

Abingdon and Witney College

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

Abingdon and Witney College is a general further education college with three main sites. Around two thirds of the learners are aged 16 to 18 and 356 learners are on apprenticeship or work-based programmes. The college was last inspected in February 2011. Overall effectiveness, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and equality and diversity were judged satisfactory. Leadership and management, safeguarding and capacity to improve were judged good. Of the five subject areas inspected, one was outstanding, two were good, one was satisfactory and work-based learning in horticulture was inadequate.

The outcome of the reinspection is as follows:

Subject area/type of provision	Original grade	Reinspection grade
Horticulture (employer responsive)	4	2

Context

On its horticulture provision the college has 108 employer responsive learners, most of whom take the diploma in horticulture delivered in the workplace at level 2, and 18 apprentices, of whom six are on advanced level provision. All learners are male and one is from a minority ethnic heritage. For NVQ learners, all learning takes place in the workplace. For apprentices, most of the off-the-job training is undertaken at the college's Common Leys Farm site.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are very good. Success rates since the last inspection have improved significantly and now exceed the national average. Learners make good progress and success rates for qualifications completed within the planned time are very high.
- Success rates on additional qualifications such as first aid and safe handling are high. Learners demonstrate satisfactory practical skills in the workplace.
- Learners feel safe, work safely and receive a comprehensive induction to health and safety. They demonstrate a good understanding of these issues and also know how to tackle inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, such as bullying or harassment.
- On- and off-the-job learning meets the needs of learners well. Off-the-job learning is well structured to meet the needs of apprentices and their employers. On-the-job learning is mostly naturally occurring and delivered effectively by employers and work-based assessors.
- Workplace assessment is regular and individual assessment visits are well planned to meet the needs of the learners and employers. This frequent and supportive assessment motivates learners and contributes to the timely success rates. However, members of staff do not take sufficient account of learners'

starting points or of the learning opportunities in the workplace when preparing individual learning and assessment plans.

- Internal verification is satisfactory. However, the process has not identified that the recording of assessments is sometimes too brief and uninformative to be of optimum value to the learner.
- Employers are supportive of the college and of their learners. The high quality placements provide good opportunities for learners to develop practical and work skills. The college provides a range of additional qualifications, including first aid, which are valued by apprentices and employers.
- The college's response to equality and diversity is satisfactory, but the reinforcement of equality and diversity through the training programme is insufficient. The college has planned actions to attract more female learners and female staff and successful female employers provide strong role models. However, neither sample questions used during reviews nor schemes of work include the promotion of equality and diversity issues adequately.
- The new management team has taken successful action to improve success rates and has made good progress in rectifying areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. The tracking and monitoring of learners' progress are rigorous and thorough and have contributed to the significant increase in the proportion of qualifications completed within the planned time. Managers have introduced effective quality handbooks. Communication has improved.
- The college has implemented a good programme of professional training to familiarise staff with the new systems and processes. However, this training has not placed sufficient emphasis on teaching and training within a work-based learning context.
- The college's self-assessment is evaluative and mainly accurate. Good account is taken of the views of employers and learners, who are consulted about the programme. They are well satisfied with the college and their feedback has contributed to programme design. However, in its self-assessment report the college did not consider all the available sources of evidence.

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

- Improve the effectiveness of individual learning and assessment plans by giving greater consideration to learners' skills, knowledge and ability as well as the workplace opportunities available.
- Promote equality and diversity throughout the programme by using structured and effective discussion during the review process, and by including specific topics in schemes of work.
- Ensure that staff use the self-assessment processes to evaluate the quality of provision accurately by using robust evidence from a range of sources, including the workplace.

Additional Themes

Inspectors explored the following themes as part of this re-inspection.

Self-assessment and quality improvement

What progress has been made, through self-assessment and quality improvement, to improve the consistency of arrangements to monitor performance at faculty, course and individual level?

Significant progress

After the inspection in February 2011, the college revised its management structure and its arrangements for reviewing course performance. The key change to the arrangements for performance review has been the introduction of a management information system to enable the college to review student achievement, retention and success more rigorously. The implementation of this has led to significant improvements in the rates of retention across all of the provision and to improved success rates. The college monitors its performance on a monthly basis at senior level using information provided by course teams. Any actual or potential issues relating to under-performance are raised. Where appropriate, a recovery plan is written which may include discussions and action planning with learners considered at risk of not completing their courses successfully. Course team leaders identified the significant improvement in rates of retention that they have seen as a consequence of these arrangements. They have found the requirement to reflect on the reasons for any withdrawals very helpful, and have introduced enhanced arrangements for initial guidance, where this was highlighted as a cause for underperformance. The college sees these arrangements as continuing to evolve and is already in the process of changing the way by which quality managers in each faculty are managed in order to improve consistency.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has Abingdon and Witney College made in improving the outcomes for learners on lower performing courses and for lower performing groups?

Significant progress

Since the last inspection the college has identified all courses that have had unacceptably low success rates and has taken successful action to improve them. On all of the lower performing courses, rates of retention have significantly improved, as have predicted and actual success rates. In order to improve the provision the college reviewed its courses and the curriculum and, where necessary, changed the staffing. It started a Springboard programme specifically for learners who had not taken GCSE qualifications in Year 11 at school for a variety of reasons, often associated with ill health or exclusions. The admission procedures have been revised, and learners have a week of induction and guidance to prepare them for this programme to make sure it is appropriate. Based on course work and actual results, as well as improved rates of retention, college data at the end of May indicate that

predicted success rates, including the proportion of GCSE A* to C passes, may be above national averages, which would be a significant improvement on previous years' outcomes. Similar improvements have been made to the lower performing AS courses.

The college has been successful in improving the rates of retention for male learners, and has narrowed the gap between males and females. Although the overall success rates for learners from a White background and for those from minority ethnic heritage show no difference, the college investigated on an individual basis any lower success rates, but has found no cause for concern. The college successfully introduced a Gateway Centre at each site, which provides individual programmes at all levels for those aged 16 to 18 who are, or are at risk of being, not in education or employment. These individual programmes act as a preparation course for possible further study or apprenticeship.

What progress has Abingdon and Witney College made in improving outcomes on Train to Gain and its successor courses and apprenticeships, particularly the proportion of learners completing their qualifications in the planned time?

Significant progress

Outcomes for this provision were inadequate at the last inspection. Since then the college has restructured the management of the work-based learning provision. The monitoring of the provision is more systematic and rigorous. The college has introduced a comprehensive management information system to track learners' progress. It now has an improved assessment plan, and a regular schedule for reviews and progress reporting. The actions taken indicate a significantly positive impact on outcomes, particularly on the proportion of learners completing their qualifications in the planned time and where success rates on apprenticeship programmes are above national averages as are framework completions. The results show significant improvement across all programmes since the last inspection.

Quality of provision

What progress has Abingdon and Witney College made in improving the learning contexts for advanced level BTEC provision, so that learners have enhanced opportunities for practical activity and work experience?

Significant progress

Following the last inspection the college has reviewed its BTEC advanced level provision and introduced an approach that combines employability and enterprise with the vocational programmes. The Professional Futures programme enables learners to experience a range of different aspects of employment and enterprise, including working with local employers and the community. Central to the approach is the pairing of diverse vocational areas, such as engineering and creative arts, in collaborative projects and extended assignments. For example, business administration and performing arts learners collaborated on a project working with local schools. This involved the arts learners in writing and performing a play to

perform at the schools, while the business learners made the arrangements using a range of enterprise skills such as marketing. All learners on the Professional Futures programme have performance managers who act as coaches and mentors and encourage them to achieve well in order to progress to their chosen destination. Learners talk enthusiastically about the practical projects, involving a range of enterprise and employability skills. They particularly enjoyed using 'Dragon's Den' approaches to the development of enterprise skills. They benefit from working with people from other subject areas, and from diverse backgrounds. They value the focus in the programme on the development of transferable skills such as making presentations. They found that they had become more confident in engaging with employers and in other public settings.

Leadership and management

What progress has Abingdon and Witney College made in improving the consistency of teaching and learning observation?

Reasonable progress

Since the last inspection the college has revised its arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning, including several changes to the observation proforma. The college has reduced the number of observers from 40 to 12, and created a new post of quality manager for teaching and learning. It has introduced more rigorous systems for moderation, and the training has included joint observations with two other colleges, where there was high agreement of grades. The college has concentrated for its observation schedule on lecturers who need to improve their performance to good or better. The college's moderators agreed with nearly all of the teaching grades, although inspectors found a few examples of over grading. The observation proforma of lessons that were judged outstanding did not always indicate with sufficient clarity why the lesson was better than good. The college has yet to ensure consistency regarding specific aspects of observations, such as the attention paid to the promotion of equality and diversity in lessons or schemes of work, and the extent to which schemes of work provide sufficient information about the underpinning skills that lecturers expect learners to develop.

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