MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: South Tyneside College

Date of visit: 30 September 2008

Context

South Tyneside College was inspected in November 2005. The quality of provision was satisfactory or better in all areas inspected, except in leadership and management which were less than satisfactory. At the reinspection in November 2006 leadership and management was satisfactory. No monitoring visit took place during the academic year 2007/08.

Achievement and standards

Have success rates of all learners continued to improve? Has action taken by managers been successful in raising learners' achievement and supporting all learners?	Reasonable progress

Since the previous annual assessment visit the college has continued to develop its performance monitoring system for improving success rates. In autumn 2007 the college implemented new curriculum audit processes for setting and monitoring targets for attendance, retention, achievement, success and higher grades. Managers have revised target-setting and the use of value added measures as performance improvement tools.

The college's own data for 2007/08 indicate long course success rates for learners aged 16-18 show year on year improvement at levels 1, 2 and 3 although they remain satisfactory and broadly at national averages. Data for success rates for those aged 19+ also indicate year on year improvement at levels 1 and 2 to above national averages. However, at level 1, success rates have declined to slightly below national averages.

Success rates for learners on GCE AS levels have remained satisfactory and broadly at national average. At GCE A level college data indicates success rates to have improved in 2007/08 to 89% following a reduction in 2006/07. The annual assessment visit in 2006 noted that GCSE high grades had not improved sufficiently. Following improvement in 2007 the number of passes at high grades declined in 2008. The college has identified underachievement of high grades at GCSE and AS level as an area for improvement. The college has implemented a number of actions

to improve success rates, high grades and value added but it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

At the previous annual assessment visit in 2006 overall apprentice framework success rates were low and had declined. Overall and timely success rates for advanced apprenticeships have shown significant improvement over the last three years from 12.5% to over 70%. Apprenticeship success rates have increased by 20 percentage points, to over 70%, over the last three years.

The college has implemented a range of appropriate actions, including revising the tutorial system and improving the identification and support of at risk learners, to improve retention of all learners.

Quality of provision

Is action to improve the quality of teaching and learning effective?	Reasonable progress

The college has a dedicated quality manager for teaching and learning who has revised the processes for observing teaching and learning. Previous paperwork was directive and observers did not use all information gathered during the observation to reach an overall judgement of the quality of lessons. For example observers did not use judgements about lesson planning or the start and end of lessons when grading lessons.

In 2007/08 the college increased its efforts to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of lesson observations. Paired observations were used extensively and external consultants were used in conjunction with college observers. Much work focused on those lessons graded outstanding. College records show that 77% of lessons observed in 2007/08 were good or better, an increase of 3% over 2006/07. The proportion of both unsatisfactory and outstanding lessons decreased.

In the 2006/07 self-assessment report and the draft for 2007/08 the college measured the quality of teaching and learning by the grades awarded to lessons. It is not clear from the report what aspects of teaching and learning are good or should be improved. This does not give a clear focus for the staff development programme. Staff who receive a grade 3 in the observation of teaching and learning process did not have a follow up observation during the academic year to measure improvement. However this is part of the revised system for 2008/09.

A team of three newly appointed advanced tutors will work with subject learning coaches and e-learning guides to support staff to improve the quality teaching and learning. The college is developing ways in which these staff can work together efficiently and effectively to promote maximum impact and improvement. Some

faculties utilise informal peer observation of lessons to share good practice and contribute to quality improvement.

The induction process of new staff has improved. It now includes training in teaching and learning and e-learning. Staff development also focused on self-assessment and the understanding and use of data. The college effectively uses e-learning for mandatory staff training in equality and diversity and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

Leadership and management

How effective has target setting and action planning been in bringing about improvement and how effective is monitoring of performance by managers at all levels?	Reasonable progress

The college uses data effectively in the quality improvement processes. Numerical targets are set for attendance, retention, achievement and success rates including high grades. Not all targets set are sufficiently specific or measurable and some are insufficiently challenging. Managers produce and closely monitor action plans to rectify all weaknesses identified by self-assessment. The revised performance management system (curriculum audit), introduced in autumn 2007, effectively identifies underperforming courses. Course teams identify and implement appropriate actions which effectively improve performance at course level.

What action has been taken to improve the reliability, access to and use of management information to drive up standards? Is data well used and understood?	Significant progress

The improvements in the use of management information system identified at the 2006 reinspection have continued. Managers and staff, including those managing work-based learning, have online access to appropriate data for course management including learner attendance, retention and success rates. Staff and managers are confident in the reliability of the data. They have received training in interpreting data and are able to obtain bespoke reports available to meet specific needs.

Has progress in resolving the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection continued? How thoroughly is the progress made in the action plan monitored?	Reasonable progress

The college continues to improve its systems and processes. Staff are well motivated. Three quality managers are now in post and provide support and focus for the college quality improvement activities.

The college has invested in information learning technology in accordance with the replacement and renewal schedule. In 2008 the college purchased four sets of mobile information and communication technology equipment, including voting pads, to enable tutors to make better use of e-learning in the classroom and put their newly acquired skills into practice. A quality manager has devised a useful spreadsheet for tracking progress made against the main action plan. Management groups monitor progress using these tracking sheets.

Health and safety management continues to improve. Faculty or local health and safety councils support the college health and safety council which has broad membership including learners. Risk assessment training is in place and all staff are scheduled to attend training by the end of the academic year 2008/09. The council monitors the health and safety action plan and reports progress regularly to governors. College safety policies include safe driving and lone working.

Plans to rebuild of the main campus are well advanced. The college is negotiating the replacement of the halls of residence with the Learning and Skills Council. The college now uses its internal auditors more effectively to highlight improvement or monitor progress.

How effectively do Governors monitor performance and progress in the implementation of quality assurance and self-assessment and in equality and diversity?	Reasonable progress

Governors receive papers on college performance and quality of provision which give them a strategic overview of the college's performance. Governors have requested these reports are in a better format to aid interpretation. The college has responded by presenting information in a series of colourful graphs and charts illustrating performance and trends, which governors have received training to interpret. Governors have a higher profile in the college through clinics, when staff are able to meet and raise issues with them, and through attendance at awards ceremonies and other events. Governors receive and consider detailed papers on health and safety and equality and diversity.

Self-assessment

Is self-assessment embedded in all areas and does it bring about improvement? How does the college encourage and use the views of learners?	Significant progress

The self-assessment process continues to evolve. The 2007/08 self-assessment report is well advanced and a draft is waiting validation. Staff understand the self-assessment process well and are trained in the college system. They are increasingly involved in the process which is now part of standard course and department

management. The quality team supports course teams effectively. Performance data and other information are provided for course teams to use in their considerations. The college uses questionnaires and focus and consultative groups effectively to consult learners. Staff use learners' views effectively in the self-assessment process. In 2008/09 the principal will meet with learner focus groups to hear their views directly.

Are self-assessment and quality assurance processes thorough? How does the college validate the outcomes from the self-assessment?	Reasonable progress

Much use is made of data and quantitative evidence; staff are less confident in using qualitative information. The report builds systematically from course self-assessments, culminating in the consideration of leadership and management and cross-college grades including capacity to improve. The self-assessment report for 2006/07 included insufficient judgements for teaching and learning. Some of the overall grades, such as capacity to improve, contained insufficient appropriate evidence. The self-assessed grade for capacity to improve in 2006/07 was too high; the criteria for determining this and other overarching grades are now more challenging. Self-assessment validation panels include representation from the peer referencing group, curriculum managers, the vice principal for curriculum and standards and two of the quality managers. Other managers attend as part of their professional development and to share practice.