



South Thames College

Re-inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published April 2007	Provider reference 130420
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Introduction

South Thames College was inspected in January 2005. Inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) carried out the inspection under Section 62 of the Learning and Skills Act. The quality of provision was found to be satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in Construction WBL which was found to be less than satisfactory. Ofsted is responsible for re-inspecting all provision that is less than satisfactory within two years of the original inspection. If inadequate areas of learning or aspects of provision remain inadequate following re-inspection, inspectors will continue to monitor progress at annual assessment visits, but the areas will not be re-graded. They will be re-inspected during the full college inspection.

The less than satisfactory Construction WBL was re-inspected on 6 - 7 February 2007. The outcome of the re-inspection is as follows.

WBL area	Original grade	Re-inspection grade
Construction WBL	4	3

Context

Advanced apprenticeships are available in electrical installation. The 'Summitskills' advanced apprenticeship framework has an expected duration of 42 months. The South Thames College apprenticeship is planned for 36 months. There are 32 advanced apprentices on programme with the first cohort due to complete in July 2007. The management of work-based learning has been transferred to the construction curriculum area.

Areas for improvement

- insufficiently rigorous framework reviews
- underdeveloped assessment practice

Achievement and standards

Framework achievement is satisfactory. All learners due for framework completion by July 2006 have completed. There is some slow progress on third year apprentice NVQ programmes. An additional NVQ assessor has been employed to increase the number of assessment visits and support portfolio development. The standard of learners' manual skills is satisfactory. Completed portfolios include a wide range of evidence and are well structured. However some learners have insufficient understanding of portfolio evidence requirements. Learners work safely and enjoy their apprenticeships.

Quality of provision

Quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Qualified and experienced supervisors provide satisfactory on the job learning and development of learners' personal skills. Individual learning plans are satisfactory. They have been updated for most learners and show individual target completion dates and the actual dates of completion of qualification. Framework reviews are insufficiently rigorous. The range of provision to meet the needs of learners is satisfactory. Employers are not sufficiently aware of learners' detailed progress on all aspects of the framework to aid their planning of on the job learning, and to support learners in their programmes. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Assessment visits are regular and fully documented but are focused solely on compliance with awarding body requirements. Opportunities are lost to reinforce good working practice and learner understanding.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The management of work-based learning has been transferred to construction and the electrical installation curriculum manager now manages this provision. There is good communication within the small work-based learning team, and regular discussions between the technical certificate tutor and the NVQ assessor inform assessor workplace visits to observe the learner. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Actions listed in both the college and construction improvement plans have been completed. Internal verification is satisfactory and the internal verifier is working closely with the assessor and learners to improve assessment, NVQ progress and development of portfolios.

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of College: South Thames College
Date of visit: 6-7 February 2007

This feedback contains brief findings from the annual assessment visit. It focuses on the themes explored during the visit and does not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of the college's performance.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in 2006

- In 2006, overall success rates rose and are in line with national rates. There was a slight decline of 2% in retention rates that reflects a decline in the retention rates on short courses. The college has taken appropriate action to address this issue, for example by ceasing to offer some elements of the provision. Success rates for 16-18 year old learners have risen across long courses in the past year. These are now in line with national averages at levels 1 and 2. Despite a 9% improvement, the success rate remains below the national average at level 3. Retention rates for 16-18 year old learners rose at all levels, but are low at level 1. For adult learners on long courses, success rates have risen and are in line with the national rates. They are high and have risen at level 3. Retention rates have also risen and are high at levels 1 and 3.
- College analysis of the achievement data shows that there are considerable differences between the performances of different ethnic groups; however, further college analysis indicates that differences in performance are better attributed to the differences in performance across age groups and courses.
- Achievement rates for 14-16 year old learners on the increased flexibility programme were low in 2005/06.

Learners' key skills achievements

- The level of full completions in key skills rose to 37% in 2005/06, compared with 24% in 2004/05. The college has set a target of around 80% key skills achievement by 2008. A pilot course for construction

learners run in the first ten weeks of their course produced 74% average achievement. The college has recently introduced 'mock tests' for learners from which individualised key skills training plans will be devised.

- A key skills steering group produces useful and detailed action plans for further improvements in this area. Management arrangements to improve continuously achievement in key skills are now well embedded and functionally mature. Heads of schools agree clearer and more realistic targets for key skills achievement. Further improvements in timetabling and scheduling of key skills classes are integrating key skills teaching better into the curriculum areas. Trained specialist tutors, who are not always based in the curriculum area, deliver all key skills teaching.

14-16 Increased Flexibility Programme

- Achievement rates for 14-16 year old learners on the Increased Flexibility Programme were low in 2005/06 on all courses. The college attributes this low performance to a range of factors, including initial assessment of learners' needs and the suitability of learners inducted onto the course. Decisive action has been taken to begin to address these issues, through the implementation of internal quality improvement measures and action planning. Monitoring of learners' progress has improved and those at risk of underachievement have been identified. An appropriate range of strategies has been identified and are being implemented. However, these strategies have not had a significant impact on quality and standards to date.

Quality of education and training

Use of individual learning plans (ILPs) and understanding of Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA)

- Progress towards improvement in the use of ILPs and tutors' understanding of RARPA is slow. New forms, supporting documentation and guidance have been introduced and are now used by the majority of tutors. However, the majority of ILPs reviewed by inspectors do not contain sufficiently meaningful or challenging learning objectives and are often partially or poorly completed. Records of progress reviews often lack depth, detail or sufficiently time-bound targets. Few clearly identifiable, incremental steps towards improvement are identified. While there is

some good and effective practice in some schools it is not shared or promoted throughout the college.

- Where learners' performance is declining, or there is poor attendance, learners' records show prompt communication with the learner, parent or guardian but no evidence of remedial action. Liaison arrangements between tutors in schools and student support services are not currently sufficiently robust, although the college plans to integrate services better and improve liaison through departmental reorganisation in the near future.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The teaching and learning profile reported by the college has improved, although the proportion of good or better teaching and learning remains low. The proportion of good or better lessons is now 59.5%, an improvement of 2.5% since the last inspection, and a slight improvement (0.5%) since the last annual assessment visit (AAV). The college has implemented a good range of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the college, for example, the reintroduction of ILT champions, peer observations and the use of a good practice database. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is average. Internal observations indicate that the proportion of good or better lessons is higher for adults than for learners aged 14-16 and 16-18.

Attendance and punctuality

- Attendance in 2005/06 was low at 78%, which was above the level at the last inspection. Attendance data provided at the time of the annual assessment visit show that attendance in the autumn term is 81%, which is 2% higher than a similar period a year ago. There is significant variability in the attendance rates across the college, and in some areas attendance is very low. There are clear lines of accountability for the monitoring of attendance and punctuality. Learners know college procedures and expectations, but not all learners appreciate why attendance and punctuality are vital to achievement. Managers report that punctuality remains a barrier to achievement on the Increased Flexibility programme for 14-16 year old learners.

Leadership and management

Management information system and the tracking of learner progress

- The management information system used to track learners and their progress is producing a good depth of reporting. A single, integrated system provides a consistent and easily accessible range of detailed information, particularly on achievement, retention and attendance. This information is available to schools and tutors in a timely and regularised manner and is used well at strategic, management, school and tutor levels. There is particularly good use of data by tutors and curriculum managers to monitor learners' attendance, although the initial recording of attendance would be further improved by the use of web-based systems at all the college's sites. Following the implementation of an additional software package, the arrangements for monitoring support for learners with additional learning needs are now comprehensive. A new college-wide management information system, which will provide even greater levels of detailed reporting, is being purchased.

Staff development and training

- The college is at an early stage of implementing a range of initiatives to improve its continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. Currently, formal cross-college training takes place only twice a year, often on a 'taster' and generally on a discretionary attendance basis. School-based CPD includes some extensive and regularised programmes with good attendance, but in other schools CPD is sparse and infrequent. At present only 60% of teaching staff are qualified, although 60 unqualified tutors are currently undergoing teacher training.
- There is some evidence of improving links between the outcomes of lesson observations and training for staff. One curriculum area (ICT) has recently undergone a mini-inspection and specific areas for improvement identified. Targeted training sessions were devised on differentiation in teaching styles, target setting for learners and managing challenging behaviour.

- Online access to a wide range of information on good practice in teaching and learning is now available to tutors. ILT specialists have been appointed to train tutors in ways to best use ILT resources, such as smart boards, in the classroom. A variety of teaching and learning 'toolkits' are under development.

Quality of teaching and learning

- The college has made improvements to the lesson observation process. All college observers have received training and there is now a dedicated team of observers who conduct many of the observations. At the time of the last AAV, the process appeared to have fallen behind schedule. This is no longer the case, with 100 observations being conducted in the autumn term. There is now a systematic analysis of the outcomes of observations to inform managers and staff of the standards of teaching and learning by age groups and for Key Skills lessons. Changes to the lesson observation form have facilitated the recording of the use of ILT and feedback on learning. However, comments on attainment were rarely evidenced in the sample reviewed by inspectors. At times, statements relating to learning are not sharply focused and therefore do not give a strong picture of the extent to which all learners are challenged and the appropriateness of expectations. Managers and teachers report that there has been a greater focus on the quality of teaching and learning as a consequence of the restructuring of curriculum management.

Quality assurance and monitoring arrangements

- There have been improvements in the documentation used for curriculum self-assessment, formalising the use of quantitative data as part of the evidence. The college has implemented additional processes, which it believes have improved the robustness of self-evaluation. For example, validation panels now moderate curriculum self-assessment reports. In addition, the college has developed an appropriate range of monitoring strategies to support the drive for improvement. For example, formalised additional support and closer monitoring of poorer performing courses, as well as an ambitious programme of internal curriculum inspections occur. It is too early to assess the impact of these actions.

Any themes from the pre-visit analysis not explored during the visit:
None

Any other observations from the visit not identified in the pre-visit analysis:

None