

Halton Borough Council

Local authority

Inspection dates		23–26 April 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
Outcomes for learners		Outstanding-1
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Outstanding-1

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Learners develop outstanding levels of personal, social and employability skills to benefit themselves, their families and communities. Progression of learners from Employability programmes into jobs and other positive outcomes is outstanding.
- Outcomes for learners on Family learning programmes are excellent. Parents work extremely well with the teachers to raise substantially the attainment levels of their children.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good with some inspirational lessons. Well-qualified and experienced tutors plan their lessons thoroughly to meet the individual needs of all learners.
- Information, advice and guidance are excellent. Staff work very hard to assess learners' needs and guide and support them well to engage in learning, enjoy, learn and progress.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The reorganisation of the service into Employment, Learning and Skills has enabled the staff to fulfil its mission of improving the life chances of Halton residents.
- The range and the quality of partnerships within the council departments, other agencies and national employers are exceptional. All partners work extremely closely to identify needs, and design well-matched and high quality programmes that are continuously improving.
- Quality improvement strategies are outstanding at raising the standards of learning. The 'Continuous Improvement Workshops' have empowered tutors and other staff to share best practice and improve their own performance.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- English and mathematics programmes do not always meet the needs of learners. A small number of learners cannot commit to a year-long weekly programme and leave the programme without achieving their qualifications.
- The proportion of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment is not sufficiently high.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment through a clear focus and challenging targets for all tutors in the observations of teaching, learning and assessment. Use the current continuous improvement workshops and the advanced tutors to support all tutors to excel at teaching.
- Improve retention and success rates on English and mathematics classes through a more appropriate curriculum design, better monitoring of attendance, evaluation of pilot activities and a stronger focus on improving the quality through existing good quality processes.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Outstanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Learners' self-confidence improves significantly and they raise their aspirations to change their lives through learning with Halton Borough Council (HBC). Having developed an appetite for learning they rapidly progress to other courses to acquire skills in a range of subject areas through studying for bite-sized qualifications. Most of the learners have faced a range of personal barriers and have little recent experience of learning and yet most succeed in gaining qualifications. ▪ Positive outcomes on employability programmes are excellent. A substantially high number of learners have gained sustainable employment in sectors such as logistics, retail and construction with some well-known national employers. Most learners improve their life chances by joining further training. Employability learners gain a good variety of computer skills that enhances their confidence in accessing services and improves their skills. Progression to other courses and further learning is good. Learners' progression into volunteering requires improvement. ▪ Learners on childcare and counselling programmes develop high level skills of caring, communication and teamwork that equip them very well for employment. Many learners are confident of entering professional careers in the field of care. Outcomes for learners at the five children's centres that work with HBC are often good and outstanding in some cases. ▪ Learners on Family learning programmes develop deeper understanding of child development, behaviour and the up-to-date teaching methods in schools. They make excellent use of their skills and their new found confidence to listen, talk and teach their children thereby establishing a strong bond with them. This has raised children's attainment levels in schools as demonstrated by a longitudinal study in the local schools. ▪ On Arts programmes learners develop exceptional level of skills and have demonstrated their pride in the enhancement of their neighbourhood. A mural painted on one of the subways in Castlefield area by the learners is a shining example of such work. Floristry learners develop high level skills and produce beautiful flower arrangements for family occasions. Inspectors saw many examples of personal case studies of learners who have made exceptional progress from the very low starting points. Learners' work in calligraphy is of highly professional standard. ▪ Through its excellent 'Skills for life' assessment service, which has been used by nearly half of all learners, HBC has driven up the demand and profile of these skills very highly. Over an eight-year period, HBC has contributed well to make a significant difference in improving intermediate level qualifications in English for residents of Halton. The improvements in mathematics are also good. ▪ Learners gain good knowledge and develop strong skills in using computers and the internet. They feel part of the modern interconnected world and explore a variety of interests. Success rates are good for accredited courses in information and communication technology (ICT) and learners make good progress. 	

- The achievement of personal objectives of learners as outlined in their well-developed individual learning plans is outstanding. Learners achieve their personal learning objectives well, often exceeding their expectations. HBC has further improved the individual learning plans since the previous inspection.
- Retention rates on most programmes have remained high for the previous three years. Attendance rates have improved to good levels during the same period in all subject areas except accredited English and mathematics programmes. Achievement of qualifications in English and mathematics is low for a very small minority of learners. Current learners on these programmes are making good progress.
- All groups of learners achieve their learning objectives and qualifications equally well. The numbers of minority ethnic groups in the local population are too low for any meaningful comparison. Learners feel safe in the centres and are highly satisfied with their learning experiences.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- A very large majority of teaching, learning and assessment are of a good or better quality; however, most learners achieve outstanding outcomes. All staff work extremely well to provide exceptional advice, guidance, feedback and support to motivate their learners to meet, and often exceed their expectations. They instil a desire for, and commitment to, lifelong learning among most learners. For example, a community arts group has continued to work together after producing some inspirational public art.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced. They use their skills and expertise well to plan and deliver good teaching, learning and assessment to meet individual needs of learners. In an outstanding mathematics session the tutor had carefully planned a highly individualised and inclusive session and ensured that all learners were able to make rapid progress. Learners working at different levels were able to apply skills in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division to solve simple and complex problems very well.
- During the inspection, inspectors observed a variety of methods used by tutors to engage learners fully in learning, particularly since this was the first week of teaching of the new term. However, a few tutors focus too much on imparting information themselves. In these lessons, learners remained passive and made insufficient progress in developing subject knowledge and skills.
- As part of the initial assessment process, an appropriately thorough and comprehensive induction takes place. However, this is, at times, so comprehensive that it dampens the enthusiasm that learners have for the subject they have just started, despite the keenness of the tutors and assessors.
- Staff have good access to ICT and use these well in teaching, learning and assessment. They are proficient at using a variety of technologies to make teaching and learning more engaging and ensure good progress for learners, especially in community learning settings. For example, in a care class, the tutor promoted the use of new technology very effectively through demonstrating the use of an application on learners' smartphones to research information and to consolidate their learning further.
- Information data and support staff make good use of initial assessment, including dyslexia screening, to identify learners' starting points accurately. Learners are placed on appropriate courses and are referred to specialist support as well as support in English and mathematics. In family learning, initial assessment of literacy and numeracy is thorough and effectively establishes learners' starting points with clear identification of short, medium and longer-term learning goals.
- Schemes of work and session plans are thorough and clearly reflect high expectations, setting challenging tasks that meet the learning needs of individual learners. For example, in a textiles class the tutor demonstrated the high standards of work that were expected of learners as they

progressed through the course, and encouraged them to engage with complementary classes to develop and extend their skills further.

- Learners make very good progress in their lessons and their learning. It is monitored carefully in their detailed and individualised learning plans. Tutors provide highly targeted and specific verbal and written feedback that informs learners about the progress that they have made and how to consolidate their skills and improve further. One learner had progressed from entry-level to an advanced level study in childcare, supported by regular progress checks that kept her focused and motivated on achieving her ultimate goal.
- The development of functional skills in English, mathematics and ICT is good as tutors embed them fully in most subject areas. Learners can see the clear relevance of these skills and progress well in their learning. Staff provide constructive feedback, guidance and support efficiently to help learners develop the independent learning skills as well as improve and achieve a good standard of English and mathematics. This practice, however, is not fully embedded within a few vocational courses.
- Information, advice and guidance are outstanding and are fully integrated in the whole delivery of teaching learning and assessment. After a thorough initial assessment and screening, support staff guide learners very well onto the most appropriate courses. Tutors use this highly analytical and detailed information on the learners promptly to plan and deliver appropriately targeted learning opportunities to secure learner success. High quality advice on progression opportunities prepares learners well for their next steps in learning and/or employment.
- Equality and diversity are soundly promoted through teaching and learning. The culture of respect for all permeates throughout the service and is particularly noticeable in employability and family learning sessions. In one well-planned session, for example, learners developed a diversity chain to celebrate similarities and differences. Learners make good use of the adaptive technology available to support their learning.

Employability training Learning programmes for 19+

Outstanding

- Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment lead to outstanding outcomes for learners. Staff use their thorough knowledge, skills and expertise to ensure that learners develop high standards of employment skills and secure jobs. A substantially high number of learners have gained sustainable employment and many more improve their prospects of employment by joining further training programmes in areas such as information technology, retail, construction, hospitality, logistics, English and mathematics and customer care.
- Engaging and highly motivational staff use their excellent understanding of the barriers to employment faced by many learners and motivate them to achieve high standards. They set very clear and challenging targets that encourage learners very effectively to aim for jobs with higher level skills and rewards. Learners learn quickly to use certain key words in their speculative curriculum vitae that are particularly helpful to obtaining a job interview. The quality of the covering letters, interview skills, job search and personal skills development are extremely high.
- Staff are very skilful at motivating the often demoralised learners to attend the employability programme. After the initial resistance, they engage well in learning particularly enjoying creative teaching and learning activities. Learners see the value of validating their own skills and prior knowledge as essential building blocks to a successful employment outcome.
- Learners benefit from excellent encouragement as well as precise and constructive assessment feedback. They develop skills of self-reflection, become independent learners and achieve high quality employment skills. The detailed feedback and suggestions for improvement help learners to make very good progress. They are inspired to stay focused, stay in learning and achieve. Staff provide highly effective support to those learners who need additional learning support to achieve their aims.

- The induction processes which include initial assessment are good. These encourage learners very strongly to identify personal barriers to employment and staff support them in completion of their personal learning targets. By using the example of a 'Personality Tree', a tutor used teaching skills exceedingly well to enable learners to reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement from their social, personal and past work lives.
- The work experience placements and work trials are first-class where learners get a real taste of work, often for the first time. They have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, abilities and potential to high profile national employers such as Tesco and O2. The local rugby club has been highly active in planning activities to motivate learners about target-setting and staying focused to achieve their personal goals. Learners are effectively encouraged to look for voluntary work.
- Teaching staff plan and deliver functional skills of English, mathematics and information and communication technology very effectively through the employability and vocational programmes. Staff constructively mark learners' work and give positive support, as to how to improve and achieve a good standard, of English and mathematics.
- Learners receive outstanding information, advice and guidance before, during and towards the end of the programme. Individual support for learners to produce high-quality curriculum vitae and the tailored covering letters for each employer is exemplary. Learners facing personal barriers and related employability issues are referred promptly to Jobcentre Plus or the Benefit Enquiry Line where their needs are dealt with highly effectively.
- Equality and diversity are promoted very well by tutors throughout the learners' stay on the programme. Learners develop a set of ground rules for their behaviour and attitude, thus creating an environment of respect. Tutors plan very effectively to ensure that learners' individual learning and support needs are covered well within lessons. Resources to support the diverse needs of learners are used very effectively to support learners' progress.

**Community learning
Learning programmes for 19+**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good although the outcomes for all but a small percentage of learners are outstanding. Most learners make good progress from particularly low starting points, enjoy their learning and develop their personal and social skills very effectively. The 'Going Underground' subway project in community arts has been particularly successful in motivating and engaging learners. Learners have established a self-constituted group that seeks funding to extend its reach into other areas such as mental health.
- The good teaching and learning uses a wide range of methods to motivate learners to achieve. Tutors plan carefully to promote learning and employ some very well-judged and imaginative teaching strategies. Learners are able to influence and negotiate the curriculum, developing learning goals to meet their personal needs. A few of the sessions are too tutor led, and provide insufficient opportunities for learners to develop independence and communicate their own ideas with confidence.
- Teachers are well qualified, skilled and experienced. They are very enthusiastic and committed to make a strong difference to the learners' lives. They update their knowledge and skills through good continuing professional development. They use good quality learning resources and materials, including information and learning technology well to help learners' progress.
- Programmes include a wide range of vocational programmes and meet the needs of the learners well including those of the hard-to-reach learners and the provision in the local children's centres.
- Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy is thorough on many programmes. It effectively establishes learners' starting points with clear identification of short, medium and longer-term learning goals. However, on a broad range of community learning programmes, assessment is

not as strong. More specialist diagnostic assessment and the match of vocational skills with literacy and numeracy need further development.

- A thorough induction programme covers all elements of the programme and ensures that learners have a full understanding of their learning programme. All learners develop detailed individual learning plans during induction, which are updated regularly and progress is monitored against these initial learning aims. However, induction is too long for returning learners and delays the introduction of the content of the programme.
- All staff monitor learners' work and their progress effectively. The assessment of learners' work is regular and the quality of verbal feedback is good, supportive and often motivational. Written feedback in Family learning is good and helpful to learners in developing and refining their skills for helping their children.
- The quality of information, advice and guidance is excellent. Staff provide very useful information at the start and throughout the programme so that learners are well informed about plans for future development and progression. Subject and additional support specialists make learners fully aware of the contents and requirements of courses. Learners are well supported and vulnerable learners receive high levels of care.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, with tutors creating a culture of respect. A very successful community arts programme engenders community pride and inclusion. Equality and diversity are well promoted within the curriculum, for example, by using the experiences of learners from Eastern Europe to develop greater understanding of educational customs and practices in the UK and elsewhere.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- HBC leaders provide outstanding leadership and management with excellent strategic planning that places learners of the council at the heart of all developments. Leaders and managers have established a highly aspirational culture for the Service that permeates throughout the delivery of all learning programmes. Leaders, managers and staff are passionate about developing the provision to enable learners to reach their full potential and make a very strong impact on them reaching this ideal.
- HBC restructured the provision in 2011, completing a highly successful merge of community provision into the Employment, Learning and Skills division (the Service). This has placed the new Service at the leading edge of exciting, innovative and dynamic developments and has made a significant impact on the residents of HBC. Outcomes for learners have shown a significant rise over the last three years, have been consistently good and are now outstanding.
- Managers work highly effectively with other council departments that liaise with some very large employers coming into the area. Beginning right at the planning stages, they work really well with employers to assess the level of training required for local people, plan bespoke training courses and train learners excellently to access these jobs. A very significant number of learners gain work through this process.
- Directors and elected members are highly active in the work of the Service. They receive regular detailed reports on the performance of the service and are extremely well involved in both supporting and challenging managers.
- Managers have substantially improved the proportion of good teaching, learning and assessment since its previous inspection. This is evident in the strong grade profile through their own observation of teaching and learning process as well as that evidenced by the inspection team. The observation process is highly effective at identifying strengths and areas for improvement accurately. However, managers have not sufficiently focused on improving teaching, learning and assessment from good to outstanding levels.
- Regular meetings called 'continuous improvement workshops' have had a significant impact on improving teaching and learning in aspects such as responding to the needs of individual learners, promoting equality and diversity and using information learning technologies. The full

potential of these workshops has not been realised by all tutors throughout the Service. Staff take pride in improving their own practice through regular reflection and improvements. Peer review is used very well to share practice.

- Professional development for staff is good. Individual performance monitoring is now very effective in improving teaching, learning and assessment.
- Overall performance management, use of data and target-setting for improvement are outstanding. Managers have an excellent understanding of data and management information at local, regional and national level. They use this extremely well to analyse data and set targets for development, adjusting these accordingly to best suit the developmental needs of the subject area, team or individual.
- Self-assessment arrangements have improved well since the previous inspection. The report is accurate and includes excellent and accurate use of data and information from key improvement processes such as the observation of teaching and learning. All staff are very well involved in assessing provision and fully understand the process. Learners' and partners' views are used very well to improve the provision.
- Managers monitor the quality improvement plan extremely closely each month and follow up any actions that should have been completed scrupulously. Staff understand this process fully and respond diligently and positively.
- Managers plan provision very well using a good range of information. Partnerships with employers are excellent and HBC uses this very well to plan bespoke and individualised training programmes. Managers use information from partners such as Jobcentre Plus and internal departments such as economic development very well to plan for employability.
- Leaders and managers liaise exceptionally well with internal education departments to ensure that family learning provision is working with schools in areas that maximise the impact of courses on parents and children in the most need. This is demonstrated by a seven-year research project that is strongly indicating family learning as having a significant impact on children's progress.
- Functional skills teaching and learning is good. However, managers have not sufficiently explored other methods of delivery outside a year-long, weekly attendance model. Attendance in this subject area has been poor in the past and HBC did not monitor this sufficiently rigorously. Current arrangements to improve attendance are good.
- Equality and diversity arrangements in HBC are particularly good with very good staff training and development to ensure that promotion with learners is good. Managers use data particularly well to analyse achievement gaps and take actions to narrow them.
- The Service meets the government requirements for safeguarding arrangements appropriately. Learners feel safe and work in safe conditions in workplaces and premises that are thoroughly checked for any risks. Staff and managers place a high priority on health and safety and learners are very safe.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Halton Borough Council			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	1	2
Outcomes for learners	1	1	1
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	1	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	1	1	1

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Employability training	1
Community learning	2

Provider details

Halton Borough Council	
Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: N/A
	Part-time: 2,159
Principal/CEO	Siobhan Saunders
Date of previous inspection	June 2009
Website address	http://www3.halton.gov.uk/educationandlearning/adulteducation/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	357	N/A	88	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	445							
Number of employability learners	255							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Additional socio-economic information

Halton is part of Liverpool City Region and is an urban, industrial area whose growth employment sectors include logistics, customer service, science and construction. Two main towns in the borough council are Widnes and Runcorn. The Adult Learning Service sits within the Employment, Learning and Skills Division of Halton Borough Council (HBC) and supports the key council priority 'employment, learning and skills' in Halton through a range of community learning programmes and strategic partnerships, including children's centres, employers and community projects. The service also has a National Careers Service contract for the delivery of information, advice and guidance.

Two of the prime contractors for the Government funded Work programme, A4e and Ingeus, subcontract work to HBC. Some 75% of the service's learners are unemployed and seeking work. In February 2013, 5.1% of the working-age population of 125,700 were claiming Jobseekers' Allowance.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Harmesh Manghra HMI

Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the divisional manager of Employment, Learning and Skills Division as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report as well as the survey report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

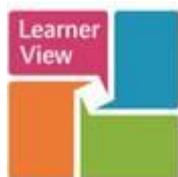
What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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