ADULT LEARNING

INSPECTORATE

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Inspection report

South East Essex College of Arts and Technology

Dates of inspection: 2–12 February 2004

Reference:

Contents

Basic information about the college

Name of college:	South East Essex College of Arts and Technology
Type of college:	General Further Education/Tertiary College
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Address of college:	Carnarvon Road Southend-on-Sea Essex SS2 6LS
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Chair of governors:	Steve Buggle
Unique reference number:	130672
Name of reporting inspector:	Tony Nasta HMI
Dates of inspection:	2–12 February 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

South East Essex College of Arts and Technology is a large general further education (FE) college, located on four sites in Southend-on-Sea. It is one of several providers of courses for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students in the local area. There are 12 secondary schools, all but 2 of which have sixth forms, a nearby sixth form college and Southend Adult Community College. In 2002/03, the college enrolled over 15,000 students of which about 40% were full time. Courses are offered from pre-entry to higher education (HE) level. Education and training takes place in all areas of learning, except land-based industries and includes vocational, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) and general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) courses. Provision in three areas: business, information and communications technology (ICT), and visual and performing arts account for over 62% of enrolments. The college has a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in media technology. College data for 2002/03 indicate that about 83% of students were white British and about 11% were non-white British. Through partnerships with local work-based training providers, the college offers a range of work-based training such as entry-to-employment (E2E) and JobCentre Plus. The college has substantial HE provision. It works in partnership with the University of Essex and its provision includes a range of higher national certificate (HNC), higher national diploma (HND) and vocational degree courses. The college's purpose is to 'transform lives through learning'. Its vision is to be 'recognised for excellence in academic achievement and learning innovation at the centre of a network of active learning communities'.

How effective is the college?

Students benefit from good academic and learning support and have access to extensive information technology (IT) and specialist resources. Through strong partnerships with local employers, schools and community groups, the college has successfully extended access to education and training in its local community. Provision in 5 out of the 12 curriculum areas and leadership and management were judged to be good. Six were judged to be satisfactory and one as unsatisfactory. The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- much good teaching in ICT, visual and performing arts, literacy and numeracy

- high standards of learning and attainment of adult students

- academic and learning support which meets students' needs and has improved retention rates

- good IT resources and specialist equipment

- wide range of courses and opportunities for student progression

- strong consultative leadership

- excellent partnerships with employers, schools and the community.

What should be improved

- the low retention rates, particularly on level 1 qualifications

- teaching methods, to address the range of student needs and the nature of the learning environments

- impact of the quality assurance system in securing improvement.

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.** Students benefit from good teaching in experiments and rigorous marking of assignment work. However, much of the teaching of theory does not cater for the range of ability and is not well adapted to the open-plan learning environment. Pass rates at GCE A level are high. Pass rates on AS-level courses and GCSE mathematics and biology are poor.
Business, administration, management and professional	**Satisfactory.** Pass rates are high on many courses. Teaching and learning are good on legal executive and accountancy courses. Students have good opportunities for progression and benefit from links with industry. Quality assurance is not rigorous and there are inconsistencies in curriculum management. Some accommodation at London Road is poor and some teaching is not well matched to the open-learning environments.
Information and communications technology	**Good.** Teaching, learning and assessment are good, particularly during workshop sessions. Students benefit from extensive specialist resources and are able to progress between courses at different levels. Quality assurance procedures are insufficiently focused upon improving teaching and learning.
Hospitality and catering	**Satisfactory.** Students develop good practical skills and the majority of teaching is good. However, the range of teaching methods is too narrow and self-assessment procedures do not give enough attention to evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.
Sports, leisure and tourism	**Satisfactory.** Student attainment is satisfactory and management has been successful in improving student attendance and in-year retention rates. However, there is a legacy of poor retention rates from previous student groups. Students develop good sporting and coaching skills. Teaching is generally satisfactory.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	**Unsatisfactory.** Pass rates are good on some courses and students receive good personal support. Beauty therapy students are successful in progressing into FE and employment. However, much teaching in beauty therapy is unsatisfactory and unsuitable accommodation constrains the range of teaching and learning activities. The curriculum offer does not match the needs of the students. Punctuality and attendance are poor on hairdressing courses. Management is unsatisfactory.
Health and social care	**Satisfactory.** Pass rates are good on many courses. Most students are confident and articulate, and able to discuss, analyse and apply theory to the vocational setting. Resources are very good and students make good use of the learning centre, Early Years Centre and work placements. Learning is not always well managed. Teaching strategies do not meet the range of student needs and some written feedback on assignments is inadequate.
Art and design	**Good.** Provision is well managed. Pass rates are high across all courses. Good teaching effectively supports students with different needs and abilities. Most students develop good skills of research and investigation, evaluation and analysis and many make progress to higher-level courses. However, there is some poor punctuality and attendance, and retention rates are low on some courses. Accommodation is sometimes inappropriately used.
Media and performing arts	**Good.** Pass rates are above the national average on many courses. A broad range of courses at level 3 are available. The area is very well resourced and many teaching staff have extensive experience of the industry, which contributes to the development of the curriculum. Teaching strategies for some subjects are not appropriate for the open-learning environment and there is some poor attendance.
Humanities	**Satisfactory.** Pass rates at GCE A level are high, but the proportion of students achieving high grades has declined. Teaching in general studies and law is good, but some of the teaching in other subjects is insufficiently challenging. Assessment is thorough and frequent. There is insufficient analysis of student progress in relation to prior attainment.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Literacy and numeracy	**Good.** Initial assessment effectively identifies those students who have literacy and numeracy needs. These needs are addressed through effective support in class and good individual dyslexia support. There is good achievement of level 1 key skills, although in some lessons there is inadequate differentiation. There is insufficient co-ordination between the delivery of basic skills and key skills.
Entry to employment	**Good.** Trainees develop practical skills and progression to FE and training is good. Work placements provide good opportunities for students to strengthen their vocational skills. A wide range of opportunities are offered through the partnership between the college and other local providers. Some theory lessons are not well planned and procedures for target setting and monitoring of progress need improvement.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers and governors provide clear direction and good support to staff and students. Strong links with partner organisations have enabled the college to attract additional students to HE and to courses at levels 1 and 2. A substantial new college campus is to be opened in September 2004. The standard of learning and attainment is good for adult students and pass rates are generally high. Students benefit from good IT resources and specialist equipment. Although improving, retention rates have been low and there has been insufficient focus on quality assurance and in developing teaching methods to address the range of students' needs and working in the open-plan learning environments.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Through strong partnerships with work-based providers and community organisations, young people and adults who might not have considered education and training have been drawn in. Good links with local schools have enabled disaffected school pupils to take vocational courses. Students benefit from a welcoming and safe environment. The promotion of equality of opportunity is good and the achievement of students is monitored in detail by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. The college has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and action plan, and a race equality policy which comply fully with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and Special Education Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA).

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Support for students is good. Student induction to the college is well structured and diagnostic assessment is effective in identifying needs for additional support. Students receiving help to improve literacy and numeracy have a much higher retention rate than other college students. Support staff and tutors ensure that additional support is very closely aligned to individual needs. Tutors provide a high level of personal support. Procedures for monitoring attendance are thorough and have led to improvements in attendance in some curriculum areas. The quality of individual learning plans and the setting of short-term and long-term learning targets for students are inconsistent in quality. Students benefit from good advice on welfare issues. There are strong links with outside agencies to provide specialist help, for example, a job-search shop offers part-time employment opportunities with local companies.

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 support from teachers and other staff

- being treated like adults

- the welcoming and friendly atmosphere

- good IT and specialist equipment

- cheap and nice food.

What they feel could be improved

- the noise during lessons in open-plan areas

- the availability of lockers and social facilities.

Other information

The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (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 should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and 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	56	37	7
19+ and WBL*	68	26	6
Learning 16–18	55	39	6
19+ and WBL*	78	20	2

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 courses that can be studied full time and part time. Courses are offered in 13 out of the 14 of the LSC's areas of learning, as Table 2 in Part D of the report shows. Three areas of learning, ICT, business and visual, and performing arts and media accounted for over 50% of student enrolments in 2002/03. Taking patterns of retention and pass rates at a college-wide level, the key indicators show that pass rates are generally above the averages for FE colleges. They are particularly good on level 2 courses and on level 3 courses for adult students. The only exception is pass rates on level 1 courses for students aged over 19, which have been below the national average for the last three years. Patterns of retention rates show a less favourable picture and with the exception of level 2 and 3 courses for students aged 19 and over, are below the relevant national averages. However, retention rates have improved over the four-year period 1999/2000 to 2002/03 and are now close to the national averages in most areas. Retention and pass rates for adults taking short courses are generally good. In 2002/03, there were approximately 6,000 student enrolments on these courses, with a student retention rate of 93% and a pass rate of 81%.

2.   The overall attendance rate was 78%, slightly above the national average for FE colleges. It was highest at 85% on sports, leisure and travel courses and lowest on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses at 74%.

16 to 18 year olds

3.   About 45% of students, as measured by student full-time equivalents, are aged 16 to 18. Students generally make good progress. Pass rates are good on general national

vocational qualification (GNVQ), national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses and full-time diploma courses at foundation and intermediate levels. They are generally lower on vocational courses at level 3 and particularly on advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) qualifications. Pass rates are good at GCE A level, with 100% passes in many subjects. However, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of students achieving grades A and B. Performance is weaker at AS level where the overall pass rate was 76% in 2003. Low retention rates have also been a feature of many full-time courses, for example on NVQ level 2 courses where it was only 52%. On two-year courses, many students do not progress from the first to the second year of the course.

4.   The college's course offer was substantially altered to meet the recommendations of 'Curriculum 2000'. For example, students were required to take four or five AS levels, and key skills and AVCE qualifications were offered in place of GNVQ and national diplomas. In the two years following these changes, 2001 and 2002, student achievements declined substantially. Performance was poor on many AVCE programmes and also in the key skills of communication and application of number. The college substantially re-modelled its curriculum offer for 2003, for example students were normally expected to take three or four AS levels and full-time diplomas replaced AVCE qualifications in many areas. These changes have led to improved patterns of achievement and attendance in many subjects. Inspectors judged about two thirds of student attainment to be good or better on Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first and national courses. In comparison, less than a third of student attainment was judged to be good or better on GNVQ and AVCE courses.

5.   In most curriculum areas, students are well prepared for progression to work and employment. For example in media, visual and performing arts they develop good occupational skills through working with modern equipment in workshops and simulated work environments. On business administration courses, links with employers are good and students develop good interpersonal skills through work experience. Standards of student work are good in ICT, media, visual and performing arts, literacy and numeracy and entry-to-employment (E2E) programmes. They are satisfactory in the other curriculum areas, apart from hairdressing and beauty.

6.   Students are generally highly motivated and able to work independently in the open-plan learning centres in which they spend much of their time. Levels of internal progression are good in many curriculum areas, with students progressing from foundation and intermediate to advanced courses and also from FE to HE. For example, about 60% of trainees on the E2E programmes which commenced in August 2004 have progressed to further education, training or employment.

Adult learners

7.   About 10,000 adults were enrolled in 2002/03. Through close co-operation with local work-based training providers, represented in the NOVA Partnership, the college attracts adults who have had little previous success in formal education. Many have poor skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. In most areas, student progression from lower-level to higher-level courses is good. For example, there are high levels of progression from the

'New Deal Gateway' into FE and work-based training. Students gain confidence by taking foundation level courses in the community and then progress to higher levels of study at the main college campuses.

8.   On level 1 courses, both retention and pass rates are below the national average. On courses at levels 2 and 3 by contrast, retention and pass rates were both above the national average in 2003. The pass rate of over 80% on level 2 courses, where there were over 1,100 enrolments, was well above the national average.

9.   Inspectors judged that in two thirds of the lessons observed that the attainment of adult students was good or better. On legal secretarial and accountancy courses, students were confident in their use of specialist vocabulary and skilful in applying concepts to practical tasks. On many IT courses, students successfully used a mix of self-study guides and online resources from the Internet and the college intranet to successfully tackle projects involving retrieval and analysis of data. On visual arts courses, adult students were confident in using experimental techniques in projects, for example the use of test tiles for scraffito.

Quality of education and training

10.   Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 239 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 59% of lessons, 34% were satisfactory, and 7% were unsatisfactory. The grading of learning followed a similar pattern with 60% good or better, 35% satisfactory and 5% unsatisfactory. The overall standard of teaching is lower than the averages for general FE and tertiary colleges inspected in 2002/03, when 63% of lessons were graded good or better and 7% unsatisfactory.

11.   The standard of teaching and learning is uneven across curriculum areas. Teaching and learning are generally good on courses in mathematics, ICT, visual and performing arts, literacy and numeracy and E2E. Across all areas, practical teaching is of a higher standard than the teaching of theory. Teaching sessions involving academic support advisers, who provide help to individual students during lessons, are also generally of good quality.

12.   There are marked differences in the quality of teaching and learning by level of course. At level 3, 60% of lessons were good or better with 8% unsatisfactory. At level 2, 53% of sessions were good or better, with 6% unsatisfactory. At level 1, 50% were good or better with none unsatisfactory. However, the proportion of good teaching was highest at entry level, with 65% of lessons good or better and 7% unsatisfactory. The better teaching and learning are to be found on national diploma courses. The less successful teaching and learning are on full-time AS-level courses. All of the tutorials observed were at least satisfactory, with about half graded good or better.

13.   The standard of teaching and learning in lessons attended predominantly by adults is higher than those attended by students aged 16 to 18. Some 68% of lessons for adults were good or better compared with 56% for students aged 16 to 18; 6% of lessons for adults were unsatisfactory compared with 7% for students aged 16 to 18. However, levels of attendance of students aged 16 to 18 were better, at 79%, than for adults at 77%.

14.   There are marked differences between the quality of teaching by full-time and part-time staff. Almost a third of lessons observed were taught by part-time staff. Of these, 51% were good or better compared with 62% for full-time staff. There were also more unsatisfactory lessons, with 13% graded unsatisfactory compared with 4% for full-time staff. Almost three quarters of part-time staff have not yet completed a nationally recognised teaching qualification and many of those observed, although well motivated, lacked good pedagogical skills.

15.   Although there is generally good in-class individual learning support, insufficient differentiation in teaching strategy was identified in several areas of learning. Teachers do not sufficiently adapt teaching or resources to reflect the information they have about the different needs of students. For example, in one foundation class, some students were identified with literacy needs, but there was no use made of a whiteboard or flip-chart to record key discussion points or common spelling errors. Many students found it difficult to listen to the tutor and take notes at the same time. Intranet resources are sometimes used that have not been adapted to meet the needs of the specific group of students. Some lessons lack sufficient pace and challenge and do not extend more able students enough.

16.   In lessons in a number of areas of learning, teaching strategies were inappropriate to the open learning environment. For example, a number of theory or demonstration lessons were ineffective. Students found it difficult to concentrate due to the high level of noise and distraction from groups working on adjacent computer clusters. Some practical classes were cramped, where different groups were sharing the same space, particularly when they were involved in large-scale activities.

17.   The college is located on four sites near the centre of Southend. Carnarvon Road and London Road house the biggest campuses. College accommodation across most curriculum areas is attractive, clean and well maintained. Some parts of the Queens Road and London Road sites are inappropriately configured for the activities being undertaken and poorly decorated. The hairdressing training facility at Queens Road provides an environment that is often too noisy to allow effective teaching of theory to groups of students. A new campus is to open in August 2004 next to one of the town's railway stations and the main shopping street of Southend. Most sites have satisfactory access and facilities for people with mobility difficulties, with the exception of the Queens Road beauty salon. The two major centres have adequate security and facilities staff to help to maintain a secure and safe environment.

18.   Students benefit from good specialist equipment. The specialist IT and media resources are excellent and representative of current industry standards. There are good equipment resources for hospitality and catering; and good learning resources for health and social care, literacy and numeracy.

19.   The college has established excellent ICT facilities in the two major centres. There are very good supplies of up-to-date computers for students, with one computer for every four full-time equivalent students. Open-access computers are a key feature of the learning environment at the college. There are excellent local area networks for both staff and

students that are connected for e-mail, Internet and intranet access. However, in the Queens Road centre, there is limited availability of computers and students need to transfer to other sites to have full access to the network. There is good technical support at all sites for computing and visual aid equipment. Much of the information on the intranet is available to students working from home. The study centre at Carnarvon Road has good stocks of books, teaching and learning materials, and is able to offer access for students on full-time and part-time courses. There are facilities for teaching groups of students and for quiet areas promoting individual study.

20.   There is a well-equipped nursery providing crèche facilities at Carnarvon Road for students and staff with children under school age. Students needing crèche places for their children at the nursery have equivalent access to other users, but current supply of places can meet demand. Students make good use of the refectory facilities at the major locations, which are attractive and welcoming. A modern sports facility has recently been purchased, some two miles from the main sites and is in the process of refurbishment.

21.   Staff are generally well qualified. The majority of permanent teaching staff have a recognised teaching qualification and the remainder are working towards achieving an appropriate qualification. In all areas, staff are encouraged and given the opportunity to update their curriculum knowledge and skills. For example, staff are able to develop online materials for their specialist subjects. Some part-time teachers are inadequately qualified. Only 27% currently hold a teaching qualification, a further 36% are studying for one. High levels of staff turnover have been a major issue over the last three years. The staff retention rate is improving. However, the historically high levels of staff turnover have made the college over-dependent on part-time teachers in some curriculum areas.

22.   Assessment is well planned in most curriculum areas, for example, in mathematics and science, business, health and social care, art and design and performing arts. Assessment information and briefs are readily accessible to students through the college intranet. An appropriate range of assessment strategies is used and coursework schedules are used effectively to ensure that students' workload is normally balanced. Assessment criteria are stated clearly and guidance is given to help students achieve high grades. However, the assessment on hospitality NVQ courses is too teacher dominated with little involvement of the students in determining when they are ready for assessment. Assessments are generally used effectively by teachers to check student progress. Most tutors track the progress of students carefully using appropriate record systems.

23.   The marking of students' work is mostly thorough, but there are subjects where it is less so. In the better examples, such as in mathematics and science and humanities, students receive prompt feedback from teachers with constructive and helpful comments that enable them to improve their future work. However, written feedback on the work of some health and social care, business and performing arts students is insufficiently constructive to help them improve their work. In psychology, essays are not always marked effectively. In some instances, spelling and grammatical mistakes are not corrected. Internal verification is

carried out in a satisfactory manner on most courses. External moderators' reports are generally positive about the standards on the courses.

24.   The college provides a broad range of full-time and part-time vocational courses that meet students' needs well. Courses are offered across the college's four main sites and range from entry level through to advanced level in many curriculum areas. A wide range of work-based programmes are available through the college's involvement in a partnership with several other providers in the locality. Market research is successfully shared between the college marketing department and individual initiatives from the various curriculum schools. There are clear progression routes in all curriculum areas, but provision at level 1 in arts, media and sport is limited.

25.   Provision is carefully planned. The college works closely with the local LSC, the Federation of Essex Colleges, the University of Essex, a variety of collaborative partners, and the local schools, in order to develop a cohesive approach to the curriculum offer. In recent years, the college has developed a highly successful provision of IT through links with major software and hardware suppliers leading to the award of industry standard training qualifications.

26.   Links with employers are generally good. Training is offered to local businesses as part of a partnership of local providers and in conjunction with the University of Essex. A number of curriculum areas have developed particular initiatives to reflect local needs; for example, the good links with legal firms in the City of London to provide career progression for secretarial students. Links with employers however, are underdeveloped in hairdressing and beauty, and in some areas such as hospitality and catering the links with employers are informal rather than established through official channels.

27.   There are strong links with local schools to provide specialist input in various aspects of their curricula. In hospitality and catering, some students aged 14 to 16 have been incorporated into a mainstream GNVQ foundation group. A substantial number of students from local schools have taken advantage of taster days at the college

28.   Support for students is good. College support and academic staff attend careers events and organise a range of suitable activities to promote college courses and to inform prospective students. Students have individual guidance interviews. Prospectuses and the college website provide clear information on courses including the course content and future career possibilities. The website and prospectuses have suitable detail about the services provided to support students and other information such as the disability statement, equal opportunities policy, racial equality policy and a values statement. Advice and information on future careers are readily accessible.

29.   Students joining the college can apply for additional support to help them complete their studies. This support can take many forms such as communicator support for students with impaired hearing or practical help with organising evidence portfolios for students who have difficulty doing this. Additional support is very closely aligned to the needs of individual students and includes regular meetings with the student or occasional telephone

calls depending upon the level of help identified. Reviews are held regularly to check on progress and to adapt the help provided if required. Support staff liaise closely with personal tutors and teachers to identify suitable practical help for the student. In 2002/03, 128 students received additional support and the retention rate of these students was high, at 91%.

30.   The students' induction to the college is structured carefully. It normally takes place over the first few weeks and is an appropriate mix of college information and an introduction to the work of their chosen area. During the induction period, students are assessed carefully to see if they require further assistance to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Students also have to complete a written assignment which further helps to identify if they require extra assistance. Tutors and support staff liaise closely over the provision of suitable support. Such support is normally provided during their specialist lessons. Inspectors judged the quality of this support to be good. During 2002/03, the retention rate of the 566 students receiving literacy and numeracy support was 84%, compared to approximately 70% for students who did not receive this type of support.

31.   All students have a personal tutor and receive good guidance. Tutors make good use of the standard college materials during tutorials in covering such aspects as revision techniques or HE applications. Tutors have concentrated particularly on improving student attendance and have been generally successful, although attendance in a few areas, for example hairdressing, is poor. Student services staff provide good help on welfare issues such as financial matters and health advice. There are strong links with agencies to provide specialist help which the college cannot offer. A Jobsearch shop, which operates through the college website, offers a range of part-time employment opportunities with over 100 local companies.

32.   Some students and tutors make good use of the availability of online learning plans to set short-term and long-term targets for students. However, the quality of individual learning plans and the setting of short and long-term learning targets for students is not consistently good. For example, many action plans are insufficiently precise to help students improve their performance and they lack specific and measurable targets. Some are not updated regularly. There is some poor target setting and reviews on some courses.

33.   The college has a child protection policy. It is amplified further in a staff document which contains clear, detailed practical information. Both documents define clearly responsibilities and procedures including key contacts if abuse is suspected. Training during the staff conference and at other internal and external events has been provided.

Leadership and management

34.   Since the last inspection in 1999, a highly motivated and committed corporation has worked with two different principals. A new college campus is being built and significant growth in student numbers has been achieved, in particular by working with new partners and attracting additional students to HE and to courses at levels 1 and 2. Staff are effectively consulted by senior managers and feel involved in decision making. There is tight control of finances. The standard of learning and attainment is good for adult students. Students

benefit from good academic and learning support, the extensive IT resources and specialist equipment. However, retention rates are low and there has been insufficient focus on developing teaching methods to address the range of students' needs and teaching in the open-plan learning environment.

35.   Governance of the college is good. Board members have extensive experience of governance and all are very enthusiastic about their roles. They are drawn from business, community and public life, work well together in committee and bring a broad range of skills to the college. They are clear about the demarcation of responsibilities between governance and management. Meetings are well focused and the monitoring of financial matters is good. However, the monitoring of student performance targets is less systematic and thorough.

36.   There is strong, consultative leadership by the principal, both in college and in the wider community. An open style of leadership and management is promoted. Communication within the college is effective. There is frequent dialogue between directors, heads of school and all departmental staff. Plentiful information including notice boards and staff bulletins are available on the college intranet. Student councils operate at school and college level and student views are systematically collected through surveys three times a year. Academic leadership has been strengthened through restructuring and additional posts being created at curriculum level. Success in achieving a range of vocational and general qualifications, at all levels, is recognised through a celebratory award ceremony for students and their parents.

37.   Securing a sustained improvement to retention rates is a high priority for management. Retention rates on courses for students aged 16 to 18 and at level 1 have been consistently below national averages. A college-wide retention rate strategy is in place and is starting to take effect. For example, a strong focus on attendance in sport and leisure classes has raised attendance levels significantly and levels of retention across the school have improved.

38.   The strategic plan is comprehensive and details the college's market position and its development priorities as well as the associated resource implications. Financial planning and forecasting, which is based on a centrally controlled budgeting programme, is very effective. An annual operational plan is also prepared which enables the college to progress priorities over time. However, the operational plan and the associated school development plans lack specificity with regard to timescales and outcomes. The pace of completion of developments varies between schools.

39.   Policies on equal opportunities, race relations and diversity are well developed and include accompanying codes of practice for staff. The college has complied with legal requirements and has made an enthusiastic response to the wider issues of diversity. Thorough analysis and monitoring of students' participation, retention rates on programme and pass rates are undertaken by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. An annual report on the findings is produced. Staff are trained and updated in equality of opportunity issues. Students receive very helpful handouts and information about equal opportunities during induction. Complaints are effectively monitored and responded to promptly.

40.   Collaborative activity between the college and a wide range of external partners is outstanding. Successful initiatives have raised the profile of the college in the community and established it as a successful organisation which achieves and is trusted. Key among these partnerships is the link with Essex University which in 2003/04 enabled the college to enrol 200 additional students to a range of HE programmes at the college. The university is also a major partner in the college's successful £52 million move to new accommodation in the summer of 2004. Other educational partners are the Thames Gateway Regeneration Project, the NOVA Partnership for trainees attending New Deal and other work-based programmes, the New Technology Institute for IT in South Essex, the OPTIMA Partnership for 14-to-19 education, the Essex Learning Hub supporting Learndirect and a business partnership with Business Link. In 2002/03, over 20% of students recruited to external partners transferred to college courses. The principal has played a major role in the development of these initiatives.

41.   Curriculum management is satisfactory or better in all areas except hairdressing and beauty therapy. Team meetings generally review data on recruitment and retention rates each month. Programme managers provide useful support for new staff through a mentoring programme. However, there is insufficient sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. Staff are able to contribute to the well-established annual review process which updates each school's three-year curriculum plan.

42.   Whilst there is a comprehensive appraisal scheme for staff, its implementation is incomplete. The appraisal interview focuses on the key competencies of the post-holder's job role and includes for teachers, discussion about the results of teaching observations. Training needs emerging from the interview culminate in a professional development programme for the individual. The scheme is mandatory for all full-time staff, but in 2003/04 only 49% of staff completed the process. Training needs emerging from appraisal are made available as part of an extensive programme of staff development. In 2003/04, the college committed 6% of its budget to support the programme.

43.   Insufficient attention is paid to the improvement of teaching and learning. Implementation of the teaching observation programme is poor. Only 25% of teachers were observed teaching in 2002/03 and the grades that were awarded were higher than grades awarded during inspection. Similarly, the college self-assessment process overestimated the curriculum area grades. About a third of teaching is provided by associate lecturers, most of whom do not hold nationally approved teaching qualifications. During the inspection, some teachers lacked good skills in managing learning in the open-plan IT environments.

44.   Quality assurance is insufficiently rigorous. Course reviews do not focus sufficiently on the quality of teaching. Progress reviews often lack specific targets and information which would help students to improve their performance in good time. College policies and procedures are not always appropriately applied across the different schools. The self-assessment report lacks sufficient detail on teaching and learning. Little use is made of value added data to assess the impact of teaching and learning on student progress and achievements.

45.   The college provides value for money. There is thorough control of resources and a
high level of investment in equipment and new buildings. Whilst there a high level of
efficiency in the use of staff, the uneven quality of teaching, especially of part-time staff has
limited the overall effectiveness of the college.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Science and mathematics

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

Strengths

- broad range of provision in science at levels 2 and 3

- rigorous and helpful marking of students' work

- good teaching of experiments and mathematics.

Weaknesses

- teaching not sufficiently tailored to the ability range in science

- poor pass rates in GCSE biology and on most AS-level courses in 2002/03

- lack of rigour in course reviews.

Scope of provision

46.   Most science and mathematics courses are provided for full-time students. At the time of the inspection, the curriculum area had 206 student enrolments, over 70% of these were aged 16 to 18. Two thirds of all students were enrolled on advanced level qualifications. AS-level and GCE A2 subjects are available in biology, human biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics. National diploma courses are provided in animal science and applied science. Intermediate level vocational courses include GNVQ intermediate science and a first diploma in animal science. An access to HE course is available for adult students.

Achievement and standards

47.   Overall, students' pass rates for AS-level courses fell in 2002/03 to below the national average for similar colleges. In contrast, the pass rates for GCE A2 subjects were high. For example, all the students who completed the GCE A-level biology, chemistry, mathematics, access to science and GNVQ intermediate science courses were successful. Pass rates for GCSE mathematics and biology are below the national average.

48.   The standard of students' written work is satisfactory and external moderators' reports generally endorse the standards of internal assessment. Students demonstrate safe experimental technique in their practical work; for example a group of AS-level students performing a heart dissection used different techniques to explore the structure and function of the organ. They were fully aware of the safety and the risk assessment associated with the

procedure. Vocational students gain valuable occupational skills through local work placements. Progression rates to further study are good with 62% of students proceeding to HE and a further 16% entering employment in 2003.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics (grades A* to C)	2	No. of starts	211	176	143
		% retention	61	56	63
		% pass rate	25	38	33
BTEC national diploma in applied science	3	No. of starts	*	26	83
		% retention	*	58	67
		% pass rate	*	80	88
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	**	41	30
		% retention	**	76	80
		% pass rate	**	58	50
AS-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	15	18	17
		% retention	80	50	71
		% pass rate	50	67	58
AS-level human biology	3	No. of starts	43	35	**
		% retention	88	66	**
		% pass rate	39	35	**
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	66	37	50
		% retention	91	68	72
		% pass rate	43	52	33

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	32	22	**
		% retention	78	95	**
		% pass rate	94	100	**

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run
** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

49.   Experimental activities are taught well in science lessons. Safe practices are used and risk assessments are carried out comprehensively. The teaching of science theory is satisfactory, but there is insufficient variety in the range of activities to stimulate learning. Teachers sometimes talk for too long, without giving students the opportunity to participate and demonstrate understanding. There is insufficient attention to meeting the individual needs of students. The same work is given to all students, without any regard for the ability range. More able students are not stretched or challenged sufficiently.

50.   Teaching in mathematics is well planned and all the materials used are of a high standard. Teaching methods make good use of students' prior knowledge to explain new concepts. For example, in one AS-level lesson on mechanics, knowledge of forces was effectively used to define equilibrium. On the GCSE mathematics course, all lessons are based on a carefully prepared set of study books.

51.   The assessment of practical work and assessments is carried out rigorously. Assignments are well designed and grading criteria are clearly stated, providing clear guidance to students on how high marks can be obtained. Homework is set regularly, promptly marked and returned with constructive comments to help students improve their work.

52.   Staff are well qualified. Science technicians provide good support for laboratory work. The science centre is well equipped with modern equipment. ICT facilities provide good access to the Internet and the college's intranet, which contains much useful and relevant learning material. Many theory lessons take place in the science learning centre. This is unsuitable for some students, particularly the younger ones, who are distracted by the noise from other lessons taking place nearby and lose their concentration.

53.   Staff have developed a broad range of courses in science at levels 2 and 3, meeting the needs of students wishing to study AS-level and GCE A2 subjects, vocational courses and adult students wishing to progress to HE. A school-links programme has been introduced for

Year 10 and 11 pupils and there is also weekend provision for students in forensic science. Work experience placements provide students on the national diploma in animal science course with a valuable insight into industry.

54.   All students are given initial screening tests to identify needs in literacy and numeracy. Students identified as being 'at risk' of under achievement are given individual support. Students receive good support about applying to HE. Tutorial records vary in thoroughness; the review of students' progress is carried out inconsistently. The parents of students aged under 18 receive regular progress reports.

Leadership and management

55.   The science and mathematics provision is managed satisfactorily. Staff are given the opportunity to contribute to decision making. Equality of opportunity is considered and actions are taken to ensure compliance with college policy. Schemes of work and the planning of lessons are done well. Management information is used effectively to monitor retention rates and student satisfaction surveys are thorough and acted upon. The observation of teaching takes place systematically and improvements have resulted, for example in the planning of teaching. However, course reviews are descriptive rather than analytical and do not lead directly to measurable improvements. Action plans are not related to the issues identified and they are not effectively monitored.

Business, administration, management and professional

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- good teaching and learning on legal secretarial and accounting courses

- good range of provision and good opportunities for progression

- effective development of vocational skills through links with industry.

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in management and quality assurance

- much ineffective use of learning resources by teachers

- some poor accommodation at the London Road Centre.

Scope of provision

56.   The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses from level 1 to level 4 which are managed by three different units in the college. Full-time business courses are provided in business and management studies and include AS-level and GCE A-level business, GNVQ intermediate business, the AVCE business single and double awards and NVQ accounting. The service sector studies unit offers full-time and part-time Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX) legal secretarial courses and the London Chamber of Commerce Institute (LCCI) Office and secretarial skills certificate from levels 1 to 3. The business development centre works closely with local employers to provide training programmes which include, call centre techniques, NVQ administration, the Certificate in Personnel Development (CIPD) and the National Examinations Board for Supervisory Management (NEBSM) programmes. At the time of inspection, there were 364 full-time and 504 part-time students.

Achievement and standards

57.   There are high pass rates on many courses. There are significant improvements in both retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business courses following changes to curriculum delivery, including a standard introductory unit for all students and a wider choice of pathways. A new procedure for monitoring and follow-up of absentee full-time students introduced in the autumn term 2003 has had a positive effect and attendance and punctuality are generally good. Results in key skills are poor at levels 2 and 3. No students achieved a pass in application of number in 2003. Retention rates are below

the national average and declining on NVQ accounting level 2. They are also poor on AS-level accounting.

58.   Students' work on most courses is good and students are well prepared for employment in business and legal firms in London and locally. Levels of internal student progression, for example from the AVCE to the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in business studies at the college, are good. Students' vocational skills are effectively developed through work experience and links with local employers.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, administration, management and professional, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Book-keeping and accounts	1	No. of starts	**	66	57
		% retention	**	88	95
		% pass rate	**	58	89
GNVQ in intermediate business	2	No. of starts	25	23	23
		% retention	80	61	83
		% pass rate	40	86	95
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	36	41	19
		% retention	78	80	63
		% pass rate	71	103	91
AVCE (double award) in business	3	No. of starts	55	43	54
		% retention	89	40	63
		% pass rate	82	94	97
AS level in business studies	3	No. of starts	95	39	54
		% retention	81	77	80
		% pass rate	71	90	81

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Legal secretaries diploma	3	No. of starts	54	55	68
		% retention	86	90	53
		% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

*** fewer than 15 students enrolled*

Quality of education and training

59.   Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory with the better teaching and learning in administration. Students are challenged by tasks in shorthand and computer skills sessions and are able to work independently and evaluate their progress. The variety of teaching methods used on ILEX courses help to promote a detailed grasp of technical terminology and other work-related skills. However, in some lessons, aspects of teaching are weak. There is too much reliance on the use of open questions and standard handouts taken from the college intranet. Learning materials do not cater for the range of student needs and the use of IT is not effectively planned. Minimal use is made of audio-visual aids. Students are not encouraged to prepare and display evidence of their work.

60.   Most full-time staff are well qualified with good vocational experience, competence and knowledge. However, many part-time staff are recently appointed and do not have teaching qualifications. At the London Road campus, many classrooms are in poor decorative condition with inadequate furniture and lighting. Extraneous noise creates distractions in learning areas. The curriculum area will be housed in a new purpose-built campus from September 2004.

61.   Assessment across most courses is well planned and meets the standards of awarding bodies. In most cases, teachers' feedback to students is constructive and work is returned promptly. On the AVCE business course, assignments in the first semester are written to the pass criteria giving students opportunities to meet this threshold and achieve higher grades later in the course. Students are well prepared for external examinations in ILEX and NVQ accounting programmes. Whilst the tracking of students' progress is good on most courses, there have been weak assessment and internal verification practices on the NVQ administration and Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) programmes. Students are given good opportunities to study specialist options, for example retailing, accounting and law on the AVCE courses. The ILEX course was introduced in response to a local need for specialist trained staff.

62.   All students receive a thorough induction to the college. Initial advice and guidance are good. All students are screened to assess their learning needs. Additional support is well adapted to specific needs. During lessons, academic support staff help students to improve

their literacy and numeracy skills. Students make good use of target setting which is given appropriate attention through the use of individual learning plans. Procedures for monitoring punctuality and attendance are effective and have improved retention rates in 2003/04.

Leadership and management

63.   Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. Weekly team briefings ensure that teachers are aware of new developments and priorities identified by senior management. Targets for retention and pass rates are set and monitored. The ILEX and administration courses and the learning centre in Carnarvon Road are particularly well managed. There are inconsistencies in the quality assurance and management of the other courses. For example, inaccuracies in timetabling and rooming have created problems for students and impacted on their learning. Procedures for lesson observation are not systematic or rigorous and do not sufficiently inform staff development needs. Slow progress in achieving assessor and verifier awards by AAT staff has delayed the accreditation of students. It has not been possible to recruit sufficient staff to match the growth in business and management studies. The GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business students have been provided with inadequate cover for some lessons.

Information and communications technology

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on GNVQ foundation, intermediate and the ECDL courses

- much good teaching and learning

- good specialist resources

- thorough assessment

- good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on the City and Guilds 7261 IT course

- inappropriate use of learning materials in a few classes

- poorly implemented quality assurance procedures.

Scope of provision

64.   A wide range of courses accommodates a diverse student population. At the time of the inspection, 391 students aged 16 to 18 and 3,026 adult students were following computer courses. Courses are provided at entry and foundation levels, at level 2 and at advanced level. They include general qualifications such as AS level and GCE A levels and vocational courses such as the BTEC national diploma and the AVCE. There are also commercially accredited programmes.

Achievement and standards

65.   There are high pass rates on GNVQ foundation, intermediate and the European computer Driving Licence (ECDL) courses. In contrast, the pass rate is poor on the City and Guilds 7261 information processing certificate, which has now been discontinued in favour of more appropriate entry-level qualifications for adults wishing to learn basic IT skills. Both retention and pass rates are much higher on the replacement course which has a cohort of over 1,200 students.

66.   Student work in classes is of good standard. GNVQ foundation students successfully developed a contract to ensure the effective functioning of members of a project group. Students develop good skills in applying IT concepts to commercial situations. For example, students on AS-level courses produced a complex and sophisticated program to administer a fast food outlet including accounting practices, staff timetables and stock

control. Many students are able to progress to higher level IT courses within the college. Some 22 out of the 24 students completing the GNVQ foundation progressed on to further courses. At level 2, 52 out of 53 students progressed to higher-level courses.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	28	31	31
		% retention	71	77	77
		% pass rate	95	92	100
City and Guilds 7261 information processing certificate	1	No. of starts	3,596	1,826	1,254
		% retention	76	47	40
		% pass rate	49	56	60
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	43	41	52
		% retention	70	71	77
		% pass rate	97	97	92
ECDL	2	No. of starts	130	272	61
		% retention	66	64	92
		% pass rate	81	78	100
AVCE/GNVQ advanced IT	3	No. of starts	73	21	83
		% retention	63	95	73
		% pass rate	96	80	70
AS-level ICT	3	No. of starts	58	35	51
		% retention	86	69	73
		% pass rate	84	96	65

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

67.   Most lessons are well planned and structured. The better teaching was workshop based. Students were enthusiastic, well motivated and eager to take ownership of the learning experience working at their own pace. Online learning materials were accessed including lesson plans, activities and resources. For example, in one lesson, students constructed a sophisticated algorithm to navigate a path from one room in the college to another. Research tasks were carried out using the computer network and appropriate packages were used to present the information in a wide range of styles. For example, in one part-time evening class students successfully used the Internet and produced a report identifying comparative costs of various combinations of computer components.

68.   In classes where teaching fails to address the needs of students some inappropriate material is used for supported self-study for example lesson activities sheets printed from the virtual learning environment. In some morning classes, poor punctuality caused disruption and prevented the planned activity from being completed. A system to address poor attendance and punctuality is being used and leading to improvement.

69.   Students have access to good computer resources. They use an extensive intranet to gain access to many resources especially lesson plans, activities, resources, and course information. Students receive feedback on work carried out and assignments by e-mail. In some lessons, the workshop environment was timetabled inappropriately for lessons where teachers attempted to explain theory to large groups. Students found it difficult to concentrate due to the high level of ambient noise from other classes.

70.   An excellent network provides good computer access across the college. Students can access online materials onsite and from home. Support personnel are in close proximity to the workshops and respond promptly to problems. Students benefit from lessons taught by a mixture of new staff with recent industrial experience and more experienced teachers. Students benefit from a good system for providing substitute cover for absent teachers. Materials for courses are available on the intranet and members of staff cover for colleagues. For example, on two occasions, the timetabled member of staff was absent and another member of staff effectively taught the lesson.

71.   Initial assessment ensures that students' needs are identified clearly and that they receive appropriate support. A range of assessment strategies is used to monitor the performance of students. Student observation, question and answer and formal assignments were all effectively used. Students are given an assignment schedule at the start of the course that reflects a fair distribution across different modules and time frames. Progress is recorded electronically. Parents, students and tutors participate in effective review meetings which take place three times a year.

Leadership and management

72.   Leadership and management are good. New staff are well supported. Mentors regularly meet with them to advise and assist. There is an effective mechanism for the

dissemination of good practice. Staff can observe and support each other effectively. Many are expanding their knowledge by taking specialist computing qualifications. A clear direction is set by managers to implement good learning practice. For example, action is being taken to address the gender imbalance in favour of males on ICT full-time courses. A 'Women into IT' conference has been held and a day of activities for local schools was organised. Certain aspects of quality assurance are poorly managed. For example, the process by which agreed targets are implemented is not formally and systematically recorded, monitored and evaluated. There is insufficient detail and depth in the course development plans to identify progress against identified issues. Formal meetings protocol is not observed. For example, minutes of course team meetings are not produced, circulated and agreed. Some informal industrial links exist, but there is no formal mechanism for work experience or collaborative ventures with industrial partners.

Hospitality and catering

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on AVCE and NVQ level 2 courses

- good teaching and learning in some classes

- good resources

- a high level of support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most programmes

- some teaching which fails to challenge students

- insufficient use of target setting.

Scope of provision

73.   The college provides courses in hospitality and catering at levels 1 to 3. There is provision for GNVQ at foundation and intermediate levels and both single and double award AVCE. NVQ courses in food preparation and cooking are offered at levels 1 and 2 for full-time students and at levels 2 and 3 for part-time students. Students undertake the basic food hygiene programme as an additional qualification. At the time of inspection, there were 63 students aged 16 to 18 and 28 adults on full-time programmes. There were 5 students, aged 16 to 18 and 7 adults on part-time programmes.

Achievement and standards

74.   There are good pass rates on both AVCE and NVQ level 2 courses. The AVCE has shown continuous improvement during the past three years and achieved a 100% pass rate in 2002/03, with NVQ level 2 students also achieving the same high standard. Retention rates on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate and NVQ level 2 courses have been poor and below national average. Students make good progress to either FE, HE or into employment. Of the 44 students who completed full-time courses in 2002/03, 22 progressed into employment and 18 into FE or HE.

75.   Students perform well in practical classes achieving a good level of practical skills in food preparation. They are encouraged to be creative within this area and develop their own menus and events. The college brasserie provides good experience for students in food preparation and service in a realistic work environment. Students also develop good supervisor and organisational skills through project work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality and catering, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation in hospitality and catering	1	No. of starts	*	4	6
		% retention	*	75	67
		% pass rate	*	100	75
City and Guilds 3320-03 diploma in professional cookery	2	No. of starts	3	8	8
		% retention	100	75	50
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GNVQ intermediate in hospitality and catering	2	No. of starts	12	26	15
		% retention	75	92	67
		% pass rate	89	96	80
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking	2	No. of starts	22	14	14
		% retention	77	71	64
		% pass rate	100	90	100
AVCE double award in hospitality and catering	3	No. of starts	20	17	18
		% retention	95	59	83
		% pass rate	84	90	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

76.   All teaching is at least satisfactory and the majority is good. Students gain good practical skills and knowledge. Better lessons engage students in a variety of activities, such as in a language class in which role play promoted understanding of French expressions in cooking. Students develop good supervisory skills, by being given responsibility for the production of menus and co-ordinating teams in the college brasserie. Teaching schemes of

work, lesson plans and supporting learning materials are stored on the college intranet which allows both students and other staff to access them.

77.   Learning outcomes are not often clearly evaluated or communicated to students. Much teaching of theoretical aspects takes place in open learning areas shared by other classes and students are distracted by other lessons. Individual learning plans are underdeveloped. They are rarely updated after the start of the year and students make little use of them to assess their own progress. Subsequent action plans fail to fully review whether previous targets have been met.

78.   There are good resources for learning. The range of equipment within the practical areas for food preparation and service are good. They allow the students the opportunity to practise the range of skills necessary and this experience is further improved when students undertake a period of work placement. Self-study programmes allow students the facility to work at their own pace and develop knowledge, for example of safe handling of knives and preparation of fish. Staff have a range of good industrial experience and of teaching and assessing. As part of the further development of staff, the college encourages them to undertake periods within industry to ensure their skills are maintained.

79.   Students are not encouraged to take sufficient responsibility for managing learning and assessment on NVQ courses. For example, they rarely negotiate with staff about when they are ready to be assessed. Internal verification is thoroughly planned. Students experience a high level of individual support whilst on courses. Good in-class support builds upon the diagnosis of support needs. There is close monitoring by teachers of student attendance at college.

80.   There are progression routes for students from level 1 to level 3 for GNVQ, AVCE and NVQ in food preparation and cooking. Whilst informal links with industry through personal contacts are good, there is no formal mechanism which allows both the college and industry to establish local employment needs and develop provision in response. Students experience a wide range of enrichment activities whilst at college. These include visits to a variety of good catering establishments which improves the students' understanding of the industry both of the variety of opportunities and employment prospects. Some students also experience a residential trip to France, which includes visits to markets, wine cellars and a chocolate factory.

Leadership and management

81.   Leadership and management are satisfactory. Regular team meetings are held with standard agenda items, which include monitoring of retention rates, recruitment, curriculum issues and internal verification. Minutes record the outcomes of the discussions, but do not fully identify actions to be taken. There is good communication between teachers who have designated areas of responsibility for courses. Course files are comprehensive and well maintained with good recording of all aspects of courses. Targets set for tutors are primarily concerned with recruitment, retention and pass rates. The college sets these, staff are aware of them, but have little involvement in determining them. The self-assessment report for this

area did not pay sufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning and the experiences of students on courses.

Sports, leisure and tourism

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

Strengths

- generally well-planned teaching

- good tutorial support

- wide range of enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on many courses

- insufficient provision at levels 1 and 2

- teaching and learning styles that are not adapted to the full ability range.

Scope of provision

82.   At the time of the inspection, there were over 200 students in this area. Over 90% were aged 16 to 18. About a quarter were on level 2 courses and three quarters on level 3 courses. The courses on offer include a GNVQ foundation and intermediate in leisure and tourism, AVCE in travel and tourism, AS level and GCE A levels in sports studies, BTEC first and national diplomas in sports.

Achievement and standards

83.   Historic retention rates have been poor, particularly on level 3 courses. Pass rates have been mixed with some good results on the BTEC first and national diploma courses. Through closer monitoring, attendance and in-year retention have substantially improved in 2003/04. Attendance rates during the inspection were better than for any other curriculum area.

84.   Students sporting skills are good, the college football team and basketball teams have reached national competition finals. A dance specialist and cross country runner has also reached finals in competitions. Coaching skills are well developed and put to good use through a scheme involving college students coaching pupils at local primary schools.

A sample of retention and pass rates in sports, leisure and tourism, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	56	52	31
		% retention	86	79	74
		% pass rate	77	78	74
AVCE leisure and recreation	3	No. of starts	*	16	59
		% retention	*	50	10
		% pass rate	*	88	83
AS-level sport and recreation	3	No. of starts	17	**	19
		% retention	76	**	53
		% pass rate	69	**	60
AVCE travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	28	50	32
		% retention	96	70	53
		% pass rate	93	86	76
BTEC national diploma in applied science (sports)	3	No. of starts	40	23	48
		% retention	70	74	67
		% pass rate	82	94	88

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

85.   All the teaching is at least satisfactory and about a third is good. The best lessons maximise the learning resources available and use the computerised environment to good effect. For example, in one lesson, the teacher used fitness equipment, ICT, group work and the college intranet to provide a well-balanced and stimulating session. Teachers make good use of prepared workbooks. There is a good level of understanding of individual student circumstances and how this influences their progress. In the best lessons, this information is used to ensure full participation of all students. However, in some lessons, teachers fail to

use the learning environment to good effect, for example by undertaking group work or whole class explanations in noisy open-plan areas. In some lessons, students are insufficiently challenged and this results in discipline problems.

86.   The sports programme makes good use of the local leisure centre for practical lessons. There are well-equipped sports halls, a swimming pool and gyms. However, there is no equivalent simulated workplace, such as a travel shop for tourism students. High levels of staff turnover have led to some disruption to teaching. However, new teachers have been recruited and demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment.

87.   Assessment practices are satisfactory. Students are provided with comprehensive assignment briefs. However, the occasional 'bunching' of assessments makes it difficult for students to plan their work. Internal verification of grading is thorough, but written feedback is too perfunctory, principally on the leisure and tourism courses.

88.   Students benefit from the broad range of extra-curricula activities and additional qualifications. For example, there is the Community Sports Leader Award and enrichment activities in football, basketball, running and dance. There is also comprehensive work experience on the sports programme. A good range of external speakers from industry add interest and variety. However, there is virtually no provision at level 1 and only two groups of students at level 2. There are no part-time courses. The college prides itself on inclusiveness and widening participation, this is not borne out by the courses on offer.

89.   Tutorial support is strong. Personal tutors monitor student attendance, academic performance and lateness. All students complete action plans, although these tend to focus more on pastoral targets than on hard-edged academic targets. Student induction is well planned and students are screened on entry for additional support needs. Many students receive dyslexia support and all teachers differentiate learning materials through the use of different colours according to the student's type of dyslexia.

Leadership and management

90.   Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a new head of school who is keen to bring stability to an area that has had a high staff turnover. Course leaders have thorough records of team meetings and the use of a standard agenda ensures that teams are focused on issues that relate to student retention and pass rates. There is substantial evidence of changes that have been made to course management as a result of teams focusing on the pertinent issues. For example, the introduction of a late-slip system for attendance monitoring was as a result of teams discussing how to improve retention rates. This was shared across the school and then more widely adopted across the college.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- good pass rates on many courses

- good progression for full-time beauty students

- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor punctuality and attendance in many hairdressing courses

- much unsatisfactory teaching in beauty therapy

- some unsuitable accommodation

- poor curriculum offer and planning

- unsatisfactory management of hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes.

Scope of provision

91.   The college offers full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy. Hairdressing courses are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3. Beauty therapy courses include a national diploma in beauty therapy, a beauty specialist diploma and a body electrics and electrology diploma. Courses are offered during the day and evening. At the time of the inspection, there were 176 full-time students aged 16 to 18 and 140 full-time students aged over 19. Some 18% of students on beauty courses, and 11% of students of hairdressing courses are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Achievement and standards

92.   Pass rates are good on level 1 hairdressing and most beauty therapy courses. Retention rates are more mixed and there is a high drop-out rate of students over the two years of the NVQ level 2 hairdressing course. There is good progression for full-time beauty therapy students; 84% of beauty therapy students progressed on to an FE course or into related full-time employment in 2003.

93.   Students demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of background theory in beauty therapy. However, too many portfolios of students' work are dull and lack visual images related to the topics covered. Some students work at too slow a pace and have an unprofessional appearance when working practically. They fail to comply with the college dress code. Students working towards qualifications at levels 2 and 3 have developed skills

which are satisfactory or better, but level 1 hairdressing students make slow progress towards completing their qualification.

94.		Student attendance and punctuality in many hairdressing lessons are poor. Students are late for many lessons, but few are challenged about their lateness. In some lessons attendance is very low, at just over 50%. Attendance and punctuality in beauty therapy are satisfactory.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ hairdressing 1 year	1	No. of starts	123	55	76
		% retention	77	71	71
		% pass rate	84	95	91
NVQ hairdressing 1 year/City and Guilds	2	No. of starts	44	39	39
		% retention	77	85	74
		% pass rate	79	82	79
NVQ hairdressing 2 years/City and Guilds	2	No. of starts	29	*	21
		% retention	48	*	70
		% pass rate	57	*	67
Access to beauty therapy and foundation in beauty therapy vocational training charitable trust	2	No. of starts	29	62	44
		% retention	27	63	76
		% pass rate	43	79	68

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

95.		There is much unsatisfactory teaching in beauty therapy. In many of the lessons, teachers do not use challenging teaching and learning strategies to engage and motivate students. There is insufficient checking of learning, insufficient involvement of students in lessons and poor preparation by teachers in some lessons. Students work at too slow a pace when preparing their work areas and make poor use of time when waiting for clients in some

lessons. Almost half of the beauty teachers have little teaching experience, and 6 of the 12 teachers do not have a nationally approved teaching qualification.

96.   Most salons are fit for purpose, but there is some unsuitable accommodation that constrains teaching and learning. High levels of background noise in hairdressing classes prevent effective learning. Not all students can hear the teacher's explanations for techniques during demonstration and theory lessons in the open salon. One IT classroom is far too small to properly accommodate all students and staff in lessons. Classroom temperatures are often uncomfortable. One of the beauty salons is unattractive and dirty. It is not of industry standard, and has insufficient storage space. Students are unable to access the Internet or college intranet at the hairdressing and beauty therapy college site. Access for students with mobility difficulties, both to the main beauty suite and also to the hairdressing theory classroom is poor. Students use a good range of hairdressing and beauty products and equipment.

97.   Students are well supported. Support is effective for students with English as an additional language, students with impaired hearing and for students with poor literacy. Specialist help is provided for students in their usual lessons and support tutors work effectively with vocational tutors. Help with coursework and pastoral support is also effective. Students value the support they receive from tutors and it helps them to progress.

98.   Induction is satisfactory and enables students to settle into their programmes. Group tutorials include such useful topics as the preparation of curriculum vitae. Assessment and verification procedures appropriately meet awarding body requirements. Written feedback on most assignments provides useful guidance for students.

99.   The curriculum offer in hairdressing is not appropriately matched to students' needs. Applicants with previous hairdressing experience undertake a vocational skills assessment and may be placed on a level 2 programme. Many other students are inappropriately placed on a level 1 hairdressing programme. Level 1 hairdressing students inappropriately undertake level 2 training from the start of their course, but are only assessed at level 1. Students who leave early have developed level 2 skills, but are only qualified to level 1. Their level of qualification does not properly reflect their skills. Just 62% of level 1 students progressed to level 2 in 2003. The curriculum in beauty therapy is based on externally examined qualifications and students do not have the opportunity to pursue national vocational qualifications.

Leadership and management

100.   The management of hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes is unsatisfactory. Weaknesses in teaching skills identified through self-assessment have not been resolved. Individual learning plans are unsatisfactory. They are not effectively monitored and improved. Progress reviews and action plans are insufficiently precise to help students improve their performance. Actions taken to improve students' punctuality and attendance in hairdressing are not effective.

101.   Curriculum planning is unsatisfactory. Hairdressing students are not provided with training or assessment in key skills. Many students have insufficient preparation for industry and do not undertake work experience as part of their programme. Students do not work under commercial pressures sufficiently in client sessions. There are weak links with employers. Feedback from employers is not collected and used to improve the curriculum. The self-assessment report lacks rigorous analysis of the curriculum area's key strengths and weaknesses.

Health and social care

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

Strengths

- good pass rates

- good development of personal skills and confidence

- very good resources.

Weaknesses

- weak management of learning in some lessons

- insufficient written feedback in some assignments

- poor retention rates on national diploma programmes.

Scope of provision

102.   Full-time and part-time courses are available from levels 1 to level 4. The full-time offer includes GNVQ foundation and intermediate, national diplomas in early years, caring services and health studies and certificate and diploma courses in childcare and education. The part-time offer includes national certificates, diploma and certificate in childcare and education, counselling programmes, NVQs in early years, care and children and young people. There are one and two-year access courses in health and social work. There are over 1,100 students; about 270 are aged 16 to 18 and about 850 are aged 19 and over. About 90% are female.

Achievement and standards

103.   There are good pass rates on many courses. For example, the intermediate GNVQ in health and social care had a pass rate of 100% in 2003. Retention rates are more mixed and have been poor on some courses. There are poor retention rates on national diploma programmes in early years, social care and health. The programme range is enriched by the requirement that students follow at least one additional qualification. These qualifications, which include GSCE maths and English, practical crafts and first aid have been chosen to complement the main programme and have been identified after discussion with employers and students. The additional qualifications improve students' employability and self-esteem.

104.   Students' creative work is at an appropriate level. In particular, craftwork displayed by students at level 1 is of a high standard. A cushion made by a student demonstrated good appliqué design and a high standard of finish. Students develop good personal skills and confidence. In discussion, they demonstrate depth of understanding and knowledge of the health, care and early years' sectors. A level 3, a student spoke eloquently of the ethical

issues of fostering and monitoring effects on family life. She demonstrated empathy to all parties, drawing extensively on her own experience. Through work placements, students develop good vocational skills. In a primary school classroom, a certificate in childcare and education student was working with a group of children aged six supporting their written class tasks. She was in control of the group and managed their behaviour successfully and demonstrated a confident professional attitude.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health and social care, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	32	27	40
		% retention	84	85	80
		% pass rate	89	96	88
NVQ care 2-year programme	2	No. of starts	18	26	*
		% retention	22	65	*
		% pass rate	100	29	*
Certificate in counselling	2	No. of starts	33	50	60
		% retention	88	82	80
		% pass rate	100	98	100
Access to social work 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	16	16
		% retention	*	44	69
		% pass rate	*	100	91
Access to health 1 year	3	No. of starts	28	31	17
		% retention	79	74	47
		% pass rate	86	100	100
Diploma nursery nursing	3	No. of starts	65	50	37
		% retention	80	73	92
		% pass rate	96	100	71

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
National diploma caring services	3	No. of starts	36	42	38
		% retention	75	69	82
		% pass rate	100	97	90

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

105.   Teaching is generally satisfactory and many lessons are good. Individual students' learning requirements are addressed through effective strategies that are agreed and used across the teaching team. On one course, all students received handouts and tasks on blue paper. This supported the needs of students who are dyslexic without discrimination. Many students are non-traditional learners and a significant number have English as a second language. Teachers are sensitive to their needs. There are effective strategies in place to support students with specific learning needs.

106.   In weaker lessons, the pace is slow. Activities lack variety and lessons are not brought to a clear conclusion. Teaching does not address the different needs of individuals within the group. There is an over-reliance on question and answer techniques and discussion. Small numbers on many courses inhibit the range of teaching activities. Specialist interpersonal skills such as observation, mediation and counselling skills cannot easily be simulated with very small numbers.

107.   There is insufficient written feedback in the marking of some assignments. Some assignments contained a number of grammatical and spelling mistakes. In marking, the work was graded but the mistakes were not corrected. For example, in one task, students were required to submit an example of a letter written to parents. The letters they produced would have been unsuitable for distribution. In some written feedback, there is insufficient specific guidance about how to improve work or achieve higher grades.

108.   The early years centre is well resourced with specialist equipment and materials. Library resources are excellent. There is a wide selection of professional journals and books serving the range of courses and student abilities. Good opportunities to develop practical skills are provided through work placement. Staff are appropriately qualified and offer a breadth of care sector experience to students. Many have current experience and are teacher trained or receiving initial teacher training.

109.   Students have weekly tutorials. There is an effective system of online learning plans which make use of regular target setting and action planning to monitor and encourage

progress through the course. Students speak highly of the individual support they receive from the teaching team.

Leadership and management

110.   The curriculum area is well led. New staff are supported through good mentoring arrangements. Course leaders demonstrate commitment to raising standards and addressing underperforming provision. Poor retention rates on the national diplomas have been identified through course review and self-assessment, and action has been put in place to address this. Staff feel autonomous and involved in decision making. There is good communication between teachers and senior management.

111.   Meetings are open to all staff and attention is paid to ensuring that part time staff are informed of decisions. Information about student progress and personal issues is shared at team level to ensure continuity. Staff bring their professional expertise from the care sector to enhance and effectively support individuals to access learning.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- high standards of attainment in lessons

- wide range of courses and progression opportunities

- much good teaching and support for students

- good management of the area.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses

- poor punctuality and low attendance

- inappropriate use of some accommodation.

Scope of provision

112.   At the time of the inspection, about 460 full-time students were studying on a range
of courses from level 1 to level 4. These included foundation and intermediate level GNVQs,
national diplomas in fashion, fine art, graphic design, interior design, product design and a
pre-degree foundation course. Most courses were at level 3. The area also offers a small
range of part-time courses for adults, which includes an access to HE course.

Achievement and standards

113.   Many courses across art and design have high pass rates, above national averages.
On many courses, all completers pass their examination and gain high grades. Student
attainment is generally of a high standard and is particularly good when students are
exploring ideas and experimenting with materials and techniques. Work on the GNVQ
intermediate course often shows exciting individual development above the required level.
Students develop good skills in using the Internet to carry out research and in computer-aided
art and design. Most students are confident in using a variety of software. In some lessons
on national diploma courses, a few students struggle with basic drawing and are not at the
standard expected.

114.   The very good range of courses allows students to progress within the college and on
to HE. Almost all foundation students gained places on HE courses, many at well-regarded
institutions. Many students who successfully complete their national diploma courses

progress to a variety of specialist degree courses in art and design. The school organises a good range of visits and trips to enrich the curriculum.

115.   Retention rates are mixed and poor on some courses, for example, on the AVCE and GNVQ foundation courses. Managers are aware of the need to improve retention rates on these courses and have put in place measures to secure improvement. In several lessons, attendance was unsatisfactory. Poor punctuality interrupts many lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in art and design, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	21	16	16
		% retention	81	81	69
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	51	50	68
		% retention	80	90	84
		% pass rate	98	96	98
AVCE art and design	3	No. of starts	**	15	28
		% retention	**	86	59
		% pass rate	**	100	100
National diploma in fashion	3	No. of starts	**	18	19
		% retention	**	61	74
		% pass rate	**	100	100
Diploma in foundation studies	3	No. of starts	61	52	36
		% retention	82	88	92
		% pass rate	92	100	100

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
National diploma in interior design	3	No. of starts	*	16	19
		% retention	*	50	81
		% pass rate	*	100	100
National diploma in graphic design	3	No. of starts	34	53	52
		% retention	82	76	83
		% pass rate	100	100	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run
** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

116.   Much teaching is good and some is very good; almost all lessons are well planned, with clear aims and objectives. Teachers prepare well and develop good schemes of work. Teaching is effectively focused on the different needs of students and there is good support for students with different abilities. There is a clear strategy for teaching that is designed around a number of essential resource centres. These centres provide facilities for the study of fine art, fashion, graphic design, sculpture and three-dimensional design, computing and digital design. There is an effective mixture of group work and one-to-one teaching.

117.   Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Many are practising artists and designers. The majority are teacher trained and well supported by technical staff. They are enthusiastic and generally motivate their students. In one lesson on the GNVQ intermediate course, students were being challenged to develop ideas for a poster for a zoo. The studio was full of lively ideas and drawings, rich in their qualities of colour, texture and form. In another very good lesson, students on the national diploma in graphic design were experimenting with a variety of techniques using pencil, pen and ink, paint, collage and photographs. In many lessons, students are developing good skills of research and investigation, evaluation and analysis. However, in a few lessons, planning is less thorough and not all students are fully involved in the tasks set by teachers. Some students struggle with their specialist art and design vocabulary and are not sufficiently challenged when discussing their work.

118.   Students are well supported. They speak highly of the support they receive during their time in college. Students consider induction to the area of learning to be successful, involving trips to galleries, sites of interest and a variety of introductory group activities. In

several lessons, students with hearing and visual impairment have very good individual support. This support, which includes the production of detailed notes for students, ensures they are fully involved, and making good progress, in their studies.

119.   The range of provision, and the diversity and inclusiveness of the student population demonstrate success in widening participation and a commitment to equality of opportunity. The area is accessible to wheelchair users and students with learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities are integrated into mainstream courses.

120.   Procedures for assessment are clear and understood by students. Students are given good guidance on assessment methods and timetables. Assessment criteria are included in project briefs and give students useful guidance on passing with merit and distinction. Written and verbal feedback to students ensure that they are kept informed of their progress. The quality of recorded information from assessments helps both teachers and students to make judgements about progress. Individual learning plans are used across the area of learning. However, they vary in quality and some do not give students measurable targets to aim towards.

121.   Studios and workshops are well managed and make good use of displays to support teaching and learning. The library has a good journal collection and students have good access to computers, both for word processing and specialist research activities. The range of equipment and the standard of lighting in classrooms, studios and workshops are adequate. However, in several lessons, some accommodation is inappropriately used. In these lessons, teachers talk over each other or people walk through rooms whilst teachers are talking to groups and, in some cases, students carry out drawing and design work on workbenches.

Leadership and management

122.   The area of learning is well managed with a clear sense of direction and a commitment to improving performance. Managers are aware of the problems with student attendance and retention rates and have put into place actions to secure improvement. Staff meet regularly in course teams and at school level. They work well as teams. Part-time staff feel supported and valued in their work. There are good communications in the school. The college's systems of quality assurance are well implemented, although the quality of course reviews are variable. The best are very effective and contain rigorous evaluation and realistic action and development plans. Observation of teaching and learning is taking place with grades awarded by the college not noticeably different from those given by inspectors.

Media and performing arts

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

Strengths

- very good pass rates on many courses

- good attainment of analytical and technical skills in media

- strong vocational ethos across provision

- wide range of provision

- good pastoral and learning support arrangements

- good teaching and learning in performing arts.

Weaknesses

- some poor attendance

- some cramped performing arts accommodation

- some inappropriate teaching styles.

Scope of provision

123. The school of media and performing arts offers courses in performing arts, media, music, journalism and photography, including national diplomas, GCE A level and GNVQ intermediate. At the time of the inspection, there were 350 students aged 16 to 18 and about 50 students aged 19 or over. There is little level 1 provision. Some evening provision and weekend provision is designed for adults without formal qualifications. There is a CoVE in media technology.

Achievement and standards

124. There are very good pass rates on many courses. Four courses achieved 100% pass rates in 2002/03: GNVQ intermediate performing arts, the national diploma in music technology, AS-level film and GCE A-level media. Most of these have been above or close to the national average for the last three years and the national diploma in music technology has achieved 100% pass rates throughout that time.

125. Most students have little prior media experience, but have developed competent skills in research and critical analysis. Students demonstrate good technical skills in areas such as production of radio, film and video projects and are able to work independently of teachers on projects such as recording and editing broadcasts. They show good use of critical

evaluation skills. For example, during a lesson on the slasher genre of film, one student was able to explore beyond the obvious in the identification of Bates' mother as a victim. In another lesson, students produced detailed analysis of the specific components from the 'shower' scene in *Psycho* that provoked fear for themselves and audiences. Students take great pride in their work and articulate their learning and progress. For example, some students talked with enthusiasm about their visit to the *Trisha* studio. They were able to comment in detail about the production procedures and practice they had seen, during the making of the show, that relate to the development of their own projects. Performing arts, dance and music students produce a good range and standard of practical work. The majority of students produce work at or above the expected level.

126.   Retention rates have been unsatisfactory on some courses. The issues that contributed to low retention rates have been identified and courses have now been replaced with alternative provision. Attendance and timekeeping were poor in some lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in media and performing arts, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate media	2	No. of starts	48	58	36
		% retention	77	81	81
		% pass rate	76	87	69
GNVQ intermediate performing arts	2	No. of starts	33	20	**
		% retention	91	75	**
		% pass rate	100	80	**
National diploma in music technology	3	No. of starts	36	28	28
		% retention	69	57	61
		% pass rate	100	100	100
AS-level film	3	No. of starts	63	98	19
		% retention	76	71	84
		% pass rate	96	84	100

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	*	62	29
		% retention	*	97	100
		% pass rate	*	82	100
GCE A-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	*	54	37
		% retention	*	94	92
		% pass rate	*	92	97

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

127.   Teaching in performing arts is good. Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm for their subject and their manner is purposeful and energetic. Teaching is enhanced with exceptional vocational experience. In one lesson, the moral, political and social aspects of Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* were discussed in depth. Students handled challenging and difficult subject matter with maturity and sensitivity. They were able to see parallels with Kane's work and their own experiences. In a dance lesson, students discussed a variety of choreographed movements intelligently to explore how they could enhance the music through staccato hip movements coupled with more fluid arm and hand gestures in their own performance. Although resources are mostly of a high industry standard, the studio theatre is cramped for some activities and some furniture is damaged. During one performing arts workshop on Boal's rehearsal techniques, students were physically constrained by the limited floor space. Changing facilities are limited and there are no separate male/female changing rooms.

128.   In media, most teaching is satisfactory and there is some good and very good teaching. Most students make good use of independent learning to further develop their knowledge and skills. In one introductory class on animation, two students were self-taught and competent at creating animated pictures and one had already set up a saved file of an animated picture. Some teaching in media is uninspiring. The fixed, open-plan arrangement in the media centre inhibits some styles of teaching, for example teacher presentations, practical demonstrations, group work and discussion. During one lesson, two different classes occupied one cluster and in another 21 students were grouped into one corner of the media centre trying to follow a computer demonstration given by the teacher. Some could not see the computer screen; others were crouching on the floor so as not to block the view of other students.

129.   CoVE funding has been used to purchase industry standard resources such as studio facilities for television and radio, video editing suites, a screening room and music technology equipment. Specialist technical demonstrators provide technical and other support to students. Many teachers and part-time staff have a wealth of current industry experience which informs teaching, course and resource development. Their range of current work includes choreography, photography, audio engineering, and theatre management. The majority have degrees and many have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications. Formal work experience for students is limited, but live projects with external 'clients' sets them typical industry based assignments relating to commissions and work for local companies and organisations.

130.   The broad range of courses meets the needs and interests of students and meets or exceeds the expectations of many of them. Students speak highly of their progression opportunities within the college. Effective arrangements to support widening participation include good opportunities for adult students. Those with relevant experience can progress on to HE without formal entry qualifications. A wide range of part-time and weekend courses complement the college's portfolio of full-time courses.

131.   Students receive very effective pastoral and learning support. Students value the support they receive, especially when they need help with individual problems. Staff are friendly and approachable. The tutorial system is successful and most students feel they are counselled sensitively about progression opportunities to meet their individual needs.

132.   Assessment is regular and most feedback is detailed. Students are given clear criteria for achieving pass, credit and distinction grades, and can obtain lesson plans, assessment schedules and assignment briefs from the intranet. Teachers' comments are generally constructive, indicating ways in which work can be improved. However, some feedback is sketchy and negative, rather than constructive. Spelling and grammar mistakes are often overlooked. There is not always enough critical feedback about writing style and fluency on media courses.

Leadership and management

133.   Management of the area is good. Clear targets are set and staff are actively involved in the course review process. The profile of grades for observed sessions in the school's self-assessment report is a close match to that of the inspectors. New staff are mentored and there is regular monitoring of teaching. Staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities and there is regular communication between senior management and teaching staff. Improvement strategies are put in place to address issues identified through course and college reviews. Staff and students are aware of strategies that have been implemented to address poor attendance and punctuality.

Humanities

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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates at GCE A level

- effective development of students' study skills and examination techniques

- good teaching in general studies and law

- good assessment of students' work.

Weaknesses

- decline in the proportion of high grades at AS level

- low pass rates in AS-level philosophy and psychology

- some insufficiently challenging teaching

- underdeveloped quality assurance procedures.

Scope of provision

134.   With 615 enrolments, this area forms 6% of the college provision. It comprises mainly GCE A-level and AS-level courses, which are based in the school of sixth form studies. The range of subjects includes communication studies, geography, general studies, history, law, psychology, philosophy and sociology.

Achievement and standards

135.   Pass and retention rates at GCE A2 are good. Most are above national averages for FE colleges. The proportion of students achieving high grades in AS-level subjects has fallen since 2001 and is substantially below national averages. Pass rates in AS-level philosophy and psychology were particularly poor in 2002/03.

136.   Standards of attainment are good in general studies and law and satisfactory in most other subjects. In general studies, students are articulate and confident in presenting findings from research. Law students showed a good level of knowledge and understanding of the concept of negligence, for example, they were very able to apply the concept of duty of care to the Paddington Rail Crash. In psychology, students have difficulty with the application of key ideas, for example, in dealing with the topic of stress, they were over-reliant on common sense answers and made little use of research evidence from key studies.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level general studies	3	No. of starts	247	183	182
		% retention	83	79	85
		% pass rate	89	90	81
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	30	37	34
		% retention	77	81	82
		% pass rate	87	90	86
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	116	72	78
		% retention	83	76	74
		% pass rate	66	85	54
GCE A-level general studies	3	No. of starts	222	146	102
		% retention	51	79	97
		% pass rate	94	97	100
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	38	36	27
		% retention	53	97	96
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	42	41	24
		% retention	67	93	96
		% pass rate	86	100	96

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

137.   Teaching is generally well planned, with the better teaching in general studies and law. Students taking law benefit from clear explanations of legal terms and an effective use of colour coding in handouts; green for case studies and blue for essential words. Good use

was made of up-to-date resources in general studies when a recent newspaper article on the proposed Cambridge Primate Research Laboratory was used to illustrate the success of pressure groups. In psychology, students were being effectively prepared for mock exams with review questions and discussion of student answers, so that a good picture of assessment was gained. There is some insufficiently challenging teaching. For example, in sociology the use of a video to illustrate a new religious movement involved no student analysis or discussion of the key characteristics of cults and sects. Students remained very passive in philosophy while the teacher read text from Aristotle, with no questions for some 35 minutes. There is poor punctuality in many lessons.

138.   Some subjects in humanities have had problems with staffing, notably psychology and philosophy with high staff turnover and illness leading to disruptions to student timetables. Students and staff find the open teaching areas too noisy and distracting. The classrooms in the London Road Centre have no student work on the walls to stimulate student learning.

139.   Good use is made of formative assessment. The use of assessment feedback sheets provides detailed comments on how students can improve. For example, in philosophy, students are given specific guidelines about explaining theories, developing conclusions and evaluating notions of truth. Students benefit from a range of help from subject tutors, student support services and additional learning support. For example, AS-level humanities students improved their revision skills during a tutorial where they were required to assess their own revision techniques. There is an effective system for monitoring attendance and following-up student absence.

Leadership and management

140.   Leadership and management of the sixth form studies team are satisfactory. There is good communication at different levels with a clear focus for sixth form studies meetings, social science pathway meetings and subject team meetings. Not enough opportunities are provided to share good practice on aspects of teaching and learning in any of the three meeting slots. At course level, aspects of quality assurance are underdeveloped, there is little use of value added, and no strengths and weaknesses from lesson observation are identified in course reviews. Development plans lack rigour and do not address all the key weaknesses from the course reviews.

Literacy and numeracy

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

Strengths

- effective in-class support

- thorough initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs

- good support for students with dyslexia

- good success rate for level 1 key skills.

Weaknesses

- inadequate differentiation in key skill lessons

- insufficient coordination of teaching and assessment of basic skills and key skills

- very poor pass rate on level 2 key skills application of number.

Scope of provision

141.   There are three strands to the literacy and numeracy provision at the college. Students assessed for literacy or numeracy support receive in-class support from academic support advisers; 564 students were receiving academic support at the time of inspection. There is discrete provision for adults and for students aged 16 to 18 on foundation programmes; 59 adults and 110 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on discrete courses. Virtually all full-time students follow a key skills programme. Those studying communications or application of number at levels 1 or 2 are part of the literacy and numeracy provision; 588 students completed these key skill programmes in 2002/03.

Achievement and standards

142.   In 2002/03, the retention rate of students receiving academic support was 10% above the average for the college as a whole. There were also high retention and pass rates on level 1 key skills, both well above the national averages. Many students are retained and achieve because of the good academic support they receive.

143.   High standards of work are produced in one-to-one dyslexia support sessions. Students make good progress in written English and the skills of learning. One student who receives this support had not received help with his dyslexia at school. His attainment on a BTEC first programme is now similar to that of other students.

144.   Students grow in confidence and develop other personal skills. An adult had learnt to write sufficiently well to complete an application form for employment. He now felt motivated and was eagerly seeking out other application opportunities. Good development of correct pronunciation was observed in lessons for students studying English as a second language.

145.   There was very poor achievement on level 2 application of number programmes in 2002/03. Just 1 student from the 186 students who started the course achieved despite good retention rates of 87%. This was a result of being set incorrect tasks for inclusion in their final assessed portfolio. Students are now doing the correct work and some students have passed their assessments subsequently.

Quality of education and training

146.   Academic support advisers give effective in-class support to over 560 students. There are 13 permanent advisers, 2 of whom specialise in support for dyslexic students, and 25 part-time advisers. They work alongside teaching staff in lessons supporting individual or small groups of students who have identified literacy or numeracy needs and intervene sensitively to support and develop individuals having noted the lesson objectives. In a small minority of instances, advisers corrected work without giving sufficient explanation and there was no evidence that students could cope independently with the tasks.

147.   Teachers and support staff use individual learning plans effectively. Each student has a detailed learning plan which is developed from the results of initial assessment. Literacy and numeracy support are planned against the learning plan targets and reviewed at the end of each lesson. There is a very good system of record keeping. Students make good progress towards the goals set out in their learning plans.

148.   There is insufficient differentiation in key skill classes. In many classes, all students are entered for the same level of examination despite marked differences in ability and experience. Students were studying the same assignment which the less able students found too hard to do without a great deal of help.

149.   Most staff are well qualified. There are some unsatisfactory learning environments. Key skill classes at London Road are held in rooms with bare walls, tiled floors and without direct access to IT resources. The high levels of noise in the open plan workshops at Carnarvon Road make them unsuitable for the development of listening and speaking skills. However, some teachers have adapted teaching methods skilfully. For example in one workshop session, three groups of students following the same programme came together and were taught by three staff from their own vocational area. A specialist in numeracy was present and gave help to students experiencing difficulties with long multiplication. Two academic support advisers worked with six students identified as needing extra help. The variety of teaching and learning styles available within the flexible accommodation resulted in a very good lesson.

150.   There is a thorough approach to initial assessment. All students take literacy and numeracy screening tests which are followed by online diagnostic assessments for full-time students. The academic support team review the assessments and propose a support package where required. A detailed individual learning plan which sets targets to address issues raised in the assessments is then agreed with the student. Progress towards achieving goals set within the individual learning plans is measured each week. Students get good verbal feedback. However, there are insufficient written comments on students' assessed work.

Leadership and management

151.   There is good management of academic support, dyslexia support and discrete basic skills provision. Regular team meetings support a consultative management style. Members of staff are involved in departmental decision making. They feel valued.

152.   There is good communication between the academic support team and vocational/academic staff. Academic support advisers meet tutors on a regular basis for sharing information and consideration of individual student needs. Communications are strengthened by the allocation of advisers to particular schools.

153.   There is insufficient co-ordination of basic skills and key skills delivery. They are managed separately within the college structure. There is little sharing or joint development of learning resources. For example, on the college intranet, there are different learning materials available on presentation skills for level 1 students in both the key skills and literacy areas.

154.   There was poor management of the planning and assessment of application of number level 2 key skills during 2002/03. There was no co-ordination of the internal verification process between schools, and some assignments were not checked before they were used. Internal verification is now managed centrally and student performance is improving.

Entry to employment

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

Strengths

- good progression and pass rates

- effective development of practical skills

- good learning support

- wide range of options within partnership.

Weaknesses

- some poorly planned theory lessons

- inadequate use of target setting and monitoring of learner progress.

Scope of provision

155.   The E2E programme for the area is delivered through the NOVA Partnership involving the college, two charities and three privately-owned companies. The contract from Essex Learning and Skills Council was awarded in July 2003 and training commenced in August 2003. At the time of inspection, there were 218 learners on E2E programmes across the partnership. Trainees have access to a wide range of vocational training in construction, engineering, IT, customer service and retail, care, hairdressing and the media. About 70% of trainees are male and about 7% are from minority ethnic groups.

Achievement and standards

156.   In the short period that the programme has been running, good progression and pass rates have been achieved. At the time of the inspection, achievement was above the targets set by the local LSC with about 60% of learners having progressed to FE, work-based training or employment. Trainees develop good practical skills in their occupational areas, for example in brickwork, music technology, hairdressing and IT.

Quality of education and training

157.   One-to-one training in practical lessons is good. Trainees are often motivated by the strong concentration on vocational skills. In one lesson, trainees responded well to good practical guidance from a hairdressing teacher who was able to help them to complete a shampoo and set on their first day on the programme. However, the teaching of theory was less successful. It often lacked focus because learning outcomes were not clear and the behaviour of some trainees was poor.

158.   Some good practical teaching facilities are in place and one provider has refurbished an excellent base room for E2E learners with facilities for powerpoint presentations, television and video. Construction facilities, although adequate, are clearly stretched and more capacity is needed to satisfy demand, particularly as there is a shortage of work placements. Similarly, the hairdressing salon is very heavily used. The music technology course running is housed in a refurbished outbuilding which, although well equipped is very small and has no effective soundproofing.

159.   Given the newness of the E2E programme, assessment practices are still evolving to meet student needs. The E2E passport which provides the official documentation for recording progress is not in full use. More attention needs to be given to target setting and monitoring achievements. The referral system through Connexions has been slowly implemented, with most learners having come direct to their providers.

160.   With the exception of construction, arrangements for work placements are good. At one provider three learners were seen at different stages of their work experience. One, working in a high street store, had spent some time acclimatising to the world of work and was now starting units on an NVQ in retail. Another was working in a florist shop towards customer service NVQ level 2 and achieving good progress. A third learner was on the point of completing an NVQ level 1 in business administration and was about to progress on to a modern apprenticeship programme. There are insufficient work placements in construction. A number of learners are ready for work experience, but are unable to progress.

161.   Initial assessment is satisfactory. Currently, all providers use the Basic Skills Agency test for literacy and numeracy to assess learners' abilities on entry to the programme. There are good examples of learning support. In one tutorial, a learner who had missed the last three years at school was stimulated to improve reading and IT skills because he wished to pass his driving test. An interactive CD-ROM was used with multiple-choice questions for the learner to work through supported by the tutor. During group sessions, learning support advisers collaborate well with vocational tutors and respond flexibly to the wide range of student needs.

Leadership and management

162.   Trainees are benefiting from good partnership arrangements. The NOVA Partnership is a well-established venture that has existed for seven years. It provides good vocational training opportunities across a variety of work contexts and it has produced a thorough initial self-assessment report based on input from all the partners. However, there is insufficient review of the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observation. Equal opportunities issues are effectively dealt with. For example, the marketing images used to promote the programme effectively challenge traditional gender stereotypes.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	18	54
2	24	18
3	56	9
4/5	0	1
Other	2	18
Total	**100**	**100**

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	456	85	4
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	62	242	2
Engineering, technology and manufacture	444	188	4
Business administration, management and professional	597	1,229	12
Information and communication technology	666	5,395	40
Retailing, customer service and transportation	18	99	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	288	136	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	99	332	3
Health, social care and public services	413	722	7
Visual and performing arts and media	1,173	410	10
Humanities	736	67	5
English, languages and communication	287	123	3

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Foundation programmes	186	520	5
Unknown	22	153	1
Total	**5,447**	**9,701**	**100**

Source: provided by the college in 2004

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16–18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	670	470	503	3,704	2,535	1,815
	Retention rate %	71	71	75	62	54	56
	National average %	75	76	**	69	70	**
	Pass rate %	82	80	74	62	61	65
	National average %	68	71	**	68	71	**
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,121	1,102	1,218	884	1,153	1,135
	Retention rate %	72	67	70	72	65	75
	National average %	70	72	**	68	68	**
	Pass rate %	79	87	85	80	79	83
	National average %	69	71	**	68	72	**
3	Starters excluding transfers	3,835	3,481	3,051	940	924	806
	Retention rate %	67	70	72	74	78	78
	National average %	71	77	**	68	70	**
	Pass rate %	85	81	83	85	82	84
	National average %	77	79	**	69	72	**
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	37	39	57	133
	Retention rate %	*	*	76	82	70	78
	National average %	*	*	**	67	67	**
	Pass rate %	*	*	64	53	55	73
	National average %	*	*	**	55	56	**

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 colleges or sixth form colleges).
Sources of information:
1.   National averages: Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.
2.   College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College ISR.
    * fewer than 15 students enrolled
    ** data unavailable

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)	60	32	8	137
Level 2 (intermediate)	53	41	6	66
Level 1 (foundation)	57	39	4	28
Other sessions	88	12	0	8
Totals	**59**	**34**	**7**	**239**

Notes