

Sunderland City Council

Community Learning and Skills – Local Authority

Inspection dates

9–12 April 2019

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Adult learning programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Inadequate	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- A high proportion of adult learners progress to higher-level courses in the service, gain employment, participate in volunteering, or actively seek work, many for the first time.
- Most learners make good progress from their starting points and achieve their personal learning targets; a very high proportion achieve their qualifications, including in English and in mathematics.
- Elected members, leaders and managers have addressed rapidly the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders, staff, subcontractors, tutors and learners promote a culture of pride, respect and tolerance which embraces the diversity and values of the service. They demonstrate these fundamental values well.
- Elected members, leaders and managers develop strong partnerships to provide a curriculum that is aligned well to meet local employment and skills needs, and to meet the needs of disadvantaged and isolated communities.
- Most learners have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Subcontractors use a wide network of employment and social justice partners well. This helps learners to acquire skills and knowledge that enhance their lives, job prospects or careers.
- Tutors use interesting and relevant learning activities on adult and family community programmes; learners develop their communication, English, mathematical and digital skills well.
- Learners enjoy their learning; they improve their health and well-being, self-esteem and confidence; and they are well prepared for their next steps. Their learning experience is often life-changing.
- A small proportion of tutors do not plan and deliver learning and assessment that supports or challenges learners to make the progress of which they are capable.
- The quality of early advice and guidance and ongoing careers information is not consistently good across all subcontracted provision. This means that not all learners develop realistic and clear life and career plans.
- Elected members and leaders do not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the full range of skills that learners develop and the progress that they make from their starting points.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Tyne and Wear Care Alliance, the Family, Adult and Community Learning Service, and Connexions have been merged into a single organisation called Sunderland City Council's Learning and Skills Service. Following the previous inspection, the council has not recruited any new apprentices onto programmes and is winding down its apprenticeship contract. This provision was not considered as part of this inspection. The service has recommissioned all its adult learning provision. There are now 19 subcontractors, five of which are new and have only recruited learners recently. At the time of inspection, all learning programmes were delivered by subcontractors.
- Unemployment in Sunderland is well above the national average. The proportion of people that come from areas of social or economic disadvantage is well above the national average. The proportion of people who hold qualifications at level 2 and above is lower than the national average. The proportion of people who do not have a qualification is higher than the national average. Manufacturing, technology, retail, and health and social care are the largest local employment sectors.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Tutors should ensure that they pay close attention to the starting points and future goals of individual learners in the planning and delivery of teaching and in the assessment of learning, so that all learners make the progress of which they are capable.
- Elected members and senior leaders should act to ensure that:
 - they receive accurate and relevant information about the full range of skills that learners develop and the progress they make from their starting points
 - learners receive helpful independent careers advice that supports them to understand all the options that are available and make clear plans for their futures.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders, managers and staff have rapidly improved the quality of the education and training that learners receive and the arrangements for keeping learners safe. They have worked well with other council services and external partners to re-engage disadvantaged adults in learning. Employers and other partners value the work of the service in developing learners' skills, confidence and ability to participate in community and family life. Leaders and managers have raised expectations and aspirations for learners, particularly in the communities that they target in the Sunderland area.
- Elected members, leaders and managers provide a curriculum that is aligned well to meet local employment and skills needs, and to meet the needs of disadvantaged and isolated learners who are far from the labour market. They have realigned effectively the strategic direction of the service into seven priority themes with the focus of employment, developing skills, building resilient communities and improving health and well-being. Programmes meet the needs of individuals and communities well. They support learners to overcome barriers to having successful adult lives and to be better prepared to return to work, through developing skills to work in sectors where opportunities are available locally, such as in health and care.
- Leaders, staff and subcontractors demonstrate their commitment to equality of opportunity and the celebration of diversity in all their work with learners, partners and employers. They promote a culture of pride, respect and tolerance effectively through the shared values of the service. For example, they provide effective support and set high aspirations for learners to make positive changes to their lives.
- Leaders and managers have successfully strengthened the performance management procedures for subcontractors. They use accurate data and observations of lessons to evaluate the performance of subcontractors effectively and take decisive action to terminate the contracts of subcontractors when performance does not meet the required standard. The new performance measures and strengthened quality arrangement checks are improving the quality of the training for adult learners.
- Leaders' and managers' self-assessment of the service's effectiveness takes good account of the views of learners, staff, partners, subcontractors and the wider council. Leaders and managers identify accurately the strengths and areas for improvement for the service. Improvement plans and actions are facilitating swift improvements in the quality of education and training that learners receive. Most learners now make good progress in developing the skills that they need to meet their individual needs and aspirations, regardless of which subcontractor provides their training.
- Elected members, leaders and managers are not aware of all aspects of learners' performance. They have a good understanding of how well learners achieve their qualifications and personal goals. However, leaders recognise that they do not have a clear view of the full range of skills that learners develop and the progress that they make from their starting points. They are right to recognise that this is an aspect of their work that they should develop.

The governance of the provider

- Since the previous inspection, elected members and senior leaders have completed a full review of the governance arrangements and have taken actions that have improved the board's effectiveness. The elected member responsible for the oversight of the provision focuses consistently on what the service needs to do to improve the quality of education and training. Elected members have appropriate experience, skills and knowledge, including of the further education sector. They use their skills well to provide effective support and challenge to the service's leaders. As a result, the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection are being addressed rapidly.
- Elected members and senior leaders have provided helpful strategic direction and support throughout the challenging period of realigning the service and its structure following the previous inspection. They place a high strategic priority on adult and community education and have successfully steered the service towards ensuring that there is a close fit between the curriculum and the needs of the local and regional economy, which they understand well. Leaders have completed an effective review of the curriculum to ensure that programmes target the priority communities, to provide routes to further study or employment and to ensure that learners have access to education in their local area.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures for staff, learners and subcontractors are appropriate. Leaders, subcontractors and staff follow appropriate safeguarding and safe recruitment practices.
- Learners, staff and subcontractors know who to contact if they have concerns. Staff make referrals to external agencies and to the wider council's safeguarding team when required. Individuals and families receive effective support to help them overcome significant barriers in their family and personal lives.
- Leaders implement the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty and ensure that learners receive information at the start of their programme about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in the local context, such as human trafficking and extremist political views. Staff and subcontractors receive mandatory training and frequent updates on safeguarding topics and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding leads receive appropriate training for their role. Safeguarding leads work well with organisations such as the Salvation Army, substance abuse services, the police and the regional 'Prevent' coordinator to develop and maintain a safe learning environment.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Most tutors use their skills well and deliver high-quality and interesting learning activities. They set work that builds on previous learning and challenges learners to make greater efforts in developing their skills. As a result, learners are enthusiastic and make good progress.
- Most tutors carefully assess learners' abilities at the beginning of their programme and gain an understanding of their starting points. They use information from this assessment

well to support learners to develop their skills, often from a very low level. Tutors use stimulating and relevant learning approaches that meet learners' individual needs. Most learners on vocational and family community learning programmes, particularly those furthest away from gaining employment, develop their skills to at least a good standard.

- Most tutors set high expectations for learners. They manage learning sessions effectively to ensure that learners participate fully during lessons and develop their communication skills and vocational knowledge. Tutors provide good pastoral and academic support to help learners overcome personal barriers to progress that have previously held them back. As a result, learners who are vulnerable or require support make at least as much progress as their peers.
- Tutors design learning activities that encourage learners to consider carefully and apply fundamental British values within their work. For example, learners in health and care lessons consider how to support children with challenging behaviour or disabilities during play work in child care settings.
- Tutors provide relevant activities to help learners to develop their English and mathematical skills well. For example, during business administration lessons, learners refresh their understanding of grammar rules and correctly identify the errors on presentation slides. They use proofreading skills to correct communications in emails and reports. In family community learning lessons, learners extend their writing skills from basic sentences to more complex paragraphs. They produce accurate budget records for a small business and use measurements to produce two- and three-dimensional craft items that they sell locally.
- Most tutors review learners' work well and provide helpful feedback on what learners are good at and what they need to do to improve further. Learners appreciate this feedback and use it well to develop their knowledge and confidence further. Learners become more aspirational about their next steps in learning, as they have a greater understanding of the progress that they are making.
- Tutors use their specialist skills well. This supports learners to develop their work and practical skills at the level they need to achieve their qualification or personal goals. For example, in employability lessons, tutors encourage learners to explore and consider positive and negative attributes when attending interviews. In craft lessons, learners develop their skills from the initial research of design ideas and go on to produce pottery items and tie-dyed clothing of a high standard.
- Most tutors use assessment information well to set clear and helpful long-term goals for learners. They break down personal targets into smaller steps that help learners to achieve their qualification and personal targets. Consequently, learners understand the life skills and work skills that they need to develop to help them to be successful in their lives.
- A small proportion of tutors do not plan learning well enough to meet the range of ability in their classes or to encourage learners to achieve at the level at which they are capable. On a few occasions, tutors do not ask sufficiently demanding questions or encourage learners to think more deeply to go beyond low-level responses. Learners in these sessions often complete work that is too easy for them and the less confident learners do not receive support to participate fully in activities. Consequently, these learners do not develop their knowledge as well as they could or achieve their potential.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners benefit from studying with carefully chosen subcontractors, many of which work with a network of partners that they use to support learners well. Partnership work with employment agencies and social justice and mental health charities helps learners to develop skills and knowledge that enhance their lives, job prospects and careers.
- Learners enjoy their learning and most attend regularly. Many learners, particularly those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable, develop their self-esteem through participating in their programmes. Learners successful develop the life skills and positive attitudes that they need. For example, learners with previous experience of homelessness develop knowledge and skills that help them to move in to sheltered or independent housing. Learners are very well prepared for their next steps and their learning experience is often life-changing.
- Learners on family community learning programmes develop their digital capability and their skills in English and mathematics well, many from very low starting points. They use these skills effectively in their everyday lives, such as in supporting their children to improve their school work. Learners use their digital and mathematical skills to apply successfully for Universal Credit benefits and to manage household budgets better. The skills that learners develop have a positive impact on family life.
- Learners have a good understanding of how to make healthy lifestyle choices and to improve their well-being. Tutors and staff promote healthy lifestyles through activities such as healthy cooking in kitchen chemistry lessons and family fitness sessions at the local football stadium. Learners benefit from additional learning experiences that improve family and community life, such as community recycling projects. They develop strategies to help them to manage their lives more independently and make suitable life choices.
- Subcontractors provide courses that very effectively meet the service's strategic objective of improving health and well-being in local communities. Through developing creative skills such as in batik and ceramics and by using image-editing software, learners overcome social isolation and improve their mental health. Tutors and staff support vulnerable learners effectively to practise mindfulness techniques, such as managing the symptoms of the menopause better, and to develop their mental health and emotional resilience.
- Learners take pride in their work. Most learners complete their individual learning records thoroughly. They complete written work to a high standard and apply their developing skills well to the tasks that their tutors set in lessons. Learners studying on vocational programmes develop their business administration and care knowledge and skills well. Learners make good progress in enhancing their speaking and listening skills.
- For learners who are vulnerable and furthest from the job market, subcontractors successfully provide useful and supportive informal one-to-one meetings to encourage them to enrol to study for a qualification. For example, they encourage learners to attend taster sessions with someone to support them. These sessions successfully raise learners' understanding of the benefits of training to their future lives.
- Tutors provide support for learners to help them to overcome barriers to learning and develop strategies to respond to stressful situations. Learners on employability courses

develop effective teamwork skills and improve their job search, application and interview techniques. Many learners are engaged in volunteering activities or are actively seeking work. A high proportion progress to higher-level courses or are successful in gaining employment.

- Most learners have a good understanding of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Learners feel safe and many say that they feel safer in their learning venues than they do elsewhere.
- The quality of early and ongoing careers advice and guidance is not consistently good. In too many instances, the initial advice and guidance that learners receive takes insufficient account of how the programme meets their needs. For example, learners studying on programmes delivered by Peshaw View Training do not receive sufficiently helpful careers advice when their attendance at training and a jobs fair does not successfully lead to employment. Consequently, these learners do not improve their prospects for employment or develop realistic career plans.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Most learners remain on their programme and achieve their qualification within the planned timescale. In 2017/18, achievement was very high, and it is high among learners who have already completed their programme in the current year.
- Most learners on family community learning programmes and other courses that do not lead to a qualification make consistently good progress, often from very low starting points, and achieve their personal targets.
- Learners produce work and develop their vocational skills to at least the standard required for the qualification that they are working towards.
- There are no noticeable gaps between learners' performance, either in 2017/18 or for current learners. Learners from areas of social or economic disadvantage achieve as well as their peers. Leaders and managers have successfully addressed performance gaps that existed previously.
- Learners' progression to higher levels of study, employment or volunteering is good. Around two thirds of learners on accredited programmes move on to employment, work-related activities or study at a higher level at the end of their programme. Approximately, three quarters of learners on family community learning programmes achieve realistic positive outcomes. Of these learners, around half move on to employment or higher levels of study. A high proportion of learners progress to higher level programmes within the service.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54666
Type of provider	Community Learning and Skills – Local Authority
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,766
Principal/CEO	Sandra Mitchell
Telephone number	0191 561 1438
Website	www.sunderland.gov.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	271	-	12	-	-	-	-
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of traineeships	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Apextra Learning Autismable Brightsparks Foundation of Light IMPACT North East Media Savvy MBC Arts & Wellbeing Northern Rights Penshaw View Training Training in Care							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the assistant director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. They reviewed learners' progress by using a case-study approach. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Tracey Mace-Akroyd, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rachel Angus	Her Majesty's Inspector
Catharine Jackson	Ofsted Inspector

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