

The Vocational College

Focused monitoring visit report

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Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

The Vocational College (TVC) is a private company with its head office and main training centre in Bootle, near Liverpool. TVC contracts with the Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships in glass-related occupations, and sport, leisure and recreation and with the Young People's Learning Agency for Foundation Learning.

TVC was last inspected in July 2010 when the overall effectiveness was judged to be good, capacity to improve satisfactory, and outcomes for learners, quality of provision, and leadership and management were all judged to be good. Four subject areas were inspected with manufacturing technologies, construction crafts glazing, and employability training all judged to be good, and hospitality and catering judged to be satisfactory. Since the last inspection the manufacturing and glazing programmes are now one programme with regard to published data and TVC has discontinued the hospitality and catering programme. This report focuses on the themes explored during the monitoring visit.

Themes

Capacity to improve

What progress has TVC made in further developing its capacity to sustain improvements?

Significant progress

At the last inspection capacity to improve was judged to be satisfactory. Since then TVC has had a very good record of sustained improvement with staff at all levels contributing to self-assessment and planning. TVC has set and met ambitious targets. TVC improved the approach to quality improvement and action planning by structuring more thoroughly the way departments approach self-assessment and improvement planning. This has worked particularly well in the two main apprenticeship programmes where overall success rates are high and where there was a significant upward trend in performance in overall success rates and completions within the planned time frame between 2009/10 and 2010/11. The strong improvement trend is also evident in the outcomes for the final year of Train to Gain. TVC achieved outstanding results in terms of the proportion of learners who completed within the planned time frame in the two main programme areas. It is too early to judge any trends in performance in the successor programme to Train to Gain or in the new Foundation Learning programme. Employers and learners recognise improvements made by TVC and the high quality of the provision. Feedback from employers and learners prior to the focused monitoring visit, for which there was a very high return, was overwhelmingly positive with almost all returns judging the provision to be good or outstanding.

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has TVC made in improving self-assessment and improvement planning to strengthen the provision?

Significant progress

Self-assessment was judged to be satisfactory at the time of the last inspection. The self-assessment report did not always result in detailed action plans and insufficient evidence underpinned the judgements. Since then TVC has thoroughly revised the self-assessment process with much improvement evident. The draft self-assessment report sets out very detailed and comprehensive reports for each programme area. It critically evaluates performance against the Common Inspection Framework using data and sound evidence accurately to form clear judgements. Areas for improvement are specified and recorded clearly in well-constructed improvement plans with effectively specified actions, timescales and responsibilities. Formal feedback obtained from employers and learners is analysed and used effectively to identify areas for improvement.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining or improving success rates?

Significant progress

During 2010/11, TVC provided three main programmes for apprentices with over 65% of learners in the areas of glass manufacturing, and sport, leisure and recreation. The remaining learners were in hospitality and catering. TVC discontinued the latter programme in year, taking a business decision in relation to the one major employer involved in the programme and learners transferred to another provider.

Success rates for learners following apprenticeships in glass manufacturing improved very significantly from 2009/10 to 2010/11 by 22 percentage points and are significantly above the national average. The number of learners who completed within the planned time frame improved to nine percentage points above the national average. Success rates for learners following apprenticeships in sport, leisure and recreation improved from 2009/10 to 2010/11 and were significantly above the national average. The number of learners who completed within the planned time frame also improved in this programme and it is now just below the national average.

The number of Train to Gain learners overall who completed their qualifications before the planned end date in 2010/11 improved significantly and was well above the national average at 90%. Results in the two main programmes were outstanding, with high levels being maintained from the previous year. In manufacturing technologies, out of 209 leavers 97% completed within the planned time frame. In building and construction, out of 113 leavers 98% completed within the planned time frame. Train to Gain ceased as a separate contract at the end of 2010/11. Foundation Learning was introduced as a new programme in 2010/11 and it is not appropriate to make a progress judgement in terms of outcomes at this stage.

What progress has TVC made in using data to enable any gaps in the performance of different groups to be identified and resolved?

Reasonable progress

The last report judged TVC's arrangements for equality and diversity satisfactory. TVC did not have a fully embedded process for the analysis of equality data. Since then appropriate actions have been taken by TVC to introduce and use a consistent process across the provision. Each department uses a standardised approach to monitoring equality and diversity data and identifies clearly where there are any specific gaps in performance by different groups of learners. This work is coordinated through an equality and diversity team which meets quarterly. TVC produces equality and diversity data and identifies impact measures together with plans and actions to improve against impact measures and targets. This process is evident in the draft self-assessment report for November 2011 but it is too early to see the full impact yet in terms of outcomes for learners. TVC recognises some further work is required to convert the analysis now being carried out into actions that have the required impact across the organisation.

Quality of provision

What progress has TVC made in improving initial assessment and in using the results to plan learning?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection the information gained from initial assessment was not used sufficiently to individualise learning in group sessions or in the development of individual learning plans. The arrangements to assess the needs of learners and plan learning have improved. In the Foundation Learning programme particularly good progress has been made in using the results of initial assessment to plan individual learning and respond to individual needs in training sessions. For apprentices the identification of additional support needs and provision of support have improved. Learners now have access to online information to support the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. However, individual plans for apprentices do not detail sufficiently specific learning objectives in relation to their particular needs. Current practice by TVC staff does not always lead to the identification of learning resources to support individual independent learning in learners' plans or subsequently at reviews. TVC is aware of the need on apprenticeship programmes to extend further the results of initial assessment to promote independent learning and is already developing this approach with some apprentices.

What progress has TVC made in improving the reviewing of learners' progress and in planning learning?

Significant progress

At the last inspection measurable targets to ensure learners completed their qualification within agreed time frames were not sufficiently clear and learners' progress was not monitored effectively. Since the last inspection, TVC has improved these arrangements and, as a result, many more learners are completing within the planned time frame or earlier. Improvements include new documentation to meet

the needs of the foundation and apprenticeship programmes. Tutors now set short- and medium-term targets at each progress review session. These targets are very clear and explained fully to learners who, as a result, understand what is required of them. During reviews, tutors routinely provide learners with information, advice and guidance about additional qualifications or higher levels of study. Thorough and effective development work by managers with staff since the last inspection has ensured learners are clearer about the progress targets set for them by their tutors. TVC tutors are very clear about how well learners are progressing against each element of their programme in both Foundation Learning and apprenticeships. This information is used particularly well by managers to monitor progress and performance against targets. Learners have a better understanding of their progress. TVC recognises the importance of communicating progress in a manner that apprentices and employers understand.

Leadership and management

What progress has TVC made in improving management action planning, using milestones and benchmarks to support improvement?

Significant progress

The last inspection judged that TVC's use of data was satisfactory with some action planning records lacking sufficient attention to medium- or long-term planning against objectives. Since then TVC has put in place better data management systems which support managers. Department performance managers use data very effectively to inform action planning. They have a strong and positive approach to action planning and improvement. They demonstrate a good understanding of TVC's priorities and have ambitious targets. They achieve good results in terms of improvements to success rates and other aspects. Currently action plans are well structured and actions against objectives are clear and cover reasonable timescales for progressing improvements. In the case of departmental improvement plans, current practice is very thorough and includes recording and reviewing specific actions to take, with measurable milestones and timescales. Staff teams review plans regularly. Benchmarking is used by managers effectively in relation to improvement actions.

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