



City of Sunderland College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Better
education
and care

Inspection report

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	City of Sunderland
Type of college:	GFE/tertiary
Principal:	Dr Bill King
Address of college:	Shiney Row Centre Success Road Philadelphia Houghton-le-Spring DH4 4TL
Telephone number:	0191 511 6000
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Chair of governors:	John Mallett
Unique reference number:	131347
Name of lead inspector:	Sandra Tweedie HMI
Dates of inspection:	13-17 March 2006

Background of the organisation

1. City of Sunderland College is a large tertiary college with three main centres at Shiney Row, Bede, and Hylton. Following the 14 to 19 area inspection in 2002 a confederation of three sixth form centres was formed operated jointly by the college and most of the 11 to 16 non-denominational secondary schools. They offer provision for 16 to 18 year olds. The college provides an extensive range of courses from entry to foundation degree level. Over 75% of learners come from Sunderland and those remaining almost entirely from the Sunderland travel-to-work area. The college is located in an area of considerable disadvantage. Sunderland ranks as the 22nd most deprived out of 354 authorities in England. Two-thirds of the College's 16 to 19 full-time learners are in receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA).
2. In 2004/05 the college enrolled 3,667 full-time 16 to 18 year olds and just over 800 adult full-time learners. There were 17,696 part-time adult students and over 800 part-time 16 to 18 year old learners. The full-time 16 to 18 student population is fairly evenly balanced in terms of gender; 62% of the part-time adult student population is female. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is small but, at 5%, is above the figure of 2% for the local population.
3. The college is engaged in extensive partnership activity, for example, in establishing provision for 14 to 19 year olds and working with the local authority. The college outreach provision using library premises contributed to the recognition of the library service through a Beacon award. The college offers foundation degrees and year zero courses in collaboration with the University of Sunderland. The college gained a Beacon Award for its *Test the City* initiative making a large contribution to the government's and regional targets to improve basic skills among adults. The college has Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Networking, Call Centre Operation and a shared CoVE in Building Services with Hartlepool College of Further Education.
4. In its mission, the college aims to provide a wide range of good quality learning opportunities accessible by young people, adults and employers with diverse educational and training needs to the benefit of the City of Sunderland and the wider North Eastern region.

Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the

period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
- achievements and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievements and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2

Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

6. Achievements and standards are good. Success rates have improved for all learners and are well above the national average at all levels and for all major qualifications. Adult retention rates which were below average are now good at all levels. The average point score for General Certificate of Education (GCE) and Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) courses is above the national average. Most learners make good progress, significantly so for ICT vocational courses and for General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) at intermediate level. At GCE A-level and AS-level learners in some subjects perform less well than predicted from their GCSE grades. Pass rates are high for vocational courses, short intensive basic skills and New Deal programmes. Overall pass rates for 14-16 courses are satisfactory.
7. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are generally well planned with a range of activities which are well matched to the needs of learners. The college intranet is particularly well used. The observation of teaching and learning is at the centre of the college's strategy for improvement; however, there is some ineffective feedback to teachers on how to improve their teaching. The recently revised system for reviewing the progress of learners is not yet fully effective.
8. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. It offers a very good range of programmes meeting the needs of learners of all ages. Participation by 16 to 18 year olds in full-time education and training has increased considerably since the last inspection through effective work between Sunderland schools and the college. Equality and diversity targets have been met or exceeded in many areas. Strategies to work with employers are highly effective. The *Test the City* initiative has engaged adults well, improving literacy and numeracy. The college enrichment programme is well developed and popular.
9. Guidance and support for learners are good. There is a well established and effectively structured tutorial system. Tutors provide learners with very effective support and preparation for entry to higher education. The college complies with child protection requirements and there are good links with external services. However, there are no plans to provide child protection training for tutors or teaching staff.
10. Leadership and management are good. Governors and leaders set a clear direction for the college. Senior managers set challenging targets and are effective in raising standards for all learners. Responsiveness to regional and national initiatives is very good. An impressive level of collaborative work with

local 11 to 16 schools, employers, the community and local authority leads to high quality provision. Underperformance in a few areas of curriculum management is being addressed.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

11. The college's capacity to improve further is good. It has made good progress in tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Success rates are very good. Strategic planning is a key strength of the college. Curriculum management is effective in many areas and variations in performance are being addressed. Financial management is good.
12. The self assessment is accurate; the processes for self assessment are well established and include staff at all levels. However, development plans arising from self-assessment sometimes lack precision and detail. The procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are effective and course validation is rigorous.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13. The college has focused appropriately on the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection in 2002 and has made good progress. Retention rates have improved considerably for all learners at all levels. Learners' progress is now analysed effectively. Areas of underperformance are being addressed. A pastoral curriculum has been established which includes careers advice and guidance. Curriculum areas which were unsatisfactory at the last inspection are now satisfactory although in mathematics there is scope for further improvement. The college has made some progress in improving the proportion of high grades on GCSE courses but they remain low. Assessment arrangements for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are now satisfactory.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- success rates well above average for all learners at all levels
- good and improving quality of teaching and learning
- outstanding range of programmes to meet the needs of learners
- well developed and popular enrichment programme
- very good collaborative work with 11 to 16 schools, employers, the community and the local authority
- clear and effective strategic direction at senior management level

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- insufficiently detailed progress reviews for some learners
- underperformance in a few areas of the curriculum
- lack of precision and detail in development plans

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

14. Inspectors judged that achievements and standards are good, a view shared by the college in its self-assessment. Since the previous inspection success rates have improved for all learners. They are now well above the national average for similar colleges at all levels for all major qualifications. College data indicate a marked further improvement in 2004/05. Senior managers set challenging targets to raise achievement. Success rates for 16 to 18 year olds compare very favourably with those for all colleges. At the previous inspection, retention was below average for adults at all levels and is now well above. The large proportion of 16 to 18 year old students in receipt of EMAs has had a positive impact on retention. Pass rates have improved most at levels 1 and 2, for all learners.
15. At AS-level the pass rate has improved to the national average while at GCE A-level it is above average at 94%. The pass rate on vocational courses at level 3 is high at 94%. On NVQ programmes at levels 2 and 3, pass rates are high for all learners. Learners on apprenticeship programmes are making good progress. The framework success rate for apprentices improved to 51% in 2004/05 from very low rates in previous years. On courses for 14 to 16 year olds, overall pass rates are satisfactory.
16. In Sunderland just over half of 16 year olds gain five or more GCSEs at grades at A*-C compared to 57.1% nationally. However, pass rates for five subjects at grades A*-C including mathematics and English is well below the low national average at 35%. In 2005 the average point score for GCE and VCE courses improved to 279.9, above the national average. The majority of learners pursue broader programmes than is usually found in colleges. Most learners make good progress. An external report has indicated high value added scores for the advanced level programme as a whole. At GCE A-level and AS-level learners in some subjects perform less well than predicted from their GCSE grades, for example in mathematics, art and design, media studies and psychology. This is being addressed through effective intervention strategies. Learners on ICT vocational courses make very good progress, especially girls, as do learners on GNVQ intermediate courses.
17. Key skills pass rates are good for communication at level 2, ICT at levels 2 and 3 and for wider key skills. There are good pass rates for adults on the short intensive basic skills courses and New Deal programmes. The proportion of New Deal clients who gain employment is very good at 86%. Attendance during the inspection was 79%, in line with the national average; college records show better attendance at 83%. Behaviour is good. Learners aged 16 to 18 enjoy their studies and apply themselves well in lessons. They respond readily to questions and are developing confidence in speaking. In practical

work, learners work safely and demonstrate good skills in craft subjects. When developing their own businesses they are keen to make a profit.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

18. The quality of teaching and learning is good and has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Lessons are generally well planned with a range of activities which are well matched to the needs of learners. Learners are enthusiastic and work diligently to achieve the planned outcomes. The quality of learning resources is good and most teachers make effective use of new technologies to support their learning. The college intranet is particularly well used by teachers to enrich their lessons. Learners access the intranet either in college or from home. Relationships between teachers and learners are good, most lessons are well managed. Teaching and learning in New Deal short courses is good. The teaching of key skills is generally effective; teachers develop learners' key skills in vocationally relevant contexts and in tutorials.
19. The observation of teaching and learning is at the centre of the college's strategy for improvement. The college rigorously monitors teaching and learning through its lesson observation process. Inspectors agreed that lesson observation grades are accurate but feedback to teachers to enable them to improve their teaching lacks clarity. Heads of departments produce action plans which aim to bring about improvement. Advanced practitioners and experienced mentors provided support for teachers and a senior manager rigorously monitors the action taken and the resulting improvements.
20. Assessment is well planned; learners receive helpful feedback on individual assessments. Termly assessment boards are held to consider and provide reports on learners' progress. Employers also receive regular reports. Parents of 16 to 18 year olds are invited to information evenings each term. The system has recently been revised and is still evolving. Managers and tutors are committed to its success, but written comments on reports are often too brief and targets are not always sufficiently challenging for learners. For many learners the progress review is unsatisfactory, and learners do not receive sufficient information on what they can do to improve.
21. Initial assessment of learners' basic skills carried out during induction is effective for most learners. The results are used by teachers to devise appropriate lesson plans. Additional learning support is well managed and learners speak highly of the support they receive. The college's own analysis indicates that additional support improves the retention and achievement of learners.
22. The college provides an outstanding range of programmes, subjects and courses. Progression opportunities are good from entry level to Higher National Diploma and Foundation degree level. There is a good mix of non-vocational and vocational provision. The formal partnerships established with

the majority of secondary schools in Sunderland focus effectively on developing the 14 to 19 curriculum. The provision includes vocational courses for 14 to 16 year olds offered at the college and schools in specialist centres.

23. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The participation of 16 to 18 year olds in full-time education has increased from 63% in 2002 to 70% in 2005. Over 2,000 of 16 to 18 year olds qualify for EMAs. Most 16 to 18 year olds follow an unusually broad programme of study, particularly at level 3. Many learners follow a mix of vocational and non-vocational subjects. For those who enter with low attainment at GCSE this has been successful in enabling progression to higher level awards and to higher education. Master classes are held for able learners in many subjects to help them achieve their potential.
24. The strategies to meet local employers' needs are highly effective. Specialist directorates manage work based and work-related programmes. These arrangements enable good access to both funded and full-cost programmes. Clear strategies focus very effectively on increasing adult participation. Surveys of employers' views confirm high satisfaction rates. The well established CoVEs support employers' needs. The successful employer training pilot that focuses largely on developing skills for life, achieved a high success rate of 83% in 2005.
25. The enrichment programme is well developed and popular. Good external links are established with organisations such as youth development groups. The programme includes both general and curriculum specific activities, visits, expeditions and overseas trips. However, the college has no formal processes to monitor or evaluate the impact of the activities.
26. Guidance and support are good overall and satisfactory for work based learners and those learners on Jobcentre Plus programmes. Comprehensive student support and welfare services are available at all main college sites. For full-time learners, specialist tutors provide a well established and effectively structured programme which includes wider key skills and for some level 3 learners, AS-level citizenship. Tutors are allocated to groups by their subject background. A mixture of group and individual sessions provides ample time for academic and pastoral issues, progress review and support. Although tutors maintain close liaison with subject teachers, the detail contained in progress review documents each term is brief. The support and preparation for entry to higher education (HE) is good. Designated tutors from partner schools help smooth the transition to college.
27. The well-developed agreements between the college and Sunderland schools ensure that prospective learners obtain good initial advice and guidance and make appropriate choices. A central team manages the process well. All applicants are interviewed. Curriculum staff provide subject specific guidance. A guaranteed place is available for all applicants. The process is monitored

closely through an admissions questionnaire and student surveys. A well-managed process enables timely transfer between courses where required.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

28. Leadership and management are good. Success rates have improved for all learners at all levels. Most of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been tackled effectively. Strategic planning is strong and governors and leaders set a clear vision for the direction of the college. In the interim period pending the arrival of the new principal, the acting principal, ably supported by senior managers and other staff, has been successful in leading the college through continual changes. Collaboration with local 11 to 16 schools is particularly impressive and the college has played a major role in increasing provision for 16 to 18 year olds in Sunderland. The number of 16 to 18 year olds who participate in full-time education has increased significantly and is now just below the national average. The college has responded well to regional and national initiatives. Challenging targets for improving adult basic skills have been met.
29. Curriculum management is effective in many areas and variations in performance are being addressed. Accountability at all levels of management is increasing through a senior manager intervention strategy. The recently introduced strategy is already proving to be successful in promoting better consistency.
30. Managers demonstrate strong commitment to continuous improvement through quality assurance. The processes for self-assessment are well established and include staff at all levels; the self-assessment report is broadly accurate. Grades are similar to inspection findings. Effective procedures are in place for monitoring teaching and learning. Course validation is rigorous. However, development plans arising from the self-assessment sometimes lack precision and detail.
31. Opportunities for staff to attend external training are good and linked to development needs identified at appraisal. In-house training opportunities are available on a range of topics, but these are not always well attended. Training delivered in departments is not sufficiently monitored or evaluated.
32. The college complies with race relations and disability discrimination legislation and monitors its performance against equality and diversity factors. The policy and procedures for dealing with child protection meet statutory requirements. There are good links between the college and the Sunderland Education Child Protection Unit. A designated staff member has responsibility for child protection; all specialist welfare staff have received training. All members of college staff have Criminal Record Bureau clearance. However, tutors and teaching staff have not received training in child protection and there are no plans for training to take place.

33. Governors are well informed about key issues facing the college and local community. They strongly uphold the interests of the college and provide appropriate challenge. Through sub-committees they play an active role in the day-to-day development of the college.
34. Financial management is good; capital projects are well managed. Resources to support learning are good. Buildings are well maintained and provide a safe environment for learners. Teaching staff are well-qualified and there are good opportunities for unqualified staff to gain qualifications. The college gives good value for money.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	02/03	1,329	55	55		4,821	35	53	-18
	03/04	1,299	67	59	8	2,191	55	57	-2
	04/05	1,405	68	-		1,883	76	-	
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	39	36	58	-22	0	0	48	
	03/04	0	0	63		0	0	55	
	04/05	0	0	-		0	0	-	
NVQs	02/03	51	43	57	-14	73	64	63	1
	03/04	109	53	57	-4	36	33	63	-30
	04/05	191	71	-		35	60	-	
Other	02/03	1,239	56	55	1	4,748	35	53	-18
	03/04	1,190	68	59	9	2,155	55	57	-2
	04/05	1,214	68	-		1,848	76	-	

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	02/03	2,130	56	50	6	3,207	39	50	-11
	03/04	1,661	61	56	5	2,427	45	52	-6
	04/05	1,920	71	-		1,642	67	-	
GCSEs	02/03	927	56	58	-2	665	32	54	-22
	03/04	478	58	64	-6	747	25	57	-32
	04/05	190	84	-		87	70	-	
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	370	59	53	6	5	100	47	
	03/04	259	66	58	8	1	0	55	
	04/05	185	84	-		24	63	-	
NVQs	02/03	210	70	41	29	510	62	54	8
	03/04	264	56	49	7	518	53	52	1
	04/05	348	65	-		455	65	-	
Other	02/03	623	48	47	1	2,027	36	48	-12
	03/04	660	63	52	11	1,161	55	51	4
	04/05	1,197	69	-		1,076	67	-	

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2003 to 2005, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	02/03	5,802	64	58	6	1,378	54	50	4
	03/04	6,048	64	60	4	1,094	57	51	6
	04/05	6,229	70	-		1,051	63	-	
A/A2 Levels	02/03	1,072	85	80	5	85	80	66	14
	03/04	784	89	83	6	52	71	69	2
	04/05	928	90	-		20	80	-	
AS Levels	02/03	3,159	59	57	2	196	57	48	9
	03/04	3,274	58	59	-1	195	38	49	-11
	04/05	3,618	63	-		61	54	-	
GNVQs and precursors	02/03	1,282	59	47	12	130	40	46	-6
	03/04	1,252	71	49	22	85	51	43	8
	04/05	1,040	82	-		76	53	-	
NVQs	02/03	49	55	47	8	150	63	46	17
	03/04	43	42	49	-7	201	62	47	15
	04/05	18	61	-		182	69	-	
Other	02/03	240	55	50	5	817	51	51	0
	03/04	695	52	49	3	561	62	52	10
	04/05	625	63	-		712	64	-	

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2003-04 to 2004-05

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	12	0	30	0	12
	Advanced	7	43	32	0	14
2004/05	Apprenticeship	33	48	40	15	11
	Advanced	6	33	38	33	14

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVO rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Apprenticeship	0	0	-	0	-
	Advanced	4	0	-	0	-
2004/05	Apprenticeship	38	24	-	53	-
	Advanced	8	50	-	75	-

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Outcomes for Employer Training Pilots and National Employer Training Programmes managed by the college from 2002-03 to 2004-05.

Year	Number of starts in year	Planned learning completed *	Still in learning
2002/03	32	27	0
2003/04	387	353	0
2004/05	732	707	0

* These are key learning objectives identified for each learner following an ETP or NETP programme

1. Outcomes on Jobcentre Plus programmes managed by the college 2003-04 year to 2004-05 year

Year	Number of starts in year	Planned learning completed *	Gained employment	Still in learning
2003/04	148	148	**	0
2004/05	309	306	**	0

- These are key objectives identified for each learner following a JC+ programme
- ** data incomplete