

Short inspection of Adult College for Rural East Sussex (ACRES)

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 October 2023

Outcome

The Adult College for Rural East Sussex (ACRES) continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

ACRES is based in Uckfield, East Sussex. It provides accredited and non-accredited learning programmes for adult learners across East Sussex. ACRES is a consortium of five partner education providers and East Sussex County Council. Programmes are taught in community and partner venues. At the time of the inspection, there were 393 learners enrolled. Most learners study non-accredited programmes in areas such as health, well-being and creative crafts. Approximately one fifth of learners study accredited programmes from entry level to level 2 in areas including English for speakers of other languages, functional skills, GCSE mathematics and GCSE English. ACRES was last inspected in November 2017, when inspectors judged the quality of provision to be good. ACRES does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners appreciate the supportive, welcoming and inclusive learning environments leaders and tutors create. Many learners gain great pleasure from their learning and rightly recognise the wider social and personal benefits they accrue. For example, learners in a residential home enjoy learning about painting watercolours alongside residents from the nearby village, leading to an enhanced sense of community.

Learners appreciate being able to access learning near to where they live. Leaders work closely with consortium members and partner organisations to locate learning activities close to areas of need. This makes it easier for learners who face barriers to learning to develop new skills and knowledge and form valuable social networks.

Nearly all learners achieve their learning goals. Most learners on accredited programmes pass their qualifications. The skills and knowledge they acquire help them progress successfully, both personally and in the workplace. For instance, learners studying GCSE mathematics move on to train as teachers.

Many learners grow in confidence because of their learning. They justifiably acquire a new sense of self-belief because of their accomplishments. For instance, learners

on GCSE mathematics feel better able to support their children's learning and model the importance of mathematical skills.

Learners feel safe while at ACRES. Staff provide them with helpful, practical advice on sensible steps to take to protect themselves and keep safe, including while online.

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

Leaders and tutors order what learners study logically and sensibly. Tutors check diligently what learners know at the beginning of their programme and use this to tailor programmes to meet learners' needs carefully. This means that learners build on what they already know, acquiring new and more complex understanding quickly. As a result, most learners make good progress and achieve their learning goals.

Leaders support experienced and knowledgeable tutors to maintain a good level of expertise. For example, yoga tutors learn about yoga for relaxation and include this in sessions. As a result, tutors ensure that learning sessions reflect current practices and are interesting and relevant to learners.

Tutors explain and demonstrate key concepts carefully and use appropriate teaching techniques, so learners apply what they learn quickly and confidently. Tutors also provide learners with ample opportunities to revisit prior learning and link it to current topics, consolidating their understanding. For example, in mathematics lessons, tutors encourage learners to use a technique they previously learned with fractions. Consequently, learners remember key information well and commit it to their long-term memory.

Tutors scrutinise learners' work closely; they identify errors swiftly and provide constructive feedback that helps learners improve their future work. For example, photography tutors give helpful guidance to learners on different photographic techniques they have used, enabling learners to take action that improves their future work. Equally, skills for life tutors provide learners with feedback that helps them recognise and value the new skills they acquire, such as writing more neatly and using more complex words correctly.

Staff provide learners with detailed information, advice and guidance on learning programmes prior to enrolment. When delivering the programmes, most tutors helpfully talk to learners about future learning and study opportunities. They signpost learners to other organisations, as appropriate. A small number of learners on accredited programmes do not have access to sufficient impartial guidance and are therefore unclear on the options available to them following completion of their current course.

Leaders have a good understanding of local skills needs. They have begun to work with partners to bring learning to those facing disadvantage successfully. For instance, ACRES now provides programmes to residents with learning difficulties in

their care homes, helping residents to maintain and develop skills while also tackling the risks of loneliness and social isolation. However, leaders rightly recognise that the curriculum ACRES offers is not wholly aligned to emerging local, regional and national skills priorities in areas such as digital skills. They are in the early stages of addressing this, but it is too early to assess the full impact.

Leaders have high aspirations, which they share successfully with staff and learners. They are self-critical and know what they do well and where they need to improve. They support staff effectively to further develop their teaching and provide helpful development opportunities. As a result, leaders maintain and further enhance the high-quality teaching from which learners benefit.

Governors are supportive of leaders and contribute to the strategic development of ACRES effectively. However, they do not have a sufficiently secure understanding of the quality of provision ACRES offers learners and how effectively it meets its statutory obligations. As a result, governors are not able to fully scrutinise and challenge leaders and support further improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Continue to develop the curriculum so that it fully meets the emerging skills and knowledge needs of the local and regional community.
- Ensure all learners have access to sufficient information, advice and guidance to understand the progression routes available to them from their current course of study.
- Ensure those responsible for governance support and challenge leaders to continue to improve the quality of the provision and ensure that ACRES continues to fulfil its statutory obligations.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50349
Address	Uckfield College Downsview Crescent Uckfield TN22 3DJ
Contact number	01825 761820
Website	www.acreslearning.org.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Helen DSilva
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 November 2017
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the second short inspection carried out since the Adult College for Rural East Sussex (ACRES) was judged to be good in May 2014.

The inspection team was assisted by the adult learning manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the providers 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 providers documentation and records.

Inspection team

Roland White, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Ann Potterton	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Addis	Ofsted Inspector
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