

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of college: North East Surrey College of Technology

Date of visit: 9 July 2009

Context

North East Surrey College of Technology (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 2007 the percentage of pupils in local schools achieving 5 or more GCSEs grades A* to C was 65% against a national average of 60%. Surrey has one of the highest levels of attendance at independent schools, and one of the highest staying-on rates in full-time education at age 16 in the country.

In 2007/08 there were 10,116 learners enrolled at the college, of which 6,126 were on further education programmes. Three-quarters of these were enrolled on part-time courses. Just over one-third of enrolments were on entry and level 1 courses, just over one-quarter on level 2 programmes and 10% on level 3 provision. Almost 80% of all learners were adults and 42% were female. 25% of learners were of minority ethnic origin, which is significantly above the local Surrey average of 8.7%. The college currently offers courses in 13 of the 15 sector skills areas. The largest numbers of learners are in health, public services and care, construction and preparation for life and work.

Nescot has contracts for work-based learning with Surrey and London South Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and four Train to Gain contracts, three of which are in partnership with other lead providers. It also holds the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contract to deliver education and training services in the six prisons located in Surrey and Sussex.

The college underwent a full re-inspection in December 2006 and was judged to be good in five, and satisfactory in four, curriculum areas. Leadership and management and capacity to improve were also judged to be good. Quality of provision and overall effectiveness of the college were satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

How much progress has the college made in raising success rates since the last inspection?	Significant progress
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Overall success rates have improved by eleven percentage points over the last 3 years, which is a much higher rate of improvement than seen nationally. In 2005/06 the college's success rates were below the national average and are now 3 percentage points higher than the average for similar colleges in 2007/08.

Success rates for long courses have also risen rapidly, from 61% in 2005/06 to 78% in 2007/08, and are also now above national averages. Long course success rates

have improved at all levels and for both age groups, with the most significant increase evident at levels 1 and 3, and for adult learners.

Improving retention rates was a key priority for senior management team, following their analysis of the previous year's results. Retention for 16 to 18 year olds on the first year of two-year level 3 programmes was below the national average in 2007/08. In-year retention data at the end of 2008/09 indicates an increase of 9 percentage points compared to the previous year.

The college's analysis of success rates for different groups of learners by gender and ethnicity indicates no significant variations in performance. Success rates for all minority ethnic groups have improved over the last three years, in line with the overall college rates. The college has taken effective action to raise retention rates for specific groups of minority ethnic learners, notably 16 to 18 year old Black Caribbean learners on level 1 and 2 programmes, and Black African learners on level 3 courses. Retention rates for these learners have improved by between 4 and fourteen percentage points in 2008/09 and are close to national averages. Success rates for learners with disabilities or learning difficulties have improved significantly over the last three years and were above the overall college average in 2007/08.

To what extent has the college maintained the improvement in work-based learning success rates noted at the last visit?	Reasonable progress
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Success rates for work-based learners have improved steadily over the past three years from 58% in 2006/07 to 67% in 2008/09. Current predictions indicate that success rates will be in the region of 74% by the end of 2008/09. Over the same period, timely success rates have fluctuated. In 2006/07, the number of learners completing in the predicted time span was 39%. In 2007/08, this rose significantly to 75% and, at the time of the monitoring visit in 2009 it stood at 48%. However, managers expect this to rise to around 72% by the end of the 2008/09 year.

How much progress has been made in improving key skills success rates?	Reasonable progress
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In 2007/08 overall key skills success rates were below the 2006/07 national average, with level 3 results well below average. The college has substantially revised its key skills strategy in the last year. In 2007/08 most learners took two key skills. In 2008/09 learners took one key skill, in either application of number or communication, at level 1 or 2, as relevant to their main programme of study and prior attainment. Learners who wished to study a key skill at level 3 undertook a formal application and initial assessment process to determine the most appropriate qualification to match their prior attainment and progression goals. These strategies have reduced the numbers of enrolments on key skills qualifications by almost one-third, with a significant drop at level 1 but a slight increase in enrolments at level 2. A very small number of learners took level 3 key skills in 2008/09.

The college's data at the time of the monitoring visit indicates that their revised strategy has been successful in raising success rates, which have improved by 9 percentage points over the previous year.

Quality of provision

How much progress has the college made in raising the proportion of good and outstanding teaching?	Reasonable progress
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The college has improved the proportion of good and better teaching since the last inspection and continues to focus on improving satisfactory teaching to good. Managers make good use of their analysis of the findings of internal lesson observations to focus on those areas most requiring improvement. The college's report on these findings identified that the proportion of teaching judged good remained similar as the previous year, but that a greater number of lessons were judged outstanding.

However, almost one-third of lessons observed were judged satisfactory. In 2008/09 the college observed its part-time lecturers for the first time, and has now identified that, whereas 31% of lessons given by full-time lecturers were satisfactory, 57% of lessons given by part-time lecturers were judged satisfactory. There is also a higher proportion of satisfactory lessons observed at level 2 than at other levels. The senior management team have made intelligent use of performance data and perceptions from learners' surveys to tailor and focus their plans for next year's observation scheme to further increase the proportion of good and better lessons.

As part of its strategy to improve teaching and learning, the college has invested heavily in information and learning technology (ILT) and in staff training in this area. The e-learning strategy has been very clearly focussed on how new technologies can improve teaching and enhance learning, rather than just using ILT for its own sake. Teaching and technology champions, and a focussed programme of staff development, are beginning to have a positive impact on teachers' attitudes, confidence and skills. For example, teachers were observed using ILT in 80% of lessons observed last year, and effective and creative use of ILT was an important feature of many good or better lessons. Managers are taking steps to improve further the evaluation of e-learning through lesson observations and to ensure that all new staff undertake diagnostic testing in ILT to identify their skills and further training needs. The evaluation of ILT skills and further training needs are being included in the performance management system for all teachers next year.

How well has the college increased the participation rates in enrichment activities?	Reasonable progress
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In its 2007/08 self-assessment, the college recognised that too much cross college enrichment was focused on sporting activities with limited participation by students. By September 2008, the college had appointed an assistant director of tutorial and enrichment to increase the integration of enrichment and tutorials and improve the marketing of tutorials.

All full-time students are encouraged to attend a minimum of five enrichment activities throughout the year, for example Freshers' Fair, Black history week, Red Nose day, 'safe driving' and Children in Need. In addition, full-time students are targeted to attend two enrichment taster sessions during the induction period. The learner voice has been further developed to encourage students to indicate enrichment activities that they would like to see introduced. The college has been particularly successful in delivering 'healthy eating' sessions. Tutors are encouraged to take part in enrichment activities and book whole group activities as part of the tutorial process. Participation rates have much improved from the previous year.

Whilst some curriculum based enrichment activities have been offered, the college has recognised that curriculum enrichment is an area for further development. Some, but not all, courses offer a broad range of curriculum enrichment activities. From September 2009, the college will introduce a minimum student entitlement of at least one curriculum enrichment activity to be included into all courses. At the time of the monitoring visit the college is in the process of collecting and evaluating cross college data on participation in enrichment activities.

Leadership and management

How well has the College improved employer engagement since the previous monitoring visit?	Reasonable progress
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In September 2008 the college appointed a director of employer engagement and the principal subsequently introduced a new management team to give greater focus to employer engagement and adult responsiveness activities in line with the MOG changes. The college has significantly increased the number of Train to Gain learners, with approximately 700 learners now enrolled on a range of programmes.

However, the number of learners on apprenticeships is low and, until recently, limited to construction programmes. The college has been cautious in developing the range of work-based provision, concentrating on raising the quality of existing provision before introducing new areas of work. Provision has started recently in hairdressing and business administration is being developed. Links with similar organisations have been developed to share best practice.

The college has links with 800 employers. Managers conducted a recent survey of 350 employers, of whom just over one-third responded. These respondents were pleased with the service offered by the college. Over the past year the college has adapted a range of provision in response to employer views, for example, re-branding the gas and electrical provision and changes to some information communication technology (ICT) provision.

