

Inspection of New Directions - The Learning and Employment Service for Reading

Inspection dates: 3 to 6 December 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

New Directions is the learning and employment service of Reading Borough Council. At the time of the inspection, there were 618 adult learners enrolled on one or more courses. Of these, the majority were enrolled on courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and tailored learning courses. Adult learners were also studying on a range of other programmes, including GCSE mathematics, early years educator and courses in preparation for employment. There were 13 apprentices studying a level 3 business administration apprenticeship and fewer than five apprentices studying on each of level 2 early year practitioner, level 3 early years educator and level 5 operations or departmental manager apprenticeships. Adult learners attend training at New Directions College or at centres in their communities.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Adult learners and apprentices enjoy a supportive and purposeful learning environment. Learners are comfortable practising their spoken English in class, making mistakes and learning from the advice and feedback they receive from tutors and peers. Learners and apprentices are polite and courteous and flourish in the positive culture tutors foster, where diversity is respected and inclusion is promoted. Most learners and apprentices attend their lessons well and focus on their studies successfully.

Adult learners and apprentices gain confidence in their work and personal lives due to the good-quality teaching that they receive. Learners studying information and communication technology courses develop their digital skills from a very basic level of understanding how to turn on a computer to being able to use search engines, send emails and carry out tasks online safely such as banking and other services. Apprentices studying early years use their new knowledge to plan safe and developmental activities for the children in their care. Apprentices make a positive contribution in the workplace, and learners value the greater independence that their learning provides.

Adult learners follow courses that meet their individual needs. This is because leaders have designed courses with staff from partner organisations who understand the needs of their learners. Learners who are recovering from the impact of issues affecting their mental health value the opportunity to attend courses that leaders organise with local mental health charities. Learners value the opportunity to mix with others with similar experiences and to be able to progress at their preferred pace. Many learners move on to volunteering or employment.

Learners and apprentices feel safe while in learning and at work. They know who to contact if they feel unsafe or have concerns about others. They are confident that any concerns would be taken seriously and acted upon appropriately.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers offer adult learning programmes and apprenticeship provision predominantly to support local residents' needs. They are ambitious to support those most disadvantaged and furthest away from work and learning. For example, a range of pre-entry and accredited courses in ESOL enable asylum seekers, refugees and migrants to gain the language skills they need to integrate into the community and secure employment. Leaders offer a range of courses to meet Reading Borough Council's key ambitions to create a healthy environment, thriving communities and an inclusive economy.

Tutors ensure learners and apprentices have a secure understanding of fundamental knowledge before introducing more complex ideas. They ensure that apprentices studying business administration understand their organisation's policies before they learn advanced content such as the impact of legislation on policy. GCSE

mathematics tutors teach learners how to complete the calculation of a basic equation before they initiate difficult worded questions to test and extend their application of the principles taught.

Tutors use questioning skilfully to test and extend learners' understanding and correct any misconceptions. ESOL tutors check learners' pronunciation and supportively correct mistakes on an individual or whole-class basis. They provide opportunities for practice and support learners identifying and correcting their own mistakes to develop fluency. Tutors direct questions well to individuals to check learning. They make sure all learners contribute well to discussions.

Most tutors provide useful and constructive feedback to learners and apprentices. For example, ESOL tutors encourage learners to be concise with their explanations so that it is easier for others to understand the key points of their presentations. Business administration tutors identify where apprentices have made spelling or grammatical errors and advise on how they can avoid making mistakes in the future. Tutors review the progress adult learners and apprentices make and inform them about what they need to do to improve further.

Tutors do not consistently set targets for learners that help them to make swift progress. Too often, tutors of tailored learning courses set targets that are not specific enough and not linked well enough to the skills learners need to acquire or their planned outcomes. When target setting is effective, such as in ESOL, tutors set personalised targets that link effectively to learners' intended career aspirations or address an area of everyday life that learners would like to improve.

Learners receive the support that they require to overcome any barriers to learning. Tutors support learners with additional learning or physical needs well. Learning support workers produce and implement individualised support plans that identify strategies to enable learners to achieve their qualifications, which most do.

Employers value the contribution that apprentices and adult learners make to their organisations. For example, learners who complete work experience are confident speaking to new customers and producing a range of hot drinks correctly and safely, using commercial barista equipment in the café. Apprentices studying business administration are able to use digital systems proficiently and can take minutes of meetings accurately. Those studying the operational manager apprenticeship know how to support their teams to reach their potential in varied situations. Apprentices and learners apply their new skills well in the workplace and become valued members of their teams.

Tutors help adult learners prepare for their next steps. They support learners in supplementing accredited courses with a wide range of tailored learning courses to meet their individual needs and ambitions. Tutors provide additional training to help learners on ESOL courses feel comfortable in a new country, such as birth preparation classes that teach birth-specific terms learners will hear while giving birth. Adults learn about topics such as food hygiene and hospitality in preparation for their next steps. They also receive support with CV writing and interview skills to

help them to gain employment. This helps learners build the confidence they need in their personal lives and to apply for job opportunities.

The majority of apprentices complete their apprenticeship. Most of those who achieve gain a distinction grade in their final assessment. However, leaders do not make sure that level 5 apprentices are fully aware of the demands and expectations of a higher apprenticeship from the outset. Several operational and departmental manager apprentices leave their apprenticeship before successful completion.

Leaders have a positive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. They benefit from highly experienced governors who are well informed about the college's performance and offer effective support and challenge to bring about continuous improvements. Leaders are responsive to governors' challenges and take appropriate and proportionate action.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

However, too often, staff do not support learners to gain an awareness of how to stay safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Provide apprentices with clear advice and guidance about the expectations of their apprenticeship.
- Improve the quality of target setting to support learners to make rapid progress.
- Raise learners' awareness of how to stay safe from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54075
Address	330 Northumberland Avenue Reading RG2 8DH
Contact number	03458 420012
Website	www.newdirectionsreading.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Lisa Welch
Provider type	Local authority
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 December 2015
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Richard Kirkham, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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