

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education

Monitoring visit report

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Address:	Lucker Road Southend-on-Sea Essex SS1 1ND

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education (SEC) merged with Prospects College of Advanced Technology (PROCAT) in February 2019 and with National College for the Creative Industries (NCCI) in January 2020. It has six sites which run along the Thames Estuary. The largest is based in Southend-on-Sea, with other sites in Basildon and Thurrock. The college provides a broad range of vocational and academic courses for 16- to 18-year-olds, adults and apprentices. The former PROCAT site in Basildon now specialises in engineering and building services programmes.

The college has 4,690 learners aged 16 to 18 on roll. SEC has 87 students in its high needs discrete provision. There are 1,500 adult learners and 1,060 apprentices. The college works with the Learning Curve Group Limited to provide courses for adult learners.

Themes

What progress have governors, leaders and managers made in establishing an ambitious curriculum to meet the education and training needs of learners, apprentices and college stakeholders during the ongoing pandemic?

Significant progress

Leaders and governors have worked tirelessly to achieve a successful merger of the predecessor colleges. They have established a strong vision for the college which is fully shared by staff, learners and other stakeholders. Staff are highly motivated and are clear about the strategic direction of the college. Leaders have invested significantly in staff, technology and learning resources. They have established a highly trained team of teaching and learning specialist (TLS) to share best practice and train staff. This has resulted in a high-level of consistency in the teaching practices used across all campuses.

Leaders have maintained high-quality training throughout the pandemic with a strong focus on ensuring that the negative impact on the learners' experience has been minimal. Leaders continue to ensure that learners are recruited with integrity. Where leaders have had significant staffing issues, they have taken decisive action. In a few instances, this has resulted in programmes not being available as planned.

Leaders are ambitious for the future of SEC to provide a high-quality curriculum that responds to the needs of the local businesses and the communities they serve along the Thames Estuary. Their strong links with a variety of employers, including those in large high-profile companies, are highly effective. Leaders and managers work successfully with employers to design new programmes. In the logistics sector, they

have designed a level 2 large goods vehicle (LGV) logistics apprenticeship. Apprentices benefit from a rich curriculum which is well-planned and co-taught with the employer.

Leaders ensure that learners benefit from state-of-the-art industry resources throughout their programme. Consequently, learners complete their programmes with high-level technical skills. Learners benefit from valuable, meaningful work experience ensuring that they are fully prepared to enter the world of work. Level 3 performance and production arts learners participate in a wide range of high-quality project-based work and establish key contacts within the industry. They gain valuable skills such as setting up rigs safely for aerial performers and have a good understanding of working safely at height. Their work experience with key employers in the industry exposes them to the latest innovative technology being used.

Teachers provide effective and consistent support to help learners catch up on lost learning and skills development. Teachers were proactive in identifying the loss of hand-skills during the pandemic in programmes such as construction and engineering. They have provided targeted additional learning sessions to enable apprentices to revisit and reinforce their practical skills. As a result, apprentices are now preparing to complete their final assessments.

Governors have excellent knowledge of SEC and what actions leaders need to take to meet the skills needs of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership. Governors are extensively involved with the curriculum through their assigned roles as curriculum link governors. They robustly support and challenge leaders and managers to grow and strengthen key provision such as logistics, performing arts and digital technologies.

What progress have governors, leaders and managers made in taking effective action to remedy the key areas of development in the predecessor colleges? How effective are quality improvement processes?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have implemented a range of effective strategies to sustain continued improvement in the quality of education and training. Leaders have acted appropriately to improve the quality of teachers' assessment practices. The dedicated team of TLS staff provide targeted core training. This includes enabling teachers to understand how to set ambitious work for learners and improve the quality of their feedback to learners. As a result, the quality of teaching and assessment practices has improved.

The previous inspection found that teachers did not effectively plan lessons to build on learners' knowledge, skills and understanding of their subject. More teachers now structure the curriculum to enable learners to gradually develop their knowledge and skills throughout their programme. In performance and production arts, teachers

sequence learning activities very effectively so that learners first develop basic skills and knowledge in aspects of theatre production such as lighting, sound and audio-visual skills. As these learners progress, they deepen and extend these skills so that they are able to work independently using a wide range of industry technical skills.

Leaders' actions to improve learners' attendance in English and mathematics have been ineffective. Attendance of learners in English and mathematics lessons remains low and is significantly below their attendance in their other subjects.

Leaders have taken effective action to tackle the shortage of appropriately qualified teaching staff. They have an ongoing recruitment programme to recruit specialist vocational teachers. Leaders took full advantage of the 'Taking Teaching Further' programme to recruit experienced industry professionals with expert technical knowledge and skills. These professionals were provided with an effective teacher training programme and provided with individual support to enable them to develop their pedagogical teaching skills. As a result, learners benefit from an enhanced curriculum being taught by professionals with very recent industry expertise.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that learners receive ongoing careers advice to make informed decisions about their next steps? **Reasonable progress**

Learners on study programmes receive good quality careers advice from both their teachers, who are mostly industry professionals, and the wider college careers service. Career advisors provide helpful guidance, education and support to enable learners to make well-informed choices about their next steps. Learners who intend to progress to university are supported appropriately with their university and finance applications. Most learners progress to their first-choice destinations. Learners benefit from good quality work experience. Teachers work collaboratively with employers to ensure that learners are provided with good placement opportunities that meet their needs and aspirations. Most learners develop confidence to apply their technical skills in a real-life work environment as a result.

Leaders have yet to ensure that staff provide effective careers advice to apprentices. Apprentices often have a limited understanding of the wider range of opportunities available to them beyond their current employment, or the transferable skills they are developing as a part of their apprenticeship.

How do leaders and managers ensure the safeguarding and well-being of their learners? **Reasonable progress**

Learners are safe and know how to report concerns should they arise. Learners have a good understanding of health and safety practices at work. Level 2 LGV apprentices can perform vehicle safety checks such as coupling and uncoupling of

trailers. They understand the importance of taking responsibility for their own safety when loading and unloading vehicles. Level 3 production and arts learners can carry out effective risk assessments to install and move heavy industrial equipment.

Safeguarding staff are well trained and provide the appropriate response, swiftly dealing with safeguarding concerns. They work closely with parents and relevant agencies to ensure that learners get the wraparound help that they need.

Learners do not always have a well-developed awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Despite a detailed tutorial programme, they often do not have a good understanding of the local safeguarding risks that could affect them in their everyday lives.

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