

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: South East Essex College of Arts and Technology

Date of visit: 30 November 2007

Context

South East Essex College is a large general further education (GFE) college. It has six sites in Southend-on-Sea plus a site in Grays, Thurrock. The college moved to a new £52 million campus in the town centre in 2004. As part of the integrated FE and HE campus the University of Essex opened its building on an adjacent site in January 2007. The local area has several providers of post-16 and adult provision including 10 secondary schools with sixth forms; a sixth form college and Southend Adult Community College. The vast majority of the local population is white and the proportion of claimants for unemployment is slightly above the county and national average at 2.5%. The college is one of the largest local employers with approximately 900 staff. Its annual turnover in 2007/08 is over £35 million and it has had Grade A financial status since incorporation. Courses are offered in all sector subject areas and include vocational, GCSE, GCE A level and AS level courses. There are two centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs), one in media technology and the other in ICT solutions. The college is the lead partner in the NOVA partnership offering apprenticeships and entry to employment programmes. It is active in 14-19 partnerships and leads the Thames Gateway South East Essex Consortium for Train to Gain with 9 other providers.

In 2006/07, the college enrolled 3329 FTE learners aged 16-18 and 1210 FTE adult learners. Approximately 11% of learners identified themselves as coming from a minority ethnic heritage. In 2006/07, there were more female than male learners, particularly among adult learners. Most learners were from Essex and Southend. Of the learners aged 16-18, 59% were studying level 3 courses with 25% on level 2 and 16% on level 1. Of the adult learners, 43% were studying level 3 courses with 35% on level 2 and 22% on level 1. The college's vision is, 'transforming lives through learning' and its mission is, 'to be a leading college providing people and businesses with the knowledge and skills needed for success'.

Achievement and standards

<p>What do early college data suggest are the overall trends in success, retention and achievement in 2006/07? In particular, what progress has been made on areas for improvement in 16-18 retention and the outcomes and use of value added data?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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College data for 2006/07 show improvements at all levels, although some of the increases are modest. One of the most sharply improved areas is the success rate for learners aged 16-18 at level 1 where the 80% success rate compares well with the national average for 2005/06 of 69% and with the college's previous year's rate of 73%. At level 2, for learners of the same age, the 78% success rate again compares well with the 2005/06 average of 66% and represents a 2 percentage point improvement. At level 3, the improvement has been slower with success rates in 2006/07 rising by 1 percentage point to 72% compared to the 2005/06 average of 70%.

Success rates for adult learners at level 1 and 2, although improved, have risen by smaller margins compared to rates in 2005/06. At level 1, the increase of 1 percentage point to 60% still leaves the college success rate 5 percentage points below the 2005/06 average. At level 2, the 3 percentage point increase to 72% compares better to the 66% 2005/06 average. The increase is sharper at level 3 from 60% in 2005/06 to 66% in 2006/07. However, it is reasonable to assume that the 2005/06 average of 63% will also increase to broadly the same as the college outcome.

College data show that most achievement rates in 2006/07 are above average with the exception of adults studying at level 1 where there was a sharp fall from 92% to 79%. Retention rates have improved and are above average for both age groups at levels 1 and 2. However, at level 3, despite improvements, they are below the 2005/06 average for both age groups. Retention on some courses is noted as a key area for improvement in the draft self-assessment report (DSAR)

Key skills success rates improved significantly in 2006/07 but remain low at 41%. The appointment of a head of key skills in the summer of 2007 has resulted in the coordination of key skills documentation accessed through the staff intranet. Key skills data have been analysed at school level to identify concerns and a development plan has started to address the issues identified.

These improvements have been reflected in a recent external moderator report.

The college uses the ALIS value added system. The overall analysis for 2006/07 shows a fall although it remains within the normal area with an overall score of -0.6. Only one GCE A level subject (general studies) is shown as significantly positive. Information communication technology (ICT), business studies and applied ICT are significantly negative. All other GCE A level subjects are within the normal range. The 3 year rolling average of standardised residuals show the same pattern with physical education being the most positive subject at 0.7. At AS level, 4 subjects are shown as having significantly negative value added (sociology, mathematics, media and English language and literature). Only one national diploma (art and design) is shown as having significantly negative value added with engineering having significantly positive scores. The college has trained staff in the use of value added data and minimum target grades (MTGs) are now included in some individual learning plans (ILPs). However, the work is still at a relatively early stage. Records show areas such as beauty therapy and sport are currently using MTGs for monitoring students' progress. A useful comparison of teaching and learning observation grades and value added outcomes has been undertaken. The DSAR notes that the use of value added data remains an area for improvement and further development.

<p>What progress has the college made in improving success rates for work-based learning? Is the college maintaining and improving its strategic overview of the quality of the NOVA partnership?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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From a low base, framework completion has improved by twenty percentage points in the years between 2004/2007. However, the success rate of 55% remains below the 59% average. Timely success rates have improved more slowly and remain 5 percentage points below average. Recent college data suggest that improvements have been maintained. Entry to employment (E2E), with 450 learners, had 58% positive outcomes in 2006/07.

Recent changes in staff management of the consortium are beginning to have an impact on improving overall success rates. Initiatives to identify and monitor the performance of individual partners continue to make progress in improving the quality of provision. A wide range of staff development activities have been provided with satisfactory participation from partners.

The quality of E2E provision has been maintained with good links to schools, youth justice and careers to widen participation. The number of learners progressing into work with further training is improving

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in using the observation of teaching and learning to spread best practice and address areas for improvement including differentiation?	Reasonable progress
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The previous annual assessment visit (AAV) noted that the observation system was well established and supported with a new observation form providing useful information for analysis. Action to support teachers whose lessons were graded as less than satisfactory was noted as rapid. In 2005/06, the college did not meet its target of observing every member of staff (80% of full-time and 71% of part-time). The AAV noted that written observations did not identify clearly enough the training needs of staff and that there was insufficient alignment and scheduling of lesson observation, staff development and appraisal.

The college has greatly increased its number of observations, although data suggest that not all full time teachers are observed and only 83% of part time staff. College observations show an increasing proportion of good or better teaching and now include useful indicators on areas for improvement and significant strengths. The consolidated document showing these factors on a college wide basis provides a clear and useful indication of staff training needs. Training records show this information being used well to plan and deliver staff development. The quality of written observations remains variable. The best examples are well written with coherent and accurate training and development issues identified. Others are poorly presented and less convincing on grade outcomes. Some written observations examined by inspectors used the areas for improvement to write advice rather than analyse teaching and learning. The college recognises that considerable improvement has to take place in the recording and monitoring of training needs as identified in appraisals.

The spreading of good practice among full-time and substantive part-time has improved through the establishing of 'Rainbow Groups'. These have provided useful cross-college forums. Whilst all full time teachers are qualified or

undertaking qualifications, a low number of part time teachers are qualified and it has only been a recent college requirement to undertake training.

How far do links with employers enhance the incorporation of work-related learning?	Reasonable progress
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Strategic partnerships continue to be maintained and expanded with key organisations and employers. The college now has the lead in the Train to Gain consortium in the area, with 109 learners. Links with appropriate employers and voluntary organisations at curriculum level are monitored to enable relevant work related experience to be offered. There is increasing activity in offering short training courses to employers with provision often tailored to meet the individual employer's requirements.

Leadership and management

How far is the college monitoring and improving the impact of ECM processes and procedures?	Reasonable progress
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The college has produced a young people's plan after an audit against Kirklees standards. The plan is clear with actions and responsibilities outlined. Generally, the evidence of outcomes is available, but is not always centralised and easily accessed. Most staff have been trained in child protection and there are 6 designated protection staff. Every Child Matters (ECM) is given a high priority. The college website 'Every Student Matters' is a useful tool for learners and staff, with informative links. However, there are no obvious and immediate links to sources of help and advice within the college. Learner events are well planned and aligned with ECM outcomes.

The college provides a good range of preventative health care and sexual health initiatives including a sexual health nurse being available for advice once a week. There is very active discouraging of smoking and encouragement of healthy eating. College food has been improved through actions such as the analysis of food data; the increase in salads and vegetables available and salt not being used in cooking. Water is freely available but some less healthy drinks are also still on sale.

The young people interviewed spoke warmly about the support they receive at college and their enjoyment of their time at college. They particularly valued the accessibility of staff. The college uses feedback from learners

actively in their self assessment and planning. However, not all young people felt they received enough feedback on the actions taken at course level in response to their comments.

All adult learners interviewed stated that their confidence in learning and working with people has improved significantly. Learning support, advice and guidance are valued highly. They reported that the extended diagnostic provision provides good guidance to learners to ensure that they are on the right level of course. Adult learners interviewed felt that they were well supported by frequent information on their progress. The college intranet site was less well known to this group of learners and only used by those adults wishing to progress to higher education.