

INSPECTION REPORT

The Vocational College Limited

30 June 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Vocational College Limited (TVC), formerly Taurus Training, is a private company with its head office and main training centre in Bootle, near Liverpool. TVC has contracts with Greater Merseyside and Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSCs), and with the National Employer Service.
2. The company offers apprentice and advanced apprentice training in construction, information and communications technology (ICT), hospitality, sport, preparation for life and work, and business administration and customer service. It provides training across Merseyside and in Greater Manchester. In addition, TVC works with employers located primarily in the Northeast, the Northwest and the West Midlands to provide training in construction for the glass manufacture and glazing industry. Until very recently, TVC also provided training in social care. In August 2003, TVC became a lead provider on Merseyside for the entry to employment (E2E) programme as it is currently working with another partner to deliver provision across Merseyside.
3. Four directors make up the company's board. One director is responsible for the delivery of programmes, which are managed by a training manager. Heads of department report to the training manager and manage the assessors.
4. The percentage of the population claiming unemployment-related benefit in June 2005 was 3.7 per cent in Greater Merseyside and 2.4 per cent in Greater Manchester, compared with 2.3 per cent for England as a whole.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** TVC's leadership and management is satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The provision is good in construction planning and the built environment, retail and commercial enterprise, and leisure, travel and tourism. In preparation for life and work, provision is satisfactory. Business administration and law provision is inadequate.
6. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is inclusive. The report is accurate in some areas and it makes too little use of data to support judgements. It is not clearly linked to the development plan.
7. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** TVC has taken effective action to improve the quality of most of its provision. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been rectified and learners' success rates have improved significantly. Quality improvement arrangements are broadly satisfactory but there is too little analysis of feedback from employers, learners and training observations. TVC failed to rectify the long-term poor management in business administration and customer service.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE LIMITED:

- continue to improve the achievement of all learners
- improve the training in equality of opportunity for staff
- develop the way it uses learners' and employers' feedback to improve provision
- implement formal appraisals for all staff
- ensure it supports administration and customer service learners to complete their assessments as a matter of urgency
- further develop and implement the skills for life strategy for E2E
- improve the range of externally accredited qualifications for E2E learners, including literacy and numeracy
- improve assessment practices in sport
- develop systematic planning of on-the-job background knowledge training in construction
- develop the delivery of level 3 technical certificates for construction

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		3
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Construction, planning and the built environment			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Construction crafts			
Apprenticeships for young people	398	2	
Other government-funded provision	98	2	

Retail and commercial enterprise			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Hospitality and catering			
Apprenticeships for young people	94	2	

Leisure, travel and tourism			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Sport, leisure and recreation			
Apprenticeships for young people	105	2	

Preparation for life and work		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i> Entry to Employment	286	3 3

Business administration and law		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Administration</i> Apprenticeships for young people	56	4
<i>Customer service</i> Apprenticeships for young people	40	4

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection reported on and graded construction, planning and the built environment, retail and commercial enterprise, leisure, travel and tourism, preparation for life and work, and business administration and law. ICT and health and social care were not inspected.

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	55
Number of learners interviewed	108
Number of staff interviewed	67
Number of employers interviewed	33
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	54

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **The achievement rate in sport is good.** Over the past two full years it has averaged over 50 per cent. The high number of framework completions since April 2006 has raised the overall success rate for the current year to 60 per cent. This is much higher than the national average, and it is particularly significant taking into account the disadvantaged background of many of the learners. Achievement has improved in construction, planning and the built environment, and in retail and commercial enterprise.

10. **In retail and commercial enterprise, learners develop good hospitality skills.** Their social skills are strong and they have a good understanding of what makes service effective for the customer. Their knowledge of hospitality topics is good, and they are able to make sound assessments of health and safety hazards in the workplace. Framework and national vocational qualification (NVQ) achievement rates for apprentices

are satisfactory, and they have increased substantially since the previous inspection. However, advanced apprentice success rates are unsatisfactory.

11. In E2E, learners develop good personal and social skills, and make steady progress in their literacy, numeracy and vocational options. Progression to employment and further training is satisfactory.

12. Success rates for construction crafts have improved considerably over the past three years. Progress has previously been slow, and it is now satisfactory for learners recruited in the past two years. At the time of the inspection, success rates for the current year are 65 per cent for advanced apprentices, 68 per cent for apprentices, and 85 per cent on the NVQ-only 23-plus programme. Learners' work is of a good standard and well regarded by employers.

13. Business administration and customer service is characterised by poor and declining success rates and slow progress. Eighty per cent of customer service apprentices have exceeded their planned completion date. In business administration, 56 per cent of apprentices have been in learning for over two years. Many have not progressed in their first year. Their experience at TVC has discouraged some learners from continuing with work-based learning in the future.

The quality of provision

14. The quality of teaching and learning is good in hospitality. Sessions are well planned, and training is adapted to meet the needs of the individual. The development of key skills is built into occupational training effectively. In construction, practical training is satisfactory, and assessment practice is very good. However, background knowledge training is weak in the workplace and in preparing learners for the technical certificate. Training in sport is satisfactory, supported by appropriate planning and training materials that TVC uses effectively. In E2E, teaching and learning is also satisfactory. Sessions are well planned and learners participate fully. However, there is too little attention to the literacy and numeracy needs of individual learners. Arrangements for learning and assessment are inadequate in business administration, with too few staff resources to maintain good quality.

15. Recruitment and induction are a strong feature of the sports provision. This ensures that learners make the right choice of training programme, and ensures that they settle into their training and placements well. The flexibility of programme design is also a strength in sport, where the timing, location and frequency of training take good account of employers' and learners' needs.

16. The close involvement of employers in the training of learners in construction crafts and hospitality and catering has had a positive effect on quality. This is not the case for business administration and customer service learners, where there have been too few links between TVC and employers to support training.

17. Initial advice and guidance is mostly good, and satisfactory in business administration. This ensures that learners have made an appropriate choice of programme and helps to tailor the training to their individual needs. These arrangements are good in most areas, and satisfactory in business administration. Support for learners is mostly satisfactory, and good in construction. In business administration it is inadequate.

18. The quality of learners' progress reviews varies considerably. They are thorough in construction crafts and hospitality and support learning well. For E2E learners, they are insufficiently thorough, and for business administration and customer service learners they are inadequate.

19. The quality of assessment varies. It is satisfactory for hospitality and catering learners. It is particularly good in construction, where assessments are well planned, fair and accurate, and learners receive good constructive feedback. However, in sport, some inaccurate judgements are made in assessing the learners' knowledge and performance, and in business administration, too few assessments have been carried out to support the learners' progress.

Leadership and management

20. **TVC has good organisational management.** It has a clear strategic focus, has invested well in improving accommodation, and has an effective management structure. TVC's approach to health and safety is strong. Staff development is satisfactory, with good support for new staff and for training in adult support and key skills. However, it is insufficiently linked to the appraisal process, too few staff have training qualifications, and there has been too little training in equality of opportunity.

21. **There are good resources to promote equality of opportunity with learners and employers.** These include a recently introduced activity booklet for raising awareness among learners, which contains useful activities to challenge stereotypes.

22. **TVC has taken well-planned and effective action to improve the quality of its provision.** It has rectified many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and learners' success rates have improved significantly. Quality improvement procedures have improved and internal verification is now thorough in most areas, which has improved success rates. The improvement in initial assessment has also had a positive effect upon success rates. There is insufficient use of feedback from learners, employers, and teaching and learning observations for continuous improvement.

23. TVC has adequate policies and procedures relating to equality of opportunity, the promotion of learning about equality of opportunity, and monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Accommodation is adequate for those with limited mobility, although it is mostly limited to ground floor accommodation.

24. The arrangements for additional literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory. TVC's skills for life strategy is satisfactory overall although it needs further development for E2E. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Arrangements to identify learners' literacy and numeracy needs through initial assessment, and to provide additional support where needed, are adequate.

25. **Training for staff in equality of opportunity is insufficient.** It has been largely reliant on questionnaires on the staff intranet, but the response rate to their completion has been low, at about 50 per cent. Training for staff at induction is inadequate.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good organisational management
- highly effective action to raise employers' awareness of health and safety
- good resources to promote equality of opportunity to learners and employers
- well-devised and effective actions to improve the quality of provision

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory supervision by senior managers of business administration and customer service
- inadequate formal appraisal of staff
- insufficient staff training in equality of opportunity
- insufficient analysis of feedback from learners, employers and observations of training

Construction, planning and the built environment

Construction crafts

Strengths

- very good assessment practice
- good use of progress reviews to support learning
- good, flexible support for learners
- particularly effective links with employers

Weaknesses

- poor planning of on-the-job background knowledge training
- slow development of level 3 technical certificate

Retail and commercial enterprise

Hospitality and catering

Strengths

- good hospitality skills demonstrated by the learners
- thorough planning of learning
- good training
- thorough learners' progress reviews
- thorough introduction to learning

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory advanced apprentice success rates

Leisure, travel and tourism

Sport, leisure and recreation

Strengths

- good achievement rates
- very flexible delivery of training to meet learners' and employers' needs
- particularly effective recruitment and induction arrangements for the learners
- very good engagement of employers

Weaknesses

- some inaccurate assessment

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- good development of personal and social skills
- well-located community provision
- very effective activities to meet individual learners' needs

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning and monitoring of learners' progress
- narrow range of qualifications
- incomplete skills for life strategy

Business administration and law

Strengths

- no significant strengths identified

Weaknesses

- poor achievement and slow progress
- inadequate arrangements for learning and assessment
- poor engagement of employers
- poor management of programmes

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE LIMITED:

- being treated well by tutors
- supportive and approachable assessors
- good work placements
- frequent and supportive visits
- practical learning sessions, both on and off the job

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- continuity - having just one assessor, and more frequent visits
- getting through the programme more quickly
- clearer background knowledge questions
- 'doing mathematics and English in the workplace, so it's less like school'
- more opportunity to gain qualifications on the E2E programme