

## MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: South Thames College

Date of visit: 7 February 2008

### Context

South Thames College is a large general further education (FE) college in central London. It is the largest provider of post-16 education and training in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The college has centres in Wandsworth, Roehampton, Putney, Battersea and Tooting and serves some of the most deprived wards in south-west London. A major capital project that will involve the complete redevelopment of the Wandsworth High Street site has been started.

The college has two Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in music technology and in health and social care. Most courses are vocationally orientated, but the college's offer also includes an Increased Flexibility (IF) and link programmes for school pupils, franchised English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, and English courses for overseas students. There is a small range of work-based learning apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. The college is the main provider of adult and community learning in Wandsworth. There are over 1,600 full time 16-18 year-old learners with the remaining 19,500 learners being adults on a mix of accredited and non-accredited programmes ranging from pre-entry to degree level.

The college was last inspected in January 2005. Two curriculum areas inspected were graded as good and seven graded as satisfactory. Leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. The work-based learning provision in construction was judged to be unsatisfactory. This was re-inspected in February 2007 and graded as satisfactory.

## Achievement and standards

What progress has been made to improve variations in success rates?	Reasonable Progress
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Overall success rates have continued to improve since the last inspection. The overall rate for all learners has increased from 67% in 2004/05 to 77% in 2006/07 and is now at around the national average. However, college data for 2006/07 indicates that although improved, variations in success rates continue. Most progress has been made on long level 1 and level 2 courses for learners aged 16-18 but success rates remain significantly below national averages on long level 3 courses. For adult learners, overall success rates have improved to 79% in 2006/07 and are around the national average. However success rates have fallen for adults at some levels. Key skills results are good and improved from 40% in 2005/06 to 61% in 2006/07. Current in-year key skills data suggest that achievement rates are 75%. Overall success rates have increased on all short courses although they declined significantly for 16-18 learners. The college recognises weaknesses in retention, in level 3 provision and in the performance of different groups of learners.

The current attendance rate is 82%; however there are variations in attendance rates between different curriculum areas. A range of strategies are used to manage improvement in this area and learners are involved in making improvements.

Strategies to improve success rates include: rigorous internal inspection; improvements in induction and initial assessment; staff development; individual learner progress tracking; and the development of online course monitoring files. Although it is too early to judge their full impact, performance management is rigorous, interventions are effective and there are improvements in overall trends.

What progress is being made by management to improve the low overall framework success rates in work-based learning?	Reasonable Progress
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Overall framework success rates on apprenticeships are improving but remain low. However, errors in data management in 2004/05 have resulted in some success rates appearing lower than expected. Data management issues have been fully rectified; however the success rates for electrical installation in

2007/08 will continue to be lower than expected. The framework success rate for advanced apprentices improved from 0% to 40% in 2006/07. Framework success rate for apprentices remains low at 31% for 2006/07, well below the national averages.

The management of work-based learning is now well-established in the sector subject area. Managers have a good understanding of expected achievement rates and issues that may have an impact on timely success. Progress of learners is very closely monitored and effective actions put in place to support learners who may be at risk of not completing. Good use is made of a database to monitor the achievement of different parts of the framework. All current first year construction apprentices have successfully completed all the key skills.

#### Quality of provision

What improvements were made in 2006/07 to teaching and learning and in particular the use of information and learning technology (ILT)?	Reasonable Progress
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Reasonable progress has been made to improve teaching and learning. Improvements include an extensive staff development programme, more effective tutorial arrangements and integration of key skills and skills for life within vocational areas. Significant investment has been made in ILT resources and 13 full-time ILT champions have been appointed to support the integration of ILT into teaching and learning. The college has launched a managed learning environment that is much appreciated by learners. The college is involved in a project exploring the potential of mobile learning to engage and inspire learners. Developments are reflective of the modernisation of learning and learners' cultural interests. The college recognises there is still insufficient use of ILT in teaching and learning in some curriculum areas and ILT champions work closely with staff to promote the creative use of ILT in lessons.

The college continues to improve its processes for the observation of teaching and learning. A programme of internal inspections supports rigorous assessment of the quality of provision. The number of observations increased in 2006/07 and the overall profile for good and better teaching was 63% with only 4% graded inadequate. For the current year, data indicate further improvements. However the percentage of good or better teaching of 16-18

learners remains an area for improvement. The college recognises the need to further develop strategies to individualise learning and challenge all learners.

What progress has been made to develop the curriculum to be more responsive to employers?	Significant Progress
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The business development unit, in close partnership with the sector subject areas, has made significant progress developing programmes to meet the needs of employers. The success rates on the Train to Gain programmes in 2006/07 were good at 86% with several courses achieving a 100% success rate. Several programmes have been designed and tailored to meet the specific needs of local employers. Staff with appropriate background knowledge and skills have been recruited to deliver these programmes. The number and range of short courses has increased. Modular courses are being developed which can be used to gain credits towards Institute of Leadership and Management qualifications. The business development unit has designed a good range of marketing materials and prospectuses for employers to promote the range of courses available in specific sectors. Programmes are delivered on employers' premises at times that meet the needs of employers and learners. The college has responded well to changing shift patterns.

#### Leadership and management

What progress has been made to establish effective quality assurance and systems to measure students' progress and achievement in ESOL?	Significant Progress
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Significant progress has been made in ESOL. Success rates have significantly improved for all learners. In-year attendance rates are very good for full-time 16-18 learners at 87% and satisfactory at 74% for adults on full-time courses. The college's observation of teaching and learning process for 2006/07 indicates that 66% of lessons were graded good or better and 33% of lessons were graded satisfactory. As in other curriculum areas, there were some variations in the quality of teaching and learning for 16-18 learners. Staff are looking carefully at developing teaching and learning strategies to reflect the needs of 16-18 year-old learners, many of whom have experienced significant turbulence in their lives.

The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement and undertakes quality assurance rigorously across a complex pattern of provision. Since the last inspection accreditation has changed to more closely meet learners' needs. Results indicate good improvements in learners' speaking and listening skills. Rigorous internal inspection has been undertaken and the recognition and recording of progress and achievement (RARPA) process developed to ensure consistent and rigorous monitoring of learner progress. An ESOL forum provides opportunities to use external research and share practice. Quality assurance systems are comprehensive and linked closely to self-assessment. Particular focus has been given to improving internal verification systems for all aspects of the assessment process.

What progress has been made to increase to use of the learner voice in the self-assessment process?	Reasonable Progress
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A learner involvement strategy published in July 2007 has clear objectives and plans to increase the involvement of learners. All substantive courses elect a representative who is given training and support for this role. Attendance by course representatives at the learner forum is good. Action points raised are followed up with support from student services. The college has invited over 100 course representatives to a learner conference where learners will have an opportunity to discuss specific topics directly with senior managers. Few formal opportunities exist for learners on employer-based programmes and short courses to feedback.

Learner surveys are used to review satisfaction levels and in the self-assessment process. Feedback to learners on survey findings is currently through the student newsletter. Plans are in place to improve the survey process and improve feedback by discussing survey findings at the learner forum. Learners are not currently aware of the self-assessment process or the strengths and areas for improvement for their sector subject area or the college as a whole. Learner representatives are to be more involved in the self assessment process during 2008.