

# Bedford College

Inspection report

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

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

The descriptors for the four grades are:

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

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

#### Scope of the inspection

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

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

#### Description of the provider

1. Bedford College is the largest provider of post-16 education and training within the Bedfordshire County Council area. It is a general further education college (GFE) offering provision from entry to university level. The college offers courses in all subject sector areas except land-based provision, although the number of learners enrolled in retailing, customer services and transportation is small. The college operates from eight sites in Bedford, Kempston, Rushden and Luton. Some 14,000 learners were enrolled in 2006/07 of whom nearly 4,000 were aged 16 to 18, 800 were aged 14 to 16 and 9,200 were adults.

2. The college serves a diverse population, including learners drawn from areas of significant deprivation in Bedford. The proportion of learners from a minority ethnic background is 25%, which is more than twice the local proportion and includes learners of more than 100 different nationalities. The proportion of pupils in Bedfordshire gaining five GCSEs at A\* to C, including English and mathematics, was similar to the national average in 2007.
3. The college works closely with local schools, particularly with pupils aged 14 to 16 who attend a new 14 to 16 centre (Bridges) established in 2007/08 on the college's main site. The college has partnerships with two local universities and is a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in five areas: plumbing, house building, care, supervisory management and skills for energy (sustainable technologies). The college's higher education (HE) activities relate to the same five areas. HE recruitment has risen 37% in the last two years. The college offers work-based learning programmes for 200 learners with the largest numbers in construction.
4. One of the college's main aims is to be a leading advocate for learning, with strong and productive links with other partners.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. Overall effectiveness is outstanding. Achievement and standards are good with outstanding features. Long course success rates have improved very rapidly in the past two years and are now high. General Certificate of Education (GCE) AS and A-level success rates are particularly good for a GFE college and 14 to 16 achievement is outstanding. Success rates for Train to Gain are good and for work-based learning are satisfactory.
6. Teaching and learning are good. The college has a rigorous and accurate system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The proportion of teaching and learning judged to be good or better has improved significantly since the last inspection. Good lesson planning meets the needs of different learners well. Assessment is good, although target setting for some learners is insufficiently challenging.
7. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and its approach to educational and social inclusion are outstanding. The college's curriculum is varied and responsive. Partnerships with employers and links with schools are outstanding. Learners participate in a wide range of enrichment activities.
8. Guidance and support for learners are outstanding. Information advice and guidance arrangements and careers advice are highly effective. Pastoral support is excellent as is the individual support learners receive from a wide range of welfare services. The tutorial programme is very good.
9. Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal and senior managers have secured significant improvements in success rates and the quality of provision. Quality assurance arrangements and performance management are highly effective. The college's self-assessment is rigorous and accurate. Governors are highly effective. Financial management is excellent. The promotion of equal opportunities is good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. The college has outstanding capacity to improve. The self-assessment report provides an accurate and realistic evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement. Strategic, development and operational plans are particularly well aligned and ensure that key college objectives are used in all aspects of performance management. They provide a clear agenda for continued improvements. College staff have confidence in their ability to achieve planned improvements. Quality assurance processes are well established and have secured significant and sustainable improvements to provision. Resources are very well managed with a clear focus on achieving college objectives and supporting the achievement of learners. Governors are effective, well informed

and appropriately challenging. The college has demonstrated a consistent ability to set and achieve challenging targets.

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

11. The college has made outstanding progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Learners' achievement has improved significantly and at a faster rate than the national average. The college has rectified the issue of low retention rates, which are now significantly above average. The improvements required in teaching and learning have been secured and are subject to robust observation and evaluation. Management of work-based learning provision, previously an area for improvement, is now a key strength. The range of provision has grown and is excellent, with courses and progression routes available from foundation to advanced level. The college has maintained and improved further the strengths identified at the last inspection, including very good financial management, effective leadership and management and provision for pupils aged 14 to 16.

### Key strengths

- outstanding leadership and management
- outstanding achievement at 14 to 16
- high GCE A and AS-level success rates
- good teaching and learning
- outstanding employer and school links
- outstanding social and educational inclusion
- outstanding guidance and support
- very good arrangements for meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- excellent financial management
- highly effective governance
- highly effective arrangements for quality improvement and performance management.

### Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- improvements to success rates in adult level 2 provision
- target setting to support learners' improvements
- the arrangements for assessing the impact of equality plans.

## Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*14 to 16*

*Work-based learning*

*Outstanding: grade 1*

*Satisfactory: grade 3*

12. Achievement and standards are good with outstanding features. The college had judged them to be outstanding. The rate of improvement in overall success rates for long courses over the last two years has been excellent. In that time long course success rates have improved at more than twice the national rate of improvement for similar colleges and are currently well above the national average. In 2007/08 success rates for the majority of the college's provision, 16 to 18 at level 3 and adults at level 1 and level 3, are high and well above the national average. However, success rates for adult level 2 long courses have declined and are below the prevailing national average.
13. Success rates at GCE AS and A level, including the proportion of high grades, are very good for both 16 to 18 learners and adults. Overall success rates are particularly high in business, education, science and mathematics and leisure, travel and tourism. The college has maintained its high success rates for short courses.
14. The college has made substantial improvements in key skills in the past year. Key skills success rates have more than doubled and are good at level 1 and level 2. Success rates for the large 14 to 16 provision are outstanding. Progression to the college, and other learning or employment for these pupils, is very good.
15. The college has made significant improvement since the last inspection in reducing the gap between the success rates of different learners, so that learners from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve at least as well as White British learners. Success rates for learners receiving additional learning support and those with disabilities and/or learning difficulties are excellent and better than the high success rates of other learners. Success rates for Train to Gain are good and improving. Success rates for framework completion by apprentices are satisfactory.
16. Learners make very good progress. A high proportion of learners progress successfully through college. The vast majority of learners completing advanced level courses progress to preferred destinations, including HE, employment and further training.
17. Attendance is good overall, with some differences between sector subject areas. The standard of learners' work is very good. Work-based learners develop good workplace skills.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: grade 2*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: grade 2*

18. Teaching and learning are good, which agrees with the college's self-assessment. Teachers plan most lessons well and include a range of activities to meet the differing needs of learners. The use of e-learning within lessons is increasing, although the college recognises that e-learning is not used consistently well across the college.
19. In most lessons teachers use questioning very effectively to check and develop learners' understanding. These lessons have good pace; activities maintain learners' interest and learning is sufficiently challenging. Learners enjoy these lessons and make good progress. In the small minority of less effective lessons the variety of tasks does not meet the range of learners' abilities sufficiently and teachers do not make enough checks to ensure that learning has taken place. The teaching of key skills has improved since the last inspection and is better integrated.
20. The college's system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is rigorous and accurate. Records of observations note strengths and areas for improvement well. Actions to improve the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better have been successful. Advanced practitioners provide very effective support to improve and develop teaching and assessment practice. Teachers value this highly. A high proportion of teachers, trainers and assessors are well qualified. They demonstrate good subject and industry knowledge. Staff development activities are wide ranging and team days to share good practice and update industry knowledge are highly effective.
21. Initial assessment is thorough. Learners appreciate the high quality individual support they receive. Communication between support staff and teachers is good. Most learners receive regular reviews of their progress but target setting for some learners is insufficiently challenging and some individual learning plans are incomplete.
22. Assessment is good. Marking and the assessment of work-based learners is mostly thorough with feedback to help learners improve. However, for some learners feedback is too brief and language errors go uncorrected. Reporting to parents, carers and employers is satisfactory.
23. The college's response to meeting the needs and interests of learners and employers is outstanding. The college offers a responsive, flexible and varied curriculum in 14 subject sector areas from entry level to level 5. The college also provides work-based learning in seven sector subject areas. Learners develop useful skills to support their future economic well-being. They make a positive contribution to the college community through such initiatives as the student council. Learners benefit from, and participate in, a wide range of

enrichment activities. Links with schools are highly effective. Partnerships with employers are excellent. The college's long-established links with around 400 local and national employers in the public and private sector are highly effective. The college is effectively marketed and is well regarded locally. It is the preferred supplier of training for many businesses.

24. The college's approach to social and educational inclusion is outstanding. The college provides good opportunities for people from all sections of the region's diverse communities to participate in learning. The college's outreach work has successfully targeted learners from deprived areas and those who are traditionally hard to reach. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported and make very good progress. Learners from different backgrounds are successfully integrated into the life of the college.
25. Guidance, support and care for both full- and part-time learners are outstanding. Arrangements for initial advice and guidance are very good. Marketing and publicity materials are accessible and informative. Learners are carefully matched to programmes based on their prior attainment, interests and aptitude. Additional support needs are identified through initial assessment and good arrangements put in place to meet any identified literacy, numeracy or language support needs. The college's counselling service provides excellent confidential support for learners. Arrangements for identifying and supporting learners with personal difficulties are robust. Procedures for protecting vulnerable learners are good.
26. Student personal advisers monitor attendance, punctuality and behaviour rigorously. Action plans for improvement are good. The tutorial programme covers each of the topics in Every Child Matters. The college's careers advice team is successful in promoting progression and raising aspirations. Pastoral support is excellent. Personal advisers work with learners identified as likely to leave their programme early. Learners receive individual help with financial matters, assignments, project work and personal difficulties. Tutors and subject staff work well with student services to identify vulnerable learners and offer highly effective structured support for as long as necessary.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

*Contributory grades:*

*Work-based learning*

*Good: grade 2*

*Train to Gain*

*Good: grade 2*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Good: grade 2*

27. Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the principal is highly effective and consultative. Managers, teachers and staff have brought about significant improvements to success rates, teaching and learning and quality of provision. The strategic direction, mission and values are exceptionally clear and appropriate. They are well understood and supported throughout the college. The college's objectives and key strategic aims are

reflected very clearly in all its planning and performance monitoring measures. The management of work-based learning and Train to Gain are good.

28. Quality assurance and performance management have secured significant improvements across the college and in particular curriculum areas such as engineering and business. Procedures and policies are understood and well supported by staff who value the transparent and supportive way in which they are implemented. Data are accurate and accessible. Staff at all levels are able to access very detailed and useful information with which to judge the progress and outcomes of their courses. The performance management of staff is equally effective.
29. The college enjoys a very good reputation with key stakeholders such as employers. Staff have confidence in their managers and morale is high. Teachers are well qualified and the observation of teaching and learning is rigorous and accurate. The college self-assessment report is accurate and moderated rigorously. Programme area self-assessment takes careful account of detailed data and provides well written targets tied closely to areas identified for improvement.
30. Governors are well informed, active and supportive. They demonstrate a very good understanding and knowledge of the standards achieved by the learners and the strategic objectives of the organisation. Governors play an active role in moderating the self-assessment report and assessing the relative performance of different groups of learners. At present, they do not fully match the profile of the college community; however, they have sought to remedy this and have taken appropriate actions to diversify their membership.
31. Financial management and value for money are excellent. The monitoring and allocation of finances are related closely to learners' needs and college priorities. Resources are generally good, although some accommodation is ageing. The college has committed funding prudently to older accommodation to ensure learners have the best facilities possible. This includes the recent refurbishment of areas such as hairdressing and the sixth form centre.
32. The promotion of equal opportunities is good. The college makes an appropriate response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Children Act 2004. The achievement of different groups of learners is monitored closely and actions taken to improve outcomes for underperforming groups have been very successful. Male and female learners achieve similar success rates. Differences between success rates for minority ethnic learners and White British learners have been overcome. Initiatives, such as a mentoring scheme to raise the self-esteem and achievement of black male computing learners, have succeeded in their objectives and are being extended to other areas of the college. The recruitment of staff has been subject to careful scrutiny, including the conversion of applications to appointment. The proportion of staff identifying themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic group has increased to better reflect the profile of the college community. The college recognises that the

procedure for assessing the impact of equality plans needs further development.

## Learners' achievement

Table 1

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

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	05/06	967	53	69	-16	2114	55	65	-10
	06/07	778	62	74	-12	1548	70	70	0
	07/08*	768	79	N/A		668	85	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06								
	06/07								
	07/08								
NVOs	05/06	115	76	72	4	120	70	74	-4
	06/07	134	72	75	-3	104	76	75	1
	07/08*	115	84	N/A		107	82	N/A	
Other	05/06	852	50	69	-19	1994	54	65	-11
	06/07	644	60	74	-14	1444	69	70	-1
	07/08*	653	78	N/A		561	86	N/A	

\* college data

\*\* courses not running

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	05/06	1825	67	66	1	1799	69	66	3
	06/07	1843	67	70	-3	1600	70	69	1
	07/08*	1571	78	N/A		2186	67	N/A	
GCSEs	05/06	136	81	68	13	75	65	67	-2
	06/07	258	71	71	0	126	71	70	1
	07/08*	294	78	N/A		121	82	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	25	80	69	11	13	92	68	24
	06/07	81	83	73	10	13	85	71	14
	07/08*	21	100	N/A		2	50	N/A	
NVOs	05/06	228	63	65	-2	570	78	68	10
	06/07	241	61	68	-7	367	72	69	3
	07/08*	220	69	N/A		1241	61	N/A	
Other	05/06	1436	67	66	1	1141	65	65	0
	06/07	1263	66	70	-4	1094	69	69	0
	07/08*	1036	80	N/A		822	75	N/A	

\* college data

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2006 to 2008, compared with the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
3 Long	05/06	1162	69	71	-2	855	66	64	2
	06/07	1188	78	73	5	803	75	68	7
	07/08*	1334	82	N/A		1131	78	N/A	
A/A2 Levels	05/06	154	82	87	-5	43	79	72	7
	06/07	160	90	87	3	48	85	76	9
	07/08*	136	96	N/A		85	89	N/A	
AS Levels	05/06	373	66	67	-1	117	54	55	-1
	06/07	308	87	69	18	82	85	59	26
	07/08*	314	86	N/A		112	82	N/A	
GNVQs and precursors	05/06	13	100	66	34	1	100	57	43
	06/07**								
	07/08**								
NVQs	05/06	68	62	71	-9	243	70	63	7
	06/07	71	80	74	6	180	81	69	12
	07/08*	52	87	N/A		198	78	N/A	
Other	05/06	554	68	65	3	451	65	64	1
	06/07	649	71	70	1	493	71	69	2
	07/08*	832	78	N/A		736	76	N/A	

\* college data

\*\* courses not running

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by Bedford College, 2006 to 2008.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVO rate**	National NVO rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	20	70	53	35	44
		timely	17	29	34	12	27
	06/07	overall	24	42	64	38	58
		timely	23	26	43	22	37
	07/08	overall	43	72	70	70	64
		timely	58	45	47	43	42
Apprenticeships	05/06	overall	37	66	57	49	52
		timely	33	27	37	18	33
	06/07	overall	132	58	64	56	60
		timely	126	50	47	48	44
	07/08	overall	99	67	67	60	64
		timely	95	57	51	52	48

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record (ILR)

Table 5a

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain NVO programmes managed by Bedford College, 2007 to 2009.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	college/provider NVO rate**
Train to Gain NVO	2006/07	overall	N/A	N/A
		timely	N/A	N/A
	2007/08	overall	242	78%
		timely	242	77%
	2008/09 (3 months)	overall	102	87%
		timely	102	85%

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

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* NVO qualification success rates are calculated using data supplied to Ofsted by the college prior to inspection