

# Bowling College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 58766

**Name of lead inspector:** Tim Gardner HMI

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**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Following the inspection of Bowling College (the college) in 2009, a partial reinspection in 2010 graded overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, and leadership and management satisfactory. The remaining themes focused on the work-based learning provision that now represents a smaller proportion of the college's provision.

There are four directors: a managing director, a deputy managing director, a financial director and a director who supports the development of the company. The college operates from two main centres in Bradford as well as a small number of community-based centres. The college employs 10 full-time and three part-time tutors and a number of peripatetic assessors. The college offers learner-responsive and employer-responsive provision. The majority of learner-responsive provision is in preparation for life and work; all learners on employer-responsive provision are on health, public services and care programmes. Provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is increasing at the college. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has the college made in using the self-assessment process to improve provision for learners?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the last inspection, the college has made reasonable progress in using the self-assessment process to improve provision for learners. Data and qualitative evidence from the observation of teaching and learning process and improved survey responses from learners and employers are analysed and evaluated in detail to identify themes that support self-assessment judgements. The current self-assessment report makes very effective use of good quality primary evidence and data and shows a clear link to the improvement plan. For example, the action point to improve attendance and punctuality is identified frequently at subject area level. Subject area self-assessment reports are detailed and fully supported by evidence, but some are over-descriptive and insufficiently concise.

## Outcomes for learners

**What progress has the college made to improve outcomes for learners, particularly the foundation level 1 and intermediate level programmes, since the previous inspection?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, the college has maintained its good outcomes for learners. Overall success rates have continued to improve and were 87% in 2010/11, an increase of six percentage points over the past three years. Short courses show strong progress, with success rates of 93% in 2010/11, an increase of nine percentage points over the same period the previous year. Foundation courses have fallen back from the strong upward trend of 11 percentage points increase in 2009/10, but remain higher than in 2008/09. However, intermediate courses show no significant increase from 2008/09 although they have recovered from a seven percentage point decline in 2009/10. Entry level outcomes show significant improvement, from 65% in 2008/09 to 90% in 2010/11, but advanced level programmes show a 10 percentage point decline in success rates to 81%. Most learners who complete their course achieve their qualification and overall success rates in 2010/11 are particularly high at 98%.

## Quality of provision

**What progress has the college made to maintain the good quality of teaching?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college has made reasonable progress in maintaining the good quality teaching identified at the last full inspection. It is on target to achieve its aim to grade all teaching as at least good by the end of the 2012 academic year. The college has reinstated and improved the formal observation process. It effectively tracks individual action plans developed at the conclusion of the process to ensure successful completion. The college also makes good use of the more informal peer observation process. Staff use this information effectively to focus on specific aspects of the class or their teaching. Very useful self-reflection and professional discussion are included in the observation review process and this contributes to improved teaching and learning practice. The small, close working environment at the college fully supports much informal discussion both within teams as well as with other members of the college staff. The much improved college website is now available to all staff enabling easier sharing of information and resources. Staff are able to access the website from home. The college provides good support to new teaching staff starting at the college. It also responds positively to requests for further training or attendance at relevant events and conferences.

**What progress has the college made to improve the use of individual learning plans for learners? How effective are the targets that are set for learners?**

**Significant progress**

The use of individual learning plans shows significant improvement. The college has reviewed and revised its individual learning plans twice; the current version forms a very effective record of each learner's learning and achievement. Its design supports ease of adaptation, ensuring fitness for purpose on either work-based or academic programmes and for learners studying at different levels. For example, in Skills for Life subjects, staff very effectively use initial and diagnostic assessments in planning learning and setting targets; in work-based and academic programmes, the effective use of a 'skills scan' for workplace or study skills underpins target setting. Individual learning plans for ESOL learners who are not yet literate include visual targets. Learners are actively involved in the completion of their individual learning plans and review of learning, which shows an increasingly reflective approach as the level of learning increases. Reviewers focus the targets on appropriate aspects very effectively and in ESOL they are particularly precise. Plans have a good focus on monitoring attendance. College managers have completed a full audit of individual learning plans to identify areas of completion and target setting that remain inconsistent. These have been analysed at college, subject team and individual staff levels to ensure that the design and delivery of further staff training and support have the most impact.

**Leadership and management**

**What progress has the college made to improve the quality improvement procedures since the last inspection?**

**Significant progress**

Since the last inspection, the college has made significant progress in improving the quality improvement procedures. Staff and managers now make good use of both qualitative and quantitative data obtained from a wider range of scheduled quality assurance activities. The quality improvement systems are now more robust and place teaching and learning at the centre. Curriculum teams maintain a systematic oversight of their programmes using well-structured documents to complete regular course reviews and maintain detailed course logs. These generate reviews of course performance that are evaluative and provide an accurate analysis of individual course performance. They make good use of data to support judgements.

The college has revised and improved the systems for the observation of teaching and learning. They have trained an additional observer to provide subject specific skills. Plans are in place to train two more observers. Observations include teaching, assessment, tutorials and reviews. The college has also introduced a less formal peer observation process. The college now makes better use of a wider range of online surveys of staff, learners and employers and it is responsive to suggestions from these. Courses have elected learner representatives and they attend key staff meetings.

**What progress has been made to improve the delegation of management responsibilities so that more staff engage in management decisions?**

**Reasonable progress**

The college has made reasonable progress to improve the delegation of responsibilities to more staff. The college makes good use of staff expertise and interests to support improvements such as the development of the online enrolment process and the college website. Curriculum teams work well together and although only one has a designated coordinator, the other teams work collaboratively to ensure effective management of their area. The Access team coordinator has managed key processes such as revalidation of qualifications, change of awarding body and liaison with external moderators. All areas work proactively making suggestions and recommendations to improve opportunities and pathways for learners. They are encouraged and supported in this by senior managers.

Regular staff meetings and briefings keep all staff well informed about key management issues such as funding and future developments. Changes to the locations of staff teams also support communications. Dedicated training weeks provide good opportunities for staff to contribute to developments and to be more actively involved by taking on additional roles and responsibilities where appropriate.

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