

# The Vocational College Limited

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

5–8 June 2018

Overall effectiveness			Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Inadequate</b>	16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Inadequate</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Inadequate</b>	Apprenticeships	<b>Inadequate</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Inadequate</b>		
Outcomes for learners	<b>Inadequate</b>		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is an inadequate provider

- The board of directors and senior leaders have overseen a significant decline in the standards of education and training since the previous inspection. No governance arrangements exist to provide challenge and support for leaders.
- Leaders do not manage or monitor the quality of apprenticeship programmes they provide for the glass industry. They do not ensure that the apprenticeship requirements are being met.
- Information, advice and guidance are ineffective. Apprentices do not gain substantial new skills or knowledge.
- Apprentices make slow or very slow progress and do not achieve their qualifications within their planned end date.
- Managers' actions to improve quality are ineffectual; teaching, learning and assessment are inadequate.
- Managers have not ensured that study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 meet the needs of individual learners; consequently, too many leave before completing their vocational qualifications.
- Learners' attendance on 16 to 19 study programmes is low; absences prevent them from making the progress of which they are capable. They do not develop the skills and behaviours they need to be successful in future learning or employment.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Managers and staff ensure that learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, many of whom are the most vulnerable with significant barriers to learning, are safe and receive good pastoral support.
- Learners on 16 to 19 study programmes demonstrate respect and tolerance for each other, their tutors and their learning environment. They behave well in lessons and in all areas of the training centre.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- The Vocational College Limited (TVC) is an independent learning provider which operates from its head office in Bootle, Liverpool. The vast majority of training programmes provided are apprenticeships for the glass industry. TVC also provides business management and administration apprenticeships for employees in the glass industry. Over 900 apprentices are currently following programmes, of whom approximately two thirds are studying at level 2. TVC provides apprenticeships nationally, including in the North, Midlands and South of England.
- TVC also provides study programmes for 16 to 19 year olds. It offers a range of vocational subjects from level 1 to level 3 at its training centre in Wallasey, which is situated to the north-east of the Wirral. TVC enrolls learners onto study programmes throughout the year. Many of the learners enrolled are not in education, employment or training. The east of the borough has some of the poorest wards in the country.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Urgently install governance arrangements to provide challenge and support to leaders.
- Implement a rigorous system to manage and monitor the quality of all aspects of provision, and to halt the decline in standards by ensuring that:
  - managers produce accurate and useful data and reports which enable leaders to monitor progress and outcomes for learners and apprentices
  - leaders set challenging targets for improvement, based on accurate self-assessment, against which progress can be monitored
  - leaders hold managers and staff to account for poor performance
  - the apprenticeship requirements are met and apprentices are recruited with integrity.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
  - tutors and assessors build on learners' and apprentices' starting points, so that they develop new knowledge and skills, including in English and mathematics
  - assessors conduct regular progress reviews for apprentices and accurately identify what progress they are making, and what they need to do to improve
  - tutors find ways to help learners on 16 to 19 study programmes catch up quickly when they fall behind, and make the progress of which they are capable
  - assessors use their extensive industrial knowledge and experience to plan training that helps apprentices produce work of a higher standard.
- Keep records of observations of teaching and learning which identify areas for improvement, and provide tutors and assessors with clear action points.
- Plan individualised study programmes that meet the needs of learners; and improve attendance so that fewer learners leave without achieving their vocational qualifications.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Senior leaders and managers have not sustained the quality of the provision since the previous inspection, and have allowed a significant decline in standards. The quality of apprenticeships, 16 to 19 study programmes, and teaching, learning and assessment have all declined from good to inadequate.
- Senior leaders do not hold managers and staff to account for the quality of their provision and the progress and outcomes for learners. The methods used to improve the quality of provision do not result in the necessary improvements. Senior leaders do not use the results of self-assessment to set relevant targets in the business plan, nor do they set clear targets for staff to improve or hold them to account for poor performance.
- Leaders and managers do not use data to set targets or to monitor progress against them. While data is used in meetings to review overall performance, the data is often inaccurate as apprentices who leave are not withdrawn. Managers do not receive regular reports on progress against improvement targets, and discussions do not result in identifying clear actions that need to be taken to make the required rapid improvements.
- Managers do not self-assess the quality of their programmes effectively. They fail to identify well enough the strengths and areas for improvement. Managers do not analyse data to identify the specific courses that need improving. They do not know what actions need to be taken to improve the quality of education and training.
- Despite business administration apprenticeships last year having very low achievement rates, managers substantially increased the number of apprentices on this framework without considering the specialist staff needed. Current apprentices make slow progress.
- Managers do not ensure that learners and apprentices benefit from effective initial advice and guidance. Apprentices have often been in the same job for several years before starting the programme and do not learn new skills. For study programme learners, courses are often not suitable for their particular needs, which means that around one third leave their courses early without achieving their qualifications.
- Senior leaders and managers do not provide adequate oversight of apprenticeships. Managers do not ensure that the apprenticeship requirements are met. In too many cases, particularly in glass apprenticeships, which currently constitute the large majority, apprentices do not receive any off-the-job training.
- Managers do not ensure that employers understand the commitment they need to make to fulfil the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. Communication with employers is poor, resulting in too many apprentices not receiving any training or assessment. Several hundred apprentices have not received the visits they are entitled to as employers do not allow training staff access to apprentices. Managers do not monitor whether apprentices remain with their employer. As a result, data is inaccurate, with leavers left on roll after they have left for significant periods of time.
- Managers do not ensure that the adult education budget funding is used effectively. They do not ensure that the adults they enrol onto the courses they offer meet the eligibility requirements of the funding rules. Managers have withdrawn learners from adult learning

programmes who were on programme at the start of the inspection as they were not eligible for funding.

- Senior leaders do not monitor the progress that their current learners or apprentices make. Consequently, they do not identify those who are at risk of not achieving in their planned time or who make slow progress. At the present time almost all current apprentices make slow or very slow progress and around two thirds of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes make slow progress.
- Most observers accurately identify in lessons the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff who are identified as needing to improve receive support, and as a result the practice of some individual tutors on study programmes has improved. However, the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment that apprentices and learners receive has not yet improved.
- Since the previous inspection managers have ensured that more learners on 16 to 19 study programmes benefit from external work experience and work-related activities. Consequently, learners develop the practical skills they need for work. For example, learners on construction courses are able to plaster a wall to the required standard. Learners on hairdressing courses benefit from working on paying clients in the salon in the town.
- Managers have taken effective action to stop working with poor-performing subcontractor partners. In the previous year, the teaching assistant and sports courses provided by two subcontractors were of a low standard; managers have stopped offering these courses in the current year.

### **The governance of the provider**

- Governance is non-existent. Senior leaders do not ensure that a group exists to meet regularly in order to challenge leaders and to set targets for improvement. Senior leaders do not set targets or receive reports on performance and therefore do not monitor progress effectively.
- The board of directors do not challenge senior leaders and managers or hold them to account for improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment well enough. They do not scrutinise and challenge them effectively.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners feel safe. They know how to keep themselves safe online. They are clear about reporting concerns relating to their safety.
- Managers ensure that they protect learners from a range of safeguarding concerns, including self-harm, homelessness and substance misuse. They take action quickly when well-being issues arise.
- Safeguarding staff record diligently the disclosures and concerns raised. They work well with social services and other agencies to ensure that a plan is in place to protect very vulnerable learners.
- The designated safeguarding lead and all staff benefit from relevant training. Senior

leaders and staff receive appropriate training and regular updates on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, staff are clear about their responsibilities and the procedures for reporting concerns.

- Managers carry out the appropriate checks on all new staff, including Disclosure and Barring Service checks. They undertake comprehensive scrutiny of job applicants' suitability.
- Tutors and assessors focus effectively on health and safety. Learners' and apprentices' knowledge and understanding about safe working practices in lessons and in the workplace are good.
- Learners on study programmes know to whom they should report any concerns and have a good awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- The small number of apprentices aged 16 to 19 have very little awareness of to whom they should report any safeguarding concerns they may have. Apprentices do not have any awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Inadequate**

- Assessors do not identify apprentices' knowledge, skills and experiences at the start of their apprenticeship or use this information to place apprentices on the correct programme. Many of the apprentices have been working in the industry for several years and demonstrate the skills of the apprenticeship framework in their day-to-day job role. As a result, many adult apprentices who work in the fenestration industry do not see the relevance of completing a level 2 apprenticeship when they are already highly skilled and have many years of experience in the industry.
- Tutors on 16 to 19 study programmes do not routinely use assessments completed at the start of the programme to plan learning. As a result, too many learners are working at the same pace on the same activities and not producing the high standard of work of which they are capable. For example, in one lesson the most able learners continued to complete tasks in calculating the average for a set of numbers, despite having already mastered these skills.
- Apprentices do not receive enough support from their assessors to assist them in completing their qualifications on time. Assessors place a disproportionate emphasis on the accreditation of existing skills and knowledge, as opposed to developing new ones that will assist apprentices to progress in their career. Assessors conduct progress reviews which are cursory, infrequent and inaccurate; they do not challenge apprentices to develop new skills or assist them in improving the quality of their work. Most apprentices do not have an appreciation of what progress they are making.
- Tutors in practical and theoretical sessions provide effective support and mentoring to 16 to 19 study programme learners, enabling them to improve their performance swiftly, particularly in a practical environment. For example, tutors in plastering show learners how to use appropriate open-trowel skills and demonstrate the correct stance when applying plaster to achieve an industry-standard finish.
- Assessors and tutors have extensive industrial experience and knowledge in the sectors in which they assess. Tutors use this experience to support learners to improve their skills throughout their programme. However, assessors do not use these attributes well enough

to plan learning so that apprentices fully benefit from their skills and produce work of a higher standard. Consequently, apprentices feel despondent and do not see the relevance of completing the apprenticeship.

- Too many apprentices do not receive helpful feedback on their work to assist them in improving their work and, in a few instances, the assessments on their work are inaccurate. For example, assessors tell apprentices that their standard of work is good when it is not; for example, some work assessed as good includes inaccuracies or has critically relevant information omitted.
- The majority of learners and most apprentices are making slow progress on their courses or programmes, either as a result of poor attendance or because of a lack of staff at TVC. Some apprentices have had no training or assessment for over 12 months because of the illness of an assessor, for whom no replacement has been provided.
- Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that they complete records of the observation of teaching and learning to a good enough standard, not only to identify areas for improvement but also to facilitate rapid improvement in tutors' and assessors' teaching and training practices. The records and subsequent actions for the observations of apprenticeship provision are particularly poor.
- Assessors do not use the results of assessments completed at the start of the programme for English and mathematics to plan learning. This results in apprentices not developing their skills beyond the standard they had at the start their apprenticeship. Too many apprentices are not challenged to develop their skills at a higher level or attain a higher-level qualification of which they are capable.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Inadequate

- Too many learners on study programmes do not develop the necessary skills and behaviours or achieve their vocational qualifications to help them be successful in their future learning or employment. Their attendance rate is very low and in a minority of lessons they demonstrate poor punctuality.
- Learners and apprentices do not improve their English and mathematical skills well enough. Apprentices are not challenged to develop new skills beyond their existing attainment or experience. Learners on study programmes do not develop their English and mathematical skills due to low attendance. When learners do attend lessons, tutors help them to develop appropriate technical language skills and mathematical skills within their vocational context. For example, catering learners calculate and adjust ingredients in recipes to prepare larger batches and then use calculators to check their accuracy.
- Personal safety is not understood by apprentices. They do not have a sufficient understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation or extremist behaviours in their locality, due to a lack of training. Conversely, managers and staff ensure that learners on study programmes have a good understanding of personal safety, e-safety, bullying and the risks associated with extremist behaviours and radicalisation. Managers and staff have introduced a range of resources and measure the impact that these have in raising learners' understanding and awareness, providing additional training where needed.
- Apprentices do not receive effective careers advice and guidance to help them plan their longer-term career goals. Too few progress to higher-level apprenticeships. However,

staff use their partnerships with local Connexions advisers to ensure that learners who remain on their study programmes receive individual expert careers guidance to help them plan their next steps. Current learners know what they want to progress to next and what they need to do to achieve this.

- Managers and staff use their range of external partnerships effectively to provide good pastoral support for learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, many of whom face significant barriers to learning. Learners benefit from the range of support they receive such as local mental health services, sexual health screening, substance misuse support, housing and domestic violence services. This help keeps learners healthy and safe, both physically and emotionally.
- Learners on study programmes participate in a range of enrichment activities that enable them to experience and value the diverse society in Britain, and raise their understanding of ethical issues. For example, learners participate in a range of community projects and other charitable events such as World AIDS Day, the collection of food for the local foodbank and fundraising for the repair of a school roof in Uganda. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of fundamental British values. They behave well in all areas of the training centre and demonstrate respect and tolerance for each other, their tutors and their learning environment.
- Managers have ensured that since the previous inspection the number of study programme learners who participate and benefit from external work experience and work-related activities has increased. As a result, a higher proportion now progress to further study or employment.

## Outcomes for learners

## Inadequate

- Achievement rates are low for 16 to 19 study programme learners and apprentices. For apprentices, who account for the vast majority of the providers' learning programmes, achievement rates declined in 2016/17 and were below that of similar providers. According to the provider's data for this current year, the proportion of apprentices who have achieved their qualifications within their planned end date has declined significantly. Currently, too many apprentices are making slow or very slow progress towards achieving their qualifications by their planned end date.
- Despite the very low achievement rates in 2016/17 for apprentices in business, administration and law, leaders and managers have significantly increased the number of apprentices in this subject area this year. Current apprentices in this subject continue to make slow progress.
- Apprentices aged over 19 who are enrolled with prior extensive knowledge and skills in the industry in which they work do not acquire substantial new learning of vocational skills or knowledge. By contrast, the small proportion of apprentices aged 16 to 19 do acquire new skills and knowledge.
- Too many 16 to 19 study programme learners leave their programme early and do not achieve their main vocational qualification. According to the provider's data for this current year, the proportion who have left before achieving their vocational qualification has reduced, but overall retention of learners on the programme remains low. Of those learners who, at the time of inspection, remained on their study programme, the majority



were making slow progress and were not on target to achieve their core vocational qualification.

- The proportion of 16 to 19 study programme learners who achieved their GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics improved in 2016/17 but remains too low. Too many learners make slow progress in developing their English and mathematical skills due to very low attendance. In 2016/17 the proportion of learners who achieved entry-level functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics was low. However, the achievement of level 2 functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics improved and was above that of similar providers. Few apprentices progress to English or mathematics functional skills qualifications beyond the level required for the achievement of their framework.
- The standards of work produced by learners on study programmes meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Learners who attend regularly enjoy their learning. They develop good practical vocational skills and technical subject knowledge. The vast majority of 16 to 19 study programme learners who stay to the end of their programme achieve their vocational qualification.
- In 2016/17 three quarters of 16 to 19 study programme learners who successfully completed their course progressed to further study or employment. According to the provider's data for this current year, progression to positive destinations has improved, with four fifths of learners progressing to employment or further study.
- Managers do not monitor or evaluate the destinations of apprentices. They do not know what impact the achievement of their qualifications has on apprentices in terms of their progression within their chosen careers or employment.

## Types of provision

### 16 to 19 study programmes

### Inadequate

- At the time of inspection there were 104 learners aged 16 to 19 following study programmes across a range of vocational subject areas, including construction, manufacturing, media, catering, sport, hairdressing and beauty therapy. The vast majority of learners are working towards level 1 and level 2 vocational qualifications.
- Leaders and managers do not plan study programmes so that all learners have highly individualised programmes that meet their specific needs. For too many learners, many of whom have significant barriers to learning and very low prior attainment, programmes do not help prepare them for their next steps or future employment.
- Too many learners do not receive appropriate impartial advice and guidance when choosing their study programme. The proportion of learners who do not stay on their programme and complete their vocational qualification is too high. While the proportion remaining on their learning programme has improved in this current year, according to the provider's data, approximately one quarter of learners have already left their study programme early and not achieved their vocational qualification.
- Tutors do not make enough use of the information available on learners' prior attainment to plan lessons so that the most able are challenged and the less able can make the progress of which they are capable. Tutors do not check learners' understanding



sufficiently. They do not provide learners with activities that help them to consolidate their learning when they are not able to recall previously taught knowledge. As a result, too many learners make slow progress from their starting points.

- Managers' actions to improve learners' attendance and punctuality have not been successful. Learners' attendance is very low. According to the provider's data, nearly half of learners do not attend lessons. This was considerably lower during the inspection. Low attendance and poor punctuality hinder the progress that learners make and do not help learners develop the skills and behaviours needed to be successful in future employment.
- Learners who attend regularly develop their practical skills and knowledge well. For example, level 2 hairdressing learners are able to demonstrate skills in sectioning and applying hair colour, working on paying clients in the salon. They can articulate their knowledge, use appropriate technical language and demonstrate good customer service skills.
- Tutors in practical sessions provide effective feedback which helps learners make swift improvements in the development of their skills. For example, construction tutors provide useful hints and tips that help learners develop accuracy when measuring windowsills to ensure that the sills fit securely.
- Managers and staff provide good pastoral support for learners. They place a high priority on the well-being of learners and work with a range of partners to ensure that learners are supported with the challenges they face in their lives. Learners feel safe. They know to whom and how to report any concerns they have. Learners demonstrate a good understanding and awareness of risks, including those associated with extremist behaviours and radicalisation.
- Since the previous inspection the number of learners who participate in relevant work experience and work-related activities has increased. Learners value the skills they gain from these activities, which help them gain confidence in preparation for the workplace. However, a few learners are not adequately prepared for the workplace and have had their placements terminated for poor attendance and punctuality.

## Apprenticeships

## Inadequate

- TVC has 933 apprentices studying on apprenticeship frameworks. Of these, 800 are on programmes in manufacturing technologies for the glass industry, and 133 are in business, administration and law. Around two thirds are enrolled on level 2 apprenticeships and the remainder are on level 3 programmes. Apprenticeships are provided across England.
- Too many current apprentices are making slow or very slow progress. They are unable to complete the apprenticeship by the planned end date due to weak management of the programme and poor teaching, learning and assessment. A significant number of apprentices have not completed their apprenticeship within the planned time.
- Leaders' and managers' strategic and operational management of the apprenticeship provision is inadequate, and the principles and requirements of apprenticeships are not being met. Most apprentices do not receive their entitlement to off-the-job training. Assessors' contact with apprentices is minimal, infrequent and cursory and the vast

majority of apprentices do not develop substantial new skills, knowledge or behaviours as part of their apprenticeship.

- Managers and staff have poor relationships with employers. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the initial or ongoing planning of apprenticeship programmes, which results in apprentices not receiving sufficient support and guidance. A significant number of apprentices have had lengthy, enforced breaks in their learning because of the shortage of assessors, while some assessors have struggled to gain access to apprentices due to poor relationships with employers. As a result of these failings, most apprentices have not completed their qualifications in the planned time.
- On the infrequent occasions when assessments are completed at the start of the programme, tutors and assessors do not use these results to plan effective learning. They merely accredit existing skills and competencies instead of developing new ones. Many highly skilled fenestration apprentices have worked in the sector for many years and do not see the benefit of completing an apprenticeship. A few do not realise they are apprentices; others have left the programme over 12 months ago, but the provider is unaware of their exit.
- Assessors do not use their extensive knowledge and experience to plan or monitor the progress that apprentices make on their programmes well enough. They place a disproportionate focus on assessment before the apprentice has received any training. Progress reviews by assessors are infrequent, and in most cases inaccurate; as a result, apprentices do not know the progress they are making towards completing their qualification. Many fenestration apprentices identify that the only new aspects that they learn are about are updated building regulations and health and safety requirements.
- Tutors and assessors place insufficient attention on developing apprentices' English, mathematical and where appropriate, information and communication technology skills. Too often training and assessment in English and mathematics are too late in the apprenticeship programme. Many apprentices see the development of these skills as irrelevant and unnecessary.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	54947
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2,100
Principal/CEO	Edward Stopforth
Telephone number	0151 944 1744
Website	<a href="http://www.vcoll.ac.uk">www.vcoll.ac.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	47	3	52	5	5	2	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	56	557	1	319	–	–		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	1		–		1			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Elaine Price, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Cocker	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Machell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Charles Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Alastair Mollon	Ofsted Inspector
Ralph Brompton	Ofsted Inspector
Shahram Safavi	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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