

# Bowling College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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## REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

### Context and focus of visit

Bowling College is located close to Bradford city centre. It offers programmes for adults on the main site and in five other venues across the city. Formerly part of Bradford Council's adult education service, it is now an independent company limited by guarantee. A minority of staff remain in the employment of Bradford Council. Two of the four directors act as Principal and Deputy Principal. There are 25 staff, including 10 full-time and 7 part-time teachers.

West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council funds the provision. The majority of enrolments are in foundation for learning and life, and in child development and well-being.

At the previous inspection, which was the college's first, the overall effectiveness of Bowling College was inadequate. There were many good features and the college had successfully brought about improvements. However, some aspects of leadership and management restricted the college's capacity to improve further and to sustain improvement. In particular, the college did not self-assess its provision adequately and thus was unable to identify its strengths and those areas that needed to improve.

### Themes

#### Self-assessment and improvement planning

What revisions has the provider made to the self-assessment process, including how this supports quality improvement planning processes? Reasonable progress

The provider has made reasonable progress in revising and improving self-assessment and the processes for development planning. In the last inspection, the college's arrangements for self-assessment were incomplete and staffing was insufficient to maintain a focus on quality improvement.

The college has recruited new staff and appointed them to key roles. A complete self-assessment report (SAR) for the 2008/09 year has been produced, with a subsequent report in progress. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process. They have made good use of accurate data to judge outcomes for learners.

In the access courses, the college makes good use of an established system of learner representatives to collect information and concerns. Managers are investigating how they can collate learners' views from across other subject areas, including use of texting and social networking sites, as well as the more traditional collation of course reviews.

The SAR does not always contain sufficient evidence to substantiate judgements fully and the quality improvement plan is insufficiently detailed. However, staff take an active part in planning, using a monthly planner to monitor and evaluate actions against targets. In arriving at judgements, managers use the re-instated scheme for observation of teaching and learning more appropriately than they did previously.

#### Outcomes for learners

Has the college maintained the good outcomes for learners identified in the last inspection? Has the provider improved the success rates for the minority of courses found to be under-performing?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in maintaining the good outcomes identified at the last inspection and improving success rates on the minority of under-performing courses. Overall success rates remained high for both long and short courses in 2008/09, although rates for short courses dipped slightly from those of the previous year. Train to Gain provision in 2008/09 showed further improvement in both overall and timely success rates, with outcomes for both categories remaining significantly above national average.

In-year figures for retention and learners' progress indicate that the college is maintaining this position for 2009/10. Success rates in provision for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) remained at, or close to, 100% during 2008/09 with in-year figures indicating that the college is maintaining this rate for 2009/10.

The provider has a clear view of the reasons for under-performance on the minority of such courses identified at the last inspection and has taken a range of appropriate actions to support the specific needs of these learners more effectively. In-year figures for 2009/10 show retention to be high on these courses, but it is too early to judge the overall impact of the actions taken to improve success rates.

#### Quality of provision

What improvements has the provider made to the way in which learners and staff use individual learning plans?	Reasonable progress
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving the way in which learners and staff use individual learning plans (ILPs). In the last inspection, although the college used ILPs satisfactorily for the most part, target setting was not always sufficiently effective in helping learners to make progress.

Staff in all subject areas have assessed their ILP processes and have implemented new arrangements that they are currently evaluating for effectiveness. In each subject area staff share practice to gain a better understanding of how they set targets. Paperwork has been revised and learners and staff are currently using this new process.

Target setting in a number of ILPs is now good. The sharing of practice has ensured more consistency across plans, with the result that targets in the revised plans are much improved on previous versions. However, more work is needed on the minority of plans where targets remain insufficiently specific or measurable.

Most learners follow highly structured programmes. Learners on access courses, for example, have good levels of support and evaluation through the tutorial process so the impact of insufficiently detailed target setting on learners' progress is minimal. Similarly, for learners following national vocational qualifications, assessors visit learners very regularly and supplement workplace visits with a series of highly structured workshops, so insufficiently detailed targets in ILPs have little negative effect on the very high success rates for both overall and timely measures.

## Leadership and management

What improvements has the provider made to their arrangements for equality and diversity?

Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving arrangements for equality and diversity since the last inspection when a shortage of managers resulted in insufficient monitoring of developments in this area.

A new staff member now takes the lead on equality and diversity. The provider has created a central resource bank of relevant materials which staff can use for their teaching. Staff have reviewed the equality of opportunity policy and implemented a new bullying and harassment policy. The college has a new procedure for documenting 'causes for concern' which captures equality and diversity, safeguarding, and health and safety issues, with each aspect monitored individually.

The provider's use of data to identify and recruit learners from vulnerable groups is good. In previous years, around 60% of learners were from white British communities. Targeting of provision in the most deprived wards has led to the college now having 60% of learners from minority ethnic groups.

At the last inspection, staff training for equality and diversity was judged to be insufficient. Training is still not regular enough, although staff circulate information well. The two actions relating to equality and diversity proposed in the quality improvement plan are insufficient to develop equality and diversity fully.

How has the college improved the observation of teaching and learning across provision?

Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in improving the observation of teaching and learning. The college has re-introduced the observation process it suspended at the time of the last inspection due to staffing issues.

In the current year, the Deputy Director has observed all but two staff. The process itself is accurate, with a good level of detail in recording each observation and with notes that substantiate the grade. The college records overarching key strengths and areas for improvement separately, but uses terms for these which are not sufficiently judgmental. Observations result in an appropriate action plan for the teacher concerned, with clear actions for improvement and specific dates for reviews of progress against these actions.

Managers collate this information onto a spreadsheet to monitor both individual progress as well as to identify generic staff training. In addition to these central observations, staff are starting to complete peer observations in order to share practice.

There is no internal moderation process, although the college conducts paired observations once a year in partnership with external peers. At present, only one person has responsibility for conducting all lesson observations. This suggests that the college may still not have sufficient capacity to avoid a repetition of the situation that occurred at the last inspection.

What actions has the provider taken to strengthen arrangements for the performance management of staff since the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

The college has made reasonable progress in taking action to strengthen arrangements for the performance management of staff. Since the inspection, the college has restructured its management and administrative functions, employing further specialist staff. Managers are mapping the organisational structure against the common inspection framework and learner journey to aid delegation and effective coverage. The college has identified requirements for individual and generic staff training. Managers plan to carry out this training during this year, although they have not yet recorded details of what they propose to do on a formal planning chart.

Managers are investigating possible approaches to the performance management of staff, prior to discussion and consultation with staff, with a planned implementation for the next academic year.

Staff numbers are small within the college. Managers conduct regular informal appraisal and performance management of staff, with good use of accurate data to set targets and goals on a short-term basis. They are using a monthly planner to monitor progress against targets. This is adequate until the implementation of the planned new system, but cannot substitute for it.

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