



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Stoke on Trent College

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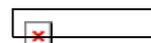
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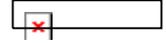
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Basic information about the college

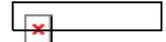


Name of college:	Stoke on Trent College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Graham Moore
Address of college:	Cauldon Campus Stoke Road Shelton Stoke on Trent ST4 2DG
Telephone number:	01782 208 208
Fax number:	01782 603 504
Chair of governors:	Kevin Farrell
Unique reference number:	130815
Name of reporting inspector:	John Gusterson
Dates of inspection:	14-25 October 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

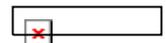


Stoke on Trent College is a large general further education (FE) college which serves the city of Stoke on Trent and much of north Staffordshire and south Cheshire. It was formed in 1990 from the federation of Stoke on Trent Technical College and Cauldon College of Further and Higher Education. The college operates from two main campuses, in Shelton and Burslem, 3 neighbourhood colleges and over 100 satellite centres across the city. Adult education provision is offered in partnership with the local education authority through 'College in the Community'. In a partnership with the local sixth form college, the college provides and jointly manages a sixth form centre for students aged 16 to 18 at its Burslem Campus. In May 2002, the college was approved as a centre of vocational excellence (COVE) in care. The college is the largest partner in the Staffordshire University Regional Federation, a consortium providing higher education (HE) and consisting of the university and 11 colleges in Staffordshire and Shropshire.

The college serves a predominately urban area. At 4.3%, unemployment in Stoke on Trent is above the national average of 3.4%. A significant decline in the city's traditional industries, particularly ceramics and manufacturing, has contributed to the high levels of unemployment. In 2001, the proportion of 16 year-old students from local schools achieving five A* to C grades for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was 35%, 15% below the national average. Minority ethnic communities form a small proportion, 2.7%, of north Staffordshire's population. The local education authority's multiple deprivation index for 2000 shows that 16 of the 20 wards in the city of Stoke on Trent are within the lowest quartile, placing the city in the bottom 10% of authorities in England. Over 28% of the city's population have a basic skills need in literacy and 31% in numeracy.

The college offers a broad range of courses that cover all 14 of the areas of learning funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 2000/01, the college enrolled 32,000 students of whom 12.2% were on full-time courses. Some 82% were aged 19 or over. The largest areas of provision, accounting for some 39% of enrolments, were information and communication technology (ICT), health and social care and foundation programmes. At the time of the inspection the college provided work-based learning modern apprenticeships for 590 learners; some 70% of these apprenticeships were in construction, engineering and health and social care.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged that the quality of teaching and learning were good in nine curriculum areas: engineering, technology and manufacturing; business, management and professional; ICT; retailing and customer service; hospitality, leisure and tourism; childcare, health and social care; humanities; and foundation studies (literacy and numeracy). The quality was satisfactory in the remaining five areas. None of the college's provision was considered unsatisfactory. Retention and pass rates at level 3 are below national averages.

Key strengths

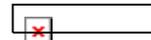
- good teaching
- good pass rates at level 1
- good support for students
- good governance
- effective leadership and management
- effective partnerships for widening participation
- sound contribution to the rise of education and training aspirations locally
- broad curriculum relevant to the needs of the community.

What should be improved

- retention and pass rates at level 3
- teaching and assessment of key skills
- unsuitable accommodation and specialist facilities in some areas
- use of information learning technology (ILT) in teaching and learning.

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

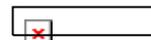


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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. Retention and pass rates in General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) foundation science and GCSE mathematics are high. Retention rates in General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) mathematics and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) science and pass rates in GCSE human physiology and health are low. Teaching is satisfactory. There is a good range of science courses and personal support for students is effective. There are inadequate arrangements to monitor the progress of part-time students.
Construction	Satisfactory. Practical teaching is effective but some theory lessons are dull and lack a suitable range of teaching methods. Retention and pass rates are improving on most craft courses but results on level 3 courses are low. Electrical installation and machine woodworking workshops are very good. Students receive good support from staff and the quality of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) portfolios and assessments for work-based learners is good.
Engineering	Good. Teaching of engineering is good. Most resources are good. Learners are enthusiastic and positive about their work and attainment. Pass rates on most courses are high. Work-based learning has improved significantly. There is insufficient monitoring of assessment and of training in the workplace. Work in key skills is poorly managed.
Business studies	Good. There is a wide range of flexibly organised provision, which meets the needs of individuals, employers and the wider community. Teaching and learning are good but more effective for adults than for students aged 16 to 18. Successful strategies have improved pass rates on some courses. Students enjoy their studies and receive good support from their teachers.
Information and communication technology	Good. Computing courses are well taught and full-time students value the good pastoral and academic support that they receive from their tutors. Retention and pass rates on most courses are high. Some of the accommodation is inadequate and there are insufficient ILT resources to support teaching. Many part-time courses are offered at centres in the community; participation had been widened effectively.
Retail and customer service	Good. Teaching on courses based in the college and in the workplace is good. Pass rates on full-time courses are high but there is a low level of achievement on some part-time courses. The standard of students' work on all courses is high. Part-time students in the

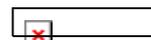
	workplace benefit from the effective teamwork between college staff and employers.
Hospitality, leisure and tourism	Good. Teaching is good. It is carefully planned and takes account of the individual learning requirements of students. Most pass rates are high, but some retention rates are low. Some accommodation is unsatisfactory. Teams are well led.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Teaching on most programmes is good and students have access to a wide range of programmes. Retention rates on some courses are low and pass rates for the full apprenticeship framework are also low. For some students, the monitoring of their progress and action planning is not effective. At entry level there is insufficient development of basic skills; some students are placed on inappropriate courses.
Health and social care	Good. Retention and pass rates on most courses are good. Practical teaching and group work are good, but the teaching of theory and of key skills is less effective. Students receive effective personal support from their teachers and progress reviews help them to improve the quality of their work. Partnerships with the local care industry are good and help to put local and national workforce strategies into operation.
Childcare	Good. Pass rates on many childcare courses are high and much of the teaching and learning is good. The retention rate on the diploma in childcare and education is below average and the achievement rate of the full modern apprenticeship framework is low. The curriculum area is managed effectively; there are strong and effective links with the community. Tutorial support is good, but insufficient demands are made on students in some lessons.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory. Standards of work in all subject areas are high but there is significant underachievement and some unsatisfactory retention rates in national diplomas in dance, drama and music. Progression to higher level courses and support for students are good. Contributions to community learning are effective.
Humanities	Good. Courses are well managed. Most teaching is very good or good. Pass rates on most courses are high. Retention rates are low for GCSE psychology. Students receive good support and guidance from staff. A wide range of courses is available and there are good opportunities for students to progress onto other courses or to HE.
Foundation studies (English for speakers of other languages)	Satisfactory. College-based courses are well managed and students receive effective support from teachers. Teaching is imaginative and effective, and retention and pass rates are high. The management and teaching of community-based courses are less effective and results are lower. In community venues, some accommodation is unsuitable and access can be difficult for people with mobility problems.
Foundation studies (Literacy and numeracy)	Good. Teaching and learning in most lessons are good. Initial assessment is effective and leads to suitably detailed individual learning plans which incorporate regular reviews. Literacy and numeracy courses are well managed and are designed to meet the individual needs of students. Teachers are well trained and provide a range of effective support services for students.

How well is the college led and managed?



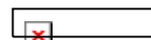
Leadership and management are good. Throughout the period of financial recovery the principal and governors have provided effective leadership. The 1997 deficit of £6.8 million has been repaid. During the same five-year period, student pass and retention rates have risen, recruitment has widened and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. Retention and pass rates for level 3 students remain below average. Curriculum management has improved and quality assurance arrangements have matured and are contributing to the raising of standards. Governors provide sound support and monitor progress effectively.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



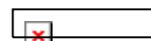
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The college is strongly committed to a policy of inclusiveness. An increasing number of students are recruited from areas of high deprivation and from groups that have traditionally not taken part in FE. A wide range of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been developed. The college is involved in a number of major partnerships with the sixth form college in Stoke, the local education authority, and with Newcastle under Lyme and Rodbaston colleges. These partnerships have resulted in many courses designed specifically to persuade students to remain in or return to education and training. The college has more than 100 centres in the community offering courses. Links with the local community are strong. Courses for asylum seekers, minority ethnic groups, young mothers and those needing help with basic education are well developed. Childcare places are widely available. Liaison with local employers is excellent. The college has established a growing network of learning centres based in company premises. The college supports underachievers through its key role as provider of Prince's Trust and millennium volunteers programmes in Staffordshire. It has prepared a thorough written policy to promote race equality and an action plan which identifies clear action points and time scales. It also monitors, by ethnic group, the admission and progress of students, and the recruitment and career progress of staff.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Pre-entry guidance and advice are good. Induction introduces students effectively to the college and their courses. The standard of most tutorial support is good. Students value this help. Arrangements for the assessment and the provision of additional support are good. Students benefit from a range of good student services including childcare, counselling, health and housing advice and financial support. Careers education and guidance are thorough and help students progress to appropriate HE and employment.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

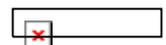
What students like about the college

- good teaching
- welcoming and friendly atmosphere
- approachable, helpful and friendly staff
- availability of good support services
- good range of books and easy access to computers
- good information about the college and its courses.

What they feel could be improved

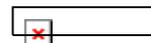
- car parking
- no shelters for smokers
- refectory too busy at times.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. 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



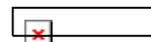
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	66	27	7
19+ and WBL*	70	25	5
Learning 16-18	64	26	10
19+ and WBL	73	24	3

Key: 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 offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses from entry level to level 3 in all curriculum areas. These provide students with the opportunity to improve their learning and basic skills, and to achieve vocational, academic and professional qualifications. There is a small amount of work-based learning.

2. The college sets challenging targets for improvements in retention and pass rates. They are pitched at or above the national averages for FE colleges. The overall college retention rates at levels 1 and 2 are at or below the national average for FE colleges. Retention rates at level 3 are below the national average. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult students at level 1 have steadily improved over the three years to 2002 and are above the national average. Similarly, pass rates at level 2 have improved and are in line with the national average. Pass rates on level 3 courses have shown much improvement for students aged 16 to 18, but are still low overall. Retention rates have been maintained in most areas where pass rates have improved. There is a wide variation in retention and pass rates in most curriculum areas. Pass rates tend to be higher on vocational programmes. Retention rates for key skills work have improved and are close to the national average, but pass rates for those taking the qualification are low. The proportion of students aged 16 to 18 progressing to employment and FE is good, but progression to level 3 courses is below average.

3. The college is developing a system to measure the value added to their achievement by students on college programmes. Analysis of students' achievements against their levels of prior attainment when they started on college courses indicates good levels of value added, particularly for students on entry and level 1 courses.

16-18 year olds

4. The staying-on rates for students aged 16 at school or in FE in the college's main catchment area are substantially below the national average. Many students enter the college with low levels of prior attainment. Initial assessment identifies students at risk of leaving the college early. They receive appropriate learning and tutorial support and encouragement which helps them to gain the qualifications that match their ability. With few exceptions, students comment favourably on their learning experience. Retention and pass rates for foundation and level 1 courses are good and many students progress from foundation to level 1. The college runs a very successful schools link programme in many curriculum areas. Pupils find these programmes stimulating and enjoyable, and the quality of their work is mostly good. About two thirds of these pupils progress to college courses when they leave school.

5. Most students aged 16 to 18 study on level 2 courses. They make appropriate progress in gaining knowledge and developing understanding. Standards achieved in lessons are good, particularly in practical lessons. Most students make satisfactory progress in developing their IT skills and some use these to good effect, for example in recording information for their course files and in the presentation of assignments. Retention rates are below national averages, and students' pass rates vary widely across the college. Over the past three years to 2002, pass rates have improved from a position below the national average to above the average in 2001. Pass rates for GCSE mathematics, NVQ level 2 bricklaying, City and Guilds electronics servicing and GNVQ intermediate IT have improved to above the national average over the three-year period.

6. Only 20% of students aged 16 to 18 are on level 3 courses. Many of these students study on courses leading to vocational advanced level, national certificate and diploma, and NVQ qualifications. On vocational courses, students reach good levels of competence in practical work, and develop an effective balance of appropriate practical skills and supporting theoretical knowledge. Most assignments and other written work from students are good. Students demonstrate good levels of understanding and make perceptive contributions to group discussion. Results vary significantly between curriculum areas. Pass rates on some courses are above the national average; particularly good results are achieved on courses in travel and tourism, engineering, business management and childcare.

7. Many full-time students undertake study on short courses that lead to additional qualifications which complement their main course. Pass rates for these additional qualifications are good.

8. Most work-based apprentices are aged 16 to 18. The overall retention rate of 70% is satisfactory. Pass rates are improving as a greater proportion of learners achieve the key skills element of the apprenticeship framework.

Adult learners

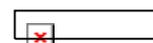
9. The greater proportion of college students are adults, but over the three years to 2002, enrolments at levels 2 and 3 have declined. At level 1, overall retention rates are in line with the national average for the sector. Pass rates have risen significantly and are 10% above national averages. The college recruits adult students from a wide range of educational and training backgrounds. In many instances, these students come from areas of high deprivation and from groups who traditionally have been under-represented in FE, and whose vocational and learning skills have not been well developed. In most areas of learning, students improve on their prior levels of attainment significantly and develop their personal and learning skills well. Some adults take courses that do not lead to accredited qualifications. Most are successful in improving their confidence and their basic skills. For those who are entered for external qualifications, the pass rates are high. However, the progress of some adult students on vocational programmes has been slow. Progress made by some students on provision based on employers' premises is slow when other activities are allowed to take priority over training and assessments.

10. The standards of practical and written work of adult students are satisfactory or good. In basic skills and access to HE, the standard of students' work is very high. The numbers on GCE Advanced

level (GCE A level) and GCSE courses are a very small proportion of the college's overall enrolment of adult learners. Pass rates are below the national average and performance is particularly poor in GCE AS mathematics, GCSE psychology and human physiology. Between 1999/2000 and 2000/01, the overall retention rate for short courses remained high at 95% and the pass rate in the same period was close to the national average at 80%.

11. Retention and pass rates at level 3 have been consistently low. However, pass rates are good for the national certificate in business and finance, for short courses in trade union studies, the course at NVQ level 3 in beauty therapy, advanced practice in working with babies and the access to HE course in humanities.

Quality of education and training



12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 254 lessons and tutorials. The standard of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection which was undertaken by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) in October 1999. Teaching was good or better in 68% of lessons, satisfactory in 26% and less than satisfactory in 6%. Teaching was particularly successful in retailing and customer service, and hospitality, leisure and tourism. A high proportion of lessons in humanities was very good. There were few lessons in which teaching was unsatisfactory and these were spread across most of the curriculum areas. The grades awarded for learning were similar to those for teaching. Overall, adults are taught better than students aged 16 to 18. On many courses, however, these two groups of students were taught together.

13. There is some variation in the quality of teaching depending on the level of course and the type of qualification. Teaching was most effective on level 1 programmes. On level 3 courses, teaching was marginally better than on level 2 courses. The highest proportion of lessons that were less than satisfactory were at level 2. The better teaching was on foundation GNVQ and level 3 vocational courses. Students are less well taught on intermediate GNVQ courses. Teaching and learning were of a higher standard where there was a mix of theory and practical activities. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was in theory lessons. Tutorials were particularly effective; 83% of sessions were graded good or better. Teaching by full-time staff was marginally better than by part-time staff. Many students at the college or those attending college courses at venues in the community are returning to learning after a long period away from education. At venues in the community, the teaching of adults and students where English is not their first language was less successful than on the college-based provision.

14. In most curriculum areas, teaching and learning are planned thoroughly; schemes of work are suitably detailed and lesson plans are well structured. Learning objectives are clear and, in most lessons, these are shared with students. In the lessons that are good or better, students' interest is sustained through a range of challenging learning activities which enable them to develop and make progress. Learning tasks are differentiated to meet the needs of the wide range of abilities within each group and to cater effectively for both the more able students and those with lower levels of prior achievement. Many teachers are adept at using questions effectively to check students' knowledge and understanding and to consolidate learning.

15. In lessons that are less than satisfactory, teachers too often fail to provide learning activities which stimulate students. Teaching is sometimes dull and relies too much on an inadequate range of teaching and learning activities. Class time is not always used effectively. Students spend too much time taking dictated notes and copying notes from overhead transparencies. In a few lessons, the pace is too slow and tasks are insufficiently demanding to engage the interest of all students. Group work is not always managed well. Students are often unclear about what they are required to do and their concentration wavers.

16. Much of the practical teaching is good or better. Teachers in most practical lessons give clear

introductions and instructions, make good use of short demonstrations to develop students' practical skills, and take effective account of individual learning needs. Lessons are well planned to develop students' occupational skills. Teachers set high standards in practical lessons and students are encouraged to adopt professional practices. Teachers draw on their industrial and commercial experience effectively to make lessons more interesting. Students are encouraged to use examples from their experience of work to enhance the learning of the whole group. In most curriculum areas, teachers link the teaching of theory to its practical application effectively. In most lessons there is appropriate emphasis on health and safety.

17. Work-based learning was observed in five of the curriculum areas inspected. Teaching was good or better in most of the sessions observed. Learners benefit from good work placements. Employers provide ample work situations to enable learners to develop their occupational skills and knowledge, and to help them to acquire all the competencies they need in order to obtain their NVQ. Work-based learners' progress is carefully monitored. Tutor assessors regularly visit learners in the workplace and provide effective guidance to enable them to complete their portfolios of work. Targets for improvement are set after discussion between the learner, the tutor assessor and the employer. However, the link between on-the-job and off-the-job training at college is not fully effective.

18. In the last year the college has improved its arrangements for the management and teaching of key skills. Key skills provision is managed by the faculty of learning skills and development, and is taught by specialist and vocational teachers in the curriculum areas. Communications between the key skills co-ordinators and faculty staff are good. There is extensive and effective staff development to support the development and teaching of key skills. The strategic plan clearly defines the college's commitment to extend the opportunity for all students to develop their key skills. Targets have been set for the number of full-time students and work-based learners studying key skills. However, there is variation in the quality and success rate in the teaching of key skills. Where key skills teaching is integrated with other parts of the students' main learning programme, it works well, but where this integration has not yet been achieved, the development of key skills is less successful. In lessons, teachers do not always make enough use of IT for teaching and learning.

19. The college has some good accommodation. Since the last inspection the college has effectively adapted and improved resources for the benefit of students and staff and to meet changes to the curriculum. These changes include redevelopment of the arts and media facility on the Burslem campus and improved learning resource centres. The main sites have been adapted to meet the needs of students with mobility difficulties and access is generally good. Access to many community venues is more difficult. Many students, especially women, find that there are insufficient parking facilities at college sites and at centres in the community.

20. Most classrooms are pleasant, well equipped and have good displays of students' work. However, some are too small for the group sizes, which restricts the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Most teachers use good learning and assessment material. In many areas, equipment is to industry standard. Learning resource facilities are extensive and well used. Students receive effective induction and use the centres well for working on their assignments and using IT. Some of the resource centres are very busy and sometimes noisy. Some are also used for teaching which often distracts students and teachers who are using the centres to work by themselves. Many curriculum areas have their own resource centre with specialist learning materials. Adequate numbers of small rooms are available for individual interviews, tutorials and additional support. Computer workshops are well resourced and have good specialist technical support. Refectories and a range of vending machines provide a very good meal and snack service. Refectories are well used although they can become crowded at peak times.

21. Most teaching staff are well qualified, competent and experienced in their subject. Most teachers either hold or are working towards a teaching qualification. New full-time and part-time staff receive effective induction and support from line managers. In some areas, for example foundation studies, there is good deployment of additional support staff, including volunteers. In vocational areas, teachers are well assisted by technician support.

22. Assessment is rigorous and fair. In most areas it is well planned, thorough and effective. In

construction, work-based learners are very good at gathering appropriate evidence for assessment, but assessors' feedback to construction students and work-based learners on assessment is unsatisfactory and does not help them improve their work. Most internal verification is well organised. In many areas, there are effective arrangements for sampling student portfolios and written assignments and observations of practical assessments. Most external verifiers' and moderators' reports are positive about verification. Where they identify issues over assessment, action is taken to resolve issues. In engineering, internal verification is unsatisfactory. Little observation of assessment occurs, checks on portfolios do not take place until the end of programmes, and sampling arrangements are insufficient.

23. Initial assessment is good in construction, engineering, manufacturing and technology, and humanities. Monitoring of the performance of most students is effective. However, it is unsatisfactory for community-based English courses for speakers of other languages. Written and oral feedback to students and work-based learners is mainly good. Part-time mathematics and science students are unclear about the progress they are making. In some media and performing arts lessons, there is insufficient feedback to students on the standard of their work. Most employers, and parents where appropriate, are kept regularly informed about students' and work-based learners' progress. Hairdressing employers are not kept informed on how work-based learners are progressing.

24. The college offers an extensive and diverse range of learning programmes. The curriculum extends from entry level to level 4. Programmes are carefully designed to ensure that there are good progression opportunities for full-time and part-time students. The curriculum is kept under regular review and modified to ensure that courses best meet the needs of learners. Flexible modes of study are available and students are able to negotiate their learning times according to their individual circumstances. Many of the NVQ programmes provide flexible arrangements for starting courses throughout the year.

25. Collaboration with the local education authority, community organisations, employers and other local providers of education and training is effective. The sixth form centre at the Burslem campus is run in partnership with the local sixth form college and offers a mix of academic and vocational provision to approximately 260 full-time students. The college is making a significant contribution to the social development and economic regeneration of Stoke on Trent. Learning centres have been established in about ten employers' premises to provide employers' training courses and ICT courses for employees and the community. The 'Saturday College' helps to raise awareness of the education and training opportunities available at the college and to encourage adults back into learning.

26. Learning programmes are socially inclusive. Initiatives to widen participation in education and training have resulted in the recruitment of students from groups who are not traditionally represented in HE. In 2001/02, community-based learning schemes have enrolled some 10,000 students on courses leading to qualifications, and 7,000 on recreational courses are offered in conjunction with the local education authority in about 100 venues. Many are run in areas of the city which have high levels of deprivation. A further significant development has been the establishment at venues across the city of 17 UK Online centres for IT training. Education and training were provided for nearly 700 asylum seekers in 2001/02. Another effective initiative is the project for Asian women which seeks to encourage them to participate in both academic and recreational courses. Home-school partnerships and family learning programmes for school pupils and their parents are helping to raise educational aspirations, and are contributing to improvements in the basic skills of adults across the city.

27. The college works effectively with local schools and the education authority on a number of projects for pre-16 pupils. More than 900 pupils are following courses leading to NVQs or other vocational qualifications and about 100 are studying GCSEs in vocational subjects. About 50 pupils who have been excluded from school are being educated at the college. In 2000/01, the Saturday 'Kids College' attracted nearly 300 young people who participated in a wide range of activities, many of which were vocationally related.

28. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities. Many are related to their main course of study. Since the last inspection, programmes have been introduced with a greater

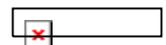
emphasis on personal, social and cultural education. A programme of extension activities for about 160 gifted and talented students is successfully raising their aspirations.

29. Effective and impartial pre-entry guidance directs most students on to an appropriate course. If the college is unable to offer a suitable course, the applicant is referred to another provider. Induction is effective in introducing students to the college and their courses. Most students find that induction helped them to settle into their course well and they particularly enjoyed the team-building activities. Careers guidance is good. Students proposing to move to HE are provided with a range of services which help them progress effectively. Students wanting to enter employment or to further their training are provided with guidance on modern apprenticeships and local and national employment opportunities. Staff provide effective advice on writing personal statements, making applications and attending interviews.

30. Tutorial support is good. Some 83% of tutorials observed by inspectors were good or better. The tutorial handbook is thorough and suitably detailed. Individual tutorials are particularly effective in the areas of business administration, management and professional, hospitality, leisure and tourism, and childcare. Tutors provide action plans and set targets aimed at improving student performance. Students appreciate the support they receive from tutors. The assessment for and provision of additional support requirements are effective. The pass rate of all students receiving additional support is similar to the college overall pass rate; full-time students exceeded the rate by 12%. Additional support for literacy and numeracy includes individual and group work and classroom support. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is significant and includes the contribution of signers, personal care and dyslexia support workers, and the provision of specialist equipment.

31. In 2000, the college was awarded the Charter Mark for student support services. Students particularly value the very good range of student services. There is a well-established counselling service and a health worker promotes student health and provides advice on health problems. Childcare facilities are good. However, these facilities are not used by students on community-based courses of English for speakers of other languages. Financial support for students is good. In addition to the access fund and educational maintenance allowances, the college provides a discretionary allowance for students ineligible for such financial support. The retention rates for students who have received support from the access fund and the discretionary allowance have improved between 2000/01 and 2001/02 by 15% for students aged 16 to 18 and by 7% for adult students. An accommodation advisory service is available for students with housing problems. A subsidised bus pass scheme is also available.

Leadership and management



32. The principal, governors and senior managers have provided good leadership throughout the college's five-year period of financial recovery. During this period, standards and achievement rose in many curriculum areas, retention rates improved, recruitment increased and the quality of teaching improved. The college's strategic plan clearly promotes life long learning and achievement for the whole community. Achievement has steadily improved from a low of 40% in 1997 to 75% in 2001. The retention rate has improved to above average levels for the sector for part-time students, but remains below average for full-time students. Retention and pass rates at level 3 remain below national averages.

33. Governors have a clear understanding of the college's strategic plan, set challenging targets and are purposeful and enthusiastic in their commitment to its successful accomplishment. The college's role in the raising of education and training standards in the city is central to their purpose, and their ambitions for the college have been a significant force in improving its performance. The governors monitor both students' performance and progress against agreed targets thoroughly. They review systematically quality assurance reports, surveys, and achievement data, and meet with managers

and teachers to discuss teaching and learning issues frankly. They also monitor issues involving equality of opportunity in the college.

34. Communications in the college are good. The values and objectives of the college are understood and promoted by staff at all levels. The senior management team comprises the heads of five faculties, the principal of the 'College in the Community', the four cross-college directors, the clerk to the corporation and the principal. The principal manages this group effectively. He meets them regularly each month, both as a team and individually, to discuss the curriculum and cross-college issues, and to review targets. The team is committed to the strategic plan and its meetings indicate a clear understanding of the college's intention to continue to improve. Since the last inspection there has been considerable improvement in operational planning within the faculties. Reviews of the role of programme area managers have led to the introduction of course team leaders and contributed to better team work at course level in most curriculum areas, better communication and more systematic analysis of achievement and recruitment data. Most significantly, effective teaching is seen as a priority. However, there is still some inconsistency in the effectiveness of curriculum management at course level.

35. Since the last inspection, the college has continued to improve quality assurance arrangements. Most course reviews lead to effective self-assessment and thorough analysis of data. Realistic targets are set and periodically reviewed by programme area managers. Each directorate and faculty prepares a self-assessment report, and also an operating plan, which set clear targets for improvement. Quality assurance procedures in each faculty are overseen effectively by the deputy head of faculty, whose main roles are to monitor progress against the faculty's targets and to manage strategies to improve teaching effectiveness and students' achievements. Self-assessments are combined into an overall report which is based on the common inspection framework. This report had identified most of the strengths and many of the weaknesses noted during the inspection.

36. The college's well-established teaching observation programme is a central element of its strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning. All full-time and part-time teachers and course tutors are observed annually by their managers or by members of the quality assurance directorate. All observations are graded. Observers are well trained in teaching observation and feedback is thorough and focused on improving teacher performance. While it is clear that standards of teaching have improved, the quality team's concern about over generous grading has resulted in the college reviewing its grading system and retraining observers. More rigorous grading is evident in the most recent observations. In September 2002, the college promoted 27 members of staff to posts as advanced skills teachers. While remaining classroom teachers themselves, their additional role is to demonstrate good practice and provide advice and training on teaching skills throughout the college.

37. Appraisal and staff development arrangements in the college are good. The principal is appraised by the chair of governors and he appraises the senior management team. Appraisals are conducted against agreed targets. All other staff are appraised by their managers and have individual action plans with targets. Teaching observation provides information for these appraisals and training opportunities are clearly linked to the college's objectives. There are clear policies for monitoring and inducting new teachers; they include early teaching observation. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1996 and was re-accredited in 1999 and 2002.

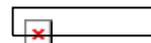
38. The college has developed a range of successful partnerships and collaborations. Many of these have gained Beacon Awards. The sixth form centre has recruited students from areas in the city where participation rates at 16+ have been particularly low. Partnership with Newcastle under Lyme College has led to effective rationalisation of art, design and performing arts provision, increased recruitment to this curriculum area and achieved reduction in costs. In partnership with the local education authority, the college is involved in managing the 'College in the Community'. The college provides link programmes for pupils from local 11-16 schools and has developed programmes in English and vocational skills for asylum seekers. Strong links have been developed with the Connexions service, Staffordshire University and the consortium of Stafford colleges. The university for industry has been established in five centres and a private sector partnership to develop customer care and retail training has been established. Collaboration with the care sector has led to the establishment of a centre of vocational excellence.

39. The college is committed to pursuing equality of opportunity. The equal opportunities committee reports directly to the governors. Two college directors are joint chairs and committee members come from all areas of the college. Recent initiatives include: the training of all members in running awareness training sessions for staff; the commissioning of performance and workshops on racism from a local theatre company; and a disability audit of the main buildings. The equality of opportunity policy has recently been revised, students and staff consulted and a disability statement developed. Leaflets on harassment, bullying and racism have been published. Data relating to examination results and retention rates are analysed by gender and racial origin. Plans to provide specific additional support for particular groups are underway.

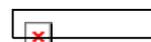
40. Management information systems have improved significantly since the last inspection. Information is accurate and readily available. Managers have access to a range of reports and data on recruitment and students' achievements. Use of information for planning purposes is increasing and some curriculum areas use the data systematically to monitor performance and assess value added.

41. Financial reporting to senior managers and governors is effective. Following repayment of the deficits, the college is expecting to secure a good level of financial health. The college is aware of the need to increase some class sizes in order to be more cost effective.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates in GNVQ foundation science and GCSE mathematics
- good teaching of physiology on GCSE and access to HE courses
- good range of science courses
- effective personal support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in GCE AS mathematics and AVCE science in 2002
- very low pass rates in GCSE human physiology and health
- some unsatisfactory teaching
- inadequate arrangements for monitoring the progress of part-time students.

Scope of provision

42. For both students aged 16 to 18 and adults, the college offers a good range of appropriate science and mathematics courses that includes: return to study; access to HE; GCSE; GCE AS/A level; and vocational courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Many of these courses are available, both full time and part time, in the evenings and during the day. Most students who attend the college on a part-time basis are adults. GCE AS/A levels are available in biology, chemistry, mathematics and physics. GCSE courses are available in biology, chemistry, human physiology and health, mathematics and physics. At the time of the inspection there were 340 students on GCE and GCSE courses, and 74 students studying on vocational courses in GNVQ science at foundation and intermediate level, and in AVCE science. The college also provides return to study courses in physiology and application of number. There were 202 students on these courses. Staff also teach on access to HE courses. The college offers work-based learning as a NVQ for laboratory technicians working in industry; eight students were following this programme at levels 2 and 3.

Achievement and standards

43. There is wide variation in retention and pass rates on science and mathematics courses. Retention and pass rates for GNVQ foundation science and the return to study physiology courses are good. The number of students on the physiology course is increasing and retention and pass rates have steadily improved. The number of students taking the GNVQ foundation science course in 2002 was small, but all passed. The number of students taking GCSE mathematics has declined over the three years to 2002. Both retention and pass rates have improved by 12% in that period and are now above the national average for the sector. Retention rates in GCE AS mathematics and AVCE science have declined and were very low in 2002, at 59% and 36% respectively. Pass rates in GCSE human physiology and health are significantly below the national average and declined to 14% in 2002. Retention rates on the one-year GCE A-level biology course are satisfactory, but pass rates have declined during the period 2000 to 2002 and are now below the national average. Retention and pass rates on NVQ programmes and access to HE courses are average. Mathematical skills developed in access and GCSE courses enable some students to progress onto higher level courses within the college or into HE. Students' attendance is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation science	1	No. of starts	9	17	16
		% retention	78	100	72

		% pass rate	100	88	100
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	441	298	273
		% retention	77	75	81
		% pass rate	28	34	41
GCSE human physiology and health	2	No. of starts	64	57	40
		% retention	64	70	73
		% pass rate	32	26	14
Return to study (physiology)	2	No. of starts	18	138	141
		% retention	67	81	90
		% pass rate	83	60	92
GCE A-level biology (one year)	3	No. of starts	11	29	16
		% retention	82	69	75
		% pass rate	78	65	58
AVCE science (GNVQ advanced science)	3	No. of starts	7	8	14
		% retention	71	63	36
		% pass rate	20	60	60

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

Quality of education and training

44. Teaching is generally satisfactory. Half of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better, and only a few were judged to be unsatisfactory. The quality of students' work and the level of attainment in most lessons are satisfactory. The more effective lessons are well planned and managed. Learning activities are suitably varied and the lessons progress briskly. Students focus on the tasks they are set and work purposefully; they take care over their written work. They work well on their own, make good progress and achieve high standards. In the more effective mathematics lessons, teachers explain the principles of mathematics. In one lesson, the teacher clearly explained the division rule for fractions and demonstrated effectively why it works. Students paid close attention and by the end of the lesson, they understood the rule in theory and practice. The good teaching of physiology on GCSE and access to HE courses involved imaginative and interesting work in groups; effective written resources enriched discussions. Teachers emphasised the importance of the relationship between structure and function in physiology, and in one lesson, very good use of IT resources illustrated key principles. In many lessons the teaching of basic scientific and mathematical principles is not satisfactory. In the less effective lessons, teachers used an inappropriate range of teaching methods and failed to check adequately that students were understanding the work. The pace of these lessons is often too slow and some teachers talk too much. The students do not learn enough.

45. All courses have schemes of work. Effective schemes include, for example, cross-referencing for key skills, the establishment of assignment schedules and well-prepared introductions to certain topics. However, the standard of schemes is not consistently high. Homework is set regularly and marked carefully. Corrections are made to students' work but often the written feedback fails to show students how they can improve. Teachers keep accurate records of students' performance and use them as a basis for progress reviews.

46. There is a satisfactory range of resources used to support learning. Most teachers are

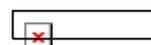
appropriately qualified and experienced, and there is regular, appropriate training to allow staff to update skills and develop their professional expertise. Most science laboratories are well equipped and effectively organised for learning. Other teaching accommodation is satisfactory and the library is adequately resourced. Access to IT resources is satisfactory, but the use of computers in lessons is inadequate, except to access the Internet. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. There are good progress reviews for a minority of students on full-time vocational science courses and satisfactory reviews for other full-time students. The arrangements to monitor the progress of part-time students are inadequate. Course teachers act as tutors for part-time students and are responsible for monitoring attendance and progress. However, there is no formal system to set targets and monitor progress. Some part-time students are unclear about their progress or what they have to do to improve.

47. Personal support for students is effective. All full-time students have a personal tutor whom they are able to see for one hour each week. Students aged 16 to 18 also have a well-designed tutorial programme for an additional hour each week, focused on the development of personal and learning skills. Guidance for careers and application to HE is good and the college offers financial support to assist with transport and childcare costs. Part-time students are able to obtain support from additional tutors who are available in the evenings and during the day. Support for additional learning needs is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

48. The leadership and management of science and mathematics are satisfactory. There are regular team meetings to discuss relevant issues, but the minutes sometimes lack the detail that would confirm whether or not planned actions had been carried through successfully. There has been some success in addressing retention and achievement issues in GCSE mathematics, but curriculum managers have been unable to arrest declining pass rates in GCSE human physiology and health. Quality assurance systems are appropriate. The arrangements for self-assessment and monitoring of development plans are satisfactory. The self-assessment report for science and mathematics lacked enough detail, but the judgements made were generally appropriate.

Construction



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

Strengths

- good retention rates on most level 2 courses
- good recording of evidence by students on NVQ programmes
- good personal support for students
- very good workshop facilities for electrical installation and machine woodworking.

Weaknesses

- some dull teaching of theory
- low retention and pass rates on level 3 technician courses
- insufficient links between practical and theory teaching.

Scope of provision

49. The college provides a wide range of construction courses which meets the needs of industry and students. Courses include craft and technician programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in all trades. Specialist provision includes gas services and wood machining. Students can attend courses on a full-time, day release, block release and evening basis. Flexible arrangements for study are available in electrical installation. At the time of the inspection there were some 2,500 enrolments on construction courses, including 126 work-based learners on modern apprenticeships. The pathways to new horizons course provides entry level qualifications for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and there is a range of Open College Network (OCN) courses which recruit non-traditional learners into construction.

Achievement and standards

50. Retention and pass rates on most construction craft courses have improved over the three years to 2002. For example, retention rates for NVQ level 2 plumbing have improved from 39% in 1999/2000 to 71% in 2001/02, and pass rates from 57% to 68% over the same period. However, pass rates for some courses are still below national averages for the sector and a significant number of students do not achieve their qualification by the expected end date. Retention and pass rates on level 3 construction technician courses are low or very low, and on GNVQ/AVCE full-time courses, pass rates are declining. Before 2001, only about a third of the modern apprentices completed the full framework successfully. Since then, key skills qualifications have been achieved by apprentices and pass rates are improving.

51. Most students' work is of a good standard. Most projects and portfolios are comprehensive and well presented. Many are word processed and contain good industry standard drawings and accurate calculations. Craft students also acquire good practical skills. Students' practical work is clean, accurate and to industrial standards. Progression rates into employment for craft students are high. The college makes effective arrangements with employers to ensure that students can continue with their studies and complete their qualification.

A sample of retention and pass rates in construction, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ decorative occupations	1	No. of starts	18	20	36
		% retention	78	60	75

		% pass rate	100	33	69
NVQ bricklaying	2	No. of starts	49	24	38
		% retention	39	67	61
		% pass rate	100	88	87
NVQ plumbing	2	No. of starts	29	42	48
		% retention	34	81	71
		% pass rate	57	83	68
NVQ woodmachining	2	No. of starts	20	32	24
		% retention	55	78	83
		% pass rate	100	96	80
City and Guilds electrical installation part 2	2	No. of starts	109	116	58
		% retention	96	91	93
		% pass rate	33	45	47
National certificate building/building services	3	No. of starts	35	28	19
		% retention	43	79	53
		% pass rate	87	60	70
GNVQ advanced construction and the built environment	3	No. of starts	7	22	*
		% retention	43	77	*
		% pass rate	67	57	*
AVCE in construction	3	No. of starts	*	*	16
		% retention	*	*	44
		% pass rate	*	*	14

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

*course not offered (AVCE replaced the GNVQ programme)

Quality of education and training

52. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. In just over half of the lessons observed, teaching was good or better. Practical teaching is generally good across construction crafts and most students take pride in their work. In most practical lessons observed, teaching was good or better. In a practical lesson on gas fitting, the teacher clearly explained the objectives of the lesson and students understood what tasks were to be completed and the standard of work to be achieved. The teacher visited students regularly to check on their progress. At the end of the lesson students assessed each other's work with their teacher. Students learn well from discussion and the interaction with the teacher and other students. However, the theoretical and practical elements of courses are often insufficiently planned and integrated, and some students are not able to relate an activity that they are working on to an industrial application. For example, in carpentry and joinery, students were unable to say how the model roofs they were constructing related to a building structure. In plumbing they could not explain where pipe models fitted into a complete system. The teaching of theory is often dull and repetitive. Teachers often talk too much and there are too few appropriate activities for students. Students become bored and inattentive. Teachers often fail to make effective use of visual

aids, such as models and samples, to help students to learn. The quality of many overhead slides is poor and there is little use of ICT in teaching and learning. In most lessons, and particularly in practical lessons, teachers check students' understanding of the work by careful questioning. Teaching of IT skills on construction technician courses is good and in craft areas the introduction of learning resource centres for each trade has improved the application of IT. Many students use IT in assignment and portfolio work.

53. Students' progress is closely monitored and recorded. Appropriately detailed records are maintained in students' workbooks and in teachers' files. Students are aware how far they have progressed at any time and can readily identify what they need to do to improve their work. Assessment of students' work across the construction area is good. Work is returned promptly with appropriate feedback from tutors, although sometimes it does not help students to improve their performance. Each term all students receive detailed reports on their progress; copies are sent to employers of part-time students.

54. Students are well supported by staff and they value the help they receive. Most students have an initial diagnostic assessment which clearly identifies additional support needs. There is good liaison between additional support staff and course tutors but the monitoring of some learning support is ineffective. Students identified with dyslexia and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support that enables them to complete their courses successfully. Effective tutorials are well established on full-time courses but this good practice does not extend across all part-time courses where the quality of tutorial provision is uneven. As part of their programme, full-time students undertake enrichment activities including driving skills, welding and golf, which are available from a wide menu of options.

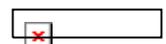
55. Workshops in construction vary in their quality. The electrical installation and wood machining workshops are very good and are used effectively to develop students' learning. Other workshops are good, but the plumbing workshop is too small for the numbers of students. The workshops have good health and safety procedures, good technician support and are well equipped. They are kept clean and tidy apart from the construction project area where storage and housekeeping are poor. Construction technician students are well supplied with surveying equipment, and computer-aided design facilities, and have access to the on-line construction and property information centre (CAPIC).

56. In 2002, the construction area has several new teachers, few of whom have teaching qualifications. Staff development opportunities are addressing this issue. Tutor assessors in each trade area carry out reviews and workplace assessment, and support work-based learners. Since 2000/01, the provision of work-based learning and the teaching of key skills have improved, retention and pass rates have also improved.

Leadership and management

57. Course management in construction is effective in most areas. Suitably detailed and well-planned schemes of work are established in each area. Paper-based learning resources are good and help students to learn. All learners receive useful course handbooks. All course tutors are aware of targets set for retention and achievement; these are reviewed regularly by line managers. Course teams experience some difficulty in obtaining reliable information to monitor performance. Quality assurance procedures including internal verification are well managed.

Engineering



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- much good teaching
- good retention and pass rates on most courses
- significant progress on work-based learning
- good quality resources in heavy motor vehicle workshops
- good assessment practice
- wide range of programmes to meet employer and community needs
- thorough initial assessment.

Weaknesses

- poor resources in light vehicle workshops
- poor management of work on key skills
- some weaknesses in quality assurance arrangements.

Scope of provision

58. The faculty of engineering and construction is based at the college's Burslem campus. A broad range of engineering courses is available which offer clear progression routes from level 1 to 4 in fabrication and welding technology, mechanical and manufacturing engineering, telecommunications, electrical and electronic engineering, motor vehicle engineering, computer-

aided engineering, quality assurance and ceramic technology. At the time of inspection, there were 857 students enrolled on these courses, of whom 213 attended full time and 644 part time. About half were aged 19 and over. The college had 117 students on NVQ, foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering. These students were working towards qualifications in mechanical and production engineering, tool setting, welding and electronic engineering. The faculty is also involved in the delivery for leading manufacturers of substantial national contracts for heavy goods vehicle technology and telecommunications.

Achievement and standards

59. Retention and pass rates for most courses in engineering are good; some are significantly above national averages. In 2002, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 were 79% and for adults 90%. Most pass rates have steadily improved over the four years to 2002. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 in 2002 were 90% and for adults 89%. Pass rates for NVQ in work-based learning are satisfactory and students make good progress through the framework. For example, the pass rate for NVQ level 2 for work-based learners completing in 2001/02 was 67 %, a significant improvement on previous performance.

60. Many students, including part-time adults, progress from level 2 to level 3 courses or to employment. In motor vehicle and fabrication, students attain a high level of practical skills and can demonstrate highly technical engineering techniques. During lessons, students showed good application of skills and awareness of engineering principles. Those on the national certificate in engineering course were able to demonstrate good analytical skills, and effectively applied these to problem solving. The portfolios prepared by the students show a good understanding of the NVQ requirements and the need for well-organised evidence. Students make good progress and produce work to a high standard. They have a firm grip of health and safety practices and apply them effectively.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation engineering	1	No. of starts	12	9	9
		% retention	100	75	71
		% pass rate	67	67	100
City and Guilds motor vehicle maintenance	1	No. of starts	47	68	20
		% retention	45	69	95
		% pass rate	44	35	84
NVQ performing manufacturing operations	1	No. of starts	158	81	157
		% retention	94	98	94
		% pass rate	45	77	93
City and Guilds 2301-03 computer-aided engineering	2	No. of starts	13	12	11
		% retention	92	100	91
		% pass rate	100	100	70
City and Guilds 2240 electronics servicing part 2	2	No. of starts	32	28	18
		% retention	88	68	69
		% pass rate	50	63	78
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	18	28	27

engineering		% retention	78	75	46
		% pass rate	57	81	58
NVQ vehicle mechanical and electrical systems	2	No. of starts	39	21	21
		% retention	56	52	57
		% pass rate	35	82	75
National certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	74	74	69
		% retention	89	68	78
		% pass rate	77	84	87

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

Quality of education and training

61. The quality of teaching is good. In over 60% of the lessons observed, teaching was good or better. In the most effective lessons, teachers provide challenging targets and inspire their students. They address all the students' needs effectively in lessons and make good use of available aids to enliven their teaching. Students are well supported, highly motivated and respond well in both practical and theory lessons.

62. In practical workshop lessons, students are given good advice and guidance before operating machinery. Practical training is well planned and students receive effective individual support from well-qualified and enthusiastic teachers. A wide range of teaching methods is used, including demonstrations, individual instruction, group work and assistance with portfolio building. In practical lessons, students carry out an assessment of their own work. The conclusions reached form the basis of a discussion with the teacher on progress made, the standard of work attained, improvements required and adjustments that may need to be made to targets.

63. In theory lessons, teachers make good use of the students' practical work to explain the theoretical aspects of the subject. They also use effective examples from their own experience to strengthen the links between theory and practice. Students appreciate this approach which helps them to understand some of the more difficult principles of engineering. In one lesson the teacher demonstrated the use of a dead-weight tester to support the theory of force. Students used the apparatus to determine experimental values and then constructed graphs. This technique was effective in demonstrating the links between practical application and theory.

64. Students and employers are not fully aware of the significance of developing key skills and gaining the qualifications. Many lack knowledge about key skills objectives and how work-based evidence can be integrated and used to build an evidence base. Key skills teaching in communications is linked to engineering topics. Analysis of students' attainment in many aspects of communication is effective and is used for planning the students' programme. In a key skills communication lesson, the teacher used bar charts to analyse students' performance in writing and mathematics. This approach was effective and showed students the criteria that needed to be met. The analysis was used as a basis for group discussion and individual target setting.

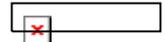
65. Most of the equipment used for practical engineering training is good. Students are made welcome at the resource centre which has modern computer engineering systems, a well-stocked library, and a good range of technical publications. However, there are poor resources in the light vehicle workshop. Vehicles are old and outdated, and equipment is poorly maintained. The range of equipment fails to match the size of most groups which limits the development of students' skills.

66. Teachers are well qualified and have suitable industrial experience. Most teachers regularly receive technical updates and join industrial liaison visits to various engineering organisations.

Leadership and management

67. Managers' roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood, which leads to good overall co-ordination of engineering provision. Managers review the range of courses to ensure that they meet the needs of the local community. Self-assessment reports are thorough and assess the quality of teaching and learning rigorously. Realistic and demanding targets are set to improve retention and pass rates. Some successful initiatives to improve courses were introduced in 2001. These are beginning to take effect and pass rates are improving. Systems for monitoring students' performance and for setting realistic individual targets for improvement are good. Data and curriculum management are satisfactory. New staff are effectively supported during their first six months. They regularly attend lessons to observe more experienced teachers. In work-based learning there are some weaknesses in quality assurance arrangements. Internal verification is poorly completed. There is little direct observation of assessment practice. Insufficient feedback is given or recorded by the internal verifiers. There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of training in the workplace. Promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory; some staff emphasise key aspects during tutorials and work-based reviews to learners and employers respectively.

Business studies



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

Strengths

- successful policies to improve pass rates on NVQ levels 2 and 3 accounting
- high pass rates on certificate of management courses
- good teaching
- a broad range of flexibly organised provision
- good support for students aged 16 to 18.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on GNVQ business courses
- low retention rates on the national certificate in business and finance

- some poor learning resources.

Scope of provision

68. The college provides a broad range of business, administration, management and professional courses from pre-entry level through to level 4 and post-graduate studies. At the time of the inspection there were some 4,500 students, approximately 90% of whom were adults on part-time programmes. Provision includes: AVCE, GNVQ intermediate and pre-foundation, GCE A level and national certificate in business; NVQ levels 2 and 3 administration, and LCCI certificate in administration; NVQ accounting (Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)) at levels 2, 3 and 4; Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX); and National Examination Board Supervisory Management (NEBSM) certificate, diploma and post-graduate diploma. In addition, there is a wide range of professional financial, accounting, medical secretarial and other management courses, as well as trade union studies. Arrangements for the teaching of courses and programmes are very flexible. One student, for example, attends an evening drop-in class for accounting. She is working through an on-line AAT accounting course and can take the examination on-line whenever she feels ready. She often visits the college's learning resource centre on a Saturday morning to continue with her studies.

69. Courses are also run in the workplace, meeting the needs of employers, individuals and the wider community. One project targets workers in the local pottery industry, involving Ceramic and Allied Trade Union (CATU), the potters' union, and the college's trade union studies team. The project involves offering basic skills and IT support at the college and is promoted by 'learning representatives' in the workplace.

Achievement and standards

70. Strategies to improve pass rates in accounting have been successful. Pass rates on NVQ accounting courses at levels 2 and 3 were well below the national averages, but improved significantly in 2001/02 to above the average. The pass rate on the national certificate in business also improved from 70% in 2000/01 to 80% in 2001/02, reaching the national average. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate dropped significantly in 2000/01, having been high in the previous two years, but improved in 2001/02 to close to the national average. GNVQ advanced business pass rates have been low and below the national average for several years. A mentoring system operates on this course to try to improve pass and retention rates. Pass rates on GCE A level in business, management and office studies and NVQ administration courses are at or near to national averages. The number of students taking administration and word processing courses has fallen significantly in recent years as many learners transfer to ICT courses, such as integrated business technology (IBT) at level 2. Pass rates on the management certificate have been consistently above national averages.

71. Most students' written work is well organised and professionally presented. Many use IT to produce projects and assignments. Adult learners on part-time courses are articulate, confident and enthusiastic. They use an appropriate range of business terminology in relation to their own experiences. AVCE and GNVQ students demonstrate good research skills and make effective use of the Internet. Most portfolios in NVQ administration, AAT and ILEX demonstrate that students acquire appropriate knowledge and practical experience. Progression for students aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses is good. Of 20 students on the AVCE business programme in 2001/02, 10 went on to related employment, while the others progressed to FE or HE. Of the 34 students on a full-time Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR) medical course, all were successful and 25 progressed to related employment, while six went on to FE. Many students improve their career options as a result of part-time study at the college.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business studies, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Word processing part 2 (one year)	1	No. of starts	189	84	*
		% retention	90	85	*
		% pass rate	83	70	*
NVQ accounting (one year)	2	No. of starts	88	70	65
		% retention	67	68	70
		% pass rate	50	51	80
Trade union representatives intermediate (short)	2	No. of starts	74	93	46
		% retention	99	97	100
		% pass rate	95	92	93
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	20	33	41
		% retention	80	72	73
		% pass rate	94	48	68
Management certificate (one year)	3	No. of starts	72	60	90
		% retention	88	83	84
		% pass rate	87	86	86
GNVQ advanced business	3	No. of starts	27	30	33
		% retention	67	66	67
		% pass rate	38	59	57
NVQ accounting (one year)	3	No. of starts	73	76	60
		% retention	77	79	81
		% pass rate	45	43	61
National certificate in business and finance	3	No. of starts	17	18	10
		% retention	29	56	56
		% pass rate	75	70	80

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

*data not available

Quality of education and training

72. The standard of teaching is good. In most of the lessons observed, teaching was good, very good or outstanding. Teaching is well planned. Schemes of work and lesson plans are good. Teachers use an extensive and effective range of methods to help students to learn. They adapt their approach to meet the needs of different student groups. Many adults praise the way teachers support them and approve of the variety of study options. Most lessons have clear aims that are fully explained to students at the start of each lesson. The most effective lessons are stimulating and resources are well used. In one lesson, students were demonstrating good analytical and evaluative skills when reviewing the mission statements of organisations they worked for. In another, students were thoughtfully examining the rigour of the supplier selection criteria used in their organisations.

Teachers have good commercial experience which they draw upon to enrich students' learning. They know their subjects well, and many use topical or local issues to stimulate interest. In one GNVQ lesson, the teacher used the local pottery industry to illustrate production processes and students were able to contribute through their own experiences. In some theory lessons, however, students lost concentration as the teacher spent too long talking and using the whiteboard or overhead projector, while students were expected to take extensive notes for lengthy periods.

73. Some teaching activities, such as group or pair work, are difficult to undertake effectively because students are often in classrooms that are too small for the size of groups. Such cramped circumstances often lead to ineffective learning. Many computer rooms do not provide good learning opportunities. Whiteboards are poorly positioned in some rooms. There are no screen filters or document holders and there is not enough space in which to work. Students on trade union studies courses have access to good computer facilities. They also use good professionally produced paper-based learning resources. Some learning resources are unsatisfactory. For example, handouts used by teachers on some administration courses were poorly reproduced.

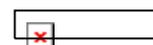
74. Assignments meet the course requirements and enable students to use vocational knowledge and skills. Homework is set regularly and marked promptly. Constructive feedback helps students to improve their performance. However, where work is satisfactory or good, learners are not always provided with guidance on how they might achieve a higher grade. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their tutors. Progress is reviewed through regular tutorials for students aged 16 to 18. Tutorial arrangements are less systematic for the adults on part-time courses, but still effective.

75. Courses are effectively designed to meet the needs of different employment markets. The range of courses is regularly reviewed and additional courses provided where needs are identified. Courses are offered as fast-track, one year, two year or as short programmes. Students without appropriate entry level qualifications are encouraged to pursue other options until they meet the requirements. This approach is often successful. One part-time student, for example, had an administrative job in a dispatch company, completed an AAT course on a part-time basis over three years, and then completed the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) qualification over a further two years, and is now an accountant in the same firm. Another student, having been made redundant, successfully completed a medical reception course and gained a job in a local hospital. The business teams work in partnership with many local employers to raise the profile of business education, particularly at level 3.

Leadership and management

76. The head of faculty sets a clear direction and there is a shared commitment amongst the teams to improve practice. Course teams work together on schemes of work and, in some cases, lesson plans. There is a strong and effective team approach to course management, but teams across the faculty have insufficient opportunities to work together, given the scope of the provision. There is inadequate sharing of good practice within accounting and some administration courses. Quality assurance arrangements including internal verification are good.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on most courses

- good teaching
- very good widening of participation
- good tutorial support for full-time students.

Weaknesses

- some poor accommodation
- insufficient ILT resources to support teaching.

Scope of provision

77. The college offers a comprehensive range of computing and ICT courses through five different programme areas. Flexible programmes of study provide training and retraining that lead to recognised qualifications at several levels. Routes for progression are good. Provision includes: a full-time OCN intermediate diploma in IT; part-time courses devised in the college in programming, hardware and web technologies and validated through the OCN; GNVQ courses at foundation and intermediate levels; and an AVCE in ICT. A new full-time foundation level GNVQ course for ICT in business and a pre-entry level course 'skills for working life' with IT were introduced in 2002. Part-time students are offered the BTEC national certificate course in computing. At the time of the inspection, the college in the community IT and applications programme area provided computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), IBT, European computer driving license (ECDL) and OCN introductory IT applications courses to over 3,400 mainly adult, part-time students in over 100 centres throughout the city. A HND and HNC in computing and a bachelor of science foundation year are available, as well as a 'using computers' course at level 2, as part of the provision for business and trade union studies. Many students enrolling on computer courses have already successfully completed a course at the college but, increasingly, these courses attract students from groups which have been traditionally under-represented in FE.

Achievement and standards

78. Pass rates on most courses are above the national average for the sector. There are particularly high pass rates on the GNVQ IT courses at both foundation and intermediate levels, the City and Guilds 7261 ICT courses and CLAIT courses. The one-year IBT course at stage II, however, is an exception; the pass rate fell well below the national average in 2000/01. Retention rates on most courses are also better than the national average except for the City and Guilds 7261 diploma in computer applications course, where retention rates have been below the national average for several years. The foundation and intermediate levels of the GNVQ IT courses are notable for their success in retaining students. A particular success is the OCN 'computing for the totally bewildered', which has maintained a retention rate of 95% or higher, with an annual student intake of over 1,500 for the four years to 2002.

79. Teachers have high expectations of their students who are highly motivated and supportive of each other, and produce work of a good standard. Part-time students in the community centres develop skills in the use of wordprocessors, spreadsheets, databases, electronic mail and the Internet. Full-time students develop good technical and practical skills in computing. All students contribute readily to classroom activities. They are able to use the college computer system with confidence and produce well-organised and attractive portfolios of work. In all lessons, good co-operation among students helped teachers to extend the knowledge of the whole group at a rate above normal expectations. Attendance is good. During the inspection, very few students were late and attendance was 81%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communication technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT (short)	1	No. of starts	553	469	272
		% retention	88	91	90
		% pass rate	50	82	77
OCN computing for the totally bewildered	1	No. of starts	1,522	1,867	1,791
		% retention	98	99	96
		% pass rate	69	74	71
GNVQ foundation ICT	1	No. of starts	19	41	45
		% retention	63	73	82
		% pass rate	83	72	86
GNVQ intermediate ICT	2	No. of starts	68	51	75
		% retention	78	67	92
		% pass rate	55	74	78
IBT II	2	No. of starts	326	436	280
		% retention	88	89	86
		% pass rate	67	57	51
ECDL (short)	2	No. of starts	*	14	78
		% retention	*	100	97
		% pass rate	*	80	72
GNVQ advanced ICT	3	No. of starts	49	31	65
		% retention	83	70	75
		% pass rate	83	83	85

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

*course not offered

Quality of education and training

80. The standard of teaching is good. In most of the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was

good, very good or outstanding. The morale and motivation amongst both staff and students are high. Learning is planned thoroughly, schemes of work are suitably detailed and lesson plans are well structured. The sequence of each lesson is logical, leading step by step to an increase in knowledge and in awareness of processes. Most lessons are in two parts. During the introductory part there was some very good teaching, and then for a longer period, students were encouraged to practice new skills on a computer. The rapid progression from words to actions suited the students very well and they completed their tasks with enjoyment and increasing skill. Students are given a variety of different tasks in lessons and they undertake them with enthusiasm. The activities have been carefully selected for level of difficulty and are attractively presented in worksheets. Attainment was satisfactory or better in all observed lessons. Key skills are taught in separate lessons although some integration with main programmes is underway.

81. Tutorials are thorough and focus on any need students may have for additional support. Full-time students have two tutorial sessions every week. One is devoted to class activities and has a comprehensive scheme of work covering such areas as equal opportunities, health and safety issues and progression opportunities. The other is concerned with the monitoring of key skills development, discussion of personal issues on an individual basis and target setting. Exercises and assignment work undertaken by students are marked promptly and returned with constructive comments. Although students' progress is carefully monitored, there is a lack of coherence in the methods used to track their development. A centralised student tracking system is not yet available on the college's management information system. Part-time students are notified where and when a personal tutor is available, but the students rarely use this facility.

82. Teachers of computing courses are well qualified and highly motivated. They have an excellent understanding of their subject. They answer questions quickly and effectively, and develop good working relationships with their students. Many students receive good individual support in lessons which helps them to understand new or difficult concepts. Tutors show a high level of awareness when allocating their time in the classroom. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and learning support needs are well supported both in and out of the classroom.

83. The computing resources for students' use are good and well prepared and maintained by technical staff. Considerable care has been taken in designing, writing and producing training materials. In general ICT courses, students do not take good notes and tend to be over-reliant on tutor support in the practical rooms. However, there are insufficient data projectors for teaching and the availability of laptop computers for staff wanting to develop course material is poor. The situation is worse in the centres at community venues where little thought has been given to the requirements of the tutors. Adequate and suitable software is available for all the courses. The library resources are good; there are multiple copies of key textbooks and a good range of reference books. An underdeveloped intranet lacks up-to-date information on computing courses and materials for students' use. Some computer laboratories are too small, too cramped and sometimes too hot, and there is insufficient space between computers to place textbooks or worksheets. Whiteboards and screens are frequently badly positioned. Many rooms have insufficient blinds. These factors can have a detrimental effect on learning.

84. The 'college in the community' offers courses in over 100 community centres. Adult students speak highly of the ease with which they can attend computing courses within their locality. Generally, computing resources are adequate and in some cases outstanding for this purpose. For example, BBC Radio Stoke, in collaboration with the college, offers completely free access to OCR CLAIT units in a purpose-built and well-appointed computer laboratory. Occasionally there are access problems for students with mobility difficulties.

Leadership and management

85. Course provision is covered by five different sections of the college. Sharing of good practice is made difficult by the lack of joint meetings of computing staff from the different faculties offering courses in ICT. Staff development is linked to an effective appraisal system. Both full-time and part-time staff are encouraged to develop occupational and personal aspirations by gaining further qualifications. Standardised documentation helps to clarify and unify the tasks undertaken by the staff. There is a high commitment to quality assurance activities. Sound internal verification

processes are frequently praised by external verifiers.

Retail and customer service

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

Strengths

- good teaching
- effective links with employers
- good well-organised portfolios
- high pass rates on full-time courses
- regular and supportive visits to students in the workplace
- very good use of the management expertise of staff.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on NVQ level 2 retail operations in 2001
- declining pass rates on customer service courses
- slow progress by some NVQ level 2 students
- poor guidance for some students.

Scope of provision

86. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time qualifications in retail distribution and customer service from entry level to level 3. All part-time courses are taught in the workplace. Entry level qualifications are often used as an initial qualification to encourage adult students onto NVQ level 2 courses in either retailing or customer service. The part-time courses on offer lead to qualifications in retailing and customer service and NVQ at entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3. Most students are working towards customer service qualifications and there are considerably fewer students on part-time retail programmes. The college offers part-time NVQ level 3 courses in retail operations and customer service. There were very few students on these programmes at the time of the inspection. Courses are delivered as distance learning packages in which students gain knowledge using a suitably detailed workbook and assessment. Part-time students are mainly adults and employed by a variety of retailers and service companies over a wide area, including regions outside the normal catchment area of the college. Most students were employees of large national companies until 2001, since when efforts have also been made to recruit students from small and medium-sized companies. The college also provides an NVQ level 1 course in distributive operations at a local authority training centre which specialises in vocational training for adults with learning disabilities. An employee of the training centre is contracted by the college to run this course at the training centre.

87. There are two retail programmes for full-time students at the college. A NVQ level 1 programme in distributive operations is primarily taught to students with learning difficulties. In 2001 a single award retail AVCE was launched.

Achievement and standards

88. There are high pass rates on full-time courses and on the NVQ level 1 in distributive operations and the AVCE single award. Both these courses achieved pass rates above the national average for the sector in 2002. Achievement on part-time programmes is more variable. In 2001, pass rates on NVQ level 2 retail operations fell by 24% from the previous year and were 26% below the national average. In 2001, pass rates on the entry level programme in customer service were 15% below the national average. Although pass rates in NVQ level 2 customer service are still above national averages, they have fallen significantly over the two years to 2002. Many students make slow progress to complete NVQ level 2 retail operations and customer service qualifications. Some portfolios remain unfinished after their programme has ended.

89. The standard of students' work is good. They make good use of evidence from their employment to achieve industry standards.

A sample of retention and pass rates in retail and customer service, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Introduction to customer service	E	No. of starts	1,020	1,344	1,794
		% retention	79	85	*
		% pass rate	90	73	*
Introduction to retail operations	E	No. of starts	48	396	203
		% retention	83	93	87
		% pass rate	23	80	*
NVQ distributive operations	1	No. of starts	12	18	14
		% retention	82	76	79
		% pass rate	89	100	100
NVQ customer service	2	No. of starts	502	654	970

		% retention	67	87	76
		% pass rate	82	70	*
NVQ retail operations	2	No. of starts	69	119	97
		% retention	99	92	71
		% pass rate	64	40	*
AVCE retail single award	3	No. of starts	**	**	13
		% retention	**	**	77
		% pass rate	**	**	90

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

*data not available

** course not available

Quality of education and training

90. Teaching on both part-time and full-time courses is good. In almost all of the lessons observed, teaching was graded as good or better. No lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. Teachers have considerable relevant vocational experience at supervisory and managerial level, and are able to present stimulating lessons that engage and hold the interest of students. Teachers draw on their commercial experience and give up-to-date examples of good retail and customer service practice. Students enjoy the lessons and find them interesting and relevant to their studies. Visits to shops, distribution depots and events such as the London Fashion Show are used to increase students' awareness of the retail industry and to add interest and variety to the courses.

91. Assignments are used particularly effectively. One assignment given on visual merchandising required students to evaluate merchandising techniques of local retailers from more than just the visual perspective. They were required to investigate the sales potential and cost implications of different merchandising strategies. These assignments give students good preparation for employment in retail management. Key skills are effectively integrated into these assignments and students appreciate the vocational importance of key skills. A variety of assessment methods is used, including peer appraisal, and this approach creates extra opportunities for developing key skills. Assignments are marked promptly and thoroughly. Teachers provide constructive comments to help students improve their performance and, where appropriate, make greater use of evidence from the workplace.

92. Part-time students are visited frequently in their workplace by their trainers and assessors. In addition to vocational guidance, staff offer support and guidance on personal issues. Employers are encouraged to take a positive interest in the progress of their employees on part-time courses. Trainers and assessors involve employers in assessment which enables employers to support students in several ways, including giving them a variety of job roles to widen their experience. Employers often recommend part-time NVQ courses to their staff at all levels which helps the college to widen participation on programmes.

93. The portfolios of students on part-time NVQ courses are of a very high standard. They contain many different types of evidence and students are responsible for organising and matching the evidence to occupational standards. Students are given a clear indication of the progress that they have made on their qualification and what needs to be done to complete it.

94. Some students on NVQ level 2 programmes are insufficiently challenged by the level of work and have job roles in which a level 3 qualification would be a more appropriate programme. At the

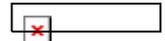
time of the inspection, there was a very low uptake of level 3 programmes in comparison with level 2.

Leadership and management

95. In retail, two different programme areas manage customer service and transport courses. Full-time retail courses are managed by one programme area and part-time courses by another. Much of the college's part-time NVQ provision is run in partnership with a private training company. There is good communication between the private training company and the college. The college monitors the performance of the private training provider effectively and uses providers' staff to train and assess most part-time NVQ students in the workplace.

96. Retail, customer service and transport did not feature as a distinct occupational area in the college's self-assessment report and there was very little mention of the courses in the report. Internal communications in the college are good. Both full-time and part-time teachers attend regular meetings and there are effective and thorough internal verification systems.

Hospitality, leisure and tourism



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

Strengths

- good teaching and learning
- thorough lesson planning
- high pass rates in 2001/02
- effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- some below average or low retention rates
- some unsatisfactory resources.

Scope of provision

97. The college offers an appropriate range of hospitality, leisure and tourism courses from level 1 to 4. Full-time courses lead to NVQ, AVCE, foundation and intermediate GNVQ, national diploma and HND. Part-time provision includes NVQ sugar craft and specialist programmes. Short courses include the national licensees' certificate and hygiene certificates. There is a small amount of work-based provision for young people consisting of modern apprenticeships at foundation and advanced level. The college provides housekeeping courses on employers' premises. At the time of the inspection, there were 110 full-time students, 303 part-time students and 12 modern apprentices on hospitality, leisure and tourism programmes. The inspection covered full-time and part-time programmes and work-based learning in hospitality, leisure and tourism.

Achievement and standards

98. Most pass rates in 2001/02 were high. The pass rate for NVQ cleaning building interiors has been outstanding. The pass rate for basic food hygiene, GNVQ intermediate, and, apart from one instance, AVCE travel and tourism and its precursor, have remained well above the national average for the three years to 2002. The pass rates for AVCE hospitality and catering and its precursor, and GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism, declined significantly between 2000/01 and 2001/02. The pass rates for these awards in 2001/02 were around or just below the national average. In 2001/02 most retention rates were above the national average. The retention rate for GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering has been significantly above the national average for the last three years. A number of retention rates improved between 2000/01 and 2001/02. GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism retention rate increased substantially between 2000/01 and 2000/02. The retention rates for AVCE hospitality and catering and its precursor, and NVQ food preparation and cooking at level 2 are unsatisfactory. Between 1999/2000 and 2001/02, the retention rate of the AVCE hospitality and catering and its precursor declined to 10% below the national average. NVQ food preparation and cooking at level 2 has remained below the national average for the last three years.

99. Most hospitality, leisure and tourism students are enthusiastic and interested in their studies. Students are punctual and have a good attendance record. In lessons, students work effectively on their own and in groups. Most hospitality students have good professional skills in cookery and food and drink service skills. Students work well in teams to prepare, cook and serve dishes and beverages to customers in the college's bistro and restaurant. Leisure and tourism students when working in the college's travel shop and hospitality students in the college restaurant and bistro develop good customer care skills. The standard of students' written work is satisfactory. Most NVQ portfolios are well organised and presented. In lessons, level 3 students demonstrate good analytical skills but these skills are not evident in their written work. The knife skills of some full-time hospitality students are less than satisfactory. For example, students used scissors to cut bacon for a quiche lorraine.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, leisure and tourism, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ cleaning building interiors	1	No. of starts	10	11	74
		% retention	100	91	100
		% pass rate	100	90	100
GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism	1	No. of starts	12	15	19
		% retention	67	67	79
		% pass rate	63	100	73
NVQ food preparation	2	No. of starts	117	104	40

and cooking		% retention	54	66	63
		% pass rate	76	70	72
GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering	2	No. of starts	15	15	15
		% retention	87	93	93
		% pass rate	92	86	86
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	36	32	44
		% retention	72	72	81
		% pass rate	88	70	92
Basic food hygiene certificate	2	No. of starts	1,179	993	1,088
		% retention	97	98	98
		% pass rate	94	92	99
Precursor to AVCE (GNVQ advanced)/ AVCE hospitality and catering	3	No. of starts	15	23	22
		% retention	67	65	59
		% pass rate	70	93	75
Precursor to AVCE (GNVQ advanced)/ AVCE travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	23	26	32
		% retention	57	58	67
		% pass rate	92	92	94

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

Quality of education and training

100. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use a range of good approaches in lessons that include effective individual and group work, practical activities and lectures, which engage and stimulate the interest of most students. Comprehensive schemes of work include links to awarding body criteria and teaching and learning strategies. Suitably detailed lesson plans include clear references to aims and objectives, resources, teaching and learning approaches and activities, timings, supporting documentation and an evaluation of the lesson. Most teachers summarise the main points of lessons well. Teachers make good use of questioning to check students' understanding of topics. They take careful account of students' individual learning requirements and provide them with good individual guidance. In hospitality there are effective short demonstrations on how students can improve their culinary and food service skills. A comprehensive programme of industrial visits and work placements consolidate students' understanding of the hospitality, leisure and tourism industry.

101. Teachers hold appropriate professional, teaching and assessor qualifications and have relevant trade experience. The well-established college travel shop is of a very high standard. It has a substantial turnover of customers and provides students with a very good context for learning. The range of specialist accommodation and equipment in hospitality is mostly adequate. There are some deficiencies in accommodation that include theory lessons taking place in a kitchen which is unsuitable for this purpose; unsatisfactory ventilation in one kitchen; a home economics' kitchen used by hospitality students; and a kitchen with insufficient workstations for the number of students. The range of library resources is good. Library staff and teachers provide students with additional information on relevant web pages. Students are particularly appreciative of the support provided by library staff.

102. Assignment briefs are clearly written and marking is fair. There are clear and established

arrangements for assessment and verification and monitoring of students' progress. All full-time and substantive part-time students receive tutorial support. Monitoring and review of students' progress at tutorials is thorough. Students are very pleased with the support and guidance they receive from teachers on how to improve their performance. Student induction is effective. The arrangements for additional learning support for literacy and numeracy are good. Careers education includes visiting speakers from the hospitality, leisure and tourism industries. Links with local industry are good.

Leadership and management

103. The hospitality, leisure and tourism teaching teams are well led. Managers are committed and effective in improving the standards of teaching and students' achievements. There are clear arrangements for target setting based on students' previous performance and national benchmarks. Managers and staff regularly review targets to ensure they are being met. Managers contribute significantly to the high standards of teaching. At inspection, most teaching and learning was judged to be good or better. There is a regular programme of lesson observations and appraisals for teachers. Where weaknesses are identified in teaching, action is taken by managers to improve the situation. Such action includes additional staff development on effective teaching and learning methods, industrial updating and close monitoring by managers to ensure that the training has led to improvement.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

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

Strengths

- good teaching on most courses
- good monitoring of learner progress in hairdressing
- frequent effective reviews for work-based learners
- wide range of enrichment opportunities
- good range of programmes.

Weaknesses

- many low retention rates
- low pass rates for the full apprenticeship framework

- inappropriate level of programmes for some learners
- inconsistencies in tutorial practice
- insufficient development of basic skills for work-based learners.

Scope of provision

104. The college offers a good range of qualifications in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. Full-time and part-time courses are available in hairdressing from pre-entry level to level 3. Routes for progression are good. A range of beauty therapy courses is offered at levels 2 and 3. There is an extensive range of holistic therapy courses including Indian head massage, aromatherapy and a diploma in holistic therapies. An OCN entry level qualification has been offered in beauty therapy since September 2002. There are no level 1 courses in beauty therapy. All students aged 16 to 18 study key skills. Most students in this area are adults. At the time of the inspection there were 487 beauty therapy students and 313 hairdressing students. There were 112 work-based learners on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship programmes working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and the appropriate key skills qualifications.

105. The hair and beauty teams have strong partnerships with local schools; there were over 100 key stage 4 pupils studying hairdressing and beauty therapy. These pupils speak positively about their experiences in college. They are following an entry level programme which has been part of the curriculum offer in hairdressing for two years, but only started in beauty therapy in 2002.

Achievement and standards

106. Beauty therapy and hairdressing students attain good standards of commercial competence. The standard of students' practical work in hairdressing and holistic therapy courses is good. On NVQ programmes, most written work and assignments are good. On holistic therapy courses, students' work is often of a higher standard than is required by the awarding body. Students have the opportunity to achieve additional skills through an extensive enrichment programme which includes opportunities to develop photographic skills to enhance their portfolios. There are regular educational visits to national trade shows, exhibitions and seminars. Students in hairdressing participate in competition work. One student recently won a regional hairdressing competition.

107. Retention and pass rates on Indian head massage courses are consistently high and well above the national average for the sector. Pass rates on NVQ level 1 hairdressing are also high. In 2001/02, the pass rate of 91% showed a significant increase from 61% in the previous year. However, there are low retention rates on some courses. Retention rates on NVQ level 1 hairdressing and NVQ level 3 beauty therapy declined over the three years to 2002. NVQ level 2 hairdressing had consistently poor retention rates over the same period. There has been an improvement in retention rates on the beauty therapy NVQ level 2, but they remain below the national average. Pass rates for the modern apprenticeship framework are low. In 1999/2000 only 38% completed and achieved a foundation modern apprenticeship. Pass rates improved during 2001/02 to reach the national average. The average attendance for most lessons is satisfactory.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ hairdressing (one year)	1	No. of starts	8	41	19
		% retention	100	71	58
		% pass rate	75	61	91
NVQ beauty therapy (two year)	2	No. of starts	151	102	118
		% retention	70	57	64
		% pass rate	89	78	82
Indian head massage diploma (one year)	2	No. of starts	117	103	63
		% retention	91	86	92
		% pass rate	93	93	89
NVQ hairdressing (two year)	2	No. of starts	205	273	223
		% retention	54	44	56
		% pass rate	65	74	74
NVQ hairdressing	3	No. of starts	20	46	28
		% retention	35	48	77
		% pass rate	86	95	55
NVQ beauty therapy (one year)	3	No. of starts	13	20	21
		% retention	85	70	76
		% pass rate	45	50	81
Diploma in aromatherapy (one year)	3	No. of starts	75	80	58
		% retention	77	75	90
		% pass rate	88	87	77
Diploma in holistic therapies (two year)	3	No. of starts	13	17	13
		% retention	54	88	85
		% pass rate	71	73	82

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

Quality of education and training

108. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. In 63% of all lessons observed, teaching was good or better. Most lessons are well planned and managed. In the most effective lessons, the students' experience is positive. Teachers use an appropriate range of activities to motivate students. In an entry level shampooing lesson, the teacher used an effective variety of activities to engage a group of 14-16 year old disaffected pupils. These included the use of an interactive board game to reward and motivate them. Pupils were awarded a star for good achievement, for example, for hairdressing skills or for working well as part of a team. This approach was highly effective, the pupils enjoyed the lesson and they attained good levels of understanding. At the end of the lesson, pupils with the most stars were awarded a prize. In most lessons, the aims are shared with students and teachers explain clearly what they should expect to achieve in the lesson. The teaching of theory is satisfactory, although sometimes narrow in approach. Often, teachers fail to illustrate their teaching with lively examples or involve students in discussions. Sometimes, students spend too much time copying

down notes. In a few lessons there is no evaluation of what students have learnt. Key skills are taught well. In a lesson on application of number, students understood simple multiplication techniques that are relevant in the workplace. By the end of the lesson, all students could calculate various levels of discount to be given on products and services in the salon. In practical lessons insufficient clients are available which significantly reduces opportunities for learning. Little use is made of ICT in lessons.

109. All students have an initial assessment of their level of basic and key skills. The outcomes are well recorded and shared with students and employers. After assessment, some students are not always placed at the appropriate level for either basic skills support or vocational programmes. Basic skills support for work-based learners is provided in workshop sessions by vocational teachers, some of whom do not have formal qualifications in basic skills. Sometimes students' poor spelling, punctuation and grammar are not identified and corrected. Some learners who progress to higher level courses have difficulty with their written work. A student with a high level of hairdressing skills had to complete all the practical assessments in college.

110. On some courses, college tutorial policies are not fully implemented and students do not receive effective support. Students have regular tutorials but often action plans do not include clear targets against which students' progress can be measured. In work-based learning, clear targets are set. Teachers mark work well but feedback is often very brief. It does not always recognise the efforts made by students in extended pieces of work or help them to improve their work. Assessment and the internal verification procedures meet awarding body requirements. Assessment planning is good. Most assessment is carried out in the workplace but often employers are not involved.

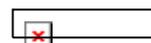
111. Staff keep suitably detailed records of students' progress in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. Work-based learners in hairdressing have a good understanding of their progress and what they need to do to complete the NVQ. Progress is well recorded on straightforward documents. This effective system is not used in beauty therapy. Employers are often unsure how learners are progressing. In 2002, employers had a schedule of college training to help co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

112. Accommodation and equipment are fit for purpose but much is getting old and worn. Resources in the learning centre are good but some textbooks are out of date. The provision has outgrown the current client base. There are insufficient clients for students to carry out commercial training and they can lack experience of the hustle and bustle and commercial pressure of a busy salon.

Leadership and management

113. Some managers, including the head of faculty, are recent appointments and many new initiatives have been started since September 2002. These include the wider use of target setting and the close monitoring of students' achievements which have not previously been systematically monitored at course level. Staff development opportunities are good. There is an inclusive approach that provides learning for many disaffected and disadvantaged students.

Health and social care



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates

- good teaching in practical lessons
- an extensive range of courses
- good progression opportunities
- good support for students
- thorough monitoring of students' progress
- effective partnerships with the care sector.

Weaknesses

- ineffective teaching of some theory
- low achievement of the full modern apprenticeship framework
- insufficient development of key skills.

Scope of provision

114. There is an extensive range and breadth of health and care courses for full-time and part-time students from levels 1 to 4. Most courses are taught at the Cauldon campus or in the workplace. Students are well informed on possible routes for progression. The foundation GNVQ course provides a good basis for further study in the area of health and social care. A variety of short courses, including first aid, are available to meet employers' needs. Specialist programmes include the diploma and certificate in welfare, certificate in management of substance misuse, and the certificate and diploma in counselling. The majority of students are adults and most full-time students are aged 16 to 18. A range of new courses has been developed to widen participation and encourage adults back into learning. In particular, the health and care team is working to increase the numbers of adults being trained and employed in the health service and social services locally. Study opportunities are flexibly organised to meet individual needs. At the time of the inspection

there were 60 work-based learners on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships who were working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3 and the appropriate key skills qualifications. The provision of NVQ in care has COVE status which has resulted in extensive demand by local employers for training in the workplace.

Achievement and standards

115. On most courses, retention and pass rates are high. Policies for improving retention rates are effective. For example, good staff and student relationships are established early on in programmes. Students receive effective induction and they are encouraged to become interested and fully engaged in learning. Staff set high standards and give good support to individual students. The impact has been significant and retention rates have remained high or improved on many courses. Retention and pass rates on GNVQ health and social care at foundation level are well above the national average for the sector. Retention and pass rates for the certificate in counselling have been particularly good for the three years to 2002. Retention rates on GNVQ intermediate improved to above the national average in 2002 and the pass rate was very high at 92%. Retention and pass rates on NVQ level 2 in care also improved in 2002 and are now above the national average. The retention rate on GNVQ advanced has improved over the three-year period, but remains below the national average. The retention rate on the certificate in welfare studies has improved but the pass rate declined to the national average in 2002. Retention and pass rates for modern apprentices are low. Large numbers of students study short courses in first aid and health and safety. Pass rates have remained consistently high. Most full-time students achieve relevant additional qualifications. Students are enthusiastic about these opportunities.

116. The standard of students' work is good and on counselling courses it is high. NVQ portfolios are well presented and contain comprehensive evidence that meets the requirements of the framework. Foundation students show a well-developed understanding of aspects of their course. Often, attainment is higher than would normally be expected for this level of course. Coursework is often well presented by students but there is insufficient use of IT. Students' assignments are appropriately detailed and well presented.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and social care, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ health and social care	1	No. of starts	52	24	42
		% retention	65	92	88
		% pass rate	94	91	94
GNVQ health and social care	2	No. of starts	47	53	31
		% retention	68	74	77
		% pass rate	91	90	92
NVQ care (one year)	2	No. of starts	117	119	52
		% retention	79	69	88
		% pass rate	54	61	67
Certificate in counselling	2	No. of starts	12	13	16
		% retention	75	93	88
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NVQ care (one year)	3	No. of starts	73	108	27
		% retention	85	79	85

		% pass rate	63	66	70
GNVQ health and social care	3	No. of starts	34	36	22
		% retention	38	58	63
		% pass rate	91	81	83
Certificate in welfare studies	3	No. of starts	22	33	24
		% retention	68	67	70
		% pass rate	93	93	82

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

Quality of education and training

117. Most teaching is good or better. Practical and group teaching is particularly effective. Lessons are generally well planned and managed. In the more effective lessons, teachers plan and initiate a range of challenging learning activities. Most teachers are well qualified, have a sound vocational knowledge and are enthusiastic in their work. Teachers encourage students to consider the links between theory and practice. They use their vocational experience to increase students' understanding. A range of case studies which challenge stereotypical behaviour helps students to develop a sound understanding of equality of opportunity. In one lesson, the teacher clearly explained the aims and objectives and what the students were expected to achieve. The exercise was introduced effectively to challenge and motivate the students. Groups of students investigated different aspects of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Each group reported its findings to the class, and lively and challenging debates took place on each topic. All students were encouraged to express their views. They enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and developed a greater understanding of diversity. In another lesson, students were asked to produce diets for clients who have physical difficulties. They had to apply their knowledge gained at college and at work to provide diets for a range of clients. The teacher visited each group to test its proposals and stimulate further discussion. Students learnt from the constructive discussion and produced appropriate diets for each client. They gained confidence and were praised by the teacher for the quality of their work. However, some theory teaching is less effective and little learning takes place. In the less effective lessons, teachers tend to talk too much, do not use the students' experience to the benefit of the group, and students spend too much time copying notes from textbooks and become bored and inattentive. Sometimes teachers do not fully meet the learning needs of less able students.

118. Most classrooms are good but some are too far from the main teaching area. Classroom resources and specialist equipment are generally adequate. Plans to develop a specialist learning centre are well advanced. Assessment practice is good. Feedback to students on assessed work is clear and helpful, and explains how they can improve. Not all part-time students are initially assessed. Many employers provide good initial assessment. Feedback following initial assessment to some students takes too long and the availability of additional learning support does not start early enough in their course. There are good internal verification systems. NVQ assessment is thorough and well recorded.

119. The college has developed strong and effective partnerships with, for example, a health care trust, social services and a wide range of voluntary and private organisations, and care homes at local and regional level. Some of these contacts have led to imaginative developments, for example, training for support staff working with substance abuse. Changes are being made to improve the flexibility of provision. Teaching and assessments are provided at times of the day convenient to adult returners.

120. The support that students receive on personal issues is very effective. Staff set high standards and act as role models, particularly for the disaffected students. Students highly value the help they receive in and out of the classroom. A revised tutorial system includes individual and group tutorials. Tutorials are carried out sensitively. Students' progress is regularly reviewed and action plans are

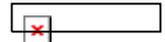
negotiated. To improve performance, clear targets are set. Analysis of the skills students need to be successful is effective. Opportunities are missed to develop key skills. Some lesson plans and assignments identify opportunities for key skills development, but few teachers plan, develop or effectively assess key skills. A tutor assessor has been appointed to develop key skills within the care area.

Leadership and management

121. The management of the provision is effective. Managers set a clear direction for the area. There is good teamwork, effective communication and sound course organisation. Part-time teachers are encouraged to be involved in curriculum developments. Course files are well organised and informative. Course monitoring and reviews are effective. Teachers are well supported by managers.

122. Clear targets for retention and achievement are set and monitored. Data are reliable and are well used to monitor progress. Managers have successfully developed approaches that embrace the core values of equal opportunities and directly impact on students' learning experience and their work in the care sector.

Childcare



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates on many courses
- much good teaching and learning
- strong and effective links with the community
- good tutorial support
- effective curriculum management

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on the diploma in childcare and education course

- low achievement of the full modern apprenticeship framework.

Scope of provision

123. The college offers a wide range of childcare courses from entry level to level 4. Full-time courses include the diploma and certificate in childcare and education, the foundation award in caring for children, NVQ level 2 and 3 in early years care and education, and the NVQ level 3 in playwork. At the time of the inspection there were 305 full-time learners. Part-time courses include foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in early years, the certificate in playwork, the entry level certificate in preparation for childcare, a school links programme, the advanced diploma in childcare and education, the certificate in professional development, and the certificate in childminding practice at three levels. There were 221 part-time learners. The programme area is based at the Cauldon campus where all full-time and most of the part-time courses are taught. The inspection covered a sample of the provision from entry level to level 3.

Achievement and standards

124. Pass rates are high and on most courses they are well above the national average for the sector. Retention rates are very high on the NVQ level 3 in early years care and education, and the course on advanced practice in working with babies. The pass rate is high and the retention rate is above the national average on the certificate in childcare and education. The foundation award in caring for children has had exceptional pass rates, achieving 100% in 2000 and 2002, but the retention rate dropped in 2002 to below the national average. The retention rate on the diploma in childcare and education has been below the national average for the three years to 2002; the pass rate dropped significantly to well below the national average in 2002. Progression within the curriculum area is good from foundation to intermediate and from intermediate to advanced level courses. Many learners successfully obtain employment and an increasing number of learners studying for the certificate in childcare and education progress to advanced modern apprenticeships. Many students on the advanced diploma in childcare and education go on to HE. The number of learners obtaining the full framework on the modern apprenticeship scheme is low, partly due to the failure of learners to complete the key skills element of the framework.

125. Standards of students' assessed work reflect the high pass rates and proportion of higher grades achieved on some courses. The best work demonstrates the development of students' analytic skills. Students with modest prior educational achievements gain in confidence and personal development and make good progress.

A sample of retention and pass rates in childcare, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Foundation award in caring for children	1	No. of starts	15	31	34
		% retention	67	83	79
		% pass rate	100	96	100
Certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	34	50	54
		% retention	64	82	87
		% pass rate	100	90	94
NVQ early years care	2	No. of starts	35	45	46

and education		% retention	94	93	83
		% pass rate	97	88	87
Diploma in nursing/diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	45	59	41
		% retention	73	59	68
		% pass rate	94	97	79
NVQ early years care and education	3	No. of starts	27	54	27
		% retention	67	91	93
		% pass rate	67	86	95
Advanced practice in working with babies	3	No. of starts	23	14	18
		% retention	87	93	94
		% pass rate	100	92	94

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

Quality of education and training

126. Much of the teaching and learning is good; a significant proportion is very good or excellent. Schemes of work are suitably detailed and thorough, and lesson plans have clear learning objectives which are shared with students. Teachers use an appropriate range of learning methods to sustain students' interest and motivation. They make reference to and draw on students' work-based learning to try to make sure that the practical implications are grasped. Lessons are conducted purposefully and the content is challenging. Students are responsive. Teachers question them skilfully to increase their understanding. In one lesson on the schools link programme, interaction was lively and students were eager to contribute. Their responses were focused and showed some real insight. In a lesson on sensory development the teacher used directed questioning to engage the attention of all the NVQ level 3 students on the course in early years care and education, and to check that they were understanding the work. Students applied themselves well in small groups to the task of identifying activities that would be likely to stimulate sensory development in babies. They shared their findings and learned from each other, making connections with theoretical concepts covered in an earlier part of the course. In some lessons where group work was used, students had no firm deadline against which to work and were allowed to drift. They lost concentration and took much longer than should have been necessary to complete the task. Occasionally the learning outcomes were insufficiently clear and students' feedback from the group lacked depth.

127. Overall, teaching accommodation is satisfactory, and improved by the displays of students' work. Sometimes a classroom was inappropriate for the size of the group. Students have good access to computers and places to study by themselves. Some of the bookstock is outdated. Equipment to support learning is good and includes virtual parenting babies. Staff are well qualified. They have extensive professional experience which they use effectively in their teaching.

128. Assessment on NVQ programmes and work-based learning is well planned. Assessment on other provision is fair and accurate. Marking is helpful and constructive. Internal verification is carried out effectively but the system adopted by the awarding body causes unreasonable delays to the return of work.

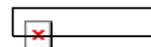
129. Good working relationships with the staff of the early years development and childcare partnership have enabled the curriculum area to identify local training needs and respond accordingly. There is a wide range of courses to meet the needs of school leavers, adults returning to study, and those in employment who need recognised qualifications or professional development courses. These strong links enable the college to maintain a wide range of good quality placements.

130. Guidance and support of students is effective. The need for additional support is identified early in the course and arrangements made for the most appropriate form of tuition. Regular group and individual tutorials are held to monitor the progress of the course and of individual students. Action plans are agreed and targets set which are addressed at the following tutorial. This approach ensures that students are aware of how well they are doing. Careers advice and guidance are introduced at an early stage in the course and support students to make informed decisions about their futures.

Leadership and management

131. The curriculum area and courses are managed effectively. Self-assessment is carried out thoroughly. Regular staff meetings address key issues and agree actions which specify those responsible for carrying them out. Communication between staff is good. Employers report that communication for work-based training has improved considerably since the last inspection. Visits to employers are now carried out on a more regular basis and they are made much more aware of their role in relation to their apprentices and the impact their contribution can make to training. Staff appraisal is rigorous. A wide range of staff development activities is encouraged and many staff take the opportunity to update their professional experience.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high standard of practical work
- good support for students
- very successful provision for students with learning difficulties
- good rates of progression to higher level courses.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory pass rates in dance, drama and music national diplomas
- low retention rates on first diploma performing arts

- insufficient attention to individual learning needs in some lessons.

Scope of provision

132. The media and performing arts provision is based at the Burslem campus. There is a wide range of full-time courses at entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in art, performing arts, music, media, and production skills and good progression opportunities. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 21. A significant part of the provision is the successful practical arts course for students with learning difficulties, which is based at the college and is also offered at local community venues. The practical arts programme has grown significantly from 179 enrolments in 1999/2000 to 605 enrolments in 2002. There is no discrete full-time provision and few part-time courses for adults. Action is being taken to develop this aspect of the curriculum. There is a thriving school links programme which encourages pupils to sample media, music and performing arts courses, and to consider taking appropriate vocational qualifications.

Achievement and standards

133. There are high levels of retention and achievement on the practical arts course. There was a pass rate of 100% in 2001 and 2002. The retention rate on the foundation course in performing arts was high in 2002, but the pass rate was low at 71%. On the first diploma performing arts, the retention and pass rates have fallen to below the national average. The retention rate on the national diplomas in dance and drama, and music all continued to decline and were below national averages in 2002. In the same year the rate on the national diploma in media improved to well above the national average. However, the pass rates on all the national diplomas in media, dance and drama, and music were low.

134. The standard of most students' work is good. The quality of practical work on entry and level 1 and 2 programmes is particularly good, taking into account the students' prior educational achievements. Many students develop good critical skills and are able to display a sound grasp of technical and subject-specific terminology. Students are encouraged to broaden their experience through involvement in community partnerships. For example Frontline Dance, a company which integrates students with learning difficulties and students from main stream courses, is in residence at the college to provide workshops for students and members of the local community. Students are also encouraged to contribute to community activities and perform at a wide range of events and festivals to develop their technical and personal skills. Students are punctual at lessons and attendance is good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Practical arts college certificate	E	No. of starts	155	179	605
		% retention	71	92	82
		% pass rate	81	100	100
Foundation in performing arts	1	No. of starts	16	28	26
		% retention	100	71	88
		% pass rate	69	95	71
First diploma performing arts	2	No. of starts	36	38	33
		% retention	83	79	63

		% pass rate	73	90	85
National diploma media	3	No. of starts	13	22	11
		% retention	69	73	91
		% pass rate	100	88	80
National diploma performing arts (dance/drama)	3	No. of starts	25	32	36
		% retention	72	69	61
		% pass rate	100	100	77
National diploma performing arts (music)	3	No. of starts	30	66	42
		% retention	74	77	50
		% pass rate	67	78	81

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

Quality of education and training

135. Much teaching is good and none was considered to be less than satisfactory. Lessons are well planned and structured and have clear learning objectives. Teachers use a good mix of demonstrations and practical activities to engage students' interest. They use discussions and questioning techniques effectively to check that students are understanding the work and consolidating their learning. In the most effective lessons, teachers enable students across the whole range of ability to learn. However, in some lessons, teachers did not fully meet the learning needs of less able students. At entry and foundation level, lessons focus on performance skills, which teachers develop by providing thoughtful comment, direction and support whilst at the same time encouraging students to experiment and practise techniques. Teachers frequently use professional examples and draw upon their own experience to relate theory to its practical application. Students' assignments are well planned and interesting, and many include practical activities. Teachers provide constructive and encouraging comments on marked work which gives students good guidance on ways to improve.

136. Student support is good and tutorial sessions and informal mentoring occur across all subject areas. Support staff working with students are fully involved in the curriculum. Students value the high level of support provided by both teachers and support staff. Recent improvements to the monitoring of students' progress ensure that all staff have good knowledge of the difficulties and problems some students face. There are new procedures to address these personal issues before they affect the student's learning.

137. All teachers in performing arts, music and media have appropriate vocational experience and use their knowledge to make the curriculum relevant and challenging. They plan work around realistic scenarios and are able to enhance the credibility of activities by reference to real-life experience. Part-time staff bring with them a wealth of professional and commercial experience which they use to enliven their teaching and motivate students.

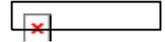
138. Specialist accommodation and equipment for all subject areas is good. Students benefit from a flexible theatre space, well-equipped rehearsal rooms for music, dance and drama, and good media resources. The music suite is well designed and students have good access to practice areas. There is a wide range of appropriate equipment for both media and music technology. Students have use of efficient IT facilities and the library resources effectively support the curriculum.

Leadership and management

139. Leadership and management of the curriculum area are good. Course teams meet regularly.

Staff across all subject areas work effectively as a team, and part-time staff participate fully in course planning. There are regular meetings between staff and students' representatives to identify issues requiring improvement; students value the opportunity to contribute to the development of their courses. Emphasis is placed on policies to improve retention rates and student absences are followed up immediately. Suitable support is available to minimise the risk of students leaving their courses early.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- good teaching
- well-resourced social sciences provision
- a good range of provision
- good opportunities for progression
- good support for students
- effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rate on GCSE psychology.

Scope of provision

140. The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time provision in social sciences which provides sound progression opportunities. Students can study GCSE and GCE AS and A-level sociology and psychology, return to study and access to HE. Courses are available at a range of times and venues to meet the needs of most learners. Provision is particularly responsive to the needs of adult and learners who want to progress quickly through 'fast-track' programmes.

Achievement and standards

141. Pass rates are high on most courses but retention rates are uneven. The pass rates on GCE AS sociology, return to study and access to HE are well above the national average for the sector. In 2002, the retention rate on the GCSE psychology was low. Enrolments on GCSE psychology and sociology have declined over the three years to 2002, as more students enrol on return to study programmes in these areas. Student progression is particularly strong in social sciences. Each year, nearly three-quarters of students who complete return to study courses in sociology and psychology progress to the access to HE programme. About the same proportion of students on the access to HE course gain a place at university.

142. Students' critical thinking skills are developed well and they gain confidence in expressing themselves orally. Students are able to assimilate complex theories and put forward reasoned arguments. Their written work is of a high standard and they make good use of ICT both for text and data processing and to improve the presentation of their research projects.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
OCN return to study introduction to psychology	1 & 2	No. of starts	73	197	212
		% retention	67	80	85
		% pass rate	83	70	84
OCN return to study introduction to sociology	1 & 2	No. of starts	73	148	214
		% retention	92	79	85
		% pass rate	77	65	89
GCSE psychology (A*-C grades)	2	No. of starts	112	95	76
		% retention	58	66	52
		% pass rate	42	31	80
GCSE sociology (A*-C grades)	2	No. of starts	34	32	17
		% retention	61	72	63
		% pass rate	60	61	86
Access to HE	3	No. of starts	179	114	152
		% retention	72	73	78
		% pass rate	79	87	87

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

Quality of education and training

143. Teaching is mostly good, very good or outstanding. No teaching was judged unsatisfactory. Schemes of work are completed to a standard format and lessons are carefully planned. In a few

lessons, however, teachers use too narrow a range of activities which fails to stimulate and challenge all learners. Students are set tasks in lessons and for homework which develop the skills essential to the social sciences. In one sociology lesson, students were given the task of interpreting a number of statistical tables relating to the state of marriage in modern Britain. They worked hard in small groups to test theories against the statistical data and produced good results. In another lesson, students who were returning to study after some time out of education worked hard to overcome initial worries as they encountered the concept of dependent and independent variables. They successfully completed an exercise designed to consolidate their understanding and were able to define the two terms by the end of the lesson.

144. Assessment is fair and effective. Students' written work receives helpful comments from teachers. Students are enthusiastic about their studies and are very appreciative of the help they receive from their teachers outside the classroom. Study packs produced by teachers provide valuable independent study guides for students. Topics covered include 'the family' and 'sociological research methods'.

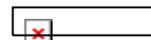
145. Good pre-entry advice and guidance enable students to make an informed choice about their course of study. Many students appreciated being advised at interview to take the return to study course before enrolling on the access to HE programme. Induction is well planned. Students' preferred learning styles are identified along with any additional support requirements to improve their literacy and numeracy. Students' studies are enhanced by opportunities to take part in social sciences conferences arranged by their teachers.

146. Teachers are very well qualified and their subject knowledge is up to date and extensive. The library and learning resource centre are well stocked with a good range of social sciences books and other subject-specific learning materials. Students have good access to computers which they use effectively to complete their course work. Classrooms are bright and spacious and well decorated. They contain good poster displays of case studies by former students on the access to HE course.

Leadership and management

147. Curriculum management is good and the curriculum offer is reviewed regularly. The social sciences team work well together to improve the provision. Meetings are held regularly and action points are recorded and routinely followed-up at subsequent meetings. Full-time and part-time staff participate effectively in all aspects of the course review process. Retention and achievement targets are set, and progress towards them is frequently reviewed. Lesson observations and staff appraisal help to identify those staff development needs that are required to improve classroom practice.

Foundation studies (English for speakers of other languages)



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on college-based courses
- imaginative and effective teaching on college-based courses

- good support for college-based students
- effective use of volunteer tutors
- broad range of courses
- effective widening of participation.

Weaknesses

- poor attendance and low retention rates on some community-based courses
- some poor teaching on community-based courses
- insufficient teaching and learning resources for community-based courses
- poor management of community programmes
- unsuitable accommodation and poor access for people with mobility difficulties at some community centres.

Scope of provision

148. The college provides a broad range of programmes in English for speakers of other languages at the Caudon and Burslem campuses and in community venues across the city. There are good progression routes on the college-based provision. The entry courses meet the needs of both those students with few or no skills in English language, and those who either want to improve oral skills or need to improve their standard of literacy before progressing to higher level courses. There is a growing provision for asylum seekers. Programmes are designed to enable students to join courses throughout the year. Students have an initial assessment to determine their English language skills and then an individual timetable is negotiated for each student. The college is very responsive to the needs of individuals and many students also enrol on vocational courses. To improve the chances of widening participation, community-based provision is promoted using all the languages spoken in the local community. The community-based curriculum offer, however, fails to meet the needs of

most of the students. The provision is predominantly non-accredited and provides no clear progression routes.

Achievement and standards

149. Retention and pass rates are high on college-based courses. Students apply themselves well and make good progress. An increasing number of students improve their vocational skills as well as their language development. Students contribute effectively to class activities. They gain in confidence and are able to practise many of the communication skills learnt in the classroom in external situations, such as visits to solicitors, social services and housing departments. Many students develop good note-taking skills and the standard of their written work is good. The rates of retention and attendance on community-based courses are low.

A sample of retention and pass rates in foundation studies (English for speakers of other languages), 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Pitman basic short programme	1	No. of starts	7	30	25
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	71	80	98
Pitman elementary	1	No. of starts	11	69	68
		% retention	100	77	69
		% pass rate	100	96	98
OCN English for speakers of other languages short programmes	1	No. of starts	95	243	170
		% retention	82	91	80
		% pass rate	67	94	*
First certificate	2	No. of starts	42	41	59
		% retention	62	53	74
		% pass rate	31	43	80

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

*data not available

Quality of education and training

150. Much of the teaching on college-based courses is imaginative and effective. Schemes of work are suitably detailed. Lesson plans are shared by all teachers and are designed to meet the language development needs of students. Teachers use a good mix of activities in lessons. For example, English language learning is combined with developing computer literacy skills. In one lesson, students learnt how to ask directions. They had a map initially of Stoke on Trent and used the language to identify landmarks. Students then travelled around the city and had photographs taken of themselves by the landmarks. There is good use of bilingual resources in teaching and learning. In many lessons, entry level students are able to contribute effectively to questions by using bilingual dictionaries. Teachers correct pronunciation and students are able to practise their language skills by role playing in different situations. Teachers provide positive feedback which encourages all learners to take a full part in the activities. In all lessons observed, teachers encouraged students to support their peers bilingually. Peer support improved the learning of students in a group with many different levels of skill in English.

151. There is some poor, unimaginative teaching on community-based courses. Many activities fail to meet the learning needs of individual students. Too often there is an over-reliance in language classes on poor paper-based learning resources. In one lesson, students were using out-of-date dictionaries. Many classes have too many students and, as a consequence, not all of them are able to achieve a good understanding of complex language structures. Some teaching fails to engage students as it is not set in a context to which they can relate. In some lessons, teachers used poor quality audio recorders.

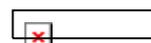
152. Support for college-based students is good. Students speak positively about the help they receive and tutorials are highly valued. Students are able to discuss their learning and personal needs with tutors. The actions, which they jointly decide need to be taken, are well recorded. Students have individual learning plans and clear targets. Regular reviews enable students to evaluate their progress. Teachers provide good guidance to students to help them improve. However, on community-based programmes, few students have completed individual learning plans and student records are often incomplete. Volunteer tutors work effectively with teachers to provide effective support for individual students.

153. All teachers have appropriate, nationally recognised qualifications and all volunteers have specialist qualifications for the teaching of English for speakers of other languages. At some community venues, attendance for people with young children is difficult when crèche facilities are not provided. There is some unsuitable accommodation and poor access for people with mobility difficulties. Generally, the community venues do not provide opportunities for stimulating learning. There is poor use of ICT in language teaching.

Leadership and management

154. College-based courses are well managed but the management of the community-based provision is poor. The quality of the provision is monitored by the head of faculty through weekly faculty team meetings and prompt action is taken to seek to rectify any issues that are raised. Communication is good and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Retention and achievement targets are set for each class and progress towards them is regularly monitored. The self-assessment report for English for speakers of other languages provides a realistic assessment of the quality of the provision.

Foundation studies (Literacy and numeracy)



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

Strengths

- good teaching and learning
- provision responsive to local need
- good rates of retention and individual achievement

- comprehensive initial assessments
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- good staff development.

Weaknesses

- lack of information for students on accreditation
- some inappropriate accommodation
- inefficient use of IT
- uneven take-up of learning support.

Scope of provision

155. There is a wide range of provision, covering full-time and part-time basic skills, family learning, workplace learning, and basic skills support. Programmes are offered in the college and at numerous community venues across the city. They cater effectively for many communities with high levels of need in basic skills. There are some imaginative ventures such as the inclusion of basic skills as an integral part of the Prince's Trust volunteer programme. When their skills need intensive development to enable them to succeed, full-time programmes provide suitable progression routes for young people which can lead into college courses. Provision responds to the needs of learners at all levels within the core curriculum; appropriate external accreditation is available. There is a strong dyslexia support service which includes specialist assessments.

Achievement and standards

156. Following comprehensive, extended initial assessment, all learners work to suitably detailed individual learning plans. Teachers monitor learners' progress. Attendance at lessons is good and overall retention is high at around 85%. Learners work hard in lessons and most are successful in achieving their learning goals. Students are clear about progression routes and many progress to other learning programmes. In family learning, students visit the college to gain experience and gather information about the opportunities available. For students receiving additional support for numeracy and literacy, this approach helps them make good progress on their main course of study. Evaluation of the impact of learning support indicates some improvement to retention and pass rates among those students taking advantage of the support.

Quality of education and training

157. There is much good, well-planned teaching. Students are enthusiastic and lessons focus on their needs. Careful consideration is given to the targets identified in individual learning plans. Teachers use a range of approaches which effectively motivates learners. In a numeracy lesson, good use was made of supermarket advertising leaflets which were relevant to learners and their daily life. In a family literacy group, learners engaged in discussions on children's language development which contributed to a greater understanding of oral communications. In lessons, students with hearing and visual impairment were supported unobtrusively. Trained volunteers help in sessions on primary basic skills, and provide good support to learners with low levels of skills. They help them to participate fully in group activities. The volunteers help learners to keep personal diaries and to record how they feel they are progressing in their tasks. In some lessons, however, the range of teaching approaches is inadequate; there is often poor use of IT for teaching and learning.

158. Teachers work to the core curriculum requirements in literacy and numeracy. In speaking and listening, they make effective use of discussion work and verbal questioning. Learners contribute to group oral work with confidence. Teachers on family learning programmes inspire learners. Partnerships with schools are excellent and learners feel encouraged to join programmes of study. There is inadequate information available to students on accreditation. Some learners, especially at entry level, have a poor understanding of the content of their course and the assessment procedures.

159. Initial assessment is comprehensive. All full-time students are assessed for basic skills need at entry. Following initial assessment, students with identified needs from the curriculum area are offered support in a learning centre or through on-course support. The progress of students receiving support is carefully monitored. However, students' take-up of learning support is uneven. Students from some curriculum areas often do not attend sessions in the learning centre and therefore receive no specialist support. Students working on primary basic skills benefit from an extended period of assessment before enrolling on to longer-term programmes.

160. All staff are qualified in basic skills and take advantage of the good opportunities for formal and informal staff development to update their skills. Part-time staff are fully involved in all training activities. A mentoring system operates for new staff. Some accommodation has a negative impact on learning. For example, a large open-plan area is noisy and distracts learners, and some rooms are so cramped that it is difficult for teachers to provide one-to-one support in lessons. At venues in the community, there are few IT facilities available for use by basic skills learners.

Leadership and management

161. Management of the diverse provision is good. There are regular team meetings which allow staff to share expertise and experiences. All staff contribute to the self-assessment report. Action plans are compiled to address identified weaknesses and to bring about improvement. The programme area has responded to new initiatives and staff are trained in core curriculum delivery. They then train staff in other curriculum areas of the college. There are regular staff training sessions on topics such as dyslexia awareness, which are open to all staff.

Part D: College data

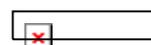


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	31	38
2	31	24
3	16	10
4/5	1	2
Other	21	26
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in spring 2002

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2000/01

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	509	5,067	10.84
Agriculture	23	275	0.58
Construction	394	1,858	4.38
Engineering	567	3,596	8.09
Business	426	4,097	8.79
Information and communications technology	322	5,540	11.40
Retailing and customer service	249	2,325	5.42
Hospitality, leisure and tourism	619	1,752	4.61
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	343	748	2.12
Health and social care	886	5,672	12.75
Visual and performing arts	296	1,727	3.93
Humanities	1,528	3,125	9.05
English, languages and communication	929	1,043	3.83
Foundation programmes	1,492	5,817	14.71
Total	8,583	42,642	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

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	1,494	1,895	1,563	4,264	5,169	5,678
	Retention rate (%)	77	76	75	80	78	78
	National average (%)	81	80	79	79	79	77
	Pass rate (%)	62	70	74	65	72	78
	National average (%)	60	65	69	61	65	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	2,172	2,229	1,956	6,475	5,962	4,671
	Retention rate (%)	73	72	73	78	75	79
	National average (%)	76	77	76	80	78	78
	Pass rate (%)	60	67	71	59	64	68
	National average (%)	65	66	69	62	65	70
3	Starters excluding transfers	830	956	860	3,457	3,051	2,760
	Retention rate (%)	71	62	71	74	75	75
	National average (%)	75	76	78	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	58	61	68	62	58	65
	National average (%)	73	75	77	63	66	70
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	14	13	12	916	779	489
	Retention rate (%)	79	54	67	85	78	85
	National average (%)	84	80	83	84	80	84
	Pass rate (%)	50	14	100	65	64	61
	National average (%)	65	65	57	58	57	54

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/tertiary or sixth form colleges).

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 by level

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	69	27	4	96
Level 2 (intermediate)	66	25	9	84
Level 1 (foundation)	76	24	0	42
Other sessions	69	25	6	32
Totals	68	26	6	254

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