

# The Marine Society College of the Sea

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## Contents

Background information .....	3
Inspection judgements .....	3
Scope of the inspection.....	3
Description of the provider .....	4
Summary of grades awarded .....	5
Overall judgement .....	6
Effectiveness of provision.....	6
Capacity to improve .....	6
Key strengths .....	7
Key areas for improvement .....	7
Main findings.....	8
Achievement and standards .....	8
Quality of provision .....	8
Leadership and management .....	9
Equality of opportunity .....	9
What learners like.....	12
What learners think could improve .....	12

## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Community learning

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## Description of the provider

1. The Marine Society (the society) was founded in 1756 to encourage recruitment to the Royal Navy. The society was joined by the Sea Cadet Association to become The Marine Society and Sea Cadets in November 2004, and became the UK's largest maritime charity.
2. The society is for people who serve, intend to serve, or have served in the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, or in the fishing and offshore industries. The Marine Society College of the Sea (MSCoS, the college) is an operating arm of the society.
3. The society has its main headquarters in Lambeth, London. MSCoS accounts for approximately one quarter of the annual expenditure of the society. Income is derived from society funds, grant funding from the Learning and Skills Council and other external sources.
4. MSCoS provides tuition and educational services to professional seafarers. These include a library facility for ships, establishments and offshore installations; tutor supported, self-study programmes at Level 2 and 3 (mainly GCSE and Advanced levels); and the facilitation of general education and information, advice and guidance.
5. MSCoS contracts with an external partner to provide tutors for GCSE courses. It provides degree level courses in partnership with two higher education institutions. The college has access to the Defence Learning Portal, a flexible distance learning facility offering general and specialist courses across the world. The college is a registered public examination centre.
6. Two full-time staff manage the provision. At present, around 400 learners are enrolled on MSCoS courses.

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## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

## Sector subject area

Community learning	Good: Grade 2
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## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

7. The overall effectiveness of MSCoS is good. Many learners have complex working arrangements which restrict their ability to study effectively or complete courses in a timely manner. Despite this, learners make good progress and pass rates are high for those who take external qualifications. Success rates are satisfactory. Standards of learners' work are good.
8. Teaching and learning are good and are increasingly monitored by MSCoS who have improved quality assurance since the previous inspection. The college provides an outstanding range of vocational and academic courses from Level 2 to higher education. Learners can access good library, intranet and other services while at sea or on shore. They receive good support and have good access to impartial advice and guidance.
9. Leadership and management are good. The self-assessment process is satisfactory overall. MSCoS takes account of formal and informal feedback, but recognises that it needs to improve its analysis of information as the number of learners increases. MSCoS is developing its management information system to support the self-assessment process and to improve the monitoring of learners' progress. The college knows its strengths and areas for improvement well, and provides very good value for money. Equality of opportunity is good. MSCoS is an inclusive organisation which takes effective actions to support seafarers who would otherwise be excluded from education.

### Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. MSCoS's capacity to improve is good. Pass rates are improving at a time of considerable growth in the range of provision and learner numbers. Managers have maintained the strengths identified in the previous inspection and have effectively addressed most areas for improvement. Quality improvement arrangements are good. Managers set challenging targets to improve performance and the quality of support for learners. Since the previous inspection, the college has improved its quality assurance procedures, and it carries out these procedures thoroughly. The monitoring of subcontractors has improved. Standards of learners' work have risen during the period of growth. The college recognises in its self-assessment report the need to encourage more learners to take a qualification. It also recognises the need for tutors to assess and record learners' progress more effectively, particularly for non-accredited provision. Learners value their courses and appreciate the good support provided by MSCoS staff. The two managers work closely and effectively within the resources available to gain maximum benefit for learners. Partnership working is effective. Staff development opportunities are good.

11. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Feedback from learners is collected regularly and staff act promptly to resolve any issues identified. Managers gather the views of their subcontractors and employers informally, but this information is not analysed regularly to inform self-assessment or development planning. The college's current system for managing information does not support the self-assessment process adequately. MCSoS recognises this as an area of improvement in its self-assessment report. The college is now installing a new system to enable more detailed evaluation of the information it collects, to improve management reports and the monitoring of learner progress.

12. The college's self-assessment report is critical and judgements made in the report match inspectors' judgements closely. The inspectors' grade of 'good' for leadership and management was lower than the provider's self-assessment grade.

## Key strengths

- High pass rates on accredited courses
- Very effective tutoring
- Particularly good learning resources
- Very effective strategic management
- Good operational management
- Particularly effective action to include seafarers in education

## Key areas for improvement

- The monitoring of progress of learners on non-accredited courses
- The development (and use) of management information (to improve provision for learners)

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

13. Achievement and standards are good overall. Although learners are seafarers who face logistical difficulties in completing their courses, examination pass rates are high for both long Level 2 and 3 courses, and are now above national rates. Pass rates for 2007/08 have risen to 95% from 86 % at GCE Advanced level and from 82% at GCSE level in 2006/07. Standards of work are good and most learners achieve the targets negotiated with their tutors. Examinations are organised flexibly at sea and ashore, and approximately 10% of learners complete their courses and achieve their qualifications ahead of the planned duration of their course.
14. Learners generally make good progress on their courses and progress well in their employment. For example, several learners gained promotion to warrant officer level. One learner who reached the end of his service progressed to degree qualifications and became a primary teacher.
15. The college does not assess sufficiently the benefits to learners of its non-accredited provision, as correctly identified in the self-assessment report. MSCoS recognises the need to encourage a greater proportion of its learners to achieve an external qualification.

### Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. Teaching and learning are good. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Tutors are effective and empathise well with learners. They take good account of the difficulties their learners face in studying while living and working in frequently changing circumstances. Tutors offer learners an effective range of communication methods. They routinely log every contact with learners and respond promptly with good individual support. Learning materials are clearly presented, well ordered and of a high standard. Learners gain confidence and work independently through each unit, often completing ahead of agreed targets. Tutors mark work closely and make constructive comments. The assessment of learning is effective and well managed. Employers conduct initial assessments and signpost learners who have not met the required standard to other courses. The college is inclusive, and accepts all enrolments. It records learners' prior achievement of qualifications but does not assess learners' skills in sufficient depth at the start of their course. The college does not analyse the performance of different groups of learners sufficiently.
17. MSCoS offers an outstanding range of programmes to meet the needs of learners and employers. Courses range from those that meet personal development needs to vocational and academic courses at foundation degree level. Learners gain the



qualifications needed for promotion within their employment, and many learners benefit from additional courses which prepare them to seek employment in civilian life. MSCoS ensures that learners have very good access to materials and resources which support their study and allow them to choose the path of learning which suits them best. These resources include a wide range of courses, an extensive library service, a website and access to Defence Learning Portal. MSCoS is recognised by a number of awarding bodies to carry out public examinations at sea or in foreign locations.

18. Support and guidance for learners are effective. MSCoS gives good, practical support. It offers a wide range of financial support to learners, including interest free loans and discounts. The college provides scholarships to some learners which allow them to access courses they could not afford otherwise. Staff go to great lengths to provide examinations at a time and place suited to the learners. MSCoS provides substantially discounted accommodation for learners taking examinations at its London headquarters.

19. Arrangements for language, literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. MSCoS has a satisfactory policy for learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs. Tutors give effective individual help and make additional contact with learners who are struggling. MSCoS accepts all learners sent by employers. Employers assess learners' needs before recommending a course at the college. The employers signpost learners below Level 2 in language, literacy, or numeracy to other local courses to prepare them for future learning opportunities. Arrangements for providing information, advice and guidance are good. Staff give impartial advice at the start and during learning.

## Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

20. Leadership and management are good. The management and board of MSCoS give good leadership and discharge their responsibilities well. Strategic management is very effective. Strategic objectives are clearly aligned with the aims of the trust and the needs of the marine industry. MSCoS has forged close strategic partnerships with a wide range of industry bodies, and relationships with the industry are good. MSCoS has also built good partnership arrangements with many specialist agencies and providers to ensure appropriate provision is available to seafarers. MSCoS works well with all its partners to identify gaps in provision, and it develops good solutions to meet the needs of seafarers and the maritime sector through effective facilitation and brokerage. MSCoS has worked well as an advocate for seafarers with external awarding bodies to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged by changes in qualifications. MSCoS has maintained consistent quality of provision for its learners during a period of rapid expansion. However, the college's longer term strategic planning is insufficient to provide a clear vision for the future.

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21. The college's operational management is good. This was recognised by MSCoS in its self-assessment report. The management style is open and effective, and the college is very responsive to learner and employer needs. Product development is good. MSCoS works closely with providers to design programmes which meet qualification requirements but also meet the needs of seafarers. MSCoS makes very effective use of resources. Staff are totally committed and focused on the needs of learners. However, the limited staffing is stretched to capacity. Other parts of the Marine Society support MSCoS well, for example, through the provision of learning resources by the Seafarers' Library service. The college maintains good communication with customers and external bodies. MSCoS promotes its services well to the industry through a wide range of media, including in-house magazines, trade press and through an informative and easily accessible website. MSCoS has an effective staff development system. Management of additional learning support is satisfactory.
22. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. Arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults, should they join the programme, are satisfactory. Staff have received appropriate training and appropriate, enhanced CRB checks have been completed. Staff are knowledgeable about the correct way to respond in the event of any issue arising.
23. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Quality improvement measures have improved the services to seafarers since the previous inspection. The college makes good use of learner feedback. For example, MSCoS has improved the clarity of information given to learners on how to register for exams. Learners value the very effective and rapid action taken by MSCoS to address any concerns. The college has improved its contract management since the previous inspection. It has increased its access to information from subcontractors to monitor activity more effectively, and holds regular, formal contract monitoring meetings. MSCoS has a wide range of policies and procedures which are clear and well written. The college's audit system fully meets the requirements of a small organisation. The self-assessment process is satisfactory and takes into account a range of formal and informal feedback.
24. The college's management information system is insufficiently developed. Although the system holds most of the required information, it is unable to provide suitable analysis of data or management reports. For example, the system records individual learner's progress but does not allow analysis of early leaver data. Although the college routinely collects feedback from learners, it does not evaluate the impact of any actions taken. MSCoS recognises this as an area for improvement in its self-assessment report and is currently developing a more suitable system.
25. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are good. This was judged to be satisfactory in the previous inspection. The actions taken by the college to include seafarers who would otherwise have no access to education are good. MSCoS is an inclusive organisation. Learners relate well to the ethics and the aims of the organisation, and they appreciate the particular benefits of learning within such a unique organisation. Learners who may otherwise have remained outside formal

education opportunities become passionate about learning. They often achieve at much higher grades than they expect at the start of their courses. They encourage their peers to take courses and act as effective ambassadors for MSCoS.

26. MSCoS links with a range of partners to enable learners to access a wide range of learning opportunities leading to academic and vocational qualifications or for personal learning. MSCoS has an appropriate equal opportunities policy and a clear set of procedures to ensure its implementation. Learners' rights and responsibilities are clearly stated in both MSCoS and subcontractor documents provided for learners. Policies and procedures for appeals, complaints and codes of conduct are clear, and learners sign up to these requirements in their enrolment. Learners recall this information well. Information and publicity documents represent the diversity of those opting to learn with MSCoS and use non-stereotypical images and easily understandable language and layout.
27. MSCoS collects satisfactory data on equality of opportunity. This was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection. Currently, 23% of learners are female, above the average level within the maritime sector. Few learners have physical or sensory disabilities, but those with specific learning difficulties are well catered through an appropriate and effective range of support options. MSCoS gives good and prompt support wherever individual learners are struggling or falling behind in their studies. It recognises the need to take further action to analyse and evaluate the performance of different groups. Tutors give appropriate emphasis to checking learners' understanding of equality and diversity in reviews of learning.

## What learners like:

- The effectiveness and reliability - 'MSCoS never fails to deliver'
- The clear expectations of learners set out in initial contact documents
- Assignments which are challenging, but rewarding and enjoyable
- Dedicated staff, who are always flexible and professional in organising examinations)
- Good tutors who know their subject
- The prompt response made to any enquiry and the good guidance offered on next steps in learning - 'I would recommend MSCoS to all my friends'

## What learners think could improve:

- Increased provision –“Even more courses”