

GET READY . . .
. . . ready for school
. . . ready for work
. . . ready for life

Introduction

Sunderland is a city that values education, nurtures potential, celebrates success and provides opportunity. It is optimistic about its future and confident in its ability to punch above its weight.

This strategy demonstrates a shared commitment by all the key players in the city to create a world class education and training system that meets the personal, social, cultural and economic needs of everyone who lives or works here – regardless of their personal circumstances.

We all want Sunderland to be a place where everyone has an appetite for learning, is excited by the available opportunities and feels empowered to succeed in a rapidly changing society and economy.

We want everyone to have the skills, qualities, attributes, qualifications and experiences that enable them to realise their full potential and to contribute to the city's prosperity. As the economy develops, individuals will need to acquire both new skills and approaches not just to the world-of-work, but everyday life, with a more flexible attitude to and understanding of employer needs. Self-management of increasingly complex lives and careers will become more commonplace for many individuals.

We are proud of the improvements in educational attainment that have been achieved over the past 10 years, but we recognise there is a lot more to do. There are still too many children starting school at a disadvantage, too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning, too many young people drifting into unemployment, too few progressing into further and higher education and too many employers reporting that they cannot recruit people with the skills they need.

But life is not just about achieving qualifications and securing employment. Life in the 21st century requires people who are well prepared to fill a variety of roles - as workers, parents, citizens and consumers - in which they can apply their knowledge and skills effectively to rapidly changing situations.

Our ambition is to build on our successes to ensure that all children, young people and adults, wherever they live or work in Sunderland, benefit from the best possible education and training opportunities in a safe and supportive environment that will allow them to thrive at every stage and in all aspects of their lives.

We want to ensure that everyone is well equipped to respond positively to all the opportunities and challenges that life presents, with a particular focus on being:

- Ready for school
- Ready for work
- Ready for life

Why does the city need an Education and Skills Strategy?

Understanding and addressing the future education and skills needs of the city is a complex task.

A strong education and skills system is essential for a successful, sustainable economy and society. It makes an important contribution to increasing both economic activity and social inclusion. People who are well educated and skilled, including those who engage in cultural and creative opportunities, are generally more able to fulfil their potential. They are more likely to earn more and to use their skills and experiences for the benefit of their families and the wider community.

The children and young people currently in education are our workforce of the future. Children attending primary school now will be of working age by 2025, a time when the key growth sectors identified in Sunderland's Economic Masterplan will be firmly embedded in the city's economy.

Policy context

For many years education and skills have been the focus of much government activity. Successive governments have wrestled with the twin issues of UK educational performance falling behind that of comparative nations and the need to develop an education system that anticipates the future requirements of the economy as well as responding to the needs and aspirations of individuals.

National

Significant changes in national education and skills policy pose new challenges and opportunities for Sunderland's education and economic partners. Local Authorities no longer control, direct or dictate education provision, but they still have a statutory duty to "promote fulfilment of potential". There is an increasing number of new challenges and opportunities as more schools become Academies, together with the introduction of Free Schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools.

Regional

The North East Independent Economic Review (April 2013), commissioned by the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, set out a number of recommendations which included; 'A high skilled economy which invests in its young people' focusing on raising the standards of schools and improving information, advice and guidance provided to young people; the importance of Apprenticeships and; increasing the Higher Education participation rate.

In April 2014 'More and Better Jobs – A Strategic Economic Plan for the North East' was published by the North East LEP. In order to meet the vision of one million people in employment as set out in the plan, the North East must see its economy grow by some 100,000 jobs over the next 10 years.

The North East LEP's European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (2014-2020), allows local partners to take up the Strategic Economic Plan's challenge of 'More and Better Jobs', with European Regional Development Fund available to support business growth and innovation and European Social Fund available to support some of the challenges in relation to skills and young people.

The city's challenges

In the years ahead people will have to manage their education and careers more actively and develop skills that employers view as essential. For most people a single course of study will not provide entry into a “job for life” and, despite some good performance from educational institutions, there needs to be a greater emphasis on employability and enterprise skills.

The so-called “soft skills”, such as communication, team-working and problem solving, are increasingly valued by employers. These are also the skills that are most needed in every aspect of our lives - as parents, siblings, spouses or partners, friends and members of the community.

Significant improvements in educational attainment have been achieved over the past 10 years. However there is still an urgent need to increase the proportion of the city's population qualified to at least NVQ Level 4. The need for improved participation in Higher Education is widely recognised, and can be a key enabler and energiser of such opportunity, for those young people and adults who are able to benefit from it.

There remains an urgent need to reduce the proportion with no qualifications at all. This cannot be achieved without further gains in attainment at all stages from early years onwards.

There also needs to be a major focus on closing the achievement gap between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and the rest of the population, which in many cases has widened in recent years.

Compared to the North East and Great Britain, Sunderland has fewer residents of working age qualified to NVQ Levels 3 and 4 – with these people being more likely to earn higher salaries. This is partly a reflection of the smaller proportion of local jobs that require higher level qualifications.

Although there is a relatively high percentage of Sunderland residents qualified to NVQ Levels 1 and 2, there is still a significant proportion who lack basic skills – and there are more people of working age that do not have any qualifications compared with the national average. The number of parents with low levels of literacy and numeracy is a particular concern, as this directly impacts on their children's development and readiness for school.

In some parts of the city, patterns of intergenerational unemployment and a culture of welfare benefit dependency has led to low levels of aspiration among many young people and adults. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, ‘The influence of parents, places and poverty on educational attitudes and aspiration’ (2011), states that “parents and families are important”. The study found a clear alignment between what parents said they wanted for their children and what young people aspired to do in the future.

For too many people, education is simply seen as something which stops at a relatively young age. Given the need in the city to up-skill the adult population, economically active and inactive, giving them the skills to contribute to a changing labour market, more emphasis must be placed upon the need for and importance of lifelong learning with both the individual and employers.

There is also a need to improve the flow of information and communication about the changing economy within the city. Too often learners are unaware of current needs and future opportunities, which then leads to ill-informed demand influencing the supply of skills investment.

Awareness of the sector opportunities that will be available needs to be widely raised among residents and businesses in order for the city's future ambitions to be realised. Education and guidance professionals will have to be much better informed about up-to-date employment and skills demand, so that they can give sound, impartial advice on realistic career paths.

The way forward

All of Sunderland's education and economic partners have a responsibility to embrace and champion the education and skills needs of everyone in the city by:

- Influencing and shaping the provision on offer and helping to develop and improve the education and skills market;
- Promoting any necessary structural change in the local education and skills system;
- Securing further improvements in the quality of education and skills provision and in the attainment of learners at all stages;
- Responding to employer needs, economic growth and community development, working with North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) as appropriate; and
- Supporting the development of provider and stakeholder networks.

Throughout this journey it is essential that early years settings, schools, colleges, training providers, universities and employers work together. The city has a strong asset base, both existing and emerging, on which to build. That includes an education and provider infrastructure with a history of co-operation and collaboration; a transformational, adaptable and versatile workforce; and an engaging co-ordinated business community.

More than ever, it is important that those who invest in education and skills – the individual, the employer and the city institutions – receive a good return on that investment in terms of prospects, productivity and economic growth.

Ready for school

Babies are born ready to learn. They are naturally curious beings who are motivated to make sense of the world around them.

The first five years of life are critical to a child's lifelong development. Young children's earliest experiences and environments set the stage for future development and success in school and life. Early experiences actually influence brain development. They establish the neural connections that provide the foundation for language, reasoning and problem solving. These connections are also the basis for the development of social skills, behaviour and emotional health.

Children will only enter school ready to learn if they are provided with the experiences and environments that support their physical, social, emotional, language, literacy and cognitive development.

Studies show that children from low income families are twice as likely to face developmental difficulties when they enter formal schooling. This places at risk their future educational achievement and employment prospects. The larger the gap at school entry, the harder it is to close.

The evidence is clear: too many children in Sunderland do not have the best start in life and enter school at a disadvantage. So it is vitally important that early help and intervention is provided to support families to break out of the cycle of poor outcomes that often repeats itself through the generations.

That means that every service that has contact with families and young children needs to be clear about how it can best support child development, in the broadest sense, so that all children reach school age ready to take advantage of all the opportunities available to them.

Every family and the wider community must also play their part in ensuring that, not only are children ready to start school, but they are also "ready for school" every day: washed, dressed, well fed, homework done and arrive on time.

In addition, as children and young people progress through the education system, they must be well prepared for each stage in their learning. This means that every transition should be as smooth and seamless as possible, enabling children and young people to build on their prior attainment and continue to progress.

COMMITMENTS

Sunderland will be a place where babies and young children are provided with all the support they need to thrive and where every child reaches school age ready to take full advantage of every learning opportunity – at home, in school, within the community and beyond. It will be a place where children, young people and adults progress seamlessly through the education system.

- All the services that have contact with families and young children will work together in an integrated way to identify as early as possible the children who are most at risk of poor outcomes and whose families would benefit most from additional support. Tailored programmes of support will enable those families to provide the experiences and environments that foster the

communication, social and emotional, and physical development of their children. This will include providing a wider range of local services at convenient times and in accessible locations.

- All families with young children, wherever they live in Sunderland, will have access to high quality, inclusive and affordable early years education and childcare. This includes ensuring that 100% of the families that are entitled to access the government-funded provision for two year olds are supported to take full advantage of that offer, as all the evidence so far demonstrates that this makes a significant contribution to closing the gap by the time children enter school.
- Schools will reach out into communities, working closely with families, nurseries, childcare providers and other services, to ensure that they are “ready for every child” and that the transition into school is as smooth and as seamless as possible for the child and its family.
- Schools and other learning providers will collaborate with each other to ensure that every child and young person is “ready for the next stage” in their education at all of the key transition points – and that they are excited by the challenges to come and inspired to reach their full potential. This encompasses every stage from entering Year One at school through to progressing into further education at 16 and beyond.

Ready for work

The city has an ambitious Economic Masterplan based on the vision of “an entrepreneurial University City at the heart of a low-carbon regional economy”. The Strategic Economic Plan for the North East aims to create 100,000 new jobs by 2024. These ambitions are only achievable if there is a highly motivated workforce with the required skills and qualifications, qualities and aspirations.

The economic landscape is changing rapidly, both regionally and nationally. The development and growth of the global economy has brought with it the need for a wider skills base as new technologies are introduced into working practices at an ever increasing rate. Within this increasingly competitive world, the people who will succeed are those who are open to change and are constantly refreshing their skills.

For that reason our ambition is to enable all children, young people and adults in Sunderland to take full advantage of the education, training and employment opportunities available here and in the North East as the economy grows and diversifies over the coming years.

In order to achieve this, there is a strong collective determination to raise achievement throughout the education system and to close the gap in attainment between those suffering disadvantage and the rest of the population. This includes a major focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (the STEM subjects) and on increasing the number of people achieving higher level qualifications at University or in the work place.

We have been listening to what local businesses have been telling us about the kind of employees they need in the future – and the qualities required to grow new businesses in the future. While many employers regard qualifications and high standards of literacy and numeracy as essential, they also strongly value certain attributes that they feel are sometimes lacking in job applicants. These include skills in teamwork, problem solving, communication, time management and information technology as well as important qualities such as self-confidence, creativity, flexibility and empathy.

It is also important that families are empowered with a sense of ability to positively influence their children, and with the ability to be able to impart learning to their children. It is becoming increasingly important for families to understand the wide range of job opportunities that could be available to them and that they are encouraged to have aspirations for themselves and their children.

Sunderland has a strong track record of schools working closely with local employers, as demonstrated by the highly successful Work Discovery programme. However this has been focused mostly on secondary schools and older students, while evidence suggests that an earlier and more sustained engagement with children and families will have an even greater impact.

It is critical that young people and adults make well informed decisions about their careers, based on up-to-date labour market intelligence and on high quality, impartial advice and guidance. Everyone should choose to follow courses that will enable them to realise their ambition and progress into further learning or employment. This is equally important for people who are unemployed and those who are facing redundancy, looking to change career or wanting to improve their prospects.

However the benefits to the local economy of raising aspirations, informing choice and improving attainment will only be fully realised if the right type of courses are being offered to a high standard in state-of-the-art facilities.

COMMITMENTS

Sunderland will be a place where people of all ages can confidently make informed choices, maximise their potential and develop skills on which they can build careers. It will be a place where employers lead the skills agenda, where the local workforce meets current and future employment needs and where economic participation is optimised.

- The local business community will enable every school and learning provider to establish a strong link with at least one employer. This will help to bridge the gap between education and employment, enrich the curriculum and provide positive role models. Employers will be encouraged to offer first-hand experience of the world of work, broaden the horizons of children and their families, inspire learners to succeed and, where appropriate, strengthen the governing body. This arrangement will then be developed further so that groups of local companies are working closely with clusters of schools and other providers.
- In addition to continually improving the quality of teaching and learning and securing improved attainment and higher level qualifications, every school and learning provider will incorporate into its curriculum and extra-curricular programme a range of activities that will enable all learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to continually develop and demonstrate the skills, qualities and attitudes that will make them more employable.
- At every stage learners will be supported to make informed decisions about subject choices, course selection and career path. Nobody should make such important decisions without fully understanding the consequences of doing so, and nobody should embark on a learning programme without any clear progression routes. In order to achieve a consistent approach across the city, every secondary school, college and learning provider will be expected to comply with a “gold standard” in Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) based on Careers England’s nationally recognised “Quality in Careers Standard”.
- A directory of materials and activities, suitable for the full age and ability range, will be developed and maintained to support work-related learning in all its forms, to raise awareness of career opportunities amongst teachers, parents/carers, children and young people, to demonstrate clear progression routes into employment and to stimulate a positive interest in the growth sectors within the local and regional economy.
- State-of-the art training facilities and high quality vocational learning programmes will be developed collaboratively by providers and employers to enable residents of all ages to gain the skills and qualifications required by the growth sectors within the economy.
- An increasing number of employers will invest in up-skilling their workforce to meet their changing needs and to ensure effective succession planning. They will also share their forward plans, as far as possible, so that learning providers can adapt their programmes accordingly.

- Whenever major procurement projects are being planned, a requirement for contractors and their sub-contractors to establish formal links with local schools and learning providers, including those working with adults, and provide apprenticeship and training opportunities, will be incorporated into the commissioning arrangements.

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Ready for life

Foundation education alone is no longer sufficient for 21st century life. Most individuals will have to re-train at each displacement, whether that be in work or life, but what foundation education provides is the ability to learn and to adapt.

The education and training system plays a key role in enabling children, young people and adults to become personally, emotionally, socially and physically effective. It helps them to lead healthy, safe and fulfilled lives, and to become confident, independent, responsible, creative and tolerant adults. It supports them to make informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives.

Culture also has a key role to play and is an important part of everyday life - made up of many of the things we enjoy. There are other benefits too – increasingly employers are seeking individuals with a well-rounded knowledge of the world, well beyond the technical aspects of their job. Cultural opportunities and experiences contribute substantially to this knowledge and can therefore help people to develop in many ways.

The capacity to do these things relies on achieving a strong sense of identity, understanding how to maintain physical and emotional wellbeing, developing independence and gaining a sense of life purpose and direction.

The best schools and learning providers already provide many opportunities to develop personal interests, talents and creativity. They positively encourage engagement in the wider community and involvement in decision-making and democratic processes. They help people to embrace cultural diversity and to recognise that they can make a difference to a wide range of local and global issues. The best employers also reap the benefits of taking this approach with their employees. We want to make this the norm in Sunderland.

We also recognise the enormous contribution that volunteering can make – both as a powerful means of personal development and as a force for positive change in families and communities.

Our ambition is to empower people, regardless of their background and personal circumstances, to take full advantage of all the opportunities that life presents and to be adaptable and resilient in the face of life's inevitable challenges and crises. More must be done to encourage children, young people and adults to believe in themselves, and to overcome real and perceived personal limits and boundaries.

This includes being ready to take on the role of parents, ready to deal with family problems, ready to play an active part in community life, ready to cope with unemployment or redundancy, ready to take responsibility for their own health and lifestyle, ready to respond to the changing needs of their employers, ready to benefit from the city's rich cultural offer and ready to live a fulfilled life in retirement.

COMMITMENTS

Sunderland will be a place where children, young people and adults are provided with the opportunities they need to develop all their talents and interests and to acquire the skills, knowledge and qualities that enable them to enjoy fulfilled lives. It will be a place that recognises achievement in all its forms and encourages active engagement in the life of the city.

- The development of those skills, qualities and characteristics that prepare children and young people to become “ready for life” will be formally recognised throughout the city. This will enable those achievements that are not captured in the current system of formal assessments to be celebrated locally in a way that is valued by learning providers, employers, families and the wider community. It will also provide opportunities for progression to regionally, nationally and globally recognised award schemes as well as recognising the individuals, institutions and businesses that actively demonstrate their commitment.
- Using all the evidence on the key characteristics of schools that are most effective in preparing children for life, an agreed standard for a “great Sunderland school” will be developed and implemented. This will give credit for those key features of the best schools that are not always reflected in performance tables or inspections but which contribute significantly to the development and emotional wellbeing of the “whole person”. Over time this concept will be extended to a “great Sunderland college”, a “great Sunderland learning provider”, a “great University of Sunderland” and a “great Sunderland employer”.
- Partner organisations throughout the city will work together to extend the range and quality of learning opportunities for children, young people and adults that support personal, social, emotional, physical and cultural development. The emphasis will be on encouraging active citizenship, community engagement and volunteering as well as participation in sport, physical activity, the arts and other interests – and on preparing for parenthood. This will include employers demonstrating their corporate social responsibility through the active engagement of their employees, for example by acting as mentors or taking on the role of school governors.

NEXT STEPS – STRATEGY INTO ACTION

The successful implementation and achievement of this strategy's ambitions will rely heavily on all of the key partners and partnerships within the city taking responsibility for and ownership of the strategy and the commitments set out within it.

For that reason the Education Leadership Board has, through the dissemination of the DRAFT strategy, already initiated a wider debate that will lead to the development of a detailed implementation plan for each of the key commitments. To facilitate this, every partner and partnership will be invited to endorse the strategy's ambitions for Sunderland and to consider:

- What are you already doing, or planning to do, that contributes to the commitments in the strategy?
- In addition, what will you commit to doing over the next 3-5 years to make a further contribution to realising the strategy's ambitions?
- In both cases, what are the benefits to your organisation of taking these actions?

EDUCATION LEADERSHIP BOARD – membership as of December 2014

John Mowbray, OBE (Chair) North East Chamber of Commerce

Angela Graham Headteacher, Usworth Colliery Nursery School

Annette Parr Sunderland City Council

Austin McNamara Associate Director – Education, Sunderland City Council

Beverley Scanlon Head of Educational Attainment & Lifelong Learning, Sunderland City Council

Brian Manning Chief Executive, Esh Group

Caroline Gitsham Executive Director Vision & Culture, Gentoo Group

Catherine Auld International Manager, Sunderland City Council

Cathy Westgate Headteacher, Hudson Road Primary School

Chris Beaumont Partner, Clive Owen & Co

Cllr Mel Speding Cabinet Secretary, Sunderland City Council

Cllr Pat Smith Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services, Sunderland City Council

Darush Dodds Community Engagement Manager, Esh Group

Dave Barber Participation and Engagement Manager, Sunderland City Council

Denise Wilson Manager, Springboard Sunderland

Gary Holmes Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Sunderland

Graeme Shillinglaw Headteacher, Springwell Dene Academy

Ian Kershaw Chief Executive, Northern Education Trust

Jessica May Partnership Manager, Sunderland City Council

Judith Quinn Assistant Principal, Sunderland College

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Mick Thurlbeck Managing Director, Stapleton International

Monica Shepherd Headteacher, St Anthony’s Girls’ Catholic Academy

Neil Revely Executive Director People’s Services, Sunderland City Council

Nonnie Crawford Director of Public Health, Sunderland City Council

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Rachel Putz Coalfields Locality / Early Years Manager, Sunderland City Council

Ralph Saelzer Managing Director, Liebherr

Sarah Reed Assistant Chief Executive, Sunderland City Council

Simon Marshall Headteacher, Highfield Primary School

Steve Wilkinson Headteacher, Monkwearmouth Academy

Steve Williamson Headteacher, Northern Saints Primary School

Vince Taylor Head of Strategy & Performance, Sunderland City Council

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