MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

| Name of college: | North East Surrey College of Technology (Nescot) |
| Date of visit: | 23 June 2008 |

Context

Nescot is located in the Borough of Epsom and Ewell, in Surrey. There are five secondary schools, with sixth forms, within a five-mile radius of the College. In 2006 the % age of pupils in local schools achieving 5 GCSE A* - C was 58.6% against a national average of 53.7%. Surrey has one of the highest levels of attendance at independent schools in the country.

The majority of the college's provision is provided at the main site in Ewell. The Epsom learning shop closed in 2007 and the only off-site provision provided is at a small site in Epsom (Maritime Court), where learndirect courses are offered. The college provides courses across ten of the 15 sector subject areas.

In 2006/07, there were 10,453 students (4,031 FTE) enrolled at the college; 76% of these were enrolled on part-time courses. Some 80% of all students were adults and 41% were women. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds was 23%, which is significantly higher than the local Surrey average of 8.7%.

The college underwent a full reinspection in December 2006 and was judged to be good in five curriculum areas. Leadership and management and the college's capacity to improve were also judged to be good. The overall effectiveness of the college was satisfactory. The college has significantly improved its financial position and is now in the LSC's category 'B' for its financial health.

Achievement and standards

| What progress has been made in ensuring that students' outcomes continue to improve, and that students' attendance is good? | Reasonable progress |
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Success rates on long courses were an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Overall the college has made reasonable progress in improving success rates, particularly for students aged 16-18. College data for 2006/07 indicate that success rates for students aged 16-18 at levels 1 and 3, and for adults at level 3, have improved significantly and are above the 2005/06 national average. Success rates for students aged 16-18 at level 2 have remained steady since 2005/06 when

they were four % age points above the national average. However, success rates for adults at level 2 fell in 2006/07 to five % age points below the 2005/06 national average, and at level 1, although they improved by eight % age points they remain seven % age points below the 2005/06 national average. Attendance for students aged 16-18 has improved from 83% in 2005/06 to 88% so far in 2007/08. Although the attendance rate for adults has remained at around 83% for the last three years, the retention rates for these students have improved significantly to above the national average at all three levels.

Quality of provision

| What progress has been made in improving the development of students' key skills? | Reasonable progress |

The annual assessment visit in June 2007 reported that although significant developments had taken place in the provision of key skills it was too early to judge their impact. Success rates for students aged 16-18 in 2006/07 increased to above the national rate at levels 1 and 3. However, they remained low at level 2, the level at which most students studied. Key skills success rates for adults remained poor. In 2007/08 early indicators suggest a sharp rise in achievement, particularly for communication at levels 1 and 2. Care is now taken to ensure that students work towards the most appropriate level of key skill and some students take basic skills tests instead. The college is well advanced with preparations for the introduction of functional skills. The 'skills zone' has proved an effective resource for developing students' key skills. Although all key skills assignments are now written in a vocational context, students still complete them as separate assignments to demonstrate key skills competence rather than vocational competence. The college plans to address this through piloting the embedding of key skills into a sample of courses in each curriculum area next year in order to avoid the need for extra assessment.

| What progress has been made in improving the proportion of good or better teaching? | Reasonable progress |

The results of the college's own lesson observations in 2007/08 show an increase of 13 % age points in the proportion of good or better teaching compared with the previous year. However, in 2006/07 all lesson observations were carried out by external consultants or as part of the previous inspection. The strategy for the observation of teaching sessions is well developed and includes a good mix of peer observation and developmental observations as well as more formal graded observations. However, there is some variation in the quality of the observation records and in the identification of strengths and areas for improvement. The content of the records does not make it easy to draw out the overall strengths and weaknesses in the teaching within a curriculum area. In some cases the written feedback does not fully support the strengths identified, although there is a rigorous system for moderation. The form used includes sections to record the impact of the

use of information and learning technology (ILT) and for the promotion of equality and diversity. These are not completed well so little useful information is gained from them. However a good range of staff development activities has been offered and the mechanisms for sharing good practice are well developed. As yet there has been little analysis of the results of observations to identify possible links between poorer teaching and low success rates, for example, for adults at level 2.

| What progress has been made in improving the use of ILT in the classroom? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has made significant investment in staff and other resources to improve the use of ILT in the classroom. However, it is too early to fully judge the impact of these new measures. New appointments for 2008/09 include 12 technology teaching and learning champions to further develop the use of ILT. A pilot of carrying out initial assessment of teachers' ILT skills needs and providing them with individual coaching has proved highly effective in developing teachers' skills and confidence. By 2008/09 around a third of teaching rooms will have access to interactive white boards. A virtual learning environment (VLE) is reasonably well developed, although there is some variation in the extent to which teachers and students use it.

| What progress has been made in improving the quality of work-based learning? | Significant progress |
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The college has made significant progress in improving the quality of work-based learning. In 2006/07, the overall and timely success rates were low at 43% and 28% respectively. Success rates were particularly low for the small number of advanced apprentices. However, in 2007/08 to date, the overall success rate has improved significantly to 71%. The timely success rate is currently 67%, which is 20% above the national rate for 2007/08 at the time of the inspection. The college identified non-completion of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) as the main reason for the low success rates and has implemented a number of successful initiatives to rectify this problem. It has restructured the work-based learning team so that managers can now monitor performance more closely. Employers have a greater involvement in the planning of programmes and the monitoring of students' progress. They have a better understanding of NVQs and the links to background theory training. The integration of on- and off-the-job training has improved. Meetings with curriculum teams to monitor progress are more frequent, and include reviews each term by the senior management team.

| What progress has been made in continuing to improve opportunities for work experience? | Significant progress |
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The college has made significant progress in improving opportunities for work experience across most areas of the college. The main focus has been on those qualifications where work experience is a mandatory part of the course specification.

The number of students taking part in work experience has increased most significantly in business and computing, and in sport and travel. In business and computing over 90% of the students for whom work experience is relevant have taken part in work placements in 2007/08. Work experience is now the responsibility of the central unit for employer engagement. Managers are able to integrate discussions with employers about work placements much more effectively with other business-related initiatives. The college maintains a database that includes a number of prestigious employers in a variety of locations. Staff now have a much clearer understanding of the college's policies and procedures regarding work experience.

| What progress has been made in the development of individual learning plans and their use at tutorial? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has made reasonable progress in developing and improving individual learning plans and their use at tutorials. There has been a strong focus on improving the tutorial process and investing in an appropriate support structure. Students now have a detailed and well thought out individual tutorial pack, which emphasises to them the importance of target-setting and reviews as significant factors in their progress at college. Tutors monitor students' attendance and punctuality carefully during individual tutorials and set them three types of target grades, based on the minimum, average and maximum progress they are likely to make. Student attendance monitors have helped to improve attendance rates for students aged 16-18 across the college. Most initial individual learning plans are now more detailed and contain appropriate action plans for agreed targets. However, targets set during individual student reviews are, in many cases, still too general. It is not clear how tutors incorporate the feedback from learning support assistants and key skills tutors into progress reviews. The college's observation of teaching and learning does not include the observation of individual tutorials.

Leadership and management

| What progress has been made in improving employer engagement through the Epsom Downs Business Centre? | Reasonable progress |
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The college has made reasonable progress in improving employer engagement through its Epsom Downs Business Centre. The capacity of the centre's team and the infrastructure for employer engagement has increased significantly and the college has a well-planned strategy to improve and increase its range of services to employers. Income from employer engagement is forecast to increase from £970,000 in 2006/07 to over £1.2m in 2007/08, mostly through employer-based distance learning courses, Train to Gain and Business Start Up/learndirect courses. The college is also increasing its income from distance learning contracts with employers. The college did not gain Action for Business status as it was judged that systems were not sufficiently well-embedded across the college's work to

demonstrate enough impact in all areas. The employer engagement steering group ensures that the college is more efficient and effective in the approaches it makes to individual employers. The role of employers in curriculum development is improving. Employer engagement is strong in construction, early years and health and social care, and independent living and leisure, but less well developed in areas such as information and communication technology. The college has, or is part of, four separate contracts for Train to Gain, but currently only has 110 students in total on Train to Gain programmes. It offers apprenticeships in construction only, but is researching further growth in this area, particularly in hairdressing and retail. The college's corporation now includes two members from industry, with further plans to recruit more employers to the governing body.