

Southwark Overview and Scrutiny Committee

A review of further education and skills provision in the London Borough of Southwark

June 2017

Section 1: Introduction and methods of scrutiny

The overview and scrutiny committee undertook this investigation to identify problems and issues with the further education offer in Southwark, particularly with regard to the offer made to young people. We want to make recommendations which will improve the FE offer so that a system is in place which harnesses their full potential and prepares them for the world of higher education and employment.

Clearly, a major focus of our work is Lewisham Southwark College. The college was assessed as 'inadequate' by Ofsted twice in the space of eighteen months between 2013 and 2015 and was given 'requires improvement' in 2016. In stark contrast to the college, Southwark's schools are now performing at their best rate in a generation, with nine in ten rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted. In the Committee's view, it is a matter of great urgency that the FE offer within the borough is brought up to the high standards of our schools.

The methods used by the Committee to scrutinise this issue include:

- Interviewing the Cabinet Member for Business, Employment and Culture
- Interviewing the principal of Lewisham Southwark College
- Informal conversations with Southwark Education Policy officers
- Informal conversations with young people accessing further education in Southwark
- Review of the Government's Post-16 Skills Plan published in July 2016,
- Review of the Independent Panel on Technical Education (chaired by Lord Sainsbury)
- Review of the Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark Skills Analysis (2013/14)
- Review of the Area Based Review of FE and Skills – setting out the FE and skills landscape in central London, presenting recommendations and wider conclusions for consideration.
- Review of the most recent Ofsted report for Lewisham Southwark College
- Review of Ofsted case studies exemplifying best practice

One action which the Committee was not able to carry out, but which was originally planned, was to visit Lewisham Southwark College in person. Eventually the committee was not able to do this, partly due to the unexpected calling of the 2017 General Election. We would like to put on record our thanks to the College for this invitation.

Section 2: Changes to the skills system, the context for Southwark

Any review of further education in Southwark must take account of the wider changes to the system currently taking place. The Independent Panel on Technical Education, chaired by Lord Sainsbury, was established to advise ministers on issues relating to technical education in England. Their report¹ published in April 2016 made a number of recommendations for the improvement of the skills system. A core focus was on simplifying the current offer and on making the sure qualifications are fit for purpose in a rapidly changing economy. The review identified a number of key challenges in the current system:

- Existing qualifications do not bear sufficient relation to occupational or employer requirements.
- The volume of qualifications on offer (over 13,000 technical qualifications including more than 33 in plumbing alone) drives down quality and makes it impossible for learners to make informed and effective decisions about what route is best for them.
- There is a market-based approach to qualifications which has reduced quality, particularly in level 2/3 qualifications.

The report recommends a fundamental shift in the structure of the technical education. It recommends two modes of learning – work-based (through apprenticeships) and college-based – structured around 15 routes anchored in occupations.

Responding to the report, the Government's post-16 Skills Plan² adopts all the recommendations included in the independent panel's review (within financial constraints). These include:

- Streamlining technical education to 15 occupation-based routes, grouping occupations where there are shared technical and skills requirements.
- Introducing a two-year programme at the beginning of all routes, centred around a common core of learning.
- Reforming qualification regulations generally, and specifically limiting qualifications for these two-year programmes to just one-per programme, delivered by licence following a competitive process.
- Offering transition years and bridging provision to help learners join and transfer on/off technical routes.
- Reforming careers education to ensure everyone knows the options available to them.

In addition to other issues identified by the Sainsbury review, the report highlights a persistent deficit in apprenticeship opportunities and a lack of technical education at higher levels to meet futures skills demand.

¹ Report of the Independent Panel on Technical Education, April 2016

² Post -16 Skills Plan, July 2016

The Government's plan also sets out four guiding principles by which these reforms will be shaped:

1. Employers must play a leading role.
2. Technical education needs to be fulfilling, aspirational, clearly explained and attractive to everyone, regardless of their gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, sexual identity or any other factor beyond their control.
3. We need to ensure that many more people can go on to meet the national standards set by employers.
4. We need close integration between college-based and employment-based technical education.

It is clear that there are some clear challenges around skills to be addressed both in the short and medium term. Plans to address some of the issues of complexity and poor-quality in the technical education offer nationally are in place.

It is widely accepted that there is a mismatch between the qualifications offered by providers and the skills required by employers. How effectively these solutions satisfy need at the local level will depend, to some extent, on the quality of information key stakeholders have access to.

Funding devolution

The devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to London (approximately £400 million per year) was confirmed in the 2016 Autumn Statement. It is anticipated that funds will be devolved to the GLA in 2019/20.

The AEB combines all Skills Funding Agency money that is not from the European Social Fund (ESF), Advanced Learner Loans or apprenticeship funding. It covers qualifications at Levels 2 and 3, and English and maths legal entitlements and can be used to support learners aged 19+. Funding levels vary according to the qualification, learner age and the current qualifications held by the learner.

A 'Skills and Employment Board' will be created in the central London sub-region with a view to creating a sub-regional skills strategy to support the administration of these funds. This board will feed in to the London-wide skills strategy and serve as a strategic framework for borough-based engagement with FE and skills providers.

How the GLA plans to administer these funds is not yet clear. This will, of course, have implications in terms of the scope for innovations. It is also noted that, at this time, the adult education budget is used to a greater or lesser extent to up skill adults who did not achieve Level 2 in school or further education. This will need to be considered in any plans for how the budget is allocated.

Advanced Learner Loans are available to support adults in accessing further education. The

loans cover qualifications at levels 3-6 (or, A Levels through to a graduate certificate) for adults aged 19 and over and are repayable only on completion of the course and once the loan recipient is earning at least £21,000 per year.

Area Based Review

The Central London Area Based Review of Skills covering all general further education and sixth form colleges across 12 local authority areas (Camden, City of London, Westminster, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Wandsworth) was released in January 2017. The reviews were designed to enable colleges to become financially sustainable. A response was presented to Cabinet in March 2017.

The report outlines the demographics of the area, sets out performance against key indicators and maps supply and demand for skills across the region. Key findings include:

Highest growth is forecasted in the following sectors:

- professional, real estate, scientific and technical
- administration and support
- health and care
- ICT
- accommodation and food service
- retail
- construction
- education

Southwark performs consistently above the London average at key stage 4.

Apprenticeships in the following areas are most popular: business administration, health and social care, and service enterprises.

There is limited apprenticeship delivery in key growth sectors such as IT, communication, leisure, travel and tourism, and education.

There is also a limited offer of higher apprenticeships from further education colleges.

The Review notes that there is a need for FE provision to better meet the needs of Central London's employers, and for improved dialogue between colleges, employers and local government to enable this. The Review also identifies a lack of quality information, advice and guidance, and the imbalance in the provision of apprenticeships between FE colleges and private providers.

Section 3: FE and Skills in Southwark

Given the evidence the committee has reviewed, it is clear Southwark residents have not had access to a quality Southwark-based FE offer for some years. The most recent Ofsted reports for both Lewisham Southwark College and Lambeth College gave ratings of 'requires improvement'. Further, Lewisham Southwark College is subject to a notice of concern for financial health and minimum standards, particularly regarding apprenticeships.

The committee notes that Southwark is among the top 5 boroughs exporting learners, with 71% of Southwark learners³ aged 16-18 choosing to leave Southwark for further education. This has implications for the retention of local talent as residents studying in other boroughs consider what their next steps following completion of their chosen course might be.

The merger of Lewisham Southwark College and Newcastle College Group was formalised Friday 12 May 2017. The committee notes that the council expressed a strong objection to this merger in favour of a more local arrangement, both directly and through formal consultation.

In the Southwark Cabinet Report responding to the Area Based Review in March 2017, the council once again voiced this opposition and went on to say:

“Moving forward, whatever the outcomes of local college mergers, the council will continue to act in the best interests of Southwark’s residents. This will mean working to ensure local FE providers deliver a secure and improved quality offer for Southwark learners especially those with additional needs and support. This will include addressing basic skills provision in literacy and numeracy, working with schools and ensure quality pathways into higher level technical learning and employment, meeting local employer and stakeholder priorities and safeguarding local physical assets.”

The Committee addresses these next steps in the recommendations below.

Features of Outstanding colleges

The committee has identified some key features of good and outstanding colleges in a review of Ofsted case studies exemplifying best practice.

The key areas of note that emerged from this research were:

- A strong focus on learner outcomes. While financial constraints are obviously given due consideration, the driving force behind any change is learner outcomes and how these relate to the skills and training needs of local employers.

³ London CCIS data (May 2016)

- Teaching and learning is a primary area of focus in tracking college performance. Learner outcomes are considered in performance management across every area of the college business, including finance, HR and business planning.
- Learner and employer feedback is used to improve all services, including teaching and learning, rather than purely support functions.
- Quality leadership and management. Leaders in outstanding institutions have a clear vision and direction for the colleges and are able to translate these in to the culture and ethos of their institution/s. This ensures that all staff and stakeholders understand the direction of travel and are able to develop their area of work in line with that.
- In addition, outstanding leaders and managers take a collaborative approach, communicating often and effectively through a variety of routine (scheduled meetings etc.) and ad-hoc (one-off whole staff meetings, open seminars etc.) forums.
- Performance management. Robust performance management is in place across the college, and managers and leaders at all levels are quick to act to address concerns.
- Quality governance (skill and diversity). Governors have a good grasp of the performance of the college and are able to ask probing questions in order to assess quality. They have a good relationship with the leadership team but are also practiced in challenging the team to secure best outcomes for learners.
- Innovation. The colleges use digital technology to ensure that teaching and learning – as well as other college processes – are flexible, enabling stakeholders to make learning work for them and reducing barriers to learning by increasing efficiency and flexibility of delivery.
- Finally, college leaders have a good grasp of the local area (both learners and employers) and have good links with employers and other learning providers.

OSC believes that it is essential that, where it is not already doing so, Lewisham Southwark College adopts these approaches in an effort to accelerate the improvement in standards. Whatever the conflicting views on the merger with Newcastle Colleges Group, the new governance and additional resources provided by the merger should be treated as an opportunity to do this. Measures to encourage this process of improvement are addressed in the recommendations of this report.

Interview with the Principal and Chair of Lewisham Southwark College

On 12th December 2016, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee interviewed Carole Kitching

(Principal and CEO at Lewisham Southwark College) and Chris Bilsland (Chair of Lewisham Southwark College).

The Principal described the current levels of provision at the College including what she considered to be a “Broad Curriculum.” Carole Kitching pointed out that the curriculum was revamped in 2015 and that both Southwark and Lewisham Colleges were invited to take part in the review.

When asked about the current quality of provision, the Principal stated. “I am told that provision is not good enough and I would agree with that.” She went on to describe a number of measures being carried out to improve this provision and stated that improvements were already being seen.

One issue mentioned by the Principal was that enforced changes in assessment regimes nationally meant a move from coursework to a greater emphasis on end point assessments. The college was therefore carrying out work with students to ensure they were ready for a greater emphasis on exams.

When asked what culture change was needed among staff in order to improve results, the Principal began by saying there had already been a big change in a number of areas. She stated that previously some teaching staff had “struggled with the concept of tough love” and were perhaps too flexible with students facing challenges at home, with regard to attendance. The College’s new approach was to “lay down firmer ground rules” for students. The principal also cited the need for teachers to take greater advantage of online teaching resources. She finished by saying there was a still a way to go on a number of issues, but improvements were being seen.

When asked about the relationship between the College and the Council, and how it might be improved, the Principal agreed this was a very important issue. She went on to say that it would help if there was enough confidence in the council to work more closely with the College. She referenced previous disagreements with the council and expressed a wish to overcome these difficulties.

The Principal went on to say that the council could do more to encourage schools to engage with the College, particularly in offering the College the opportunity to go to schools and talk to potential students. She stated the following. “In the past year we have made over 50 visits into schools but only one of them has been in Southwark.”

On the potential (at that time) merger with Newcastle Colleges Group Chris Bilsland said that the option was being considered and preferred because the leadership of the College wanted to accelerate the improvement process and the Group has the skills and resources to allow this to happen

He went on to say that other options would be considered if they were attractive but that currently, other London based offers did not meet their expectations.

During the questioning, it was stated several times by members of the committee, that there were deep concerns about the potential merger with Newcastle Colleges Group. The remoteness of the Group’s senior leadership, the location of other colleges in the group and concerns about how well the Group would understand the needs of a borough like Southwark formed part of these concerns.

Apprenticeship provision

The Area Based Review identified that, overall, the most popular frameworks for apprenticeships were business, administration and law (36% of all starts), health, public services and care (25% of all starts) and retail and commercial enterprise (17% of all starts).

Provision of apprenticeships is split between FE colleges and private training providers. In central London 8,690 apprenticeships were delivered by colleges in 2014-15. A further 16,800 starts were delivered in the area by private training providers in that same period.

The Committee notes that the 2014 Southwark Labour Manifesto pledged to create 2,000 new apprenticeships. To date the council has created 1184 apprenticeships through direct delivery, supply chain contracts, commissioning and local partnerships.

The Southwark Apprenticeship Standard has played a role in ensuring that newly created apprenticeships are good quality and rewarding opportunities.

The number of Southwark residents starting apprenticeships in 2014/15 and 2015/16 was 1,630 and 1,560 respectively. The majority of those starts were in administration, business and law (570/570), health, public services and care (440/410), and retail and commercial enterprise (280/270) (FE Data Skills Library).

Skills Strategy

A skills strategy has been commissioned by the Cabinet in light of the Area Based Review, with a view to increasing work readiness, influencing local provision and ensuring residents can access opportunities. A draft outline is proposed for July 2017 with a consultation to follow July-September 2017.

Links between further and higher education

The Committee also looked at the current state of links between further education providers and higher education institutions. They found:

- The National rate of progression to HE is 32.6%
- Majority of boroughs in the central London review areas have in excess of 40% rate of young people progressing in to HE
- The proposed merger of Lambeth College with LSBU bodes well in terms of a local journey from FE to HE.
- Passmore Centre at LSBU offering apprenticeships from levels 4-6 also allowed for a transition on the apprenticeship pathway – exact detail of qualifications that will be available TBC
- In her interview with OSC the principal of Lewisham Southwark College stated that the College did have links with HE institutions, but that these were mainly local, rather than with institutions in other parts of the country.

Section 4: Recommendations

1. The committee is disappointed that warnings about the merger with Newcastle College Group by Lewisham and Southwark College were not heeded. We believe a London based partner would have been more appropriate and been better placed to meet the challenges identified in this report. OSC now urges the leadership of the college to work with the council to demonstrate it is prepared to work constructively with the Council and other stakeholders.
2. However, the Area Review noted the need for improved dialogue between colleges, employers and local government to improve the offer to young people. Both the council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have voiced serious concerns about the merger between Lewisham Southwark College and Newcastle College Group. These concerns have not gone away, but the Committee believes that, now that the merger has taken place, a new effort needs to be made to engage positively with the college leadership to secure positive outcomes for local young people.

The Committee recognises that a Cabinet Member (Councillor Situ) sits on the Board of Governors of the college, but that there is also a need for a broader forum for discussion in order to build a better relationship between the College and the council.

With this in mind, the Committee recommends the establishment of a new forum to facilitate this engagement.

This would include both officer and political leadership from both Lewisham and Southwark council's and senior leadership from Lewisham Southwark College. We hope that all sides will be prepared to put aside previous differences in order to produce the best outcomes for Southwark's young people.

The Committee recommends that the Cabinet Member raises this at the next meeting of the College Board.

3. The mismatch between the skills employers want and the courses on offer is a clear problem. The council has a role to play in ensuring local FE providers have the information they need in order to construct less complex, more focused course offers. The data and intelligence gathered via the local business forum is just one example. The committee recommends that Southwark provides a formal written contribution to Lewisham Southwark College (and other relevant providers, where appropriate) informing their annual review of courses to be offered. This communication should be a public document.
4. The Committee has found that one of the reasons the skills offer does not tally with employer demand is that funding is tied to course completion rates, meaning that provision is steered very much by what learners request.

The Cabinet should consult with the college (and other local skills providers) about changing this incentive so that actual employment prospects and skills demand are more central to the courses offered.

5. One particular area where more apprenticeships are needed, as identified by the Area Review, is in IT, communication, leisure, travel and tourism, and education. The council should put particular focus on working with employers from these sectors in developing new apprenticeships.
6. This report notes the devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB) to London (approximately £400 million per year). The committee believes that the council should have a central role in deciding how these funds are spent in our borough. As with recommendation 2, the council is ideally placed to understand how to match this funding to practical support for adult learners, particularly with regard to up-skilling those wishing to improve their employment opportunities.

OSC recognises that Cllr Peter John is Deputy Chair on the Mayor of London's *Skills for Londoners Taskforce* which is tasked to:

- Help the Mayor meet his manifesto commitments on skills
- Support the Mayor to develop a London Skills Strategy
- Share creative and innovative ideas to improve City Hall policy making on skills

Using its influence, the Cabinet should lobby the Mayor and the GLA for a more central role for the council in allocating funding in the longer term.

7. The evidence in this report shows that one of the key challenges for the council, colleges and employers is to get the right information about further education to the right people. Currently there is a lack of quality information, advice and guidance for young people in London with regard to the opportunities which are available. The new skills strategy which is being developed by the council should include a proposed communications strategy to address this issue. The strategy should include working closely with other stakeholders.
8. The Cabinet should work with schools to see if more can be done to facilitate visits by FE providers to Southwark schools, to make pupils aware of appropriate courses. However, this work should only take place once Southwark Council is convinced that the courses on offer are high quality and would improve the life and employment chances of children in Southwark schools.