

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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Mr Alistair Gourlay  
Head of York Learning  
City of York Council  
West Offices  
Station Rise  
York  
YO1 6GA

Dear Mr Gourlay

### **Short inspection of City of York Council, York Learning**

Following the short inspection on 2 and 3 February 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in June 2011.

#### **This provider continues to be good.**

- You and the leadership team have maintained strong and particularly effective partnerships within the City of York Council, and with other providers and agencies in the city and wider region. Through these, you have continued to provide a range of programmes that meet the needs of learners, employers and local communities in the City of York particularly well.
- Elected members and senior leaders within the City of York Council are committed to improving the lives and prospects of the city's residents and have a clear understanding about how York Learning should contribute to this. Senior leaders and council members govern the service effectively and provide good support and effective challenge to you as the head of service. They have a good understanding of the few areas of the service that require further improvement and monitor the progress that you and the leadership team are making to bring about improvements in these areas. You and the leadership team respond to this well, creating a positive culture and desire across the service to provide a good service to City of York residents and the communities in which they live.
- Since the previous inspection, you and your leadership team have sustained high-quality provision in family learning. This continues to engage adults in the first steps in learning, through which they greatly improve their confidence and self-esteem and are better able to help their children in their schoolwork and learning. A high proportion of adults gain the confidence through family learning to progress to take accredited qualifications in English, mathematics

and in the use of information and communication technology. A good proportion improve their skills and achieve accredited functional skills or GCSE qualifications in these subjects.

- You and the leadership team have responded well to the need in the city to provide 16 to 19 study programmes for young people with high needs and for those who are at risk of being not in education, employment or training (NEET), and not yet ready to attend other learning providers. Young people following the study programme receive very good personal support. They enjoy attending and the programme prepares them well to progress into further study or employment. Leaders of the study programmes have ensured that they provide all learners with purposeful work experience through which they gain in confidence and improve their attitudes to work. Although all young people on study programmes attend classes to improve their English and mathematical skills, you and your leadership team are aware that the proportion who achieve qualifications in these subjects is too low. You have made a number of changes to learners' programmes aimed at improving this but you know that further work is needed.
- You and the leadership team recognise that although a high proportion of apprentices achieve their qualification and develop good skills that enable them to be successful at work, too many in recent years made slow progress in completing the English and mathematics functional skills elements of their programmes. Leaders responsible for the apprenticeship programme recently restructured the training and assessment arrangements in response to this. As a result, apprentices who have started since September 2015 are making much better progress in improving their skills in English and mathematics and in achieving functional skills qualifications in these subjects.
- You have made good progress in addressing most of the weaknesses from your previous inspection. Managers now use the lesson observation process very effectively to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They ensure that teachers share best practice identified through observations with others to help them to improve. Although you have made recent improvements, data and information available to managers about the progress that learners are making are still not sufficiently robust to enable them to take action quickly if concerns arise.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

- The leadership team has ensured that safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and appropriate actions are taken to safeguard learners. Three leaders with designated responsibility for safeguarding, supported by the head of service, respond to safeguarding concerns swiftly. Staff have a good understanding of how to report any incidents or safeguarding concerns. Incident logs are detailed, and record actions taken, as well as subsequent learning points, and details of referrals to the City of York Council safeguarding team or other agencies.

- Robust procedures are in place to keep learners safe when online. Leaders have created a strong culture among staff to keep learners safe. As a result of this, teachers and assessors provide learners with suitable advice and guidance about the risks of radicalisation and extremist views and opinions. Leaders have only recently begun to provide all staff with formal training in the Prevent duty.

## **Inspection findings**

- The effectiveness of leadership and management is good. Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken appropriate steps to develop the provision to meet the needs of local communities and employers in the City of York. Leaders work particularly well with a range of partners to ensure that programmes offered by the service target individuals and communities who would benefit from them the most. The service has responded well to the locally identified need to provide a 16 to 19 study programme for young people with high needs and for those who are at risk of being NEET. Through the increased recovery of full fees from a range of community-based leisure and personal interest courses, leaders have been better able to use available funding to increase the number of adults who participate in family learning in the communities where the need is greatest.
- Governance is good. Elected members and senior leaders work closely with the head of service to set the strategic priorities for York Learning. They receive a good range of information through a clearly defined reporting process and use this well to hold service leaders to account for the quality of provision and outcomes of learners.
- Leaders and managers have strengthened the process for observing teaching, learning and assessment. This was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Observations are frequent. Managers who carry them out focus well on the learning that is taking place, and the progress that learners make. Following observations, managers provide teachers and assessors with clear actions to improve; they arrange good support as well as appropriate staff development for them. Managers identify good practice well through observations and ensure that this is shared across the service. The outcomes from teaching observations feed into teachers' and assessors' performance management and, where necessary, managers set them clear targets to improve. When teachers and assessors make insufficient progress in improving their practice, managers take appropriate action, including referring staff to the City of York Council's capability procedure.
- The 16 to 19 study programme provision is good. Learners receive particularly good support, which enables them to improve their confidence and attitudes to learning and work. Through training activities and appropriate work experience, they develop a good range of personal and work-related skills. However, the progress that learners make in improving these skills is not always formally recognised or recorded sufficiently well by teachers. Although English and mathematics, at an appropriate level based on learners' starting points, are an

integral part of study programmes, the proportion of learners who achieve qualifications in these subjects requires improvement.

- York Learning has maintained good quality provision on community and family learning programmes. Learners receive good initial advice and guidance, which enables them to choose courses which are appropriate for them and will help them to make progress towards their planned next steps. Teachers plan activities well to meet the individual needs of learners. They use procedures for recognising and recording learners' progress and achievements well to record the skills and knowledge that learners gain in family learning. Through well-planned and delivered lessons, learners improve their skills, knowledge and self-esteem and many gain the confidence to progress to further learning and to seek employment.
- York Learning provides a good range of opportunities for adults to access learning and qualifications in English and mathematics that are appropriate to their existing levels of skill, prior achievement and confidence in the subjects. Through family learning, learners who begin the programmes, often lacking in confidence, improve their basic English and mathematical skills well. They feel more able to help their own children with the reading, writing and mathematics they are learning at school. After participating in family learning courses, a high number of learners take further courses leading to accredited functional skills or GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics. A good proportion of learners achieve these. Leaders and managers implemented a useful range of actions as a result of their analysis of the reasons for the low proportion of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who achieved successfully in English and mathematics in 2014/15. Learners now undergo a more thorough diagnostic assessment when they start their study programme, and class sizes in these subjects have been reduced so that learners receive more personalised and individual support.
- Apprentices improve their technical and professional skills well through their work with supportive employers. The service's self-assessment for 2014/15 correctly identified that although the proportion of apprentices who achieved their learning goals remained high, the proportion who did so within the planned time was poor. This was the result of the late introduction and poor coordination of training and assessment of English and mathematics functional skills. Leaders responsible for the apprenticeship programme restructured the training and assessment arrangements because of this. Apprentices who have started on programmes since September 2015 undergo thorough diagnostic assessment and are placed into functional skills classes from the start of their apprenticeship. As a result, these apprentices are making much better progress in English and mathematics. A minority of apprentices who started prior to September 2015 remain behind target. Although managers have introduced improved procedures for monitoring the progress of apprentices, these require further improvement as they are not yet sufficiently robust to provide managers with an early warning if apprentices are at risk of falling behind target.

### **Next steps for the provider**

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- the progress that learners following 16 to 19 study programmes make in improving their personal and work-related skills is recognised and recorded fully
- they and other managers rigorously monitor the effectiveness of the actions implemented to improve the proportion of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who achieve English and mathematics qualifications, taking further appropriate action if these are found not to be fully effective
- the proportion of apprentices who achieve within the planned timescale improves significantly as a result of the actions put in place to improve the quality and timing of functional skills training and assessment, and take further, appropriate action if these are not fully effective
- all managers use data and information about the progress that learners are making sufficiently well to be able to take action quickly if concerns arise and that systems and procedures to enable them to do this are sufficiently robust.

Yours sincerely

Malcolm Fraser

**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors were assisted by the Head of York Learning as nominee. Inspectors met with senior leaders and spoke to elected members with responsibility for governance. They visited the City of York Council offices and observed lessons and assessments taking place in community venues across the city and visited and observed sessions at both locations where the delivery of the 16 to 19 study programme takes place. Inspectors held meetings with, or spoke to, managers, teachers, learners, apprentices and employers. They scrutinised learners' work and assessment records and key documents relating to the service strategy and implementation plans, self-assessment and improvement planning, and safeguarding. Inspectors considered the views of learners through discussions during learning sessions visited and through the responses received through Ofsted's online questionnaire.