

Inspection of South Bank Colleges

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 January 2025

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Provision for learners with high needs	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

South Bank Colleges (SBC) is a general further education college based in Lambeth, South London. SBC is made up of two colleges, Lambeth Gateway and London South Bank Technical College (LSBTC). The college is a wholly owned subsidiary of London South Bank University (LSBU).

Lambeth Gateway college has two campuses, one in Brixton and one in Clapham. The Brixton campus is a dedicated campus for adult learners studying English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Adults and young people study at the Clapham campus. Most learners in Clapham study ESOL, English and mathematics. Learners on study programmes also study subjects including education, sport, creative arts and beauty. Adult learners at Clapham study courses designed to help them enter employment.

LSBTC opened in February 2023 near Nine Elms. At this campus, learners study a broad range of technical vocational subjects at levels 2 to 4, as well as apprenticeships in subjects including construction and engineering.

Across the three campuses, around 8,650 learners study a broad range of subjects from entry level to level 4. Most learners study courses in ESOL. A high proportion of learners arrive at the college without qualifications in English and/or mathematics.

At the time of inspection, there were 6,476 adult learners studying courses from entry level to level 4. There were 1,125 enrolments on ESOL courses. Most other adult learners studied vocational courses including construction, science and counselling to help them secure employment or improve their employment prospects.

There were 1,644 learners on education programmes for young people, of whom 47 were studying T levels in construction, health or digital design. Leaders offer courses in most subject areas at levels 1 to 3.

There were 270 apprentices studying courses at levels 2 and 3. Most apprentices studied standards relating to engineering or construction, with a small number studying business and education.

There were 259 learners in receipt of high needs funding. Of these, 102 were taking courses including preparation for further study, or employment courses including supported internships. The remaining learners studied vocational courses.

Leaders subcontract some of their adult teaching to three subcontractors. The largest subcontractor is The Skills Network.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Learners from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances feel welcomed at the college. There is a strong culture of inclusion, where learners and apprentices feel safe and valued. Staff at all levels foster an understanding of diversity, which helps learners appreciate each other's differences.

Learners respond very positively to the high ambitions that staff have for them. They understand how they can build their qualifications and experience at the college and beyond, from entry level through to level 7. Learners gain the confidence to raise their aspirations beyond their initial studies. A very high proportion move on to higher levels of study or into work.

Adult learners study comprehensive and well-taught curriculums, which help them flourish in their communities and at work. Many learners on ESOL courses have newly arrived in the country, and through their studies they get the positive start they need to speak English and assimilate into British culture. ESOL learners gain very good mathematics, digital and employability skills as part of their course that give them skills for employment. Learners share their opinions with confidence and take part in discussions sensitively. The experience of many adult learners is characterised by those who told inspectors that the college was an integral part of their journey in life.

Young people value the high-quality support and teaching they receive that helps them reach their next steps. For example, where learners do not hold qualifications in English or mathematics, staff teach them the fundamental knowledge they need to study at higher levels. Tutors challenge learners on higher level courses appropriately to meet the professional and technical demands of their chosen industry. This helps learners to be well prepared for their next steps.

While apprentices are keen to learn and appreciate the college's well-resourced training centres, they do not experience a consistently high quality of teaching. Staffing issues have led to disruption in their training, and too many apprentices studying building services have submitted work that has not been assessed in a timely way. As a result, these apprentices are not sufficiently aware of how much progress they have made.

Learners with high needs value the friendships they make in college and the help they receive from tutors and learning support staff. Staff individualise the curriculum for learners to help them prepare for adulthood, work and further study. For example, learners on supported internships complete carefully chosen tasks in a local hospital to develop their employability skills. Learners with high needs studying vocational courses receive good support from their teachers and support staff, both to integrate with their peers and to achieve well.

Contribution to meeting skills needs

The college makes a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs.

Leaders and managers of the college, with the leadership teams of their partners in the LSBU group, work highly effectively to create training pathways in vocational subjects from level 2 to degree apprenticeships. They respond collectively to the local skills agenda outlined by the local authorities of Lambeth and Southwark. They support their local authorities well to meet their skills strategies as set out by Central London Forward, London Local Skills Improvement plan and Greater London Authority (GLA).

Leaders provide a broad range of vocational courses and apprenticeships to meet the current and future skills needs of employers. For example, leaders responded rapidly to a national power company who identified a skills shortage in expertise in Electrical Vehicle (EV) charging point fitting. SBC staff worked with the company to develop and teach a new qualification in EV charging to electrical installation apprentices. Leaders now include this additional qualification as part of their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers work well with Lambeth Council, Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions to create a curriculum offer at Lambeth Gateway college that meets the needs of the local residents, supports the long-term unemployed, and helps those further away from work move towards employment.

Leaders work closely with the local NHS trust to create new apprenticeships at levels 3 and 5 in laboratory and dental technology, to help the NHS and private sector meet staff shortages in the workforce.

While employers have helped shape the curriculums of a large proportion of subjects, areas remain where this is still in development. For example, in information technology, employers do not participate sufficiently in the design and implementation of the curriculum and learners do not have sufficient exposure to the world of work.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have managed very effectively the transition of much of their vocational training to a comprehensively resourced new campus at Nine Elms. In doing so, they have kept a keen focus on the quality of education, which remains good for young learners and those with high needs and is now outstanding for adult provision.

Leaders have developed an ambitious and well-considered curriculum offer to help learners and apprentices to enter employment or to go on to higher level courses. For example, leaders work very closely with employers to teach Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) for adults. A high proportion of adult learners on their NHS course learn the skills they need to secure employment in non-clinical roles and the organisational values of their potential employer.

Adult learners achieve very well. They make exceptional progress from their starting points. A very high proportion of adult learners move on to higher level courses, or gain employment on completion of their studies. Most young learners, including those with high needs, achieve well. In a few subjects, including information technology, learners' achievement is not high enough. Too few learners achieve grade 4 or above in GCSE English and mathematics. Most learners and apprentices who complete their courses move on to further or higher education and gain or sustain employment.

Teachers and support staff make good use of education and healthcare plans for learners with SEND, in order to set purposeful targets and pace them through their education. They integrate therapies effectively for those learners who need them. Learners on supported internships have very effective placements in a local hospital. They thrive in an atmosphere where staff are positive about encouraging young people with SEND to learn. In return, learners respond positively to the carefully chosen tasks that staff set for them.

Too many apprentices do not achieve their qualifications in a timely manner. A number of apprentices studying in previous years were not retained due to the impact of COVID-19. Leaders and managers have identified accurately the improvements needed and have recently made positive steps towards improving the delivery of their apprenticeships. They have recruited experienced staff, and made improvements to the processes in place to monitor the progress apprentices make and to intervene when necessary. However, some of these processes are not yet fully embedded and previous staffing shortages still hinder the progress of a minority of apprentices.

Staff plan each curriculum effectively to build learners' knowledge and skills over time. For example, in games design, tutors first teach learners about the fundamental components of games such as creating characters, designing scenes and using sound techniques through well-designed short projects. Once learners are competent in these skills, they learn to use more complex coding software in which they learn how to change the tone and lighting of games and create interaction between characters. This approach helps learners to gain the knowledge, skills and techniques they need to depict accurate scenes in their final projects.

Expert tutors give learners valuable knowledge of and insights into their industries. For example, science tutors use their experience of industries such as genetics, biochemistry and scientific management in chemistry to share helpful examples from the workplace, and link theory to practice.

Most tutors make skilful use of a range of effective teaching methods, such as clear explanations, presentations and demonstrations to introduce new topics. They use activities such as practical tasks, pair work, online quizzes and group discussion effectively to help learners explore new ideas. For example, ESOL tutors use effective revision techniques, such as asking learners to apply their knowledge in homework activities. As a result, learners remember how and when to use different prepositions accurately.

In most cases, including in subcontracted provision, staff complete appropriate assessments to gain a comprehensive understanding of learners' and apprentices' knowledge and experience at the start of their course. In adult dental courses, for example, staff conduct multiple manual dexterity assessments to make sure learners are on the right course. In ESOL, staff assess accurately the specific strengths and areas for development that learners have in speaking, writing and reading in order to tailor their teaching to bridge gaps in learners' knowledge.

Tutors use assessment well to check what learners can remember. In English, tutors set helpful assessments that successfully prepare learners for an examination task, in which they are required to evaluate a piece of previously unseen text. Tutors observe learners carefully and provide timely verbal and written feedback on work and tasks. Learners correct their work, learn from their mistakes and improve it.

Leaders have high expectations of learners' attendance and punctuality. For the most part, learners attend well and have a positive attitude to their studies. However, in a few subjects, attendance is too low and a small proportion of learners miss opportunities to learn valuable knowledge and employability skills. Leaders address concerns with focused support interventions, and attendance rates show signs of improvement.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken effective actions to improve on areas for development. For instance, leaders have introduced rigorous progress monitoring processes and have supported tutors to improve the quality of their teaching. Tutors have attended workshops in cognitive science approaches to teaching and in the principles and practice of giving effective feedback. Leaders have taken effective actions to increase the proportion of learners and apprentices who stay on their course, which is now high across most subjects.

Leaders have established a range of partnerships and subcontracted provision, which helps them to enhance their curriculum offer for adult learners. For example, they offer excellent patisserie courses in partnership with the National Bakery School, part of LSBU group. Nearly all learners on these courses achieve and learn valuable skills such as how to precisely measure ingredients to produce highly professional baked goods with the correct flavour and texture. Through the college's relationship with LSBU, learners studying level 4 courses such as film and television can progress directly on to the second year of a relevant degree at the end of their course.

Leaders offer a wide range of activities for learners to explore their interests and talents. Tutors take learners on trips relating to their courses, such as trade shows, which learners find to be highly beneficial. Learners are aware of the range of activities on offer including sports. However, many do not take part in the wider opportunities available.

Learners benefit from a range of comprehensive and informative careers activities. Teachers and leaders arrange mock interviews, informative skills fairs and university

talks for learners at all levels. Learners are able to make informed choices about their next steps.

Leaders have planned an extensive tutorial programme for learners on study programmes and adult learners. Staff cover a range of topics related to fundamental British values and help learners recognise the signs of unhealthy relationships. Learners have a sound understanding of British values and their importance. For example, adult learners on pre-employment courses learn about how they can challenge discrimination. Tutors reinforce learners' understanding of topics. For example, English tutors weave discussions of themes such as anti-racism and equality through their curriculum skilfully. Managers have recently introduced innovative non-accredited courses in response to emerging social issues. This includes topics such as allyship, inclusivity in the workplace and digital literacy. Staff are starting to teach these to adult and young learners.

Trustees are highly knowledgeable of the further education sector and the local area. They know the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision. Trustees provide effective support for leaders, such as by linking leaders with employers, reviewing policies, setting relevant targets, and providing suitable challenge of the quality of education leaders provide.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Support apprentices to make expected progress and achieve their apprenticeship standards.
- Fully implement planned actions to improve attendance in subjects where it is too low.
- Improve the uptake of personal development activities.
- Implement planned actions to improve the number of learners who achieve their information technology qualifications and who achieve grade 4 or better in English and mathematics GCSEs.

Provider details

Unique reference number	130413
Address	45 Clapham Common Southside Clapham Common London SW4 9BL
Contact number	02075015010
Website	www.southbankcolleges.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Fiona Morey
Provider type	General further education college
Date of previous inspection	1 to 4 March 2022
Main subcontractors	The Skills Network TenDean Limited Croydonsam Training Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the principal of LSBTC, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider’s most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners’ work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider’s documentation and records.

Inspection team

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