

# Tower Hamlets College

## Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

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

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

### Description of the provider

1. Tower Hamlets College is a large general further education college in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in East London. There are two main centres: Poplar, next to Canary Wharf, and Arbour Square in Stepney. Other centres include Bethnal Green, housing predominantly English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and some other adult learning, East India Dock Road, housing the Financial Services Skills Academy and the college's Employment Solutions team, and Heron Quays, in Canary Wharf, from which Train to Gain programmes are managed. Part-time skills for life programmes are offered in over 30 community venues throughout the borough.

2. Several neighbouring colleges are within easy travelling distance of the college. Six local secondary schools have sixth forms and more than 30 private and voluntary sector training organisations operate in the local area. The college provides vocational and academic programmes for both young people and adults in 12 of the 15 sector subject areas (SSAs). In 2007/08 the college had 6,882 LSC-funded students. Of these, 2,565 attended full-time and 4,317 attended part-time. Students aged 19 and over constituted 69% of enrolments and the remainder were aged 16 to 18. The largest ethnic groups were Bangladeshi (47%), White British (12%) and African (12%). In the light of national funding changes, the college's programmes for adults have undergone significant changes and more adult learning is now funded through project work.
3. Tower Hamlets continues to be one of the most deprived areas in the country and is rated the third most deprived out of 374 English local authority districts. Unemployment is nearly twice the London average at just under 12%. The percentage of widening participation learners attending the college was 91% in 2007/08. Fifty-seven per cent of the local population are from minority ethnic groups and 78 different community languages are spoken. The college's mission is 'Removing Barriers, Raising Achievement for Everyone'.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. The overall effectiveness of provision is satisfactory but the college demonstrates good capacity to bring about further improvement. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall and good for provision in Train to Gain. Overall success rates, after a period of steady improvement matching national trends, fell markedly in 2006/07, to below the national average. They significantly recovered in 2007/08. For long qualifications they improved to 71%, from the previous year's low of 65%, placing the college at around the most recent national average. There is some significant underperformance for long courses but this is being gradually reduced. Students' progress at GCE A level, relative to their prior attainment, is satisfactory overall. Success rates for Train to Gain are satisfactory. Standards of students' work are often satisfactory and sometimes better. They are good for Train to Gain. Students generally progress well to employment or education.
5. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but are good in Train to Gain. Too much teaching is no better than satisfactory and there is too much inconsistency in quality between curriculum areas. Students participate in lessons, work hard and are very well behaved. Well qualified teachers provide good support to students. Much learning takes place in high quality, vocationally realistic settings. The effective use of information learning technologies (ILT) is inconsistent across the college and the development of a virtual learning environment is at an early stage. Assessment is good.
6. The college's response to educational and social inclusion and to meeting the needs and interests of students is good. The latter is outstanding for Train to Gain. A responsive, broad and inclusive curriculum successfully widens participation in education and training, although not all lessons meet the differing needs of students. Enrichment is outstanding. Extensive partnership work results in very effective strategies and funding to develop courses to help local people to get work. Responsiveness to employers is good, with a strong emphasis on employment and skills.
7. Guidance and support for students are good. A wide range of support services are accessed by students at all locations, including outreach community centres and employers' premises. Students at risk of not completing are identified early and given good guidance and support. With the exception of courses for ESOL, the targets set for students in individual learning plans are underdeveloped. Provision for additional learning support is good. Careers advice and guidance are good.
8. Leadership and management are good. Governance is good. The college's strategic direction is clear, well articulated and supported. The college experienced a period of significant change in senior management after the last inspection and this affected the consistency in the pace of improvement. There

is now innovative strategic and financial management. The college is highly responsive to its local community. Quality assurance, including self-assessment, is good and leads to improvements. Accurate management information informs quality improvement. Equality of opportunity is good and the college makes an important contribution to community cohesion through promoting tolerance and respect within a very diverse community. The college is compliant with equality and diversity legislation and appropriate procedures are in place for the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

## Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The college's capacity to improve is good. Since the last inspection, the college has dealt effectively with significant challenges in management and performance. Quality assurance and the thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process are good. Quality improvement plans are well founded and understood by staff and governors. The internal lesson observation system is rigorous, enabling managers to make accurate evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning and to target training and support on areas requiring further improvement. Managers undertake regular monitoring of the performance of all curriculum areas, enabling early identification of any concerns and prompt actions to secure improvements. Governors have relevant expertise and monitor finances and performance well. The college has a strong financial position and resources are well managed to meet educational needs and college priorities.

## The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

10. Improvement is satisfactory since the last inspection. The college experienced a period of significant change in senior management after the last inspection and this affected the consistency in the pace of improvement. Success rates dropped sharply in 2006/07. The college successfully raised success rates in 2007/08 to a satisfactory level. At the same time, it has maintained its focus on meeting community and employer needs well. The use of data to monitor performance and set targets for further improvement has improved and self-assessment and action plans set a clear agenda for further improvement. Managers monitor performance more systematically and are able to identify areas of underperformance earlier and implement prompt actions to secure improvements. The college has not fully resolved the issues around target setting for students.

## Key strengths

- hard working and well behaved students
- extensive and well supported enrichment opportunities
- very good engagement with the community and employers
- very good integrated additional learning support
- innovative strategic and financial management.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- success rates for all groups of students
- the progress of students relative to their prior qualifications and experience
- the proportion of teaching and learning that is no better than satisfactory
- the rigour and the monitoring of students' individual target-setting
- the level of consistency in the pace of improvement since the last inspection.



## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

*Contributory grade:*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: grade 2*

11. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. This agrees with the judgement in the self-assessment report. They are good for Train to Gain. Overall college success rates improved up to 2005/06, exceeding national averages for similar colleges. They fell significantly in 2006/07 to below the national average at 67%. They recovered to 72% in 2007/08 to around the 2005/06 college figure.
12. The overall college success rate for long qualifications improved to 71% in 2007/08, from the previous year's low of 65%. It improved for both students aged 16 to 18 and for adults, placing the college at around the most recently published national averages at the time of the inspection. Rates improved at each level. At level 1, for both ages, there is significant improvement between 2005/06 and 2007/08. For adults, all levels have recovered to above the success rates for 2005/06. Long course success rates in most SSAs reflect the overall improvement noted above. Success rates for Train to Gain are satisfactory. The LSC's minimum level of performance (MLP) data show that there is some significant underperformance for long courses, especially at GCE A level, but that this is being gradually reduced.
13. Students' progress at GCE A level, relative to their prior attainment, is satisfactory overall. However, for a significant number of subjects, for both GCE AS and A2, where there is relatively weak performance, progress is not in line with expectations.
14. Overall success rates for the much reduced number of short courses improved from 71% in 2006/07 to 79% the following year and are satisfactory.
15. The self-assessment report correctly identifies differences in the performance of students by ethnic group and age. Young white students underachieve. Success rates for Bangladeshi students of both age groups are slightly better than for the college overall but adult black African students achieve less well. The college is well aware of this and is addressing the differences as part of its improvement strategy.
16. Relatively few students take key skills qualifications in information and communication technology (ICT). Success rates have improved over the last three years but are still low, at 39% in 2007/08. They are high for very small number of students taking freestanding mathematics qualifications at levels 1 and 2.

17. Standards of students' work are often satisfactory and sometimes better. In Train to Gain and in practical activities for ICT, students' work is good. They develop their work-related skills well.
18. Students generally progress well to employment or education. Progression to higher education is good. Eighty-one per cent of the students applying from the sixth form college in 2007/08 gained entry and good numbers progress from Access programmes. Internal progression is good, with nearly 80% of eligible students aged 16 to 18 moving to higher level courses. Students' attendance is satisfactory, at 83% overall in 2007/08.

#### Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

19. The quality of provision is good and teaching and learning are satisfactory, as identified in the college's self-assessment report. College procedures for evaluating the quality of lessons are robust. The self-assessment report accurately identifies that too much teaching is no better than satisfactory and that there is too much inconsistency in quality between curriculum areas.
20. Students are keen to participate in lessons, work hard and are very well behaved. Well qualified teachers provide good support to students and organise a very good variety of enrichment activities to enliven the curriculum. Well planned lessons ensure the needs of all individuals are met but this is lacking in a minority of lessons. Strategies to check learning are generally effective although there is insufficient direct questioning in some lessons.
21. Much learning takes place in high quality, vocationally realistic settings, particularly for business and hair and beauty courses. Innovative learning centres, the 'Idea Stores', provide accessible and appropriate local settings for many skills for life students. Substantial investment has increased access to interactive white boards for almost all teachers. Despite some good use of ILT, its effective use is inconsistent across the college and the development of a virtual learning environment is at an early stage. The quality of provision provided for employers is good, with the needs of individual learners and employers matched well through Train to Gain and bespoke training.
22. Assessment is good. Many assignments stimulate students' interests and relate well to the world of work, helping to prepare them for employment. Rigorous systems for moderating assessed work are in place. Cross-college groups help to maintain consistency in the standards of work and promote sharing of good practice. Marked work is returned in a timely fashion but feedback to students varies in quality.
23. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of students is good. It is outstanding for Train to Gain. The college has established a wide range of strong and productive partnerships with employers, the Local Authority and most schools within the borough. These help identify community education and training needs and to develop appropriate courses, many of which are funded through partnership projects. Responsive curriculum development successfully widens participation in education and training. The college is involved with local

schools in developing and delivering a wide range of diploma routes. Provision in ESOL is extensive and meets community needs. The college has responded well to the area's significant levels of unemployment. Employability skills are embedded into most courses. Despite the range of employer-linked initiatives, there is no cross-college process to collect, analyse and use employers' views and needs. The college is working to address this.

24. The extensive and well supported enrichment programme includes a college-wide programme and curriculum-linked activities. The sports activities are not taken up by many female learners.
25. Guidance and support for students are good. A wide range of support services are accessed by students at all locations, including outreach community centres and employers' premises. All students have a personal tutor whom they meet weekly. Students at risk of not completing are identified early and given good guidance and support. The excellent careers guidance is provided through a range of activities and appropriate software and textual resources. In addition, group tutorial activities focus on preparing students to make progression choices. With the exception of ESOL courses, the targets set for students in individual learning plans are often not measurable and there are no deadlines for meeting them.
26. Provision for additional learning support is good. It is well integrated with other aspects of students' courses. All students receive initial and subsequent diagnostic assessments for numeracy and literacy. Outcomes are used well to identify support needs and inform provision and there is excellent communication between tutors, support staff and teachers. The Poplar drop-in centre provides very effective support, valued highly by students. The centre is sometimes too small for the level of demand. The impact of additional learning support is monitored and evaluated rigorously. College analysis shows that the overall success rate of students receiving support in 2007/08 was 10 percentage points above that for those not receiving it.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grade:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Good: grade 2*

27. Leadership and management are good. The Principal, governors and senior managers set a clear direction for the college, with a strong focus on improving students' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning. Following the sharp drop in success rates in 2006/07, managers implemented insightful and successful improvement strategies that have brought overall success rates, especially for long courses, to around the national average in 2007/08.
28. Staff have a good understanding of the college's priorities and their role in improving outcomes for students. The revised curriculum management structure ensures that managers are accountable for the performance of their

- areas. Regular monitoring of curriculum areas enables early identification of concerns and prompt action to secure improvement. The college acknowledges that some middle managers are more confident in their role than others and provides on-going support, training and coaching to develop their skills further. Communications are good and teachers feel well supported by their managers.
29. Quality assurance and the thoroughness and accuracy of the self-assessment process are good. Self-assessment correctly identifies key strengths and areas requiring improvement. Accurate management information is easily accessible to staff and is used well to review and evaluate performance. Systems for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are rigorous and judgements are broadly accurate. However, a few curriculum area reports do not focus sufficiently on the quality of teaching and learning and some actions for improvement are too vague.
  30. The college is highly responsive to its local community, working to meet the very diverse needs of local residents, business and employers. The range and impact of developed partnership working is outstanding. The college maintains a very clear focus on supporting local students in developing good skills for employment.
  31. Governors work well with senior managers, providing good support and challenge in setting the direction for the college and monitoring its performance closely. Governors bring a wide range of relevant skills to the college. They know its strengths and areas for improvement well and are keenly aware of future challenges. Strategic planning is good and financial management is strong. The college maintains a healthy financial position whilst continuing to make significant investment in improving accommodation, specialist resources and information and communication technology. Managers have been particularly effective in securing alternative sources of funding to meet specific community needs and the college provides good value for money.
  32. The quality of accommodation and specialist resources are good and, in some areas, outstanding. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and almost all teachers have, or are working towards, a teaching qualification. They are well supported through good access to a variety of relevant training and development activities.
  33. Equality of opportunity is good and the college meets legislative requirements for race, gender and disability equalities. Whilst the college has successfully increased the proportion of staff from minority ethnic heritage, this remains low at management level and the college is working to increase this. Success rates for some minority ethnic groups are below those for the main groups of Bangladeshi and white British students. The college has implemented a range of well targeted strategies to support students and raise aspirations and achievement. Managers demonstrate a strong sense of social responsibility within the local community. The college makes an important contribution to community cohesion through promoting tolerance and respect within a very diverse community.

34. Safeguarding procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults are robust and meet government requirements. Criminal Record Bureau checks are undertaken systematically and staff are aware of procedures for dealing with any concerns. The college has recently revised its safeguarding policies and further staff training is planned. The college provides a safe and secure environment for students, who feel safe and well supported.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
			College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
All Long - Level 1	05/06	1823	64	68	-4	1010	65	67	-2
	06/07	1796	65	73	-8	2157	70	71	-1
	07/08*	1519	74	N/A		2068	71	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	118	63	71	-8	4	75	...	...
	06/07	53	60	N/A		1	100	...	...
	07/08*	-	-	N/A		-	-	N/A	
NVQs	05/06	55	55	70	-15	23	78	71	7
	06/07	27	67	73	-6	11	100	77	23
	07/08*	18	78			6	100		
Other	05/06	1650	65	67	-2	983	65	67	-2
	06/07	1716	65	73	-8	2145	70	70	0
	07/08*	1501	74	N/A		2062	71	N/A	

\* college data

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, 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
All Long - Level 2	05/06	966	70	65	5	771	61	66	-5
	06/07	1006	63	69	-6	845	60	70	-10
	07/08	879	71	N/A		752	65	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	426	85	69	16	234	75	67	8
	06/07	486	75	71	4	239	74	70	4
	07/08	316	87	N/A		187	79	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	138	65	67	-2	3	67	65	2
	06/07	17	18	70	-52	1	100	63	37
	07/08	28	71	N/A		-	-	N/A	
NVQs	05/06	42	50	64	-14	115	30	69	-39
	06/07	76	32	66	-34	167	38	71	-33
	07/08	76	28	N/A		203	48	N/A	
Other	05/06	360	56	63	-7	419	63	65	-2
	06/07	427	56	69	-13	438	62	70	-8
	07/08	459	67	N/A		362	67	N/A	

\* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 long qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, 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
All Long - Level 3	05/06	2252	72	68	4	718	59	62	-3
	06/07	2529	67	70	-3	692	56	67	-11
	07/08	2414	71	N/A		574	66	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	537	91	86	5	34	79	74	5
	06/07	645	89	84	5	67	81	77	4
	07/08	647	91			49	80	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	1437	67	64	3	55	62	57	5
	06/07	1605	59	64	-5	51	49	59	-10
	07/08	1300	65	N/A		18	61	N/A	
GNVQs/ AVCEs	05/06	18	89	67	22	8	88	54	34
	06/07	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	07/08	6	100	N/A		4	100	N/A	
NVQs	05/06	11	91	66	25	65	37	65	-28
	06/07	6	67	75	-8	45	49	71	-22
	07/08	12	58	N/A		25	44	N/A	
Other	05/06	249	62	62	0	556	60	62	-2
	06/07	273	60	68	-8	529	54	66	-12
	07/08	449	59	N/A		478	66	N/A	

\* college data



Table 5

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the college 2008 to 2009

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2007/08	overall	466	65
	2008/09	overall	876	n/a

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 3 months or greater of the LSC contract year

- \* 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/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
- \*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'