

Bolton College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130495

Name of lead inspector: Sheila Willis HMI

Last day of inspection: 14 May 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. Bolton College is a medium sized general further education college. The college's main site is in the centre of Bolton and it operates from five other sites and approximately 100 community venues in and around the Bolton area. The college changed its name from Bolton Community College to Bolton College on 31 March 2010. It is planned that the college will move into newly built premises in September 2010. Building work is at an advanced stage.
2. The college offers learner responsive provision in 14 of the 15 areas funded by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The college offers employer responsive provision in health, care and public services, agriculture, horticulture and animal care, engineering, construction and the built environment, hairdressing, retail, leisure, skills for life and work, and business, administration and law, funded by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). It provides vocational training courses for school pupils aged from 14 to 16 years. The college is the main subcontractor for Bolton Metropolitan Council to provide community safeguarded learning programmes for adults. It offers a range of fully costed programmes funded by employers which provides approximately 2% of its annual income. The largest of these is with the water utility industry.
3. The college recruits 57% of its learners from areas of deprivation. The proportion of learners aged 16 achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics in Bolton is 40.1% compared with the national average of 46.8%. The unemployment rate for Bolton, at 5.8%, is slightly higher than the rate for England of 5.4%. In 2008/09, the college recruited a higher proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds when compared with Bolton as a whole.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Bolton Metropolitan Council
 - CITB – Construction Skills
 - Alliance Learning
 - STEGTA
 - Skills Solution
 - JTL
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Citrus Training Solution Limited
 - Peter Rowley and Associates Ltd
 - Bolton Wanderers Football Club
 - TTE Ltd

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 | 360 part-time learners |
| Further education (16 to 18) | 1,609 full-time learners 362 part-time learners |
| Foundation learning | 551 full-time learners 237 part-time learners |
| Entry to Employment | 212 full-time learners |
| Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) | 356 full-time learners 3,706 part-time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain | 922 learners |
| Apprenticeships | 946 apprentices |

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 2 |
| Capacity to improve | Grade 2 |
| | Grade |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| Safeguarding | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | 2 |
| Subject Areas | |
| Building and construction | 2 |
| Hospitality and catering | 2 |
| Foundations for learning and life | 2 |
| Preparation for work | 2 |
| Business, administration and law | 3 |

Overall effectiveness

6. Bolton College is a good college where managers have made significant improvements to the provision, and to how well learners achieve, since the last inspection. Outcomes for learners are good and show a three-year improvement trend to just above national averages for similar colleges. Outcomes for learners on work-based learning programmes are high. Achievement on short courses has been maintained at a high level over three years. Learners develop good skills and knowledge that help to prepare them for higher level study or employment. Learners enjoy learning and feel safe at college. Learners participate in a wide variety of community activities and develop good social and personal skills.
7. Teaching is good. Learners make good progress. Staff are knowledgeable and well qualified. Assessment practices are good and learners receive good

information on what they need to do to improve. Not enough teachers set precise targets at learners' progress reviews that can be monitored clearly enough to measure learners' rate of progress towards their qualification effectively. A broad range of provision offers useful progression routes for learners in the majority of subject areas. The links with employers and partners are highly productive in curriculum development. Care, guidance and support for learners are a key strength of the college's work and have contributed significantly to improved retention rates, particularly for vulnerable learners.

8. The college has good capacity to improve further, demonstrated through its record of implementing actions for improvement successfully. The self-assessment process is good and judgements based on rigorous analysis of data and learners' and employers' views inform improvements. Senior managers provide strong strategic direction that is supported by strong financial management and outstanding governance. The college's engagement with employers, learners and stakeholders to improve provision is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements are good.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Long course success rates have increased notably since the last inspection for learners of all ages and are just above the average for similar colleges. Success rates on short courses are high for learners aged 16 to 18. On work-based apprenticeship programmes success rates are high and are very high on Train to Gain programmes.
- Learners enjoy college, develop good skills and knowledge and make good progress. There is no significant difference in the achievement rates when measured by age or gender. The number of learners who complete their courses has improved over three years and is satisfactory. The development of literacy and numeracy skills supports learners well to achieve their learning goals.
- The vast majority of learners say that they feel safe. Incidents of bullying, abuse and harassment are rare and dealt with effectively by the college. Good attention is paid to health and safety throughout the college and in lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are planned well and use a variety of teaching methods which motivate learners. Equality and diversity are promoted well during lessons. Staff are knowledgeable and well qualified in their subject areas. Information learning technology (ILT) is used well and sometimes very imaginatively. A minority of staff do not use ILT effectively to enhance learning.
- Assessment processes are good and help learners to achieve their qualifications. Assessment in the workplace for work-based learners is particularly effective. Target setting for learners at progress reviews is insufficiently developed. Too many tutors do not set precise learning improvement targets or monitor learners' progress towards achieving these targets sufficiently well.

- Quality assurance arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning are comprehensive. However, too little focus is placed on learning observed in sessions and written feedback given to staff about what they need to do to improve is not always clear.
- The college offers a broad range of provision with good progression routes for learners. The vocational enrichment programme develops learners' personal and social skills well. The broad work-based learning provision meets employers' needs particularly well. The college is highly flexible and responsive to employers' training and assessment requirements in the workplace.
- Partnership working is extensive and very effective. The college works very effectively with a broad range of partners to improve provision for learners and to extend and improve the curriculum. Highly effective relationships with external agencies enhance personal and social skills development and support for learners. Effective joint working with the local council provides a range of community provision.
- Academic and pastoral support for learners is good. Systems to monitor and support learners' participation and attendance are effective and help keep learners on their programmes. Learners receive good advice on progression, careers and employment.
- Senior managers provide a clear strategic vision to benefit learners and the local community. The vision is well supported by strong financial management and informed by a wide range of national and local partnerships and networks.
- Governance is outstanding. Governors have an excellent understanding of the needs of the college, and help to drive improvements effectively for learners and learning. They are particularly active in promoting the use of learners' views.
- The college's engagement with users and partners to support and promote improvement is outstanding. Learners' views are very well represented and have significant impact on curriculum design and the strategic direction of the college. The college captures a very wide range of learners' views through democratically elected forums, learning walks, themed lunches and student governors, and then responds promptly to effect improvements.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates for learners by consolidating current improvement practices.
- Provide further staff training to improve the setting of learning targets and improve the monitoring of learners' progress and skill development.
- Improve teaching and learning by giving staff better feedback about their performance with a greater focus on the quality of the learning taking place in lessons.
- Continue to support staff to develop their skills in applying ILT to enhance teaching and learning sessions.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the way their confidence and self-esteem are increased through learning and training, which helps them to achieve their qualifications
- the courses, which help them to be better prepared for work
- the approachable, helpful and supportive staff
- the good teaching, training and learning that they experience
- the good atmosphere and safe learning environment created by the college which makes them feel safe
- being part of the community
- the good initial advice and guidance given by staff to ensure that they are on the right course
- being treated as individuals and as adults.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the amount of healthy eating options available in the canteen
- the cleanliness of male toilets
- some cramped teaching accommodation
- the number of cancelled lessons.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the highly professional and helpful staff
- the flexible delivery of programmes
- the good support provided to learners by tutors
- the good communication between the college and employers
- the regular weekly updates from college about learners' progress
- the way the college is highly responsive in meeting their company's training needs.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no areas for improvement were identified by employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

9. The college's capacity to improve is good. The college has made considerable progress on several areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 at advanced level have improved quickly and consistently over three years to around the national average. Key skills success rates have improved significantly by 18 percentage points since the previous inspection. Much training takes place to help teachers plan for, and better meet, the individual needs of learners. This is resulting in areas of good practice which are now in the process of becoming embedded throughout the curriculum. Learners benefit from the considerable investment in ILT. Staff training in how to use it well to support learning is good. In a few subject areas, a small proportion of aspects of provision identified in the previous inspection as needing improvement remain as areas for improvement in the current self-assessment report.
10. Outcomes for learners have improved significantly over three years and are now around the national average for similar colleges. Senior managers set and monitor appropriately challenging improvement targets. Self-assessment and other quality improvement measures bring about significant improvements. The development plan is monitored regularly and is realistically ambitious. The self-assessment process includes the views of learners and other stakeholders and the self-assessment report is broadly accurate. Governance is outstanding. Staff are appropriately qualified and resources and finance are well managed to support the college's plans. The college has effective strategies that are reducing the impact of staff absence. Leadership and management are responsive to the needs of learners and staff. In particular, the outstanding use of learners' views leads to significant improvements in the accessibility and quality of provision. All teachers are members of the Institute for Learning and make use of regular professional development.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

11. Outcomes for learners are good. Long course success rates have increased notably since the last inspection for learners of all ages and are just above the average for similar colleges. For learners aged 16 to 18, rates at advanced level were in line with averages when compared with similar colleges. For learners aged over 19, rates at all levels improved to above those of similar colleges. On long programmes in eight subject areas, success rates have improved and are significantly above national averages. Success rates in key skills have improved significantly and are satisfactory.
12. Success rates on short courses for learners aged 16 to 18 show a three-year improvement trend and are high. For learners aged over 19, success rates are good. On very short courses for learners aged 16 to 18, the college has maintained very high rates over three years; learners aged over 19 perform less

well and rates are four percentage points below national rates for similar colleges.

13. On work-based learning programmes, success rates are high. On apprenticeship programmes, success rates are high and the percentage of learners who complete their programmes on time is also high. On Train to Gain programmes, success rates are very high. However, small pockets of underperformance are not addressed sufficiently well in the college improvement plan. A high number of learners on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes progress to a positive destination.
14. The number of learners who complete their courses at all levels has improved over three years and is in line with the national average for similar colleges. In the current year, with around three weeks of most courses remaining, the number of learners who have been retained on their course has improved when compared with those retained in the previous year.
15. The college pays close attention to monitoring and improving the success rates of different groups of learners. There is no discernable difference in success rates when measured by age or gender. The college identified a small proportion of under-performance of minority ethnic groups and has taken successful action to support improvements for these groups. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers.
16. Most learners make good progress and develop sound skills and knowledge. The development of literacy and numeracy skills supports learners well to achieve their learning goals. Learners enjoy college and develop their personal and social skills well. They are punctual to lessons, attend regularly and adopt positive attitudes to work, raising their aspirations to progress to higher levels of study.
17. The vast majority of learners report that they feel safe. The learner survey conducted by the college indicates that 92% have this view, which was confirmed in discussions held with learners during the inspection. Improved security arrangements make them feel less vulnerable and incidents of bullying, abuse and harassment are rare and dealt with effectively. The college actively encourages learners to report any incidents of abuse or bullying and displays names of staff to contact for help throughout the college. Good attention is paid to health and safety, especially in vocational areas where procedures and requirements are rigorously applied.
18. Learners' awareness of health and well-being is raised effectively across subject areas, particularly during enrichment activities and group tutorials. Successful partnerships with community groups give learners good access to current and relevant information on drug and alcohol misuse. Learners benefit from very good access to on-site sexual health screening and a counselling service. The college arranges events, such as the college health fair, that encourage learners to adopt healthy lifestyles.

19. Learners make a good contribution to the college and the local community. They participate in a wide range of community and fund-raising activities. Sustainability of the environment is promoted well during tutorials and enrichment activities. Learners from different subject areas work well together in organising college and local events and contribute enthusiastically to learner forums.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

20. Teaching and learning are good. In well-planned lessons learners make good progress because activities and tasks are matched to their levels of ability and provide sufficient stretch and challenge. Staff are knowledgeable, well qualified and skilled in their subject areas. Questioning techniques to check learners' understanding are effective. Most teachers use of a variety of teaching and learning activities which motivate and encourage learners to succeed. In the best lessons learners are fully involved in evaluating and reflecting on their own learning.
21. ILT is used to good effect, with examples of highly imaginative use. In a lesson where computers and interactive whiteboards were not available, mobile phones were used to download information from web sites to support learning. In a minority of subject areas, resource limitations and lack of staff expertise in the use of ILT hampers learning.
22. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners with different levels of ability are well planned for and their awareness of equality and diversity is successfully raised through a wide variety of topics covered within subject areas.
23. Recently the college has refined its observation of the teaching process. Curriculum leaders and heads of department have responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their area. This is linked to performance management. In addition, a group of experienced observers observe and moderate observation reports. A system of peer mentoring enables staff to share good practice. A small proportion of written feedback on their performance to staff is insufficiently focused on measuring the learning taking place in lessons. Actions to improve the quality of the lesson are not always clearly stated. The college recognises that this is an area for development.
24. Assessment practices are good. The standard of learners' work is good. Staff provide useful feedback to learners about what they need to do to improve. Improvement targets set at learners' progress reviews are too often imprecise and do not help learners to focus on developing the skills they need to make good progress. Assessment in the workplace for work-based learners is particularly effective and enables learners to make very good progress towards their qualifications.
25. The college offers a broad range of provision with clear progression routes in most areas from foundation to advanced level and some offer level 4 provision.

Learners with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with hearing or visual impairment, progress well in mainstream provision. The college provides specialised provision for employers in gas engineering and water treatment. The broad work-based learning provision meets employers' needs particularly well. The college is highly flexible and responsive to employers' training and assessment requirements in the workplace.

26. Learners enjoy the tutorial and vocational enrichment programme which contributes well to their personal and social development. The wide range of vocational enrichment activities have high participation rates and are very effective in promoting equality and diversity, safe learning and being safe, healthy living and employability skills. Work experience enhances learners' employability skills in many subject areas. The work experience programme for learners on the skills for independent living programme is recognised nationally as good practice and many more learners progress to paid employment compared to the national rate.
27. The college works very effectively with a broad range of partners. Arrangements with the local 14 to 19 partnership and local schools are good. The college takes the lead on five new Diplomas, offering one- or two-day attendance options to meet needs of schools and learners. Highly effective relationships with external agencies enhance support and personal and social skills development for learners. Effective joint working with the local metropolitan council through community provision enables many learners to take their first steps back into learning.
28. Learners receive good care, guidance and support. Initial assessment is effective in identifying learners' individual learning needs and levels of ability and is used well to ensure that learners join the most appropriate course. Attendance is monitored well. A team of support staff specialise in providing effective and timely interventions for learners identified as at risk of leaving their programme. The team works with approximately 900 learners, 80% of whom are still on programme. Many learners benefit from attending additional learning workshops outside lesson times. Chaplaincy arrangements meet the needs of all faiths effectively.
29. Learners receive good advice on progression, careers and employment. The college is working successfully to build ambition and increase participation in education and training. Extensive advice and guidance for learners and parents on progression to higher education have encouraged over 200 learners to apply to higher education in 2010, an increase of 60% on the previous year. Feedback from learners on student support services is used extensively to inform improvement planning.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

30. Leadership and management are good. The Principal, governors and senior managers provide a very clear strategic focus firmly grounded in meeting local needs and priorities. These include developing provision which supports

community cohesion and increasing progression routes for learners. Plans to move the college to a new building close to the university and the sixth form college are well advanced. Regular and challenging performance reviews of subject areas have resulted in several improvements to provision. The college manages its finances very well to support its planned improvements.

31. Governance is outstanding. Governors come from a wide range of local organisations and industry, and understand clearly the needs of the community. They set the mission and strategic direction for the college with a strong focus on the benefit to learners and learning. They receive plentiful information to monitor the implementation of the strategy. Governors challenge performance outcomes rigorously and ensure that the college sets demanding targets. They understand their role very well and fulfil all their statutory duties. They are particularly active in promoting the use of learners' views and diligent in their detailed risk assessment for the new building.
32. Safeguarding arrangements are good and comply with current legislation. All staff and governors have criminal record bureau checks, or list 99 for those in continuous employment since March 2002. Records of these are held on a single central register. Student services monitor the progress of learners at risk, including learners leaving care. A governor and a senior manager have responsibility for safeguarding and they are supported by staff from human resources, student services and the nursery. Very good links with the local safeguarding board and organisations which support vulnerable young people are used promptly to protect learners who disclose abuse. All staff are aware of safeguarding issues and all but a few have had thorough external training, which is offered annually. Clear anti-bullying and harassment procedures are in place, including an excellent set of descriptors for apprentices and employers which outline behaviours that indicate bullying at work.
33. Arrangements for the promotion of equality and diversity are good. The college has carried out equality impact assessments on all key policies and regularly analyses equality and diversity impact measures. Actions taken as a result have closed the achievement gap for most groups of learners and the college is focused on raising the success rates for the few groups who are still underachieving. The new single equality scheme is at the final stages of acceptance by the corporation. Equality and diversity are fundamental to the tutorial programme and extensive training is given to governors and staff. Leaders and managers have a clear ethos that equality and diversity must be reflected in lessons to meet the needs of individual learners, and offer a significant amount of staff development to support this. While attention to individuals is not yet embedded in all lessons, a range of good practice is evident and individual support for learners, including regular catch-up and skills development weeks, is supporting learning well. Following learners' comments about divisions between subject areas, a series of activities has taken place to promote successful cross-curricula working.
34. The college's engagement with users and partners to support and promote improvements is outstanding. It captures a very wide range of learners' views

through democratically elected forums, learning walks, themed lunches and student governors. Managers respond promptly to learners' views, which include improvements to curriculum, enrichment activities and cross-subject area working. They communicate resulting actions to learners in several formats, including eye-catching posters around the college. The college responds quickly to requests and suggestions from employers who often work with the college to adapt the curriculum to meet their needs.

35. The self-assessment process is good. It is inclusive of the views of learners and employers. It is based on analysis of data. In a minority of areas the self-assessment report identifies strengths which reflect the significant progress the area has made to bringing the provision to a satisfactory standard; areas for development are insufficiently focused on actions for which the teams are accountable. Central to the quality improvement process is the once-termly performance review of all subject areas. These are robust and challenging and have resulted in significant improvement in several subject areas. Actions emerging from these performance reviews are regularly monitored. However, the self-assessment process and performance reviews create some duplication and over-complicate quality improvement activities.
36. Value for money is good. Success rates have risen overall and the curriculum is designed to meet government priorities and local needs. Resources are appropriate to the requirements of the curriculum. Currently, new technology has resulted in significant reduction in electricity use. The new building is designed to use sustainable sources of power and equipment with expected long life spans.

Subject areas

Building and construction

Grade 2

Context

37. Approximately 960 learners follow programmes in plumbing and heating and ventilation, carpentry and joinery, brickwork, painting and decorating, roofing and construction and civil engineering technician. About a third of the learners on college-based courses study part time. The majority of learners are male. Of those learners on work-based learning programmes, 354 are apprentices and 27 are on Train to Gain funded programmes. Currently 129 pupils from local schools study on a range of building craft programmes at foundation and intermediate level.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates on most courses are above averages for similar colleges. A high proportion of apprentices, particularly at advanced level, complete their programmes on time. Overall success rates for apprentices are high and well above national rates. Apprenticeships in plumbing and on the BTEC national certificate programmes have low success rates.
- Learners enjoy their programmes and make good progress. They demonstrate particularly good practical skills and a sound understanding of related technical knowledge. They develop good personal and social skills. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well through vocationally relevant key skills assignments. Nearly half of school pupils who attend tasters at the college progress onto college courses.
- Learners feel safe and understand how to report safeguarding disclosures. Health and safety practice is well adhered to. Learners demonstrate high health and safety standards.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and learning activities are differentiated suitably to meet learners' differing abilities. Assessment is good and learners receive detailed feedback on how to improve. Targets set on learners' personal development plans are insufficiently precise to enable learners and tutors to measure learner progress accurately and set improvement targets.
- The use of ILT provides satisfactory variety and interest in lessons. Effective use is made of the virtual learning environment to support learning. However, a minority of tutors only use ILT as a method of displaying class notes, which adds little to promote learners' interest.
- Regular individual tutorials support learners' progress. However, group tutorials are infrequent and learners do not benefit from the college programme.
- The range of provision is good. The department offers programmes from foundation to advanced level and learners are encouraged to progress to higher

level learning or into employment. Apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of employers adequately. The range and level of participation in enrichment activities is good and adds value to learners' programmes.

- Partnership working is good. A productive partnership with local schools and the local authority is developing a diploma in construction and the built environment. School pupils take taster sessions at college to encourage progression onto construction diplomas. Learners benefit from a wide range of sponsorship from employers including the provision of materials, tool kits and specialist training days.
- Learners receive good pastoral and learning support. Initial assessment is used effectively to determine the appropriate level and programme for learners. Support staff are effective and provide good individual support in lessons.
- Curriculum management is good with a strong focus on improving learners' outcomes. Staff are well qualified. Resources are well utilised, fit for purpose and represent good value for money. Quality improvement is good. Interventions are effective and improvement actions are monitored regularly. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report accurate and sufficiently critical.
- Staff encourage learners to express their views and hold regular meetings with learner representatives. They take effective action in response to learners' views. Actions taken are widely reported through posters on notice boards. Strong links with employers, through the Business Unit and within the department, ensure that employers' views are reflected in current provision.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners, recruited from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, report that the college promotes respect for all effectively. To increase participation of minority ethnic learners in construction programmes the college runs successful taster programmes for learners following English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) programmes.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Better monitor learners' progress and provide support for those learners underachieving on the BTEC national certificate and apprenticeship programmes in plumbing.
- Support tutors to develop the use of ILT in lessons and identify and share the better practices of some tutors.
- Improve setting and monitoring of targets to enable learners' progress to be measured effectively.
- Better implement the college group tutorial programme to ensure that learners benefit from all activities and information contained within the programme.

Catering and hospitality

Grade 2

Context

38. The subject area offers courses in multi-skilled hospitality, food preparation and cooking, food service and professional cookery at foundation and intermediate level. Of 95 learners enrolled on courses in the subject area, approximately two thirds are aged 16 to 18 years and half the learners are male. Some 42 learners are on Train to Gain funded programmes and 24 school pupils are working towards a foundation level course in hospitality and catering. A range of short programmes is offered to meet employers' training needs.

Key findings

- Success rates on long programmes in 2008/09 were high and above averages for similar colleges. On Train to Gain programmes, success rates are high, but the proportion of learners who complete their programmes on time is below average. Success rates for key skills are satisfactory. Retention rates are high across all programmes. Attendance and punctuality are good.
- Learners feel safe and their good awareness of safeguarding is effectively reinforced in lessons and during tutorials. Learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- Learners enjoy their lessons and develop good knowledge and skills. Their portfolios and written work are good. Learners improve their social awareness by participating in community activities, fund-raising events and local projects.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons and learning materials are well prepared. Teachers use a range of learning methods that motivate and interest learners. They regularly check learning and learners' understanding. In a small number of lessons, teachers pay insufficient attention to providing a range of activities to meet the differing skills and abilities of the group.
- Monitoring of learners' progress is good and learners know how well they are progressing and what they have to do to achieve. Learners' improvement targets are precise and their progress towards them measured well against their predicted grades based on their qualifications on entry. Learners receive regular feedback on progress, which motivates them to achieve.
- Assessment is timely and fair, and used well to set improvement targets for learners. The amount and range of ILT to support learning is insufficient.
- Tutors use tutorials effectively to monitor progress; part-time learners also benefit from regular tutorials. A well planned induction provides a range of activities over a three-week period to make certain that learners are on the right programme matched to their ability.
- The range of provision is not sufficient and reduces learners' progression opportunities to higher level programmes. In 2009/10, advanced programmes are not running due to low demand. The business plan for 2010/11 includes the addition of an advanced catering and hospitality leadership and management

programme. A range of educational visits and guest speakers broadens learners' experience of the industry.

- Learners receive good pastoral and learning support. The initial advice and guidance learners receive prior to enrolment is good. Support staff are effective and provide good individual support in lessons. A team of staff provides very effective support and guidance to learners identified at risk of leaving the programme early.
- Management of the area is good. Managers have a strong culture of putting learners' needs first. Courses are well planned. Quality improvement measures are good and have raised success rates. Staff monitor learners' performance and progress well at regular team meetings. The staff are well qualified and have good current industry experience. Staff training is good.
- Equality and diversity are well promoted and celebrated. Regular promotional events include an Indian theme week developed in conjunction with a local business to promote and raise awareness of Indian cookery and culture. Equality and diversity impact measure targets are challenging and aim to reduce the performance gap of some minority ethnic learners.
- Staff are very responsive to the views of learners. Learner representatives meet regularly and report their views at the college and safe learner forums. Learners' views have improved timetable planning to assist learners' part-time work and extended enrichment activities. Learners express their views confidently and are involved in the decision-making processes in their curriculum area.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Improve on the number of learners who complete their programme within the planned time on Train to Gain programmes.
- Continue to support staff to develop and provide learning activities and materials to meet better the differing range of learners' abilities in lessons.
- Extend ILT facilities to give learners a wider range of learning activities and resources in lessons.
- Extend provision to include higher level programmes that provide progression routes for intermediate learners.

Foundations for learning and life

Grade 2

Context

39. Of the 2,725 learners on preparation for life and work programmes, 1,565 are on literacy and numeracy courses that range from pre-entry to intermediate level. A further 1,160 learners are on key skills courses. The majority of courses lead to nationally accredited qualifications.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good in numeracy, literacy and key skills communication at foundation level. Outcomes are satisfactory for literacy, key skills communication and key skills application of number at foundation and intermediate level. Retention rates are generally good.
- Attendance is satisfactory. In a minority of lessons it is poor and has been low for some time. Learners attending classes through the day are punctual, but punctuality is poor in some evening classes.
- Learners produce well-presented, good quality work. Some of their work is produced using computer software enabling them to produce very high quality graphical and pictorial images. Key skills portfolios are well presented and the content relevant to their vocational courses. Learners' improved self-confidence while on their courses benefits their everyday lives.
- Learners enjoy their learning and demonstrate good skill improvement. Some learners who have never used a computer before starting the courses are able to access learning websites with ease. Many learners whose first language is not English are able to demonstrate good English skills in both literacy and numeracy lessons.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a wide range of activities that learners enjoy and participate in fully. ILT is used well in most lessons. Differentiated learning materials ensure learners of all abilities can take a full part in lessons. Key skills lessons focus on learners' primary learning goals and the teachers work closely with vocational teachers to ensure that lesson content is relevant to learners. Learners demonstrate newly acquired skills with confidence.
- Learning resources are satisfactory. Teachers develop and use some innovative, good-quality learning resources. A minority of teachers use poorly reproduced copies of text books. Some learning resources lack relevance, are too generic and insufficiently contextualised to learners' local knowledge and interests.
- The monitoring and recording of learners' progress is good. Tutors and learners review progress regularly against learners' individual goals and group goals. Learners routinely repeat goals not achieved or only partially achieved to ensure that they do not miss important aspects of learning. The assessment process is good.

- The provision meets the needs of learners well. Courses are offered at a variety of levels and attendance patterns, at the college sites and in a range of community venues.
- The college has good working relationships with a wide range of community groups including community centres, schools and employers. These effective partnerships provide good facilities which benefit learners. The college, in partnership with the local authority, delivers functional skills in mathematics and English to school pupils attending the construction and built environment diploma.
- Support for learners is good. Tutors support learners effectively during lessons. Some learners receive additional support during classes and good use is made of volunteers, teaching assistants and signers. The college has specialist provision for those learners with visual and hearing impairment and has developed learning materials designed to assist learners in gaining recognised qualifications.
- Curriculum management is good. Quality improvement initiatives have improved the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for learners. Managers and tutors have high expectations of learners, which helps to raise their aspirations.
- The department promotes equality and diversity effectively. Learners from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, age groups and abilities work well together. Teachers promote a high level of respect for different cultures. There is little difference in the achievement of learners from different groups.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates for Skills for Life literacy, key skills communication and key skills application of number at foundation and intermediate level.
- Improve attendance and punctuality in some evening classes.
- Continue to develop innovative learning resources and place more emphasis on contextualising the content so that it is more relevant to learners.

Preparation for work

Grade 2

Context

40. The area offers the E2E programme as part of the preparation for work provision. Of the 57 E2E learners, 42 are male. Nine learners have a declared learning difficulty and/or disability. Approximately a quarter of learners are from minority ethnic groups. Learners take qualifications in literacy and numeracy and participate in a range of vocational taster programmes. These include catering, joinery, hairdressing and beauty. Citizenship and work experience form part of the programme.

Key findings

- Progression rates are high. In 2007/08, some 86% of learners progressed into further education, training or employment.
- Personal and social skills development is good. Most learners join the programme without clear career plans, qualifications or employment. Learners develop increased confidence and self-esteem as they progress through the programme. They develop a positive attitude to work and education and demonstrate a good understanding of their improved employability skills.
- Learners feel safe within the college. They respond well to the welcoming learning environment created by the staff team. Learners receive good advice on sexual health matters and substance misuse. The cook-and-eat vocational taster programme promotes healthy eating.
- Community projects provide realistic work experience and encourage learners to make a positive contribution to the local community. In 2009/10, some 56 learners completed up to 16 hours of a community service placement, including soccer coaching, furniture refurbishment and conservation work.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, a variety of teaching and learning strategies maintains learners' interest and increases their motivation and good learning takes place. Learners benefit from constructive feedback on their work, which helps them to improve. Learners develop additional skills such as research techniques using the internet.
- In less effective lessons, learning strategies fail to engage learners and checks on learning are insufficient. More able learners are insufficiently challenged. The pace of lessons is slow and often dictated by less able learners. Learning outcomes in lesson plans are often unrealistic for the time available.
- Initial assessment processes are satisfactory and results inform individual planning for learners. Progress reviews are regular. Individual short-term targets set at progress reviews are insufficient to guide and monitor learners' progress effectively. Many of the targets are the same for the majority of learners.
- Programmes meet the needs of learners well. Learners can join the programme at any time throughout the year, which meets their needs well. Learners are clear about the progression opportunities open to them on completion of their

course. Vocational tasters are an important part of the programme. However, the range is insufficient, being limited to three curriculum areas and some are occasionally oversubscribed.

- Partnerships are good and support the development of learners' personal and employability skills. External agencies refer young people to the programme at any time during the year. Communication is good and potential issues that could result in learners leaving the programme are resolved.
- Learners receive excellent care, guidance and support. They appreciate the support given by the staff. Teachers are readily accessible outside of timetabled lessons to support learners and provide advice and guidance. External agencies such as housing and those that support young adults in or leaving care provide good support.
- Teachers consider, and respond well, to the views of learners. Learners have good opportunities to contribute their views within the department and through college learner forums. Teachers take good action following learners' improvement suggestions.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It considers the views of staff and learners well. The report correctly identifies strengths of the provision but fails to identify some significant areas for improvement. Quality assurance and improvement processes inform insufficiently the judgements in the report.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Share existing good practice in lesson planning within the curriculum. Ensure that the range of tasks and activities are well matched to learners' abilities and interests and are achievable within the time allowed.
- Improve the setting and recording of learners' short-term targets at progress reviews. Ensure that targets are individual to learners and effective in monitoring learners' progress.
- Extend the range of vocational tasters to provide more variety for learners.
- Improve the rigour of the self-assessment process to take account of areas for improvement. Improve quality monitoring processes to inform better the judgements in the report.

Business Administration and Law

Grade 3

Context

41. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in a range of business, clerical and accountancy courses from foundation to advanced level. Of the 341 learners currently enrolled, approximately 85% are adults. On work-based learning provision, 119 learners are on apprenticeships in administration, accounting and finance and 194 are on Train to Gain funded programmes working towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in administration, customer service and management.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates on apprenticeships are very high and significantly above national averages. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes have increased significantly over three years and are very high. Learners on advanced accounting perform at or above averages for learners in similar colleges. Learners at NVQ level 2 are under-performing when compared with learners in similar colleges.
- Learners are punctual in lessons and attendance on courses has improved to 82%. Learners' progress is satisfactory, relative to their prior attainment. The standard of learners' work, both in lessons and in written assignments, is satisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and paced and teachers create a purposeful learning environment. Learners contribute confidently and articulately in lessons and teachers use ILT very effectively to support learning. Learning activities are well planned to meet the needs of all learners.
- Assessment practice is good. Weekly study clubs provide additional support to full-time learners. Learners value the approachability of staff and their willingness to provide much informal support outside lessons. Learners value the support of their assessor in the workplace on work-based learning provision.
- Target setting for learners at reviews is insufficiently detailed and does not provide learners with enough information on what they need to do to improve. Targets are not sufficiently challenging and do not have specific agreed achievement dates. Tutors do not record the achievement of targets at subsequent progress reviews.
- The range of provision is satisfactory and relevant to learners' career and employment goals. Progression opportunities on to higher-level programmes are good. Too few learners on business and accounting courses have had the opportunity to experience work placements. Work-based learning programmes are responsive to employers' needs.
- Partnership working is satisfactory. Working with three local schools the college has developed and provides a two-year course in accountancy for learners aged from 14 to 16. It is too soon to measure the impact of this provision as learners

have yet to achieve on this programme. The college provides business administration provision in the community to widen access for learners.

- Learners receive good guidance and support. Learners receive good individual and group support in lessons and during weekly tutorials. The initial assessment process is good and includes a variety of activities to ensure that learners join the appropriate course. Specialist tutors provide good additional support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The area restructured in 2008 and a new management and operational team was formed. Action plans to improve provision, learner recruitment and learners' performance are monitored regularly at team meetings. Many of the actions identified have yet to have a significant impact on the outcomes for learners.
- The self-assessment report identifies accurately the areas for development within the provision. All staff are involved sufficiently in the process through course reviews and team meetings. The department has implemented a range of strategies to address the areas for development, but it is too early to judge the impact of these strategies on improved learners' outcomes.

What does Bolton College need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for learners by continuing to monitor learners' attendance and support learners at risk of not completing the programme.
- Improve target setting for learners by ensuring that targets are specific and have dates for achievement. Monitor and record the achievement of targets more rigorously at learners' progress reviews.
- Develop stronger links with local employers and the community to create more opportunities for curriculum enrichment and work experience for learners.
- Continue to monitor the impact of quality improvement plans on improving outcomes for learners.

Information about the inspection

42. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's vice principal as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the SFA or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
43. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Bolton College

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

| Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate | Overall | 14-16 | 16-18 Learner responsive | 19+ Learner responsive | Employer responsive |
|--|---------|-------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | 2129 | 0 | 1650 | 479 | 0 |
| Full-time learners | 5491 | 357 | 315 | 3082 | 1737 |
| Part-time learners | | | | | |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 2 | | | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners progress? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 2 | | | | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 2 | | | | |
| Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?* | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?* | 2 | | | | |
| Quality of provision | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users? | 2 | | | | |
| How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners? | 2 | | | | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | | | | |
| Leadership and management | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?* | 1 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap? | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 1 | | | | |
| How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners? | 2 | | | | |
| How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money? | 2 | | | | |

*where applicable to the type of provision

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