

Inspection dates 3–6 November 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers, through strong partnership arrangements, ensure that the curriculum is successfully aligned to community and national needs.
- Managers and staff constantly review service standards to ensure that continuous improvements are timely, effective and lead to an increasing number of learners achieving their goals.
- Learners benefit greatly from good quality teaching, learning and assessment that motivate and develop their skills beyond their initial expectations.
- Programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or low prior educational attainment are particularly effective.
- The support from tutors and staff for learners who require additional learning support or help through personal difficulties is good.
- Learners gain great satisfaction from attending lessons in a friendly and respectful environment that ensures that they all have equal opportunities to contribute and grow.
- Standards of learners' work are at least good and in many cases outstanding.

This is not yet an outstanding provider

- Managers do not clearly assess the impact of learning through self-assessment and the observation of teacher performance.
- Learners, specifically those on non-accredited courses, are not always sufficiently challenged to pursue their own targets beyond those related directly to course outcomes.
- Data to assess the impact of the service on learners' destinations, and development of personal, social and employment skills is not sufficiently robust.
- Careers and next step advice is not sufficiently clear and/or readily accessible for all learners.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Buckinghamshire County Council Adult Learning (BCCAL) is the main provider of part-time learning for adults in the county. Provision includes: leisure learning, targeted family learning and outreach provision, English and mathematics courses, apprenticeships and other work-based learning. The programmes are delivered in around 170 locations across the county, including dedicated adult learning centres, schools, community and employer premises.
- The total number of learners enrolled in 2014/15 was over 8,000, and of those around 200 were apprentices. Thirty per cent of BCCAL enrolments are from minority ethnic learners compared to a Buckinghamshire White population of 86%. Buckinghamshire is a relatively affluent county with a generally highly skilled work force and low unemployment.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that self-assessment reports and observation of teaching, learning and assessment records are much less descriptive and much more judgemental about the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on learners.
- Use detailed initial assessments to plan and set targets effectively and monitor progress for all learners. Ensure that all learners can pursue their own interests within subjects and achieve levels of knowledge and/or skills that are over and above course aims.
- Develop effective methods to measure accurately the impact of learning on learners' destinations and progress; evaluate more fully the extent and usefulness of learners' development of personal, social and employment skills so that managers can make clear judgements about the effectiveness of the service and plan to make further improvements.
- Ensure that all learners are made fully aware of courses available with other providers so that they may continue their studies after progressing through levels of learning at BCCAL. Improve the availability of careers advice and guidance so that all learners can benefit from timely access and impartial advice.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders and managers set a clear and effective direction for the service. They maintain high standards across provision types; senior and middle managers set a strong, positive example to staff in their professional behaviours and in their concern for learners' progress, success and well-being.
- Strategic planning aligns well to county council priorities for promoting economic growth and sustainability. Managers plan and review the curriculum effectively to ensure it matches closely to the needs of the community. Leaders ensure that the provision is particularly effective in meeting the needs of those in the economically deprived wards of the county, and those from communities generally under-represented in education and training.
- Managers have successfully developed an active and well-connected outreach provision that engages and supports targeted communities particularly well. Managers make good use of volunteers across the provision to support learning and to develop skills and capacity in the communities from which they are drawn. Learners from outreach and employability provision receive good encouragement and well-targeted fee reductions to join leisure and arts courses.
- Leaders and managers analyse success rate data effectively and monitor learners' achievements closely. Tutors and other staff receive a good range of accessible data reports that allow them to monitor effectively the progress and achievement of their learners, and to compare performance between learner groups over time.
- Communications between managers and the widely dispersed, sessional, tutor workforce are good. Managers focus staff development activity clearly on continuing to develop tutors' skills so that they may support learners more effectively, raise their achievements and enhance their well-being. Development activities derive from close analysis of curriculum and service self-assessment reports and development plans, and their impact is closely monitored through observations of teaching, learning and assessment. Tutors receive good encouragement and financial support to attend training events, and good processes exist to involve tutors in reviewing the quality and relevance of training.
- Performance management is effective in supporting tutors and other staff to develop their skills. When improvement does not occur within a reasonable timescale, managers implement clear capability and capacity procedures.
- Leaders manage and support subcontractors particularly well and, as a result, learners on subcontracted provision achieve at least as well as their peers. Managers monitor the performance of subcontractors closely and take effective action to deal with any concerns.
- Partnership working is particularly strong. Leaders, managers and partners work effectively to engage hard-to-reach groups and those for whom engagement with learning is difficult. Leaders analyse local market intelligence and other demographic data well and position courses accordingly. Outreach and community-based staff have very well developed links with community groups, children's centres, health professionals, mental health charities, Jobcentre Plus and a wide range of other specialist support and advocacy groups.
- Quality assurance arrangements are effective in their operation, and promote improvements to the provision. However, managers have not integrated sufficiently the quality assurance measures that apply to apprenticeship and work-based provision with other whole-service measures. Quality assurance measures applied to apprenticeships, progress reviews and on-the-job assessments are not subject to routine scrutiny by managers.
- Self-assessment reports from curriculum areas are comprehensive and the majority are suitably self-critical. These, and the overall service self-assessment report, are subject to good levels of scrutiny, challenge and moderation. However, the existing self-assessment report for 2013/14 is over-long and contains too much descriptive text. Leaders are aware of this and are currently working to produce a significantly shorter and more succinct report for next year's self-assessment cycle.
- **The governance of the provider:**
 - Elected council members provide appropriate oversight and scrutiny of service operation along with other council services.
 - In association with BCCAL leadership, elected council members ensure continued links between the council's strategic priorities and the planning of the curriculum to meet local and national priorities.
 - Council members provide effective oversight of service finances.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective:

- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders, managers and staff work effectively to ensure that vulnerable learners are safe and able to thrive. All staff who have routine or frequent contact with vulnerable learners are appropriately checked, and tutors receive frequent training on safeguarding and safe working. Tutors and managers share a clear commitment to ensuring that all learners have the best opportunity to progress and develop skills in a tolerant, open and inclusive environment.
- A good range of steps have been taken by managers to promote the Prevent agenda and meet service duties under counter-terrorist legislation. All staff received training during the past year about ways to identify and refer those who are at immediate risk of radicalisation or engagement in extremist activity. A good range of useful resources are available on the service intranet to develop staff understanding through online learning.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good across all provision types. In particular, teaching is highly effective in meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, enabling them to participate effectively in learning, develop confidence and engage with their peers.
- Tutors are well qualified and experienced; they ensure that lessons are lively and engaging and that learners participate enthusiastically. Learning is enhanced through the effective use of learning support assistants and classroom volunteers. Tutors are adept at encouraging learners to support one another well.
- Tutors carefully monitor learners' understanding and skills development and, as a result, learners make good progress. Tutors' oral feedback is highly effective, ensuring learners understand what they need to do to make further improvements. However, in a minority of cases, written feedback is insufficiently detailed. Inspectors noted that in a small minority of cases, poor spelling and grammar were not routinely corrected.
- Many learners benefit from a good range of visiting speakers and visits to community venues such as libraries and museums to develop their subject knowledge. They participate in charity and fundraising activities, which enable them to increase their confidence and develop a broader understanding of other cultures. Employers fully participate in improving their apprentices' technical and employability skills, raising learners' expectations and enabling them to undertake more complex work and progress into permanent employment or further education.
- Support for learners who need extra help is highly effective. Purposeful deployment of specialist staff and volunteers supports a wide range of learners' additional needs. For example, provision of sign language interpreters for hearing impaired learners, and individual coaching for learners with language or attention problems enables learners to make very good progress and helps them to achieve their learning goals.
- Tutors promote equality and diversity and safety, including e-safety, very effectively in lessons, linking such topics well with the subject matter of the lessons. For example, learners in an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) class developed a good understanding of the cultural differences between celebration events such as Halloween, bonfire night and Diwali. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities know how to keep safe and understand how to report incidents and concerns.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on the improvement of teaching and learning through the lesson observation process and through the professional development of staff. External stakeholders such as subcontractors recently contributed effectively to a revision of quality systems; they frequently attend moderation meetings to help assure the quality of lesson evaluation. However, teacher observation reports too often lack clear evaluative judgments and do not always identify the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on learners' progress.
- The vast majority of learners complete comprehensive initial and diagnostic assessments and these are tailored to the requirements of the individual programme. However, in a minority of cases, outcomes of the assessments are not used effectively to inform the planning or setting of targets to meet individual learner needs. This is particularly the case in the promotion of greater challenge for more-able learners.
- Tutors on leisure courses do not routinely support learners to identify and set personal targets to develop their skills. As a result, too many learners on programmes such as painting and stained glass making remain on the same level of programme for too long and although they develop good practical skills they fail to develop a sufficiently broader knowledge of the subject.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Overwhelmingly, learners are positive about their learning at BCCAL and take much pride in their progress. Most learners develop high levels of confidence and self-belief in their own achievements. This is particularly so for learners on employability, family learning and ESOL courses, and for those on courses for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of learners significantly exceed the skills they expect to develop at the start of their course. Apprentices gain much benefit from improving their confidence in the working environment from the effective development of assertiveness and team working skills.
- In lessons, most learners are diligent, work hard, share their ideas well and are keen to progress. They exhibit high levels of respect and this ensures that most progress equally well. Attendance is generally good. The majority of learners explore the wider aspects of life in Britain well and this helps to forge a greater understanding of society. This is demonstrated particularly well in ESOL lessons.
- Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make significant gains in personal skills, including communication skills, manual skills, organisational skills, independent living and group-working skills. For example, they are more able to engage with the public in the selling of merchandise or by becoming volunteer workers.
- The development of knowledge and skills for those learners new to the subject or where prior educational attainment has been impeded is good. However, more-able learners, for example in art subjects, are not sufficiently extended or challenged by tutors.
- Advice and careers guidance from tutors are generally effective and support learners well in considering their next steps. In addition, the service offers an opportunity for all learners to access impartial careers advice during a two-week period. However, not all learners are aware of the availability of advice and guidance. For learners wishing to progress into further education on courses not offered by BCCAL, information on where to go is not always sufficiently clear.
- The formal process of measuring learner progress and assessing the wider benefits they may attain by improving their personal, social and employment skills is not sufficiently well developed to inform management of the full impact of the service.

Outcomes for learners are good

- Success rates across types of provision are good. Over the past three years, the trend in success rates has been upwards in almost all areas of the curriculum. The vast majority of courses and types of provision sustain success rates above national rates for similar provision. In provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, for learners on employability programmes and for most outreach provision, success and achievement rates are very high.
- During 2014/15, success rates within the planned timescale for apprenticeships declined slightly, breaking an otherwise upward trend. However, they still remained five percentage points above national rates.
- Leaders and managers monitor data trends well, and understand the achievements of identifiable groups across the curriculum. Managers work effectively to minimise achievement gaps between groups of learners.
- The vast majority of learners make good progress in lessons. They understand their own progress and are enthusiastic about the skills they have gained on courses. However on non-accredited programmes, the measures to recognise and record progress and achievement are not sufficiently effective across all curriculum areas, particularly in creative subjects.
- Apprenticeship provision provides excellent progression routes for learners and meets employers' needs very well. Subcontracted employability programmes are highly successful in supporting learners to develop good personal, social, communication and team-working skills, and progression rates into employment are outstanding.
- Standards of learners work are at least good, and on some courses, outstanding. For example, on leisure courses, learners produce artefacts of intricacy and beauty that often exceed their initial aspirations and expectations. Languages learners develop good communication skills and increase their confidence. However, in ESOL provision, too few learners progress routinely from speaking and listening courses to reading and writing courses.
- The vast majority of apprentices secure employment, gain promotions or attain positions of enhanced responsibility because of their training. A growing number of apprentices progress to higher apprenticeships. Many learners on employability and work skills programmes make rapid and sustained progress in developing personal, social and team working skills and the majority gain employment and improve their economic prospects following training.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

are good

- Adult learners make up the majority of all learners; they study part-time across a very broad range of subjects, many of which are aligned to key county council priorities. Approximately 411 learners are referred by Jobcentre Plus to attend employability programmes.
- Leaders and managers combine an ethos of care and support with high expectations for their learners and, as a result, tutors and all staff share a commitment to enhance their learners' progress. Learners develop very good working relationships with each other and with their tutors, they are confident and enjoy their learning and make good progress. Learners' attendance and punctuality are good.
- Tutors carefully design a wide variety of resources that successfully engage learners' interest and motivate them in lessons. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities used their tutor's hand-made Christmas angels as inspiration to make their own. In a mathematics lesson, learners used an imaginative range of resources, including jelly beans, to develop their understanding of fractions.
- Learners develop their skills and knowledge very well as a result of the high levels of individual support and good oral feedback from tutors and staff in lessons. Learners carry out a range of skills such as jewellery making, cooking fish or speaking French to a good standard. In an entry level English lesson for speakers of other languages, learners explored the meaning of the word 'metabolism' and were then able to use it successfully in a sentence.
- Tutors maintain a strong and successful focus on the development of learners' speaking and listening skills. For example, tutors generally use questioning in lessons well to elicit detailed and fluent answers. English tutors are particularly effective at correcting learners' mistakes. However, in other subject areas, tutors pay insufficient attention to the development of writing and literacy skills through the marking of learners' work.
- Learners develop their personal and social skills very well. In particular, learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress. For example, dedicated and committed tutors use their skills and experience extremely well to help these learners develop their confidence to play a more active role in their community. Overall, however, too few learners have sufficient opportunities to explore and develop employability skills linked to or associated with their studies.
- Measures to ensure learners' safety and understanding of British values are effective. Tutors design good quality resources and create opportunities that encourage learners to explore topics and concerns relating to life in modern Britain; as a result, learners contribute by supporting each other well in lessons and by volunteering in the community.
- Learners' achievements are good. Most learners gain their qualification and many progress to further study or employment and become more independent in their personal lives. Learners' achievements are celebrated well through motivational initiatives, such as displaying photographs of learners with their certificates and by nominating learners for national awards.

Apprenticeships

are good

- The provision includes apprenticeships in business administration, customer service, supporting teaching and learning, management, information technology, youth work and care. The service is directly responsible for the delivery of around a third of the apprenticeships, with subcontractors responsible for the remainder. One of the four current subcontractors delivers just under half of the current 187 apprenticeships
- Learners benefit from positive relationships with assessors and employers, and from safe and nurturing learning environments. They develop good theoretical and vocational subject knowledge, produce comprehensive assignments and gain a wide range of practical skills. Apprentices improve their personal and work skills well. They build confidence in the workplace, are aspirational and take pride in their work. Many progress into permanent employment, further learning or higher education or gain promotion at work.
- Apprentices make good progress during well-planned on- and off-the-job learning sessions. These help them to develop a good range of practical skills and theoretical knowledge that they apply in their job role; as a result, they become much more competent to manage people and difficult situations. Apprentices effectively apply the mathematics and English skills learnt in the workplace.

- On- and off-the-job training is well coordinated and apprentices benefit from comprehensive and timely on- and off-the-job assessment. For many apprentices, learning is enhanced by studying with a group of peers whose employment settings vary widely. Many apprentices request and gain additional training units beyond those required for their qualification. Apprentices make good use of information learning technology and distance learning materials to research and develop their assignments.
- Care and support for apprentices are good. Induction is purposeful and effective, giving apprentices a good understanding of their apprenticeship frameworks and the demands that learning will place upon them. Information, advice and guidance are timely and comprehensive.
- Oral feedback from trainers effectively ensures apprentices focus on where they need to improve. Assessors ensure that reviews of progress promote learner reflection. Clear and challenging targets ensure that apprentices and employers fully understand the next steps in learning.
- Apprentices gain sufficient knowledge about how to keep safe, particularly when using social media, and develop a good knowledge of equality and diversity legislation. However, they are not given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in the workplace.
- In a small minority of cases, assessors do not ensure that apprentices' written skills are developed sufficiently during training sessions. Not all apprentices routinely take notes during off-the-job training, and written feedback from a minority of assessors is not always sufficiently detailed and challenging. Although employers monitor apprentices' progress and support them very well, the written feedback they provide is not always sufficiently detailed and developmental.
- It is too early to judge whether the recent changes in the main subcontractor's delivery of mathematics and English will have a positive impact on apprentices' completion of their framework within the planned timescale.

Provider details

Type of provider	Local authority
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	8,325
CEO	Mr Chris Williams
Website address	www.adultlearningbcc.ac.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 and above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	15	3304	13	220	2	8	1	13
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	23	44	14	68	1	14		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of learners aged 14–16	NA							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Berkshire Scout Enterprises Limited Care Training Solutions Limited EMBS Community College Limited E-Training Maybe Magazine CIC							

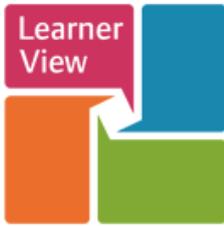
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Richard Beaumont, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Beynon	Her Majesty's Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Bourne	Ofsted Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the Learning Services Manager, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. 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 students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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