

Abingdon and Witney College

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	130793
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Type of provider:	General further education college
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Information about the provider

1. Abingdon and Witney College is a large general further education college situated in south and west Oxfordshire in the relatively affluent south-east of England. The college draws students from a mix of backgrounds and many students qualify for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The college has three main sites in Abingdon, Witney and a rural skills centre at Common Leys, near Witney. A centre at Milton Park, near Didcot, provides training for businesses. A new centre in Witney provides training in construction skills.
2. Courses are provided in all subject areas and from entry level to higher education. Most students are at least 16 years of age, but the college also provides part-time courses for school pupils aged 14 to 16. The largest subject areas are arts, media and publishing; preparation for life and work; and, business, administration and law, which together make up around half of the work of the college. High numbers of short courses are provided both by college staff and through partnerships with seven external organisations. The college has considerable provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The subject areas graded during the inspection were employer-responsive provision in horticulture, and learner-responsive provision in engineering; hairdressing and beauty therapy; visual arts and media; and, independent skills for life and leisure.
3. Two thirds of the work of the college is with students aged 16 to 18. Employer-responsive provision includes 320 learners on apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. Most teaching is at advanced level. Seven per cent of students are of minority ethnic heritage, a higher proportion than in the local population. The proportion of young people gaining 5 or more GCSEs graded A* to C in the local area is well above average.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - the Abingdon Partnership (A levels).
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - the National Federation of Women's Institutes (arts, media and publishing short courses)
 - Oxford Film and Video (arts, media and publishing short courses)
 - Oxfordshire Football Association (coaching qualifications)
 - Trax (motor vehicle courses for young people who are not in education, employment or training)
 - McIntyre (provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties)
 - Skills Centre UK (construction)
 - Oxford Learning United (sports courses).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to 18)</p> <p>Foundation learning</p>	<p>124 part-time learners</p> <p>1748 full-time learners</p> <p>1203 full-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>327 full-time learners</p> <p>5162 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Train to Gain</p> <p>Apprenticeships</p>	<p>390 learners</p> <p>108 apprentices</p>

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	
Horticulture employer-responsive provision	4
Engineering	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2
Visual arts and media	2
Independent skills for life and leisure	1

Overall effectiveness

- Abingdon and Witney College satisfactorily meets the needs of students and other users, and it has good capacity to improve. Outcomes for students are satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress. The overall performance of students has improved well and is above average. Students aged 16 to 18 have improved their performance at foundation and intermediate levels and it is now broadly in line with that in similar colleges. At advanced level, performance is below average but improving. Female students aged 16 to 18 perform at a higher level than male students. The performance of adults is above average, and short courses are very successful. Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes are inadequate. Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection and lesson planning is usually thorough. However, lessons do not always meet the individual learning needs of students effectively or promote equality and diversity sufficiently well.

7. A good range of courses meets the needs and interests of users well. Students take part in many interesting educational visits which enhance learning. Outstanding partnership arrangements, which are well established with many organisations in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, produce tangible benefits for students. These include providing a greater choice of courses and specialist expertise which allows the college to provide for a diverse student population. The college contributes positively towards broadening the curriculum offer in local schools and works in partnership with them to provide advanced level subjects. Support for students is good and initial advice and guidance ensure that students are on the right courses.
8. Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders have set a clear vision for improvement and raised expectations and ambition throughout the organisation. Quality assurance is effective at bringing about improvements and self-assessment is self-critical and accurate, but curriculum management is not yet sufficiently effective in all areas.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. The college's overall success rate improved in 2009/10 from the national average to above average. Success rates are above average for adults and they are at the national average for students aged 16 to 18. The success rate for long qualifications improved from below average to the national average in 2009/10.
- The success rate for students aged 16 to 18 at advanced level is below average. Male students aged 16 to 18 have lower success rates than female students. Success rates for work-based learning qualifications completed within their planned time are very low.
- Students make at least satisfactory progress, and those on the independent learning and leisure course make excellent progress. Students enjoy their courses and their attendance is satisfactory. The standard of students' work is satisfactory or better. Students feel safe at college and work safely in lessons. They develop satisfactory skills for employment.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons carefully and include safety, equality and diversity and functional skills. They generally meet students' learning needs, although lessons plans are not always implemented effectively. Teacher explanations too often are overly long and students are not sufficiently engaged in discussions and activities. Information learning technology is not always used effectively by teachers.
- Questioning techniques are good in the best lessons. In these lessons teachers use directed questions well to check learning. They encourage all students to think more deeply about topics by using probing follow-up questions. In less effective lessons, undirected questioning enables a small number of students to dominate lessons. Poor punctuality disrupts learning in a minority of lessons.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Students are aware of their targets, and tutors monitor students' progress closely. Students' work is marked promptly and teachers provide sufficient guidance for students to improve. Occasionally,

students' basic spelling and punctuation errors are not corrected. Assessments for work-based learners have not been frequent enough for learners to complete their qualifications on time.

- The curriculum has improved and there is a good range of courses at all levels which meets the needs of a diverse student population. A high proportion of students progress to higher level study, higher education, or employment. Enrichment activities are satisfactory but improving. There is a good range of educational visits related to subject areas.
- Partnerships are outstanding. Work with an extensive range of partners provides students with significant and tangible benefits. These include highly effective provision for students with significant learning difficulties. A wide choice of General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level subjects is provided in partnership with local schools. Partnerships provide improved facilities for vocational and business courses and well-focused training to meet local needs.
- Support for learners is good. Assistance for those with specific needs and disabilities is very effective and well managed. Support for students with academic, personal and welfare problems is good. Information, advice and guidance effectively support students. New arrangements allow students to request support with their study skills in drop-in centres.
- Leadership and management are good. Senior managers and governors have set a clear vision and strategy for the college, and promote high standards. Staff at all levels are strongly committed to improving the quality of provision. Challenging targets are set at all levels and monitored regularly. Success rates have improved and the overall success rate is above average.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Students who receive additional learning support and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. Despite the college's considered action, the achievement gap between male and female students aged 16 to 18 remains too large. The promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is not yet consistently good.
- Self-assessment is good. Quality assurance is thorough and rigorous. Curriculum management is not yet consistently good in all areas; challenging performance management procedures are bringing about improvement. Well-designed lesson observation procedures are improving teaching and learning. However, grades are sometimes over generous and there is still too much teaching and learning that is no better than satisfactory.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' success rates in lower-performing courses, and for male students, through consistently good teaching and learning. Monitor closely the progress made by work-based learners.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers use appropriate questioning techniques to check students' understanding, and that lessons meet the individual learning needs of students. Ensure that students attend punctually to avoid disrupting lessons.

- Improve the effectiveness of information learning technology in lessons by increasing the sharing of good practice by teachers within and between subject areas.
- Ensure that work-based learners make good progress throughout their programmes by providing well-planned and timely assessments.
- Ensure that additional learning support for study skills, in the new arrangements, is provided effectively to students with identified needs by monitoring closely the take-up of support.
- Ensure equality and diversity are promoted effectively in all subject areas. Promote equality and diversity in lessons to help all students to be successful and to prepare them for life in a diverse society.
- Ensure that quality assurance arrangements improve the quality of curriculum management in underperforming areas by implementing appropriate actions. Improve the consistency of judgements made about the quality of lessons across the college by strengthening the moderation of lesson observers' judgements.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly and adult environment
- the opportunity to learn interesting subjects
- the safe environment, especially with the introduction of students' identity badges
- the good and readily available support from teachers and tutors
- the wireless internet access, the computerised learning plans and some good resources
- the educational visits and work placements
- the extensive support given to those who need help with their learning.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the limited help with travel costs
- the availability of formally-assigned individual literacy and numeracy support time
- the speed of the computers at busy periods
- the standard of the toilets
- the choice of healthy foods in the refectory
- the availability of hot meals for students who come straight from work in the evenings
- the number of tables in the library and chairs in the canteen

- the availability of quiet space for non sixth form students, such as a lounge or 'chill out' area.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very flexible and often innovative response to employers' needs
- the very inclusive provision offered to learners with learning difficulties
- the outstanding partnership work allowing the college to provide learning using a range of resources
- the involvement of employers and others in developing programmes relevant to their needs
- the continuity of staff dealing with employers
- the readiness of staff to respond to requests.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the limited range of courses for employers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

9. The college has good capacity to improve. It has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement reported at the last inspection, and the overall success rate has improved to above average. The management of GCE AS- and A-level provision is now good. Staff are analytical and critical in their review of the curriculum, teachers now develop students' learning more effectively, and teaching and learning and success rates have improved well. Senior managers and governors set high standards, raise expectations and provide a clear strategy for improvement. Managers have successfully developed the ambition to succeed amongst staff at all levels. Self-assessment is thorough and largely accurate and quality assurance procedures lead to good improvement. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Additional learning support is very effective in helping students succeed. Partnerships are outstanding and lead to tangible benefits for students. Resources are well managed. Governors provide strong challenge to the college to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for students.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes for students are satisfactory. The overall success rate was consistently at the national average in the three years to 2008/09, and in 2009/10 improved significantly to above average. Overall success rates are above average for adults and they are at the national average for students aged 16 to 18. The long qualification success rate for students of all ages improved from below average to the national average in 2009/10. Good improvements were made to the success rates of students aged 16 to 18 at foundation and intermediate levels, bringing them broadly in line with similar colleges. The long qualification success rate for the high proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who study at advanced level is below average. Success rates are broadly average for all qualifications apart from GCSEs and GCE AS qualifications, where they are below average, although improving on AS qualifications. Success rates on AS qualifications studied full-time are average. Success rates on short courses are consistently high.
11. Success rates are at or above average in most, but not all, subject areas. The success rate for key skills is good. Success rates for completion within the planned timescales on apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes are low and learners make slow progress. Success rates are outstanding for school pupils aged 14 to 16 attending college courses. A high proportion of students progress to higher level courses in college, to higher education or into employment. Students' average attendance rate is satisfactory and students enjoy their courses. Most students make at least satisfactory progress and they make good progress in some areas. Students in the independent learning and leisure area make outstanding progress.

12. Most students develop at least satisfactory skills for employment. A large number of students work with local businesses on enterprise activities. Students feel safe at college and demonstrate safe working practices in lessons. Internet safety measures are familiar to students. Bullying is rare and students know how to request help if needed. Students make informed choices about healthy lifestyles. They make a positive contribution to the community in a variety of ways, such as through acting as course representatives, running the college radio station and magazine and by taking part in charitable activities. Last year, business students organised a 'red carpet' awards ceremony for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and sports students ran a general practitioner referral surgery for patients.
13. The college has reduced the gap between the success rates of adult male and female students and rates are now very similar for both genders. Female students aged 16 to 18 consistently have much higher success rates than male students of the same age. There are small numbers of students in most minority ethnic heritage groups at college and there are no significant trends of underperformance by most groups. Students receiving additional learning support and those receiving EMA have higher success rates than the average for the college.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

14. The quality of provision and teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons well and include details of how they will promote equality and diversity, engage and develop all students, embed functional skills and ensure safety working practices. Teachers plan lessons well but do not always implement them effectively. In the best lessons, teachers pay good attention to equality, promote diversity and ensure the learning needs of all students are met effectively. In too many lessons, teachers do not involve all students or ensure they all make appropriate progress. Sometimes teachers use language at too high a level without sufficient explanation to ensure students' understanding. Learning materials are not always suitable for students with a range of abilities. Occasionally, teachers use stereotypical or gender-specific examples inappropriately in lessons. They sometimes omit planned discussions with students and replace them with overly-long teacher explanations.
15. In the best lessons, skilled teachers manage lessons well. They establish and maintain a good pace of learning. They facilitate reviews of previous learning and check students' understanding through carefully-directed questioning which ensures all students are involved. Teachers use probing questions to encourage more-able students to think deeply and expand their answers. Lessons are enjoyable and engaging, with activities that challenge students well and ensure they have to work hard to complete them. Students play an active part in most lessons. On occasion, students use their developing critical skills to evaluate their own and their peers' performance. In less successful lessons, group work is not sufficiently productive, students lose concentration and learning is not checked effectively. Undirected questioning allows a small number of students to dominate whilst others remain passive. Too many lessons have a slow start

or are disrupted because of poor punctuality by students. Lateness is not always challenged effectively by teachers.

16. Students use technology, such as computers and video cameras, confidently to support learning. Many teachers use technology well to provide and clarify information, and students use electronic 'voting buttons' in lessons to respond to questions privately. Teachers monitor individual students' responses closely to check understanding. Students who want to follow up references or who have missed lessons use the intranet to obtain relevant materials. However, some less confident teachers miss opportunities to use technology effectively.
17. The college has robust procedures for assessment and verification. Students have clear targets, which teachers monitor effectively using the new electronic individual learning plans. In the main, teachers provide sufficiently detailed feedback for students to improve their performance. Much work has been done to integrate functional skills into lessons. Whilst key skills and functional skills programmes are successful, teachers do not consistently correct basic spelling and punctuation errors in students' written work. Teachers planned insufficient assessments for work-based learners to complete their qualifications in good time, but are now implementing improvements.
18. The range of provision is good and meets the needs of a diverse community of students. The college is meeting the needs of its local population well.
19. Since the last inspection the college has introduced more courses at foundation level, increased short course provision in vocational skills, and extended provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Opportunities to progress to higher level courses within the college are good. Courses are provided from entry level to advanced level, and higher education courses are provided in some subjects. Courses meet the needs of young people who are not in education, employment or training and for those seeking specific skills for employment.
20. The college provides a satisfactory, but improving, range of enrichment activities which are enjoyed by a growing number of students. Teachers carefully plan additional course activities, such as work experience, work-orientated projects and an impressive number and range of educational visits. These activities successfully enhance courses in most subject areas by motivating students and accelerating their progress.
21. Outstanding partnerships enable the college to develop its provision very effectively to meet students' needs. The college has built up excellent working relationships with an extensive range of partners, such as schools, the not-for-profit sector, employers and the local authority. Partnerships add creativity and flexibility to the curriculum and extend choice for students in a range of areas. These initiatives offer substantial benefits to students, such as improved inclusion for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college works with local specialist schools, charities and local authorities in providing specific courses for people with a range of learning difficulties, or for those who

have had limited previous engagement in education. Students benefit from an extensive range of courses delivered partly in collaboration, such as the increased GCE A-level offer available through two consortia comprising the college and secondary schools. The college has a leading partnership role in establishing vocational training in a new construction centre, for example. Work with employers has resulted in courses being better focused on local skill needs. High numbers of students regularly attend enterprise development training with employers. Work experience is well structured and effective for students in many areas.

22. Care, guidance and support for students are good. Prior to the start of their courses, staff provide students with advice which is comprehensive, accurate and helpful. They offer a wide range of further advice on progression opportunities, higher education and employment during students' courses. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is provided at the start of their courses. The college assesses new students' literacy and numeracy skills promptly and offers support with study skills, when appropriate. Learning support staff provide help in lessons for particular groups. This year, many students are being encouraged to use drop-in centres rather than receiving all of their support through individual sessions. It is too early to judge whether this approach will ensure that students will continue to make such good progress as in previous years.
23. Support for students with physical or learning needs is very good and helps students perform well on their courses. Initiatives include providing dedicated peaceful areas where students with autism can spend time relaxing or working. Learning targets for students receiving additional support are set as part of the routine system for planning and review. Students experiencing difficulties in following the details of a lesson use the college's virtual learning environment routinely to catch up on their work.
24. The tutorial system provides satisfactory support for students' personal and academic development. A core tutorial programme appropriately covers a range of topics such as safety and healthy eating. Some tutors cover topics imaginatively, for instance by linking fuel for healthy engines in motor vehicle courses with healthy eating for mechanics, or by linking Valentine's Day with sexual health advice. However, managers do not evaluate the appropriateness of materials used and the coverage of topics in all areas.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

25. Leadership and management are good. Senior managers and governors have set a clear vision and strategy for the college. One of the college's key objectives is to continue improving success rates so that it is in the top 10% of colleges by 2012. Staff are highly motivated to improve quality and performance. Senior managers set high standards, including challenging targets at all levels, and regularly monitor performance against these with governors. Outcomes for students have improved well and overall success rates are above average.

26. Governance is good. Governors use their wide expertise to good effect when developing strategy. They assiduously monitor the college's progress against objectives and they assess their own performance. Governors receive succinct and analytical reports from managers and are well informed about key areas of the college's work. Governors ensure they fulfil their statutory obligations and receive annual reports on equality and diversity, safeguarding and health and safety. The corporation's financial oversight is sound. Governors support student members well, enabling them to contribute effectively to meetings.
27. Arrangements to safeguard students are good. The college fulfils all statutory requirements with regard to criminal records checks. Safeguarding and health and safety have a high priority in the college. Staff and students demonstrate a good awareness of how to keep safe. Case studies show appropriate, thorough and sensitive treatment of child protection issues. The college has strong links with the local safeguarding children board and with local agencies such as the police, local doctors and social services. Middle managers all have an advanced level qualification in health and safety management. Risk assessment covers all aspects of the college's work, for example work experience placements and educational visits. Managers deal with incidents of bullying promptly, although these are rare.
28. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The college promotes equality and diversity through the tutorial programme, but these themes are not sufficiently well promoted in lessons. The college offers good opportunities for those who might not otherwise participate in education to improve their life chances. Data are analysed to explore gaps in performance or other equality issues among staff and students. Students who receive additional learning support and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. There are few discernible patterns of underachievement amongst students of Black or minority ethnic backgrounds. The significant gap in success rates between male and female students aged 16 to 18, in particular at foundation and advanced levels, persists. The proportion of staff of minority ethnic heritage is similar to that in the local population, although lower than the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The governing body is insufficiently diverse.
29. The college takes into account the views of students, partners and employers effectively when planning and assuring the quality of provision. Students actively contribute to quality improvement through attending course team meetings, completing surveys and participating in development days. Students contributed to the design of the planned new buildings. Partners and employers make a strong contribution through the college's many formal and informal networks. Feedback is provided to inform users of the steps taken in response to their views.
30. Quality assurance is good; procedures are robust and lead to improvement. Self-assessment is accurate. Managers make good use of data to evaluate provision and to identify where there are problems on a frequent basis. Key performance indicators for all courses are formally reviewed at management

meetings. Curriculum management is generally good, but it is not sufficiently effective in all areas. Challenging performance management is bringing about substantial improvements.

31. A strengthened lesson observation process has improved the quality of teaching and learning, although lessons are sometimes graded too generously. A well-focused staff development programme supports teachers well and is linked to key objectives for improvement. Teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection, but too many lessons remain no better than satisfactory. Value for money is satisfactory and the college manages resources well to support the curriculum.

Subject areas

Horticulture employer responsive provision

Grade 4

Context

32. Ninety-six learners, most of whom are adults, take apprenticeship or Train to Gain programmes in horticulture. Around three quarters of learners study horticulture at level 2. There are 69 Train to Gain learners, 12 apprentices and 15 advanced apprentices. Specialist options are provided at levels 2 and 3 in horticulture, landscaping, sports turf and parks, and, gardens and green spaces. Most of the off-the-job training is delivered at the Common Leys Farm site.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes are consistently low, although they are improving. The success rate within planned timescales for Train to Gain learners is very low. The success rate for key skills is good. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes for learners aged 16 to 18 were above average in 2009/10, but they were low for adult learners.
- Learners made slow progress in 2009/10 and assessment activity was too infrequent to ensure the completion of qualifications within the planned timescales. Progress was particularly slow for Train to Gain learners. The progress being made by learners currently is satisfactory. However, almost half of the Train to Gain learners are relatively new and at an early stage of their programme.
- Learners demonstrate good knowledge and practical skills and enjoy their training programmes. The skills they develop help to build their self-confidence and performance at work. Learners develop additional skills, such as in the use of pesticides or chainsaws, which are essential for their jobs.
- Learners feel safe and work safely at college and in the workplace. Learners receive a comprehensive induction to health and safety at college and take an additional qualification in manual handling. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of these issues and also know how to tackle inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, such as bullying or harassment.
- Progress reviews for learners are unsatisfactory. They are not sufficiently effective at helping learners to make good progress. Targets and comments are not sufficiently developmental, specific and time bound. Too often they do not include clear targets for future action and assessments to ensure the achievement of qualifications within the planned timescales. The promotion of equality and diversity in reviews is inadequate.
- The range of courses is satisfactory. Work-based programmes are all available through four relevant, specialist options. The range of additional short courses that are offered in response to employer demand is satisfactory.

- Partnerships with employers are good. The college has responded well to the needs of employers in developing their workforce. Workplace supervisors are fully involved in developing and extending the skills of learners.
- The personal care and support provided for learners are satisfactory and appreciated by them. Guidance on learners' rights and responsibilities is provided to them at an early stage of the programme but it is not always effectively integrated with learners' induction to the workplace.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. The college has made slow progress in achieving its targets for learners' success. The planning of assessments to ensure that learners complete in good time is inadequate.
- When setting timescales for the completion of programmes, teachers do not link these sufficiently to the needs of learners and their employers.
- Quality assurance is inadequate. Quality assurance and improvement arrangements did not enable the college to identify the inadequate progress made by learners in time to remedy the situation. The self-assessment report correctly identified the serious weaknesses affecting low success rates, but the pace at which managers have implemented appropriate corrective actions has been slow.
- The frequency of assessment visits is insufficient to meet the needs of some employers and learners. The tracking of student progress is inadequate. The college has recently implemented improvements to their systems to address this, but these are currently under developed.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Improve the success of learners within the planned timescales by introducing a planned schedule for assessments so that all elements of learners' programmes can be completed on time.
- Ensure that timescales for the completion of programmes are closely linked to the needs of learners and employers by ensuring that a personalised, rather than standardised, approach is taken when setting end dates for programmes.
- Improve the effectiveness of progress reviews by linking them strongly with planning for assessments, improving the effectiveness of target setting and improving the promotion of equality and diversity.
- Improve quality assurance by tracking learners' progress frequently, and by taking appropriate actions to remedy slow progress being made by any learner.

Engineering

Grade 3

Context

33. The college provides engineering courses in motor vehicle, manufacturing and electronics. Courses are offered at entry level through to higher education for full-time students. A part-time professional development course is provided for electricians. There are 139 full-time students, 120 of whom are aged 16 to 18. Fifteen adults study on a part-time basis. Most students are male and 7% are female. Ten per cent of engineering students are of minority ethnic heritage. Sixty-six school pupils aged 14 to 16 study a vocational course, including 10 pupils who are young apprentices.

Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates are high on the advanced level national certificate in mechanical engineering and on the foundation level certificate in motor vehicle production. Success rates on the national diploma in engineering and the two-year performing engineering operations course are below average. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Retention is below average, but is improving in the current year.
- Students develop industry-standard vocational skills for employment and make satisfactory progress. Students work safely in all engineering activities. They are aware of best industry practice and procedures for different processes, using tools and equipment. Students feel safe and the college provides a safe and supportive environment. Students make informed decisions about healthy lifestyles.
- The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers use a range of teaching techniques effectively to involve and motivate students well. Good use is made of interactive learning technology. One lesson involved the animated action of a submarine to demonstrate clearly the principle of fluid and liquid displacement.
- Characteristics of weaker lessons include students not being fully involved in learning, insufficient challenge to ensure a good pace of learning by all students, and, too few checks on learning. The sharing of good practice between teachers is underdeveloped.
- Resources for learning are good and help to develop students' engineering skills to industry standards. Engineering has benefited from recent investment with new lathes and milling machines in manufacturing. The motor vehicle workshops are equipped to commercial garage standards. However, the current stock of workshop vehicles is old and does not ensure that students' practical experience is up to date.
- Assessment and verification are accurate and fair. Work is clearly marked and returned promptly. Feedback provided for students helps them to improve their work.

- The range of provision is satisfactory. The engineering department works closely with schools to provide the diploma in engineering and the young apprentice programme. The college provides courses from entry level through to higher education. Work experience is not part of the full-time engineering curriculum and there are insufficient alternative activities to help prepare students for employment.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Initial advice and guidance are effective at ensuring students are on the right course. Students receive appropriate academic support. The tutorial programme provides wide-ranging and effective support with, for example, health and well-being sessions and in monitoring students' attendance and punctuality.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recruitment procedures for students have been improved to ensure that students are on the right course. Most tutors now track students' progress more effectively and ensure that additional learning support is provided for all students who need it. Teachers are ex-industry practitioners and have good knowledge of industry.
- Communication between teams is effective and tutors make good use of data for tracking students' performance. The self-assessment report is self-critical and accurately identifies areas for improvement. Target setting is robust and challenges teams to raise standards. Staff have confidence in managers and are appreciative of the positive and supportive environment.
- Students work well together regardless of their background or ethnicity. Teachers do not tolerate poor behaviour and it is challenged immediately. Students show respect for each other both in lessons and in other social areas of the college. However, staff have insufficient understanding of equality and diversity and these themes are not actively promoted in all lessons.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates by improving lessons and monitoring students' progress more closely, so that fewer students leave early and more students achieve their qualifications.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that all students are actively involved in lessons and that checks on students' learning are consistently good. Share good practice between teachers more effectively.
- Ensure that motor vehicle students' understanding and the development of their skills is up to date by providing an appropriately modern stock of cars for them to work on at college.
- Prepare full-time students for employment in a commercial environment by introducing activities which provide students with workplace experience and understanding.
- Strengthen the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons by ensuring staff receive effective training in equality and diversity and have a clear understanding of their role in actively promoting them.

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

Context

34. There are 149 students following full-time courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Courses are provided in hairdressing at foundation and intermediate levels and in beauty therapy and holistic therapy at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. There are 27 full-time students on foundation courses, while 122 full-time students study at intermediate and advanced levels. There are 93 students aged 16 to 18 and 56 adult students. Another 48 students, mostly adults, study on a part-time basis. Courses in massage and nail treatments are offered to experienced practitioners throughout the year. Most students are female.

Key Findings

- Success and retention rates are high and improving. Success rates are outstanding for adults at advanced level. Success rates on other beauty courses are good with both retention and pass rates at least good. A very high proportion of students progress to higher level courses.
- Students' beauty therapy practical skills are very well developed and they make good progress. Students have a smart appearance. They undertake treatments, such as massage and manicures, in a professional manner and demonstrate good standards of work. Hairdressing students demonstrate satisfactory skills. They work to a professional standard in the salon when, for example, highlighting and blow-drying hair.
- Students' written work in hairdressing and beauty therapy is good. Portfolios are well presented and students demonstrate good research skills when completing assignments. The standard of work of advanced level beauty therapy students is particularly high.
- The development of skills for employment is generally satisfactory, but there is insufficient focus on developing students' ability to work to industry time pressures. Students complete practical tasks effectively, but are not always mindful of working to industry times. Teachers do not always reinforce the expectations of employers in lessons. Students feel safe at college and enjoy their studies.
- There are insufficient opportunities for students to develop practical skills on external models early in their courses. Students work extensively on fellow students, which limits chances to evaluate the effectiveness of their work on a range of people. Opportunities for students to develop their interpersonal skills with a range of individuals, at an early stage, are missed.
- Students make a good contribution to the local community by providing low-cost hair and beauty treatments. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students are actively involved in many local fundraising events for charities.
- Teaching and learning are good in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Teachers use a wide variety of methods in lessons to retain students' interest. They use

information and learning technology widely, which effectively enhances learning. Lessons are appropriately challenging and teachers check learning in many ways, including through individual support.

- Assessment is good and meets awarding body criteria. Assessors are unobtrusive when observing practical skills and they provide detailed feedback to students. They mark written work well, identifying and correcting errors in grammar and spelling, and providing constructive feedback which enables students to progress.
- The range of courses is satisfactory and enrichment activities, such as work experience, are good. Hairdressing courses are new and do not yet include work-based learning or advanced level courses. Hair and beauty students take part in a closely-monitored and useful 12-week programme of work-experience in local hairdressing and beauty salons.
- Support for students is good. Students value the good and readily-available support they receive from their teachers. Staff provide good support for students with sensory impairments. Two profoundly deaf students receive effective individual support in practical and theory lessons. Staff offer good support to students with personal problems.
- Resources in hairdressing and beauty therapy are satisfactory and salons are spacious. However, there is insufficient specialist professional equipment for nail technology. Some chairs in salons are damaged and do not reflect a professional image. There are insufficient sterilizing units and disinfectant jars in hairdressing.
- Leadership and management are good. The curriculum manager promotes high standards and teaching staff have targets to improve the performance of students. The self-assessment report is accurate. Staff value the many opportunities they have to develop their expertise.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' preparation for industry by emphasising and promoting the importance of treatment and preparation times in lessons, and by linking these to employers' expectations.
- Develop students' skills at working on a wide range of people by introducing clients at an early stage of their courses.
- Ensure that salons are appropriately equipped and contain enough disinfectant by providing sufficient specialist equipment and products which are in good order.

Visual arts and media

Grade 2

Context

35. The college provides courses in media and in art and design at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Full-time students include 102 students who study media and 271 who study art and design. There are 85 students on the foundation art and design programme. Part-time courses in art and design are studied by 120 students. GCE AS- and A-level qualifications in media, film, photography and graphic design are studied by 103 students. Most students are aged 16 to 18 and just over half the students are female. There are 365 students studying part-time with a franchise partner.

Key Findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates and the percentage of high grades on the foundation art and design course are consistently above the high national averages. Success rates on first diplomas in media and art and design have improved from low to above average. Success rates are consistently high on GCE A-level media studies.
- Students demonstrate good work and progress well in lessons. Their drawing skills and print-making are well developed. Project work is supported well by students' analytical research and their thematic development of ideas. Media work is of a high standard in film and photography. Effective group work increases students' confidence and skills of evaluation.
- Students enjoy their lessons, feel safe and work with enthusiasm. Safe working practices are well established and monitored in the studios. Well-focused risk assessment is an integral part of project briefs, particularly for media students filming in public spaces. Relevant themes for internet safety day were explored and developed into short films.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons and schemes of work are well planned. Teachers use detailed group profiles effectively in the best lessons to plan activities to support the wide ability range of students. Lessons are engaging, interactive and foster independent learning. However, activities in the less effective lessons use insufficient personal research and do not engage and inspire students.
- Assessment and internal verification are thorough. Teachers provide detailed written feedback which gives a clear indication of what students need to do to improve, yet praises their progress. They give constructive verbal feedback to students in lessons to improve both their practical and theoretical skills. Additionally, they provide valuable feedback electronically for whole group activities.
- There is an appropriate range of courses. Enrichment activities and industrial visits are good and enhance both the academic and vocational aspect of the curriculum for students.

- Support for students is good. Students enjoy their tutorials and value the extra support provided by staff. Effective learning support is provided in lessons for the wide range of identified needs of students.
- Resources are good. Art and design studios at Abingdon are light and spacious with good display facilities. Media classrooms at both sites have appropriate computers and edit suites. Teachers use information and learning technology effectively to support learning in most classes. However, some rooms at Witney are cramped and do not always have access to computers which prompt students to research topics.
- Leadership and management are good. Recent new approaches are beginning to have a positive impact on quality improvement. The self-assessment report is accurate and self-critical. The quality improvement plan is well focused. Action plans and data are regularly monitored and discussed at staff meetings, but there is insufficient sharing of good teaching and learning practice between staff.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Male and female students achieve equally well. Equality themes are identified in lesson plans and most projects and assignments make reference to cultural and social influences. However, there are some missed opportunities to extend the discussion of equality and cultural diversity, particularly in media lessons.
- Staff have a clear understanding of quality issues and are committed to raising success rates. They are involved in course reviews and the self-assessment report. Staff development provides a good balance of professional and personal development activities which benefit teaching and learning. The breadth of training contributes to staff feeling valued as practising artists, designers and media specialists.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Enable students to achieve their potential by ensuring that lessons meet the individual learning needs of all students. Use the detailed student profiles in lessons so that all students are sufficiently challenged and inspired.
- Improve teaching and learning by sharing good practice between staff which promotes student reflection, evaluation and individual student target setting.
- Improve the promotion of equality and diversity, particularly in media lessons, by providing more opportunities to engage students in discussions about cultural diversity, as identified in the schemes of work.

Independent learning and leisure skills

Grade 1

Context

36. The college provides courses in independent living and leisure skills for 111 students, 90 of whom study full time. Of these, just over half the students are aged 16 to 18. Two thirds of students are male and three per cent are of minority ethnic heritage. Courses range from pre-entry level to entry level 3. Specialist provision supports 15 students who have autistic spectrum disorders.

Key Findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students enjoy college. They make excellent progress in developing personal, social and life skills and they develop literacy and numeracy skills well. Success rates are high, but retention rates on life skills and skills for working life at entry levels 2 and 3 were slightly below average in 2009/10. A high proportion of students progress to further learning or employment.
- The standard of students' work is good. All students have excellent opportunities to develop employability skills at college and in work placements. Students feel safe and have a good understanding of bullying and how to respond if they have concerns. An extensive range of volunteering and enrichment activities enables students to integrate into, and contribute to, the wider community.
- Teaching and learning are good. Students benefit from a purposeful learning atmosphere and high levels of participation in lessons. Students' involvement in lessons is encouraged by teachers very effectively, through praise and other methods which demonstrate approval. The individual needs of students are met successfully through well-targeted activities. Highly effective, personalised questioning is used to elicit responses from students.
- Teachers make lessons interesting through the good use of an extensive range of resources. They reinforce learning very effectively in multi-sensory ways. Students and teachers use information learning technologies with high degrees of competence and confidence. A few weaker lessons include explanations, tasks and working methods which do not meet students' needs effectively.
- Teachers use annotated photography well to monitor and record students' success in practical tasks. They present work for external assessment which is clearly marked and verified, but worksheets are not always dated or marked.
- The initial assessment of students' skills is thorough, but teachers take insufficient account of prior learning and achievement in functional skills. They do not link learning goals sufficiently to the ability and prior achievement of each individual student.
- The range of courses is outstanding in meeting the needs of students. It enables students with autistic spectrum disorders, complex learning needs, mild learning difficulties and disabilities to participate in learning. Individualised timetabling enables students to choose from a range of options within each

programme. Staff provide an extensive range of well-planned work placements for students at all levels.

- Outstanding partnerships provide significant benefits for students including work placements. Good communication and productive working with special schools ensure that transition arrangements, from school to college, are effective. Partnerships have developed engaging enterprise projects for students. Close working with a national specialist organisation has improved the integration and qualifications of students with autistic disorders.
- Support for learners is good. Teachers use a wide range of adaptive technology to support learners particularly well, enabling them to participate fully. A high level of skilled support is available from within the team and from an extensive range of external agencies. A small number of learning support staff do not respond to students in a timely way.
- Curriculum management is outstanding. Teachers and support staff are committed to continuous improvement. They monitor courses closely during weekly staff meetings and address concerns promptly. Rigorous quality assurance procedures are in place for the internal verification of qualifications. Managers use data well to monitor performance. The self-assessment report is accurate and clearly identifies actions for improvement.
- Safeguarding is good and staff are fully aware of how to respond to concerns. Regular training in safeguarding and in manual handling ensures both staff and learners are kept safe. Staff pay outstanding attention to ensuring that risk assessments are undertaken for all relevant students. However, teachers do not always fully brief staff at work placements about potential triggers for students' poor behaviour.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good and all students are included in a range of activities at college. Teachers promote cultural awareness well in most lessons and throughout the curriculum.
- Resources for learning, including information learning technology, are of a high standard and are used well. Some accommodation at Witney is very unattractive, although displays of students' work and decoration help to make classrooms bright and welcoming.

What does Abingdon and Witney College need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring that explanations and tasks are presented in language which is easily understood by students. Ensure that all support staff engage in the most effective way with learners and support their learning effectively.
- Ensure that learning targets for students in functional skills lessons are tailored to the needs of individual students by linking them effectively with the outcomes of initial assessment.

Information about the inspection

37. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six 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 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.
38. 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 each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Abingdon and Witney 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	2,194		1,809	385	
Part-time learners	2,254	165	103	1,666	320
Overall effectiveness	3	1	3	2	4
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	3	1	3	2	4
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3				
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?	3				
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3				
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	3	1	3	2	4
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
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?	2				
Leadership and management	2	1	3	2	4
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
<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?	2				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
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?	3				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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