Worcester College of Technology
Inspection report

Unique reference number:	130712
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Information about the provider

1. Worcester College of Technology is a large further and higher education college. It operates from three sites in the city of Worcester and has a construction centre in Malvern seven miles away. Most of its provision is vocational education and training. The college's mission is to provide 'outstanding learning for successful lives'. Within eight miles of Worcester, there is a sixth form college, an academy with a sixth form and one general further education college.

2. The college has provision in fourteen subject areas, the largest of which are preparation for life and work, retail and commercial enterprise and engineering and manufacturing technologies. Courses are offered from entry level to higher education, but most learners study at intermediate and advanced levels. Approximately 4,000 learners are on full-time courses of whom 1,070 learners are on apprenticeship programmes and 760 are on workplace learning provision. Just over 2,000 learners attend part-time courses, of whom about 1,470 are adults. The college leads, and is a partner in, a large consortium of subcontracted training providers which offers apprenticeships and workplace learning in most subject areas. The college receives approximately two thirds of its funding, for the provision inspected, from the Education Funding Agency and one third from the Skills Funding Agency.

3. The proportion of college learners from Worcester is approximately half. The proportions of learners living in the areas of the greatest multiple deprivation are low. Approximately 90% of learners are from a White background and learners from Pakistani and Caribbean backgrounds form the largest minority ethnic groups. The proportion of female learners is about half. In Worcester, the proportion of young people who gain five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics is 54%, which is just above the national average.

4. Inspectors collected evidence from most parts of the college and inspected six subject areas in depth. These included learner responsive provision in: health, social care and childcare; literacy, numeracy and functional skills; provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; business management, accounting and finance. They also included work-based provision in: engineering and manufacturing technologies; business, administration and law.

5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
   - JTL
   - Kidderminster College
   - Hereford College of Technology
   - Worcestershire County Council
   - HGTA and WGTA

- Gloucester Group Training
- Construction Skills (C-Skills)

6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
   - The Three Counties Consortium
   - Yeovil Foyer Futures
   - YMCA Worcester

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	331 part-time learners
Further education (16 to18)	1,951 full-time learners 209 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including Entry to Employment	319 full-time learners 90 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	491 full-time learners 1,874 part-time learners
Employer provision: National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the workplace* Apprenticeships	1,800 learners 1,592 apprentices
Adult and community learning	808 learners

*formerly Train to Gain

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3

Capacity to improve	Grade 3

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
College-based provision	
Health, social care and childcare	3
Literacy, numeracy and functional skills	4
Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2
Business management, accountancy and finance	3
Work-based provision	
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

7.   Worcester College of Technology is a satisfactory college. The proportion of learners achieving their qualifications is just below average on long courses but is low on short courses. Learners from minority ethnic backgrounds are often less successful, but college data indicate that this situation appears to be improving. Most learners make the progress expected of them. Apprenticeships and NVQs in the workplace delivered by the college and its consortium of training providers are good. Most of the learners on these programmes achieve the qualifications they set out to obtain and do so within the expected timescale. Learners on both college-based and consortium-based programmes enjoy their learning and feel very safe. They develop good skills and

confidence. Most lessons are satisfactory for college learners but they are good for workplace learners. Assessment is satisfactory in both situations, and most teachers provide helpful and prompt feedback to learners to help them improve. The wide range of courses meets the needs of learners and employers very well. The college works extremely well with other partners. This benefits learners in improving their employability skills and is also especially supportive for vulnerable learners. Learners receive good care, guidance and support to help them stay on course.

8. The leadership and management of the college and of the consortium are satisfactory. Governors give a high priority to improving the quality of learners' experiences. They, and managers ask for and act on learners' views in order to improve the quality of provision for learners. Managers promote a safe environment for their learners. They also promote equality and diversity, but teachers often fail to reinforce these matters in lessons and training sessions sufficiently. Learners benefit from good specialist resources and equipment.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Long course success rates have increased to just below average, but short course rates have decreased and are low. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 are high at foundation level, but are low at advanced level. Success rates for adults have increased significantly at advanced level but are low at intermediate level.

- Managers have narrowed the gap between the success rates of female and male learners aged 16 to 18 very effectively. However, the success rates of female adult learners compared with male adults and of adult learners from a minority ethnic background compared with adults from a White British background are low.

- Functional skills success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 decreased considerably last year and are very low, especially at foundation level, where they are the lowest for some time. College data indicate that the actions taken to improve provision are resulting in better outcomes, albeit for a relatively small number of learners.

- Success rates for apprenticeship programmes have increased over three years and are high. They are outstanding in business, administration and law for the third consecutive year. Despite increases in engineering success rates over this time, they remain low for the few apprentices involved in 2010/11. Success rates for NVQs in the workplace have increased over time and they are above average.

- Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory overall, but are good for work-based learners. Learning resources are good, especially the content and use of the virtual learning environment. Learners learn well when fully engaged in interesting activities and challenging discussions. Teachers check on and extend learners' learning skilfully. In the less effective lessons, teachers dominate and fail to check learning sufficiently.

■ Teachers and tutors have detailed group profiles of learners' individual abilities and needs and good access to learners' individual learning plans. Too many teachers, however, do not use them effectively to agree academic targets or plan appropriate activities to enable all learners to progress and achieve to the best of their abilities.

■ The outcomes of the college's internal lesson observation system are too generous and teachers' development needs are not always identified clearly. Managers are aware of these issues and are developing a more rigorous procedure for next year. The findings made by college observers in joint lesson observations during inspection are mostly valid and their gradings are mostly accurate.

■ The provision is good at meeting the needs and interests of learners. A very wide range of courses is offered at all levels, including for more vulnerable learners. Short courses to prepare learners for apprenticeships meet employers' needs well. Opportunities for college-based learners to develop their employability are increasing but not all full-time learners benefit from real work experience.

■ Partnership arrangements are outstanding. Staff work very effectively with a wide range of organisations to enable the most vulnerable learners to access training. Increasing numbers of learners aged 14 to 16 follow college courses. Most areas have excellent links with employers that improve provision. Partnerships with a range of higher-education institutions enable good progression opportunities in most areas.

■ Care, guidance and support are good. Initiatives to ensure learners are on the right course have improved in-year retention. It is too early to judge their impact on achievement. While support enables good outcomes for most learners with disabilities and/or specific difficulties, it is less effective for functional skills learners. The learning targets written within additional learning support plans lack detail and are monitored infrequently.

■ Leadership and management are satisfactory for college-based and work-based learning. Governors set a clear mission which is communicated well to all staff. They support and challenge senior managers very effectively and encourage them to improve the quality of provision. Teachers are well qualified, specialist resources are good and accommodation is satisfactory.

■ The college self-assessment report is detailed and comprehensive, but many of its judgements are optimistic. The views of external stakeholders are underused in self-assessment. Development planning has not consistently led to improvement. The self-assessment of the work-based learning consortium is underdeveloped.

■ The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners value highly the culture of mutual respect evident in college life. The promotion of equality and diversity in both college lessons and work-based learning reviews, however, is underdeveloped. Many teachers and work-based reviewers miss too many opportunities to develop learners' understanding of cultural diversity and equalities. The promotion of safeguarding is good.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■ Increase success rates on advanced-level courses for learners aged 16 to 18, on intermediate-level courses for adult learners and on short courses by improving the use of individual learning plans and by setting appropriate academic targets.

■ Increase the success rates of adult female learners and adult learners from minority ethnic backgrounds by analysing the key factors which disaffect them. Use this analysis to inform appropriate actions that will help to sustain their interest, enable them to make progress and achieve well.

■ Increase functional skills success rates, especially at foundation level, by ensuring that lessons relate to learners' interests and are at the appropriate level for them and that learners are encouraged and inspired to achieve.

■ Increase the rigour of lesson observations and of the moderation of their outcomes so that managers have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. Provide support to teachers promptly and share good practice widely in order to increase the proportion of good lessons.

■ Encourage teachers to use a wide range of interesting learning activities which meet the needs and abilities of their learners. Improve their use of effective questioning to check learning has occurred and to involve and challenge all learners to make rapid progress and reach their potential.

■ Increase the rigour and relevance of the learning targets written in additional learning support plans and the frequency with which they are reviewed, so that learners are motivated to work towards achievable but demanding aims which aid their learning and accelerate their progress.

■ Develop the formal and systematic methods to capture the views of external stakeholders in order to inform the self-assessment and development planning processes. In particular, improve the rigour of the self-assessment and action planning of the work-based learning consortium provision.

■ Increase the awareness and ability of teachers and trainers to know how best to promote equality and diversity in lessons and in work-based reviews and to optimise naturally occurring opportunities. Improve the monitoring of this aspect to ensure that all learners are aware of equality and cultural diversity.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors
What learners like:
■ the approachable and supportive tutors, teachers and assessors

■ the facilities and resources, including the study centres, which support their learning well

■ opportunities to gain qualifications in response to their needs

- opportunities to gain work-based qualifications and develop skills in the workplace

- pastoral support that keeps them on track and helps them progress

- the safe college environment.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the lack of availability of car parking spaces

- not being informed when lessons have to be changed.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- how well the college meets their training needs

- the working relationship between them and the college

- the quality of tutors and assessors

- the response by the college to ensure that training does not impact adversely on their day-to-day operations

- the advice and guidance provided on future training.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the communication and support they receive from the college

- their insufficient involvement in the reviews of learners' progress

- the links between training at work and in college.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement
Grade 3

9. Overall improvements in learners' outcomes since the last inspection have been modest, but the rate of improvement in 2010/11 was more significant. The overall effectiveness of the work-based learning provision has improved and is now good. The overall effectiveness of most subject areas, however, has remained satisfactory or has declined from good to satisfactory. The college has not resolved all the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The retention rates of learners aged 16 to 18 have improved and are average. The accessibility to, and analysis of, management information have improved.

10. Inspection findings disagree with the self-assessment judgements on several key aspects, including capacity to improve, quality of provision, leadership and management, self assessment and equality and diversity. Self-assessment judgements are optimistic. Internal lesson observation grades are also optimistic. The effectiveness of improvement planning remains inconsistent and one area inspected is inadequate. Recently introduced changes to curriculum management and quality assurance systems indicate improvements and in-year college data indicate increases in retention rates. Nevertheless, it is too early to judge the impact on learners' outcomes. The college mission and strategic aims are clear and well communicated. Partnership arrangements are outstanding and lead to significant benefits for learners. Staff are well qualified, specialist facilities are good and accommodation is satisfactory.

Outcomes for learners
Grade 3

11. Long course success rates have increased over the last three years but are just below average. Short course success rates have decreased during this time and are very low. Long course success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have increased significantly in the last three years and are just below average. They are above average at foundation level, but are below at advanced level which accounts for over a third of the provision. Most pass rates are close to average, but retention rates at intermediate and advanced levels are below average. Long course success rates for adults have not improved over three years and are below average. At advanced level they have increased significantly to be average, but at intermediate level they are low, due to the low pass rate.

12. The AS- and A-level success rates for adults have increased significantly and are high, whereas for learners aged 16 to 18 they are just below average. In-year college data indicate increased retention rates, compared with the same time in previous years. The proportions of high grades achieved have increased. They are high for adults and on GCSE courses, but are below average for learners aged 16 to 18. Most advanced-level learners make satisfactory progress. Success rates for learners aged 14 to 16 on vocational courses are high and their progression rates to college courses have increased.

13. Staff have narrowed the gap between the success rates of female and male learners aged 16 to 18 successfully, but the success rates of female adult learners are below those of male adults and are low. Managers have not increased the low success rates of learners from many minority ethnic backgrounds compared with those of learners from White British backgrounds, especially for adult learners, although college data for in-year retention rates indicate an improved picture. Success rates of adult learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are higher than those for other learners, but for learners aged 16 to 18 they are lower. Success rates for learners receiving additional learning support are higher than for those not receiving support.

14. Functional skills success rates for adults increased to just above average in 2010/11, whereas those for learners aged 16 to 18 decreased significantly and are very low, especially at foundation level. College in-year data indicate improved outcomes. Skills for Life success rates are low. High success rates in 2010/11 for apprenticeship programmes have followed a three year upward trend. They are outstanding in business, administration and law for the third consecutive year. Despite increases in engineering success rates over this time, they remain low for the few apprentices involved in 2010/11. Success rates on NVQs in the workplace have also increased significantly and are above average.

15. The standard of most college-based learners' work is at least satisfactory. Work-based learners acquire good standards of practical skills. For some, these are well above normal industry requirements, reflecting the high calibre of their employment. All learners develop good skills and confidence. Attendance during inspection is low. Punctuality is satisfactory. Learners enjoy their learning and college life and feel very safe in their environment. Consortium learners feel safe in their workplaces and in training sessions. They use safe working practices which reflect good industry and commercial standards. The development of college-based learners' economic and social well-being is satisfactory. They receive very good information about their health and well-being. They make a very good contribution to the college community. Their participation in activities to promote community cohesion is satisfactory but their involvement in sustainability projects is underdeveloped.

The quality of provision   Grade 3

16. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory for college-based learners and good for work-based learners. Inspectors agree with the college's judgement that too many lessons for college-based learners remain satisfactory. Although inspectors observed a few outstanding lessons, too many lessons were satisfactory or worse. Most teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects, and provide good support and encouragement to their learners. In many lessons, learning objectives and expected outcomes are clearly expressed, but in a few cases, objectives are just a list of activities which do not link to learning.

17. When teaching is good or better, learners engage in interesting activities that have been carefully planned by teachers to respond to individual needs. Teachers challenge learners frequently by using directed and extended questioning to check and develop their knowledge and understanding. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not plan effectively to stimulate high levels of learner involvement, aspiration and attainment and learning activities are undemanding. Learning is not checked, and questioning techniques are ineffective in challenging learners.

18. In the current year, managers have introduced a revised lesson observation scheme which focuses more on the extent of learning and learners' progress. It also leads to comprehensive support for teachers whose lessons are judged less than good. Nevertheless, effective observation practice has not yet been embedded and lesson observation outcomes are generous in too many cases. Managers are fully aware of this, are taking action to remedy it. Key findings by college observers in most joint observations during inspection correlated very closely with those of inspectors.

19. Although teachers have detailed records of learners' prior attainment and aptitudes, they do not always use these effectively to plan lessons to cater for the needs of individual learners. The introduction of electronic individual learning plans has begun to enable more incisive early intervention to manage learners' underperformance. Target setting for individual learners, however, is not used consistently to raise aspiration and optimise attainment. Not all learners know how well they are doing and few staff consistently set learners short-term targets about what they need to do to improve their progress.

20. Learning resources in the college, and those provided by work-based consortium partners, are good. Most teachers and trainers use them effectively to enhance learning. The virtual learning environment (VLE) is well-developed to support and extend learning and many teachers are moving rapidly beyond providing text-based material into more interactive and multi-media resources. Where learners make good progress, teachers often use information and learning technology (ILT) well to enhance learning.

21. Assessment practices across the college and for work-based learners are satisfactory. Most teachers provide timely and constructive feedback to learners on their work. Not all learners, however, are given clear and helpful guidance on how to improve the standard of their work and make better progress. Arrangements for internal verification are well organised. Equality and diversity aspects are included in schemes of work and lesson plans, but too few teachers and work-based reviewers take advantage of opportunities in lessons to promote equality and cultural diversity.

22. Provision to meet the needs of users is good. The range of courses and progression routes across most subject areas is very wide. An extensive and developing curriculum is offered to meet the needs of more vulnerable learners.

Courses are offered flexibly to meet the needs of learners and employers. For example, the college offers short courses to prepare learners for study and training before they start their apprenticeship programmes. Employers' views are considered fully in areas such as hospitality and catering and ensure learners are prepared for local employment opportunities. While learners have increasing opportunities to develop employability skills through course-based projects, work-related visits and through the college's realistic work environments, not all learners have opportunities to undertake work experience to enhance their career and progression prospects. Learners' involvement in enrichment is satisfactory.

23. Partnership work is outstanding. A very extensive range of partnerships enables the college to support learners, especially the most vulnerable, very effectively. Links with a very wide range of community and employer organisations support curriculum development very effectively to ensure that courses meet learners' specific needs, such as acquired brain injury, autism and mental health. Outstanding relationships with local schools through an active consortium arrangement result in increasing numbers of learners aged 14 to 16 accessing college courses with high progression to college provision thereafter. Strong and increasing partnerships with higher education institutions provide progression routes across many subject areas, including for work-based learning. The contribution the college makes in partnership and work-based consortium arrangements is valued very highly by the partners themselves. The college prepares learners interested in apprenticeships thoroughly for interviews with employer partners.

24. Care, guidance and support are good. A more rigorous approach to ensuring the right student is on the right course is resulting in increased retention on targeted programmes such as GCE A level. New tutorial arrangements for full-time learners are ensuring a greater consistency of approach across subject areas. Frequent progress reviews keep learners on track to meet their targets. Managers monitor the impact of these new arrangements closely, although it is too early to judge their impact on improving learners' achievement. Personal learning coaches support learners effectively by motivating them to improve their attendance and achieve agreed targets. Parents and carers are informed appropriately through college events and by reporting of learners' progress.

25. Learners' support needs on college-based and work-based courses are identified promptly and are informed well by the information received through the very effective partnership arrangements with feeder schools and agencies. Timely support is put in place which leads to good outcomes for learners with specific difficulties and disabilities, such as those with mental health needs, more vulnerable learners and those in local authority care. Learners receiving functional skills support attain lower success rates than those who do not receive support. On work-based courses learners value highly the support they receive from both assessors and their employers. The college's observation process does not determine the quality of support sessions. Learners' targets within additional support plans and the frequency with which they are reviewed

are insufficiently helpful in informing learners of what they need to do to improve and to accelerate their progress.

26. Welfare support to develop learners' health and well-being is good for college-based learners. The diverse range of campaigns and activities, such as 'Set 4 Success' on employability skills, the sexual health advice and guidance week and 'Be Safe at Festivals' on staying safe and healthy outside college, benefit learners considerably. Participation rates are high. The most vulnerable learners benefit particularly from support provided by the welfare team, including from specialists on domestic abuse and on homeless young people.

Leadership and management   Grade 3

27. Leaders and mangers raise expectations and promote ambition satisfactorily. Curriculum management has recently been changed to drive improvement in college-based learners' outcomes, which have fluctuated since the last inspection. The college leads, and is a major delivery partner within, a large consortium of providers of work-based learning programmes. Partnership success rates have increased. New management, staffing and delivery models have been introduced for functional skills courses to address poor learners' outcomes. Recent improvements in access to data about learners' attendance, retention and success rates enable managers to focus more closely on improvements. A revised appraisal scheme is about to be launched with an increased focus on target setting. It is too early to judge the full impact of these initiatives on learners' outcomes.

28. Governance is good. Governors focus effectively on improving the learners' experience and on preparing learners to lead successful lives. They explore new strategic directions and partnership opportunities proactively. Governors use their skills and experience to challenge and support senior managers to improve learners' outcomes and experience. They are seeking to diversify their membership to address the current gender and ethnicity imbalance. The corporation fulfils its statutory responsibilities for overseeing safeguarding and equality and diversity effectively.

29. Safeguarding arrangements are good, particularly for vulnerable learners. Staff assess the risks associated with activities and work placements effectively. Learners practice good standards of health and safety, resulting in few accidents. Assessors of work-based learners, however, miss opportunities to reinforce safeguarding during reviews. The college meets its legal requirements. Clear and appropriate strategies and policies are in place and Criminal Records Bureau checks are made appropriately. A large and appropriately trained safeguarding team responds efficiently to learners' personal safety needs. All staff are trained and regularly updated on safeguarding arrangements. The college works very effectively and proactively with the Local Safeguarding Children Board, helping to shape practice with regard to the safeguarding of adolescents.

30. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners value the culture of respect at the college. The promotion of equality of diversity in college lessons and in work-based delivery, however, is underdeveloped. Managers are proactive in seeking ways to attract and support disadvantaged learners. The single equality scheme covers necessary legislation and is regularly monitored by senior managers and governors. Procedures for monitoring the impact of policies on staff and learners are satisfactory. Managers have addressed certain differences in outcomes between different groups but not others.

31. Engagement with users to support improvement is good. The college captures the views of learners and employers effectively, and addresses their suggestions for improvements promptly. Course representatives collect and communicate the views of their peers at meetings with college managers, and through regular learners' surveys. Learners are appreciative of the opportunities they have to engage directly with governors, and praise the response to issues they raise, for example enabling the provision of extra printing resources and resolving concerns regarding accommodation. Employers contribute helpfully to course delivery by assisting with assessment and influencing the design and development of courses. The full-time Student Union sabbatical officer and the dedicated Student Union social space have resulted in demonstrable benefits to learners. For example, for the first time learners have set up and run social groups for others such as the Christian Union.

32. The effectiveness of self-assessment to improve the quality of provision is satisfactory. The self-assessment report is comprehensive and detailed. Inspection judgements indicate that managers over estimated several key aspects of the provision. Development plans have had variable impact on the quality of provision. They have improved the overall effectiveness of a few subject areas, but areas of persistent underperformance remain, such as functional skills. The sharing of good practice is underdeveloped. The views of stakeholders such as consortium partners are not formally captured and used to inform planning, although the college is very responsive to their informal feedback. The self-assessment of consortium provision and subsequent improvement planning are areas for development.

33. Financial management is good and risk management is effective in identifying and mitigating against key risks, such as decreasing levels of learners' enrolments. Managers have taken appropriate steps to improve the college's environmental sustainability. Learners benefit from good specialist resources and equipment and satisfactory accommodation. Most teachers are teacher trained or are working towards appropriate qualifications and have good academic and vocational qualifications and experience. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Value for money is satisfactory.

Subject areas

Health, social care and childcare   Grade 3

Context

34. Provision consists of full-time and part-time courses from foundation level to higher education. Of the 630 learners, 510 are on full-time and 120 are on part-time courses. Approximately 480 are aged 16 to 18, and 150 are adults. Nearly 90% of learners are female, and 5% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A range of additional qualifications such as paediatric first aid, safeguarding young children, counselling and aromatherapy is available.

Key findings

■ Learners' outcomes are satisfactory. Success rates on most courses are around national averages, but success rates on advanced-level courses, especially in early years, are very low. College in-year retention data indicate increased rates.

■ Learners enjoy their studies and feel safe in the college environment. Incidents of bullying or harassment are very rare and are dealt with effectively by managers. Courses are designed well to promote heath and well-being, especially in early years. Learners make a satisfactory contribution within the local community through their involvement in charity fundraising.

■ Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, examples used from the workplace relate practice to theory effectively. Staff use information from initial diagnostic assessment and targets well to inform planning. Learners develop satisfactory levels of knowledge and skills that they apply well in lessons and in their work placements.

■ In the less effective lessons, teachers do not motivate learners sufficiently and learners do not make good progress. Teachers rarely challenge learners who arrive late. Although the courses lend themselves well to the promotion of equality and diversity, teachers often miss opportunities to relate lesson topics to equality and diversity matters.

■ On-line resources and the virtual learning environment (VLE) are underdeveloped. VLE sites are in place but most teachers do not populate these or encourage learners to access them. Many electronic resources are available to teachers, but learners do not benefit from the use of such materials.

■ Teachers track learners' progress effectively and this supports the new tutorial arrangements well. Mechanisms for attendance monitoring are in place, but this has had little effect so far on improving learners' poor attendance.

■ The range of provision is wide and meets learners' needs well. Clear progression routes exist through all levels. Induction involves diagnostic tests of learners' skills which inform their suitability for courses appropriately. Employers are involved effectively in planning work placements for learners, but the

quality assurance of work placements is insufficient. Learners' participation in curriculum enrichment activities is low.

■ Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners benefit from effective personal support. Tutorials are used to monitor progress well and provide learners with opportunities to explore matters of concern. Career progression advice and guidance are good, but the use of employers to contribute to learners' understanding of employment is low.

■ Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers are active in raising ambitions and expectations, but have judged overall effectiveness of this area as only satisfactory for three years. The observation of teaching and learning process and follow-up support aid the improvement of teaching practice. Teachers are very supportive of managers and are committed to quality improvement, but they are unaware of the success rate targets for the courses they teach.

■ The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The area provides a harmonious and inclusive environment, but teachers do not do enough in lessons to encourage students to consider and value different cultures and beliefs. The success rates for learners with declared disabilities are lower than those for learners without declared disabilities.

■ Resources to support teaching and learning, especially in childcare, and the sharing of good practice are good. Students gain from good use of ILT, such as interactive whiteboards. They improve the skills they need for the workplace by using the crafts room and nursery facility.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■ Increase the success rates for all learners, especially those identified as at risk of underperforming and those on advanced-level courses, by setting challenging targets for learners, teachers and courses, and by rigorous monitoring of progress against these targets.

■ Increase staff's awareness of, and ability to use, on-line resources and the VLE so that learners benefit from wider perspectives and learning methods to aid their understanding.

■ Enhance learners' understanding of equality and diversity by developing teachers' awareness of equality and diversity and their confidence to promote and reinforce key messages in lessons whenever appropriate opportunities arise.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies - work-based provision

Grade 3

Context

35. The college works with many partners to offer engineering, manufacturing and motor vehicle maintenance provision. Around 80% of learners are on intermediate-level programmes. Currently there are 400 apprentices and 130 learners taking NVQs in the workplace. About 40% of apprentices follow a motor-vehicle maintenance course. All other learners are studying engineering or manufacturing courses. Most learners are adults and around 15% are female. The college and its consortium of subcontracted partners deliver the provision.

Key findings

■ Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates for the small number of apprenticeships have increased over the previous three years, but are very low. Success rates on NVQs in the workplace are high. Three quarters of learners now follow apprenticeship programmes. College in-year data indicate continued increases in outcomes for apprentices.

■ The standard of learners' work is satisfactory. In a few cases, learners produce high quality practical work. Learners have good opportunities to develop and acquire high levels of competence. For many learners, however, their written portfolios are standardised documents that conform to awarding body requirements but which often fail to demonstrate learners' full achievements.

■ Learners say they feel safe. There is a strong focus on the development of safe working practices particularly in the workplace. Many workplaces have very stringent safety practices, which learners readily adopt. Learners speak with confidence about safety and are able to challenge unsafe practices. Assessors reinforce learners' awareness of health and safety regularly and effectively.

■ Teaching and learning are good. Tutors plan sessions very well and make excellent use of resources, including ILT and engineering components, to illustrate key learning points. Although many tutors make good use of directed questions to engage learners, a few lack the skills to manage learning and minor disruptions.

■ Assessment practices are satisfactory. Assessment and verification meet awarding body requirements and enable learners to demonstrate their skills and understanding. Assessment and teaching and learning practices vary significantly between consortium members leading to very varied learners' experiences which impact negatively on the progress that learners make.

■ The reviews of learners' progress are ineffective. Reviews generally lack sufficient detailed information on learners' progress. They do not result in clear and detailed targets to guide future learning and evidence gathering. Limited

questioning fails to develop learner's understanding of health and safety sufficiently or promote equality and diversity in a workplace context adequately.

- Programmes meet the needs of users satisfactorily. Programmes are mostly at intermediate level, providing limited progression opportunities. The college's ambition is to grow the provision to include advanced apprenticeships and progression to higher level qualifications. Learners greatly appreciate the opportunities to improve their qualifications and employability.

- The college makes good use of partnerships with a wide range of providers to deliver and support engineering programmes covering a wide geographical area and a breadth of disciplines. Partnership with employers for the college-based provision is productive. Workplace assessors form very effective working relationships with employers and integrate well into companies.

- Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed early in their courses and these diagnoses lead to the provision of appropriate support. Learners value the support the assessors provide and recognise its contribution to improving their achievements. Advice and guidance are helpful and inform learners of course expectations and assessment practices. They are less useful in informing learners about progression opportunities.

- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have a clear vision for the quality of the provision and set demanding targets for both subcontracted provision and in-house delivery. They use data effectively to monitor the performance of the subcontracted provision and ensure compliance with the contractual arrangements.

- Equality and diversity are satisfactory. They are promoted during induction satisfactorily. Progress reviews, however, do not develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity in the workplace sufficiently. Lesson planning fails to identify, and teaching fails to promote aspects of equality and diversity sufficiently.

- Staff meet regularly and use data effectively to monitor the performance of the provision. Results of learners' surveys are used and interventions are made when issues are raised. However, a self-assessment report has not been produced and staff and managers have not made overall judgements about core aspects of the provision or the overall learners' experience.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

- Increase apprenticeship success rates by improving the quality of learners' progress reviews and target setting.

- Improve assessment and teaching and learning practices to ensure a greater consistency of learners' experience and challenge. Enable greater sharing of the good practices identified in assessment within the subcontractors.

- Increase staff's ability to plan for and implement the promotion of equality and diversity in training sessions and reviews, so that learners' awareness of such key issues related to employment is increased.

■ Initiate self-assessment processes that focus on the quality of learners' experiences to ensure a greater understanding of core aspects of the programmes and to drive quality improvement, especially in teaching and learning.

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Literacy, numeracy and functional skills Grade 4

Context

36. Literacy and numeracy courses are offered from entry to intermediate levels. Learners on adult literacy and numeracy provision, account for 250 enrolments. Functional skills are available from entry to intermediate levels. Of about 800 enrolments, nearly 90% are aged 16 to 18 and just over half study English. About 40% are female and nearly 12% are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are inadequate. Success rates on most functional skills English and mathematics courses are low, although they are high for the very few learners at entry levels 1 and 2. Success rates for adult literacy and numeracy entry and level 1 programmes are also low, although success rates on the level 1 certificate in adult numeracy have increased.

- Learners make satisfactory progress. Most learners enjoy their programmes. They develop their abilities in functional skills, literacy and numeracy satisfactorily. Learners apply and practise their literacy and numeracy skills in lessons and talk confidently about how they will improve their employability by becoming more proficient in English and mathematics. Attendance rates are very low.

- Learners feel safe and have a satisfactory understanding of keeping safe. They learn about safeguarding at induction. Teachers' reinforcement of safety within lessons, however, is insufficient. Learners have a superficial understanding of equality and diversity matters.

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers deliver lively and well-paced activities. They meet individual learners' needs well by using good differentiated tasks. Teachers check learners' work carefully to ensure progress. In the less successful lessons, teachers use a limited range of strategies and talk excessively. The use of technology to support teaching and learning is underdeveloped.

- Formative assessment by most teachers to check learning is insufficient. In the best lessons, teachers carry out satisfactory assessment practices and provide satisfactory feedback to help learners improve. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not assess learners' progress. The rate of learning is not monitored and recorded routinely by teachers and too much reliance is placed on the outcomes of mock tests and examinations to assess learners' progress.

- The range of provision to meet the needs of most learners is satisfactory. Learners have opportunities to progress between course levels and a small number of learners progress to a higher-level programme.

- Partnerships are satisfactory. The department has built positive relationships with a small number of organisations so that programmes are delivered in the

community. Adult literacy and numeracy programmes are being delivered in a local business, two local primary schools and a children's centre.

■ Learners receive satisfactory support, advice and guidance. Staff have improved the initial assessment process to ensure that each learner's level of study is matched more precisely to assessment results. Additional learning support is satisfactory. A few tutors provide good one-to-one support for learners requiring additional encouragement or tuition towards an examination.

■ Leadership and management are inadequate. Managers have not improved learners' outcomes. New leadership and dedicated delivery teams are in place. Curriculum managers have made significant efforts to improve action planning and to redesign the curriculum and its delivery. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these actions. Most teachers are well qualified and have appropriate specialist qualifications.

■ The promotion of equality and diversity is underdeveloped. Equality and diversity training has taken place for staff and learners receive information and training during induction. Equality and diversity matters, however, are not reinforced effectively in lessons. Teachers do not promote discussions on, or encourage further understanding of, equality and diversity.

■ Quality assurance lacks rigour. Internal lesson observation outcomes are generous. They have too few action points for teachers to reflect on and use for further improvement. The self-assessment report lacks evaluation and is too descriptive. It does not focus sufficiently on specific curriculum areas and judgements made differ from inspection findings.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■ Improve outcomes for learners across functional skills and adult literacy and numeracy programmes by improving assessment and monitoring of learners' progress. Set and review clear and measurable short-term targets for learners to facilitate their progress and achievement.

■ Increase the rigour of the lesson observation process so that staff are more aware of how best to develop their expertise in teaching, learning and assessment.

■ Improve learners' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity matters by encouraging teachers to incorporate appropriate activities into lessons and to make best use of naturally occurring opportunities in lessons.

■ Ensure that the self-assessment report provides managers with a greater understanding of the key areas for improvement and informs a detailed action plan to address the improvements required to the quality of provision and the inadequate outcomes for learners.

Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Grade 2

Context

37. Full-time and part-time courses are offered from entry to intermediate level for about 170 learners. Of these, 82% are adults and 30% attend on a full-time basis. The proportion of male learners is about 60% and approximately 5% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

■ Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are high. Attendance and punctuality are good. Learners make significant progress in developing their communication and social skills. They become more able to manage their anxieties and behaviour. Their confidence increases substantially. Progression to further education or employment is good. Learners improve their economic and social well-being greatly and make good contributions to community life.

■ Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers treat learners with respect and have high expectations of them. Behaviour management is good. Verbal feedback is encouraging. The best lessons are lively and active, with well structured learning activities. Paired work is effective and written feedback is constructive. Learning materials are stimulating and the use of ILT is imaginative.

■ In the few less effective lessons, essential steps to learning are missing and learners have too few practice opportunities before engaging on whole tasks. Extension tasks do not always challenge more able learners. Teachers do not make enough use of opportunities to improve learners' literacy skills.

■ The range of programmes is outstanding. A wide variety of provision gives excellent progression routes from pre-entry to intermediate level. It includes well-designed programmes for visually impaired learners and those with acquired brain injuries. Courses attract large numbers of learners at risk of not being in education, employment or training. Innovative full-time programmes provide local provision for learners previously studying out of the county.

■ Partnerships are outstanding. A wide range of voluntary and statutory partners helps to extend the range of curriculum options, recruit more learners and target specialist areas. Partners support the college very well in refocusing programmes on employment and increasing work placements. Benefits to learners from partnerships include very good opportunities for paid work and access to mentoring.

■ Advice, guidance and support are good. The college supports substantial amounts of successful outreach provision which attract new learners. Support for learners in lessons is very effective. Specialist speech and language therapy support has reduced but it still offers very effective group and individual language development. Specialist support for autistic learners is very good.

Individual mentoring keeps learners who are at risk of failing on track to succeed.

■   Leadership and management are good. Innovative curriculum developments attract and retain learners very successfully. The college has a high profile within the community as a major contributor to local development. The arrangements for safeguarding are very effective in ensuring the safety of vulnerable learners. Value for money is good.

■   Quality improvement is good. The department takes effective action to address areas for development, using feedback from stakeholders as well as from internal observations. Frequent consultations with learners through the college's disability forum take place and these have a positive impact. The self-assessment report is generally accurate but is too discursive. A few lesson observations are graded generously.

■   Equality and diversity are satisfactory. Staff promote learners' understanding of disability rights strongly. A minority of teachers is well-informed and skilled at promoting learners' understanding of sexual diversity, but others are not so well skilled. Staff lack confidence in promoting equality and diversity and matters concerning race and gender do not receive sufficient attention in lessons.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■   Improve the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that the very good practice in teaching within the area is shared amongst all teachers.

■   Improve teachers' confidence in promoting aspects of equality and diversity, in order to equip them better to help learners improve their understanding of equality and diversity matters.

Business management, accountancy and finance   Grade 3

Context

38. Full-time and part-time courses in accounting and business management are offered from foundation level to higher education. Of approximately 330 learners, just over half are adults and just over half are part time. Nearly two thirds of learners are female. Approximately 18% of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

■   Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. The success rate for the level 4 diploma for accounting technicians is outstanding, but that for AS-level accounting is inadequate. The success rate for the national diploma in business is high, whereas that for the national certificate is low. Retention rates have increased over the last three years.

■   Learners enjoy learning. They help each other and gain in confidence and self-esteem. Their progress in class is good. A minority of learners' work is of a high standard including written management reports, marketing evaluations and pie charts. The targets set for about a quarter of business management learners, however, lack sufficient challenge. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory.

■   Most learners progress to further learning and employment. The majority of accountancy learners progress from intermediate level to higher education courses within the college. A minority of A-level business studies learners progress to foundation degree courses and a minority of national diploma learners progress to modern apprenticeships or onto higher education.

■   Learners feel safe. Staff provide a safe learning environment. Access to buildings is controlled and learners not carrying identity cards are challenged. Learners treat each other and their staff with high levels of respect and consideration.

■   Teaching and learning are good. Highly qualified tutors, many of whom have recent industrial experience, use a wide range of interactive resources to engage and inspire learners. Learners participate in lively debates which extend their knowledge and understanding. They access good on-line learning resources which are regularly updated with current vocational material.

■   Initial assessment is thorough and includes diagnostic tests. Learners requiring additional support work effectively with specialist tutors. Learners complete a probationary period to ensure they are on the right course. Functional skills are not yet embedded into the business management vocational curriculum and learners make slow progress in achieving their functional skills qualifications.

■   The qualifications offered are relevant to future employment and progression to higher education. Learners take part in a variety of enrichment activities such as drug awareness and applying for university. There are no formal

arrangements, however, for work experience for business management learners.

■ External partnerships are underdeveloped. An informal arrangement is in place with a retailer for a small minority of business management learners and one local school works with A-level business studies learners. However, no other partnerships with local employers, schools or community groups exist.

■ Support and guidance are satisfactory. Tutors offer individual guidance and support both in and out of lessons. Specialist learning coaches have been introduced to help business management learners improve their knowledge. Learners find it difficult to access information on future career routes.

■ Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are well supported. Managers have the autonomy to implement strategies to improve success and achievement on underperforming courses. The self-assessment report identifies accurately the key areas for improvement, but the quality improvement plan does not specify in enough detail how improvements will be implemented.

■ Arrangements to safeguard learners and the promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Staff are trained appropriately and risk assessments are completed on all relevant activities. Health and safety and equality and diversity are covered thoroughly during learners' induction. Teachers fail to reinforce learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity during lessons sufficiently.

■ The engagement of learners to improve the quality of learning is good. Learners are encouraged to offer their views during lessons and by completing feedback forms on tutorials. Improvements to the business management curriculum have been implemented as a result of learners' feedback.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■ Improve success and achievement rates on underperforming courses and in functional skills by setting more challenging achievement targets for all learners and by rigorous monitoring of their progress against these targets.

■ Develop partnerships with external employers to help learners increase their employability skills and to help them in their decision making about future career choices.

■ Increase the awareness and confidence of teachers so that they use naturally occurring opportunities to promote health and safety and equality and diversity during lessons to best effect.

■ Improve the rigour and detail of the quality improvement plan so that clear and precise targets are set and their achievement monitored frequently to drive improvement.

Business administration and law – work-based provision   Grade 2

Context

39. The college provides apprenticeships in accountancy, business administration, customer service and management. There are currently 610 learners working towards qualifications in business administration and law. Of these, approximately 90 are on NVQs in the workplace and 520 are apprentices. Of the apprentices, about 330 are registered with subcontractors, 16% are aged 16 to 18 and 60% are female.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates for NVQs in the workplace have increased and are above the national average. The overall success rates for apprentices are outstanding and have been so for three years.

- Most learners who complete their programmes do so within the agreed timescales. The proportions of learners who complete their programmes within the expected timescales have increased during the last three years. They are above average for learners taking NVQs in the workplace and outstanding for apprentices.

- The quality of learners' work is satisfactory. Learners produce a wide range of evidence to map against the required standards. They enjoy this process since it helps them to consolidate their learning. They talk about their work confidently and with enthusiasm.

- Learners feel very supported and safe. They benefit from the safe working practices of their employers. They enjoy their courses and they appreciate the way staff support them throughout their programme. Learners value the approachability of staff and their flexibility in providing support whenever it is needed.

- Teaching and learning are good. In the best examples, employers play an effective role in supporting learners in their learning and in providing them with opportunities to develop and supply evidence for portfolios. Assessors use a range of teaching and learning strategies which are adapted to the needs of the business and the learners. Learners participate enthusiastically in lessons and individual coaching.

- Staff on the Association of Accounting Technician course use ILT effectively to help learners with their understanding and learning. In the less effective cases, assessors do not make sufficient use of ILT and interactive resources to aid learning and assessment. Although college staff observe college lessons, they do not assure the quality of subcontractors' teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice is underdeveloped.

- Assessment is satisfactory, fair and well planned and recorded. Progress reviews reinforce learners' understanding effectively but the resulting learning

targets do not always challenge learners enough to improve. In a minority of reviews there is too much concentration on evidence collection and insufficient on the development of learners' skills.

■ The broad range of programmes meets the needs of learners and employers successfully. The programmes are flexible to meet learners' work commitments and fit in with their roles. The provision helps to support learners' career and personal development.

■ Partnerships are good and provide training programmes across a wide geographical area. Managers have good relationships with their partners. Employers are pleased with the improvement in the quality of their workforce as a result of their training. The opportunities to share best practice amongst the partnership are insufficient.

■ Care guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners receive good initial guidance to choose the appropriate course and choice of units. The care provided is very reactive to learners' personal and pastoral needs, but staff are not proactive in providing additional learning support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs.

■ Leadership and management are satisfactory. Learners' views are sought and analysed systematically and improvement accrues as a result. The monitoring of learners' progress is strong and effective. The quality assurance of the subcontracted work is underdeveloped. The self-assessment report contains insufficient detail on leadership and management.

■ The promotion of equality and diversity and safeguarding are satisfactory. All three are included during review sessions. Discussion is of general issues, but does not allow for contextualised themes to be fully developed. Many learners are aware of equality and diversity and safeguarding matters from induction and through reviews, but teachers do not discuss these matters sufficiently during teaching and learning.

What does Worcester College of Technology need to do to improve further?

■ Increase the scope and the rigour of the self-assessment and quality assurance processes of subcontractors, including that of their teaching and learning, in order to be more aware of the key improvements needed and to share good practice.

■ Increase the accessibility and use of ILT and other interactive learning resources to improve learners' understanding and progress.

■ Increase the promotion of learners' understanding of safeguarding and equality and diversity through reviews and in training, so that they are empowered to apply this awareness to their everyday life and work.

Information about the inspection

40. Four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and eight additional inspectors, assisted by the college's vice principal of quality and external relations, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding bodies, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

41. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the college. They 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)

Worcester College of Technology

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+ Learner 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	3,993	0	1,836	323	1,834
Part-time learners	2,077	361	250	1,466	0
Overall effectiveness	3	n/a	3	3	2
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3	3	2
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?	3				
How safe do learners feel?	2				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	2				
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2				
Quality of provision	3	n/a	3	3	2
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?	1				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	3	n/a	3	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
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?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2				
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				

*where applicable to the type of provision