportunities for assessment more frequently and earlier in the programme.
- Share good practice in the use of computers in lessons and extend the use of the VLE for learners at work or at home.
- Improve communication with employers by ensuring dates for off-the job training are accurate and that they are notified in advance by assessors of any changes in dates and times of visits to the workplace, to enable employers to plan effectively for staff absence.
- Improve the accuracy of initial advice and guidance given to Train to Gain learners, giving more careful consideration to the experience, job role and starting point of learners to enable them to be guided onto the most appropriate course and level.

Learning for social and personal development

Family Learning

Grade 2

Context

35. Currently, 198 learners are enrolled on 18 family learning courses. Approximately one third of these learners are on family literacy, language and numeracy courses leading to accreditation. Courses are held at nine schools, two children's centres, a church, a village hall and a swimming pool. The programme area is managed by a curriculum manager and a programme leader. Almost 12% of learners are men, 3.5% are from minority ethnic groups and 8% are European migrant workers, mainly from Poland and Portugal.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are outstanding for all courses. The overall success rate for 2008/09 was 94%, an increase of 8.5% from the previous year, and these high rates have continued during this year. Success rates are equally good for men and women and for all minority ethnic groups.
- Learners on non-accredited programmes reach challenging learning goals. Some learners overcome adverse personal circumstances to achieve regular attendance in class and complete weekly homework activities with their children.
- Many learners are inspired by their experience of family learning courses to continue their studies, often with a view to entering employment. Just over one third of learners from 2008/09 are now attending other courses run by the Service. Although this information is collected by individual staff, the data are not analysed centrally to improve provision further.
- Teaching and learning are good. Course planning is detailed with a clear focus to every session. Learners interact well and participate enthusiastically in activities, using the wide range of high-quality learning resources.
- A good range of IT equipment is available to teaching staff, but there is little exciting or innovative use of technology. The VLE is not used sufficiently to enhance teaching and learning.
- A few Early Start sessions feature objectives for children but not parents and carers and there is insufficient focus to develop the skills of adults. Managers recognise that trained primary teachers may be inexperienced in teaching adults and training earlier this year has already had some positive impact.
- The monitoring of learners' progress and achievement is generally good. However, initial assessment and personalised target setting on Early Start programmes are unsatisfactory, as the starting point of learners is rarely recorded, making it difficult to monitor their progress. Individual learning plans often contain group targets, regardless of individual need or interest.

- Partnership working is excellent. Managers make joint funding bids and support other agencies to access funding to benefit disadvantaged families. For example, collaboration with the region's 'passport to learning' programme, which accredits children's extra-curricular learning, has provided new opportunities to reach families where children are at risk of under-performing.
- Information, advice and guidance for learners are satisfactory. Learners receive appropriate initial and end-of-course guidance. Most promotional literature is screened for readability and has complete and accurate information. In a very few cases, pre-course information has been misleading and difficult to read and this has resulted in learners joining courses with false expectations.
- Procedures for safeguarding are good. Information for learners is well publicised. Family learning programmes provide a safe environment for parents and their children. Learners adopt safe working practices, learn how to keep their children safe, and are encouraged to train their children to safeguard themselves. A cybersafe programme is available which was co-written with the local police.
- Social inclusion and the promotion of equality and diversity are outstanding. Targeting of at-risk families and under-represented groups is very successful. Current learners include many parents of children with learning difficulties, teenage mothers, homeless families and those whose children have been in care. Initiatives to recruit men and learners from minority ethnic groups are very successful.
- The leadership and management of family learning provision are good. Detailed reports from the observation of teaching and learning identify much good practice. However, action planning lacks focus on continuous improvement for teaching and learning. The self-assessment process is accurate, but part-time staff are not involved sufficiently.

What does Somerset Skills and Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Ensure Early Start learners reach their full potential by carrying out rigorous assessments at the start of their course and setting appropriate targets to monitor their progress accurately.
- Use ILT more widely to give learners the confidence to support their children's learning through technology.
- Ensure teaching staff have specific and measurable targets for improvement in areas for development identified by the observation of teaching and learning process.
- Continue to develop the expertise of teaching staff inexperienced in teaching adults.

Learning for social and personal development

Community Development

Grade 2

Context

36. Community development provision is delivered by staff, in partnership with community groups, in over 50 community settings. To date, 104 learners have enrolled on 16 courses receiving NLDC funding. First Steps community learning courses are taught directly by Service staff and by eight sub-contractors. Provision is managed by one part-time manager.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Achievement recorded on accredited provision is 100% and there are similarly high rates for non-accredited courses. Learners' work is of a very high standard. For example, learners with mental health issues develop good art skills and opportunities for reflective writing.
- Learners participate enthusiastically in sessions and gain skills which they are able to apply at home, work and in the community. They are proud of their achievements and enjoy their learning. Several learners have been supported into work, others become active in social enterprises and provide courses for others. Over half of the NLDC learners progress to further training or employment.
- Consideration of learners' safety is good. Learners say they feel safe and can discuss and resolve concerns over safety with staff. Vulnerable learners feel secure and well supported in sessions when difficult personal topics are discussed. Community course providers receive good advice about safety from Service staff.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teaching staff and project leaders meet learners' needs well, using a wide variety of teaching and learning methods. Some sessions are inspirational and stimulating. However, half of the teaching staff in NLDC provision do not have teaching qualifications.
- Provision is prioritised to areas of high deprivation. Very good work builds the capacity of community groups. Outstanding partnerships with community groups and other organisations develop provision for hard-to-reach groups, often with former learners contributing to the work.
- Learners' progress is monitored well on accredited courses. Teachers give very effective feedback to learners. However, the initial assessment of learners' needs, particularly their literacy and numeracy skills, is not always used fully to inform teaching. The individual targets set for learners are often not precise or measurable and they do not always reflect each learner's personal goals.
- Advice, guidance and support are good. Learners with mental health issues gain support for their disability. They are helped to develop insights into their personal issues and explore the opportunities for progression into learning.

- Leadership and management are good. Very effective partnership work leads to the responsive development of provision. Staff involved with NLDC courses make good use of management information data. Community groups and partner providers receive clear communication and access to information from Service staff.
- Quality improvement procedures are rigorous and take into account the views of learners. The self-assessment process is robust and evaluative.
- Staff provide clear direction on equality and diversity matters. The Service and its partners carry out very good work to ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Support for community cohesion and the initiatives to bring different communities together through learning are good.

What does Somerset Skills and Learning Service need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of target-setting for individual learners by agreeing and recording more precise targets with learners which incorporate relevant personal goals and aspirations.
- Improve the induction of learners with better initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and other relevant skills.
- Ensure all teaching staff involved in NLDC programmes meet the current criteria for training and qualifications.

Information about the inspection

37. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's organisational performance manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the Service's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the Somerset LSC, previous inspection reports and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
38. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires that learners and employers had recently completed. They also observed learning sessions and assessments. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the four subject areas inspected and from other subject areas that the Service offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Somerset Skills and Learning Service

Learning types: 14-16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships. Blank column: insert DWP employability programmes (including Workstep), or Judicial Services or nextstep as appropriate

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive	Social and personal development
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners	881		59	822	
Part-time learners	7155	143	1289		5732
Overall effectiveness	2		2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2				
A. Outcomes for learners	2		2	3	2
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2				
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2				
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2				
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
A3. Do learners feel safe?	2				
A4. Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	-				
A5. How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
B. Quality of provision	2		2	2	2
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2				
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2				
B3. How well do partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1				
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3				
C. Leadership and management	2		2	2	2
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
C2. How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	2				
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2				
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2				
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2				
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

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