

# South Tyneside College

## Focused monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 388023

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**Type of provider:** General further education college

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## **Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings**

### **Context and focus of visit**

South Tyneside College has moved from three sites to two since the last inspection. The main campus is in South Shields and a second campus is located on the riverside. Accommodation at the South Shields campus provides residence for up to 204 learners. The college offers programmes in 14 subject areas at all levels. Approximately 33% of enrolments are on engineering programmes. The college offers a wide range of GCE AS- and A-level subjects, mostly to learners aged 16 to 18. It offers apprenticeships in a range of areas including: hairdressing; health and social care; business administration; early years; retail; construction; and warehouse and distribution. As well as government-funded work the college has significant funding from private business, primarily for courses provided at its Marine Centre. The college currently has 9,479 enrolled learners.

The college was last inspected in October 2009. The inspection judged overall effectiveness, capacity to improve, outcomes for learners, quality of provision, leadership and management, and equality and diversity to be satisfactory. Safeguarding was judged to be good. Inspectors judged health and social care, hospitality and catering, and foundations for learning and life to be satisfactory. Engineering and crafts, creative arts and design were judged to be good. Inspectors judged residential accommodation to be satisfactory.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

<b>What progress has South Tyneside College made in further improving quality-assurance processes, self-assessment and development planning to improve provision?</b>	<b>Reasonable progress</b>
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Since the last inspection staff have been much more involved in the self-assessment process resulting in it being more critical and evaluative. The college has made improvements in all of its quality systems including significant improvements in the observation of teaching and learning, in gathering and using learner and employer feedback and in performance monitoring. It has made good and effective use of external support to help the college make necessary changes to the curriculum and staffing. Staff have individual targets for performance and these are monitored and reviewed regularly and contribute directly to overall organisational targets. Staff use data confidently to inform them of areas that require further improvement or development. Improvement plans are focused and link directly to self-assessment. Governors and senior managers monitor progress against targets robustly. However, while outcomes for learners have shown improvement, some areas of poor performance remain.

## Outcomes for learners

### What actions has the college taken to improve success rates? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection success rates on most courses were satisfactory; however, the GCE AS success rate was low. Overall success rates on long courses have continued to improve since the last inspection. Although the success rate on long courses at advanced level for learners aged 16 to 18 has also improved it remains below the national average. Work-based learning success rates for learners completing in the designated time have fallen since 2008/09 to below the national rate. The college has identified that this is mainly due to the lower success rates in engineering and has taken action to improve these; however, it is too soon to determine if the actions taken will prove successful. Overall success rates on GCE AS-level courses improved in 2009/10, but fell slightly in 2010/11. College senior managers have identified some of the reasons behind the weaker performance and have taken steps to correct these. The college has introduced strategies to improve retention successfully. The retention rate has improved from 81% in 2008/09 to 87% in 2010/11, with clear indications of a further rise in the current year. A strengthened diagnostic process, which monitors closely the match between learners' needs and the course they are studying in the first few weeks, has been the key driver behind this improvement.

## Quality of Provision

### How successfully has the college improved the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice? Significant progress

At the last inspection too much teaching was judged to be satisfactory and the sharing of good practice was not routine or fully embedded. Since then, significant improvements have been made by refocusing classroom activity on learners' progress rather than on teacher-led activities. The appointment of learning coaches has brought about a significant change of culture which is more transparent and supportive and enables staff to reflect on their practice and make improvements. All staff whose lessons are judged to be satisfactory are supported effectively and re-observed regularly. Observation outcomes link directly to the staff appraisal system. The impact has been an improvement in teaching grades from 65% good or better in 2010/11 to 85% in 2011/12. A consistent approach to evaluating teaching, learning and assessment is now in place, assisted by the use of external specialists, and thorough action planning to bring about the necessary improvements. Staff are enthusiastic about the new methodology and the increased opportunities to share good practice. These now permeate across the whole college along with a wide range of strategies including team teaching, peer observations and regular teaching and learning good practice surgeries. Feedback from learners confirms consistently good teaching.

**How effective have managers and staff been at measuring the impact of care, guidance and support particularly on improving retention and pass rates?**

**Significant progress**

At the last inspection it was reported that the quality of care, guidance and support was good, but that the college did not check sufficiently rigorously how well these were having an impact on outcomes for learners. Since then, the college has strengthened this aspect of its work and monitors the impact well. A new management structure has improved the planning, coordination and monitoring of support. A team of personal learning coaches provides a more personalised tutorial programme and the coaches liaise with teachers and managers to arrange support and timely interventions. This year the college has developed the additional learning support system to ensure that support needs are identified as early as possible. It has introduced short-term targets on most courses, which are reviewed every two weeks to help learners keep on track with their studies. Teachers give learners good support if they fall behind. They provide workshops for help with literacy, numeracy and study skills. The impact of these measures taken by the college is reflected in improved retention on most courses, including AS levels. The retention and success of learners receiving support is similar to that of other learners.

**Leadership and management**

**What progress has the college made in improving its arrangements to promote equality and diversity particularly in the work-based learning provision?**

**Significant progress**

At the last inspection, the promotion of equality and diversity was judged to be satisfactory. However, its reinforcement for work-based learners was weak. The college takes a strategic approach, driven by the principal, towards strengthening the promotion of equality and diversity across all college activities. Training has developed the capacity of staff to promote this in their teaching and through other activities. In work-based learning, improved quality checks ensure that partners have appropriate equality and diversity policies and procedures in place. Staff now have a range of materials to support more meaningful, work-related discussions about equality and diversity issues with learners and with employers. Following further work to recruit men and women to non-traditional course areas, the college has more than doubled the participation of men in hairdressing. The college continues to monitor the success rates of different groups of learners and recognises the need to address the lower performance of some minority-ethnic learners. Surveys show that learners have a high and improving level of satisfaction with the way the college promotes equality and diversity.

**How successful has the college been at capturing the views of learners and others in making improvements?**      **Significant progress**

At the last inspection, the process to collect learners' and employers' views to shape and influence planning was inadequate. Since then a new system of course representatives and learner forums has been established. The college is now very good at ensuring that learners receive prompt feedback about the issues they raise. Learners say their views are important and taken seriously. Student governors are well supported and trained, and the impact has been that a considerable number of changes have resulted directly from learner feedback. The college involves learners routinely in all aspects of the college including staff appointments and curriculum changes. With the direct steer of the principal, and the addition of two key posts, employer and stakeholder engagement has improved significantly. The college is now much more responsive to employers' concerns and needs. Within all curriculum areas there are good examples showing how employers are working in partnership, helping to shape the curriculum and directly influencing the college strategically and at operational levels.

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