

Herefordshire Council

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Background information

Inspection judgements

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

Key for inspection grades

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

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

Scope of the inspection

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

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

- Information and communications technology (ICT)
- Preparation for life and work.

Description of the provider

1. Herefordshire Council (the council) receives funding from the LSC to provide adult and community learning programmes. The council enrolled a total of 1,368 learners in 2005-06 and at the time of the inspection had 471 learners on adult and community learning courses. The programmes are managed by the lifelong learning development unit (LLDU). LLDU sits within the council's adult and community directorate, under economic and community development. It develops a range of provision targeted at disadvantaged sectors of the community and delivers its programme by subcontracting courses to a number of partners. The largest programmes are in ICT and in preparation for life and work.
2. The council is also the lead partner on two European Social Fund (ESF) financed projects. The learning ambassador project enables learners to take one accredited and one non-accredited course from a wide variety supported by the project. The community learning project offers literacy and numeracy at pre-entry level 3 and level 1, and a small number of level 2 national vocational qualifications.
3. Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county and has the fourth lowest population density in England. Just under a third of the population lives in Hereford City, about a fifth in the market towns and almost half in the rural areas. The population of Herefordshire is 178,800 of which 141,500 are aged 18 or over. The proportion of adults aged 55 or over is 34.2% compared with 27.7% nationally. Levels of unemployment in the county are relatively low, at 1.6% in January 2007 compared with 2.6% for England. Approximately 45% of the population aged between 18 and 74 have either no qualifications or level 1 qualification only.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Information and communications technology	Good: Grade 2
Preparation for life and work	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Leadership and management and provision in ICT and in preparation for life and work are all good. Inspectors also sampled other areas of the provision, which were not graded and indications are that they are at least satisfactory.
5. Achievement is generally good. It is measured as a combination of accredited achievement and achievement of course and personal goals for non-accredited programmes. Learners gain in confidence and apply their learning to enhance their working and personal lives.
6. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and the teaching of literacy through ICT is excellent. However, tutors do not use initial assessment and individual learning plans sufficiently in the setting of individual targets for learners.
7. The programmes are particularly flexible and meet the needs of disadvantaged learners particularly well. The adult and community learning programmes and the ESF programmes are designed to meet the needs of those with previously low qualification levels or those who are socially or economically disadvantaged.
8. The council's response to social inclusion is particularly good. It has formed a range of successful partnerships through which it identifies and provides many learning opportunities for those who have not been in education or training for many years and for ex-offenders and those with a history of mental illness. The council has successfully enrolled learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly migrant workers, onto programmes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
9. Guidance and support for learners are particularly good. Learners have a good understanding of the provision and guidance for those moving onto accredited provision or into employment is good. Learning support is particularly effective. Most courses have at least one teaching assistant, giving a very good ratio of staff to learners.
10. Leadership and management are good. The council's strategic planning and direction of the adult and community learning provision is very clear. The council does not employ any tutors itself but leads the lifelong learning partnership well, providing support to partners and using community development funding to build their capacity and train their teaching staff. Equality of opportunity is good. Social inclusion and provision targeted at the most deprived are features of the provision. The council supports its partners with advice and guidance on equality and diversity issues and in obtaining funding to comply with disability access legislation.

11. The council's skills for life strategy is good. Skills for life is the government's initiative on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Skills for life are well established in all adult and community learning programmes. Quality assurance is effective. The council has identified the major areas for improvement and is working to overcome them. The monitoring of subcontracted provision is well established, although there is still insufficient monitoring of ESF programmes and the monitoring of learners' progression is unsystematic. The use of data has improved but too recently to identify trends or anomalies.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

12. The council has demonstrated good capacity to improve. It has made good progress to improve its programmes since the previous inspection. Many of the previous weaknesses identified have been rectified. The council continues successfully to identify and pursue appropriate alternative funding to support its strategies in this area.

13. The council's development plans have realistic targets to overcome weaknesses identified through self-assessment and the council monitors progress appropriately. The self-assessment process is thorough and accurate. However, stakeholders do not have enough involvement. The self-assessment report identifies many of the same strengths and weaknesses as the inspection.

Key strengths

- Clear strategic planning and direction
- Highly effective partnerships
- Good support and training for partners
- Highly inclusive learning
- Effective quality assurance

Key areas for improvement

- Inadequate initial assessment and use of individual learning plans
- Insufficient monitoring of ESF projects
- Unsystematic monitoring of learners' progression
- Insufficient involvement of stakeholders in self-assessment process

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

14. Achievement overall is good. The introduction of systems for recognising and recording progress and achievement has enabled the provider to differentiate accurately between completion and achievement. Before that, in 2004-05, learners who stayed on their course for its duration were deemed to have achieved. The 2005-06 achievement figures for all programmes reflected the introduction of the system for recognising and recording progress and achievement, but it was not until the autumn term of 2006 that the provider completed the standardisation of procedures across the provision. In that term achievement in two of the areas not inspected in detail, family learning, literacy and numeracy and wider family learning, was particularly good at 96.6% and 94.4% respectively. ICT achievement was also good at 87%. In skills for life programmes 81% of the learners achieved unit accreditation in literacy and 19% passed their level 1 qualification. In the past year, 25% of ESOL learners achieved speaking and listening qualifications. Learners develop confidence as well as acquiring new skills. The monitoring of progression outside the council's provision is unsystematic. However, the council is involved in a local initiative to identify all local inhabitants who access any of its services as well as supporting LSC-led initiatives to develop a unique identification number for learners.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

15. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and the teaching of literacy through ICT is excellent. Tutors plan learning sessions well and use an appropriate range of learning activities. However, tutors do not use initial assessment and individual learning plans sufficiently to set individual targets for learners. There is some apparent differentiation in classes but it is not recorded well in lesson plans and little response is made to differing preferred learning styles identified through initial assessment. Teaching resources are good, including handouts and ICT equipment. Some locations do not have sufficient appropriate seating for ICT lessons. However, learners are aware of the health and safety issues of prolonged use of the seating provided.

16. The programmes are particularly flexible and meet the needs of disadvantaged learners very well. The programmes' timing and location correspond to learners' needs. Courses are free to learners. They are closed and not widely advertised. Courses respond to needs identified by partner organisations or the council itself. This is part of the council's particularly good response to social inclusion. A range of successful partnerships provides many learning opportunities for those who have not been in education or training for many years and for ex-offenders and those with a history of mental illness. The council has successfully enrolled learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly migrant workers onto ESOL programmes.

17. Guidance and support for learners are particularly good. Learners understand the provision well and guidance onto accredited provision or into employment is good. Learning support is particularly effective. Most courses have at least one teaching assistant. The ESF-funded learning ambassador programme provides particularly high levels of support through individual mentoring and advice to learners who might otherwise not return to learning, and successfully maintains high levels of retention.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

18. The council has a clear vision and direction for adult and community learning. It is part of the economic and community regeneration of the county and clearly features in the council's strategic plan, action plan and lifelong learning development plan. The council's strategic aims are translated effectively into targets for lifelong learning which are shared annually with partners and subcontractors. The processes of planning, monitoring and review of aims and targets are well established. These targets are used systematically to appraise the performance of the LLDU manager.

19. Partnerships with subcontractors and stakeholders are highly effective. Partners work particularly well together on producing collaborative bids for funding, improving the quality of provision and sharing good practice. Communication between partners is effective and timely. Learners' success is regularly celebrated by awarding certificates of achievement and an annual festival of learning. The learning partnership's adult and community learning group is effectively led by the LLDU manager.

20. Partners are supported particularly well through regular training, assessor accreditation and the loan of additional learning resources, which are well used by learners. Guidance materials are comprehensive and professionally presented. Tutors highly value council support. The teaching and learning observation scheme is effectively structured and cross-referenced to standards for trainers. Moderation is appropriate and the internal grade profile is good. Inspectors observed a sample of lessons which were graded satisfactory or better. Observers feed back with sensitivity to tutors but do not always clearly identify actions to raise standards of teaching.

21. Learning is highly inclusive. The council has a wide range of learners, of which 16% have additional learning disabilities and/or difficulties and 1.4% are from minority ethnic groups. Learning takes place at a wide range of venues including community centres, schools, a fire station, village halls and colleges. Equality and diversity awareness is particularly promoted to learners at induction. The council provides clear guidance to subcontractors on equality and diversity policies and promotion throughout learning. All venues have been assessed for access by learners with disabilities and in some cases the council has supported successful

bids to improve access through the use of ramps and lifts. Some tutors have received specific training on equality in assessment of qualifications.

22. Subcontractors have regular monitoring visits and quality assurance reviews. Accredited learning is thoroughly moderated. The council places great emphasis on continually improving provision and systems. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate. Not all stakeholders were involved in the self-assessment process. The council accurately identified weaknesses in initial assessment and consistency of individual learning plans and has yet to make improvements. Two new ESF-funded projects have not yet been quality assured but review dates have been agreed. Management of data is satisfactory. The council maintains performance and equality data which is reviewed regularly. Learners' progression between courses, levels and providers and into employment is not monitored effectively on all programmes.

What learners like

- Helping each other in small classrooms – ‘I do not get embarrassed about my poor spelling’
- ‘Wonderful and patient teachers who explain things really well’
- Informal, friendly, small groups
- Challenging and interesting experience
- ‘Changing ideas to help my personal growth’
- The handouts
- ‘I know I have improved as I don’t print my words anymore when I write’
- ‘The literacy lesson helps me and I don’t feel stressed about it’
- Easy access
- The friendly atmosphere
- The approachable teachers

What learners think could improve

- The availability of simple dictionaries
- The amount of practise in listening and speaking
- ‘More lessons in English as two hours per week is not enough’
- The number of mixed ability groups – it’s too high
- The amount of computers that work
- The number of ICT courses
- The seating for ICT classes
- The air conditioning

Sector subject areas

Information and communications technology

Good: Grade 2

Context

23. At the time of inspection there were 143 learners on programme, of whom 77% were women. There were 13 courses running, including using a computer, desktop publishing, using the internet, word processing and digital photography. The 10- week courses are offered at beginners' and intermediate levels. Accreditation is through the Open College Network. Venues are spread throughout the county and include schools, village halls, a fire station and community centres. Learners are recruited by partnership organisation, community groups or enrolment events at one extended school venue. There are three subcontracted providers offering courses in ICT and employing four ICT tutors. The programme is managed by an adult and community learning co-ordinator.

Strengths

- Good development of learners' confidence and skills
- Highly responsive courses designed to meet the needs of learners
- Particularly good support for learners
- Good support for tutors

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of initial assessment to set individual targets

Achievement and standards

24. Retention and achievement were good at 87% and 79% respectively in 2005-06. There is no comparable data for previous years and no trend analysis. Achievement for the first quarter of 2006-07 is good at 82%. Learners are well motivated and quickly gain confidence using their new skills. Before the course some learners have never turned a computer on. By the end of the course all learners can use word processing applications at a basic level. This raises their self-esteem and fires their ambition to learn more. Many are so keen they often stay after lessons. Many learners progress to other courses offered by the council and are planning to develop their ICT skills further. For example, one learner of 80 years has recently bought her first laptop computer after starting the beginners' course. She plans to surf the internet to research her family history.
25. The standard of learners' work is mostly satisfactory and in some cases is good. One learner has created a bright and colourful poster to advertise her business.

Quality of provision

26. Teaching is satisfactory. In good sessions it is paced well to meet needs of learners. There are good demonstrations using industry-standard resources. Learners are engaged and involved throughout the sessions which use a wide range of teaching strategies. Tutors use good-quality handouts with clear instructions and diagrams to consolidate learning. In weaker sessions, there is insufficient target-setting and tutors sometimes do not differentiate in mixed groups. Tutors do not always make the most of learning points and there are some poor resources that affect teaching. For example, one computer was faulty leaving one learner with no computer to sit at.
27. Tutors make insufficient use of initial assessment to draft learners' individual learning plans. Learners assess themselves at the start of their course. However, the weaknesses that they identify are not transferred to their individual learning plan and are not used as a focus for improvement. For example, a learner identified in her initial assessment that she did not like working with written instructions or finding out things for herself. Tutors did not record this on her individual learning plan or set targets to help her adapt her behaviour. There is no initial screening of ICT skills, except on the embedding ICT with literacy programme. Learners are given lesson objectives for each session but these are rarely broken down into individual, short-term, measurable targets.
28. Most tutors monitor learners' progress and give feedback after each session. Sometimes feedback is not recorded. One tutor did not assess or mark learners' work until the end of their programme. In this group, a learner made a number of key mistakes when writing a letter. There were capital letters in the wrong place and grammatical errors. The tutor did not correct her errors at the time they were made. The learner made the same mistakes repeatedly.
29. Courses are highly responsive to the needs of learners. Learners complete a 'make a difference' form halfway through their course. They use this form to give feedback to tutors and managers, including expressing their interest for next course. Managers use these forms and learners' focus groups to identify learners' needs and arrange future courses. Courses are offered in a variety of learning centres including the city centre and rural outreach centres. Managers make effective and clever use of their resources so that learners have the opportunity to remain on the course of their choice for a full year. Courses run throughout the day and evening.
30. Tutors provide very good support to learners. Tutors are extremely flexible and supportive in learning sessions and offer supportive, non-patronising individual coaching for learners in ICT sessions. Teaching assistants are present in every workshop to provide effective expert advice for learners at their computer workstations. The average ratio of tutors to learners is very good at six to one. Advice is given to learners about the suitability of courses and learners are signposted to colleges to take external qualifications when appropriate. Managers provide a wide range of additional hardware support for learners with a disability. This includes large and coloured lettering on keyboards and special monitors. Some centres have no adjustable chairs or eye-level monitors.

Leadership and management

31. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Tutors receive good support, with those who often work in isolated rural environments feel well supported. Tutors and learning assistants are given a range of training opportunities including teaching and assessment qualifications. Tutors feel included in the decision-making process and there are good communications with the centres. Managers visit tutors in centres and conduct regular and supportive teaching observation visits. Staff appraisals are regular and focused on targets. Staff take full advantage of the wide range of training opportunities available to them. Overall, quality improvement is satisfactory, although inspectors' grading of teaching and learning was lower than the grade profile given by the provider's managers. The self-assessment report is largely accurate.
32. Equality of opportunity is good. There are a number of initiatives to widen participation. Learners with disabilities are supported well.

Preparation for life and work

Good: Grade 2

Context

33. The council provides courses in literacy, literacy through computers, ESOL and numeracy to 406 learners in venues across the county. At the time of the inspection 366 learners were in learning. Forty-six learners were on literacy through computers programmes, a further 110 were on literacy programmes and 134 were on ESOL programmes. Eleven groups each of ESOL and literacy classes run from several venues. The classes are of two hours' duration and run throughout the year. Twenty-seven learners with learning disabilities and difficulties attend three literacy classes. A group of 52 volunteers support 36 learners on an individual basis in their homes and/or community venues. One learner is taking a numeracy class. Eighteen per cent of learners are unemployed and 46% are men.

34. The provider subcontracts to a local charity, Herefordshire Literacy Project (HELP), which develops and delivers these programmes. The charity is responsible to the council's LLDU manager and to its own trustees. Three co-ordinators, 10 part-time paid staff and volunteers deliver the programmes.

Strengths

- Good achievement of personal skills and qualifications
- Excellent teaching of literacy through ICT
- Particularly flexible range of courses and programmes that meet the needs of disadvantaged learners
- Very good support for learners
- Good curriculum management

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient development of independent learning skills
- Insufficient short-term target-setting in individual learning plans

Achievement and standards

35. Learners achieve their personal objectives and qualifications well. ESOL learners greatly improve their understanding and spoken ability in English. This has improved their relationships and effectiveness at work. Examples include acquiring nationality, opening bank accounts and complaining to mobile phone operators. Literacy learners are better able to pass the driving theory test or electrical testing, write simple reports for their job roles and fill in their tax returns. All learners make substantial gains in confidence and self-esteem. They progress at least by one level within their programmes. Their motivation increases and they continue to learn and pass examinations. Learners' unit qualification achievement is good. For example, in the current year 81% of learners have achieved unit accreditation in literacy and 19% have passed their level1

qualification. In the past year, 25% of ESOL learners achieved a speaking and listening qualification. The standard of most learners' work is good. The provider has very successfully engaged men in learning and helped them achieve their objectives. Attendance levels are satisfactory.

36. Learners do not develop independent learning skills sufficiently. They are not taught strategies and skills to learn independently. For example, they do not develop skills through listening to radio, watching English television programmes, using computers or reading newspapers. Some employed learners are not sufficiently encouraged to consolidate their reading skills at work.

Quality of provision

37. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Teaching of literacy through ICT is excellent, and teaching is also good for learners with learning disabilities and difficulties. Tutors use plentiful learning resources imaginatively to develop literacy and ICT skills for learners simultaneously. For example, in one session the tutor very creatively engaged all learners to use computers to learn comma and apostrophe usage. Learners with disabilities and learning difficulties acquire a broad range of skills in literacy classes, learning about local tourist attractions and planning trips. ESOL teaching is too heavily focused on developing reading and writing skills. Learners use bilingual dictionaries excessively to find the meanings of words rather than learn in context, slowing down the pace of some sessions.
38. Assessment overall is satisfactory. Initial assessment for literacy and ESOL is effective. All learners have individual learning plans that have satisfactory long-term aims. Tutors do not set short-term, timebound targets effectively. Some learners are capable of making better progress and achieving their objectives more quickly.
39. The range of courses and programmes is particularly flexible to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. Many of the learners face multiple disadvantages such as homelessness, settling into a new country, drug misuse, mental health problems, offending history, domestic violence, family breakdown and redundancy. Many of the employed learners are new to this country and are working shifts in low paid and low skilled jobs. The provider has adjusted the timetables of the classes to meet their needs. Venues are easily accessible by public transport. Examination bodies have been chosen to maximise learners' achievement. The provider has run courses at employers' premises at very short notice. Workshops and individual support by volunteer tutors augment traditional classes. Learners are able to learn ICT as well as literacy and ESOL qualifications. Learning mentors very effectively identify learners' needs.
40. Support for the learners is very good. Staff are highly skilled, experienced and dedicated. They provide much needed pastoral and study support to learners with a range of difficulties. Some of the staff have faced similar difficulties and empathise with the learners. They deal with the learners' most immediate needs before providing study support. Information, advice and guidance arrangements are satisfactory. Staff with a sound knowledge of learner groups are being trained to the matrix quality standard for information, advice and guidance.

Leadership and management

41. Curriculum management is good. The council and HELP have a clear strategic direction. The council has assisted HELP to build its capacity greatly through support and guidance. Staff development is good. Nine staff are working towards level 4 qualifications in literacy and ESOL. Support for the subcontractor, including for quality and contract management, is effective. Communications are very good. Staff share good practice through regular contact and meetings. The subcontractor and the provider have secured a very good range of learning resources. Staff including volunteers and mentors contribute effectively to self-assessment process. Monitoring and checks on learning are very detailed and correctly identify areas for development. Action-planning to deal with most weaknesses is sound. However, action-planning to improve classroom practice is not as effective. Most observations are graded generously. Action plans do not pull out key action points for improvement.