

# Newcastle-under-Lyme College

Inspection report

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Provider reference 130812  
Published date December 2007

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

#### Grading

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.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

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

#### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management.

### Description of the provider

1. Newcastle-under-Lyme College is a large tertiary college located in North Staffordshire. The college enrolls the majority of its learners from the local conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme which, together with surrounding towns and villages, has a population of more than 500,000 people. The area around Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme is largely urban in character and includes districts of deprivation. Newcastle-under-Lyme is ranked 138 out of 354 for the highest levels of deprivation in England. The unemployment rate is approximately 3.5%, which is lower than the national rate of around 5.4%. The percentage of pupils gaining at least five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C in the local area in 2007 was below the national average.

2. The college provides a range of further education programmes and offers courses in most sector subject areas. Qualification levels range from pre-entry to level 4. The college provides apprenticeship programmes to around 250 work-based learners and full-time provision for approximately 80 young people aged 14 to 16 years. Part-time provision for around 450 young people aged 14 to 16 is provided in collaboration with local schools. In addition, there is a growing higher education programme and the college provides adult and community learning courses on behalf of Staffordshire Local Authority.
3. Newcastle-under-Lyme College enrolled about 6,700 individual learners in 2006/07. Of these, around 40% of learners were aged 16 to 18 and 60% were adults. About 85% of learners aged 16 to 18 were on full-time courses, but only 20% of adults studied full time. Around half of all learners were on level 3 courses, with the remainder being split fairly equally between level 1 and level 2 courses. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds was approximately 5%, compared to the 2.1% in the local population.
4. The college's mission is to 'shape successful lives through excellent education and training'.

## 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
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Good: contributory grade 2</i>

## Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

5. The effectiveness of provision is good. The achievement and standards of learners are good. Success rates are above national averages on long courses at all levels of the curriculum. Pass rates are high on most courses and retention rates are slightly above national averages. The vast majority of learners aged 14 to 16 years are successful on their chosen courses and many of them progress to other further education programmes. Learners make good progress on vocational level 3 programmes and satisfactory progress on AS and A2 courses.
6. Teaching and learning are good. The college has implemented successfully a range of strategies to minimise the number of weak lessons. The college has recognised that it now needs to focus more attention on increasing the proportion of outstanding lessons. The identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Although most assessment processes are very thorough, feedback to learners does not always guide them sufficiently on how to improve.
7. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college offers a wide range of courses for learners and there is good progression to further courses, higher education and employment. Strong links with employers and other stakeholders enhance learners' experiences by broadening the curriculum and providing a good range of work experience opportunities. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding.
8. Support and guidance for learners are good. The college provides outstanding initial advice and guidance to learners. Learners also benefit from an extensive range of support services and effective careers advice and guidance. Systems for monitoring progress have recently been improved. The setting of targets for learners to help them improve is an area for further development. The development of the economic well-being of learners is outstanding.
9. Leadership and management are good. Leaders set a clear strategic vision and direction based firmly on providing for the educational and training needs of the local community. The college self-assessment report is broadly accurate but some aspects of quality improvement planning are insufficiently rigorous. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Governance is excellent. Financial management is strong and the college provides good value for money.

## Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

10. The college demonstrates a good capacity to improve its provision for learners. It has successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. Self-assessment arrangements have improved and the revised quality assurance procedures are better at identifying underperformance in order that appropriate actions can be taken. The college is clear about its strengths and areas for improvement, although the use of target setting to monitor and evaluate quality improvement plans is underdeveloped. Financial management is very good. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the college and are very positive about how leaders and managers have set a clear strategic direction for the future.

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

11. The college has made good progress in addressing areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Retention and pass rates have improved for learners of all ages and at all levels, although in some cases these improvements have not been as rapid as those seen nationally. The management of work-based learning is now much more effective and framework success rates are significantly above national averages. Support for literacy and numeracy needs is outstanding and strategic management is very good. Some unsatisfactory accommodation remains but plans are well developed for the new building.

## Key strengths

- high success rates on long courses and work-based learning programmes
- good teaching and learning
- very responsive curriculum that meets the needs of learners and the local community
- highly effective strategies to widen participation
- outstanding identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs
- outstanding initial advice and guidance for learners
- very good strategic vision and direction
- strong financial management.

## Areas for improvement

*The college should address:*

- the progress made by learners on AS and A2 courses relative to their prior attainment
- the proportion of outstanding lessons
- the setting of specific and challenging targets for all learners
- the rigour of quality improvement planning.

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

12. Achievement and standards are good. The overall success rate for long courses was 6% above the national average in 2005/06 and increased by a further 2% in 2006/07. Pass rates are high on most courses and retention rates are slightly above national averages. Framework success rates for work-based learners have improved considerably in recent years and are now significantly above national averages. Short course success rates are similar to the national averages. The overall success rate for long courses has improved by 6% in the last three years, but this rate of improvement is not as great as that seen nationally.
13. Pass rates in key skills improved considerably in 2006/07. However, although pass rates were high at level 1, they were low at only 41% and 24% at levels 2 and 3 respectively, in line with the low national averages. The college provides full-time courses for around 80 learners aged 14 to 16 and part-time provision for a further 450 pre-16 learners. The vast majority of these learners are successful on their chosen courses and many of them progress to other further education programmes.
14. Many learners enter the college with prior attainment that is slightly lower than that seen nationally. They receive very effective support and the majority make good progress and are successful on their chosen courses. Very good progress is made by learners on vocational level 3 programmes and a good proportion achieve high grades. The progress made by learners on AS and A2 courses, although satisfactory, is not as good as that made by other learners. There is generally good progression for learners between levels of courses within the college and a good proportion move on to higher education.
15. The overall success rate of learners from a minority ethnic background is similar to that of the college as a whole. The overall success rate for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those in receipt of additional learning support, is also similar to the college average. Learners enjoy college and produce work of a good standard. They also take opportunities to make a good contribution to their community. The development of the economic well-being of learners is outstanding. The average attendance rate in 2006/07 was good at 86%. Health and safety practices are good.

### Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

16. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good and improving because of the successful implementation of a range of strategies to further reduce the proportion of weak lessons. Lessons are monitored frequently and support is targeted in the weaker areas. The



- college has recognised that it now needs to focus more attention on increasing the proportion of outstanding lessons.
17. Standardised lesson plans and schemes of work have been improved and implemented throughout the college. Lessons are generally planned carefully with clearly stated learning objectives. In some, however, a whole group approach is adopted and insufficient emphasis is placed on meeting the individual needs of all learners. In a number of these lessons, inspectors observed a lack of pace and challenge, especially for more able learners. Good use is made of effective questioning techniques and previous learning is reinforced at the start of most lessons. There is limited use of integrated learning technology (ILT), often because of the lack of available resources.
  18. The identification of, and provision for, additional learning needs has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. Learning support assistants work well to ensure that supported learners gain the maximum benefit from lessons. The provision for key skills is well organised and pass rates are improving. The key skills being developed in lessons, however, are not always put into context relevant to the learners' programmes.
  19. An extensive range of continuing professional development opportunities enables staff to attend a variety of training sessions throughout the year. Many of these sessions have been arranged as a result of feedback from lesson observations. The virtual learning environment is used well to provide staff with guidance and examples of good practice. It also enables learners to access a wealth of learning and support materials for their course, both within college and from home.
  20. There are strong internal verification processes for formally assessed work and marking is accurate. However, although most marking is very thorough, feedback to learners does not always guide them sufficiently on how to improve.
  21. Provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is outstanding. The college offers a wide range of courses for learners and there is good progression to further courses, higher education and employment. The college provides strong leadership of local partnership arrangements for provision for 14 to 16 year old learners. The college is also very responsive to the needs of adults in its local communities, offering courses in more than 40 community venues. The college is effectively addressing key government priorities and the training needs of local employers.
  22. Most full-time learners benefit from enrichment activities linked to their main courses, such as trips and residential events, and an appropriate range of cross college enrichment activities are available. However, participation on cross college activities is much lower than on course related activities. A high proportion of learners on vocational courses

- undertake work experience or train within realistic work environments at the college.
23. The college has highly effective strategies to widen participation, and has significantly increased the proportion of its learners taking courses at entry level, level 1 and level 2 in recent years. Provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased and this provision very effectively meets the needs of these learners. The college does much work to address the needs of specific groups, such as young mothers, ensuring that they remain in education. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding.
24. Support and guidance for learners are good. The college provides outstanding initial advice and guidance to learners. Publicity and guidance materials are attractive and informative, and written in appropriate language and style. The college is proactive and innovative in its engagement with local secondary schools. Learners of all ages have ample opportunities to discuss their choice of course, experience taster sessions and visit the college before they enrol. Careers advice and guidance are effective and there is good progression of learners to higher education.
25. Regular group and individual tutorial sessions are timetabled for all learners. Learners speak highly of the personal attention they receive from their tutors who know them well and monitor their progress effectively. Monitoring of progress using individual learning plans has been improved with the introduction of an electronic system. Individual target-setting in some areas is underdeveloped and learners do not always understand exactly what they need to do to improve. The college has recognised this issue and staff training is planned as part of the implementation of the new electronic learning plan.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

*Contributory grades:*

*Equality of opportunity*

*Good: grade 2*

26. Leadership and management are good. Leaders set a clear strategic vision and direction based firmly on providing for the educational and training needs of the local community. The college is taking a strong lead in the development of 14 to 19 provision within the local area and is highly successful in working with a range of organisations, including local strategic groups, employers and schools.
27. The recently revised quality improvement cycle provides improved procedures for the monitoring of performance. Accurate and detailed data are used in regular course review meetings so that underperformance is identified and addressed. Self-assessment arrangements are comprehensive and involve all staff and many

learners. Course reviews and draft curriculum self-assessment reports for 2006/07, although satisfactory, are in some cases overly descriptive. Judgements about the quality of provision, for example, are not always based on a sufficiently broad range of robust evidence. The overall college self-assessment report is broadly accurate.

28. The college quality improvement plan is reviewed regularly at senior management meetings. However, some of the targets and actions contained within the plan are insufficiently specific and have lengthy implementation timescales with few milestones to assess progress. The use of target setting to drive forward further improvements in the college is underdeveloped.
29. Staff are well qualified and have good opportunities to participate in professional development and training. There are clear performance management systems in place, and staff development is organised in response to individual training needs and the college's strategic objectives. All staff have individual action plans, but the monitoring of actions and the evaluation of their impact are areas for improvement.
30. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The college's response to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2002 are good. Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place. Clear and detailed equality and diversity policies and procedures are in place, and these are being successfully implemented.
31. Governors provide high levels of support and challenge. They bring an excellent range of expertise and are rigorous in their scrutiny of college performance. Resources are satisfactory overall. Learning resources are generally good, but some of the accommodation is dated and cramped. The college is well advanced in its plans for a new building to be completed in 2009. Financial management is strong and the college provides good value for money.

## Learner's achievements

### Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	04/05	608	75	65	10	1076	68	62	6
	05/06	747	73	69	4	1098	73	65	8
	06/07	570	81	*	*	1074	74	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	62	73	68	5	1	0	64	-64
	05/06	43	91	72	19	1	100	***	***
	06/07	**	**	*	**	**	**	***	***
NVQs	04/05	88	68	68	0	44	41	66	-25
	05/06	99	69	72	-3	40	70	74	-4
	06/07	90	76	*	*	21	86	*	*
Other	04/05	458	77	64	13	1031	69	62	7
	05/06	605	72	69	3	1057	73	65	8
	06/07	481	81	*	*	1064	72	*	*

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	04/05	804	78	61	17	1364	69	60	9
	05/06	615	70	66	4	1383	73	66	7
	06/07	657	73	*	*	718	72	*	*
GCSEs	04/05	191	78	64	14	83	58	63	-5
	05/06	162	70	68	2	86	70	67	3
	06/07	126	71	*	*	63	79	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	97	72	67	5	4	50	75	-25
	05/06	28	75	69	6	**	**	***	***
	06/07	**	**	*	**	**	**	*	**
NVQs	04/05	90	68	57	11	215	75	60	15
	05/06	142	68	65	3	301	70	67	3
	06/07	106	74	*	*	263	69	*	*
Other	04/05	426	81	61	20	1062	68	59	9
	05/06	283	70	66	4	996	74	65	9
	06/07	364	70	*	*	395	72	*	*

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2005 to 2007, 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	04/05	3247	75	68	7	636	69	58	11
	05/06	3192	76	70	6	659	67	63	4
	06/07	3093	76	*	*	530	70	*	*
A/A2 Levels	04/05	853	92	86	6	26	62	69	-7
	05/06	787	91	87	4	45	82	72	10
	06/07	816	92	*	*	50	78	*	*
AS Levels	04/05	1739	67	66	1	83	58	52	6
	05/06	1711	68	67	1	117	56	55	1
	06/07	1664	69	*	*	59	78	*	*
GNVQs and precursors	04/05	167	86	61	25	13	85	54	31
	05/06	63	90	66	24	13	92	57	35
	06/07	**	**	*	**	**	**	*	**
NVQs	04/05	15	80	63	17	212	74	56	18
	05/06	12	83	71	12	152	70	63	7
	06/07	16	75	*	*	166	73	*	*
Other	04/05	473	73	60	13	302	69	59	10
	05/06	619	77	65	12	332	66	64	2
	06/07	597	71	*	*	255	65	*	*

\* The 2006/07 national rates were not released at the time of this inspection

\*\* Qualification not offered by the college in this year

\*\* National rate not available

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college 2005 to 2007.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners *	College NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate **	College framework rate **	National framework rate **
Advanced Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	27	70	48	59	34
		timely	23	61	31	43	21
	05/06	overall	37	84	54	62	44
		timely	38	63	34	50	27
	06/07	overall	42	71	***	67	***
		timely	41	61	***	59	***
Apprenticeships	04/05	overall	57	70	50	60	38
		timely	62	47	29	42	22
	05/06	overall	94	63	58	63	53
		timely	86	40	38	40	33
	06/07	overall	152	76	***	75	***
		timely	148	63	***	62	***

\* 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'

\*\*\* The 2006/07 national rates were not released at the time of this inspection