



Bridgwater College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

Audience
Post-16

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130830

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Basic information about the college

Name of college: Bridgwater College

Type of college: Tertiary

Principal: Fiona McMillan OBE

Address of college: Bath Road
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Chair of governors: Derek Randall

Unique reference number: 130830

Name of lead inspector: Russell Jordan HMI

Dates of inspection: 16 November 2006

Background of the organisation

1. Bridgwater College was established in 1973 and is the main education and training provider for young people in the area leaving secondary school at age 16. There are four 'Centres of Vocational Excellence' (CoVEs) in automotive engineering, early years, residential care, and tourism and hospitality. The College won the Association of Colleges' National Beacon Awards for Employer Engagement, based upon its work in 2004/05.
2. In 2004/05 there were a total of 15,801 learners on roll. Of these 3,955 were aged 16 to 18 and over half of learners from this age group were studying qualifications at level 3. Around half of these study GCE AS or A level subjects. Half of adult learner enrolments were for qualifications at Level 1. The college has re-structured its adult provision in line with the priorities of the Learning Skills Council. It has expanded recruitment at Level 2 whilst managing a reduction in learner numbers at Level 3. The college provides qualifications in all 15 subject sector areas (SSAs).
3. Bridgwater College merged with Cannington College (the county's land-based college) on 1 September 2004. Land-based qualifications now account for approximately 10% of learners aged 16 to 18 and a slightly larger proportion of adult learners; enrolments increased in 2005/06. The college has approximately 400 work-based learners on apprenticeship programmes in land-based occupations, engineering and construction.
4. Bridgwater College was last inspected in February 2002. At that inspection the majority of its provision was judged to be outstanding.

Scope of assessment

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits; and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding : grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding : grade 1
Achievements and standards	Outstanding : grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding : grade 1

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

6. The college provides outstanding education and training and fulfils its mission to inspire learners to achieve success. Leadership and management are outstanding and are focused on ensuring that all learners fulfil their potential. The college is committed to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning and there are very effective mechanisms in place to ensure this happens. Learners are set challenging targets and receive exceptional support from their teachers and tutors in order to help them achieve these targets. The curriculum provides an excellent mix of vocational and academic qualifications. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Self-assessment is rigorous and reliable; it plays an essential role in driving continuous improvement. The college's growth has been well supported with excellent new buildings and facilities. The college is very effective at engaging employers across a range of occupational areas, successfully identifying and meeting their training needs.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: grade 1

7. The college demonstrates outstanding capacity to improve. Outstanding leadership and management have maintained and further improved excellent standards of performance. This has been achieved alongside significant growth in 16-18 learners, the merger with an inadequate college, and the expansion of accommodation and other resources at both the Cannington and Bridgwater sites. In the areas where weaknesses were previously identified, managers have taken extremely effective action to bring about improvement, such as in raising the level of work-based framework achievement and in raising success rates in land-based courses. Self-assessment is rigorous and reliable. The college monitors its own performance relentlessly.

Achievements and standards

Outstanding: grade 1

8. Overall success rates on long courses for all learners are outstanding compared to similar colleges and have improved steadily since the last inspection. Learners aged 16 to 18 perform extremely well at National Diploma, GCE AS and A Level. Their achievement of high grades at National Diploma, AS and A Level is exceptional and well above national averages for similar colleges. Learners' progress from their starting points on entry to the college is outstanding. National value-added data demonstrate performance is excellent, placing the college in the top 10% of further education and sixth form colleges. This performance is underpinned by extremely effective target setting and individual review. Key skills success rates are well above national

averages and have improved considerably, particularly for learners aged 16 to 18. Achievements and standards for work-based learning are good and there has been a very significant improvement in framework completion. There are many examples of individual students achieving awards, including apprentice of the year. Attendance is very high and is rigorously monitored. The college rightly takes great pride in celebrating learners' achievements.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: grade 1

9. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers and managers are committed to continuous improvement for the benefit of their learners. They work very diligently and successfully to share good practice in teaching and learning and to bring about improvement in any aspects of teaching where this is needed. There is a real and active commitment to preparing students for employment, further and higher education and training. The marking of learners' work is of a high standard across the range of courses. Learners receive very detailed and constructive feedback on their work so they can easily see how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve.
10. Bridgwater is a highly inclusive college. There is a very broad range of courses which offer good opportunities to students from a very wide range of abilities. There is an excellent mix of vocational and academic qualifications reflecting the college's commitment to the community as a whole and many learners study a combination of these. There are good progression routes at all levels, including the opportunity to study higher education courses at the college. The college is very effective at engaging employers and in identifying and meeting their training needs. This is reflected in high levels of repeat business and very high satisfaction rates.
11. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. The college takes very great care to ensure that learners are on the right course and settle in well. An extensive range of pre-entry activities successfully supports the transition from school to college. There is very effective use of students as 'ambassadors' to promote the college to the wider community; 'angels' who act as mentors and advisers to new students and 'advocates' who support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Extensive consultation with parents takes place throughout the year; perception questionnaires evidence their very positive views about the quality of advice, guidance and support provided for students. Learner voices have a high priority at the college through focus and user groups, and a variety of other course and college forums. Learners endorse the high quality of pastoral support they receive; tutorials now encompass the 'Every Child Matters' agenda which is further promoted through different 'theme' weeks. A large number of learners receive additional learning support; success rates for this group are in line with those for the college as a whole. A comprehensive tracking programme is used to record students' progress. This provides a wide range of pastoral and academic information and is a key factor in supporting the high standards of learners' achievements at the college.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: grade 1

12. Leadership and management continue to be outstanding. Teachers and managers share a determination for continuous improvement and a focus on ensuring that all learners reach their full potential. Self assessment is reliable and rigorous. The monitoring of college performance is relentless and highly effective in identifying areas for improvement. The resulting actions are equally effective, as is clear from the very successful focus on raising framework achievement in work-based learning and in bringing about improvements in courses which have not met challenging targets. The college's responsiveness to the needs of employers is outstanding. The close relationship with employers enables the college to provide very extensive work-placement opportunities for learners, and use employers extensively in curriculum enrichment.
13. Financial management and the effective development and use of resources to support learning are equally important strengths in the college. The college has very successfully managed the merger with Cannington College. Success rates in land-based courses are now well above the national average. Provision has been extended and there has been considerable investment in accommodation and learning resources. The college provides very good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	03/04	1997	75	60.3	14.7	3467	80.2	59.1	21.1
	04/05	2527	74	64.2	9.8	3637	86.4	61.6	24.8
	05/06	3106	73.0			2688	85.9		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	51	76.5	65.1	11.4	-	-		
	04/05					-	-		
	05/06	-	-			-	-		
NVQs	03/04	127	52	61	-9.1	64	71.9	62.3	9.5
	04/05	66	95.5	67.2	28.3				
	05/06	62	88.7		21.5				
Other	03/04	1819	76.6	60	16.6	3396	80.4	59	21.4
	04/05	2452	73.5	63.6	9.9	3619	86.6	61.4	25.2
	05/06	3044	72.7			2681	85.9		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	03/04	1015	66.1	56.3	9.8	1200	55.3	53.6	1.7
	04/05	1313	69.9	60.9	9	1483	71.7	59.5	12.2
	05/06	1714	69.3			1851	76.5		
GCSEs	03/04	204	52.5	61.3	-8.8	83	74.7	58.8	15.9
	04/05	197	55.8	64.1	-8.3	115	56.5	62.3	-5.8
	05/06	215	59.1			84	58.3		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	51	68.6	63	5.6	28	75	56.6	18.4
	04/05	55	81.8	66.8	15	107	79.4	70.4	9
	05/06	61	78.7			70	87.1		
NVQs	03/04	32	34.4	51.9	-17.5	215	30.2	53.5	-23.2
	04/05	27	66.7	57	9.6	221	60.2	59.6	0.6
	05/06	28	75			204	62.3		
Other	03/04	728	71.2	54.1	17.1	874	58.9	52.7	6.2
	04/05	1034	72.1	60.1	11.9	1040	75.1	58.8	16.3
	05/06	1410	70.3			1493	79.0		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	3070	71.6	64.1	7.5	1544	59.8	53.5	6.3
	04/05	3040	72.1	67.5	4.6	1352	60.7	57.3	3.4
	05/06	3346	76.3			881	63.2		
A/A2 Levels	03/04	542	91.5	83.8	7.7	49	75.5	65.5	10
	04/05	670	91.3	85.6	5.7	55	74.5	69.1	5.5
	05/06	690	91.4			47	78.7		
AS Levels	03/04	1710	68.2	62.9	5.3	93	51.6	49.6	2.0
	04/05	1555	71.8	65.5	6.4	71	52.1	52.2	-0.1
	05/06	1948	73.3			100	53.0		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	280	62.1	52.4	9.8	40	50	43.5	6.5
	04/05	156	41.0	60.2	-19.2				
	05/06	-	-			-	-		
NVQs	03/04	28	75	53.7	21.3	200	50	47	3
	04/05	10	30	62.4	-32.4	178	51.7	53.9	-2.2
	05/06	25	68.0			127	59.8		
Other	03/04	510	66.7	56.3	10.3	1162	61.8	55.7	6.1
	04/05	649	60.9	60	0.9	1040	62.4	58.3	4.1
	05/06	683	69.8			607	64.4		

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2004 to 2006.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No. of learners *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	03/04	overall	34	53	48	44	31
		timely	40	38	30	30	19
	04/05	overall	30	53	48	30	34
		timely	24	33	31	17	21
	05/06+	overall	49	57	53	53	44
		timely	57	47	33	32	26
Apprenticeships	03/04	overall	10	50	47	10	32
		timely	9	0	24	0	16
	04/05	overall	67	65	50	29	38
		timely	86	24	29	12	21
	05/06+	overall	142	68	58	64	53
		timely	83	23	38	19	32

(data from Cannington College for 2003/04 and 2004/05 have been excluded)

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

+ LSC un-validated data based on period 13 LSC return October 2006