

Bournville College

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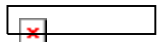
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Basic information about the college

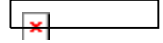


Name of college:	Bournville College of Further Education
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Norman Cave
Address of college:	Bristol Road South Northfield Birmingham B31 2AJ
Telephone number:	0121 483 1000
Fax number:	0121 411 2231
Chair of governors:	David Short CBE
Unique reference number:	130459
Name of reporting inspector:	Fred Brown

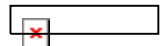
Dates of inspection:

7-11 October 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

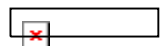


Bournville College of Further Education is in the south west of Birmingham. Its immediate catchment area covers ten wards, which account for about a quarter of Birmingham's population. All the local wards include areas with high levels of disadvantage and some are amongst the most deprived in the country. Unemployment is slightly below the Birmingham average but well above the national average. Bournville College is a medium-sized general further education (FE) college, which was established in 1913. The college occupies a single site, which is three miles from the city centre, but use is also made of over 60 outreach centres for courses for the local community. The college operates as a Learndirect centre and has a virtual college facility. Courses are provided in all 14 areas of learning defined by Ofsted and the ALI. They range from entry level to higher education (HE). The largest areas of provision are business, health and care, science and mathematics, information technology (IT), literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). A large proportion of the college's students are recruited from the local area. During 2001/02 there were 15,066 student enrolments of whom 92% were aged 19 or over. About 100 were under 16 and the rest were aged 16 to 18.

Some 71% of the students aged 16 to 18 are from disadvantaged backgrounds. There is a small work-based learning programme and the college has franchise partnerships with a small number of local providers. The college runs a substantial number of courses aimed at meeting the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in the area. Some 18% of the college's students are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 8% in the local population. Over 150 students attend courses specifically designed for people with disabilities and many other students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities undertake mainstream courses.

The college's mission 'is to provide good quality provision to meet the diverse needs of the local community from a sound financial basis.'

How effective is the college?



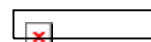
Inspectors judged the overall quality of provision to be satisfactory. Education and training are good in early years and care, and satisfactory in the other ten curriculum areas inspected. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths



- good arrangements for students' guidance and support
- broad range of courses for adults
- successful initiatives to widen participation
- clean, tidy and relaxed learning environment
- effective links and partnerships with local organisations
- realistic self-assessment.

What should be improved

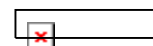


- poor pass rates
- students' poor punctuality
- some ineffective teaching
- slow response to identified need for support in literacy and numeracy
- poor library and learning resources

- narrow range of work-based learning programmes and opportunities for work experience.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

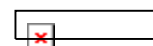


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Satisfactory. Teaching is good in most lessons. Retention rates are close to national averages. Pass rates are good on some science courses. There is strong support for individual students. The teaching of mathematics to adult learners is unsatisfactory and many adults make slow progress. There is insufficient use of IT and sharing of good practice among teachers.
Horticulture and floristry	Satisfactory. On floristry courses the teaching is good and students achieve good results. On horticulture courses, much of the teaching is unsatisfactory, target setting is ineffective and students' progress is often slow. The courses provide appropriate training opportunities for students from disadvantaged groups. Good use is made of local commercial venues to provide students with realistic learning environments.
Business administration	Satisfactory. Retention rates have improved markedly on most courses. Pass rates are good on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) administration courses, but have declined on the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses. Most of the teaching is good and support for students is strong. There are insufficient opportunities for students and staff to gain relevant business experience. Some of the accommodation is unsatisfactory.
Business management and professional	Satisfactory. There is a wide range of courses and much of the teaching is good. Strategies to improve retention rates have been effective, but some pass rates are low. Students' coursework is of a high standard. The systems for monitoring attendance are ineffective. Some teachers are not effective in managing small groups.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Overall, pass rates are satisfactory, but retention rates on the General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) course in IT are poor. GNVQ foundation and intermediate information and communication technology (ICT) courses have poor pass rates, which are deteriorating. ICT students have access to excellent computing facilities, but there are insufficient information learning technology (ILT) resources. Teachers have prepared particularly well-designed handouts which they use effectively. Tutorial

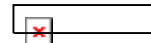
	support is good.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Satisfactory. Retention rates have improved over the last three years but there have been low pass rates on some courses. There is good support for students and effective use is made of work experience to enliven learning. Punctuality is poor in many lessons. Some theory teaching is unsatisfactory.
Complementary therapies	Satisfactory. Students' work is of a high standard and there are good progression rates from courses in the community to those in the college. There are good retention rates on many courses but pass rates on level 3 courses are low. Measures to widen participation have been effective but there is insufficient provision at level 2. Monitoring of students' progress is inadequate.
Early years and care	Good. Much of the teaching is very good and there is strong support for students. Adults can take advantage of a broad range of courses. Managers concentrate on assuring a good quality learning experience for students. There are very low retention rates on a few courses. Learning resources and accommodation are poor in some community venues.
English for speakers of other languages	Satisfactory. There is a broad range of courses. Teaching and pastoral support are good. The percentage of students entered for external examinations is too small. There is no use of IT in teaching and the monitoring of students' progress is inadequate.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. Students make good progress towards their individual learning goals. Teaching is particularly effective in mixed groups of hearing and deaf students. Course management is good. Insufficient use is made of ILT in teaching and written feedback to students is not detailed enough. Many of the learning materials are poor. There is little basic skills provision in the community.
Supported learning and pre-vocational education	Satisfactory. There is a diverse range of courses and the mentoring skills and classroom assistant programmes are particularly effective. Support for students is good. Effective use is made of community venues. Data about students' achievements and progression are not sufficiently analysed or used. Individual learning plans on pre-entry and entry level programmes are not precise enough. Many handouts are poorly designed.

How well is the college led and managed?



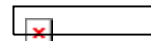
Leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors and senior staff have set a clear direction for the college through a period of financial uncertainty and management re-organisation. Strategic planning is effective. Since the last inspection the college has increased enrolments and improved retention rates but made little impact on the poor pass rates on many courses. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive but not always effective. The evaluation of students' performance contains insufficient detail to enable managers to assess their achievements. The college's self-assessment is frank and realistic. Inspectors agreed with the judgement that the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. The college has developed successfully as a multi-cultural institution and has effective procedures to ensure equality of opportunity. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Provision for groups that have not normally entered FE is a high priority. The college is responsive to the needs of individual students and the local community. It regularly reviews the effectiveness with which it is meeting these needs. The college has effective strategies to fulfil its aim to widen participation. The success of these strategies is evident from the fact that 71% of its 16-18 year old students come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nearly 30% of the college's students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is much higher than the proportion in the local population. The college recruits additional learners in its community venues and through partnerships with other providers. Basic skills provision is inclusive and responsive to the needs of learners. Learning support is not available in all areas of the college or in community settings. People with specific learning support needs are provided with a range of learning opportunities at the main site. However, there are few opportunities available to them in other curriculum areas or in community venues. The college has produced a race equality policy and an action plan, which were approved by governors in June 2002. It consulted with the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC), local community groups and students about its contents. The action plan contains precise and measurable targets. The college has made some progress on its implementation.

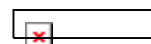
How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Pre-entry guidance is effective and impartial. Students are given appropriate advice to help them choose the most appropriate course. Some course leaflets and the college website contain out-of-date information. Induction arrangements help learners who join programmes at normal times to settle in quickly to their studies, but some late starters do not receive an effective induction. Initial assessment has improved since the last inspection and helps to identify additional learning needs early in students' programmes. Full-time students and modern apprentices undertake an initial assessment of their key skills and this results in a detailed development plan to address any identified needs. Vocationally relevant materials are used in the initial assessment process on too few courses. Most students receive immediate support when needs are identified, but there have been delays in providing literacy and numeracy support in a few areas. Arrangements for providing additional language support are inadequate. More specialist support needs are generally met promptly. There is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their personal care issues are identified very early.

Tutorial arrangements have improved since the last inspection. Full-time students are entitled to a personal mentor or tutor. However, not all tutors monitor the progress of their tutees effectively or produce appropriate action plans for improvement. On part-time courses, tutorials are scheduled once each term, and are also available on request. Students receive good pastoral support, and effective specialist support, which is provided by the central college team. Careers advice is accessible and effective in helping students to progress. Students who attend courses in community venues can get careers advice at a local centre.

Students' views of the college



presented below:

What students like about the college

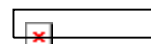
- caring and supportive tutors
- enjoyable courses they would recommend to a friend
- course content and quality of teaching
- adult environment and relaxed atmosphere
- fair treatment and equality of opportunity
- opportunity to meet other people and make new friends
- learning new vocational and life skills
- accessibility of community venues.

What they feel could be improved

- library, learning resources and access to photocopiers
- car parking and student recreational facilities
- cost of the food and the quality of the canteen service
- cleanliness of the toilets

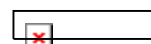
- complaints system and ways of informing managers of students' views
- quality of some classrooms
- induction procedures for later starters.

Other information

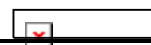


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (local LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

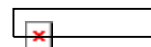


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	59	33	8
19+ and WBL*	64	30	6
Learning 16-18	54	40	6
19+ and WBL	68	23	9

Key: Inspectors grade three aspects of lessons: teaching, learning and attainment. The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. The college enrolls approximately half its students from postcode areas with high levels of deprivation. Over 60% of students follow courses at levels 1 and 2. Since the last inspection, in May 2000, student numbers at level 1 have nearly doubled, whereas student numbers at level 2 have declined by nearly 40%. Enrolments at level 3 have increased by 17% over the last three years, but still represent only about 15% of the total. Enrolments on higher level courses have halved during this time and last year under 1% of students took courses at levels 4 and 5. Around 20% of students take courses which are not assigned to one of these levels, and for whom benchmarking data are not readily available. The majority of these students are on literacy and numeracy and ESOL courses. Inspectors judged students' overall achievements in these curriculum areas to be satisfactory or better.

2. The previous inspection highlighted the need for the college to improve retention rates. In response to this, the college has improved its initial advice and guidance arrangements, its tutorial arrangements and the way it monitors students' progress. Retention rates for students of all ages on courses at all levels improved between 1999 and 2001. They are now at, or slightly above, the national averages for colleges of this type. Evidence available during the inspection indicates that this improvement continued in 2001/02.

3. During the same period, however, pass rates have been declining, most markedly in 2001. There is presently little evidence that the college is adding value to students' expected achievements although procedures to assess such added value are underdeveloped. Levels of attainment were judged to be good or better in only 49% of the lessons observed.

16-18 year olds

4. About 25% of students aged 16 to 18 take courses at level 1. In 2000/01, some 80% of them completed their course, a retention rate in line with the national average. However, only 55% of these students achieved the qualification, a pass rate 10% below the average. The largest proportion of students aged 16 to 18 are on courses at level 2. Retention rates on these courses improved considerably between 1999 and 2001 to 4% above the national average. However, the pass rate declined over the same period to 4% below average. Some 20% of students aged 16 to 18 take level 3 courses. At this level the retention rate has been improving steadily towards the national average, but the pass rate fell sharply in 2001 to 14% below the average. Retention on short courses has remained high in recent years, but pass rates have fallen from 90% in 1999 to 49% in 2001.

5. While student numbers and retention rates have increased on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses, most pass rates and the percentage of students achieving higher grades have declined. Similarly, on General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A-level) courses, where student numbers have reduced, the pattern is one of improved retention rates coupled with declining pass rates and fewer students achieving higher grades. For students aged 16 to 18, attainment was judged to be good or better in only 38% of the lessons observed and unsatisfactory in 8% of lessons.

6. The college has small numbers of work-based learners on modern apprenticeship programmes, mostly in care and administration. NVQ pass rates are very poor on advanced modern apprenticeships, and no learners achieved all aspects of the apprenticeship framework until the current year.

Adult learners

7. Over 45% of all adult students are on level 1 courses. The overall pass rate for adults at level 1

has been 69% each year from 1999 to 2001. At one stage this was well above the national average, but now it is in line with it. Similarly, at level 2 the overall pass rate for adult students was significantly above the national average four years ago, but in 2001 it is just above the average. Student numbers on General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses have reduced by half, retention rates have increased, but the percentage of passes at grades A-C has fallen. Inspectors found that a high proportion of students on literacy and numeracy and ESOL courses achieve their primary learning goals.

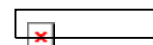
8. On level 3 courses the pass rate for adult students had been in line with the national average for a number of years. But in 2001, 8% fewer adults at the college achieved their level 3 qualification than the national average. Pass rates are good on most health and social care and childcare courses, although retention rates are slightly below national averages.

9. Adult learners comprise the majority of students taking NVQ qualifications. On level 1 and 2 NVQ courses there was a fall in retention rates in 1999/2000 followed by an improvement in 2000/01. However, pass rates at both levels declined significantly in the same year. Only on level 3 NVQ courses have pass rates improved over the three years from 1999 to 2001. Pass rates for adult students on higher level courses and on short courses leading to qualifications have declined over the last three years.

10. For adult students on courses at the main college site, levels of attainment were good or better in 57% of lessons observed and unsatisfactory in 5% of lessons. However, levels of attainment were found to be lower for adult students on courses in the community, where attainment was good or better in 50% of lessons and unsatisfactory in 19% of lessons.

11. For clients on New Deal programmes, the primary goal is employment, although clients also work towards NVQ units. In each provider performance review to date the college had exceeded its target of 40% of completers finding employment.

Quality of education and training



12. The quality of teaching and learning has improved slightly since the college was last inspected in May 2000 and is satisfactory overall. The quality of teaching is good in six of the eleven curriculum areas inspected and in early years and care it is very good. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 171 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 63% of these, satisfactory in 30% and less than satisfactory in 7%. Grades for learning were almost identical. A higher percentage of teaching was good or better than the college average in science, business administration, early years and care, and ESOL. More teaching than average for similar colleges was less than satisfactory in mathematics, horticulture, and sports, leisure and tourism. There were similar differences in the grades for learning. In most curriculum areas, the practical teaching was better than the teaching in theory lessons. Teaching on courses for adult students was generally better than on courses for students aged 16 to 18. Teaching and learning were least effective on courses for students aged 16 to 18 at level 2 and on GCE AS courses. Attendance rates were similar to the national average but punctuality was poor in many lessons.

13. Most teachers attempt to meet the needs of individual students by using a variety of learning materials and styles. Many encourage students to work at their own speed. The majority of lessons are well planned and prepared, although not all teachers explain the learning objectives to students. In most lessons, students are involved in a range of suitable activities, which help maintain their attention. In science lessons, teachers make good use of directed questions to encourage students to explore and discuss their own ideas. Teachers usually explain topics carefully. Students are encouraged to draw on their existing knowledge, particularly in business administration and science. However, in mathematics and horticulture there is insufficient consideration of how students' prior knowledge might be used to assist learning. Students are set challenging assignments that extend

their abilities in business management and professional studies lessons, although more able adult students are insufficiently stretched by the tasks set in mathematics and science. On ESOL courses, assessment opportunities and schemes of work are clearly linked to the national curriculum. Teachers frequently check students' progress during most lessons.

14. There is good teaching of practical skills in floristry and catering. In these subjects, demonstrations by teachers are used effectively to set high standards for students to aspire to. In ICT and complementary therapies, students' understanding of theory is improved by completing well-designed practical tasks. In horticulture, some lessons are inadequately planned and poorly taught, and students make little progress. In contrast, floristry lessons include a range of activities to suit a range of learning styles and students learn rapidly. Few teachers make good use of ILT to promote effective learning. Most teachers use carefully sequenced activities to motivate and interest students. They provide detailed and encouraging guidance to students requiring help. Written feedback on students' work is generally thorough although in some subjects it is insufficiently detailed. There is good teaching of literacy and numeracy to mixed groups of deaf and hearing students. Particularly imaginative and creative teaching in complementary therapies takes place in community venues, which helps to compensate for the lack of specialist resources. These venues provide students with valuable opportunities to develop personal skills and the confidence to make progress.

15. Students make good use of their work experience when they contribute to classroom discussions in leisure and tourism. In early years and care, students learn how to analyse and debate complex issues. They show respect for others' points of view and cultural differences. Students on supported learning programmes give presentations on their strengths and abilities. Business administration students develop valuable skills related to handling conflict and dealing with aggressive people through well-managed role-play exercises. In literacy and numeracy, students are given insufficient encouragement to work on their own. In some ESOL lessons, students are given too few opportunities to practise their oral skills.

16. Most teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Of full-time staff, 86% hold a recognised teaching qualification and 89% have a degree or relevant professional qualification. Approximately 73% of part-time staff hold a teaching qualification whilst 76% have a degree or relevant professional qualification. Of business support staff, 87% hold qualifications relevant to their role. On a number of courses, teachers lack recent commercial and professional experience. Since the last inspection the college has appointed a further 73 teachers.

17. The college occupies a single 10-acre site southwest of Birmingham city centre. Six blocks built in the 1960s are grouped around an attractively landscaped garden. In addition, courses are taught in over 60 community venues and 45 of these were in use at the time of inspection. There have been few changes to the accommodation on the main site since the last inspection. The site is well maintained and tidy. Most areas are accessible to wheelchair users. Most learning areas are adequately decorated and equipped. Some specialist rooms, for example the science rooms and the information and guidance area, are particularly good. Staff accommodation has been improved since the last inspection by grouping course teams together in larger workrooms. Some teaching areas are drab and unattractive. Display space is often under-used or used ineffectively. The entrance area is too small and fails to create a welcoming and well-signed introduction to the college. The library size, budget, staffing and stock are inadequate, a weakness identified at the last inspection. Since the last inspection, significant investment has been made in computers and the student to computer ratio is now better than 5:1. However, a lack of computers for teachers has delayed the integration of ILT into lessons. The implementation of the college's ILT strategy has been slow and most targets have not been achieved. There is no learning intranet. Learning resources available from the Internet are insufficiently promoted to students. An innovative and effective 'virtual college' provides on-line learning and tutoring for students who cannot, or prefer not to, attend the main site. However, its potential has not been realised in the college as a whole. Accommodation at community venues is of a lower standard than that at the main site. Nevertheless, most venues are fit for purpose, provide valuable local learning opportunities and help to increase participation in education and training.

18. In an attempt to improve retention and pass rates, the college has implemented a number of strategies. These include personal mentors for GCE A-level students and the use of a monitoring

and action-planning document to monitor the progress of students at the sixth form centre. This enables information on progress in all aspects of each student's programme to be held centrally, and has proved especially useful for GCE AS students who study courses in more than one programme area. Attendance advisers contact students if they fail to attend lessons and personal mentors receive regular reports about students' absences.

19. Despite these developments, the monitoring of students' academic progress and action planning to improve performance remain underdeveloped. Target setting is seen by many staff as a mechanistic process. They have recently been given guidance on what is required and encouraged to take a more student-centred approach. Action planning is not sufficiently focused on measurable short-term goals for improvement. On work-based learning programmes, opportunities to carry out assessments in the workplace are not taken. On ESOL courses, many learners are unclear how well they are doing. In many curriculum areas, insufficient attention is given to students' prior achievements. In science and mathematics many students repeat work they have successfully completed on other courses.

20. The college provides an extensive range of courses from entry level to level 5 in a wide range of subjects. There are GCE AS and A-level courses in 16 subjects and 30 NVQ programmes. ESOL courses are provided at ten different levels and there are nine separate access routes into HE. There are currently only 20 modern apprentices on work-based programmes. In 2001, overall enrolments increased by 13% over the previous year. The biggest growth was in the college's community-based provision, where student numbers increased by 68%. In 2002, overall enrolments increased by a further 8% compared with October 2001.

21. The balance and range of provision are strongly influenced by the college's mission and strategic objectives. The college has recently reorganised its faculties around provision for particular student groups. One faculty caters for 14-19 year olds, another focuses on responding to community needs and one on people's employment needs. Many courses have flexible start and end times to suit the needs of adult students. There are also many opportunities for progression within the totality of provision offered by the college.

22. The college works effectively with a large number of partners. Some 45 community venues are used, where students who might not wish to travel to the main site can study a diverse curriculum including horticulture, ESOL and IT courses. Over half the provision of one of the faculties is taught in community venues. Recently there has been a 50% growth in the provision for literacy, numeracy and ESOL. Particularly popular is a mentor preparation course, which during 2001/02, recruited 500 students on 18 courses run at 37 venues. There is evidence that some students progress from community-based courses to courses on the main college site. For example, about a fifth of students on a classroom assistant's course for classroom assistants progressed to an NVQ course in early years education.

23. Students value the accessibility of local community centres and schools. The use of a women's centre made it possible for Muslim women to attend training. However, in some community-based venues, students have insufficient access to facilities, such as the students' union and advice and guidance. A new outreach adviser has been appointed to address this weakness.

24. The college has good links with local employers. For example, it works in partnership with one of the largest local employers to provide management and customer service training. The college is also a member of a number of vocational networks which develop and provide business skills programmes. Franchised provision, which made up 10% of the college's work in 2001/02, is well managed and rigorously monitored. It extends the college's work with disadvantaged groups. Half of the franchised provision is aimed at people with learning difficulties. Some 36% of learners on franchised courses are from minority ethnic groups.

25. Some 70% of students in the sixth form centre live in postcode areas designated for widening participation in education. There is a good range of courses aimed at attracting people who do not yet have the necessary qualifications to progress to level 2 and level 3 programmes. These include life skills programmes, half a GNVQ programme and a first diploma in sports. The college also works closely in partnership with local schools to provide a range of courses for disaffected school pupils

aged 14 to 16. Full-time students and modern apprentices undertake an initial assessment of their key skills in literacy and numeracy. The college's self-assessment report identified some weaknesses in key skills work and some improvements have been made. These include the appointment of a key skills co-ordinator. There have been improvements in key skills achievements.

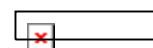
26. Pre-entry guidance is effective and impartial. Learners are given appropriate advice to help them choose the most appropriate course. A central service provides effective handling of applications and requests for further information. Some course leaflets and the college website contain out-of-date information. In a few cases, late changes to courses have resulted in students being placed on inappropriate programmes. Induction arrangements help learners who join programmes at the normal times to settle in quickly to their studies, but some late starters do not receive a proper induction.

27. The initial assessment undertaken by full-time students and modern apprentices results in a profile of each student's ability in key skills and a detailed development plan to address any identified needs. Vocationally relevant materials are used in the initial assessment process on too few courses. Most students receive immediate support when needs are identified, but recent improvements in initial assessment arrangements led to an increase in the number of students identified as needing support. This, in turn, caused some delays in the provision of literacy and numeracy support. Arrangements for providing additional language support are under-developed. More specialist support needs are generally met promptly. For example, when a student with a hearing impairment started a course, a signer was provided the same afternoon. There is good support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, many support needs are identified while learners are still at school, or in the first stage of interview.

28. The college has taken steps to improve tutorial arrangements since the last inspection. Full-time students have a personal mentor or a personal tutor responsible for target setting, action planning and monitoring their tutee's progress. These procedures are part of the documented tutorial arrangements, but not all tutors implement them fully. On part-time courses, tutorials are scheduled once each term, but are also available on request. Overall, the tutorial system provides students with good pastoral support, and inspectors found support for individual students to be strong in most curriculum areas. However, the monitoring and action planning aspects of tutorial work are less effective.

29. Pastoral support needs are identified early in most cases and a central college team, with a good mix of expertise, provides specialist support. Students value the support and find it easy to access. Careers advice is also easily accessible and is effective in helping students to progress. Students who attend courses in community venues can get careers advice at a local centre.

Leadership and management



30. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection the college has extended its partnerships with schools, FE and HE colleges, and voluntary organisations. Strategies to widen participation and promote social inclusion have been successful. Enrolments have increased. Retention rates have improved. However, the college has been unsuccessful in improving pass rates on many courses.

31. Procedures for strategic planning are good. Governors, senior managers and staff work together closely to agree the college's strategic objectives and corporate aims. The strategic plan for the period 2001 to 2003 is comprehensive and identifies appropriate targets for the college as a whole. In 2001/02 the college met its targets for growth but failed to meet its target for reducing the financial deficit. The college's financial position remains weak. Other planning processes, for example the production of faculty business plans and the staff development plan are carefully integrated with those for strategic planning.

32. The college has recently restructured its management in order to support students' learning more effectively. There are now fewer curriculum divisions and new management posts in support and service areas. Detailed job descriptions emphasise the need for all staff to focus on raising standards and monitoring students' progress. A new principal took up post in September 2002. Senior managers have provided firm leadership during a period of rapid change. Communications are effective. Teachers and support staff are clear about the aims of the college and value the open and consultative style of senior managers. The quality of curriculum management, identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, has improved.

33. The college has recently revised its quality assurance arrangements. Staff understand the new procedures. However, students, employers and representatives of community organisations and services are not involved sufficiently in important aspects of quality assurance such as self-assessment, quality reviews and assessment of performance against the standards contained in the college charter. The new procedures for annual course reviews are rigorous and help to identify courses where performance is weak. Most of the resulting action plans are thorough and clearly identify the improvements needed. Managers monitor the progress made towards the targets in the action plans carefully. Students' views, collected in termly surveys, are cited in self-assessment reports. The surveys show that most students are happy with their courses. The college has a lesson observation programme. The profile of teaching grades resulting from this programme matched that observed by inspectors. The college's self-assessment report is a frank and realistic statement of the college's strengths and weaknesses. The procedures for monitoring the college's franchised provision are effective. However, the management of work-based learning is unsatisfactory and the achievements of modern apprentices are poor.

34. Procedures for evaluating the performance of students are unsatisfactory. The extent to which the college is providing added value, in terms of students' achievements, has not been assessed. Although students' performance is analysed by gender, ethnicity and learning needs at programme level, the additional analysis to enable the college to evaluate its overall performance is inadequate.

35. The college has improved the quality and reliability of its management information. Regular reports are produced which enable staff to track budgets, student enrolments, and retention and pass rates against national benchmarks. However, the college has only recently begun to make this information available to managers in electronic form.

36. Procedures for staff appraisal are thorough. All full-time and part-time staff are appraised annually. Lesson observation forms part of the appraisal of teachers. Development needs identified through appraisal are well met by a comprehensive programme of staff development. Staff are given opportunities to enhance their teaching skills and to acquire additional professional qualifications.

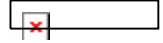
37. The college promotes equality of opportunity among its students and staff. It has an appropriate range of policies and procedures, covering all aspects of the college's work. A recently appointed equal opportunities co-ordinator is responsible for a series of projects designed to strengthen the college's success as a multi-cultural institution. The college consulted widely with students, local organisations and community groups on the development of its race equality policy and action plan. This plan is comprehensive and includes precise targets and timescales for completion. High priority is given to equal opportunities issues in staff training and staff and student induction programmes. Some 16% of staff have minority ethnic backgrounds.

38. Governors work effectively with senior managers. They are well informed about the college's academic and financial performance and understand the context and community in which the college works. They explored a range of options before determining the college's strategic priorities. Governors review the college's performance regularly against its corporate objectives. The work of the corporation is very well supported by the clerk. Committee minutes and board papers are informative and well organised.

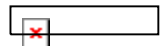
39. Managers have monitored college expenditure carefully in response to its weak financial position. Spending has been tightly controlled. The college has an effective procedure for determining the cost of courses. Appropriate decisions have been taken to discontinue courses where the cost of provision is high and performance is poor. Teachers' workloads are monitored

carefully to ensure that their time is used efficiently. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- broad range of courses
- good science laboratories and resources
- good pass rates on access to health studies and GCE AS biology courses.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory teaching of mathematics to adult learners
- insufficient sharing of good practice among teachers
- insufficient use of IT in mathematics lessons
- slow progress of many adult learners.

Scope of provision

40. There are currently 176 students aged 16 to 18 and 94 adult learners studying on a good range of courses in science and mathematics. The course with the largest number of students is the GCSE mathematics, which is taught during the day and in the evening and currently has 184 students. Application of number at level 2 has replaced GCSE mathematics for those students for whom GCSE is inappropriate. There is a range of mathematics and science GCE AS and A-level courses, including a new freestanding GCE AS course in statistics. GNVQ intermediate science and GCSE science courses are offered. A new level 1 course, leading to a certificate of achievement in science, prepares students for the GCSE double science course. Biology and mathematics modules are provided as part of the access to health studies course.

Achievement and standards

41. Pass rates are satisfactory overall. On the access to health studies course, pass rates have been above national averages for the past three years. Retention rates are good in GCE AS biology and the pass rate was 32% above the national average in 2000/01. At 27%, the pass rate in GCE AS mathematics was very poor in 2000/01. The pass rate in GCE A-level physics has declined to well below the national average over a three-year period to 2000/01. The pass rate on GCSE mathematics declined further in 2001. Pass rates on some courses improved in 2001/02.

42. The standard of most students' work is good. Their attainment was good or better in most of the lessons observed. However, the learning skills of the more able adult learners were not being developed sufficiently and, as a result, their progress was slow.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE mathematics (one year) grades A-C	2	No. of starts	304	230	166
		% retention	54	63	67
		% pass rate	29	44	38
Access to health studies	3	No. of starts	36	45	35
		% retention	64	56	66
		% pass rate	96	96	83
GCE A-level chemistry (two year)	3	No. of starts	8	13	24
		% retention	75	38	82
		% pass rate	83	80	78
GCE A-level physics (two year)	3	No. of starts	6	11	14
		% retention	67	55	69
		% pass rate	75	67	50

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

43. Teaching is good or better in the majority of lessons. In a physics lesson, the teacher made good use of everyday objects such as a tin of paint and a starter motor to demonstrate the principles of movement. In an access to health studies lesson, the teacher skilfully used directed questioning to coax answers from students and then discussed their contributions carefully. One student on the course had overcome her 'fear' of mathematics and now hopes to train as a specialist mathematics

teacher in a primary school. Practical work is carried out safely and effectively.

44. In some theory lessons, students do little apart from listening and making notes. They are rarely asked to draw on their prior knowledge to contribute their own ideas or to discuss scientific or mathematical topics in groups. The quality of learning and attainment is unsatisfactory in a quarter of lessons for adult learners. There is a lack of suitable learning material for these students and the more able among them are insufficiently stretched.

45. There are good science laboratories and resources. Technician support is effective. The rooms are spacious and pleasant, with separate areas for practical and theory work. They are accessible to people in wheelchairs. There is insufficient use of IT in mathematics lessons, although new software has been acquired recently. Students are encouraged to word process assignments and are shown how to use spreadsheets. Laptops are available for use in lessons and in the science resource area.

46. Students receive helpful feedback on their work and are shown how they can improve. Statistical data are used to set target grades in GCE AS and GNVQ courses and students find this motivating. All full-time students have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy ability, but this does not always identify all their support needs.

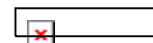
47. The range of courses available meets the needs of the students. The application of number course at level 2 provides a suitable alternative to GCSE mathematics and allows students who might not otherwise do so to gain a mathematics qualification. A new, freestanding alternative to GCE AS mathematics caters for a wide range of students. There is a good rate of progression to a wide range of HE courses from the access to health studies course and the GCE A-level courses.

48. Students receive valuable extra help outside lesson time in response to their individual learning needs. Handouts are available for students who are absent, to help them to catch up. A full-time attendance adviser was appointed in September 2002 and unexplained absences are followed up quickly. The average attendance during the inspection was 82%, which represents a significant improvement on previous years. Teachers share a base room which provides opportunities for discussion of any concerns about students' progress leading to prompt supportive action.

Leadership and management

49. Teachers have a good understanding of their responsibilities for subject and curriculum management. Lesson observations are carried out by the programme area leader, and the findings result in an action plan for discussion at team meetings. The programme area manager also appraises teachers annually and helps them to identify their staff development needs. Course team meetings focus on students' progress and in particular on patterns of attendance and retention rates. However, the minutes of these meetings do not record the outcomes of discussions sufficiently clearly. There is little evidence that teaching and learning are discussed regularly at course team meetings. There is insufficient sharing of good practice among teachers in the programme area.

Horticulture and floristry



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good facilities for practical training

- good support for students
- effective teaching in floristry
- well-constructed portfolios in floristry.

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in horticulture
- unsatisfactory portfolios in horticulture
- inadequate target setting for individual students.

Scope of provision

50. The college provides full-time and part-time courses in horticulture, floristry, amateur gardening and garden design. Many of the courses respond to local community interests and seek to recruit from under-represented groups. They range from pre-foundation level to level 2. At the time of inspection there were 85 students enrolled on courses in horticulture and gardening, and 78 students enrolled on courses in floristry. Some 91% of students on these courses are over 19 years of age, 60% are female and 29% are from ethnic groups.

Achievement and standards

51. Retention rates are good on most courses. New courses in amateur gardening, introduced in 2000/01 had 100% retention in their first year. The main exception is the NVQ level 1 course in amenity horticulture, on which the retention rate declined significantly between 1999 and 2000, when less than half the students who started the course completed it. Retention and pass rates on most other NVQ courses are above national averages. Pass rates on the new amateur gardening courses were initially very low, but college data indicate substantial improvement in 2001/02.

52. The standard of work produced by floristry students is high. Assessment and internal verification are good on floristry courses. Students on NVQ courses begin building their portfolios from the start of the course. Portfolios are well structured and contain a variety and range of evidence that confirms that students are making steady progress towards achieving the qualification. Students find the portfolio-building process motivating and take a pride in their work. On NVQ courses in horticulture, students' portfolios are unsatisfactory. They are untidy and consist mainly of documentation provided by teachers. They do not contain an appropriate range of evidence of students' competence. Some assessment records fail to identify the assessor or the witness responsible for confirming that the students have demonstrated a particular competence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in horticulture and floristry, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	No. of starts	24	25	17
		% retention	83	72	47
		% pass rate	35	67	63
Certificate in gardening	1	No. of starts	*	*	31
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	32
Certificate in gardening (short)	1	No. of starts	*	*	10
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	10
NVQ decorative horticulture	2	No. of starts	*	*	12
		% retention	*	*	92
		% pass rate	*	*	75
NVQ floristry	2	No. of starts	14	*	22
		% retention	50	*	86
		% pass rate	71	*	79
Creative skills certificate in floristry	2	No. of starts	*	13	21
		% retention	*	85	86
		% pass rate	*	100	89

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

53. Teaching on floristry courses is good. Lessons are well planned and carefully structured. Technician support is available during lessons. Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching styles. Students' interest is maintained and the pace of learning is brisk. Teachers provide very effective demonstrations of floristry skills, and then students attempt to achieve the same high standards. Regular references are made to the requirements and standards of the floristry industry. Throughout lessons, teachers make good use of questions and practical tasks to check students' understanding and skills development.

54. Some lessons in horticulture are not well planned or structured. Account is not taken of students' individual learning needs, their progress is slow, and many become bored. In some lessons, teachers talk too much and students are given too little to do. On occasions, too much time is spent completing paperwork. Insufficient use is made of IT to enliven teaching and learning.

55. Effective links have been developed with local industries. Horticulture and floristry teachers make use of a range of high quality, specialist sites and equipment which provide students with excellent opportunities for practical learning and assessment. For example, lessons take place in large commercial glasshouses, in gardens used in television programmes and amongst high quality plant collections. These learning environments are stimulating and working in them helps students to develop the skills needed for employment in the industry.

56. Dedicated classrooms for floristry lessons are well organised and equipped with appropriate resources to enable students to practise their skills to industry standards. Master classes in floral decoration are held at the college and students are involved in these prestigious events. Several local floristry outlets, ranging from small family businesses to large city-centre shops, provide valuable work experience for students.

57. Students' progress is checked during periodic reviews and targets are set for them to work towards. However, in horticulture many of the targets lack deadlines and are insufficiently precise. The associated action plans are insufficiently detailed. In some cases no action plan has been produced. Horticulture students struggle to produce the work required before their next review and their progress is slow.

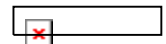
58. The range of courses illustrates the college's responsiveness to local needs and interests. The courses provide training for students from disadvantaged groups, including, for example, clients from the local mental health trust and probation service users.

59. Support for individual students is good. Students are well informed about the range of support services available at the college and make good use of them. There are regular tutorials for full-time students. Students on work placement discuss any problems with their tutor by telephone. Students identified as being at risk of dropping out are offered additional support according to their personal needs.

Leadership and management

60. Management of the curriculum area is satisfactory. The use of commercial premises for teaching and learning contributes to effective and efficient resource management. Team meetings have set agendas and are effective in planning new developments. Course teams set targets for their courses and monitor progress towards them. Annual course reviews draw on information from a range of sources. The self-assessment report did not identify the weaknesses in teaching and assessment on horticulture courses.

Business administration



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good teaching leading to effective learning
- strong support for students
- good and improving retention rates on many courses
- opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications.

Weaknesses

- weak internal verification on GNVQ and AVCE courses
- poor pass rates on some courses
- teachers' lack of recent commercial experience
- some unsatisfactory accommodation.

Scope of provision

61. Full-time business studies courses, aimed primarily at the 16-18 age group, lead to GCE AS and A-level qualifications, GNVQ intermediate and AVCE. There are part-time evening GCE A-level courses for adults in business studies and e-business. NVQs in administration at levels 1 to 3 are provided on a full-time and part-time basis. There are currently 8 supported learners on a pre-entry course in administration and 13 adult students working towards NVQ level 2 administration. A small number of modern apprentices are following administration courses. Evening class provision in word and text processing usually attracts good numbers, but has recruited poorly this year. The college has an effective partnership with a major local employer, through which company personnel are trained to assess new administrative staff at NVQ level 2. NVQ students undertake work-based learning and attend college for lessons on background knowledge and to work towards additional qualifications in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), and text and word processing.

Achievement and standards

62. Retention rates on most business and administration courses have improved substantially over the last three years. On most courses, they are now well above national averages. However, there has not been a similar improvement in pass rates. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate business course has fallen to below national average. On the GNVQ advanced business courses the pass rate fell dramatically in 2001 to 20% below the national average, and the downward trend has continued on the replacement AVCE course. In 2001 the pass rate on the GCE AS business studies course was 80%. The percentage of students achieving the GCE AS accounting qualification was also poor.

63. Pass rates on NVQ administration courses are above the national average at level 1, approaching the national average at level 2 and significantly above the national average at level 3, with 100% gaining the award in 2001. There is a good rate of achievement of additional qualifications by full-time students, who gain awards in word processing, text processing, CLAIT, young enterprise, and use of Internet technologies. The pass rate on the level 3 text processing course has been consistently good for the last three years. The standard of work produced by business and administration students is mostly good. NVQ portfolios are well organised and contain a wide variety of convincing evidence of competence, collected on work placements. The average attendance rate is approximately 80%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business administration, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ administration	1	No. of starts	17	9	11
		% retention	65	78	91
		% pass rate	34	86	60
NVQ administration	2	No. of starts	47	37	45
		% retention	79	84	71
		% pass rate	70	84	78
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	29	25	20
		% retention	62	68	90
		% pass rate	50	88	61
GNVQ advanced	3	No. of starts	22	28	20
		% retention	55	68	83
		% pass rate	92	95	60
Text processing III	3	No. of starts	*	41	41
		% retention	*	95	95
		% pass rate	*	79	79
NVQ administration	3	No. of starts	7	10	15
		% retention	100	80	93
		% pass rate	71	100	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

64. Teaching and learning are good or better in most lessons. Teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to extend students' learning. They draw on their own professional experience, and use students' experience of work, to make lessons relevant and interesting. In an effective lesson on the supported pre-entry course, learners developed valuable interpersonal and social skills through role playing office situations in which one of the people involved was difficult or aggressive. Adult students on an e-business course were particularly motivated by an activity which required them to research websites in order to assess the impact of government on e-business. Each student was required to report back on a different topic such as the environment, tax, or transport, and their findings were recorded on the whiteboard to provide their notes for the lesson. Key skills lessons are not well integrated with vocational studies and some are pitched at too low a level. In some lessons there is over reliance on exercises copied from books.

65. Lessons are well planned. They are based on detailed schemes of work in which the needs of individual students are identified to enable appropriate support to be given. Students are kept informed about course requirements and given guidance on the resources to use in research, the production of coursework and how to prepare for examinations. There is particularly effective short-term planning for NVQ assessments. Assignments are designed to motivate students and develop their skills. Students' knowledge and experience of business are enhanced by visits to companies. Some AVCE students visit Paris to study the Disneyland organisation, while NVQ students benefit from visits to local companies, such as the post office, to learn about current business practices. Students develop the skills which they will need in employment. A good proportion progress to

higher level courses within the college or to HE.

66. Resources to support learning are generally good. A well-equipped office centre provides a realistic work environment in which NVQ students can collect evidence of competence for their portfolios by providing office services to college staff. There are sufficient computer suites in which students develop office skills such as word processing and Internet technologies, and workbooks to enable them to work on their own. Some of the computer software needs updating to reflect current office practices. Some classrooms are dull and cramped, and unsuitable for practical or group activities. A student in a wheelchair was unable to participate in a group activity because there was not enough room to turn her chair around. There are no IT facilities in the classrooms. Some of the resources in the library are outdated, and there are insufficient library resources for the number of full-time students studying accounting, general business, marketing and European studies. Few of the staff have recent business experience. NVQ level 2 students gain valuable experience from placements with local employers, but there is a shortage of work placements for GNVQ/AVCE students. There is no strategy to widen the network of employers willing to provide work experience for full-time students.

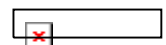
67. Internal verification is weak on GNVQ/AVCE courses. The process failed to identify students' work that was below the required standard, resulting in delays in students achieving their qualification. New arrangements have been put in place for this year. There is good assessment planning and short-term target setting on NVQ courses, enabling students to make the most of opportunities for workplace assessment. Assessment is carried out regularly, and students' portfolios contain a good range of evidence collected in the workplace. Prompt action is taken to rectify weaknesses identified by external verifiers. Insufficient work is set and marked in the first term to assess students' progress, particularly on GNVQ and AVCE courses.

68. There is strong support for individual students. A thorough induction provides students with a clear understanding of their course and how they will be assessed. All students have an initial assessment to identify any learning support needs. The resultant support includes help with dyslexia, additional lessons in literacy or numeracy, and help from learning support workers or the tutor in the lessons. Course materials are adapted to meet the needs of learners. For example, they have been produced on different coloured paper, in Braille, in large type and in electronic form. Part-time students can contact tutors easily by telephone or e-mail.

Leadership and management

69. Course management is good. Managers consult with course teams before making decisions. Regular team meetings provide opportunities to share ideas and disseminate information. Course reviews are an effective part of the quality assurance cycle and result in action being taken to improve courses and resources for the benefit of students. There is insufficient sharing of good practice with teachers in other programme areas. Key skills are not an integral part of vocational courses, but teams are beginning to share information in order to facilitate this. Equal opportunities are strongly promoted. Students with additional learning needs are taught on mainstream courses.

Business management and professional



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- much good teaching

- good support for individual students
- high standard of course work.

Weaknesses

- ineffective monitoring and follow up of absenteeism
- failure to adapt teaching methods for small groups.

Scope of provision

70. The college provides a wide range of business, management and professional courses for full-time and part-time students from level 2 to postgraduate diploma level. There are medical and legal secretarial courses and an access to HE (business) course, which has recruited well this year. Accounting technician awards are available at all three levels. There are courses leading to professional qualifications in marketing, personnel, advice and guidance, credit management and purchasing and supply. Management courses range from introductory to advanced diploma level. A few courses are provided on a full-time basis, several on one day a week, but most are taught as evening classes. Some courses are supplemented by lessons on Saturday mornings. Working in partnership with a primary care trust, the college has developed leadership training for middle managers.

Achievement and standards

71. Pass rates are consistently high on the medical secretarial, NVQ level 2 accountancy, NVQ level 4 management and national certificate in business and finance courses. Pass rates are below national averages on NVQ level 3 accountancy, certificate in credit management, certificate in personnel practice and the certificate in supervisory management courses. Data supplied by the college indicate that some pass rates have improved in 2002.

72. There are effective strategies to improve retention. Retention rates have improved on most programmes. The average attendance rate in the lessons observed was 80%. The college has procedures for following up students who are absent but they are not implemented by all teachers and are not monitored routinely.

73. Students' course work is of a high standard, demonstrating a good level of research, analytical and evaluation skills. On management and professional courses, students develop personal and management skills related to their work. Students apply theory to a range of practical problems through assignments and project work in ways that broaden their management perspective.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, management and professional, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
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NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	62	41	40
		% retention	71	78	73
		% pass rate	77	65	75
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	40	48	41
		% retention	88	83	88
		% pass rate	43	20	50
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	48	45	51
		% retention	83	84	100
		% pass rate	85	89	67
Diploma in medical secretaries	3	No. of starts	10	*	9
		% retention	90	*	100
		% pass rate	89	*	89
Advanced certificate in marketing	H	No. of starts	14	45	51
		% retention	96	77	79
		% pass rate	5	12	36
Diploma in marketing	4	No. of starts	9	8	8
		% retention	100	75	25
		% pass rate	0	0	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

74. Most teaching is good or better. Teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in 9% of the lessons observed. Lessons are carefully planned and well prepared. They have clear objectives and are based on detailed schemes of work. In a few cases the objectives were not explained to students. Topics are generally dealt with at an appropriate level, and lessons proceed at a brisk pace, keeping students fully occupied. Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching methods to help students to learn effectively, including lectures, question and answer sessions, discussions, and case-study analysis in small groups. In one lesson on action-centred leadership, the teacher kept students fully engaged by mixing an absorbing and knowledgeable presentation with action-based exercises and regular questioning, drawing out links with their own work experience and earlier lessons. Most teachers set demanding assignments and projects that require students to use a wide range of skills. Teachers make good use of students' work experience in linking theory with practice, and assignments are frequently work-related. Students produce good coursework. Feedback on their work by teachers is usually detailed and constructive, providing good guidance on improvement.

75. In a minority of lessons, teachers talked too much, failed to hold the students' attention and did not question students sufficiently to check that they were learning. Student numbers were low in many of the lessons observed but teachers failed to adapt their teaching methods to take advantage of the small groups. Discussions in these lessons were less stimulating than those in larger groups.

76. Staff are generally well qualified and many have recent business or professional experience. However, there is no systematic arrangement to enable others to gain such experience and keep it up to date. The majority of part-time agency staff have professional backgrounds that enable them to enliven their teaching with first hand experience of business processes. Their teaching is usually dynamic and they succeed in engaging students in lively discussions that promote learning. There

are good, co-operative relationships between teachers and students. The classrooms used for business, management and professional courses are spacious, well furnished and well equipped. The reference library provides a satisfactory range of textbooks and journals. Students make good use of these in completing coursework and preparing for examinations.

77. Students' progress is monitored carefully and all students have regular progress reviews. There is appropriate internal verification which includes scrutiny of written work and assignments. However, it does not include observation of any workplace activities on NVQ programmes. Procedures for recording assessment, internal verification and students' progress work well. Teachers ensure that students are well prepared for external examinations. They provide study sessions, mock examinations and workshops held on Saturday mornings to improve examination technique. Two or three levels of study are available on most professional routes and students are encouraged to continue to the next level of qualification whenever appropriate.

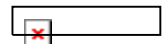
78. On the first day of each course, students receive a useful induction to the college and their programme. Workshops are provided, which inform students about the careers information and counselling services. However, there is no systematic induction programme for late starters and no monitoring to ensure that key induction topics have been covered with each student.

79. There is good support for individual students. Each student has a personal tutor with whom they can discuss issues and concerns unrelated to their studies. Students also have scheduled one-to-one tutorials with the course tutor, in which targets are set and guidance is given about coping with the demands of their course.

Leadership and management

80. The management of the programme area is satisfactory. Regular team meetings are held, in which staff share ideas and agree measures for improvement. There are regular reviews of the courses and of the progress made by individual students. Team members work together effectively and communications between full-time and part-time staff are good, but there is insufficient sharing of good practice. The outcomes of lesson observations are evaluated, staff performance is discussed, and action plans are agreed for improvement. The self-assessment report demonstrates sound awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in the programme area.

Information and communication technology



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- particularly well-designed handouts
- excellent computing facilities
- many opportunities for students to develop IT skills outside lessons

- good tutorial support.

Weaknesses

- poor punctuality of students
- insufficient ILT resources
- low pass rates on GNVQ courses
- very low retention rates on GCE AS courses.

Scope of provision

81. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in computing and IT spread across four different programme areas. The science programme area runs full-time IT courses at levels 1, 2 and 3, ranging from foundation GNVQ through intermediate GNVQ, AVCE and GCE AS to GCE A level. A full-time level 1 City and Guilds course for un-waged adults, who may join at any time in the year, is provided in the vocational training programme area. The management and professional programme area runs full-time office technology courses from beginner to advanced levels. There is also a range of part-time office technology courses, most of which are managed by the access and community training programme area, which specialises in CLAIT courses.

Achievement and standards

82. In 2000/01, retention rates on most courses were at or above national averages. However, college data show retention rates declining in 2001/02 on GNVQ and AVCE courses. Pass rates are low, and substantially below the national average, on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses. The pass rate on the AVCE course is in line with a low national average. The pass rate on GCE AS IT in 2001 was significantly higher than the national average for students aged 16 to 18, but fewer than half the students who started the course completed it. The retention and pass rates on the City and Guilds course have been significantly higher than the national average over several years. Large numbers of adult students take short or one-year CLAIT courses. Pass rates are just below the national average for these courses and the retention rate is declining on the one-year course. Punctuality is poor on many full-time courses, with many students arriving late for lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communication technology, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
CLAIT (short)	1	No. of starts	511	610	495
		% retention	95	94	95

		% pass rate	57	58	58
CLAIT (one year)	1	No. of starts	233	350	233
		% retention	81	75	72
		% pass rate	76	51	64
City and Guilds certificate in computer applications	1	No. of starts	12	28	21
		% retention	75	71	90
		% pass rate	89	95	74
GNVQ foundation IT	1	No. of starts	*	*	18
		% retention	*	*	78
		% pass rate	*	*	36
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	10	*	35
		% retention	60	*	86
		% pass rate	67	*	43
AVCE ICT	3	No. of starts	*	*	45
		% retention	*	*	78
		% pass rate	*	*	54

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

83. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory in most lessons. High quality, informative handouts and task sheets are used regularly to good effect. Teachers on most courses organise appropriate learning activities including group, practical and individual learning tasks. The best lessons are effective in meeting the needs of individual students. These lessons are organised to ensure that previous work is revised and learning confirmed before introducing the next topic. New material is taught in easily managed sections and practical tasks reinforce and confirm the learning. Students encountering difficulties are well supported by the teachers. Teaching on part-time courses for adults is good. Staff develop productive relationships with students, set appropriate tasks, assess work well and track progress reliably. Students produce work of a good standard.

84. Students use computers during lessons, and are also encouraged to use the sixth form centre IT facilities to practise their skills outside formal lessons. This open-access centre has a help desk where staff are available to assist students who are having difficulties. The roomy computer laboratories contain good quality up-to-date computing equipment with fast Internet access. However, there are insufficient other ILT resources such as data projectors.

85. A team of technicians maintains the college's computer network, which is still being developed. Machine malfunctions and software problems are rectified quickly. Staff and students are generally satisfied with the standard and performance of the equipment. However, the network is not used to its full potential. For example, staff do not publish course syllabuses, schemes of work and assignment briefs in web page format. Overhead projector transparencies are not used effectively to promote learning. Some whiteboards are too small, badly positioned and poorly illuminated. Students sometimes have to leave their seats to see what is written on the board. One tutor could only write on the lower half of the whiteboard because it is positioned too high. Most staff do not have sole access to a desktop computer or laptop to develop their coursework or respond promptly to e-mail messages.

86. Students are assessed to identify any needs for literacy or numeracy support. Those needing support are allocated time with a specialist tutor. Teachers generally have a good relationship with students and are aware of their individual needs. The assessment process is well structured and carried out methodically. It is well managed and detailed records are kept. However, it is used mainly for summative judgements rather than to identify weaknesses during the courses and to plan work to rectify them. There is a thorough internal verification system, which was approved by the external verifiers. Students' progress is monitored carefully. All students have their own record sheets and tutors keep a summary of their progress that they update regularly.

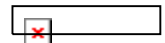
87. There is a good range of courses providing clear opportunities for progression. Some courses such as the European computer driving licence (ECDL) are provided at the request of local employers. However, the range of full-time courses for students aged 16 to 18 was developed without consulting commercial enterprises or academic institutions.

88. Both full-time and part-time students are satisfied with the tutorial arrangements. Full-time students have a weekly group tutorial where any problems are discussed and resolved, targets are set for individual students, and progression to more advanced courses is discussed. External speakers are sometimes invited to group tutorials. Part-time students have a less structured tutorial system which responds to the needs of individual students as they arise. They also have individual progress reviews with a tutor once a term.

Leadership and management

89. Some aspects of curriculum management are good, but there are also weaknesses. For example, some courses are set up without sufficient reference to the local business or academic community. Although managers have identified deficiencies in ILT equipment, these have not been remedied. On the other hand, demands for staff training to prepare for the introduction of new courses have been met in full. There is a programme of lesson observations and the findings are used to improve the quality of teaching. However, there is insufficient sharing of good practice across the four programme areas responsible for ICT provision.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- effective strategies to improve retention rates
- good support and guidance for students
- effective use of work experience to enhance learning.

Weaknesses

- poor punctuality which adversely affects learning
- poor pass rates on short courses in 2001
- some unsatisfactory teaching of theory.

Scope of provision

90. The college provides a diverse range of courses in hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism. The courses are managed by staff based in two programme areas. Catering and hospitality are managed by staff in the vocational training team, and leisure, tourism and sport by the staff in the business communications team.

91. There is a broad range of courses. In sport, leisure and tourism there are courses leading to GNVQ at intermediate level in leisure and tourism, AVCE in travel and tourism and BTEC first diploma and certificates in sport. In catering, students work towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. There are also short evening programmes and practical craft skills courses for students with learning difficulties and those with mental health problems.

Achievement and standards

92. Retention rates have improved over the last three years. In 1998, 41% of courses had retention rates more than 5% below national averages. Tutorial hours have been increased, mentors appointed, and students' progress has been monitored more closely. By 2000/01 the number of courses with retention rates more than 5% below national averages was 18% and projections suggest it will be zero in 2002/03.

93. There are consistently high pass rates on the NVQ level 2 course in food preparation and cooking. On some other courses pass rates have fluctuated widely. For example, the pass rate on the GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism course fell from 86% in 1999 to 50% in 2000 and rose to 100% in 2001.

94. The standard of most students' work is satisfactory. Students' written work is well planned and meets the appropriate requirements. Learners' portfolios on the NVQ catering programmes are well organised and demonstrate appropriate vocational knowledge and understanding. In over half of the lessons observed by the inspectors, some students were late. The reasons for their lateness were not checked stringently enough by teachers.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Credit achievement national open college network (short)	1	No. of starts	*	162	219
		% retention	*	91	92
		% pass rate	*	93	41
GNVQ intermediate in leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	18	23	18
		% retention	56	57	61
		% pass rate	40	69	91

NVQ catering food preparation and cookery	2	No. of starts	18	21	18
		% retention	67	76	89
		% pass rate	92	100	94
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	No. of starts	16	20	10
		% retention	88	70	60
		% pass rate	86	50	100
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cookery	3	No. of starts	16	14	3
		% retention	69	86	67
		% pass rate	91	40	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

*course did not run

Quality of education and training

95. Most teaching is at least satisfactory and about 40% of it is good. In 13% of the lessons observed teaching was unsatisfactory. Many teachers made effective use of good handouts, organised classroom activities which met students' different learning needs and styles, and checked on their progress regularly. Much of the teaching in catering is good. In food preparation lessons, instructions are given clearly and simply to ensure that students understand their tasks. An effective NVQ catering lesson began with an expert demonstration on how to use kitchen knives safely and effectively. Each student was set practical tasks appropriate to their ability, and given appropriate guidance on how to carry them out. In a lesson on human resources, travel and tourism students displayed knowledge and confidence in answering questions. In many lessons, students show an ability to take accurate notes when guided by the teacher.

96. In a small minority of lessons the teaching did not meet the needs of all the students, and they were given too few opportunities to contribute orally. In one BTEC lesson the teacher talked at length but did not organise any activities to reinforce students' understanding of the material. The students had difficulty maintaining their concentration and interest in the topic. In some sports lessons, handouts were of a poor quality and the text was too small to read easily. Similarly, in a travel and tourism lesson the visual aids were difficult to read.

97. Teachers make good use of the college restaurant, tea room and bakery to improve students' learning experience. These facilities provide opportunities for the development of practical skills in realistic settings. Specialist equipment and resources are good. The sports hall and associated exercise equipment have extended the range of opportunities for sports students. Teachers are well qualified and many have undertaken industrial placements to stay up to date with current practice

98. The assignments set by teachers meet awarding body requirements. Comment on assessed work is thorough, informative and helps students to improve their work. In some cases, assignments are also used to develop students' key skills.

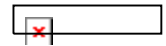
99. There is a good range of local work placement providers and work experience is well integrated with the other aspects of GNVQ programmes. Students draw on their work experiences in discussions and case studies. They also use role-plays and other classroom activities to help them prepare for their work experiences.

100. Students speak well of the college and enjoy their courses. Small group sizes, frequent feedback and friendly staff are highly valued.

Leadership and management

101. The courses are managed effectively. Catering courses are particularly well managed, and assessment and internal verification are effective. Leisure and tourism and sports are managed through a different programme area. There is scope for further development of leisure and tourism programmes. Not all management procedures are fully applied to the sports programme, which is in its first year of development. In the regular team meetings, staff concentrate on sharing good practice and developing the curriculum to meet the needs of students. There is good liaison with local work placement providers and effective working with partners including rehabilitation centres and the probation service.

Complementary therapies



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high standard of students' work
- good retention rates on most courses
- effective initiatives to widen participation
- good progression from community outreach provision to mainstream courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on level 3 courses
- insufficient provision at level 2
- insufficient monitoring of students' progress.

Scope of provision

102. The complementary therapies provision is managed by the social care programme team. Most of the students are adults and 96% of enrolments are on part-time courses. Introductory and level 1

courses are provided in aromatherapy, reflexology and Indian head massage on the main college site and in a number of community venues. Courses last between six and ten weeks. Only one course, in Indian head massage, is offered at level 2. Part-time level 3 courses lead to diplomas in aromatherapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, and auricular ear therapy and baby massage. Courses are offered during the day and in the evenings. There are also weekend courses and summer schools. There is only one full-time course, the holistics therapy diploma. There are strong and effective links and partnerships with a number of external agencies and courses have been developed in response to their needs.

Achievement and standards

103. There have been good retention rates on most courses for the past two years. Courses completing in 2000 and 2001 and leading to diplomas in aromatherapy, reflexology, remedial massage, and Indian head massage and the sports massage certificate, had retention rates above national averages. However, pass rates on most level 3 courses in 2001 were poor. Pass rates were above national averages for the diploma in aromatherapy and the sports massage certificate in 2000, but well below in 2001. Retention and pass rates on the full-time holistics therapy diploma were both significantly below the national average in 2001. Data produced by the college suggest there have been improvements in 2002. The average attendance rate at lessons observed during the inspection was satisfactory at 70%. Students are well motivated and keen to learn. The standard of students' work is good and shows that they have a good level of knowledge, skill and understanding for the stage of the course they have reached. Students' practical work is good and their portfolios are well organised. The standard of attainment observed in lessons was good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in complementary therapies, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Indian head massage diploma	2	No. of starts	**	**	11
		% retention	**	**	91
		% pass rate	**	**	*
Indian head massage certificate (short course)	2	No. of starts	**	40	87
		% retention	**	92	99
		% pass rate	**	81	63
Diploma in aromatherapy	3	No. of starts	**	10	52
		% retention	**	100	91
		% pass rate	**	100	59
Diploma in holistic therapies	3	No. of starts	**	**	16
		% retention	**	**	69
		% pass rate	**	**	64
Sports massage certificate	3	No. of starts	8	14	11
		% retention	50	93	91
		% pass rate	100	85	40
Diploma in reflexology	3	No. of starts	11	24	25
		% retention	100	88	88
		% pass rate	100	86	86
Baby massage certificate	3	No. of starts	**	**	11
		% retention	**	**	91
		% pass rate	**	**	*

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

**pass rate not yet known*

***course did not run*

Quality of education and training

104. Teaching in over 90% of the lessons observed was satisfactory or better. Teachers working on different sites use common schemes of work in an attempt to provide a consistent approach to teaching and learning. Most theory and practical lessons are well planned. Learning objectives are explained to students at the start of each lesson, and tutors summarise what has been learnt at the end. Most teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and check frequently to confirm that students have understood what they have been taught. Most theory teaching is satisfactory but in some lessons students spend too much time copying down notes. Students find the linking of theory to practice helpful in enabling them to remember complex theory or techniques, particularly when the information is presented in imaginative ways. In one lesson, students' knowledge of anatomy and physiology was reinforced through a role-play demonstrating the vascular system.

105. Teachers generally make good use of appropriate teaching resources and good internally produced handbooks. Staff are well motivated and receptive to new ideas. There is a wealth of occupational expertise amongst members of the teaching team and students benefit from the up-to-date experience of teachers.

106. Students undertake an appropriate amount of practical work. They work in a professional and competent manner on clients and on each other. Students are clear about their course requirements and receive good support in lessons. Full-time students benefit from a comprehensive tutorial programme which includes scheduled sessions for group activities and individual tutorials. Part-time students do not have formal tutorials, and their academic support and guidance occur informally. There is insufficient monitoring of students' performance and an inadequate system of target setting and review. Written feedback from teachers on students' work is insufficiently detailed to enable them to use it to improve their performance.

107. Although the community venues do not have specialist resources available on the main college site, teachers make the best use of the resources available to them and organise creative and imaginative teaching and learning activities. There are good rates of progression. Participation by students in community outreach activities provides them with valuable opportunities to develop personal qualities, such as confidence and self-esteem.

Leadership and management

108. Most aspects of the programme are well managed. Resources are well managed and planning days are used effectively for target setting and curriculum development. However, the fact that there is little provision at level 2 has resulted in some students being placed on inappropriate courses and has reduced the progression opportunities for others. Strategies to improve performance have been introduced recently but it is too early to assess their effect. The course team, many of whom are new to the college, work together effectively. Communication between staff is good. Team meetings are held regularly and part-time and agency staff are fully involved. There is no formal discussion on the standardisation of assessment practice. Students are encouraged to give their views on the quality of courses and college services both informally and formally and students value the responsiveness of staff to issues raised.

Early years and care



Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- very good teaching
- strong support for students
- wide range of course for adults
- good progress by students towards their learning goals.

Weaknesses

- poor resources and accommodation in some community centres
- very low retention rates on a few courses.

Scope of provision

109. The college provides health, social care and childcare programmes, including a wide range of courses for adults from level 2 to level 4 leading to NVQs and specialist professional development qualifications. Some 85% of students are over 19 years of age. There are also courses aimed at 16 to 19 year olds from level 1 to level 3, but the GNVQ intermediate level course did not run in 2000/01 because not enough students were retained to make it viable. Courses for adults are offered at times to suit their needs and take account of their domestic responsibilities. During the last two years, new courses have been developed in response to employer, community and learner demand. The majority of full-time courses are taught on the main college site. Courses are also provided in local community venues in partnership with other organisations.

Achievement and standards

110. The majority of students make good progress towards their learning goals. Standards are high on most courses and attainment was at least satisfactory in all observed lessons. Students respond well to challenging tasks. For example, in one lesson, adult care workers were able to discuss the complex ethical and financial issues surrounding national health policy. A few courses have pass rates well above national averages, including the national diploma in nursery nursing, and in some NVQ level 2 care programmes. There are a few courses with low retention rates, for example the NVQ in developmental care, the certificate in counselling, and the national certificate in childhood studies which had a 13% retention rate in 2000/01. Retention rates on most courses improved in

2001. Many students progress within the college to higher level courses, whilst others find employment in the care sector.

A sample of retention and pass rates in early years and care, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
First diploma in caring	2	No. of starts	14	10	20
		% retention	71	90	75
		% pass rate	10	89	80
NVQ early years and education	2	No. of starts	7	20	19
		% retention	100	49	74
		% pass rate	71	100	100
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	10	11	*
		% retention	60	18	*
		% pass rate	50	100	*
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	No. of starts	18	9	14
		% retention	44	56	64
		% pass rate	75	60	67
National diploma in childhood (nursery nursing)	3	No. of starts	9	13	17
		% retention	89	62	76
		% pass rate	100	75	100
Certificate in counselling (one year)	3	No. of starts	11	38	38
		% retention	91	79	76
		% pass rate	91	79	90
NVQ care promoting independence	3	No. of starts	18	10	17
		% retention	44	40	88
		% pass rate	50	100	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

*course did not run

Quality of education and training

111. Teaching and learning are very good. All courses have detailed schemes of work and lesson plans, which take account of the different needs of individual students and identify those who need additional support. Most students are able to demonstrate the knowledge, understanding and skills specified in the course requirements. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported in the classroom using additional tutors or specialised equipment. A minority of adult students do not participate effectively in groupwork.

112. In most lessons, teachers use a range of effective teaching methods including discussion, small group work and practical craft activities. Teachers encourage students by praising their contributions to discussions and their answers to questions. There is a supportive learning environment, which helps to develop students' confidence and self-esteem, and their ability to think independently. Students respect each other's point of view and cultural differences. In many lessons, particularly at the higher levels, staff encourage students to debate and analyse complex issues. In one

counselling lesson, the students worked well in small groups to evaluate the extent to which the personal background of a psychologist led to the development of his theories. Most students understand their course and its assessment requirements. They are clear about the way practical work placements contribute to their learning. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory. Many teachers use feedback sheets to provide comments on assessed work, but in some cases, these provide insufficient detail to enable students to improve their work. In some cases, staff make arrangements to meet students in order to give more detailed feedback. Tutors hold progress reviews with individual students, during which they focus on performance in assignments and key skills development. They then develop appropriate action plans which have measurable targets and deadlines.

113. Key skills are taught in separate lessons. Those students identified in initial assessments as requiring additional help receive it. The materials used to develop key skills are linked to the vocational programme and draw on applications found in care and early years settings.

114. Work experience plays an important part in the learning of adult students, and they are encouraged to use practical examples from such experience to illustrate theoretical concepts. Students on health and social care programmes are encouraged to undertake work experience but are not required to do so. Second-year AVCE students have not undertaken work experience and the college has recognised the need to change this. There is a placement officer who organises and monitors placements on early years courses. Extra care is taken over the placement of students with disabilities. For example, a wheelchair user was placed in an early years setting which had appropriate access and accommodation.

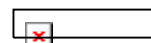
115. Staff are well qualified. Specialist staff are used effectively on advanced level programmes at levels 3 and 4. There are insufficient specialist books in the library, although sets of standard textbooks are issued to students on a 12-month loan. Most rooms in the main college are fit for purpose. Many have interesting displays of students' work. Resources and accommodation at some community centres are inadequate. In one lesson, a large number of adult students were using a cookery room in a special school with fixed low tables for wheelchair users.

116. Guidance and support for students are good. Learners who need them have access to specialist support services and resources. Students speak highly of the help they get from their tutors and teachers. The new tutorial system ensures that the review system is working effectively and that it is linked to reports and parents' evenings for the 16 to 19 year olds. The college has recently set up an attendance monitoring system which involves telephoning absentees and, where appropriate, employers. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

Leadership and management

117. The programme is well led and managed. The work in this curriculum area has recently been re-organised and some courses have been replaced with more suitable ones. There is an appropriate emphasis on curriculum development. In the frequent team meetings, information on students' progress is discussed, at risk students are identified and support is recommended. Staff are aware of targets on attendance and retention rates and their progress towards achieving them. The appraisal system is effective and contributes to decisions on staff development. There are effective lesson observation programmes and staff development programmes. Teachers are aware of and implement the college's equal opportunities policies and procedures.

English for speakers of other languages



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

Weaknesses

Scope of provision

118. There is a comprehensive range of 32 courses in ESOL, most of which are aimed at students aged 19 and over. Almost all students follow full-time programmes of 15 hours duration. The 20 morning courses and 12 afternoon courses held at the main college site cover the full range of ability allowing learners to be placed on a course at an appropriate level. Transfers between courses are discussed at team meetings and are based on observation and assessment. In 2001/02, 851 students started ESOL courses and 572 were on programmes at the time of the inspection.

119. There is a small amount of ESOL provision at three outreach centres for students unable to attend college. Groups who might be unwilling to attend college, such as women from some minority ethnic groups, are able to attend part-time courses for women only.

Achievement and standards

120. The available data on ESOL courses are insufficiently reliable to be used for a summary table of students' achievements. The data suggest that retention rates are improving but are still below national averages on both one-year courses and short courses.

121. The college has increased its range of ESOL courses, particularly those suitable for asylum seekers and those with indefinite leave to remain. Students have achieved high pass rates in speaking, listening and reading skill modules, but pass rates are low in the writing module. Students acquire good speaking, listening and reading skills in lessons. The courses are organised to meet learners' needs. There are several classes at each level allowing students to be grouped according to ability.

Quality of education and training

122. Most teaching is satisfactory or better and some is very good. In the most effective lessons, extremely committed and enthusiastic teachers make good use of detailed lesson plans, with clear learning objectives and provide good learning experiences. These lessons are well attended and the students enjoy them. In a minority of lessons, teachers used handouts unimaginatively and did not give students sufficient opportunities to practise oral skills. Schemes of work are designed to match learners' needs and assessment is linked to the ESOL national curriculum.

123. Most teachers are well qualified and others are improving their qualifications. There is a good multi-cultural environment, emphasised by the displays in the department's open areas and in some of the classrooms. The fact that the department occupies the whole of a single floor facilitates teamwork and sharing of good practice. The staff room has been expanded to provide teachers with good preparation and work areas. The teaching rooms are mostly of adequate size, though for some large groups a lack of space makes it difficult to vary seating arrangements for different kinds of activity.

124. There is no use of IT in ESOL teaching and little provision for use of multimedia materials. Staff have not had training in such techniques. The department has a new IT suite with 18 high specification computers, but these were not in use at the time of the inspection. Teaching resources such as books and audio tapes are well organised, plentiful and easily accessible. The provision of learning materials for ESOL in the college library is small.

125. Teaching in outreach centres takes place in good, well-equipped accommodation. One centre in a local primary school has a computer, overhead projector and lockable storage space. Teaching in another centre is in a comfortable, carpeted room, which is large enough to divide learners into several ability groups.

126. The tutorial system is effective and provides good pastoral support for students. Each student is allocated a teacher as a tutor and there are timetabled group tutorials. There is a scheme of work for each tutorial group but tutors have not had any guidance on how tutorial work should relate to the ESOL curriculum.

127. Language support for ESOL students is provided by tutors based in the key skills department. The ESOL department offers advice to the tutors but is not responsible for their work. These arrangements work satisfactorily for students aged 16 to 19, who undertake an initial assessment of language support needs when they start at college. Support is then provided in three timetabled lessons each week. The arrangements for adult students are less satisfactory. They are not given an initial assessment, but those who need language support can use the drop in centre in the communication room.

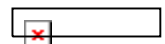
128. The annual course review acknowledges that monitoring of learners' progress lacks rigour and is insufficiently detailed. New initial assessment tests have been developed and these will be linked to the ESOL curriculum. Tutors are responsible for monitoring learners' academic progress through the tutorial system. The outcomes of monitoring and assessment by tutors are not recorded centrally within the department. Learning plans for students are insufficiently detailed, and do not contain specific goals or achievement targets.

129. The range of courses leading to external qualifications is good, but in the last two years only a small proportion students have been entered for these. Last year only 26% of students were entered for external qualifications. Failure to achieve external qualifications limits learners' opportunities for progression.

Leadership and management

130. The management of the programme is satisfactory. The ESOL department has recently been reorganised. There is a programme area head, two curriculum leaders for ESOL and one for languages and outreach. There are 11 full-time and 3 part-time staff supported by agency teachers as required. A detailed programme area action plan has been produced following a rigorous self-assessment. Some of the new systems and procedures are not yet being implemented. The current arrangements for collecting and using data on students' achievements and progression are inadequate.

Literacy and numeracy



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- effective programme management
- good progress towards individual learning goals
- good recording of students' progress and learning

- particularly effective teaching in mixed groups of hearing and deaf students.

Weaknesses

- poor learning materials
- little community-based basic skills work
- insufficient use of ILT
- insufficiently detailed written feedback to students.

Scope of provision

131. The provision for literacy and numeracy includes basic skills courses, basic skills learning support and a small amount of basic skills work as an integral part of vocational programmes. Courses are held on the main site and in one community location. There are currently 119 enrolments on basic skills courses. Over 900 students have been given an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs. Of the 175 identified as needing support, only 67 are receiving it.

Achievement and standards

132. Targets are set for retention and pass rates. Retention rates are improving and are at or above national averages on all courses. Students make steady progress towards their individual learning goals. The lack of consistent data on students' achievements is due to changes in accreditation over the last three years. This situation will change following the adoption by the college of the national accreditation framework and the new curriculum and standards. College data for 2001/02 show that 80% of students achieved qualifications in the national tests.

133. There are good systems for recording each student's progress, how much new learning has taken place and what has been achieved. In most lessons, tasks are successfully matched to students' learning needs and outcomes are recorded accurately. In a few lessons, intended learning outcomes are unclear and the recording of students' progress is poor.

Quality of education and training

134. Much of the teaching is satisfactory and some is good. In the most effective lessons, tutors use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to meet the wide range of abilities, interests and personal objectives among the students. Learning materials are used well. Many of the materials promote equality of opportunity. The learning activities organised by teachers are closely linked to the students' own experiences, helping to maintain their interest.

135. Teaching methods take account of students' preferred learning styles. For example, in a learning support session, the tutor modified his approach and encouraged a student who preferred

to learn visually to use visual software on the computer.

136. There is relatively little basic skills work done as an integral part of vocational programmes but some work is done by well-trained staff.

137. Some particularly effective teaching takes place in classes of mixed groups of deaf and hearing students. In one such group on a basic skills course, all students were kept busy and were learning effectively. Support tutors, working as communicators, played an important part in the lesson. The team approach to the teaching helped to build a team spirit amongst the students.

138. A few teachers fail to involve students in planning their learning. They do not draw out the links with everyday life and work, and this results in some dull and uninspiring teaching. Groupwork is inhibited by the low number of students in some lessons. Students are not given sufficient encouragement to be self-reliant. For example, tutors tend to pick out books and other learning materials in workshops rather than asking students to find appropriate resources.

139. Teachers check students' understanding during lessons and give appropriate verbal feedback and help. However, written feedback to students is insufficiently detailed and not constructive enough to move students forward and reinforce their learning. Teachers and students make insufficient use of ILT. Computers are available to tutors but little effective use is made of them. This is recognised as a weakness by the staff.

140. Some staff are not appropriately qualified to teach the full range of basic skills. So far, 16 staff have been trained in literacy and 11 in numeracy teaching. The results of this training are evident in some lessons. For example, mental arithmetic is being incorporated into numeracy lessons and speaking and listening into literacy lessons. Some vocational staff are being trained to teach basic skills in an attempt to integrate basic skills with other aspects of the vocational curriculum. To date, 11 vocational staff have successfully completed their training and 8 are awaiting certificates.

141. Most of the learning materials are worksheets which make few references to real life and rarely set basic skills tasks in a vocational context. There is little attempt to match the materials to students' interests to enhance their motivation.

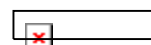
142. New initial assessment and review procedures have been introduced recently and are already proving effective. Students are placed on appropriate courses at the appropriate level. Their progress is monitored effectively. Their needs are identified and are used to set targets in their individual learning plans. Although students take part in these negotiations, tutors tend to dominate the proceedings.

143. There is relatively little basic skills provision in the community or in the workplace. Currently only one course is held in a community location although the small number of enrolments doubled in 2001/02. Measures are in place to increase participation and widen access through further programme development.

Leadership and management

144. Quality assurance arrangements are effective at course level and staff undertake self-assessment. There is good curriculum management, which has resulted in the successful adoption of the new curriculum and standards.

Supported learning and pre-vocational education



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good student support
- particularly effective mentoring and classroom assistant programmes
- diverse range of provision
- good use of community venues.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently precise individual learning plans on pre-entry and entry level programmes
- poorly designed handouts
- insufficient analysis of data on students' achievements and progression.

Scope of provision

145. The college provides a range of full-time and part-time courses for young people and adults at pre-entry, entry and level 1. There are currently 67 learners aged 16 to 19 on a pre-vocational programme designed to enable students with learning difficulties to make informed choices about careers whilst developing numeracy, literacy and IT skills. A part-time programme providing essential pre-vocational skills has 87 students enrolled. A two-year, part-time programme designed to increase the employability skills of adults with learning difficulties has 21 participants. The Prince's Trust programme is aimed at disadvantaged young people who have achieved little at school. There are currently 18 learners on the 12-week full-time programme. There are other programmes aimed at socially and economically deprived learners who have achieved little in traditional educational settings. For example, a 12-week part-time life skills course provides opportunities for disaffected young people to engage in learning and has 20 students enrolled. The certificate in education provides a combination of accredited learning opportunities from level 1 to GCSE. This is a one-year, full-time programme and currently there are 46 learners enrolled. The college has a strong commitment to community provision and works in partnership with others to provide opportunities for learning within local settings. There are two community-based programmes for adults wishing to train as classroom assistants or to gain mentoring skills, and there are 80 and 120 students respectively on these programmes. Students also have the opportunity to take part in a range of enrichment activities which include work experience, residential training, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, vocational tasters and an introduction to British sign language.

Achievement and standards

146. Retention rates are high across all programmes. The majority of students who complete their programmes achieve their learning goals. In the year 2001/02, 92% of learners on the mentoring skills programme achieved the qualification. Some 90% of learners on the career and personal development programme achieved City and Guilds literacy and numeracy awards at entry level, and 92% of learners on the essential skills programme achieved the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) award. Most students on life skills and Prince's Trust programmes achieved their learning goals. Tutors ensure that the tasks set for students match their academic ability and that they are given opportunities to develop their learning skills. All programmes include lessons designed to assist students with their personal development and to offer opportunities to gain social and life skills. Students are also encouraged to gain additional qualifications that may help them gain employment.

Quality of education and training

147. The quality of teaching on these programmes is generally good. In 62% of the lessons observed the teaching was good or better. All lessons are well planned and have clear learning objectives. The planning and teaching of the mentoring skills and the classroom assistant programmes are particularly good. Attendance and retention rates on these programmes are very high. Learners value the opportunity to return to education in a setting which suits them. Many learners progress to mentor or classroom assistant roles within the community. Tutors maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning. Students feel valued and supported. The specific needs of individual learners are included in lesson plans. Teachers frequently think up imaginative ways to draw learners into the learning process. One lesson, for example, followed the format of the television quiz show, 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire' and students were able to phone a friend when they were unable to answer a question. In a tutorial, the tutor used the National Record of Achievement as a basis for personal development planning. Students were asked to identify their personal strengths and qualities and to prepare a presentation about their personal achievements. In a few ineffective lessons, teachers were over-reliant on work sheets and students lost interest.

148. All students have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills on entry to their programme. The results are used to determine the most suitable programmes for each student and form the basis of individual learning plans. Regular reviews of progress are carried out by tutors and by careers advisers where appropriate. Progress reviews take place both formally, during tutorials, and informally at other times. However, in the essential skills and career and personal development programmes, individual learning plans are poor. They are not derived from the initial assessment and the targets set are too vague. Short-term targets identified by students do not always match their long-term learning objectives.

149. Managers and tutors frequently reinforce the importance of regular attendance and good time keeping. Attendance rates are good on most programmes, but on the certificate in further education, attendance is poor. Managers have recognised this weakness and a procedure has recently been implemented to remedy it.

150. Students are given plenty of support in the classroom and through the tutorial system. Learning assistants are used in all lessons at pre-entry and entry level. Deaf students are well supported by communication support workers. Several tutors use sign language to communicate with deaf learners. Additional support is provided by volunteers who accompany learners with severe learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In one lesson, learners with a visual impairment were given coloured paper to reduce glare and in another lesson a learner was given learning material with enlarged print.

151. All teaching and support staff are suitably qualified and experienced to work with students who have learning difficulties and social needs. Some support workers are qualified to stage 3 in British sign language. Where possible, the deployment of skilled staff is matched to the individual support needs of students. There is good use of the community venues for some courses. The classroom assistants and mentoring skills programmes are taught on the main college site and in nine community locations, including schools, church halls, community centres and a sports complex in

the centre of Birmingham. Students appreciate the opportunity to attend these courses in convenient locations. The courses are popular and well attended.

152. Accommodation is generally of a high standard. Rooms are selected to match the planned learning activities. They are generally well decorated, suitably furnished and contain displays of learners' work. Pre-vocational learning takes place in specialist vocational accommodation. Community venues provide realistic working environments. For example, students on a horticulture programme use a garden centre owned by social services and learners on the Prince's Trust programme use a scout camp for residential training.

153. Handouts and other learning resources are generally unimaginative. Most are produced commercially, and staff rarely make use of ICT to produce handouts and work sheets, specifically for learners with poor reading skills.

Leadership and management

154. The management of the programme is satisfactory although the college has recognised the need to apply more rigorous measures to improve the quality of provision. Staff are clear about their roles. Some attempts have been made to share good practice, but they have been largely ineffective. Staff have had insufficient training on teaching methods. Whilst data about the quality of programmes and the progress of students are collected, they are not analysed to identify trends and issues. There is little information about what happens to students when they have completed their programmes.

Part D: College data

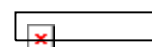
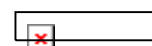


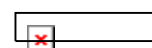
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2000/01



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	25	42
2	39	20
3	20	14
4/5	0	1
Other	16	23
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2001

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	450	308	3.1
Land-based provision	26	382	1.7
Construction	13	239	1.0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	69	383	1.8
Business administration, management and professional	409	3,047	14.0
Information and communications technology	563	1,841	9.7
Retailing, customer service and transportation	4	29	0.1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	289	1,619	7.7
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3	208	0.9
Health, social care and public services	363	5,128	22.2
Visual and performing arts and media	143	1,162	5.3
Humanities	190	2,293	10.1
English, languages and communication	553	396	3.8
Foundation programmes	779	3,808	18.6
Total	3,854	20,843	100

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
		1	Starters excluding transfers	385	466	574	1,114
	Retention rate (%)	80	76	79	85	70	81
	National average (%)	77	78	79	74	77	80
	Pass rate (%)	56	56	55	69	69	69
	National average (%)	57	63	65	58	66	69
2	Starters excluding transfers	772	751	823	1,648	1,253	908
	Retention rate (%)	59	67	78	73	71	77

	National average (%)	73	74	74	75	77	78
	Pass rate (%)	74	70	63	72	73	68
	National average (%)	63	67	67	62	65	65
3	Starters excluding transfers	422	406	840	1,228	1,080	1,299
	Retention rate (%)	57	60	71	67	69	79
	National average (%)	75	75	74	76	78	77
	Pass rate (%)	62	67	48	61	65	58
	National average (%)	66	68	69	61	64	66
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	0	1	2	202	173	292
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	*	83	72	79
	National average (%)	78	77	*	83	84	83
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	*	40	34	36
	National average (%)	57	68	*	50	51	48

Note: summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is General FE and Tertiary colleges).

**numbers too low to provide a valid calculation*

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1999 to 2001: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1999 to 2001: College ISR.

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	67	29	4	52
Level 2 (intermediate)	58	31	11	36
Level 1 (foundation)	63	30	7	43
Other sessions	59	34	7	40
Totals	62	31	7	171

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