

The Vocational College Limited

Inspection report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. The Vocational College Limited (TVC) is a private company with its head office and main training centre in Bootle, near Liverpool. TVC has contracts with the Skills Funding Agency, to provide apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes across a wide range of geographical areas in the north, midlands, and the south of England. The company also contracts to provide Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes in Merseyside from a specialist centre on the Wirral.
2. The company offers Train to Gain and apprenticeship training in manufacturing technologies, construction, and hospitality, as well as apprenticeships in sports and recreation. All manufacturing and construction awards offered by TVC are in glass-related occupations including processing, fabrication, fenestration, glazing and installation. The majority of TVC's hospitality training is provided for a large national hospitality group.
3. Recruitment for TVC's apprenticeship programmes is directly through employers for hospitality and catering, and manufacturing technologies. Learners on sports programmes are primarily programme-led apprentices, whilst for construction there is a mixture of employed and programme-led provision.
4. Since the last inspection, TVC has stopped offering business administration programmes. The numbers of learners in sports and recreation, and in hospitality and catering have significantly increased. TVC has also extended the programme-led provision through the introduction of programme-led apprentices in construction. All subject areas were inspected apart from sport, leisure and recreation.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners:	
Entry to Employment	180 full-time learners
Programme-led apprentices	225 learners
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	379 learners
Apprenticeships	258 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Manufacturing technologies	2
Construction crafts – glazing and glazing systems	2
Hospitality and catering	3
Employability training	2

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of TVC is good. It has satisfactory capacity to improve, with consistently high success rates for Train to Gain and high progression rates on E2E programmes. Success rates of apprentices have improved steadily, keeping them in line with national rates. All learners make good progress, enjoy their learning and develop good occupational skills. They have a very good understanding of safe working practices. Learners benefit from good teaching and learning that utilises a wide range of activities to make learning interesting. Support with literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. However, diagnostic assessments insufficiently influence how tutors develop individual learning plans, or plan for activities in group sessions. TVC is responsive and flexible in its approach, providing E2E learners with a good range of additional qualifications and work-based learners with appropriate optional units. The review of learners' progress is satisfactory overall but monitoring of progress focuses insufficiently on achievement and most targets set lack detail. Leadership and management are good. Managers and staff understand the

company priorities well, and are committed to improving the learning experience. However, TVC does not sufficiently provide staff with detailed operational objectives that help them in prioritising developments, or measure the effectiveness of actions taken. TVC's quality processes inform self-assessment insufficiently and do not adequately support well-defined improvement and strategic plans.

Main findings

- Timely success rates for Train to Gain are consistently high and well above the national average. However, success for the small group of level 3 learners is low. Progression rates on the E2E programme are consistently high and significantly above the national average. Overall success rates for apprenticeships have remained similar to national rates for three years, with apprentices at level 2 more successful than those at level 3.
- Learners enjoy their learning, develop good personal and social skills, and gain confidence and increased motivation. They develop extensive awareness of health and safety and good occupational skills. Learners value and recognise training as increasing their job security and career opportunities. Employers value learners' increased capacity to take responsibility.
- Learners benefit from good teaching and learning sessions which employ a wide range of activities, are interesting, and relate well to industrial practice. Tutors are enthusiastic and have high levels of industrial expertise, which enriches learning. Assessment practice is good overall. Learners have access to well-planned, wide ranging, and flexible opportunities for assessment, which meet employers and learners' work patterns.
- TVC completes initial diagnostic assessment for all learners. Work-based tutors support their learners' literacy and numeracy needs adequately. Full-time learners benefit from discrete sessions to improve their literacy and numeracy levels. However, staff do not use the results of initial and diagnostic assessment sufficiently in planning for differentiation in group sessions or in developing individual learning plans.
- In hospitality, the process of learner reviews is good. The approach to, and quality of, reviews are less consistent in other areas. A well-considered system triggers good interventions for those learners judged to be at risk of falling behind. However, tutors monitor insufficiently the progress learners have made towards achievement of their qualifications and targets to ascertain progress are insufficiently measurable.
- TVC meets the needs and interests of learners and employers particularly well. Good progression routes, additional qualifications and well considered National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) optional units combine with TVC's flexible and responsive approach to training and assessment. Partnership working with employers and wider stakeholders is particularly good in informing the direction of the provision and meeting learners' needs.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, and personal support is good, particularly for E2E learners. Employers are supportive of their employees

and tutors provide good individual support for employed learners through their regular monthly visits. Careers advice and guidance are well sequenced and thorough on full-time programmes but less effective for employed learners.

- Managers have a clear organisational vision that they disseminate through good communication to an enthusiastic and committed staff. Staff work extremely well as a team to improve the experience of learners. The provider uses information from employers and their national networking roles very well to plan provision, taking full account of national and regional priorities.
- The provider's use of data to plan provision is adequate. Managers set appropriate overarching and departmental targets. However, action planning, both across the provision, and within individual departments, makes insufficient use of long- or medium-term planning or milestones to benchmark progress accurately.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory overall, with aspects of good practice. Arrangements for occupational health and safety are good. TVC's arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory. They place a high emphasis on inclusion and are highly learner-centred. Managers analyse some data, with good actions taken to remedy underperformance. However, TVC has not fully embedded a standardised process for the analysis of all equality data.
- TVC uses its good partnerships with stakeholders, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), and awarding bodies very effectively to promote improvement. Staff discussions with employers inform programme changes. TVC makes good use of learners' forums to improve provision. However, TVC does not use sufficiently its more formal processes for collecting feedback from employers and learners in order to inform quality processes.
- TVC's arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory. The self-assessment process is suitably inclusive and well embedded. The process identifies most strengths and areas for development. However, the report does not always sufficiently outline the evidence underpinning judgements. Data are robust but not always used well to form conclusions. The self-assessment report does not always result in detailed action plans.
- The provider uses its resources very well to secure value for money. Financial control is rigorous, with staff and learners aware of cost-effectiveness and sustainability.

What does The Vocational College Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates of apprentices and Train to Gain learners at level 3 through the development of better monitoring systems to track learners' progress on programmes and against timely completions.
- Make better use and interpretation of initial and diagnostic results to plan activities for effective differentiated learning. Improve the monitoring of the impact of additional learning support to ensure that it meets individual needs.

- Extend the use of, and fully embed strategies and long-term plans, in order to drive improvement across the provision. Ensure that appropriate staff or teams systematically review progress against agreed actions.
- Improve the self-assessment process and related quality improvement measures to ensure that there is a clear well-evidenced view of strengths and areas for improvement that brings about improvement through effective actions.
- Continue to raise the profile of equality and diversity through better promotion, monitoring, and use of data, to ensure that there is equity of success across all groups of learners.
- Improve the use of reviews by ensuring that clear measurable targets are set, and that learners fully understand how well they are progressing towards their learning goals.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- that tutors provide full support in their learning, helping them to overcome any difficulties and increase their confidence
- the ability to learn new skills and achieve a first qualification
- the improved knowledge about their companies and the ability to apply this knowledge to make changes at work
- the way that TVC listens and takes actions on learners' comments
- the responsive way courses are planned to fit in with job roles
- the support from companies in letting learners complete qualifications
- the one-to-one support and consistent guidance from tutors who know the industry well.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more frequent visits from tutors to quicken the completion of the award
- less jargon so learners do not have to keep asking tutors what is required
- more use of photographic and video evidence
- having more of learners' work displayed to help personalise teaching rooms in different subject areas
- earlier information about what they can move onto at the end of the qualification.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the enthusiasm and flexibility of tutors in meeting employee needs

- that the college maintains high standards and qualifications completed are relevant to the industry
- the good relationships in developing specialist provision delivered on employer sites and the way training makes employees feel valued and an asset to the company
- their employees' development of problem-solving skills and confidence-building
- that they receive excellent communication from the college, being kept informed at all times
- the college making best possible use and management of employers' physical resources
- their employees' enjoyment of the course and the high levels of support from the college.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more ownership of portfolios by employees
- more involvement as employers in signing-off work completed for customers
- better advertising to potential employees in the workplace, encouraging more staff to take courses
- better and regular communication on how employees are progressing towards their award.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

6. TVC's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, overall success rates have shown a steady trend of improvement. Overall and timely success rates in Train to Gain remain high. Similarly, E2E progression rates have remained high at over 70% for the last four years. Overall success rates for apprenticeships have improved steadily and remain around the national average. However, timely apprenticeship success rates remain low.
7. Operational management has a clear emphasis on performance management to improve outcomes. Managers use data well, team working is strong, and TVC responds quickly to issues or concerns. Managers set appropriate overarching targets for success rates, but outside contract compliance, there is an over reliance on good staff working and communication, rather than the use of detailed operational planning or well defined targets to drive improvements.
8. Teaching and learning are good, with some innovative use of various technologies for learning. Value for money is good. TVC gains views of employers and learners from a wide range of sources and makes some good improvements to provision. However, information from mechanisms for formal feedback is used insufficiently.
9. Managers have a clear understanding of the company's priorities, which staff understand and implement effectively. However, managers do not formalise strategic planning sufficiently in order to ensure that staff have clarity about the long-term development of the company.
10. TVC's arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory. The process is inclusive of staff views and the views of some employers and learners. Inspectors agreed with most of the report's strength and areas for further development. However, the report fails to support the key judgements with sufficient qualitative evidence. Data, although robust, do not always accurately support the conclusions about outcomes for learners. The report is not based sufficiently on the observation process to support its judgements on teaching and learning. Most crucially, the self-assessment report does not sufficiently inform detailed action plans that genuinely drive improvement.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

11. Timely success rates for Train to Gain are consistently high and well above the national average by some 12%. However, this masks low success rates over a three-year period for the small cohort at level 3. Success rates are high in engineering and construction but in hospitality and catering, success has been slightly below national rates for the last two years.

12. Progression rates on the E2E programme show a steady improvement from a very good starting point. Consistently high progression rates have remained above 70% over a four-year period, ranging between 12% to 27% above the national average. Pass rates on the wide range of qualifications taken by E2E learners are satisfactory.
13. The headline success rate for apprenticeships has improved more slowly than national rates, remaining at or about the national average for the last three years. Current learners are making better progress towards their qualifications. Engineering and construction are above national average and sport is slightly above the average, as is hospitality. Timely success rates show an inconsistent trend and were 5% below the national rate in 2008/09.
14. The overall success rate for apprentices has shown an improving trend over the last three years and is currently 4% above the national average. This improving trend is still apparent in 2009/10 with a further improvement of 5%. The overall success rates for advanced apprentices are significantly below the national average, with low success rates in engineering, construction, and sports.
15. Slight variations exist in both apprenticeship and Train to Gain success rates between different geographical regions. There are no discernible differences between the success rates of men and women or of those from diverse heritage groups. However, 16 to 18-year-old learners are more successful than adults. TVC has successfully implemented a strategy for improving the quality of teaching and learning for advanced-level apprentices to improve adults' success.
16. Learners develop good personal and social skills and gain confidence and increased motivation. They are fully engaged in learning, generally make good progress, and value the acquisition of occupational skills which they recognise as increasing their job security and career opportunities. Employers value learners' increased capacity to take responsibility and benefit from their high levels of motivation, increased customer service skills, health and safety awareness, and more confident decision-making.
17. Learners, staff and employers exhibit good and extensive health and safety awareness and practice. A comprehensive health and safety induction prepares learners well for the workplace, whilst reinforcing employers' existing policies and practices. Learners feel safe and well protected through employers' and TVC staff's consistently sustained promotion of safe working practices.
18. E2E and sports learners have a good awareness of choices that affect personal well-being. They are able to make informed choices about the personal cost of smoking and about the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse. Whilst E2E and sports learners benefit from a well-integrated healthy living context within their courses, this focus is less established and promoted in apprenticeship programmes.

19. E2E learners make a good contribution to their local communities. Their participation broadens their knowledge and skills and makes them aware of their wider communities. Aspirations are raised, giving young people a focus and sense of self-worth. Apprentices become involved in local projects dependent on the level of their employer's commitment.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

20. Teaching, training and assessment are good. Work-based learners develop good skills through a wide combination of learning experiences, much good teaching, and support from workplace mentors. Full-time learners on E2E and programme-led apprenticeships benefit from sessions that have a wide range of activity, are interesting, and, in most cases, relate well to industrial practice. Tutors are enthusiastic, develop a good rapport, and motivate learners well. Tutors have high levels of industrial expertise, which enriches learning. Staff development is good, with high priority given to ensuring that teachers are equipped with the skills to enable them to provide good quality teaching. A good range of resources is available across all the provision which supports teaching and learning well. The promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning is underdeveloped.
21. Assessment practice is good overall. Learners have access to well planned, regular and flexible opportunities for assessment that match employers' and learners' work patterns. Good use is made of naturally occurring evidence. Tutors use technology well in the workplace to provide an effective and efficient record of their monthly assessment visits. A very effective online learning environment has recently been introduced for sport learners and e-portfolios are used in glass and glazing programmes. In hospitality, some learners on level 2 programmes take insufficient ownership of their portfolios to manage and drive their own progress.
22. An improved observation process is raising the quality of teaching and learning. Well structured observation plans ensure that staff are observed at least twice-yearly. The observation team moderates all the grades awarded comprehensively. Staff receive particularly good verbal and satisfactory written feedback on how they might improve. However, some grades are over-stated, particularly the higher grades. Moderation of written feedback is made difficult due to the overly descriptive written reports of performance.
23. TVC systematically completes initial diagnostic assessment for all learners. Work-based learners who are identified with literacy and numeracy needs are supported by visiting tutors using a satisfactory range of resources. Full-time learners benefit from discrete sessions to support their literacy and numeracy. However, staff do not use the results of initial and diagnostic assessment sufficiently to plan differentiation in group sessions or in developing individual learning plans.
24. Internal verification is satisfactory overall. Good systems are in place to ensure that the thorough sampling of assessment practice covers all learners and

aspects of the qualifications. There are regular standardisation meetings. However, too many planned samples of assessment are missed and internal verification strategies insufficiently address the low timely completion rates for apprentices.

25. In hospitality, the process for learner reviews is good. The approach to, and quality of, reviews are less consistent in other areas. A colour coded system triggers good interventions for those learners whom tutors judge to be at risk of falling behind. However, the monitoring of assessments completed and of learners' progress towards their qualification is insufficient. Tutors are missing opportunities to progress learning in a timely fashion through the use of specific, measurable targets.
26. Learners' and employers' needs are particularly well met. Good progression routes exist from E2E to apprenticeships. On full-time programmes, learners are able to take a good range of additional qualifications. On work-based programmes, learning and assessment plans take full account of employers' work practices and patterns. Negotiated optional units make best use of learners' current responsibilities and potential career choices. TVC works well with employers to meet the demands of the glass, glazing, and hospitality industries.
27. Partnership working with employers is particularly good in informing the direction of the provision and meeting learners' needs. The college works collaboratively with high profile employers in the glass, glazing, and hospitality industries, developing training and acting as an advocate to awarding bodies. In sport, good employer engagement helps learners find employment. TVC's involvement with young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) provides a highly valuable career route for many whom the education system has failed. Staff in construction work closely with the SSC and have been instrumental in the development of the industry's qualifications.
28. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, and personal support is particularly good for E2E learners. Employers are supportive of their employees, whilst tutors provide good individual support for employed learners that promotes their achievement and success. Full-time learners receive a more memorable and comprehensive induction than employed learners. Similarly, careers advice and guidance are well sequenced and thorough on full-time programmes but less effective for employed learners.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

29. TVC senior managers have a clear organisational vision that they disseminate through good communication to an enthusiastic and committed staff. Operational management is good. However, too many operational objectives are not sufficiently supported by comprehensive and clearly recorded operational plans. Staff work extremely well as a team to improve the learners' experience. Staff are highly occupationally competent and TVC invests heavily in their development both occupationally and with a clear emphasis on

assessing and teaching competencies. Resources, including use of technologies for teaching and learning are good, as are those to disseminate and gather information and maintain good staff cohesion.

30. The provider uses information from employers and their national networking roles very well to plan provision, with some good work both nationally and regionally in response to national priorities and the needs of the sector. They are well respected in the industry and play a major part in a number of developments across the sector. For example, SSC consistently requests their input in the development of new standards that influence the direction of the industry.
31. The provider's use of data to plan provision is adequate. Managers set appropriate overarching provision and departmental targets. However, action planning, both across the provision and within individual departments, makes insufficient use of long- or medium-term planning or milestones to benchmark progress accurately.
32. Arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory overall, with aspects of good practice. TVC has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures, with safeguarding responsibilities allocated to appropriate staff. TVC meets all legal requirements and all staff have completed training. Learners feel very safe in the provision and have at least an adequate knowledge of safeguarding. Arrangements for occupational health and safety are good. All work placements are regularly risk-assessed, with action plans that demonstrably lead to improvement. Initial training on the requirements of the Independent Safeguarding Authority is complete but not fully implemented.
33. TVC's arrangements for equality and diversity across provision are satisfactory. The provider places a high emphasis on inclusion and is highly learner-centred. Learners are very happy and feel well supported by tutors. The provider has developed some good resources to help raise awareness of equality and diversity that many learners are now using well. TVC is also developing a regular questionnaire system with learners to assess their level of understanding of underlying issues of equality.
34. A fully representative staff working group on equality and diversity leads on actions across the provision. It meets regularly and has compiled an action plan for some developments across provision. Policies and procedures are up-to-date and are satisfactory. However, while the group has responsibility for the direction of equality and diversity, reports relating to issues of equality are not always available to them. The company uses some data to identify and thus help narrow the achievement gap, with managers taking good actions to remedy underperformance. However, TVC has not fully embedded a standardised process for the analysis of all equality data.
35. TVC uses its good partnerships with stakeholders, SSC, and awarding bodies very effectively to support and promote improvement. Staff meet regularly with key employers to discuss the provision and plan for any changes. TVC also uses

information from learners to improve provision successfully in many areas. TVC makes good use of learner forums to improve provision. Using information given by learners, TVC are re-writing national standards to be more user friendly. However, TVC is still finalising its strategy for employer engagement and is not sufficiently using the formal processes for collecting employers' and learners' feedback in order to inform quality processes.

36. TVC's arrangements for performance management, particularly regarding timely success rates, are good. Managers use monthly meetings with staff to examine caseloads carefully against overall progress towards the overarching targets. They use data well to identify individual staff underperformance and support them to improve. All learners are risk-assessed but there is not yet a single specific system to track mid-unit progress.
37. TVC's arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory. The self-assessment process is inclusive of the views of staff and of some employers and learners. It follows a regular cycle that is well embedded in the company. The process identifies most strengths and areas for development. However, the report does not always sufficiently outline the evidence underpinning some judgements. Data are robust but not always used well to support conclusions reached about outcomes for learners. The self-assessment report does not always lead to detailed action plans. Managers have a clear understanding of the company's priorities. However, they do not plan sufficiently strategically in a clear and systematic manner, to ensure that all staff have an understanding of their part in the long-term development of the company.
38. The provider uses its resources very well to secure value for money. Since the last inspection in 2006, overall success rates show a consistent trend of improvement. Financial control is rigorous and TVC consistently gains a good provider financial assessment report. Managers use monthly meetings very well to analyse performance against the contract closely. TVC is very successful in encouraging staff and learners to be aware of cost effectiveness and sustainability. In the glazing department, the good links with employers have led to many donations of windows and window fittings that learners re-use as learning materials. Construction learners make table tennis tables for E2E learners rather than buying new products. Learners' views expressed in forums result in some allocation of resources in response to their requests, such as renewed seating in the E2E café area. Learners are encouraged to consider the cost implications themselves and often become involved in costing the activities that they propose.

Subject areas

Manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Context

39. Currently 138 learners are working towards level 2 and 3 qualifications in manufacturing. Twenty-six apprentice learners are studying at level 2, whilst 12 are working at level 3. A further 100 learners are undertaking Train to Gain programmes, predominantly at level 2. Learners complete all their training and assessment within the workplace. All learners are male.

Key findings

- The overall success rate for level 2 apprentices has risen over the last three-years and is high at 80% in 2008/09. However, although the level 3 apprentice success rate has also risen consistently over the last three-years, it was well below the national average in 2008/09. The timely success rate for Train to Gain learners is high and in 2008/09 was 11% above the national average.
- Current learners are making good progress towards their planned learning goals. Learners develop good work-related skills and feel safe at work. Train to Gain learners use existing occupational knowledge and technical skills well to achieve in a timely manner. Learners feel that the programme gives them the structure and confidence to improve their work practices and to recognise the importance of policies and work instructions.
- Learners work safely and feel safe within the workplace. Employers and tutors give a very high priority to health and safety throughout the training period. Learners apply health and safety procedures to an exceptionally high standard.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Learners value the good individual coaching provided by tutors. Tutors use their extensive industrial experience well to enhance learning. The regular assessment of wide-ranging evidence includes video footage. Learners fully understand the technical aspects of their qualifications and efficient work practices. Good feedback from assessments ensures that learners have sufficient information to help them to improve.
- Staff review the progress of learners frequently. Discussion provides learners with adequate guidance on progress but this does not result in sufficiently clear short- or medium-term recorded targets to help learners and employers plan work. TVC does not have an adequate central record of the ongoing progress of each learner. However, individual tutors have developed their own ongoing monitoring systems.
- All programmes meet the needs of learners effectively. They value the opportunity to achieve a work-related and relevant qualification whilst gaining a greater awareness of their organisation's work practices. They acquire better

understanding of the relevance of policies and procedures used in high-risk work.

- The use of partnerships to develop the provision is good. Effective partnerships with employers ensure that learners receive relevant experience in the workplace. TVC has close links with the SSC and many learners have won both local and national apprenticeship awards.
- Support for learners is good. TVC tutors provide good informal individual support for learners needing additional help or guidance. Most employers place learners with experienced engineers who are keen to impart their wealth of knowledge and skills. Some employers give learners time off work to concentrate on their portfolio evidence. Tutors support learners particularly well with key skills tasks, linked closely to working in the glass industry.
- Leadership and management are good. Success rates have improved consistently over the last three years. Staff place sufficient attention on ensuring that apprentices complete their awards within their planned timescales and consequently, in 2009/10, there has been a significant increase in timely success rates. Monthly review meetings discuss all learners' progress and underperformance is risk-assessed, with actions taken to resolve shortfalls in success rates.
- Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. TVC pays good attention to health and safety, with comprehensive policies and observation of safe working practices. The college has a designated safeguarding officer. Staff have received safeguarding training and clearly understand safeguarding issues.
- Induction satisfactorily covers equality of opportunity and many employers' equality and diversity policies are very comprehensive and cover all relevant legislation and definitions. Although TVC demonstrates their commitment to equality and diversity, there is insufficient reinforcement of equality issues during learners' reviews.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate and identifies many of the strengths that inspectors identified. The low timely success rate in 2008/09 for apprentices was also recognised and remedial actions were put in place.

What does The Vocational College Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve arrangements for progress reviews to support the development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Develop targets for learners during reviews that are specific, time-bound, and linked to learning plans. Measure progress and challenge any shortcomings fully during all subsequent reviews so that learners improve their timely completion rates.
- Develop an adequate central recording system to monitor the ongoing progress of each learner, enabling tutors, learners and employers to plan their work more effectively in order to achieve within their planned timescales.

Construction crafts - glazing and glazing systems

Grade 2

Context

40. Currently, there are 206 learners following construction courses in glazing installation and fenestration installation at levels 2 and 3. This includes 100 apprenticeships, nine advanced apprenticeships and 75 Train to Gain learners. Training and assessment are predominantly delivered in company training facilities and on building sites, with national coverage by the construction assessment team. Recently the college introduced a programme-led apprenticeship route in fenestration installation to support the progression of unemployed learners into the industry. Currently 22 learners attend this programme.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Timely success rates in Train to Gain are high and consistently above the national rate. However, there is some variability across regions and in particular in the North West. Overall success rates for apprenticeships are good. However, too many learners do not complete their qualification framework by their planned end-date.
- Apprentices develop good practical and job-related knowledge and skills. Train to Gain learners build effectively on their existing competences and benefit from a good range of additional skills. Learners are enthusiastic, motivated and enjoy their studies. Programme-led apprentices benefit from personal and social development and well supported practical skills in real working environments.
- Attention to health and safety is rigorous. TVC staff and employers promote high standards in health and safety. Learners are clear about the procedures to follow for their own safety and that of others. Learners feel safe, use personal protective equipment routinely and maintain safe working areas. Learners' understanding of wider safeguarding issues is satisfactory.
- Teaching and learning are good, with particularly effective one-to-one coaching. Enthusiastic and experienced tutors share their knowledge and site practice well. They make good use of information learning technology (ILT) to enhance and make learning interesting. Learners actively participate and show good understanding of complex tasks. Training takes good account of the high quality training by employers on company sites.
- Assessment practices are good, as are the processes for internal verification. Tutors make good use of naturally occurring evidence and use transferable competences effectively to optimise opportunities for assessment. The best portfolios contain a good variety of evidence and learners understand the process well. However, the planning of assessment is near the end of the course and the early capture of evidence and the completion of units are lost.
- During assessments, tutors provide excellent, constructive and supportive feedback to ensure that learners understand their achievement and what

further improvements are required. Progress reviews are satisfactory overall. However, the recording of progression targets lacks measurable detail and discussion during reviews insufficiently reinforces the learners' understanding of equality and diversity.

- Working in partnership with employers is very good, with learners benefiting from TVC's well-informed and collaborative training planned to replicate their work roles. Companies speak highly of the flexibility and responsiveness of TVC staff and the positive impact they have with their employees. TVC are still developing employer links on programme-led apprenticeships and few learners are on placements.
- Support for learners is good. Arrangements for initial assessments are satisfactory, with few learners requiring additional support. However, the tutors are very highly praised by both learners and employers for the caring, supportive and responsive attention they pay to apprentices and Train to Gain learners. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.
- Leadership and management are good, with all staff working together in a positive and supportive culture. Highly effective communication keeps all staff informed about the complexity of working nationally. Circumstances that could affect the progress of individual learners are effectively risk-managed. However, TVC insufficiently uses data to monitor performance or record learners' achievement throughout their course to ascertain progress.
- Self-assessment and quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The self-assessment report is broadly accurate. All staff understand the process, which is inclusive and utilises a well-embedded self-assessment tool kit. However, the action plans for improvement lack specific, measurable, realistic and timely targets to measure improvement and drive performance.
- Resources are good, with TVC making good use of the good training facilities within company sites. All tutors are well equipped and use ILT well to support learners. TVC and employers support the sustainability agenda through the recycling of glass, UPVC frames, paper and other building materials on-site and in-company.

What does the Vocational College Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the overall and timely success rates on apprenticeships, together with Train to Gain by considering and implementing effective strategies for the assessment of learners at an early stage.
- Develop work experience opportunities for programme-led apprentices to support potential progression into industry.
- Improve the effectiveness of progress reviews through the setting and monitoring of measurable targets to pace and challenge learners across all programmes.

- Build on the existing effective monthly team meetings and communication to ensure that tutors and managers routinely understand, identify and monitor learners' progress towards the completion of their award.
- Ensure that the action plan in the self-assessment report has specific, measurable, realistic and timely targets so that improvements can be evaluated more effectively.

Hospitality and catering

Grade 3

Context

41. TVC provides training and qualifications in hospitality and catering to learners on Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes. The majority of learners are working towards qualifications in food preparation. Other qualifications offered are food and drink service, housekeeping and hospitality supervision. Currently there are 204 Train to Gain learners, 186 apprentices and 56 advanced apprentices. All learners are in employment within various aspects of the hospitality industry. All learners receive training and assessment in the workplace.

Key findings

- The overall headline success rate is satisfactory. For level 2 programmes for apprentices, overall success is satisfactory and slightly above the national rate. However, at level 3 the success rate is low and has declined during the past three years. Learners in the current year are making good progress and in-year success has improved.
- The combined timely success rate for Train to Gain learners has been inconsistent and in 2008/09 was at the national rate. Success is better at level 2, which has been slightly above the national rates for the last three years. Conversely, level 3 success is below the national rate. Overall success rates at level 2 are satisfactory but remain low at level 3.
- Learners develop good technical and theoretical skills during their training. They become more involved in the areas they work in, and are able to accept additional responsibilities. All learners improve their social skills with both customers and colleagues. Employers and supervisors recognise this improved level of performance and many learners gain promoted posts, with roles as team leaders and assistant managers.
- Learners feel that they are safe at work and display good working practices whilst at work. There is good emphasis by tutors on health and safety. Learners are encouraged to identify any shortcomings which need to be put right and are made aware of the correct action to take and to whom to report concerns.
- Teaching and learning within the workplace are good. Tutors provide formal teaching sessions to individuals and small groups. Tutors plan sessions well, with clearly identified goals that learners work hard to achieve. These lessons provide opportunities for learners to develop and improve their levels of knowledge and to complete theoretical questions to a good standard.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Learners are involved in the planning of assessment, which tutors undertake and record appropriately. Portfolios are clearly organised. However, at level 2, learners do not always have a good

understanding of how to record evidence and identify opportunities for assessment. The recording of completed assessment insufficiently identifies learners on-going progress.

- Reviews of learners' work are good. Actions that need completing between visits and the timescales for completion are clearly identified. Learners use the review targets effectively to manage their learning. Supervisors are fully informed and as several have completed similar programmes, are able to provide good additional support.
- The college manages learning programmes in a flexible manner to meet the needs of the learner and the employer. Tutors plan visits to the workplace carefully, with full consideration given to when best to make them. Shift patterns influence when learners are available and tutors frequently make additional time available.
- The college works closely with industry partners and meets their needs well. There is good communication between managers and industry to discuss future developments. This good relationship has resulted in college involvement in joint training and development. Training is planned to make best use of employers' structures for in-house training.
- Learners receive good advice and guidance when starting their programme. Tutors spend time with them at the outset to ensure that they fully understand the programme's requirements. There is good involvement of learners and employers in discussions to ensure that learners are on appropriate programmes and make good choices when selecting the optional units to be completed.
- Learners have access to a good range of additional support from tutors and employers. Employers identify this support as improving the retention of staff at work and reducing staff turnover. Tutors provide adequate additional support for literacy and numeracy. For learners whose first language is not English, tutors provide additional time, which these learners value and say improves their language skills.
- The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners complete an equality of opportunity workbook at the start of learning and it forms part of the progress review. Recently questionnaires have been introduced to learners which question their understanding and are used to raise their awareness. However, the overall level of understanding by learners needs to be improved.

What does The Vocational College Limited need to do to improve further?

- Improve both the timely and overall success rates of learners by greater monitoring and recording of their progress in order to identify slow progress.
- Develop a greater understanding by level 2 learners of how to compile a portfolio and recognise assessment opportunities to improve their progress.

- Build on the current developments that improve learners' understanding of equality of opportunity.

Employability training

Grade 2

Context

42. Courses in literacy and numeracy, and preparation for work are offered to 190 learners from entry level to level 2. Courses are offered in construction, Skills for Life, horticulture, sport, catering, and pre-uniformed services. Training takes place primarily at one TVC learning centre on the Wirral and at three outreach centres at various locations. The department has a manager and 13 teachers, with learning support workers and volunteers supporting learning. Eighty-three per cent of learners are male, 2% are from different heritage groups and 23% have a declared learning difficulty and/or disability.

Key findings

- Progression rates for learners are high and have remained significantly above the national benchmark for the last three years. In 2009/10, the current progression rate is 71%. Learners progress into trained employment, apprenticeships or further education. Many learners progress onto higher level accredited courses.
- Learners are highly satisfied and enjoy their learning. They speak enthusiastically about their learning and recognise good developments in their vocational skills, levels of personal confidence and social skills. Attendance is satisfactory.
- TVC's attention to learners' personal welfare and health and safety is very good across all venues. Good use is made of initial assessments of learners' awareness of health and safety. Teachers routinely reinforce safe working practices. Good use is made of specialist external agencies over a range of important issues of health and personal well-being. Learners are able to make informed decisions about their own health and well-being.
- The development of learners' vocational skills, knowledge and competencies are good. Learners develop good skills in all occupational areas. Learners make good progress towards gaining accredited qualifications in a good range of awards. Pass rates overall are satisfactory. Learners develop good skills and knowledge in the safe use of specialist equipment.
- Teaching and learning are good. Staff plan sessions well, with a good range of interactive activities that engage and motivate learners. Resources to support learning are good and teachers make good use of these to challenge and extend learning. Learners interact very well with teachers and their peers. However, formal feedback from tutors following assessment is insufficiently detailed.

- Facilities and resources to support learning are good. Workshops, classrooms and facilities for practical activities across all subject areas are well equipped and good use is made of these and modern technologies to support learning.
- The use of reviews of learners' progress is insufficiently developed. Currently reviews focus mainly on short-term goals. Targets set are very general and lack specific detail that learners can understand and use to improve. Reviews do not incorporate a holistic overview of learners' progress towards medium-or longer-term goals.
- Literacy and numeracy support and teaching are satisfactory overall, with satisfactory numbers of learners progressing and achieving literacy and numeracy qualifications. However, the individual learning plans developed by specialists insufficiently reflect the detail gained from initial and diagnostic assessments. Group sessions are insufficiently differentiated to take account of learners' individual needs. Some activities lack challenge for more able learners.
- TVC provides good opportunities for learners to experience taster sessions in all curriculum areas during an extended induction period. Learners are able to make informed programme choices about the vocational programme that appeals to them most.
- TVC makes very good use of partnerships with employers, external agencies and local community associations. Partnerships provide real work experience, enhance learning and provide good opportunities, particularly in horticulture, to make valuable contributions to the local community. Local residents and employers value and appreciate the work completed by learners.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The programme offers a range of specialist occupational areas effectively. Staff use management information systems well to monitor progression rates. Managers monitor the marketing and recruitment strategies effectively. However, the area's quality improvement plan is insufficiently detailed, with little mention of targets or of actions on how underperformance identified in self-assessment will be improved.

What does The Vocation College Limited need to do to improve further?

- Meet individual literacy and numeracy needs of learners more effectively through the more detailed use of diagnostic assessments in the planning and monitoring of learning.
- Improve learners' progress reviews by extending and agreeing medium- and long-term targets that are well understood by learners.
- Develop further the effectiveness of self-assessment through a more detailed approach to quality improvement planning that takes full account of available data and measurable outcomes.
- Extend further the information provided to learners through better recording of tutor feedback that is informative, constructive and developmental.

Information about the inspection

43. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Quality Manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) or other funding bodies, 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.
44. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed at the request of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in four of the five subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
The Vocational College Limited

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	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners	1125	225	900
Full-time learners			
Part-time learners			
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2		
How well do learners progress?	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?*	3		
Quality of provision	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?	3		
Leadership and management	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?*	n/a		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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