

Herefordshire College of Technology

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 130710
Name of lead inspector: John Evans HMI
Last day of inspection: 21 May 2010
Type of provider: General Further Education College
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Information about the provider

1. Herefordshire College of Technology is a medium-sized further education college operating on a campus in Hereford, a land-based campus at Holme Lacy and numerous community venues. It provides vocational education and training to young people and adults through a diverse range of pre-entry to higher education (HE) courses. The college offers courses in 13 sector subject areas. Approximately 25% of provision is at foundation level, 33% at intermediate level, 37% at advanced level and 5% at higher level.
2. Herefordshire is a predominantly rural county with a population around 180,000, giving it the fourth lowest population density in England. Unemployment is below the national level and well below the rate for the West Midlands as a whole. The proportion of school leavers in Herefordshire achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics is a little above the national average. Only four per cent of the resident population has minority ethnic heritage. The city of Hereford, in the middle of the county, has a population of some 56,000 and is the centre for most facilities.
3. The college has approximately 2,500 full-time equivalent learners divided roughly evenly between those aged 16–18 and adults. Males represent 58% of learners aged 16–18 and women represent a similar proportion of adult learners. Some 98% of learners are from White British heritage.
4. The college's curriculum has changed considerably since the last inspection following its merger in 2007 with the Holme Lacy campus of the Pershore Group of Colleges, which added land-based provision to its portfolio. The college has strengthened its vocational focus and managed significant growth in employer-responsive provision. The college mission is simply "Success for our Students". This inspection did not inspect the college's adult supported learning provision.
5. The college provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Three Counties Consortium
6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the college:
 - Herefordshire Citizens Advice Bureaux
 - Deaf Direct
 - Abbeydale Vetlink Veterinary Training

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: 14 to16	36 learners
Further education (16 to18)	882 full-time learners and 119 part-time learners
Foundation learning, including	342 full-time learners and 9 part-time learners
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	433 full-time learners and 1472 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain	524 learners
Apprenticeships	320 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	2
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

7. Herefordshire College of Technology remains a good college which has continued to improve since its last inspection. Success rates have increased strongly in recent years, although they dipped last year due to the number of students who failed to complete their course. The steps taken by the college to address this are working well and retention has improved considerably this year. Success rates are above national level for learners aged 16–18 and at the national level for adult learners. Success rates are high for apprentices and advanced apprentices. Most lessons are good with a broad range of activities to keep learners engaged and interesting use of information and learning technology (ILT). Learners enjoy their lessons and often make good progress in them. The standard of learners' work is mostly good. Learners develop personal, social and vocational skills which prepare them well for life after college. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not have clearly established learning objectives against which to measure learners' progress, do not tailor learning activities to meet the needs of learners with different levels of ability and do not stretch learners sufficiently when checking their understanding through questioning. The promotion of equality and diversity is not strong enough in lessons and tutorials.

8. The range of courses is well suited to learners and employers' needs. Not all full-time learners can access the cross-college enrichment programme and group tutorials are better on some courses than others. But individual tutorials, and progress reviews in work-based learning, are effective in making learners aware of how well they are doing and what aspects they can improve. The college has good procedures to ensure learners are on the right course. Support and guidance are good. Learners particularly value the informal support teachers provide outside of lessons. Additional learning support helps those learners receiving it to complete their course successfully. The college is well led and managed. It is financially secure, has clear and appropriate strategies and good governance. The safety of learners is a high priority and learners certainly feel very safe at the college. The learning environment is very good. Learners have good opportunities to give feedback to the college, which listens to and often acts on their views. The college has good arrangements for quality improvement which usually ensure that managers are able to identify and tackle weaknesses early. The college's self-assessment shows that it has an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement.

Main findings

- Learner outcomes are good. Standards of learners' work are consistently good and in the better lessons learners make good progress. Learners develop good personal, social and vocational skills and are well prepared for life after college when the overwhelming majority progress into HE, employment and apprenticeships.
- College success rates have improved significantly over recent years and long course success rates, despite a dip last year, are now above national average for learners aged 16–18 and at the national average for adult learners. In work-based learning, apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships achieve high success rates, but the timely success rate for Train to Gain learners was low last year.
- The college is addressing vigorously the areas of poor retention for adult learners and the underperformance of female learners relative to male learners. Strategies are having a clear impact and current in-year retention is substantially higher than the previous year. Learners feel very safe at the college and make a good contribution to the college and local community.
- The majority of lessons are good. Learners have good attitudes to learning. Teachers use assessment to support learning well. They use practical settings productively to develop practical skills to the level expected in industry. Good use is made of ILT. A minority of lessons fail to challenge learners and ensure they make consistently good progress. Questioning by teachers is often ineffective.
- Teachers are benefiting from the strong focus on staff development. Teachers value the constructive nature of the lesson observation scheme, but observers, are sometimes overgenerous in their evaluations. They do not always focus

rigorously enough on evaluating the learning and skills development that is taking place. The process makes good use of learners' views.

- Teachers' skill and expertise in maximising opportunities to develop equality and diversity themes in lessons, tutorials and work-based reviews are too limited. Although lesson plans have prompts to include such themes and staff training in equality and diversity has increased, learning points are often not well developed and consequently learners' knowledge and awareness are often at a basic level.
- The college's provision meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. Provision is reviewed regularly to ensure a good match between the offer and learners and employers' requirements. Partnerships with schools and the local authority are effective in creating increased opportunities for learners aged 14–19.
- Participation rates in a varied enrichment programme are generally low. Learners in all areas benefit from a good variety of guest speakers and industry-related visits that add interest to their vocational programmes. The quality of the group tutorial programme is variable but individual tutorials are very effective in helping learners progress and achieve.
- All learners, including those who are work-based, receive good individual and personal support. The college has established strong links with external agencies to meet the diverse support needs of learners. Promptly provided additional learning support has a positive impact on learners' success.
- Leadership and management are good. The college's financial position is secure. Budgets are managed well. The college provides good value for money. Strategic and operational planning is good. Governors set challenging targets for the college which are monitored regularly and lead to improvements.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff and learners are mutually respectful and the college is inclusive in its approach. The college is strengthening arrangements for reporting the impact of actions to improve equality and diversity across the college's work. Data are used well to inform actions plans, which have narrowed the long-standing achievement gap between males and females successfully.
- Quality improvement arrangements are largely effective. Self-assessment is well embedded and generally accurate. Managers at all levels regularly review action plans to ensure improvements. Senior managers play a significant role in leading such improvement arrangements. However, a degree of inconsistency in success rate performance and the quality of provision between different curriculum areas has persisted.
- The college makes good use of the views of learners to improve the college and the quality of provision. The use of formal and informal channels is effective and learners are informed of actions taken in response to their views.

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

- Improve college and Train to Gain success rates to well above the national average by embedding the range of strategies which have strengthened retention and achievement and consolidating the current in-year improvements.
- Promote teachers' skills in using strategies that challenge and stretch learners, including the increased use of more demanding questions, greater emphasis on matching tasks to individual ability and making sure that learners think for themselves, so that more learners make consistently good progress relative to their respective starting points.
- Support teachers to develop equality and diversity themes fully in lessons and tutorials and to reinforce learners' awareness and understanding over and above where equality and diversity issues occur naturally.
- Strengthen the college's response to the entitlement for learners aged 16–18 by reviewing timetabling arrangements to increase access to, and participation in, the cross-college enrichment programme and by monitoring group tutorials more closely to ensure all key themes are covered and reinforced consistently across the college.
- Strengthen equality and diversity policies to ensure they underpin the college's work and embed arrangements for the timely reporting of progress against equality and diversity action plans.
- Embed arrangements to increase the rigour of internal lesson observations by enabling observers to assess learning and progress in lessons more effectively and ensuring observation records are evaluative and accurately graded. Ensure that appraisals take systematic account of the outcomes from lesson observations, and of targets set at earlier appraisals.
- Secure greater consistency in success rates and the quality of provision between different curriculum areas through more effective sharing of good practice. Ensure new courses are monitored closely to minimise risk of failure.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- very helpful and supportive teachers
- good teaching, especially teachers use of their links with industry
- the buildings, learning environment and facilities at the Hereford campus
- the calm environment and library facilities at the Holme Lacy campus
- feeling very safe at the college
- the relaxed and sociable atmosphere
- the encouragement of learners to express their views.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more visits related to careers paths and help with finding appropriate work experience
- limited choice, especially of healthy eating options, in the canteen
- canteen prices
- parking space
- a sheltered smoking area
- a few design features in the new Community Studies Centre, which can disrupt their lessons.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- courses which are well suited to their needs
- caring and supportive environment for learners
- good communications which keep them well informed about the progress of their employees
- clear focus on a vocational curriculum
- the college's strong desire to develop and sustain partnerships
- good source for recruiting new staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- greater promotion of wider college services to employers
- continued development of flexible response to changing employer needs.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

9. The capacity of the college to continue to improve is good. Senior managers take the lead in implementing well-developed quality improvement arrangements. They seek improvements by giving careful attention to self-assessment and the monitoring of quality improvement plans. Staff and learners are involved in producing self-assessment reports and action plans, which are underpinned by good analysis of appropriate data. Self-assessment reports are thorough and accurate. Inspectors agreed with all but one grade and were able to confirm most of the strengths and areas for improvement the college itself had identified.
10. Since the last inspection, the college has addressed all of the areas identified as needing improvement. The college now meets the legal requirements for equality and diversity; Skills for Life are more strongly embedded; staff development activities have led to improvements in meeting the needs of all learners; and the self-assessment of courses has improved.
11. Governors challenge managers to improve performance. Challenging targets are set in the strategic plan and monitored regularly. The college has usually taken swift and decisive action to remedy weaknesses and under-performance and there have been sustained improvements in all aspects of the college's work. However, annual self-assessment reports reflect some long-standing differences in success rate performance and the quality of provision between different curriculum areas. The views of learners are used well to make improvements to the quality of provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

12. Outcomes for learners are good. In recent years the college has secured a strong increase in long course success rates. The degree of improvement in 2007/08 was particularly substantial. In 2008/09, success rates continued to increase at advanced level, but declined at foundation and intermediate levels. Overall, long course success rates are just above the national average for learners aged 16–18 and at the national average for adult learners. Learners on employer responsive provision in apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships achieve high success rates and complete their qualifications in good time. For technical rather than quality reasons, the timely success rate for Train to Gain learners was low last year. It is now increasing strongly. Success rates are higher for male learners than for female learners. This gap has widened in recent years among learners aged 16–18 and last year it appeared for adult learners. Those learners receiving learning support achieve at a slightly higher rate than do other learners.

13. For learners aged 16–18, both retention and achievement are just above the national level. For adult learners, achievement rates are high but substantial variations in retention have had a major bearing on success rates. Retention is also the major factor in the gender gap. The college's strategies to improve retention have resulted in a very marked improvement in current in-year retention. Close to the end of the college year, retention is much higher than it was at the same point last year and retention of female learners is at least as strong as it is for male learners. Attendance is good and continuing to improve.
14. Although value-added data indicate that relatively few learners achieve beyond normal expectations, in the better lessons learners often make good progress. They develop good independent study skills and the standard of their work is consistently good. Most learners develop a good range of personal, social and vocational skills, which prepare them well for higher education and enhance their employability and promotion prospects. They are made aware of the implications of the choices they can make about their health and well-being but they are not challenged sufficiently to change their habits. Learners take an active part in college and community life, for example through the course representative structure, charitable fundraising and increasingly demonstrating their developing skills in the local community. However, there was no obvious celebration of adult learners' week, which coincided with this inspection.
15. Learners of all ages say how much they enjoy their learning and attending college. Their skills in literacy and numeracy are strengthened alongside their vocational programmes. Results in key skills were high, but dipped last year. Progression rates between different levels of study within the college are satisfactory and a very high proportion of learners progress from college to higher education, employment or apprenticeships. Learners feel extremely safe in the college and free from bullying, harassment and discrimination. They largely demonstrate safe working practices and implement them effectively on vocational courses and whilst at work.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. Regular and rigorous assessment supports learning well. Teachers plan assessment carefully and link it closely to course objectives. The use of the results of initial assessment to inform lesson planning is increasingly effective. With a few exceptions, teachers mark learners' work promptly and provide detailed feedback which helps learners to achieve. Additional workshops to support learners needing extra help in completing work are used productively as catch-up sessions. Learners' progress is monitored closely and almost all learners have a clear idea of how well they are doing. Assessment and monitoring of progress for work-based learners are good.
17. The majority of lessons are good. Learners have enthusiastic attitudes to learning and value many teachers' high levels of vocational expertise. Teachers use the high quality learning environments in many vocational areas, such as the Cider Orchard Restaurant and the organic Pound Farm, to promote practical

skills development well. They devise realistic practical tasks to ensure that learners work towards the standards expected in industry. The often creative use of ILT adds variety to lessons and assessment. A minority of lessons are less effective, where teachers have low expectations of learners and fail to provide enough challenge to ensure they learn quickly and effectively. Teachers' use of questioning to probe and extend learners' knowledge and understanding is often ineffective.

18. The strong focus on extending teachers' skills through professional development is supporting many teachers to improve their practice well, including through peer observation of lessons. Constructive use of lesson observations provides feedback to teachers on the quality of their lessons. As part of the process, observers canvass learners' views and use these to inform their judgements. However, some evaluations are over generous and lack a sharp focus on how effectively teaching is promoting learners' progress. Lesson plans are detailed, but learning objectives are often too general to help teachers ensure their lessons are fully effective.
19. The college meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. Vocational progression routes are numerous and coherent. The regular review of the curriculum ensures a good match with learners and employers' requirements. A detailed course approval process scrutinises market demand and the financial viability of new courses. A few newly developed courses have very low numbers. Reduced funding is resulting in a narrowing of courses available to adults and others are moving to a self-financing basis. The college is particularly effective in widening access to training in rural communities. Employers value the college's speedy response to requests for training and flexibility in how it is provided. They are generally very satisfied with the quality of training.
20. Partnerships with schools and the local authority have helped to create increased opportunities for learners aged 14–19. The college leads the development of new diplomas in construction and engineering due to start next year. It also provides key elements of other diplomas for partner schools. A broad range of vocational opportunities are made available for learners aged 14–16 but the provision is small, due to low take-up by the schools, with most learners following young apprenticeship programmes.
21. A varied enrichment programme is available across college. The college recognises that participation is generally low and constrained by course timetables. The recreational sports programme includes minority sports and the college runs representative teams, the majority of which are male dominated. A good variety of guest speakers and industry visits add interest to learners' vocational programmes.
22. Care, guidance and support are good. Learners now receive more accurate and timely advice and information from first contact in schools, which helps them to make sound decisions about their choice of college course. Arrangements for transition from school to college are good and induction helps learners settle into college quickly. Most learners receive useful careers advice and helpful support in applying to university.

23. Additional learning support is well organised and systematic in identifying additional needs early and ensuring learners receive support promptly. Information from initial assessment informs a detailed learner profile for each class to assist in planning lessons and monitoring progress, although the use of this information is not always effective. The impact of additional support on learners' success is routinely monitored. Performance of learners receiving support compares favourably with those who are not.
24. Teaching and specialist support staff provide learners with highly flexible and responsive individual support. Trainers are equally flexible in providing good support for learners in the work place. A wide range of services is available through the specialist support team. Strong links with external agencies help the college meet the diverse support needs of learners. Specialist provision supports vulnerable learners well, including those with learning difficulties.
25. Tutorial provision is satisfactory. Learners value individual tutorials because they monitor their progress well and tackle personal issues. However, the quality of group tutorials is variable and coverage of mandatory elements of the common tutorial programme is inconsistent. A growing range of resources is available centrally to support tutorials, but not all tutors take advantage of them.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

26. Leadership and management are good. The principal, senior managers and governors have overseen significant change in performance, buildings and the curriculum over the last few years that reflect confidence and ambition for the college. Strategic and operational planning is good. Performance against the strategic plan is monitored, but this is made more difficult because some aspirations have insufficiently detailed targets. Target setting in the college is well established and comprehensive. Most targets are met, although targets set for employer engagement have not been achieved. Curriculum areas are managed well and courses are mostly well organised.
27. Governors play a full part in determining the strategic direction of the college. They have been instrumental in pushing forward some key developments such as the assimilation of provision at Holme Lacy and building the new college campus in Hereford. Governors monitor the performance of the college closely and challenge managers appropriately. They discharge their responsibilities for safeguarding and health and safety well, although reporting against equality and diversity action plans has not been systematic. Governors have a valued three-hour workshop covering pertinent issues before four of the five annual corporation meetings. Clerking arrangements are good. Despite good efforts, the college has failed to attract governors from minority ethnic communities.
28. The college gives high priority to the safety of its learners. Secure arrangements are in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. Designated safeguarding staff are clearly signposted and staff and governors receive training to the appropriate level. The college exceeds

essential requirements in its vetting of staff, governors and volunteers. The required single central record is up-to-date and very comprehensive. Health and safety arrangements are mostly good. Regular internal audits provide assurance that standards are being maintained and promote further improvements. The incidence of accidents is low. The use of risk assessments is embedded well, but they are not always visible where learners need to see them.

29. The college's promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Inclusiveness is a strong and central feature of the college's work. It provides a harmonious environment with few incidents of concern and good relationships between different groups of people. Teachers place increasingly high importance on adapting their teaching strategies and use of resources to ensure that no learner is disadvantaged. The promotion of equality and diversity themes in lessons, tutorials and in progress reviews for employment-based learners varies but is often too limited and unmemorable. Consequently, learners' knowledge, understanding and preparation for working in a multicultural society are underdeveloped.
30. A revitalised equality and diversity group is working to strengthen many aspects of the college's policy and procedures. The newly published single equality scheme **needs further development** and is to be reviewed. Arrangements for timely and formal reporting of the impact of equality and diversity measures are now much firmer. Detailed analysis of data on the performance of different groups is used well to inform comprehensive action plans. These have been successful in narrowing the significant achievement gap between male and female learners considerably in the current year.
31. The college has developed extensive arrangements to listen and respond to learners. As well as formal structures such as a student forum and council, learners' views are surveyed and they contribute to course reviews. The student council provides two governors and minutes of their meetings are sent to the senior management team. Course teams are responsive to learners' concerns. Arrangements for letting learners know about actions taken in response to their feedback are satisfactory. Links with employers are good and often help to develop new provision and occasionally to improve the quality of courses. Arrangements for listening and responding to community groups and other partners are good.
32. The college enjoys good relationships with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, which benefit the college and its wider communities. Links with secondary schools, the local authority and regeneration partners are good. Links with professional firms to develop specialist curricula, particularly in rural crafts and aspects of sustainable construction, are well established.
33. Quality improvement arrangements are good. They have led to significant improvements in outcomes and teaching and learning over the last few years. Self-assessment is well established. During the year the principal holds three 'quality summit' meetings with each curriculum team leader that focus on raising achievement and addressing improvements needed to meet targets.

These meetings complement a range of other quality improvement activities, including an effective process for spotlighting under-performing courses.

34. Managers use quality improvement plans effectively to monitor progress and secure improvements. The findings from lesson observations are used in self-assessment. The process covers all teachers every year and teachers of those lessons judged satisfactory or worse receive support. College data show a marked decline in the proportion of satisfactory lessons and a corresponding increase in those judged good or better. Some evaluations, however, are over generous as recognised in the college's recent strengthening of moderation arrangements. The quality improvement system did not pick up early enough shortcomings in a few new courses.
35. A broad range of staff development activities provides a good emphasis on improving pedagogic practices. Participation rates are high. All staff receive training in equality and diversity as well as safeguarding. Arrangements for appraising staff are satisfactory. Appraisals are carried out regularly but they fail to take sufficient account of outcomes from lesson observations or progress towards achieving objectives set at the previous appraisal. Resources for learning are good and often outstanding. The intention of the design and materials used in the construction of the new college buildings is to minimise impact on the environment and reduce energy consumption.
36. Financial management is good. In the last few years, the college has managed an extensive new build, merger with another college and changes in funding whilst maintaining healthy financial balances. The college pays good attention to achieving best value when securing goods and services; for example, it has entered a consortium for purchasing. The college provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Context

37. The college provides mostly full-time courses in this area with some part-time courses in childcare, health and social care and counselling skills. Of the 424 learners enrolled, 100 are full-time 16–18-year-olds; 15 are part-time 14–16-year-olds. Among the full-time learners, 11 study at foundation level, 50 at intermediate level and 97 at advanced level. Some 260 learners study part-time courses and 90 Train to Gain learners follow NVQ programmes in health and social care and children's care.

Key findings

- Success rates are high on the majority of courses. They are outstanding on the intermediate child care course, at 100% for the last two years, and for young apprentices. Success rates on foundation child care and intermediate public services are low. Retention improved on most courses last year and has continued to improve this year. On Train to Gain, the timely success rate was low in 2008/09 due to administrative errors but the in-year success rate is rising towards the national average.
- Learners develop good personal, academic and vocational skills and make good progress in lessons. They are confident in using information technology (IT) for research, presentations and word processing their work. In public services, learners have gained excellent map reading and orienteering skills.
- Student work is of a high standard. During inspection, for example, intermediate level learners produced extended documents in which they synthesised information from several sources in order to explain the various systems of the body. Learners are motivated and confident; they enjoy their studies and feel very safe at the college.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good. Lessons involve a broad variety of learning activities. ILT is used well by teachers to enliven lessons. Learners' work is assessed thoroughly. Learners are set clear targets and receive detailed feedback on how they can improve further.
- The good informal support learners receive from their teachers and through the tutorial system contributes significantly to the good quality of their assignment work and their development of vocational skills. Additional learning support is effective and "at risk" learners are well supported.
- Train to Gain learners receive particularly good pastoral support from their training officers and assessors. Assessors are flexible and will readily adapt their approach to suit workplace environments and minimise any barriers to success.
- Most learners complete and value a period of work experience relevant to their chosen career path. Occasionally this leads to permanent employment. Learners

on public services courses spend one day at each of the main uniformed services.

- The broad range of courses is well suited to learners' needs and interests. Progression pathways, in some cases from foundation to degree level, are available in childcare, health and social care, public services and counselling. Learners aged 14–16 from local schools follow the young apprenticeship programme. Full-time learners do not enjoy key skills as much as the rest of their course.
- Good advice and guidance ensure learners are on the right course and have a clear career path ahead of them. Taster days have been extended to include vocational as well as functional skills assessment. Learners value this opportunity to test out their commitment to the course and it is motivational for those who choose to continue. Visiting speakers from related professions talk to learners about their roles. Learners are well versed in completing CVs, application forms and mock interviews.
- Curriculum management is good. Good practice is shared very effectively across the whole area. Discussions take place on different teaching approaches and new ideas at the regular team meetings. The recent introduction of lesson observations by peers is viewed positively. However, learners' understanding of equality and diversity is too basic because its promotion within lessons remains underdeveloped.
- Teachers and learners are involved in the course review process and have good opportunities to feed into self-assessment. The improving teaching and learning grade profile supports the view of teachers that this area is getting better year-on-year.

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

- Increase success rates on the less well performing courses by focusing and embedding the range of strategies which are successfully improving retention.
- Further strengthen the promotion of equality and diversity within lessons and tutorials so that teachers become more skilled at identifying opportunities to discuss equality and diversity issues as they arise.

Business, administration and law

Grade 2

Context

38. The college provides full- and part-time courses in business, business administration, management and accounting from foundation level to higher education. Of the current 420 learners, 336 are adults and the remainder are aged 16–18. One quarter of learners study full-time. About one third of learners are studying at advanced level and the rest divide evenly between foundation, intermediate and higher levels. Nine apprentices are on accounting or business administration programmes and a few Train to Gain learners follow a management programme.

Key findings

- Learners' outcomes are good. In 2009, success rates were high on most full-time courses, but fell on NVQ accounting courses due to poor retention. Well-implemented strategies to improve retention, including more extensive pre-enrolment advice and guidance to ensure learners are on the right level of course, are proving successful and in-year retention is very high on most courses. Success rates on the diploma in management are consistently outstanding.
- The standard of learners' work is good. Learners demonstrate good presentation skills and the ability to analyse business situations well. They make good use of IT and talk about their work confidently and with enthusiasm.
- Learners feel very safe and supported. They come to college enthusiastically, enjoy their lessons and respond positively in them. They value the approachability of their teachers and the extent to which they provide them with informal support outside lessons. Learners' work is marked fairly and attracts detailed and encouraging feedback on how they can improve.
- Many lessons are good and outstanding but too many remain satisfactory. The best lessons are busy and use a good range of methods to interest learners. The high level of learners' involvement promotes more secure understanding of business concepts and stimulates greater skills development. Other lessons lack sufficient differentiation, challenge and formative assessment. Lesson planning does not always identify specific learning objectives which can be used to evaluate learners' progress.
- ILT facilities are excellent. All classrooms have interactive whiteboards and all full-time learners have a notebook computer. Access to computers and the internet is very good, with a laptop 'bank' on each floor and good numbers of computers in the curriculum area, the IT centre and the learning resource centre.
- The range of provision is good with courses at foundation to HE levels. The recent introduction of the new diplomas in business, administration and finance at all three levels is popular with full-time learners. Teachers have reinvigorated

the curriculum to provide more exciting learning opportunities. However, local schools are currently contributing insufficiently to the diplomas. . A wide range of part-time provision in accounting and secretarial skills meets the needs of local employers with 80% of accounting learners progressing onto the next level.

- Visits to relevant employers enhance courses and some courses are developing more extensive links with employers. A particularly good relationship exists with one employer who allows a member of their marketing team to link with the college and contribute to courses. In 2009, this employee won the regional award for best company advisor.
- Individual tutorials provide good opportunities for each learner to reflect on and discuss their progress and set targets for improving further. Individual learning plans have clear course-related targets, which teachers monitor closely. Learners are very aware of what they need to do to pass or achieve higher grades.
- Curriculum management is good. Success rates have increased and managers and teachers focus keenly on securing further improvements. Their implementation of college retention strategies has had a clear impact. Managers use data to monitor progress against self-assessment targets effectively. The close monitoring of courses throughout the year identifies any underperformance and managers take decisive action where necessary.
- Communication within the area is well structured. The organisation of courses is good and teams meet regularly to share information and discuss learners' progress. Lesson observations take place systematically and where lessons are graded satisfactory teachers have a mentor to support them to improve.

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

- Create more consistently good or better lessons by sharing good practice in the setting and sharing of learning objectives, in differentiating the learning experience to meet learners' needs across the ability range better and in using question and answer sessions to challenge learners more.
- Further improve success rates by ensuring that existing retention strategies impact positively on all courses.
- Further develop the curriculum experience of learners by extending the links with employers and by working with the local authority to secure a better commitment from schools to the ethos of the new diplomas.

Information about the inspection

39. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's deputy principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
40. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed lessons, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Herefordshire 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+ 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	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	2511	1224	443	844
Part-time learners	2456	128	1472	0
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2			
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2			
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	2 3			
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2			
How safe do learners feel?	2			
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	3			
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	2			
Quality of provision	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
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?	2			
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2			
Leadership and management	2	2	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2			
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?	2			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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