

Tower Hamlets College

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	130418
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Type of provider:	General further education college
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Information about the provider

1. Tower Hamlets College is a general further education college in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in east London. The two main centres are in Poplar next to Canary Wharf and Arbour Square in Stepney. Other centres include East India Dock Road and Oxford House in Bethnal Green.
2. The college provides programmes in 13 of the 15 subject areas. Full-time qualifications are offered for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults at all levels up to advanced level, with a limited provision of courses and professional qualifications at level 4. Provision for employers is offered in business, management, health and care, and teaching support. In 2010/11, the college enrolled 1,928 learners aged 16 to 18 and 4,377 adults, of whom 43% were of Bangladeshi heritage and 14% were White British, the rest from a broad range of backgrounds.
3. Tower Hamlets is a borough of severe deprivation and two thirds of its residents live in wards that are within the 10% most deprived nationally. Child poverty is considerable and the borough has the most severe income deprivation for children in England. Unemployment is high and above the national rate. Some 56% of the population is from a minority ethnic heritage with the largest minority ethnic group, other than White British, being Bangladeshi, accounting for 30% of residents. The proportion of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 who achieve five grade A* to C passes at GCSE including English and mathematics was 51.8% in 2009/10, just below the England average figure. The building of Canary Wharf as a major financial district has brought considerable infrastructure development to Tower Hamlets.
4. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Greenwich University (additional diploma in teaching mathematics/numeracy in the lifelong learning sector)
 - Middlesex University (observation of teaching and learning in post compulsory education and training)
 - University of East London (professional graduate certificate in education)
 - Institute of Education (professional graduate certificate in education in literacy/English for speakers of other languages).
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - SR Education (sport qualifications for learners aged 16 to 18)
 - Free To Learn Ltd (employability courses).

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
<p>Provision for young learners: 14 to 16</p> <p>Further education (16 to 18)</p>	<p>81 part-time learners</p> <p>1,773 full-time learners 92 part-time learners</p>
<p>Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)</p>	<p>1,589 full-time learners 2,889 part-time learners</p>
<p>Employer provision: Apprenticeships</p>	<p>238 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	2

Subject areas	Grade
Science	3
Arts, media and publishing	3
English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	3
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

6. The overall effectiveness of Tower Hamlets College is satisfactory. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. They have improved consistently for the past three years and increased significantly in 2010/11, but they are still below the national figures at all levels. The proportion of learners who complete their course is satisfactory, but too many learners do not pass their qualification and the number achieving a high-grade pass is low. Learners enjoy their time in college and feel safe there. Many develop good employability skills that help them to gain jobs. A large number of eligible learners go on to university.
7. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers and other staff are enthusiastic and very supportive of learners. They use their experience well to develop the skills of learners. The standard of accommodation is good, with well-equipped and comfortable classrooms. However, too many lessons are inadequate or no better than satisfactory, with too many learners remaining passive and teachers pitching their teaching at the middle ability learners and

not meeting the needs of low and high ability learners. Teachers do not share sufficiently the good practice that exists both within the college and outside it.

8. The college has a broad range of courses and strong partnerships that further extend the learning opportunities. Learners receive good care, guidance and support. The assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners agree personal targets with their tutor, but these are sometimes too vague and teachers do not always monitor learners' progress frequently enough.
9. Leaders, managers and governors have a strong focus on raising standards and outcomes for learners are improving. Quality assurance processes are effective, but not consistently applied in all subject areas. The college is in sound financial health and has good resources. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. The college promotes equality and diversity well and makes a large contribution to improving social cohesion in the local community. The capacity for further improvement is good.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates increased significantly in 2010/11, but are still below the national averages. The number of learners who complete their courses is satisfactory, but too many do not achieve their qualification, particularly with a high-grade pass.
- Outcomes for the small number of learners on work-based learning programmes are low, but improving. Learners of all ages who declared a disability and/or learning difficulty have higher success rates than their peers.
- Learners greatly enjoy their time in college and attendance rates are satisfactory. They develop personal and social skills, building their self-confidence and self-esteem. The college has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere where learners feel safe.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers are supportive and learners enjoy lessons, but too many lessons are inadequate or no better than satisfactory. Learners are not involved actively enough in lessons and teachers do not focus sufficiently on ensuring all learners, particularly the low and high achievers, make good progress. Where teachers share good practice, the standard of teaching is better, but this does not take place consistently.
- The use of information and learning technologies (ILT) in lessons has improved but is still not good enough across all areas to match the significant investment in resources. The majority of classrooms are well equipped. Assessment is satisfactory.
- The broad range of provision meets users' needs well, offering good progression pathways across the curriculum. New and extended courses and other initiatives have given learners better opportunities to enter and stay in the college. A large programme for unemployed adults enables them to gain employability skills. The college has a well-established and popular enrichment programme offering good recreational opportunities for learners.

- Partnerships are highly responsive in meeting the needs of the community and large employers. Strong partnerships with several universities exist and a high proportion of learners progress to higher education. Close collaboration with employers has led to good mentoring, internships and bursaries for learners. The college has also worked with employers to develop the skills of employees in the workplace.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Pastoral support is strong with a range of procedures in place to guide and help learners to stay on at college and progress to higher-level courses or employment. Learners with additional learning needs receive very effective support. Outcomes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good. Support in individual tutorials is inconsistent, with personal targets not always specific or monitored regularly.
- Leadership and management are good. Leaders, managers and governors focus on raising standards and outcomes for learners are improving. Governors provide good support and monitor the performance of the college effectively. The college is in a secure financial position and continues to invest in improving accommodation and resources to benefit learners. The college has good capacity to improve further.
- Performance management and quality assurance arrangements have led to improvements, but staff do not yet apply quality assurance processes consistently and the rate of improvement across the college is too variable. Curriculum management is satisfactory overall.
- Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. Security arrangements are highly effective and ensure learners feel safe. Staff promote equality and diversity well and the college makes a significant contribution to promoting community cohesion. Users' views are valued and acted upon, but arrangements for learners to contribute to decision-making processes are underdeveloped.
- Self-assessment is broadly accurate and identifies the main strengths and areas for improvement. The lesson observation process does not provide an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning. The self-assessment grades awarded in some areas are over generous and the college does not consider sufficiently its performance relative to that of other providers, particularly regarding outcomes for learners.

What does Tower Hamlets College need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who pass their courses, and the number obtaining high-grade passes, by setting personal targets that are specific and measurable, with relevant actions to improve the standard of learners' work, and monitor the progress of learners towards these targets more rigorously.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to enable learners to make better progress and achieve to their full potential by ensuring that staff:
 - share best practice in teaching and learning both within the college and with external colleagues

- use ILT more innovatively
- plan a wide variety of activities that involve learners more actively in their learning
- set tasks in lessons that meet the full ability range of all learners.
- Ensure all areas improve at a similar rate by implementing consistent quality assurance arrangements and by further developing the monitoring and evaluation skills of curriculum managers in order to use accurate information for action plans and improvement.
- Enhance the rigour of self-assessment by ensuring the evidence gathered during lesson observations provides an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning and by comparing the outcomes for learners more systematically against national figures.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the safe college environment
- the learning zone and resources to promote learning
- the support provided by staff
- the financial assistance
- learning new skills and improving independence and self-confidence
- the friendliness and welcoming nature of teachers
- the wide range of courses on offer.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the inconvenient timing of lessons for some adult courses
- the behaviour of some learners
- the entrance and space in the Poplar canteen which can become crowded and noisy.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the standard of work of apprentices
- the responsiveness of college staff to local needs and their willingness to accommodate them
- the flexible training arrangements
- the good and prompt communication by college staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more training opportunities within the college.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

10. The college has a good capacity to improve. Success rates are rising and the rate of improvement in 2010/11 was very significantly above the national rate. The college has made progress in tackling most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection, although further improvements are still required to raise success rates and strengthen the quality of teaching and learning. The college continues to invest to improve accommodation and resources for the benefit of learners while maintaining a secure financial position. Leaders, managers and governors have a clear focus and ambitious vision for the college and monitor performance closely.
11. Quality assurance and quality improvement processes are effective. The improved monitoring, evaluation and intervention arrangements are having a beneficial impact. Performance management arrangements are more effective and changes have made managers and staff more accountable. The self-assessment process is thorough and uses a wide range of evidence to support judgements made. The report is broadly accurately in identifying the key strengths and areas for improvement, but in some cases the grades awarded are over generous. Improvement planning is comprehensive and effective.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

12. The college has improved learners' outcomes consistently for the past three years. A very significant improvement in 2010/11 increased the headline success rate by 7.6%, but it remains below the national average. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 and adults taking long courses are below the national figures at all levels. The proportion of learners of all ages that remain in the college to complete their course is above the national average. However, achievement rates are low and, despite a large increase in 2010/11, significantly below those found in similar colleges. The number of learners gaining high-grade passes is also low.
13. Reflecting the low success rates for learners in the college generally, most minority ethnic groups perform below the national figures. Success rates for learners of Black or Black British – African heritage are consistently below the national figures and above for those declaring themselves White – any other White background. In 2010/11, learners of all ages who declared a disability and/or learning difficulty had higher success rates than other learners.
14. Success rates for the relatively small number of apprentices gaining their qualification within the agreed timescale improved greatly in 2010/11 but they are still low. They are better for learners on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes, although below the national average. The overall success rate for learners of all ages taking functional skills qualifications in 2010/11 was

very low, but they have improved significantly during the current academic year.

15. Progression rates to higher education are high, with 84% of eligible learners applying for university in 2010/11 receiving an offer of a place. Progression to higher-level courses is also high in subject areas such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
16. Learners greatly enjoy the time they spend in college. Attendance rates are satisfactory overall, but poor attendance and a lack of punctuality disrupt learning in some subject areas, such as business and science. Learners feel safe and the highly effective security staff help to create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere at all college centres. Learners show a high degree of respect towards each other and staff. Many develop their personal and social skills well and improve their economic well-being by extending their use of language and raising their self-confidence and expectations. Learners increase their awareness of how to live healthily. For example, ESOL learners increase their awareness of healthy lifestyles when discussing topics such as sport, staying fit, diet and weight loss.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

17. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The working relationships between staff and learners are good. Teachers know their learners well and support them enthusiastically. Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced and use their expertise well to help learners to develop sound vocational skills in practical lessons. All staff pay close attention to health and safety in lessons. Teachers focus on developing the wider employability and social skills of learners. In-class support from learning mentors is also good.
18. The use of ILT in lessons has improved and the majority of classrooms are well equipped and comfortable. Staff are using different technologies, but not with any degree of innovation. Development of the college's virtual learning environment (VLE) is making learning and assessment more accessible, stimulating and interesting to learners. The college's learning zone is well resourced, used regularly and effective in supporting learners in their studies.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Many teachers promote equality and diversity well and plan sensitively in order to celebrate the differences in culture between learners. However, a significant minority of teachers pay insufficient attention to incorporating an appreciation of diversity and understanding of equality and fairness in society and how these relate to the topic learners are studying.
20. The college has improved its arrangements for monitoring and moderating the quality of teaching and learning, focusing more on learning and attainment. It identifies and uses the emerging themes as priorities for staff training, but too many lessons remain inadequate or no better than satisfactory. These lessons focus too much on learners of average ability, to the detriment of low and high

achieving learners. Teachers talk too much in lessons, leaving learners passive and missing opportunities for more active tasks. They fail to check the understanding and progress of learners regularly. The sharing of good practice has led to improvements in teaching and learning but this does not take place systematically across the college.

21. Overall, the assessment of learning is satisfactory. Procedures for the internal verification of work are good. As managers acknowledge, assessment practices vary too much across the college. Many teachers provide constructive assessment that encourages learners and informs them what they need to do to improve, but this is not always the case. Assessment for work-based learners is good. It takes place in the workplace and is timely, fair and consistent.
22. The wide range of provision meets the needs of users well. Staff review the curriculum thoroughly and set up initiatives to broaden opportunities for learners. A technical centre opened at the Poplar Centre in September 2011 offering lower level qualifications in construction to mainly younger learners. The college invested in a training restaurant offering advanced-level catering qualifications, enhancing progression opportunities. Close working with Jobcentre Plus staff has led to over 200 unemployed adults joining programmes aimed at developing their employability skills. Work-based learning programmes are available, but their scope is limited and the number of apprentices in the college is small.
23. The college has a well-established enrichment programme operating from a purpose-built building called the Workhouse. The programme is subsidised by local employers and communities hiring the venue during lunch times, evenings and weekends. The Student Union is also very active in supporting recreational events. Staff responded to requests from female learners for specific activities, for example Zumba dance classes, and the participation of females is now higher than at the time of the previous inspection.
24. Partnership working is good. Staff are highly responsive and flexible in meeting the needs of the local community and employers. The college manages the borough's scheme for alternative provision for school pupils aged 14 to 16 effectively. It works with secondary schools to ensure career paths are available for disaffected school pupils. Close collaboration with universities has led to high rates of progression to higher education and mentoring and coaching support learners' applications and their transition.
25. Strong partnerships with large private companies in Canary Wharf provide mentoring that is benefiting 130 learners this year. In addition, large international companies offer annual internships and bursaries for learners. The college has worked with employers to develop their employees' skills in the workplace. For example, college staff provide a bespoke equality and diversity programme for train operator staff of a large national company.
26. Care, guidance and support are good. The college's induction programme, 'bridging the gap', is successful in settling learners into the college quickly and

ensuring they are on the right course. This has reduced significantly the number of learners who change programme soon after they start. High retention rates reflect the good pastoral support provided by staff. Effective support and guidance assist vulnerable learners and those requiring extra help. Learners with additional learning needs receive well-organised and high-quality support covering issues such as adaptive equipment, financial assistance and advice on health, mental and sexual health. Outcomes for learners receiving additional support are better than the college average. Learners value the peer support and mentoring system in place that helps them to develop their personal skills and confidence.

27. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support. They achieve well and develop good personal and social skills that help them to live lives that are more independent.
28. Learners receive regular individual reviews of their progress during which they agree personal targets. Learners progress well when these targets are specific, measurable and time bound and tutors monitor them frequently, but this is inconsistent across the college. Too many personal targets are vague, lack completion dates or do not provide sufficient challenge. Work-based learners have personal targets set at the beginning of their programme, but staff do not monitor them regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

29. The Principal, ably supported by capable senior managers and governors, provides strong and secure leadership that focuses clearly on improving the performance of the college and raising success rates. Leaders and managers have introduced many beneficial changes to strengthen performance monitoring arrangements and have secured significant improvements in outcomes for learners. Many subject area teams have embraced the positive changes introduced to the culture of the college. The college has a clear strategic direction and sets appropriately ambitious and effectively monitored targets. A revision of the college's curriculum, focusing on local, regional and national priorities, has resulted in provision that meets the needs and interests of learners more effectively.
30. The recently revised management structure has improved the accountability of staff. A management development programme has helped staff to develop more competence and self-confidence. Curriculum management is satisfactory overall and good in some areas. However, managers' skills in monitoring, evaluating and improvement planning are still too variable. Leadership and management of work-based learning have improved recently and are good. Robust monitoring systems track learners' attendance and progress and the outcomes for learners have improved.
31. Governors have a wide range of experience and expertise that they use well in the performance of their duties. They contribute significantly to informing the strategic direction of the college and to monitoring financial performance.

Governors support the college well and have been influential in promoting its work within the local community, industry and commerce. Governors hold the college to account effectively through an appropriate committee structure that enables the work of the college to be scrutinised against well-considered key performance indicators. They have a satisfactory understanding of its academic performance and receive regular detailed and informative reports from senior and curriculum managers. Governors acknowledge that attendance levels at some board meetings are too low.

32. Arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. Security staff provide a visible and reassuring presence and carry out their duties very effectively. They control access to the college by diligently checking identity badges and permit only authorised access. Recruitment vetting procedures, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, are completed for staff and an up-to-date single central record is maintained. The college places a high priority on ensuring learners are safe and have clearly defined policies and procedures in place. Staff have received safeguarding training and designated child protection officers are in place. Links with external agencies are maintained and referrals made when required. Learners are confident that issues reported are dealt with effectively. Health and safety are well managed and promoted throughout the college.
33. The college promotes equality and diversity well and makes a significant contribution to community cohesion. Learners from different backgrounds are encouraged to interact with one another and the curriculum promotes the development of learners' knowledge and understanding of key issues. However, the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons is inconsistent and no better than satisfactory. The college provides a friendly and relaxed environment where learners show respect for one another and to staff. A single equalities scheme is in place and a committee, chaired by the Principal, ensures that the promotion of equality and diversity is given a high priority. Learner success rates are analysed by different ethnicity groupings, age, gender and disability. The college is successfully narrowing the achievement gap between different groups of learners, although overall success rates for most groups of learners remain below corresponding national averages.
34. Staff use a variety of strategies to seek and act upon the views of learners in order to improve provision. Questionnaires and focus group meetings collect learners' views and staff act upon them appropriately. However, learners are not always involved sufficiently in decision-making processes and arrangements to enable their contribution to improvement planning processes are underdeveloped. The views of employers, partners and key stakeholders are used to inform self-assessment and improvement planning satisfactorily.
35. Quality assurance arrangements and self-assessment processes are satisfactory. Quality assurance and quality improvement practices are much improved and are having a beneficial impact in raising success rates. However, they are not yet embedded fully and applied consistently across the college. Arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching and learning are not fully

effective and do not provide the college with an accurate overview. Self-assessment, while broadly accurate in identifying key strengths and areas for improvement, does not always consider sufficiently learners' outcomes in relation to national averages.

36. The college continues to improve accommodation and resources to benefit learners. Classrooms and learning environments are generally well equipped with appropriate specialist resources. Access to ILT resources is good. The college is in a secure financial position with good financial management and control arrangements. The property strategy is well considered and informed by information on space utilisation. The monitoring of resource efficiency is effective. Given the broadly average learner success rates, the college provides satisfactory value for money.

Subject areas

Science

Grade 3

Context

37. The area offers courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels including GCSE science, the BTEC diploma in applied science at all three levels, access to higher education, diploma in science, pathway to science at intermediate level and AS and A-levels in physics, biology and chemistry. Of the 435 enrolments in 2010/11, 351 (81%) were 16 to 18 years old and 196 (45%) were female. Some 388 (89%) were of minority ethnic heritage of which around half were Bangladeshi.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates have increased and are now broadly in line with the national average for similar providers. Retention rates remain consistently high and are above national figures. Pass rates have also risen over the last three years. They are outstanding in A-level chemistry and the BTEC extended national diploma, and significantly above average for the access diploma to higher education in science and GCSE science at A* to C grades. Pass rates for AS science subjects and vocational courses at foundation and intermediate levels remain low.
- The standard of work and current attainment of learners indicate that they are achieving well. Progression rates to higher education are high. However, only just over half of AS learners continue to A-level courses. Learners on A-level courses and the BTEC national diploma underperform significantly compared to their prior achievement. A low proportion of learners attain high-grade passes. Learners' poor attendance affects learning. All learners feel safe and health and safety practices are generally appropriate.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In better lessons, learners are fully involved, highly motivated to learn and receive good support from teachers. Teachers encourage independent thinking and problem solving through stimulating activities, effective use of practical and group work, and vivid demonstrations. The college's VLE is much used and appreciated by learners, but contains insufficient interactive and stimulating materials.
- Too many lessons are uninspiring and lack a variety of activity. Teachers are too dominant in the lesson and fail to involve learners sufficiently or meet their individual needs. Questioning is ineffective in checking the learning of all learners or stimulating discussion. Teachers use ILT mainly for presentations and to enable learners to copy notes rather than stimulating learning.
- The quality of assessment is good. Homework is set frequently and marked quickly, providing learners with constructive written and oral feedback to help them improve their standard of work. This occurs across all subjects, but there

is insufficient recording of learners' achievement to monitor attainment and progress effectively in physics and GCSE science.

- The breadth of science provision for adults and learners aged 16 to 18 is very good and enrolments have increased steadily. Entry criteria for courses are now applied more diligently to ensure that learners are on the right course. An induction programme incorporates taster sessions to enable learners to experience different subjects.
- Visits help learners to contextualise their learning. For example, A-level biologists visited a local cemetery as part of an ecology project and A-level physicists went to the Royal Observatory. However, these visits are not available to all learners, especially those on vocational programmes. Work-related experience to support learners is underdeveloped. Partnership work is satisfactory. Staff have formed close links with local universities.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Learners at risk of underachieving receive additional support and may be allocated a peer or university undergraduate mentor, or attend weekly progress reviews and extra workshops. This has resulted in improved attendance and performance.
- All learners have personal learning plans containing targets that tutors monitor regularly through individual meetings. These targets are not always sufficiently detailed and challenging. Learners do not value group tutorials as highly as individual reviews, many considering them to be of little interest and not always taught well.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent improvements include an increase in the pass rates for this year's January modules in AS biology and improved attendance for some learners at risk of underachieving. Curriculum managers have a self-critical and rigorous approach to self-assessment and inspectors agreed broadly with the key findings in the self-assessment report. Course reviews are insufficiently rigorous and contain little reference to learners' views.
- All staff use management information data effectively. However, science staff have placed insufficient emphasis on ensuring they are able to teach and support learners effectively on lower-level vocational programmes as well as advanced-level courses.
- Resources are satisfactory. Laboratories are adequate and four technicians provide good support for the science provision at the two college centres. Staff carry out risk assessment appropriately and health and safety requirements are enforced strictly.

What does Tower Hamlets College need to do to improve further?

- Increase learners' pass rates, especially on AS-level and vocational courses, by ensuring learners' individual targets are detailed and challenging and tutors monitor progress towards them effectively.

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, especially for learners on lower-level courses, by sharing good practice systematically, making more innovative use of ILT and meeting the needs of all learners fully.
- Improve the effectiveness of course reviews by ensuring areas for improvement receive more rigorous and timely actions and having a greater focus on capturing and meeting learners' concerns.

Arts, media and publishing

Grade 3

Context

38. Courses from entry to advanced level are available in art and design, film and media studies, photography, communications, commercial graphics, digital illustration and web design. The provision is located at the Poplar Centre. Of 380 learners in 2010/11, approximately three quarters were full time and aged 16 to 18. Just over 50% were female and approximately 70% were of minority ethnic heritage.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates were poor in 2009/10, but they improved the next year to 79%, which is broadly in line with the national average. They are good on the advanced-level access to higher education diploma in art and design, and A-level media studies, but low on BTEC diplomas in art and design, AS art and design, AS film studies and the foundation-level certificate in creative media production. There is no significant variation in outcomes for different minority ethnic groups.
- Learners have good progression rates. In 2010/11, 63% of foundation-level and 82% of intermediate-level learners who completed their course progressed to a higher-level course within the college. Some 56 learners also gained places on creative degree courses, an increase on the previous year. Learners on the advanced-level diplomas in art and design and media studies obtain lower grades than might be expected compared to their prior attainment.
- The standard of learners' work is varied. The most able learners produce very good practical work, particularly in art, graphics, digital illustration and animation. A significant minority of learners are behind schedule for tasks and assignments and their folders, portfolios, sketchbooks and practical work demonstrate insufficiently detailed initial research and analysis. Learners feel very safe around the college and there is a strong culture of respect among learners.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. All teachers support and promote independent learning. They raise the aspirations of learners to progress and succeed. Learners have access to very good resources including Mac suites, technical equipment and up-to-date, industry standard software packages. Staff are highly experienced and many maintain and develop their industrial and commercial expertise that adds significant value to the learners' experience.
- In less effective sessions, teachers do not involve learners sufficiently in the tasks they set and learners are too passive. Displays of learners' work and other creative stimuli are sparse in art classrooms and studios.
- Staff and learners make good use of the VLE to store and share information during lessons. However, too many learners do not have easy access to sketchbooks, folders and portfolios in lessons or are unsure of the location of

work completed in previous lessons. This has a significant, and adverse, impact on their ability to learn.

- The quality and impact of assessment are inconsistent. Staff make good use of peer assessment, encouraging learners to share their practical work and creative ideas with the rest of the group. Learners comment on each other's work, thereby extending their critical and evaluative skills. However, a significant number of learners are unclear about their targets and progress and unsure how to use feedback from teachers to improve their work.
- The courses available provide a broad range of learning pathways. Effective partnerships and links with local employers and community centres provide valuable opportunities for learners to participate in community and employer-based projects in realistic working environments. Valuable links are also in place with higher education providers.
- Learners receive good care, support and guidance. Effective procedures identify learners requiring additional learning support. Learners have regular group and individual tutorials where staff monitor their progress, set targets and timelines and provide them with support on day-to-day issues if required. On occasions, following the tutorials, learners are still unclear about what they need to do to improve.
- Leadership and management are good. Over the past 18 months, managers have identified and implemented effective strategies that have raised standards. The self-assessment process enables managers to identify areas for improvement, although not in all areas. A strong ethos and good strategies promote equality of opportunity well.

What does Tower Hamlets College need to do to improve further?

- Raise success rates on most courses and improve the progress made by learners relative to their prior attainment, by developing a consistent approach to assessment across all courses, ensuring learners are clear about their objectives, learning goals and progress, and understand how to use the feedback from teachers to help them improve.
- Improve the amount of good or better teaching by ensuring learners remain motivated and participative actively in lesson activities, produce work on time and are given support and strategies to prevent them falling behind with their course work.
- Implement clear policies and expectations with learners over the compilation, storage and management of learners' work, including folders, portfolios and sketchbooks, and ensure they have ready access to them in lessons.
- Increase the rigour of quality assurance processes by identifying all key weaknesses accurately and take action to bring about improvements in the quality of provision.

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)

Grade 3

Context

39. ESOL courses are provided at all college sites and ten local venues, from entry to intermediate level. Programmes include options in employability, information technology, mathematics, literacy and citizenship. Vocational courses with embedded language teaching are available in administration, computing, hair and beauty, childcare, health and social care, and creative arts. In 2010/11, 902 learners studied ESOL and 538 studied the unitised reading and writing provision. Some 78% of learners were female and 68% were of Bangladeshi heritage.

Key findings

- Success rates, whilst improving in 2010/11, remain below national averages. They are satisfactory at entry level 2 and for the large unitised reading and writing provision, but they are low for entry level 1, entry level 3, and foundation-level courses. Current retention rates are high. Learners' attendance rates are satisfactory and improving and punctuality is good.
- Progression rates are high for ESOL learners on part-time courses with 53% progressing from one level of learning to the next in 2010/11. Nearly 400 ESOL learners have progressed to mainstream college programmes over the past two years and 82% of learners on foundation-level courses progressed to other college programmes during 2010/11.
- Learners develop good employability skills and some gained paid employment in 2010/11. A significant number demonstrate good knowledge of work practices, health and safety and recruitment procedures. Learners become fluent and confident speakers, improve their communication and presentation skills and lead more independent lives. They work well collaboratively and are highly motivated to learn.
- Overall, teaching and learning are good. Aspects of better teaching include the way teachers organise learners into suitable groups quickly, focusing their attention on tasks and activities skilfully and promoting effective teamwork. Learning is set in meaningful life contexts using interesting topics. Learners get good opportunities to check their progress through regular homework and mock examinations. Teachers provide effective and timely verbal and written feedback.
- The small amount of less effective teaching fails to focus sufficiently on the needs of individual learners. Teachers do not stretch the more able learners to optimise their progress. They research and contextualise their teaching materials well, but do not use ILT sufficiently to enhance learning. Although learners develop fluency and confidence, lessons provide too few opportunities to rehearse, practise and further refine pronunciation, intonation and stress.
- The broad and responsive ESOL provision meets local needs well, offering clear

progression pathways. A small number of learners undertake work experience in the college as information technology assistants. Other learners participate in work experience or voluntary work, for example with a housing association, in community centres or working with the local Somalian community.

- Enrichment activities are well developed and valued by learners. They include the library six-book challenge and visits to museums, cinemas and music workshops. Visiting speakers provide learners with a rich experience of influences, representing a broad range of organisations such as the Palestinian Women Bureau, the Volunteer Bureau, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and parliamentary staff.
- Partnership working is strong. It enhances learning and widens the participation of the local community in education. Managers have established an agreement with the local authority to avoid unnecessary duplication of ESOL programmes within the borough and learners are referred between different providers where appropriate. Collaboration with staff from a local bank has led to the development of a finance programme in which learners undergo training as community-based mentors who then work with local people to help them access financial services.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Initial assessment is effective in placing learners on the right course, resulting in only a few learners transferring between courses. Staff organise and complete diagnostic assessments quickly and teachers use these well when planning their teaching. Learners benefit from the college's counselling service, additional learning support, the hardship grant, funding and support for childcare, and employment support.
- Regular tutorials provide good opportunities for learners to discuss personal issues and their attendance, punctuality and progress. Individual learners are set targets alerting learners to what they need to do to improve further. However, the support provided is not always effective in helping them improve and progress reviews are not always carried out regularly.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers set clear targets and take effective action to improve performance and review performance. Managers ensure they are easily available to staff, who feel well supported. Staff are clear about their role and how to further improve their programmes. They receive suitable training and robust supervision. The self-assessment process involves all staff and is self-critical and largely accurate.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff have successfully reduced the gaps in achievement between different groups. For example, the achievement of male learners and those from Somalia has been raised significantly. Modification to the ESOL curriculum ensures it is better suited to the needs of learners and courses now lead to external accreditation. Staff use the views of learners to enrich the curriculum offer. Procedures for safeguarding are good and staff and learners are well aware of how to stay safe.

What does Tower Hamlets College need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve success rates, particularly on entry level 1, entry level 3, and foundation level courses, by closer monitoring of the progress of individual learners and by taking effective action when necessary to improve their performance.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further by developing a broader range of teaching strategies that meet the needs of all learners and ensuring learners have more time to practise pronunciation and intonation.

Business, administration and law

Grade 3

Context

40. In 2010/11, 538 learners were on courses in business, administration, accounting and law from foundation to advanced levels. Of these learners, some 203 were female and 335 males. The predominant minority ethnic groups were Bangladeshi, Black African and White. Work-based learning provision had 52 trainees covering business administration and customer service programmes at intermediate and advanced levels.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates show a three-year trend of improvement, but they remain below national figures. They improved significantly in 2010/11 and are above the national averages for adults and those taking accounting and finance courses. Business management and administration programmes are below the national averages. Overall retention rates are satisfactory for learners aged 16 to 18, but pass rates are low. For adults, the opposite scenario exists with low retention rates but higher pass rates.
- The large number of learners taking the advanced diploma in business achieve very well compared to their prior attainment. However, by this value-added measure the performance of learners on A-level courses is unsatisfactory. The overall proportion of learners gaining high-grade passes is also low.
- Staff raise aspirations for learners to progress to higher education where appropriate and a high proportion of learners do so. However, the progression rate from AS to A-level subjects is low.
- The number of apprentices who completed their course within the agreed timescale was below the national average in 2010/11, but is improving for the current year. Success rates for learners on NVQ programmes are comparable to the national average. Work-based learners enjoy their training and feel safe at college and in their employment.
- Learners produce work of a satisfactory standard and current learners are making satisfactory progress. Safeguarding is a high priority at induction and in tutorials, but there is insufficient reinforcement during review sessions with apprentices. Internships and mentoring with local blue chip companies provide excellent opportunities to raise the expectations of learners and help them to develop good employability skills.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most lessons help learners to understand key concepts, and through discussion they relate theory to the wider world of business. Mutual respect between learners and staff encourages learning and ILT informs learners as well as keeping them interested in the lesson.

- In weaker lessons, poor classroom management skills mean teachers do not command the attention of learners and low-level disruption makes learning difficult. Learners are too passive and not involved sufficiently in their learning. Learners' attendance rates are often low in these lessons.
- The quality of assessment of learners' work is good for work-based learners, but inconsistent for others. Many teachers provide comprehensive feedback with supportive comments, but where comments are not detailed, learners are unclear what they should do to gain higher grades.
- Managers have refashioned the curriculum and learners can now choose from a wide range of courses in business, accounting and finance. Additional activities enhance the curriculum, such as inviting guest speakers to lead sessions. Mentoring opportunities with multi-national employers, many located in nearby Canary Wharf, such as Amex, KPMG, Accenture, Deloitte and City Bank, are very beneficial to learners.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Many learners agree specific and measurable targets with tutors that link closely to their syllabus and the development of skills. These learners are aware of their progress and understand what they need to do to improve further. A minority of learners have vague targets that do not contain specific actions or timeframes to help them progress.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are focused on improving learners' outcomes and recent initiatives provide support to learners, but it is too early to see the impact on learners' outcomes. The self-assessment process involves staff well, but the quality improvement plan does not include all areas for improvement.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learning materials contain interesting and relevant case studies relating to international issues. However, there are missed opportunities to promote diversity issues in lessons and during review sessions for the small number of work-based learners.

What does Tower Hamlets College need to do to improve?

- Increase the pass rates for learners aged 16 to 18, including high-grade passes, through rigorous assessment containing comprehensive feedback that clearly informs learners how they can improve the standard of their work.
- Increase the retention rates for adult learners, particularly those at risk of underperforming, by ensuring all learners have specific and measurable targets that tutors monitor regularly for progress.
- Improve teaching and learning by ensuring all teachers have good classroom management skills and engage learners actively in lessons.

Information about the inspection

41. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice principal, curriculum and standards, working as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Tower Hamlets 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	3,233	0	1,536	1,694	3
Part-time learners	2,503	19	69	1,997	418
Overall effectiveness	3	-	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	2				
Outcomes for learners	3	-	3	3	3
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?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?	3				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?	3				
Quality of provision	3	-	3	3	3
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?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	2				
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?	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?	2				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3				

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