

Harlow College

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130676

Name of lead inspector: Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

Last day of inspection: 26 November 2010

Type of provider: General Further Education College

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Information about the provider

1. Harlow College is a medium-sized tertiary college located on a single site close to Harlow town centre, North West Essex. The college draws around half of its learners from Harlow and the remainder largely from West Essex and East Hertfordshire. The college's main work is vocational education and training. The Young People's Skills Agency (YPLA) and the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) fund the majority of the college's further education provision.
2. The college offers programmes in all subject areas. Around a third of learners are aged 16 to 18 and follow full-time courses. Some 20% of these study at foundation level, 25% at intermediate level and just over half at advanced level. The majority of adult learners are on part-time courses, mostly at foundation level and intermediate level. The largest number of full-time enrolments across the college is in arts, media and publishing, engineering, construction and preparation for life and work. Approximately 38% of learners are in employer-based training. The college is the lead partner in APEX, a consortium of training providers in the East of England; only Harlow learners were included in the scope of this inspection.
3. In 2009, the proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C in Essex was 50%, broadly around the national average. Approximately 10% of learners are of minority ethnic heritage, above that of the local population. Harlow has low unemployment and major employers but it also contains a few areas of deprivation and a history of low participation in learning.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Hertford Regional College
 - Association of Colleges in the Eastern Region (ACER)
 - North Hertfordshire College
 - Capita Training
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of the college:
 - Academy of Learning
 - Citrus Training
 - DB Training
 - Essex County Council
 - People Development Team
 - Princess Alexandra Hospital
 - Writtle College
 - Catch 22

- Essex Training Centre
- Epping Forest College
- Lota Training
- Chelmsford Training Services (CTS)

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10 |
|---|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to 16 Further education (16 to 18) Entry to Employment | 177 part-time learners 2,193 full-time learners 217 part-time learners 394 learners |
| Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+) | 318 full-time learners 666 part-time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships | 490 learners* 295 learners* |

* Harlow College learners only, the figures do not include all learners within the APEX consortium.

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 1 |
|----------------------------|----------------|

| | Grade |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Outcomes for learners | 1 |
| Quality of provision | 2 |
| Leadership and management | 2 |
| Safeguarding | 3 |
| Equality and diversity | 2 |

| Subject Areas | Grade |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Engineering | 3 |
| Construction | 2 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 2 |
| Hospitality and catering | 1 |

Overall effectiveness

- Harlow College is a good college with several outstanding features. Exceptionally high proportions of learners that start their programmes complete and pass them successfully. The college prepares learners very well for their future lives and significant numbers progress successfully onto their chosen destination. Most staff have high expectations of their learners and, in turn, most learners have high aspirations. The majority of learners enjoy their lessons, which focus on achievement and independent learning. Where lessons are fun and individual targets are precise and challenging, learners excel. This, however, is not the case for all lessons across the college.
- The college meets the needs and interests learners well and the breadth of courses, including the range of additional activities to enrich the learners' experience, is growing rapidly. Well-established and highly effective partnerships support the growth in provision. Guidance and support are a key strength of the college. The swift identification of learners who may be

struggling and close personal support, particularly for vulnerable individuals, has been a major factor in ensuring learners are successful in achieving their qualifications.

8. Leaders and managers, particularly at senior level, demonstrate an eager determination to bring about improvement. They monitor most areas of the college's work in detail and thoroughly. As a result, the college has increased notably the consistency with which all learners achieve. Much of the college's provision is good and improving markedly. The college recognises the need for further emphasis in all aspects of its work for it to gain greater consistency in students' learning experience so that it can reach the excellence it seeks. The college demonstrates an outstanding capacity to bring about this improvement.

Main findings

- Since the last inspection, the proportion of learners achieving their qualifications, across nearly all levels and ages, has increased very substantially and is now exceptionally high. A consistent picture of high attainment exists across most subject areas of the college, for employer responsive provision and for learners aged 14 to 16.
- The progress learners make is good. In a few subjects, learners make exceptional progress. However, in a few cases not all learners have enough challenge to maximise the progress they could make. The standard of learners' work is high.
- Staff prepare learners very well for life after college. Learners develop very good attitudes to learning. Attendance is high. They develop a strong work ethic and good workplace skills. The college is raising learners' future aspirations very effectively. A very high and increasing proportion of learners are progressing into related further education, higher education, employment or training.
- Learners enjoy college and feel safe. Most learners benefit from the growing range of opportunities available to become involved in the college and local community. The college is increasing rapidly its promotion of health and well-being and other broader outcomes, particularly through the tutorial programme. The evaluation of its widespread impact in all these areas is not comprehensive.
- Overall teaching is good and enjoyable, particularly in practical lessons, but too many theory lessons are teacher led and do not involve learners sufficiently. Assessment practice is good overall. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is uneven across the college.
- Staff use daily learning targets very effectively to monitor learners' progress and increase success rates. Learning targets in a minority of subjects however, are not specific, precise or individual enough to ensure all learners make good progress and achieve to their full potential. A minority of learners who would benefit from literacy and numeracy support do not receive help.
- Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning are highly effective. Internal observers accurately grade the quality of lessons. The

proportion they judge to be good is high. Too few lessons, however, are outstanding. The college recognises the need to engage learners more, particularly in theory lessons, to improve further the quality of teaching.

- An expanding curriculum meets the interests and personal goals of learners and responds to local needs well. Younger learners have good opportunities to progress into further education. Most learners participate in additional activities to improve their learning. The college is widening enrichment but learners' participation, managers do not monitor or evaluate in enough detail.
- The effectiveness of the college in using an extensive range of partnerships to develop its provision and respond to the emerging needs of learners is outstanding. It responds very flexibly and effectively to emerging local and regional needs. Close and highly productive links exist with local schools, which benefit younger learners.
- Intervention, guidance and support, particularly for learners at risk of not completing, are highly effective. Subsequently, an exceptionally high number of learners complete and successfully achieve their qualifications. Learners value very highly the personal, pastoral and welfare support they receive. Staff offer expertly provided and well-organised guidance services to learners.
- The principal and senior managers provide strong leadership, clear strategic direction and promote a culture of relentless improvement. Governors provide strong support and appropriate challenge. Management of most subject areas is good. Improvements to learners' achievement are notable. Strengthening of management of several support functions has recently taken place.
- Staff do much to keep learners, particularly the most vulnerable, safe. Promotion of safety is effective. Whilst vetting checks on staff are complete, arrangements to ensure appropriate checks on contracted non-teaching staff have only very recently been put in place. Staff promote health and safety well in the curriculum but similar promotion of equality and diversity is underdeveloped.
- Rigorous quality assurance procedures and effective use of data have ensured increases in learners' success rates but less so in the quality of teaching and learning. Self-assessment is broadly accurate but is not consistently evaluative at subject level. The evaluation of data in a few areas, such as participation in enrichment activities, is less effective.
- The college has improving financial health and sound financial management. Staff deployment is successful but management of performance is not fully effective because the revised appraisal scheme managers have not fully implemented. The college's role in supporting local community development is important and its reputation is improving rapidly. Recruitment is strong.

What does Harlow College need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the setting of daily learning targets takes full account of individual learning needs and ability levels so that the targets are sufficiently challenging,

specific, precise and individual enough to enable all learners to make good or better progress and achieve to their full potential.

- Ensure managers and governors regularly overview safeguarding and health and safety arrangements. Monitor the rigour of checks on contracted non-teaching staff. Ensure that contracted non-teaching staff receive basic safeguarding awareness training.
- Develop the performance management of staff further through full implementation of the revised appraisal scheme. Ensure the link between lesson observation findings and appraisal is strong and productive in supporting rapid improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.
- Ensure teaching in theory lessons enables learners to actively contribute and participate by using a wider range of teaching techniques that are motivating and engaging and that enhance learners' enjoyment.
- Extend the promotion of equality and diversity themes in the curriculum beyond where they may naturally occur in subjects. Share the existing best practice in a few areas across subjects to encourage teachers to maximise all promotion opportunities.
- Strengthen the collection and evaluation of data in a small minority of areas, including the impact of the college's work on development of learners' wider outcomes and participation in enrichment activities.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- friendly and safe environment
- supportive staff
- practical elements of courses
- having clear targets
- help and support to achieve
- trips and visits where provided
- good resources in a minority of areas
- feedback on how to improve.

What learners would like to see improved:

- choice of healthy food options
- quality of resources and equipment in some areas
- availability of courses in some areas
- access to computers
- availability of parking spaces
- teaching in a minority of theory lessons
- range of social activities
- less strict arrangements for monitoring attendance and lateness.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- standard of training
- approachable and experienced assessors
- good standard of learners' work
- level of support.

What employers would like to see improved:

- aspects of communication
- availability of a few courses
- involvement in curriculum design.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 1

9. The college's record in bringing about sustained increases in learners' success rates is outstanding. Managers, supported by governors, have rightly prioritised a strong focus on this in their mission to reach excellence. The progress made on all the areas of development identified at the last inspection is very notable. Self-assessment is accurate. Quality assurance and strong, skilled management intervention have supported improvement well. Managers promote a self-critical culture very effectively across the college and know exactly what more needs to be done, particularly to ensure a better quality of teaching and learning. The vast majority of staff support the college keenly and enthusiastically. The college's reputation has improved markedly and recruitment is strong.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

10. Success rates at all ages and levels have risen rapidly since the last inspection and are now, in most cases, exceptionally high. This trend of very high and increasing success rates is echoed across virtually all of the college's provision at subject level. On vocational programmes, most learners are achieving grades higher than that found nationally. For academic subjects, the achievement of higher grades improved notably in 2009/10 to be broadly average for similar colleges.
11. Success rates on employer responsive are high and improving rapidly. On both apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes a much higher than average proportion of learners complete their qualifications in a timely manner.
12. The majority of learners make good progress in relation to their starting points. In a few subjects, such as hospitality, photography and history, they make exceptional progress. In the majority of lessons, learners make good progress and demonstrate very positive attitudes to their study. However, a minority in lessons did not always have sufficient challenge to make the progress they are capable of in the time allocated. The overall standard of learners' work is high.
13. Managers analyse the performance of different groups of learners very thoroughly. Gaps in achievement in regards to gender, ethnicity and learning difficulties and/or disabilities are minimal and, in the vast majority of cases, are at or above the very high college average. Managers monitor the outcomes for looked after children carefully and these learners achieve very well.
14. Learners enjoy their study. This is reflected through their consistently high attendance and good punctuality. They take pride in their presentation of work, are very reflective about their learning and develop high levels of confidence. This, along with the development of a strong work ethos and work-related skills, prepares them exceptionally well for life after college. As a result, a very

high and increasing proportion of learners are progressing into subject-related further study, training or employment. Progression and achievement for those aged 14 to 16 is outstanding.

15. Learners feel safe and demonstrate safe working practice. The college is increasing its promotion of health and well-being for learners. Promotion of sexual health and e-safety is strong. For healthy eating and fitness, promotion to all learners is generally effective but how this helps contribute to learners' choices in pursuing healthier lifestyles is less clear. Managers' evaluation of this work they recognise they need to assess in more detail.
16. Most learners contribute to the wide range of opportunities to support the college and local community. The learners' voice in the college, particularly through its student union, has strengthened notably. Learners' involvement in promoting and contributing to sustainability is less effective across subject areas.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

17. Teaching is good in the majority of lessons. The carefully considered teaching and learning strategy is instrumental in ensuring learners are successful in achieving their qualifications. The use of daily learning targets ensures close monitoring of learners' progress and this has resulted in a rapid increase in learners' success rates. Individual target setting is highly effective in a minority of subjects, especially where they take account of initial assessment and the needs and ability level of learners. In other subjects, such as construction and engineering, daily targets are not specific, precise or individual enough to be useful in aiding learners' progress or developing additional skills and knowledge.
18. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well to ensure learners achieve. Most teaching in practical lessons is more effective than that for theory. In practical lessons, the majority of learners develop good vocational skills and teachers motivate and engage them in meaningful and enjoyable learning. In too many theory lessons, especially on academic courses, teaching is not always as enjoyable or effective because learners are not sufficiently involved.
19. Assessment is frequent and fair. Assessment practice is good overall but variable across the college. In a minority of subjects, usually on academic courses, teachers mark learners' work frequently and provide detailed feedback that clearly informs learners what they need to do to improve. In other subjects, feedback is not as detailed or as useful. Initial assessment arrangements are comprehensive.
20. Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning are highly effective. Well-trained internal observers accurately judge the quality of teaching and learning. Observers identify good practice and development needs following observations, which managers use well to improve provision. Teaching

and learning is improving with the proportion of lessons good or better improving each year. The proportion of lessons that are outstanding is relatively low. Observation data show that the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is uneven across the college.

21. The good and expanding curriculum responds well to the interests and personal goals of learners. The college has carefully consolidated its range of advanced programmes, and has successfully increased the number of learners moving to higher education each year. A broad and expanding range of apprenticeships meets local need. Opportunities for progression, however, at the college onto advanced apprenticeships in hairdressing and construction are limited.
22. Most learners make use of additional activities to enrich their curriculum, including subject related visits and guest speakers. The college encourages learners to participate in community and charitable projects. Not all learners are fully aware of the wider range of enrichment activities available. The college's self-assessment recognises the need to strengthen enrichment opportunities within group tutorials and to evaluate overall participation in activities more closely.
23. Partnership working is outstanding. The college has very strong partnership links with local employers, regional authorities and other organisations. It responds very flexibly and effectively to emerging local and regional needs. For example, the college collaboration has supported local employees following redundancies and it has increased the number and range of apprenticeships and other work-related programmes available to learners. Links with a number of higher education institutions are very good. The particularly well established and productive close links with schools include a good range of learning opportunities for very many younger learners.
24. The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The college provides a very comprehensive system of support to ensure that learners achieve their qualifications. Exceptionally strong arrangements are in place to monitor learners' progress and to identify individual learners at risk of not succeeding.
25. The college provides carefully planned guidance throughout the year for learners and parents. Particularly good pre-entry support is provided sensitively to more vulnerable learners, for whom the transition to college may be very challenging. The college makes increasingly effective use of information from partner schools to establish appropriate support for those with a wide variety of learning needs.
26. Staff expertly provide well-organised guidance services for learners. Learners value very highly the personal, pastoral and welfare support they receive. Through tutorials, opportunities for young people to develop their awareness and understanding of areas such as money management and sexual health are good. The college recognises that demands for its support services have grown continuously and is now increasing its capacity to respond to rising levels of demand.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

27. All staff are strongly committed to the clear strategic direction that centres on individual learner's success. The principal's leadership and aspiration for excellence are strong. He and senior managers are skilled and relentless in promoting a supportive culture based on high expectations using effective team work. Managers at all levels put learners' needs first and ensure they meet challenging targets. Managers have a well-developed knowledge of the local and regional community and they align the college's work to local needs and support community development well. Management of most curriculum areas is good and is outstanding in a few. Recent strengthening of the management of human resources and finances has increased their effectiveness.
28. The governing body have supported the college through a difficult transformational period from a weak to a much stronger position. Governors monitor the effectiveness of college provision productively. Using increasingly clear and informative reports, they provide good challenge to managers and assess risks carefully. Governors recognise that their monitoring of financial management and health has been less effective. They have taken action to increase their knowledge and confidence in this area. Governors use internal audits effectively to ensure that they fulfil their legislative obligations including the recent audit of safeguarding arrangements. The recent reinstatement of regular reporting of health and safety has taken place.
29. Most staff are involved in helping to keep a high number of vulnerable learners safe. A new safeguarding team, including learners, meets regularly and thoroughly promotes safety in a wide variety of ways. Almost all staff and governors have received recent suitable training for this area. Appropriate checks, including those from Criminal Records Bureau, take place on all staff. The college has accurate records for this area. Safeguarding checks on contracted non-teaching staff were incomplete but managers have promptly rectified shortcomings. Arrangements to ensure that contracted non-teaching staff will receive basic awareness training in safeguarding matters are now in place. Safe practices are promoted well in the curriculum. The analysis of accidents is underdeveloped. Requirements for risk assessments for educational visits have recently been put in place.
30. The use of data is good to identify variations in the performance of different groups of learners. Managers' actions have reduced any gaps in achievement across almost all groups of learners. Substantial training ensures all staff thoroughly understand equality and diversity. Its promotion within the curriculum has increased recently. Promotion is high in a few areas but limited in others. Initiatives such as themed weeks and displays, for example the 'Diversity Wall' prepared by construction learners, staff use well to highlight equality themes. A few initiatives to challenge gender stereotyping within subject areas, such as recruiting women into painting and decorating have proved successful and more are planned. The proportion of male and female staff, those with a disability and from minority ethnic groups matches the

learners' profile well. However, despite recruitment efforts, too few female governors are in place to ensure a close match to the learners' profile.

31. Well-established strategies for involving learners and employers in developing the college's work are in place. Learners' views from most groups are influential in bringing about improvement. Their involvement in decision-making forums and self-assessment is less marked. Plans are in hand to resolve this issue. The college engages effectively with employers through a variety of means, mostly by taking advantage of opportunities to seek out their views rather than formal participation in forums or other activities. Through the college's employment-based provision, engagement with employers is productive and substantial.
32. Senior managers use data and rigorous quality assurance procedures highly effectively to drive improvements although evaluation of data in a few areas, such as measuring learners' development of wider outcomes, is less effective. High levels of progress monitoring against a wide range of targets and rapid intervention are particularly effective in ensuring increased success rates. Improvement in the quality of lessons has been comparatively slower but a sharper focus in the current year is further increasing the number of good or better lessons. Self-assessment at subject level is not always consistently evaluative or thorough. Quality improvement plans, however, are exceptionally well used.
33. The college's financial position is improving from a weak position. Financial management is sound and supported by careful planning and a high awareness of risks to the college's financial stability. The deployment of staff and resources is effective. Managers recognise the need to revise and reinstate its appraisal scheme to ensure that performance management is fully effective. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Context

34. The college offers a range of engineering programmes from entry to advanced level. Of the 519 enrolments, most learners are aged 16 to 18, on full-time foundation and intermediate provision in electrical and motor vehicle engineering. Sixty eight learners aged 14 to 16 study on college courses. Approximately 4% of learners are female and 6% are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for vehicle engineering at foundation level and performing engineering operations at foundation and intermediate levels have been consistently high for the last three years. Success rates on computer aided design and vehicle maintenance and repair advanced level are low. Overall success rates have declined in 2009/10 to be broadly average.
- Learners develop good practical skills and develop their trade specific skills well to industry standard. Learners value the acquisition of these trade skills, which enable them to progress successfully into employment. Learners develop good knowledge of engineering principles, tools and equipment.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Better lessons use practical learning including effective links between theory and practice. Teachers use a limited range of strategies in theory lessons to capture learners' interest. In most theory lessons, teachers dominate with little involvement of learners. Use of information and learning technology to support learning is underdeveloped.
- Teachers pay insufficient attention to individual target setting. All learners set their own targets for the lesson, which are mostly the same and not specific or individual to each learner. When learners complete their targets, the use of time is not always effective; teachers often allow learners to leave without further activities being available.
- Assessment is well-planned and internal verification is thorough. Monitoring of learners' progress across theory and practical lessons is satisfactory. Feedback to learners is supportive with indicators on how to improve.
- Resources are satisfactory. In a few classrooms used for theory lessons access to information and learning technologies is limited. Workshop facilities for motor vehicle are too small for the number of learners on programme, with no clear walkways identified for access into the work area.
- The range of provision appropriately meets learners' needs and interests. Progression opportunities from foundation to advanced levels in electrical, vehicle and mechanical manufacture engineering are good. Apprenticeships are

available in these areas to advanced levels. Work placements are insufficient for full-time learners. Enrichment activities are few.

- Partnerships to meet learners and employers' needs are good. Staff work well with five local schools to provide programmes for learners aged 14 to 16. The young apprenticeship programme is successful. Local employers provide work placements for all young apprentices. The college works with employers to place most full-time learners on relevant apprenticeship programmes.
- Information advice and guidance, and learners' support are good. Staff provide clear guidance prior to enrolment to ensure learners are on the correct course. This includes taster days, pre-enrolment activities and parents' events. Specialist staff support well learners with identified needs. Tutors know their learners well and provide good personal support.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Much change and reorganisation has recently taken place in all areas. Communication across the areas is good with most teams having daily meetings to improve teaching and learning. These changes are beginning to have a positive impact on improving provision but it is too early to judge the full impact of all actions taken.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactorily within lessons. Lesson plans clearly identify opportunities for promotion but teachers do not always highlight these in lessons or check learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity sufficiently.
- Self-assessment is inclusive. Quality improvement plans are detailed. Plans clearly identify and staff monitor strengths and areas for improvement in the different subject areas. An effective monthly quality review process, with key risk-rated performance indicators, provides clear information on each sections performance to date, which senior staff use well to monitor progress.

What does Harlow College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on all courses by more effective monitoring of learners' progress. Ensure all targets are precise and individual. Provide a range of additional activities to stretch and challenge learners who complete their targets early.
- Introduce more variety in theory lessons by increasing the range of activities and teaching methods. In addition, ensure all theory lessons take place in classrooms, which have information and learning technologies to help improve learners' engagement in learning.
- Increase learners' understanding of equality and diversity by more effective and consistent planning, promotion and development within lessons across all subjects in the curriculum area.
- Improve learners' experience further by increasing work placements for full-time learners and expand the range of enrichment opportunities across all subjects within engineering.

Construction

Grade 2

Context

35. Full-time courses are available in brickwork, painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery and plumbing, mostly at foundation and intermediate level with a small number at advanced level in plumbing and construction. Learners study at college, or off-site on apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. Of the 502 construction learners, just over half are full-time aged 16 to 18. The college has 175 apprentices and advanced apprentices and 75 Train to Gain learners.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates overall are very high but have declined slightly on college-based courses. Train to Gain success rates have increased over the last two years and are very high. Apprentice and advanced apprenticeship success rates are broadly average. Outcomes for learners on school links programmes are very good.
- Learners develop good practical skills and improve their trade skills effectively to industry standards. These skills help learners to progress at work, build their confidence and help them work well with others. The quality of practical skills development and opportunities for work experience for those learners who study within college varies across trade areas.
- Promotion and monitoring of health and safety within the construction area is good. In the workplace, college staff undertake detailed assessments of the health and safety measures that assures learners' understanding and safe working. At college, reinforcement of safe working practices is also good. Learners have a good awareness of health and safety arrangements.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. The teaching of theory lessons is better than that of practical. Teachers plan most lessons well, using a good mix of theory, practice and assessment. In theory lessons, teachers generally make good use of information and learning technologies to aid learning.
- Learners' individual target setting lacks focus and challenge. In practical lessons, much use is made of learners' individual targets but these often lack detail, are vague, have insufficient measurable outcomes and do not have enough stretch and challenge. The precision and recording of individual learner's targets are inconsistent across the different trade areas.
- Assessment in the workplace is effective and uses a wide range of methods which maximise opportunities for gathering evidence. Portfolio evidence is of a high standard. The monitoring of learners' progress is particularly strong at college and in the workplace.
- The college has good partnerships with a large number of public and private organisations that help to develop wider opportunities for learners. Through partnerships, the college has provided targeted support to help unemployed

building workers gain new skills and qualifications, as well as offer assistance in matching learners with potential local vacancies.

- The provision meets the needs and interests of learners effectively. The range of provision is mainly at intermediate level, and opportunities to progress to advanced level in brickwork, plumbing and painting and decorating are insufficient. The college obtains learners and employers' views through a range of mechanisms but opportunities to seek employers' feedback formally to plan curriculum developments are not maximised.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. A wide range of college services provides mentoring and counselling support, particularly for the more vulnerable learners. Weekly group tutorials contain varied events and visiting speakers that add good value to the learners' experience.
- Leadership and management are good. All managers promote high expectations. Managers routinely share performance data with staff and they use it to inform ambitious targets to improve provision. Resources to support learning are good but in plumbing the practical training area and resources are insufficient for the number of learners. Staff morale is high and team working is good.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory both in the workplace and at college. Lesson plans often refer to equality and diversity themes but staff miss opportunities to develop and extend learners' understanding of diversity and cultural differences. Learners value the inclusive environment.
- Self-assessment is inclusive and mostly accurate. Issues in all trade areas, which staff identify at frequent team meetings, managers incorporate in a very thorough quality improvement plan. Managers monitor the plan frequently and most identified actions are completed on time. The self-assessment report does not have sufficient detail on work-based learning.

What does Harlow College need to do to improve further?

- Broaden opportunities for progression across trade areas at advanced level by involving employers in developing programmes of study. In addition, further expand the range and scope of work placements to support and improve learners' employment prospects.
- Improve the structure and provision of practical lessons in a few trade areas by increasing the emphasis in all lessons on supporting the development of better practical skills, providing learners with demonstrations that are more practical and through the increased sharing of good practice.
- Ensure that all learners have much greater challenge and are stretched to achieve their full potential through the setting of more precise and meaningful individual targets so that learners use the time effectively to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Increase the promotion and inclusion of equality and diversity into workplace reviews, student assignments and lessons to increase learners' awareness of this area.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Grade 2

Context

36. The college offers full and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level in beauty therapy and foundation to intermediate level in hairdressing. Of the 254 learners following courses in this area, 11 are aged 14 to 16 from local schools, 175 are aged 16 to 18 and 68 are adult learners. Part-time provision has 88 learners and 28 learners are apprentices. Around 4% of learners are from minority ethnic groups and 3% are male.

Key findings

- Outcomes are good. Success rates are high overall but on NVQ at level 1 programmes and those for the NVQ at level 2 hairdressing, they dipped to be broadly average in 2009/10. Success rates for NVQ at levels 2 and 3 for beauty therapy are consistently high. Framework completion for apprentices is good with the majority of learners completing their framework within the allotted time.
- Learners produce high standards of work and develop positive attitudes to their studies. Work-based learners enjoy mastering specialist techniques, which are not always available in their workplace. Most learners have high standards of appearance but the appearance of a few beauty therapy learners' does not meet professional standards.
- Learners develop safe working practices that reflect industry standards. In practical lessons, staff thoroughly promote high health and safety, including sterilisation of equipment. They frequently promote learners' well-being at tutorials and lessons. Learners receive good support to help them make safe choices and adopt healthy lifestyles. Learners enjoy lessons, know their rights and feel safe in college.
- Teaching, learning and assessments are good. Teachers use a variety of activities that maintain learners interest. They use questioning techniques well to check learners understanding. Learners participate and contribute well to lessons. Most teachers make good use of electronic resources to improve lessons. Learners use information technology effectively in assignments, research and presentations.
- The monitoring of learners' progress overall, is very effective. Teachers set learners a range of targets for every lesson, which link to personal reviews and drive assessments for completion of units. In a few lessons, teachers do not monitor targets well enough to ensure learners working without clients are challenged sufficiently. In a small minority of lessons, the number of clients is too few.
- The curriculum adequately meets the needs and interests of learners. Beauty therapy learners benefit from an extensive range of courses that provide good opportunities for progression. This is not available for hairdressing learners.

They are unable to progress to advanced level within the college. Learners do not undertake work experience and the number progressing to employment is low.

- Partnership working is effective overall. Links with employers are good. This has led to some salon staff undertaking assessor training to become in-house assessors. Collaboration has brought about visits from international stylists, which have raised learners' aspirations and creativity.
- Initial advice and guidance is particularly good. Interviews by specialist staff ensure learners are on the correct programmes. Learners make good use of workshops for individual support on all aspects of their courses. Mature learners speak highly of support in using information technology. Staff use resources very well to support learners with specific support or language needs.
- Leadership and management for both hair and beauty are good. Very productive staff meetings take place every morning to set targets for the day and discuss learners' progress. Managers and staff have taken effective action to resolve absenteeism and to improve retention. Punctuality and attendance are good. Managers monitor this closely. Teachers promote safeguarding well in lessons, including e-safety.
- The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is strong. Activities reinforce learners' knowledge in attending to clients' individual needs for salon treatments. Responses in apprentices' progress review records show a good understanding of equality and diversity themes. Despite promotion, the number of male learners on courses in hair and beauty is low.
- Self-assessment reports are not sufficiently evaluative or self-critical. Reports do not fully identify underlying causes of lower performance, outlines all areas for improvements and celebrates the successes of the subject area the process does not include the views of learners and employers enough.
- Hairdressing and beauty therapy accommodation has well-equipped salons.

What does Harlow College need to do to improve further?

- Increase success rates on foundation level programmes and the NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing by ensuring that all learners' targets are challenging and rigorously monitored so they can achieve their potential, particularly when they have no clients in practical sessions.
- Review current provision to ensure appropriate and relevant progression routes for hairdressing learners and apprentices.
- Ensure teachers reinforce that all beauty therapy learners are correctly presented, reflecting high industry standards at the start of the lesson.
- Increase the rigour of self-assessment by fully identifying underlying causes of lower performance, areas for improvements and recognises the successes of the subject area.

Hospitality and catering

Grade 1

Context

37. Some 75 learners are enrolled from foundation to advanced level, most at intermediate level. Numbers have doubled over the past three years. The main qualifications are vocationally-related in professional cookery, with a very small and declining number of hospitality NVQs. Most learners are aged 16 to 18. Some 57% of learners are male and 4% are of minority ethnic heritage. Short courses are available for the unemployed that involve work placement.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Qualification success rates and learners' retention are consistently very high. The average success rate for 2009/10 was 99%. Learners make very good progress and develop strong work skills, especially in practical sessions, where learners also improve their levels of self-confidence significantly.
- Learners achieve excellent employability skills, which improves their economic well-being. In 2009/10, all leavers found employment in the industry or continued in further study. For professional cookery learners, teachers make very effective use of realistic work environments to replicate commercial practice. Learners' attendance is consistently high.
- Learners feel safe and use safe working practices. Kitchens, restaurants and other hospitality areas have rigorous risk assessments with frequent reviews. In lessons, particularly practical lessons, teachers frequently reinforce good health and safety practice.
- Learners make a positive contribution to the local community. All learners take part in community activity, and often have their perception of others in the community positively changed as a result. Learners' involvement is very wide ranging including public demonstrations, charitable and seasonal events. The hospitality team develop and maintain very effective partnerships to implement successfully these activities.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. The teaching of practical skills is often inspirational. Teachers ensure particularly well that learners develop innovatory work and presentation skills. Learners enjoy learning and most stay beyond their scheduled time in the kitchen or volunteer for additional workplace experience.
- Assessment practice is good. The monitoring of learners' daily targets is frequent but the recording of targets does not always accurately reflect the strong progress and development of skills during practical lessons.
- Very good enrichment opportunities exist for learners that contribute positively to their enjoyment. Learners take up enthusiastically additional activities and related qualifications, including relevant vocational short courses, restaurant and bar experience, visits and events and supporting the college at open evenings.

- Relationships with employers and other organisations are effective and support the wide range of enrichment opportunities available. The hospitality team recognises that opportunities to formalise and extend engagement with employers they have not maximised.
- Care, guidance and support, particularly the additional support for learners, are outstanding. A significant emphasis on pastoral support for individual learners helps retain them on programme and ensures they complete their qualification successfully. Learners receive high quality individual and personally focused information, advice and guidance on their next steps in education, training and employment. Learners value this support very highly.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Managers and staff are collaborative, focused on improvement, and very committed to sharing and implementing best practice. They are experienced with a clear focus on learners, which has contributed to the consistently very high levels of learners' achievement. Staff use feedback thoroughly to improve the learners' experience of the provision and equipment.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Teachers promote it well in lessons so that learners gain increasing awareness of its relevance and importance. Tutors use tutorials to reinforce further equality themes.
- The self-assessment report is inclusive, realistic and informative. All staff in the hospitality team are closely involved in self-assessment, which incorporates a continuous review of operating targets and team objectives. The report is accurate and managers and staff use it used effectively to improve provision further.
- Accommodation is modern and conforms to best industry standards, including good use of clear signage understood by learners. Staff use resources well to support learning. In a very few cases, staff miss opportunities to use specialist resources to support better the development of craft and presentation skills at advanced level in practical sessions.

What does Harlow College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the recording of daily learner targets to reflect more realistically the degree of individual challenge presented to learners in practical skills sessions.
- Utilise specialist learning resources more effectively to develop learners' high level craft skills and innovation in advanced practical skills sessions.
- Expand and formalise engagement with employers to raise their awareness of the value of vocationally related qualifications and further improve partnership working.

Information about the inspection

38. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Deputy 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 funding body, 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.
39. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in many of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Harlow 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 | | | | | |
| Full-time learners | 3101 | 0 | 2144 | 283 | 674 |
| Part-time learners | 1410 | 156 | 244 | 241 | 769 |
| Overall effectiveness | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Capacity to improve | 1 | | | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning? | 1 | | | | |
| How well do learners attain their learning goals? | 1 | | | | |
| How well do learners progress? | 2 | | | | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 1 | | | | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 2 | | | | |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | 2 | | | | |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | 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? | 1 | | | | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 1 | | | | |
| Leadership and management | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 1 | | | | |
| <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i> | 2 | | | | |
| How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners? | 3 | | | | |
| 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? | 2 | | | | |
| 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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