



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

North Hertfordshire College

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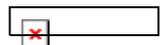
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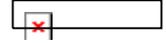
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Basic information about the college

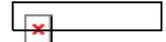


| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Name of college: | North Hertfordshire College |
| Type of college: | General Further Education College |
| Principal: | Mr R Gochin |
| Address of college: | Monkswood Way Stevenage Hertfordshire GG1 1LA |
| Telephone number: | 01462 424239 |
| Fax number: | 01462 443054 |
| Chair of governors: | Mrs T Millson-Cain |
| Unique reference number: | 130721 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | D Dana HMI |
| Dates of inspection: | 10-14 February 2003 |

Part A: Summary



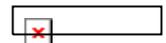
Information about the college



North Hertfordshire College is a medium-sized general further education (FE) college. The college is located 30 miles north of London and operates predominantly in North Hertfordshire and Stevenage. It has centres in Stevenage and Letchworth and two centres in Hitchin. The area served by the college is a mixture of urban and rural development with significant variations in the range of employment opportunities and social conditions. Social deprivation in parts of Stevenage and Hitchin is characterised by long-term unemployment, poor housing, high proportions of lone parents and low educational expectations. The population in the recruitment area is approximately 200,000, of which just over 5% are of minority ethnic origin, mainly Asian. The college attracts over 7% of students from this group. Overall, there are some 63% female and 37% male students enrolled at the college. The participation rate of North Hertfordshire and Stevenage students in full-time education after the age of 16 is high. All local schools have sixth forms. The college attracts 26% of school leavers.

The college offers courses in 12 of the 14 areas of learning and teaches a range of students from the age of 14 upwards. The college offers a wide range of vocational courses and some work-based learning and higher education (HE) courses, community-based learning and leisure courses. The college has recently received funding to develop a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in business and management. There is a high level of commitment to the provision of courses for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In 2000/01, the college had some 15,600 course enrolments from the 11,400 full-time and part-time students attending the college. There are approximately 400 full-time equivalent teaching and support staff employed. Some 13% of full-time students and 2% of part-time students are enrolled on HE programmes.

How effective is the college?



Provision is good in three areas of learning, satisfactory in eight areas and unsatisfactory in one. The work-based learning in motor vehicle technology is also unsatisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory overall and at the average for similar colleges. The college's key strengths and areas for improvement are listed below.

Key strengths

- significant new building developments to improve the teaching and learning environment

- high-quality accessible computers for students' use

- effective initial assessment and identification of learners' needs
- good examples of adaptation of teaching to individual students' needs
- good support for students
- good governance
- strong financial position.

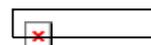
What should be improved

- key skills achievements
- the quality of teaching and learning in some curriculum areas
- the use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support learning
- assessment on a minority of courses
- attendance and punctuality of students aged 16 to 18 in some curriculum areas
- retention rates of students aged 16 to 18
- consistency in the application of quality assurance arrangements across the college

- o work-based learning achievements.

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



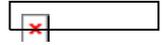
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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 | Satisfactory. The curriculum area is well managed. Teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Advanced vocational certificates of education (AVCE) and general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) science students have good practical experimental skills. Good imaginative computer-based resources are used in chemistry. Pass rates are satisfactory. The low retention rates on all General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Supplementary (AS) courses are being effectively addressed. A significant minority of students do not complete homework regularly. |
| Motor vehicle technology | Satisfactory. Teaching is good and the standard of vocational competence is high. There are good pass rates in college-based assessments and in key skills. Pass rates are low on courses requiring portfolios of evidence because portfolios are often incomplete by the required date. The rapid expansion in provision has been well supported by investment in resources and staff. During this period, there has been a lack of rigor in internal verification, and work-based learners have had insufficient assessments and occupational reviews. |
| Business administration and professional and management studies | Satisfactory. Teaching is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Students acquire good skills in business practice. Pass rates are high on many courses and there is good progression. There is a wide range of courses for professional and management students. On full-time courses, attendance is poor. Monitoring of students' progress is inconsistent. Self-assessment and action planning are inadequate. |
| Information and communications technology | Satisfactory. Management of the 'learning shops' is good and overall management of the information and communications technology (ICT) curriculum is sound. Teaching is satisfactory overall but both teaching and learning in GCE Advanced-level (A-level) computing are poor, resulting in poor pass rates. There are above average pass rates on some courses and support for individual students is generally good in lessons and tutorials. Students are friendly and well behaved but a significant minority are late for lessons and have a poor attendance record. The retention rate for students aged 16 to 18 on the AVCE computing course is poor. |

| | |
|---|--|
| Hospitality and catering | Unsatisfactory. Pass rates on most courses are good. The retention rate is poor on national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 food preparation. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in many practical lessons and students make insufficient progress. The standard of students' work is low in some practical lessons. Assessment arrangements do not meet the needs of more able students. |
| Leisure, sport and tourism | Good. There are good retention and pass rates on most courses. Learning resources are good and students produce high-quality work. On sports programmes, there is particularly good teaching. There has been late introduction of individual target setting for second year sports students. |
| Health, social care and public services | Satisfactory. Pass rates are good on some courses for students aged 16 to 18 but retention rates are poor on most level 3 courses. Teaching and learning on adult courses are good. Teaching is uninspiring on childcare and health and social care courses and leads to slow progress by many students. There is insufficient use of ILT to enhance learning. There is a high level of personal support for all students and productive links and partnerships with the local community. |
| Visual and performing arts | Satisfactory. There are good pass rates on some courses and students are supported by staff well qualified in their subjects. There is much good accommodation in both performing arts and art and design. Art and design students benefit from a good range of enrichment activities. Retention rates are poor on some courses, particularly performing arts and popular music. There is a lack of effective quality assurance procedures, inconsistent practice in subject areas, inadequate monitoring of students' progress and some poor action planning. |
| Humanities | Satisfactory. The access to HE programme is well managed and retention and pass rates are good. Pass rates are also good in GCE A-level law and psychology but are poor in GCE AS and A-level history. Low numbers of students progress to the second year of GCE A level (A2) courses. Students receive effective guidance and support but the assessment of their work is unsatisfactory. Quality assurance is ineffective. |
| English and media | Good. There is much good teaching on level 3 courses and some excellent pass rates, particularly at GCE A2. Students are well motivated and capable. Good management has dealt effectively with problems in retention rates on some courses. Materials to support learning are of poor quality and there is insufficient use of ILT. |
| Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | Satisfactory. Students' achievements through practical activities are good and there is effective use of individual learning plans in teaching. The range of provision is good and meets a wide range of identified needs. However, there are insufficient opportunities for students with learning difficulties to learn in vocational settings or progress to vocational courses. There is insufficient recognition of the full range of students' achievements on some programmes. Students' learning in lessons involving simulations and paper-based activities is unsatisfactory. |
| Literacy and numeracy | Good. The teaching of literacy and numeracy within full-time and part-time separate specialist programmes is good and support for students on vocational and academic programmes is effective. The overall quality of management is good. Individual learning plans are used well to record achievements. Some initial assessment lacks precision for planning programmes for students on non-accredited courses. There |

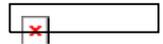
| | |
|--|---|
| | is very little basic skills provision in the workplace. |
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How well is the college led and managed?



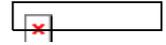
Leadership and management are satisfactory. The corporation, managers and staff have a shared view of the purpose and strategic direction for the college. There has been an ambitious and successful accommodation strategy to improve the quality of the teaching environment. In many areas, teams work together well. However, there is variation in the effectiveness of curriculum management across the college and, within three curriculum areas, aspects of management were judged to be weak. Managers have been successful in raising retention and pass rates, although retention rates remain below the national average. The arrangements for quality assurance are not effectively applied in some areas of the college. Individual target setting for students to raise their achievements is being used well in many courses but is underdeveloped in others. The self-assessment processes and procedures are comprehensive but in some areas there is insufficient monitoring of actions to achieve significant improvements. The management information system provides accurate, timely and reliable information. The college has a strong and effective governing body with a broad range of skills, experience and background. Individual governors are knowledgeable about the college and FE in general. The college provides value for money in many aspects of its work. The financial health of the college is good. This has enabled the college to substantially improve its accommodation on two sites.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



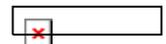
The college's response to education and social inclusion is satisfactory. The college has a commitment to equality of opportunity; staff are sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities and the college responds rapidly to identified needs. The college has focused considerable resources on accommodation and staffing to improve the provision. The college has developed a range of learning shops in the community to reach those who traditionally do not participate in education. These centres have been very successful in attracting adults to part-time learning. There has been some small development of provision to meet the needs of a greater diversity of students. The equal opportunities committee has commenced monitoring ethnicity, gender and disability. The college does not evaluate the experience or success of significant groups of students such as young males on full-time courses. There are policies for equal opportunities, disabilities and race relations, which address the requirements of recent legislation. Comprehensive staff development has been undertaken by staff on the key requirements for diversity, equality and race relations and the significant elements of all policies. The college has a coherent strategy for student support. The additional needs of students are assessed on entry and the college offers support to all students identified with additional needs. There is a good level of support for these students, either in lessons or in one-to-one sessions. The college has secured additional funds to support level 2 and 3 students at risk of dropping out. Students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities have opportunities to study at the college. The college student support fund is used well to support students who would not otherwise be able to stay in education. Students' attendance, retention and pass rates are analysed by gender and ethnicity by the corporation, managers and course teams but there is little use of the analysis to develop the provision. Students are aware of the complaints procedure and these are followed carefully in the few instances where complaints are received. Publicity material is easy to understand and the college makes good use of community languages.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive impartial information, advice and guidance when interviewed that allows them to make an informed choice of courses to study. There is effective academic and personal support. Students value the support they receive from personal tutors and course teachers. A high priority is given to students identified with additional learning needs and they are quickly and effectively supported in lessons either through individual one-to-one support or as a part of a group. The learning support observed was good or better in 75% of lessons and none was unsatisfactory. Students' take-up of the support available is good in literacy but poor in numeracy. Personal tutors monitor academic progress and attendance and provide general support which students value. Persistent non-attendance is not always dealt with appropriately. There is a comprehensive range of personal support services for students that includes counselling and general support with housing. There are also health promotions and other events to encourage healthy living.

Students' views of the college



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

What students like about the college

- good teaching

- good tutorials

- supportive and helpful teachers

- learning support arrangements

- friendly and welcoming atmosphere for all students

- the student union

- range of courses available.

What they feel could be improved

- library resources

- the relevance of key skills

- refectory facilities, range of food and cost

- the range of enrichment activities across sites

- the reliability and updating of some computing facilities

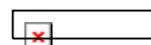
- car parking.

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 is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

| Aspect & learner type | Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) % | Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) % | Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) % |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Teaching 16-18 | 55 | 41 | 4 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 70 | 25 | 5 |
| Learning 16-18 | 49 | 45 | 6 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 66 | 27 | 7 |

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 in-year retention rates for the whole college in 2000/01 for full-time and part-time students placed it in the bottom 10% of colleges, at 79% for full-time students and 76% for part-time students. This gave the college an overall retention rate of 76%. The college has improved its overall retention rate in 2001/02 to 80%. The college also improved the number of qualification aims achieved to 79% in 2000/01 and this placed the college in the second quartile of colleges. There has been a further improvement in qualification aims achieved in 2001/02 to 85% overall.

2. The students' attendance during the inspection was 81% and this is better than the national average of 76% for similar colleges but slightly below the college's own average of 83.5% in 2001/02. There are wide variations in attendance between students aged 16 to 18 and adults and between students in the various curriculum areas.

3. Students used ICT well for presenting their work to a good standard in most courses. Curriculum areas where this was a particular feature included business administration, professional and management studies and leisure, sport and tourism. There is effective use of the Internet for research, particularly by students studying at level 3 and above. Most students talk confidently about their studies and respond well to discussions in lessons. Assignments are written to at least a satisfactory standard. Students showed good analytical skills and an understanding of complex issues on a number of courses, including counselling, psychology, law and access to HE.

4. Students in most curriculum areas develop good practical skills linked to their subjects. In science, students had the confidence to evaluate and modify experimental procedures. In motor vehicle technology, students demonstrated high levels of vocational competence and sports students worked confidently and competently in practical situations. Students on performing arts courses displayed good practical skills in music and dance and good improvisation skills in drama. Students with severe learning difficulties learned to work independently, confidently and to a high standard in their practical activities. Art and design students developed good practical skills, which they combined well with theory, but the general standard of drawing skills is less well developed. The standards of practical skills in aspects of catering were unsatisfactory.

16 to 18 year olds

5. The overall pass rates for students aged 16 to 19 have improved over the last three years to 78% in 2001/02. Overall retention rates have declined over the same period to 76%. At level 1, the pass

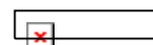
rates have improved and reached the national average of 68% in 2000/01. There has been a further improvement of 9% in 2001/02. The retention rate declined to below the national average, at 72%, in 2000/01 but has since improved to 78%. At level 2, pass rates have improved but remained at, or below, the national averages in 2000/01. There was a further improvement, by 5%, to 72% in 2001/02. The retention rate at level 2 declined to below the national average in 2000/01. It has not improved in 2001/02. Pass rates on level 3 programmes have improved consistently over the last three years to reach the national average of 75% in 2000/01 and have improved further to 80% in 2001/02. The retention rate at level 3 over the same period declined to the national average of 76% in 2000/01 and declined further in 2001/02. Retention and pass rates on short courses have been satisfactory or better.

6. The college offers work-based learning through foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQ programmes for young people and adults. Over the three years from 1998 to 2000, the pass rate has been poor, with only 20% of trainees successfully completing their full qualification. The pace of progress of trainees enrolled in 2001 is much improved. Foundation modern apprentices in motor vehicle technology, for example, are making very good progress towards completion of their key skills qualifications.

Adult learners

7. There has been a general improvement in the pass rates for adults, from 62% to 86%, over the last 3 years to 2001/02. The overall retention rate dropped in 2000/01, from 86% to 75%. It has since recovered to 81% in 2001/02. Pass rates at level 1 were consistently below the national average up to 2000/01. They improved by 8% in 2001/02. Retention rates declined to 13% below the national average over the same period. At level 2, pass rates have been consistently above the national average and the trend has been upwards, reaching 81% in 2001/02. Retention rates declined to 7% below the national average in 2000/01 but showed a small improvement in 2001/02. Pass rates on level 3 programmes improved consistently to 66% in 2000/01 but remained below the national average. There was a significant improvement to 78% in 2001/02. The pass rates on level 4 programmes have been consistently well below the national average, although there has been a significant improvement of 17% in 2001/02. Retention rates have been consistently above the national average to 2000/01 but declined significantly by 12% in 2001/02. Retention and pass rates on short courses have been satisfactory or better.

Quality of education and training



8. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 217 sessions across 12 areas of learning. Of these, teaching was good or better in 60%, satisfactory in 35% and unsatisfactory in 5%. This profile is in line with the national average for similar colleges in 2001/02. Teaching was better for students aged 19 and over, with 71% of teaching good or better compared to 55% for students aged 16 to 18. On level 1 programmes, 74% of teaching was good or better and none unsatisfactory, compared with 50% and 4%, respectively, on level 2 programmes and 50% and 5% on level 3 programmes. Lessons containing a mix of theory and practical work provided the best learning experience for students. The best teaching and learning was observed on motor vehicle technology courses and the weakest in catering.

9. In most areas of learning, there were some very good lessons that contributed to the total of 60% of good or better lessons. The best lessons were thoughtfully planned, had clear aims and were structured to provide learning activities in which students could actively participate. Teachers were sensitive to the learning needs of individual students and organised individual and group work to encourage students to work to their full potential. In several curriculum areas, such as science, motor vehicle technology, public services and literacy and numeracy courses, the teaching encouraged many students to develop confidence in themselves and their abilities in their subject. The teachers in a number of areas, including science, health, social care and public services, visual

and performing arts and humanities, used questions well in a number of lessons to promote discussion and confirm students' understanding. Teachers in business administration, professional and management studies, health, social care and public services and humanities made effective use of students' own experiences to make the learning more interesting and meaningful. In several subjects, such as chemistry, ILT was used effectively to enhance students' learning, although in many areas its use is still at an early stage of development. In the weaker lessons, teaching was frequently competent but uninspiring, the pace of learning was slow and students were not sufficiently engaged in the learning. The slow pace was evident in some lessons in catering, leisure, sport and tourism, health social care and public services and aspects of visual and performing arts. Some students were not sufficiently challenged or there was insufficient checking of their understanding of the work in some lessons in science, business administration, professional and management studies, health, social care and public services and aspects of visual and performing arts.

10. The college's vision commits it to providing an 'attractive and inspirational' environment, in which the use of ILT 'permeates the entire college'. It has made considerable progress towards meeting these commitments. The previous and the current accommodation strategies are well conceived and clearly identify the college's needs and plans for improved accommodation.

11. There has been significant rationalisation, improvement of accommodation and new building developments over the last five years. The Goldsmith Management Centre in Letchworth, purpose built in 1998 for management and professional studies, provides an excellent standard of accommodation. The Centre for the Arts, in Hitchin, is a modern redesigned office building, providing mostly good accommodation. Most recently, a new £14 million college building at Stevenage has been completed. Due to be opened immediately after the inspection, it replaces the existing out-of-date and inefficient accommodation. It will provide outstanding teaching, learning and communal accommodation. Its design and equipping recognises the college's commitment that ILT should be at the heart of teaching and the students' experiences. The next planned phase of development is to combine the two Hitchin campuses on one site in one new building.

12. Most teaching accommodation is satisfactory. It is particularly good for management and professional studies, travel studies, the visual and performing arts and for science students. There is insufficient performance and rehearsal space for music students and one sports science room is too small. Most classrooms are well maintained and well equipped with essential teaching aids. However, in the rooms used for humanities teaching there are often no whiteboards or projection screens. Access and the availability of toilets for students with restricted mobility is good on all college sites, with the exception of two buildings at the main Hitchin site.

13. Specialist equipment for teaching and learning is generally satisfactory. Considerable investment has been made in motor vehicle technology, although there remain some outdated vehicles. The college has made significant investment in new computers and software. A clear and detailed ILT strategy and an associated learning strategy are at the centre of the college's well-conceived plan for improvement. There are a good number of modern and reliable computers available to students. Students usually have ready access to computers in classrooms, when they are not timetabled, the learning resource centres or open access computer areas. The computers used by access to HE students are unreliable.

14. The three learning resource centres embrace traditional library facilities and ICT resources. Stevenage is well served, but the facilities at Hitchin are smaller and there is little space for students to work. The Centre for the Arts has no learning resource centre, but the Hitchin centre is very close. The centres hold a good range of materials and resources and are a central part of the college's e-strategy. However, in catering, a significant proportion of books are out of date and there are no videos or CD-ROMs. In science, there are no up-to-date reference books and too few new textbooks. Humanities books and multi-media resources are inadequate.

15. Teachers are often well qualified, with a good range of skills and experience. Over 80% of teachers on permanent contracts have a teaching qualification and others are working towards one. Part-time teachers are also actively encouraged and paid to engage in professional updating and staff development. Teachers are particularly well occupationally qualified in the arts and in

counselling. There are usually sufficient staff to support teaching and learning, but in science and the performing arts there are too few technicians. Staff development opportunities are good, although there is little industrial and commercial updating of teachers in business administration, professional and management studies and catering.

16. The arrangements for the assessment of students' work and the monitoring of their progress are good in many curriculum areas. Students' performance is carefully tracked by teachers and course tutors. In ICT, literacy and numeracy and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities this is particularly good. Students speak positively about the ways in which they are assessed. However, in most curriculum areas, there is insufficient assessment of students' key skills through coursework. The lack of regular customers in the training restaurant and the nature of some of the teaching inhibits assessment opportunities. Insufficient work-based assessments had been completed for motor vehicle students at the time of the inspection.

17. Assessment is fair and rigorous in most curriculum areas. Assignments, work in class and homework are set at an appropriate level and standard. Some assignments and case studies in business administration, professional and management studies, ICT, leisure, sport and tourism, humanities and literacy and numeracy were particularly effective in motivating and interesting the students. Students' work is usually marked promptly and thoroughly. However, the quality of feedback to students varies considerably from, in many cases, detailed and clear feedback that allows students to improve, to little more than a grade for the completed work. There are some variations in the grading systems adopted with some subjects. For example, awarding body assessment criteria were sometimes replaced by percentages which were not always fully understood by students.

18. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory. However, there is variation in the implementation of the procedures. There is insufficient verification in one curriculum area and insufficient feedback to assessors in other areas. Parents of full-time students aged 16 to 18 are kept well informed about students' progress. They receive detailed progress reports and are also invited to attend parents' evenings. Parents find these meetings particularly useful as tutors explain much of the course content and indicate how much time students should spend on assignments and in private study.

19. The college provides a good range of courses at most levels from pre-entry to level 3 or 4 in 12 of the 14 areas of learning offered by the college. Construction and land-based industries courses are not offered. Collaboration with another local college has ensured the continuation of motor vehicle technology but there is no provision above level 2. The college has increased the number of level 1 and 2 vocational courses available but there are still areas of learning without level 1 courses. There are good progression routes, particularly between levels 2 and 3, in many of the vocational areas, as well as to HE courses at the college and elsewhere. There is a large programme of part-time courses for adults that includes a significant number of non-accredited courses such as yoga and keep fit, much of it in community venues.

20. The college takes effective action to widen participation. It makes good provision for people facing significant barriers to entry or success in learning. There is a well-planned programme of mainly part-time courses in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) with progression routes from pre-entry level to preparation for GCSE. There is wide provision for students with a range of specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including a programme that runs during the summer. The college has good links with community organisations and meets the needs of people unwilling or unable to follow programmes in a formal college setting. The college has a thriving network of centres offering training in information technology (IT) in venues across the community, including a football club and shopping precincts.

21. The college has an effective school links programme with Letchworth and Stevenage schools to provide students aged 14 to 16 with a programme of courses in hair and beauty, catering and motor vehicle technology. The college, in partnership with local schools and a local training provider, has received funding under the flexibility programme to extend this provision across North Hertfordshire.

22. The implementation of Curriculum 2000 has been moderately successful. Students have an

entitlement that includes key skills, a greater choice of curriculum subjects and courses and a tutorial and enrichment programme. Tutorials have been successfully implemented. However, few students take advantage of the options to combine vocational and academic subjects and the college has identified the need to improve key skills achievements. Subject teams have been given responsibility for enrichment but in several curriculum areas these do not significantly enhance and extend the curriculum.

23. Students' key skills achievement is poor and significantly below the national average. The college is committed to improving students' key skills achievement. A small team of managers is implementing and monitoring a new policy to integrate key skills within students' main study programme. Students attend regular workshop sessions to learn IT key skills in contexts relevant to their main programme and prepare for the key skills tests. However, students often fail to see the relevance of key skills, and attendance is poor at some workshops. There is evidence of improvement in attendance and progress in some curriculum areas, such as motor vehicle technology, but little impact in areas such as GCE A levels.

24. There is little training provision in the workplace. There are very small numbers of students receiving literacy and numeracy training where they work, although the college is making significant efforts to recruit more students. There are insufficient suitable work placements for students on a number of programmes, including catering and leisure, sport and tourism. The college has work-based learning provision, primarily for foundation modern apprentices. The programmes are too closely linked to the academic year and this restricts the times when new trainees can join.

25. The college has a coherent strategy for providing academic and pastoral support for students. Students are made aware of their entitlements through the college charter and student handbook and diary. Learner services staff follow the clear procedures and timescales for admission to courses and prospective students appreciate the efficiency with which their applications are processed. Publicity material is clear and easy to understand. Students commented favourably on the impartial information, advice and guidance they received at their interview. Results from the annual on-entry survey indicate that almost 100% of those who responded felt that they were on the correct course.

26. Most students enjoyed their induction period, although in a few instances students felt that induction was overlong and in some cases repetitive. Students found that the information relating to health and safety, study skills, time management and the essential components of their course was very useful. During the induction period, there is an opportunity for parents/guardians to find out more about the courses and interviews with parents/guardians demonstrate how useful they found this information. During the induction phase, students complete a set of assignments that are used to assess their full suitability for their chosen subject.

27. All full-time students undertake an initial assessment which identifies their level of literacy and numeracy and the results of these assessments are used to place the student on the appropriate key skills level and to provide additional support, where required. The results of the initial assessment are dealt with quickly. In 2001/02, 895 students undertook an initial assessment, of which 124 students were identified as requiring additional literacy support and 312 students were identified as needing support with numeracy. Students are encouraged to take up the support available and take up was good in literacy at 80% but poor in numeracy, with only 53% receiving support. The level of support in lessons either in one-to-one sessions or as part of the group is good. Students can also be referred to a specialist tutor for additional diagnostic assessment for support with mobility, specialist technology support or the use of an inclusion assistant to provide classroom support. This support is regularly monitored and close contact is maintained with the personal tutor on students' progress.

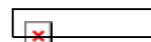
28. There are effective personal tutorial arrangements. There is a detailed cross-college tutorial policy and timetable of tutorial activities for the year. The activities are a mix of group activities and individual reviews. All full-time students and those on substantial part-time courses are allocated a personal tutor who has responsibility for providing support and guidance for students from induction through to course completion. Individual reviews provide good advice and guidance to students and, in most instances, effectively monitor students' progress and generate action plans and individual targets for improvement. Many tutorial records are clear and detailed but a minority lack sufficiently

detailed records of advice given and action plans and targets for improvement. Attendance monitoring is also a responsibility of tutors. College procedures are not always followed and persistent non-attendance is not always dealt with effectively. Most students value the support they receive from tutors and course teachers.

29. The college provides an extensive and comprehensive range of personal support services for students across all its sites. Learner services provide effective inter-agency support on topics such as sexual health, sexuality, drug abuse, contraception, general health and welfare, counselling and guidance. It also works closely with the local primary healthcare team to promote health awareness and at the time of inspection a campaign entitled 'affairs of the heart' managed to promote issues such as sexual health and healthy eating to students. The student union plays an active part in student life and officers are available to provide support on debt counselling, housing and related topics. There is also a chaplaincy service for students and a quiet sanctuary room has been provided for students at the Stevenage site. Students regularly make contact with the college chaplain, who visits all the sites.

30. The learner services section has local LSC funding for a project to support level 2 and 3 students who are 'at risk'. This funding has enabled staff to be employed to identify reasons for course withdrawal and to work with students to prevent this. These staff devise a contract of support to assist the individual. In addition to this, the local primary healthcare team has sponsored a project to investigate the use of bulk-texting to inform students on issues such as health and also for following up non-attendance. There are indications that there has been some improvement in retention rates this year in some curriculum areas but attendance remains poor on some courses.

Leadership and management



31. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The corporation, managers and staff have a shared view of the purpose and strategic direction for the college. There has been an ambitious accommodation strategy to improve the quality of the teaching environment that has been successfully achieved on the Letchworth and Stevenage sites. Further development is planned for the Hitchin site within the next three years. The curriculum management structure was substantially revised in September 2002. Teaching and learning are managed in 37 curriculum areas. Managers have considerable delegated authority to develop their curriculum areas in response to identified needs within the overall strategic plan for the college. Curriculum areas are grouped into five centres. In addition, there are two specialist units. Each of these centres reflects the specific needs of the students and provision they are designed to serve.

32. In many areas, curriculum teams work together well. However, the effectiveness of curriculum management varies across the college. Homework policies are inconsistently applied in some areas and in another area some basic health and safety procedures are not always enforced. Not all lecturers have seen or are aware of many college policies and procedures. There are formal procedures in place to support curriculum development but good practice is not always shared between teams or across curriculum areas. In the centre for post-16 academic education, good practice in tutorials in English and humanities has not been transferred to some other curriculum areas. Senior managers have made considerable efforts to promote improvements through staff development but there is not always a detailed analysis and critical evaluation of the impact of other policies and procedures.

33. Managers have been successful in raising overall retention and pass rates over the last three years. However, the retention rate for students aged 16 to 18 has continued to decline over this period. The college recognises this in its self-assessment report and is making concerted efforts to deal with this problem, but it is too early to assess the overall success of these efforts. The lack of consistency in the approach to monitoring attendance and lateness means that not all students at risk of leaving are identified sufficiently early.

34. The college has a commitment to equality of opportunity. Staff are sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities. The college responds rapidly to identified needs. There is an equal opportunities policy and a race relations policy. Comprehensive staff development has been undertaken by staff on the key requirements for diversity, equality and race relations and the significant elements of all policies. The equal opportunities committee was re-formed in 2002 and it reports to the senior management team and the corporation. It meets regularly to consider issues and to monitor progress. There has been some small development of provision to meet the needs of a greater diversity of students. The equal opportunities committee has commenced monitoring ethnicity, gender and disability but it is not well established in all areas of the college. The college does not evaluate the experience of different groups of students, for example, the performance of young males on full-time courses. There is an anti-bullying policy for students and a harassment policy for staff. Complaints are handled effectively and promptly and reported to the governing body annually.

35. Managers are approachable and responsive. The senior management team consists of the principal, the deputy principal and the directors of IT, teaching and learning, resources and information systems, respectively. The senior management team meets regularly and the minutes are available to staff. There is a wide range of committees covering all aspects of the college. All committees have appropriate terms of reference and produce minutes. There is a twice-termly newsletter and e-mail is used as a direct form of communication throughout the college.

36. Quality assurance procedures and strategies for improvement are well documented but not always rigorously applied consistently across the whole college. The self-assessment process and procedures are comprehensive. However, in several curriculum areas the self-assessment either did not address weaknesses or underestimated the impact of the weaknesses. In some areas, there is insufficient monitoring of the effect of actions taken to remedy identified weaknesses. In two of the areas inspected, weaknesses identified at the last inspection persist. Lesson observation procedures are clear to all teachers, including agency staff, who are all observed annually. However, in some instances, normal teaching practices are claimed as strengths and weaknesses are understated. The college has started to develop individual target setting for students to raise achievements. The system is being used well by many course teams but some are failing to set, record and monitor individual targets. While some of the college's weaker curriculum areas have received appropriate attention to secure improvements, in others, poor results have persisted for several years. Appraisal is carried out systematically for all staff but the judgements made are not always clear and outcomes are not always effectively monitored. The college is aware of this and is in the process of changing this procedure.

37. The management information system provides accurate, timely and reliable information on finances and student enrolment and retention rates three times a year. The system has been upgraded recently and a satisfactory range of reports is available to staff on request. The reports are updated on a daily basis. Not all staff make adequate use of the reports to identify trends. In particular, they are not always used well to identify and support students at risk. Monitoring of attendance is hampered by the limitations of the systems for the collation of attendance data.

38. The college has a strong and effective governing body with a broad range of skills, experience and backgrounds. Individual governors are knowledgeable about the college and FE in general. They are well informed on college activities and feel well served by the principal, senior managers and the clerk. The governors receive presentations by college managers on initiatives in the college and in the sector. There is effective communication between the chair, principal and clerk. The governors attend open evenings and a range of exhibitions at the college. Governors use their commercial expertise and experience to support and develop the college. They receive regular bulletins from the clerk, which update them on activities in the world of FE. The principal is appraised by the remuneration committee annually and senior staff are appraised annually by the principal to assess the achievement of agreed targets. This forms part of the review of performance related pay. Targets for improvement are set annually to reflect the strategic objectives of the college.

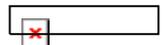
39. The college has undertaken exercises using national benchmarking data to compare its performance with other similar colleges. It is now providing value for money in many aspects of its business. The financial health of the college is good. This has enabled the college to substantially

improve its accommodation on two sites.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science



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

Strengths

- high standard of students' practical skills on GCSE science and AVCE courses
- good and imaginative web-based resources in chemistry
- well-managed curriculum.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates for all GCE AS courses
- insufficiently demanding work for more able students
- poor completion rate of homework.

Scope of provision

40. The college offers GCE AS and A2 courses in biology, chemistry and physics during the day and GCE AS human biology and chemistry in the evening. Adults and part-time students can study GCE AS or A2 courses over one or two years. The numbers of students aged 16 to 18 on GCE A2 courses is declining and all have significant numbers of adults enrolled. Full-time students studying GCE AS subjects are expected to study four subjects and level 3 IT key skills. GCSE single science and human physiology and health courses are offered in the evening. Biology is the most popular GCE AS subject and GCSE science is the most popular level 2 course. Vocational science courses

at levels 2 and 3 did not recruit in 2001/02. There are no level 1 courses. Adults can study chemistry and biology units as part of an access to HE course.

Achievement and standards

41. Pass rates for the GCE AS sciences courses are close to the national averages for similar colleges. Pass rates were satisfactory for GCE A2 biology in 2002 and good for chemistry, with 50% of the students gaining higher grades. The GNVQ intermediate science course had an excellent pass rate in 2000/01. The GCSE science single award has a retention rate consistently above the national averages, while retention rates for all GCE AS courses are consistently below the national average for colleges of a similar type. There is good progression from level 3 courses to the first year of the extended science degree or other HE provision.

42. In all courses, practical work is well integrated with theory and students develop good practical skills, particularly on the AVCE and GCSE single science courses. In an AVCE lesson on immobilised enzymes, the students devised their own method of ensuring a fair test and then evaluated the modifications they had made to the experimental procedures. Students respond well to questions from teachers, talk confidently about their work and are prepared to raise queries about their work in lessons.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GCSE science single award | 2 | No. of starts | 12 | 14 | 21 |
| | | % retention | 67 | 63 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 75 | 59 |
| GNVQ intermediate science | 2 | No. of starts | 10 | 15 | * |
| | | % retention | 70 | 73 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 43 | 91 | * |
| GCE AS physics | 3 | No. of starts | * | 14 | 16 |
| | | % retention | * | 64 | 50 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 11 | 75 |
| GCE AS biology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 15 | 34 |
| | | % retention | * | 73 | 68 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 6 | 13 |
| GCE AS human biology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 6 | 13 |
| | | % retention | * | 76 | 38 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 64 | 100 |
| GCE A2 biology | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 12 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 92 |
| GCE AS chemistry | 3 | No. of starts | * | 25 | 24 |
| | | % retention | * | 76 | 54 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 74 | 77 |
| GCE A2 chemistry | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 10 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 80 |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|-------------|---|---|-----|
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
|--|--|-------------|---|---|-----|

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

43. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. In the best lessons, objectives are shared with the students at the start of lessons and good use is made of well-directed questions to monitor students' understanding. The questioning strategy was used particularly well in a GCE AS lesson on spectra, when students were questioned at each stage of the lesson. There was a good mix of open questions to the whole class and questions directed at individual students to ensure that they all participated and understood the work. There is good technical support for experimental work. The large evening GCSE science class worked confidently on their practical work, demonstrating a good understanding of experimental techniques such as the need to change one variable at a time in order to study their effects. ILT is well integrated with the chemistry curriculum. In a GCE AS chemistry lesson, learning materials on a CD-ROM were used effectively to illustrate bonding and molecular shape. However, in some lessons, the work set was not sufficiently demanding for the more able students. In one biology lesson, for example, students were not encouraged to undertake further research once they had completed the main activity. In another lesson, poor planning resulted in students failing to be given sufficient time to complete an ecology question. In several lessons, the overhead transparencies were not clear and some of the handouts were poor.

44. All teachers encourage and support students and the students collaborate well in many of the tasks set. Student-teacher relations are good and students feel able to ask for help outside normal lessons. There is good one-to-one support for students with disabilities. A visually impaired student and hearing-impaired student are supported by a well-qualified member of the learning support staff.

45. In too many cases, students submit homework sporadically. Most teachers set homework every week but the quality of the marking and the feedback given is not uniformly good across the subjects. In the best examples, detailed feedback is given that clearly indicates what improvements are needed to gain better marks, while in others, the level of detail of the feedback is poor. The assessment of vocational assignments and of GCE AS and A2 biology practical work is accurately internally verified and moderated.

46. All teachers are well qualified, with specialist degrees or higher degrees in their subject. Most are well qualified in IT and are being trained to use the interactive whiteboards. Two teachers are ILT champions. The laboratories are spacious and are well equipped. Chemistry also has a good range of learning materials, including a directory of learning resources for each topic which links into intranet or Internet sites or other software. This development is to be extended to biology and physics. All AVCE course handouts are available to students on the intranet and can be accessed from home or at the college. There is a small, well-used, dedicated science resource area with good computing facilities.

Leadership and management

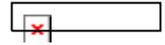
47. Effective curriculum leadership ensures that the curriculum offer is appropriate and responsive to local needs. For example, a 6-unit AVCE is now offered in place of a 12-unit course that did not recruit well. The evening GCSE science course is set to expand, with the introduction of a daytime course, and a GCE AS evening class with small numbers has fewer lessons but is supplemented with self-study packs. Adults attend daytime courses as part-time students.

48. Retention and pass rates are carefully monitored. Action has recently been taken to try to improve retention rates through improved guidance at recruitment and additional support for AS students. Minimum target grades are now set for all full-time students and students' progress is regularly reviewed. GCE chemistry and AVCE students compare their test and examination scores

against national norms. This good practice is being spread to all science courses.

49. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed, effective and have a common format. The part-time staff have been well integrated with the science team and feel well supported. Self-assessment is accurate in most respects but the evaluation of teaching and learning is insufficiently rigorous.

Motor vehicle technology



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

Work-based learning is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- rapidly improving and good entry level pass rate

- high motivation and self-confidence of students in workshop activities

- good teaching

- early completion of key skills by modern apprentices

- substantial recent investment in specialist resources.

Weaknesses

- slow completion of portfolios and low pass rates and progression on NVQ courses

- insufficient NVQ assessment in the workplace

- no recent progress reviews for work-based learners

- lack of rigour in internal verification

- small scope of the provision.

Scope of provision

50. Since the last inspection, carried out by the Further Education Funding Council in 1998, engineering provision has been rationalised through arrangements with another local college. North Hertfordshire College is now the centre for motor vehicle technology. It offers particularly good education and training opportunities for students with low prior qualifications and good progression routes to advanced modern apprenticeships. Enrolments have increased significantly in 2002/03. Previously, only light vehicle repair and maintenance courses were operated. The range has been extended to include motorcycle and paint spraying and body repair programmes. Part-time and full-time entry level courses, with around 20 students, include disaffected school pupils, adults on New Deal programmes and school leavers. The full-time level 1 provision, with around 50 students, has three specialist streams. These provide progression routes to related NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 that form a part of the frameworks for the advanced modern apprenticeships managed by the college.

Achievement and standards

51. Students' pass rates on the entry level City and Guilds motor vehicle repair and maintenance courses have risen rapidly and now exceed the national average. However, pass rates have been low elsewhere, primarily because students have not completed their evidence portfolios before their expected course completion dates. In 2001/02, six of the ten retained students on the progression award passed all their written tests but failed to complete their portfolios. On the NVQ level 2 light vehicle repair and maintenance course in 2001 and 2002, none of the retained students completed portfolios in the normally expected time. Retention rates have been below national averages in some years, partly due to students obtaining related employment or apprenticeships but not continuing to study at the college. Students' abilities in key skills are assessed immediately they start their courses and key skills development follows directly. Work-based learners successfully complete the key skills requirements of their frameworks within the first two years.

52. In almost two-thirds of the lessons, students attained higher standards than those normally expected. In lessons, particularly those in workshops, students showed confidence in tackling their work, displayed high levels of vocational competence for their level of study and worked well individually and in groups. In one workshop lesson at entry level, students with greater practical expertise ably instructed and assisted their fellow students to remove, inspect and replace brake pads. The table below relates to the provision as it was before the addition of new courses in 2002.

A sample of retention and pass rates in motor vehicle technology, 2000 to 2002

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| City and Guilds 3992 motor vehicle repair and maintenance | entry | No. of starts | 25 | 22 | 33 |
| | | % retention | 76 | 73 | 61 |
| | | % pass rate | 26 | * | 80 |
| City and Guilds 6956 motor vehicle progression award | 1 | No. of starts | 26 | 12 | 15 |
| | | % retention | 69 | 58 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 86 | 40 |

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

* *unreliable data*

Quality of education and training

53. The overall quality of teaching and learning is high. More than 70% of the lessons observed were good or very good and little was less than satisfactory. Students benefited from the careful planning of lessons, good-quality learning materials and the enthusiasm and vocational experience of teachers. They encouraged students to develop oral expression and to accept responsibility for planning and completing their work. In a lesson on changing oil filters, the highly motivated students developed their own detailed action plan as a group before commencing the practical work. As a result of discussing the detailed steps in the plan, students also gained a good understanding of related pollution regulations.

54. Students often demonstrated their good level of technical understanding and interest through their answers to questions from teachers, their contributions to discussions and their own questions. In a minority of lessons, some students are not working constructively or are occupied on the same activity for too long. Students are given inadequate opportunities to use IT in their lessons. Students are provided with good support to meet their literacy and numeracy needs.

55. The completion rate of evidence portfolios is poor. Students have too little assessment in their workplaces. Some third-year students still have no observed work-based assessments in their portfolios. No work-based learners have had a formal review of their progress since September 2002. As a result, students are not fully aware of their progress or the actions they need to take to complete their programmes. Records show that there has been little internal verification during this academic year. Sampling plans, where they exist, have not been followed.

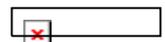
56. Substantial recent investment has greatly improved the learning facilities for light vehicle work and created good-quality workshops for students in the new motorcycle and paint and body repair provision. Newly appointed teachers have recent experience of the industry and have more than doubled the size of the teaching team. A motor vehicle resource centre holds a dedicated IT suite and other learning resources and is used for much of the classroom-based work. This centre and other classrooms, however, are separated from the workshops and students cannot get easy access to machinery and items that could immediately illustrate points of theory.

Leadership and management

57. The rapid expansion of the college-based provision and the transfer of students from another college has been well managed. However, the management of work-based learning is unsatisfactory and many detailed aspects of the provision have been neglected or been insufficiently developed. Important aspects of the students' experiences lack appropriate monitoring. For example, inadequate attention is paid to students' progress reviews and the pace at which portfolios are completed. The self-assessment report was developed through consultation with all area staff. Inspectors agreed with most findings about college-based courses but considered that there was insufficient emphasis on the work-based provision.

58. The scope of provision is modest. Students are not able to access any accredited motor vehicle provision in the evenings, although such courses operated in the past. Young people cannot prepare for employment through a foundation modern apprenticeship. There are no full-time motor vehicle courses at level 3 or above or professional courses that would provide progression for advanced modern apprentices.

Business administration, professional and management studies



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

Strengths

- high retention rates on GCE A-level business, GNVQ intermediate and certificate in marketing courses

- good pass rates on GCE A-level business, administration, professional accounting, personnel and management courses

- good teaching and learning on professional and management courses

- good student progression

- excellent resources and employer links for professional and management courses

- effective learning support.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on the AVCE, NVQ administration and advanced certificate in marketing courses

- low pass rates for the NVQ level 3 administration award

- poor attendance of full-time students

- poor recording of individual tutorials on full-time courses

- lack of vocational identity in classrooms at Stevenage

- ineffective self-assessment.

Scope of provision

59. The college offers a broad range of courses for full-time students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. Full-time provision includes GCE AS and A2 business and accounting, AVCE, GNVQ intermediate and NVQ business administration. Students of business administration can study full time or part time. On both the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) and business administration courses, students undertake additional single subject qualifications in book-keeping or ICT. The college is developing a CoVE for business and management. Professional courses in accounting, management, personnel, training, purchasing and marketing are offered at the Goldsmith centre in Letchworth. Work-based learning provision includes foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in accounting and business administration. Some 364 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on business courses and some 1,384 adult students are enrolled on mainly part-time professional and management courses.

Achievement and standards

60. Pass rates on the GNVQ advanced and the AVCE are consistently high but the proportion of high grades has dropped significantly. In 2001, pass rates on GNVQ intermediate were below the national average. They are consistently poor on full-time business administration courses. GCE A-level pass and retention rates were significantly above the national average for 2001, while retention rates on AVCE and business administration were significantly below the national averages. Retention and pass rates are high on many professional and management courses, with pass rates significantly above national averages on the certificate in personnel practice, introductory award in management and the AAT foundation and intermediate awards. On management and professional courses, students are progressing well. However, students on full-time courses are not achieving their full potential.

61. Progression within the college, to employment and to HE is good. Progression rates from the GNVQ intermediate to AVCE are excellent. Full-time students' attendance is very poor and a significant number of students on GCE AS and AVCE courses have developed persistent patterns of non-attendance.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GNVQ intermediate business | 2 | No. of starts | 23 | 22 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 68 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 81 | 73 | 58 |
| GCE A-level business | 3 | No. of starts | 30 | 24 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 60 | 88 | 91 |
| | | % pass rate | 65 | 81 | 95 |
| GNVQ advanced business / AVCE | 3 | No. of starts | 57 | 40 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 77 | 59 |
| | | % pass rate | 91 | 86 | 87 |
| NVQ accounting | 3 | No. of starts | 75 | 86 | 69 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 85 | 90 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | % pass rate | 63 | 89 | 81 |
| Introductory award in management | 3 | No. of starts | 96 | 134 | 63 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 100 | 97 |
| | | % pass rate | 90 | * | 90 |
| Certificate in personnel practice | 3 | No. of starts | 24 | 25 | 19 |
| | | % retention | 96 | 88 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 87 | 91 | 100 |
| Professional management foundation | 4 | No. of starts | 39 | 40 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 95 | 98 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 72 | 83 |

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

* unreliable data

Quality of education and training

62. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching is good and sometimes very good on professional and management courses. On full-time courses it is mostly satisfactory and sometimes good. Lessons are mostly well planned. Teachers design effective learning activities and case study materials to develop students' understanding. In the best lessons, students are motivated through the use of a wide range of teaching methods. In a second year AVCE lesson, students learned techniques in critical path analysis by drawing on their own experiences before transferring the techniques to practical business contexts. Teachers use their own business experience to provide examples of good business and accountancy practice. However, in many lessons, teachers do not encourage students to work together, do not ensure that they are fully engaged in their work and do not check their learning sufficiently frequently. Students' work is marked regularly and thoroughly, but there is not always sufficiently detailed feedback to enable students to improve their written work.

63. Most teachers are appropriately qualified but there is no formal, systematic updating of their business experience. Classrooms at Stevenage are dull and uninspiring and lack appropriate display materials to create a subject identity. The practical training office is used effectively to build students' confidence in preparation for work. The Goldsmith centre has excellent resources for professional and management courses and access to the very latest technology for teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to develop their skills to make more effective use of ILT in their teaching. However, there is little use of ILT in teaching at Stevenage and few part-time teachers have the skills to use ILT consistently well. All students make excellent use of college ICT resources to ensure work is presented to a high standard.

64. Homework is set and marked regularly. Portfolios are clearly structured and include good examples from the workplace. On full-time courses, teachers do not encourage students to self-evaluate their own learning or identify specific and measurable targets for improvement, although progress is reviewed in tutorials.

65. The development of key skills is unsatisfactory. There is little assessment of key skills in the workplace and completion of some key skills portfolios is slow. Attendance of full-time students at key skills lessons is poor and the tracking of progress is inconsistent.

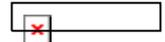
66. Students value greatly the learning support they receive from their teachers and tutors. Systems to identify and provide for students' additional learning support needs are implemented at induction. Completion of tutorial review records by teachers is not always thorough. In some cases, records lack sufficiently clear detailed targets for the student.

67. The Goldsmith centre has recently been awarded funding to develop a CoVE in business and management. Good progress is being made in developing customised provision to meet local workforce development needs. A successful partnership for this is in place with the local chamber of commerce and a steering group is being set up to provide training for parish council clerks in the region. Market research for the CoVE has identified new markets for the college and there are plans to improve the portfolio of professional courses at levels 3 and 4.

Leadership and management

68. Day-to-day management of courses is satisfactory. Course co-ordination of professional and management courses is very effective. Teachers are well supported and managed by their curriculum area managers. Some of the contributing self-assessment reports from the various course teams are poor and fail to identify significant weaknesses. Where weaknesses are recognised, these are not carried through to the development plan. Plans to improve standards lack rigour and have little impact. Policies and procedures have failed to address the problem of poor attendance and the management systems do not record students' attendance.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on the GNVQ ICT and City and Guilds diploma in computer applications

- good individual support for students

- well-managed learning shops.

Weaknesses

- poor provision and achievement in GCE A-level computing

- low retention rate in AVCE computing

- poor attendance on full-time programmes.

Scope of provision

69. The college offers a range of programmes at levels 1 to 3. There is distinctly differing provision for 16 to 18 year olds and for adults. For the former, the provision is almost entirely full time and includes GNVQ foundation, GNVQ intermediate, AVCE ICT, GCE AS and A2 computing and a City and Guilds IT practitioner's diploma. For adults, the provision is mainly at levels 1 and 2 and includes the City and Guilds 7262 certificate and diploma in computer applications and some entry level programmes. Adults mainly study in the open access learning shops in convenient town centre sites across North Hertfordshire and at the main college sites in Stevenage and Hitchin.

Achievement and standards

70. Retention and pass rates on many courses are at, or around, the national averages, although the GNVQ and City and Guilds programmes have good pass rates alongside improving recruitment. There are very poor and declining pass rates for GCE AS computing, and little achievement of higher grades. Pass rates are unsatisfactory in both computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and Integrated Business Technology (IBT) at level 2. The college has recognised this and has changed its teaching of CLAIT and will cease offering IBT2 in September 2003. Retention rates are poor on both AVCE computing and GCE AS computing courses. Adult students are punctual and their attendance is very good but for younger students on many full-time programmes it is poor. Attendance is frequently low. During the inspection it was less than 60% in many lessons and registers indicate that this is not untypical.

71. Computing and ICT students have a good practical understanding of the software packages they are using and are competent and confident in their use. Most students are well motivated and are able to work on their own and at their own pace. Portfolios of work are well organised and contain evidence of vocationally relevant and summative assessments.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| City and Guilds 7262 certificate in computer application | 1 | No. of starts | 14 | 1245 | 1459 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 56 | 59 |
| | | % pass rate | 75 | 58 | 72 |
| GNVQ foundation, ICT | 1 | No. of starts | 19 | 17 | 38 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 65 | 76 |
| | | % pass rate | 35 | 73 | 79 |
| CLAIT (short course) | 1 | No. of starts | 331 | 336 | 184 |
| | | % retention | 90 | 83 | 84 |
| | | % pass rate | 68 | 65 | 48 |
| City and Guilds 7262 diploma in computer applications | 2 | No. of starts | 17 | 34 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 65 | 70 |
| | | % pass rate | 13 | 82 | 87 |
| GNVQ intermediate ICT | 2 | No. of starts | 18 | 34 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 74 | 82 |
| | | % pass rate | 53 | 84 | 72 |
| IBT | 2 | No. of starts | 74 | 85 | 37 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 78 | 84 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---|---------------|----|----|----|
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 74 | 26 |
| AVCE ICT | 3 | No. of starts | 63 | 67 | 38 |
| | | % retention | 95 | 60 | 53 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 44 | 80 |
| GCE AS computing | 3 | No. of starts | * | 31 | 33 |
| | | % retention | * | 86 | 73 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 44 | 33 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

72. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. There were some good and very good lessons where teachers were sensitive to the needs of students, made appropriate use of praise and celebrated the achievements of individuals. Some teachers have a good awareness of the progress and levels of ability of individual students and plan activities and time to ensure that students work at an appropriate pace. Some teachers effectively plan lessons to meet the needs of students and use imaginative techniques to ensure that key messages are reinforced. For example, in one spreadsheet lesson with foundation students, there was effective use of a simple crossword puzzle based on a spreadsheet, where the clues were revealed as notes for the numbered cells and the solution checked using a macro. Some teaching, particularly for students aged 16 to 18, lacks variety and attention to individual learning needs. Little thought is given to measuring students' progress, setting short-term targets or providing challenging learning goals. In some lessons, students are not given suitable tasks and become bored. In one GCE A-level lesson, an opportunity for students to develop their learning skills was removed when they were discouraged from taking notes.

73. A friendly ethos is promoted in lessons but insufficient attention is given to promoting aims and values relating to equality of opportunity. There are sufficient well-qualified, experienced and well-motivated staff for the programmes offered. There are also sufficient numbers of computers for students to work on their own. For many of the specialist computing and IT applications, the computer network is too slow and sometimes unreliable.

74. Many rooms are equipped with data projectors and some good use is made of these to demonstrate key teaching points. Although a comprehensive staff development programme on their use is underway, often they are not used to their full potential. Learning shops all use the same professionally produced support materials either commissioned or developed by the college. Support materials are available for students with disabilities. For example, large print versions of the learning materials and large screen text.

Leadership and management

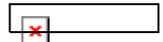
75. The leadership and management of the area are satisfactory and the management of the learning shops is good. The latter are well organised with common policies used across the college and a similar range of good learning opportunities available for students. In comparison, the organisation of the full-time courses is less structured and there is less consistency in the application of policies and sharing of good practice. Procedures for reporting students' absence are not consistently applied.

76. Targets for retention and pass rates are set but, until recently, this process has not been sufficiently rigorous. Targets are now also set for individual students based on their previous academic achievements. Quality assurance arrangements are systematic, including an effective

system to evaluate courses, identify priorities and set targets. The management of GCE A-level computing is not within the remit of the ICT curriculum area managers. There are significant weaknesses in the teaching of the GCE AS and A2 courses. Staff appraisal is formal and completed conscientiously. Regular meetings enable teachers to raise issues of concern and seek solutions. However, other than informally, the good practice of some teachers is not shared.

77. There are some gaps in provision, with fewer opportunities for adults, including limited provision of European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) and CLAIT. Some investigations are in place to include more technical subjects such as web page and Internet technologies.

Hospitality and catering



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

Strengths

- well-planned assignments
- good retention and pass rates on NVQ level 2 food and drink service
- good attendance rates.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on NVQ food preparation courses
- low standard of students' work in practical lessons
- insufficient progress by students in many lessons
- unsuitable assessment arrangements for more able students
- inadequate links with employers

- o the management of aspects of realistic working environments.

Scope of provision

78. The college offers full-time and part-time NVQ courses in food preparation and food service at levels 2 and 3. Short courses include food hygiene and health and safety certificates. The college recently introduced NVQ level 1 food preparation and cooking in response to an identified need to improve the progression opportunities for students. At the time of the inspection, only four full-time students were enrolled on the course. A small number of work-based learners attend the college one day a week for off-the-job training. Students with family and work commitments can attend courses at times to suit their individual needs. There are no short courses to meet the specific needs of employers. School link programmes are well established and some pupils progress to college courses at 16.

Achievement and standards

79. Pass rates have fluctuated over the last three years but are now good on most courses. Retention rates on the NVQ level 2 food preparation courses have fallen sharply over the last three years. They are now unsatisfactory and are significantly below national averages. Retention and pass rates are above national averages on NVQ food and drink service. Students' attendance is good; during the inspection, attendance was 88%.

80. Students' work is often of a low standard in practical classes and they do not attain the appropriate levels of skills for the various stages of their courses. They frequently work in an unmethodical and untidy manner. Poor practice includes using incorrect knives for cutting vegetables and stirring food in metal pans with metal spoons. On several occasions practical work did not comply with best practice in food hygiene. The standard of written work meets course requirements. Key skills achievements are poor. This is recognised by the college and considerable work has been carried out to begin integrating key skills assessment into catering related topics and assignments.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Food hygiene certificate (short) | 1 | No. of starts | * | * | 79 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 95 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 98 |
| NVQ food preparation (full time) | 2 | No. of starts | 18 | 30 | 33 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 73 | 52 |
| | | % pass rate | 65 | 100 | 80 |
| NVQ food preparation (part time) | 2 | No. of starts | 22 | 9 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 89 | 37 |
| | | % pass rate | 71 | 57 | 83 |
| NVQ food and drink service (full time) (1 year) | 2 | No. of starts | * | 28 | 30 |
| | | % retention | * | 71 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 100 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|---|---|----|
| NVQ food and drink service (full time) (2 year) | 2 | No. of starts | * | * | 29 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 62 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 94 |
| NVQ food preparation (full time) | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 12 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 88 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

81. Much learning is less than satisfactory, especially in practical lessons. Students often carry out practical tasks without fully understanding the reasons for their actions. In some practical skills lessons, students have insufficient work to keep them busy and develop the skills required to work at a professional pace. In one lesson, NVQ level 2 students spent three hours making two basic cream soups. Chicken stock, the main constituent of one of the soups, was provided ready made. In one theory lesson, on the different classifications of fish and shellfish, no pictures were provided to help students to distinguish, for example, between lobster and crayfish. Much of the work in practical lessons lacks flair. It fails to prepare students for the variety of contemporary styles of preparation and presentation prevalent in the catering industry. Links with employers are under-developed and have no impact on curriculum design. Few students undertake planned and assessed work experience as an integral element of their courses. Pastry production lessons for NVQ craft students are generally well organised and enable students to produce goods for sale in the restaurant.

82. The college's restaurant provides inadequate opportunities for students to practise and reinforce their skills. The number of guests using the restaurant and the range of catering activities fluctuate widely throughout students' learning programmes. In most practical sessions in the restaurant during the inspection, the ratio of customers to students serving and preparing meals did not provide a realistic restaurant experience or enable students to be assessed to industrial standards. The restaurant diary revealed similarly poor student to customer ratios for other months of the year. During food production sessions, two students cook and serve food in the college's bistro, supported and supervised by a member of college staff. This provides an occasional opportunity for students to experience a busy environment and to learn and develop skills in cooking and serving snacks and fast food.

83. Enrichment activities include opportunities to work on a number of private dinners and functions throughout the year, in addition to providing college corporate hospitality. A recent multicultural day included demonstrations by visiting chefs from the local Asian community. Students then contributed to devising a special Asian theme dinner menu, which they prepared and served. All NVQ level 2 and 3 students undertake a well-planned assignment, which culminates in a special theme dinner menu, served in the college restaurant. Students undertake market research, costing, advertising, design and research into the origins of the dishes for their chosen speciality night. Students make good use of ICT in promoting their evening events. Students receive support for key skills in separate workshop lessons. Completed portfolios contribute to key skills assessments in application of number, communications and IT. Assignments are generally marked conscientiously and returned promptly, with supportive comments from teachers.

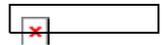
84. Assessment does not take account of students' particular needs and demands. The traditional academic year is followed and there are no opportunities for more able students to be assessed on demand and move more quickly to their qualification goal. Students do not have appropriate job descriptions to clarify their roles, responsibilities and assessment opportunities in the college restaurant and kitchens.

85. All full-time staff hold teaching qualifications and appropriate assessor awards. Teachers who have worked for most their career in education have had too few opportunities to update their awareness of current industrial practice. Much of the book stock in the library is out of date and most books are little used. Specialist accommodation and equipment is satisfactory, but a lack of modern technology does not allow students to become sufficiently familiar with current industrial practices.

Leadership and management

86. The staff work well as a team. Course team meetings take place regularly, but agendas concentrate mainly on operational issues. There are no clear strategies identified for raising retention rates, although college data shows some improvement for students enrolled in 2002. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's identification of strengths and weaknesses but considered that it contained insufficient analysis and underestimated the importance of low retention rates on the NVQ level 2 food preparation course.

Leisure, sport and tourism



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on the GNVQ leisure and tourism and first diploma in sports studies courses

- good retention rates on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate leisure and tourism courses

- high standards of students' work

- good teaching on sports programmes

- good use of a wide range of learning programmes

- highly effective football programme, meeting students needs.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on AVCE programmes in 2002

- late introduction of target setting for second year sports students

- few opportunities for work experience for vocational students.

Scope of provision

87. The college offers a range of sports courses, including the BTEC national diploma in sports science, the first diploma in sports studies and the national certificate in sport and exercise science. Students can study GNVQ courses at foundation and intermediate levels in leisure and tourism and AVCEs in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation. A football course linked with three local football clubs is popular and attracts students who would otherwise not have remained in, or returned to, education. These students have a well-devised programme that enables them to study for a recognised qualification while receiving their football coaching. Additional qualifications available include the travel agents' certificate, sports coaching and football basic treatment and management of injury certificate. A small range of leisure and fitness classes for adults run in the day and evenings. Full-time courses are offered at the Hitchin site, while the part-time courses are held at four community centres. There are 256 full-time students taking leisure, sports and travel qualifications. Most of these students are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

88. Pass rates are consistently above the national average and are good on the GNVQ leisure and tourism and first diploma in sports studies courses. In 2001, there were excellent retention and pass rates on the foundation GNVQ course. The proportion of students achieving high grades in GNVQs is considerably higher than the national averages. Some courses, such as the travel agents certificate, have significantly improved pass rates for students finishing in 2002. Retention rates on most courses are above the national average. However, retention rates on the first year of the AVCE leisure and recreation and travel and tourism courses are low. Students' progression rates to higher level courses in the college and to HE are good. In addition, over half of the AVCE students gained employment.

89. Students' work is of a high quality and at a professional standard. Their work is illustrated with pictures, photographs and charts, graphs, illustrations and tables. Students develop good research skills and use a wide range of sources, including the Internet, in assignment work. In practical situations, sports students work confidently and competently.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism | 1 | No. of starts | 9 | 17 | 35 |
| | | % retention | 78 | 100 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 100 | 89 |
| GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism | 2 | No. of starts | 47 | 45 | 64 |
| | | % retention | 81 | 87 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 71 | 82 | 83 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|----|----|----|
| First diploma in science (sports studies) | 2 | No. of starts | 16 | 23 | 40 |
| | | % retention | 81 | 70 | 70 |
| | | % pass rate | 77 | 88 | 85 |
| GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism / AVCE | 3 | No. of starts | 69 | 85 | 77 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 70 | 57 |
| | | % pass rate | 81 | 85 | 75 |

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

Quality of education and training

90. Teaching and learning are good or very good in all of the sports lessons. Lessons are well planned and interesting and include a wide range of activities. In a coaching session at one of the football clubs, where bad weather made the pitch unusable, students analysed a video of a recent game by reviewing the play, evaluating team performance and recommending coaching methods. Effective teamwork is incorporated in most lessons with students working in pairs or small groups. Teachers use these group activities and other methods to ensure students are working to their full potential. Skilful question and answer sessions and discussions are used to good effect in most lessons. On leisure, travel and tourism courses, the best lessons are well planned and use relevant, topical subject material, including videos of interviews as case studies. In some of the lessons judged satisfactory, the pace of work was often slow, with few opportunities for students to become actively involved in their learning. Many sports students do not value the relevance of their key skills training and attendance is poor in some IT lessons.

91. Assignments are clearly written, with explicit grading criteria and indications where key skills can be accredited. There is appropriate assessment of work and students receive useful feedback from teachers on areas for improvement. The moderation and internal verification system is effective, although some internal verifier's comments to assessors are brief.

92. Travel and tourism students have a varied programme of enrichment built into their courses that includes an overseas visit and a programme of guest speakers and visits. Very few AVCE students take additional GCSE, GCE AS or A-level qualifications. Vocational students do not have an appropriate breadth of work experience. AVCE students have three days work shadowing in a very narrow area of the travel and leisure industries.

93. Supportive group and individual student tutorials cover a range of advice and guidance. Tutorial records vary in quality. For some students, there are very brief records of discussions that take place in individual tutorials. A small number benefit from additional individual in-class learning support. Regular, additional support has been arranged for some first-year groups in their application of number key skills sessions. Second-year national diploma in sports science students do not have individual learning plans and the setting of individual targets has been implemented slowly. Some are now finding that they may not achieve a sufficient number of merit and distinction grades to go to their first choice of university.

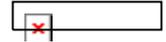
94. There is a good range of resources in the curriculum area and the learning resource centre. Two classrooms with open access to computers are well used by students. For some sports massage lessons, students use the specialist resources available in the college. An 'astroturf' floodlit football pitch is used for all-weather matches and practice. All students have use of a sports injuries clinic. Handouts, videos and other learning materials used in lessons are helpful, clear and up to date. Some teachers make good use of digital projectors to enhance their teaching and reinforce learning.

Leadership and management

95. The overall management of the area is good. There is regular communication and all staff have annual appraisals. The area has many new teachers who are well supported by managers and other

teachers. Data are used effectively by managers for regular monitoring of courses, individual students, annual programme reviews and self-assessment. Students' views are listened to and acted upon, with positive changes being made to programmes and teaching. Self-assessment is self-critical and inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified. In sports science, the self-assessment development plan does not address all the weaknesses, although action has been taken to address them.

Health, social care and public services



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on some programmes
- wide range of effective external links and partnerships
- good teaching and learning on adult courses
- high levels of personal support on all courses.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most level 3 courses for students aged 16 to 18
- poor achievement of key skills on childcare courses
- uninspiring teaching and slow progress in too many childcare and health and social care lessons
- insufficient use of ILT to enhance learning.

Scope of provision

96. There are courses for full-time students in childcare, health and social care and public services. Provision for part-time students covers counselling, early years, playwork, health and social care and childminding. At the time of the inspection, there were 260 students aged 16 to 18 following full-time courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Courses include the AVCE, first and national diplomas in public services and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma, certificate and foundation courses. There were also a small number of adults enrolled on these courses. There were 283 adult students following courses in introduction, certificate and diploma in counselling, CACHE childminding and NVQ levels 2 and 3 in early years care and education.

Achievement and standards

97. There are consistently good pass rates for at least the last two years on some courses, such as the certificate in childcare and education, the GNVQ and AVCE in health and social care and national diploma in public services, but these are frequently not matched by similarly good retention rates. There are good retention rates on first diploma public services but declining pass rates to well below the national average. The retention rate on the certificate in childcare and education is at the national average. Retention rates have declined to well below the national averages in 2002 on most level 3 full-time courses, often from high rates in the previous two years. Retention rates have improved in the current year due to greater focus on initial guidance and more careful monitoring of attendance and punctuality.

98. Retention and pass rates on the counselling course are around the national average. In their first year of operation, the NVQ level 2 and 3 courses have high retention rates of 91% and 95%, respectively, with corresponding pass rates of 75% and 53%. There is satisfactory progression from level 2 to level 3 courses within the college and to HE or relevant employment from level 3 courses.

99. Students' oral and written work is appropriate for the level of their courses. For example, in a counselling lesson, one student made a thorough and detailed presentation on the comparisons between psychodynamic and person centred approaches. The achievement of key skills qualifications is satisfactory on most courses but poor on childcare courses. In some lessons, students demonstrate good development of personal and learning skills. On counselling courses, they show very good levels of self-awareness and analytical skills. In a foundation level lesson, students were creative and imaginative in designing a poster to illustrate their learning about the health and hygiene needs of toddlers.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| First diploma public Services | 2 | No. of starts | 23 | 17 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 82 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 74 | 64 | 47 |
| Certificate in childcare and education | 2 | No. of starts | 16 | 18 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 89 | 78 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 94 | 94 |
| Certificate in therapeutic counselling | 2 | No. of starts | 32 | 25 | 20 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 84 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | 89 | 95 | 83 |
| Diploma in childcare | 3 | No. of starts | 34 | 33 | 34 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------|----|-----|-----|
| and education | | % retention | 79 | 77 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 52 | 46 | 82 |
| National diploma in public services | 3 | No. of starts | 25 | 19 | 26 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 74 | 48 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 79 | 100 |
| AVCE health and social care | 3 | No. of starts | 24 | 19 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 79 | 43 |
| | | % pass rate | 85 | 100 | 90 |

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

Quality of education and training

100. Teaching is satisfactory or better. It is good on courses for adults. Most lessons are well planned, with clear aims and objectives, although teachers sometimes run out of time. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods effectively and use students' work experiences to promote discussion and foster learning. For example, in a lesson on childminding, the teacher drew on students' experience of dealing with a range of behavioural problems when settling new children into their home and developed additional perspectives on how to manage this process more effectively. On some full-time childcare and health and social care courses, the teaching is uninspiring and clear learning objectives are not set. This adversely affects students' learning. Students are insufficiently stretched to maximise their potential and significant learning points are not reinforced. Good use is made of external speakers and external visits.

101. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and some have recent vocational experience. Systems to update existing staff have yet to have a significant effect. Some, but not all, of the accommodation is good. There are effective displays of students' work in classrooms to stimulate learning. Students have good access to computers in the learning resource centre but not in classrooms, and this restricts learning opportunities. The use of ILT to enhance teaching is not well established.

102. An initial assessment of students' individual learning needs is carried out, but not all those identified as in need take up the range of support on offer. The standard of assessment of students' work is satisfactory and students receive feedback on their work that helps them improve their performance.

103. There are high levels of personal support for students. There is good tutorial support for all full-time and some part-time students, though there is poor recording of tutorials on some childcare courses leading to poor target setting and action planning. Students value the support they receive, much of which takes place outside the formal tutorial sessions. Parents are informed of progress by letter and at parents' evenings. Those students deemed to be at risk are monitored closely.

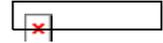
104. There is a good range of placement opportunities for childcare students but not for health and social care students. Other enrichment activities do not add significant breadth to students' experiences. There are strong links with the local community. The college has developed a range of NVQs through its involvement with the Early Years Development Partnership. Positive links with the local authority have resulted in NVQs in playwork being offered to widen participation.

Leadership and management

105. The appointment of curriculum area managers has improved the guidance to staff. Recent staff shortages had an adverse effect on course management and the learning experience of students. Some course leaders are not full-time teachers at the college and they are not always available when students need to see them. The attendance of agency staff at course team meetings is poor.

106. The self-assessment process is thorough. Internal lesson observations accurately reflect the quality of teaching and learning. Appropriate targets for improvement are set, monitored effectively and largely met. Equality of opportunity is a fundamental value underpinning the curriculum in all courses. It is appropriately promoted in the content of some lessons.

Visual and performing arts



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on some courses
- experienced staff with good subject qualifications
- much good accommodation and equipment
- good enrichment for art and design students.

Weaknesses

- poor and falling retention and pass rates on some courses
- inadequate course and area management
- narrow range of provision.

Scope of provision

107. The Centre for the Arts, at Hitchin, provides full-time national diploma courses in performing arts, dance, drama, popular music and design, and the diploma in foundation studies art and design. There are also open college network (OCN) art and design courses, City and Guilds photography, patchwork and quilting and creative studies courses and a Centra interior design course for part-time adult students. There are 265 full-time students. Almost all of the students are aged 16 to 18 and

most are studying on level 3 courses. There are 16 students studying GCE AS or A2 music technology at the Hitchin music centre and 83 part-time students in art and design. There are good progression opportunities to HE within the college and elsewhere.

Achievement and standards

108. There are good pass rates in GCE A-level music technology and the national diploma in design and good retention and pass rates on the diploma in foundation studies courses. However, there are poor and falling retention and pass rates on the national diploma in popular music, the national diploma in performing arts and City and Guilds creative studies courses. There is poor attendance on some courses in art and design.

109. Students' performance skills are good. Music students have good practical skills in playing their instruments and singing. National diploma drama and dance students perform well and have a wide range of opportunities to develop practical skills in a variety of disciplines. Their work is lively and confident and they have good improvisation skills. Drama students tackle difficult texts with confidence and express their views on complex concepts clearly. Art and design students develop good practical skills which they combine well with theory. The general level of work is satisfactory or better but the general standard of drawing is poor.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| City and Guilds 7900 part 1 creative studies | 2 | No. of starts | 10 | 14 | 5 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 93 | 40 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 77 | 50 |
| GCE AS music | 3 | No. of starts | * | 26 | 15 |
| | | % retention | * | 62 | 87 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 63 | 85 |
| GCE A-level music technology | 3 | No. of starts | 14 | 12 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 75 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 62 | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in design | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 41 | 30 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 78 | 63 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 94 | 100 |
| National diploma in performing arts | 3 | No. of starts | 55 | 44 | 49 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 77 | 57 |
| | | % pass rate | 89 | 88 | 68 |
| National diploma in popular music | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 21 | 26 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 62 | 50 |
| | | % pass rate | 73 | 50 | 46 |
| Diploma in foundation studies art and design | 3 | No. of starts | 35 | 36 | 54 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 94 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 97 | 97 | 98 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

110. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching, particularly in practical lessons, is often good and well structured. Relationships between staff and students are good and this helps students to be articulate, perceptive and confident in their practical activities. In the best lessons, teachers give clear introductions. They ask appropriate questions to promote understanding and provoke discussion. Students' skills and knowledge are built up through well-written assignments. Teachers are sensitive to the varying needs of students and provide appropriate help in and outside of lessons. Particularly good teaching and learning were seen in lessons in the dance show, 3D design, patchwork and quilting and the national diploma in drama. In lessons that were judged satisfactory, work was sometimes repetitive, the combination of theoretical work and practical activities was inappropriate or there was insufficient studio discipline. In the poor lessons, objectives were not made clear, the pace of work was slow and students made little progress in developing new knowledge or skills.

111. There are good enrichment opportunities for students in art and design, with regular museum and other visits to London and an annual study visit to mainland Europe. A gallery in the Centre for the Arts provides students with the opportunity to exhibit their own work and view the work of visiting artists and designers. The *Clothes Show Live* gave students a unique opportunity to work on a live project that involved fashion and 3D design students and students from hairdressing and beauty. There is ample opportunity for performing arts students to participate in college public performances but few opportunities to observe professional theatre, dance or music performers and there are few external visits to theatre or dance events.

112. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects and bring current practical experience and vocational standards into their teaching. Few have teaching qualifications. There is insufficient technician support across the programme area for the extensive highly technical equipment available. There are few opportunities for staff development in performing arts.

113. Accommodation is generally good and well equipped, notably in dance, music and drama, the 3D workshop, foundation studios, art shop, gallery and the IT suite. There are well-equipped rehearsal studios and a large versatile area used for public performance that has good sound and lighting equipment. However, the music store and the recording studio need some work to create a more professional environment and there are insufficient practice rooms for music students. There is also a lack of rehearsal space for dance and drama students outside lecture times.

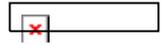
114. Assignments are well structured and most students are given good supportive feedback. Art and design assessments are fair and reflect the requirements and level of the courses. In performing arts, teachers carry out joint assessments of practical work and assignments are double marked. In the national diploma in music and dance, assessment is not made against the awarding body grading criteria. There are good application and interview arrangements that include an audition for dance and drama students. Academic support is good, but the quality of tutorials and the keeping of tutorial records are not uniformly good. Some tutorial records are insufficiently detailed to identify the progress made by students. Students feel insufficiently supported and guided in making choices about their progression to HE and completion of application forms.

Leadership and management

115. Art and design and performing arts are managed separately. The management of the areas and courses is inadequate. The range of provision is narrow. There is no level 1 provision and 2002 is the first year that level 2 courses have been offered. Although students have the opportunity to combine their national diploma studies with GCE AS courses there are few opportunities to study other appropriate performing arts qualifications. There is a good schedule of meetings in both curriculum areas but the records do not always indicate the decisions taken or when actions have been completed. Good practice and new initiatives are not regularly shared between course teams. Courses in both curriculum areas are well documented and course reviews are completed. However,

the arrangements for assuring quality are not effective. Action plans lack detail; effective targets for improvement are not set and progress is difficult to monitor. Data are not used effectively to manage the area or courses, are sometimes inaccurate and are not shared adequately between staff. There are good student monitoring systems in place but they are not used effectively to record the progress and needs of students.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on access to HE courses
- good pass rates in GCE A-level law, psychology and sociology
- effective guidance and support for students
- well-managed access programme.

Weaknesses

- poor achievements in GCE AS and A-level history
- poor progression from GCE AS to A2 courses
- unsatisfactory resources to support learning
- inadequate assessment in humanities subjects
- ineffective quality assurance.

Scope of provision

116. All of the college's provision in humanities is at level 3. There is a full-time GCE AS and A-level programme for students aged 16 to 18. Some 249 students are currently enrolled. This year's programme has attracted groups in psychology, sociology, law and history. A small number of part-time adult students attend these courses or attend evening classes in GCE AS psychology and GCE A-level law. The range of enrichment activities offered is limited and participation is low. Some 109 students are currently enrolled on the access to HE courses. The courses are available for full-time or part-time day or evening study and can be completed over one or two years.

Achievement and standards

117. There are good pass rates in GCE A-level law, sociology and psychology, with pass rates of 100% for each of the last two years to 2002. Pass rates on GCE AS courses are close to the national average in these subjects. Pass rates in history have been poor over a number of years, with few students gaining higher grades of A to C. Students achieve lower grades than predicted based on their GCSE results. In 2002, only 27% of students who followed a GCE AS course progressed to GCE A2. The number of students who successfully complete a two year advanced course in humanities subjects has declined. In-year retention rates for the current year do not show any improvement in retention. Access courses have shown good retention and pass rates over recent years. Overall pass rates on these courses are well above the national average.

118. The standard of GCE AS and A level students' work is satisfactory. In history, the work of the best students demonstrates a high level of ability in evaluating source materials to reach well-considered conclusions. In law, written work is generally well presented, clearly structured and illustrates the skills of synthesis, analysis and evaluation. However, many sociology and psychology students do not complete all the written work that is required of them. Some students merely narrate texts and are unable to analyse beyond a superficial level. Students reach an appropriate standard in their oral work and are able to make effective and confident contributions in class. Adult students on the access to HE programme demonstrate a sense of purpose and are keenly interested in their work. They understand and apply a range of research methods and are able to criticise methodology. Many psychology students explain complex issues with increasing confidence. A significant proportion of access and GCE A-level students progress to a wide range of courses and HE institutions.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GCE A-level history | 3 | No. of starts | 9 | 12 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 67 | 92 | 78 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 73 | 71 |
| GCE A-level law | 3 | No. of starts | 21 | ** | 11 |
| | | % retention | 52 | ** | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 78 | 80 | 91 |
| GCE A-level psychology | 3 | No. of starts | 34 | ** | 18 |
| | | % retention | 59 | ** | 82 |
| | | % pass rate | 56 | 100 | 100 |
| GCE A-level sociology | 3 | No. of starts | 29 | ** | 5 |
| | | % retention | 75 | ** | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 47 | 100 | 100 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---------------|----|----|----|
| GCE AS history | 3 | No. of starts | * | 27 | 20 |
| | | % retention | * | 88 | 65 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 57 | 54 |
| GCE AS law | 3 | No. of starts | * | 39 | 20 |
| | | % retention | * | 76 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 72 | 73 |
| GCE AS psychology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 67 | 83 |
| | | % retention | * | 55 | 78 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 75 | 73 |
| GCE AS sociology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 26 | 37 |
| | | % retention | * | 62 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 88 | 78 |
| Access to HE | 3 | No. of starts | 40 | 36 | 32 |
| | | % retention | 58 | 82 | 84 |
| | | % pass rate | 87 | 91 | 93 |

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

** unreliable data

* course not running

Quality of education and training

119. Teaching and learning are satisfactory or good. Teaching is authoritative and teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects. Lessons are well planned. Teachers employ a range of methods to stimulate interest and to help students maintain their concentration during the three-hour sessions. In psychology, topics draw upon the students' own experiences and relate activities to real life. In a successful GCE AS psychology lesson on the links between stress and illness, the teacher gave a brief introduction to the work of key theorists before introducing the students to self-rating scales. The students then practised using the scales and matched their scores with their own attendance records at the college and plotted the results. This simple exercise developed the students' skills in the analysis, correlation and presentation of data. In some lessons, the teachers presented the work competently but were not very inspiring. At times, work in pairs or groups lacked purpose. In access to HE lessons, care is taken to build the confidence of students. In a history lesson, the teacher and students worked together in developing an increasingly sophisticated interpretation of the relationships between the beliefs of Luther and Zwingli.

120. Teachers produce a wide range of resources for learning. The best examples successfully extend the understanding of students by including relevant and interesting case studies and related problems. However, some materials replicate the information that students already have in their textbooks. There are insufficient up-to-date reference materials and textbooks in the learning resource centre. This weakness was also identified at the previous inspection. The college is developing its range of multi-media resources but it is not yet sufficient to compensate for the unsatisfactory book stock. The use of ILT in lessons is increasing. Teachers provide lists of web sites to help students' research. Some subjects have developed their own web sites. Classrooms are drab and uninviting.

121. On access courses, assessments are set regularly at an appropriate level. Work is carefully marked, strengths are praised and areas for improvement clearly identified. However, in some humanities subjects, teachers do not provide sufficiently detailed comments and frequently fail to correct basic grammatical and spelling errors. Teachers use different marking and grading schemes.

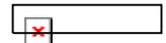
This makes it difficult for students to compare the standard of work they have achieved in their subjects.

122. Most staff have teaching qualifications and relevant degrees in the subjects they teach. Some use their experience as examiners to keep up to date with developments in their subjects. Students are well informed about their programmes and receive good impartial advice during enrolment. Academic and pastoral support are good. Teachers monitor the progress of their students through formal tutorials and informally. Attendance is carefully monitored. Access students are particularly appreciative of the support they receive.

Leadership and management

123. Access courses are well managed. The provision has been revised to cater for students who wish to follow different study patterns. Teachers are effectively deployed and agency and part-time staff are well supported. Good informal communication is encouraged by the sharing of a large workroom. However, the arrangements for assuring quality are ineffective in humanities subjects. Self-assessment fails to identify strengths and weaknesses and provides little information on the quality of teaching and learning. Action plans do not address the main weaknesses, effective targets for improvement are not set and arrangements for monitoring the achievement of actions lack rigour. Most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection persist.

English and media



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

Strengths

- excellent pass rates on GCE A2 English, film and communications courses

- much good teaching on level 3 courses

- good tracking and monitoring of students' progress

- good management and communications.

Weaknesses

- below average retention rates on GCSE English and AVCE media

- poor quality materials to support learning

- o insufficient use of ILT to enhance teaching and learning on most courses.

Scope of provision

124. There is a wide variety of English courses at advanced level available during the day at Stevenage. The courses are English language and literature, English language and English literature. English language is only available as a GCE AS course. Communication studies and film studies are also offered as GCE AS and A2 courses. The AVCE media course can be studied as a single award and double award at the Centre for the Arts. GCSE English is available to full-time and part-time students at Stevenage and Hitchin. GCE A-level evening classes in English did not recruit this year, but an intensive one-year GCE A-level course in film studies is now running successfully.

Achievement and standards

125. There are excellent pass rates on GCE A2 English language and literature, English language, English literature, film studies and communication studies courses. Pass rates at higher grades in English language and literature and communication studies are well above national averages. Pass rates on GCE AS courses are also above average. Retention rates on some evening GCE AS courses are below average and were particularly poor for GCSE English and AVCE media in 2001/02.

126. Students are well motivated and regularly complete the assignments set. English students on level 3 courses make thoughtful, considered responses to texts and topics studied. They make good use of quotations and express themselves clearly in discussions and in their written work. Formal coursework assignments are completed to a good standard. Comparative literature essays are handled well, with students choosing examples from a wide selection of writers. Communication studies students produce detailed, thorough and well-presented projects. Some students' responses to non-coursework homework are brief. This is not questioned sufficiently in the feedback they receive from teachers.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GCSE English | 2 | No. of starts | 89 | 109 | 120 |
| | | % retention | 72 | 69 | 57 |
| | | % pass rate | 81 | 85 | 53 |
| GCE A-level English language and literature | 3 | No. of starts | 56 | 25 | 22 |
| | | % retention | 61 | 84 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 85 | 100 |
| GCE A-level communications | 3 | No. of starts | 26 | 16 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 64 | 73 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 89 | 100 |
| AVCE media | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 22 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 48 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
| GCE AS literature | 3 | No. of starts | * | 11 | 12 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---|----|----|
| | | % retention | * | 55 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 67 | 90 |
| GCE AS English language and literature | 3 | No. of starts | * | 52 | 56 |
| | | % retention | * | 77 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 90 | 90 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

127. There is much good teaching for students on level 3 courses and none that is less than satisfactory. The best lessons are well structured and actively seek students' participation. Students are interested in their studies and contribute readily to class discussion. In one GCE AS literature lesson, students gained a deeper understanding of the ending of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* by discussing a filmed version of the ending. They worked in pairs to identify the issues and then questioned other students who were playing the roles of the main characters. They were able to identify key quotations from the scene, which illustrated the new perspective they had gained about the scene. In all lessons, students work co-operatively with each other. In some lessons, a formal 'partner' system has been adopted to encourage students to help each other and share ideas. In one evening GCE A-level film studies lesson, groups of students were introduced to storyboarding by choosing slides from a film they hadn't seen and then presenting a storyline and an invented dialogue. The groups worked imaginatively and created a coherent and often witty presentation in less than an hour.

128. In some of the less effective lessons, there were missed opportunities to enliven the teaching and learning and motivate the students. In GCSE English, for example, students were not encouraged to draw upon their own experiences to provide enrichment to discussions and assignments. On many courses, learning materials, such as handouts and overhead transparencies, are poor. On most courses, there is little use of ILT to enrich the learning experience, for example, by referring to Internet web sites to support students' research and extending the range of materials available in the learning resource centre. Teachers do arrange trips and visits for students to widen their experiences and enriches their studies.

129. The curriculum area has a relatively small team of very well-qualified staff with relevant subject degrees and appropriate teaching qualifications. There is good provision of specialist teaching resources in AVCE media and GCE A-level film studies. Classrooms lack visual interest. There are no wall displays to disseminate information or display students' work. In some rooms, the arrangement of furniture restricts group interaction. The learning resource centres have subject-related books but their number is small and the selection of modern fiction is unexciting. There are few on-line computer resources.

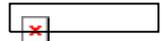
130. Students on all courses receive regular and accurate feedback on the standard of their work. However, there is inconsistency in the level of guidance provided to enable them to improve their work. The monitoring of students' progress is good and is helped by the use of data that compares their performance with previous academic achievements.

131. Information, guidance and support to students are good. All full-time students receive an interview, an effective induction that offers 'tasters' of different subjects on offer and an initial assessment for key skills. All students receive a year plan for their course showing topics covered and key dates. Full-time students receive an individual review of progress each half term, where targets for academic improvement are agreed. Review feedback to students is detailed and thoughtful, taking account of their personalities, their out-of-college commitments and their learning preferences. Staff have a good working relationship with students, which the latter appreciate.

Leadership and management

132. The curriculum area is well managed. There is a clear management and communications structure and regular meetings allow for good communications between staff. Care is taken to offer courses that meet the needs of students. Timetables are constructed to allow media students to attend GCE AS English classes. Additional Saturday classes have been arranged to allow GCE A-level film studies students to take up assignment options that interest them. There is a thorough and detailed process of self-assessment with key actions for improvement identified and reviewed. Good progress has been made in addressing previously identified weaknesses in retention rates, and good use is made of national averages in setting targets for individual courses.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- students' good achievements through practical activities

- effective use of individual learning plans in teaching

- extensive range of provision to meet a wide range of identified needs.

Weaknesses

- insufficient opportunities for students with learning difficulties to learn in vocational settings or progress to vocational courses

- insufficient recognition of the full range of students' achievements

- unsatisfactory students' achievements in lessons involving simulations and paper-based activities.

Scope of provision

133. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time separate specialist courses. For students aged 16 to 24 with moderate learning difficulties, the supported learning provision

comprises three full-time courses that aim to provide a route to employment. The Northeast Transition programme, for students who are not yet ready to attend college full time, is based on the site of a local special school. It is run in collaboration with the local education authority. The pre-vocational progression award and the first year of 'skills for working life' are run at the college's Hitchin site. The second year of skills for working life takes place on the Stevenage site, together with 'workplace training', a vocational programme in retail and catering. Some 57 students are currently on these courses. Supported learning also includes 2 courses for 21 school leavers with severe learning difficulties. 'Horizon' and 'threshold' are designed to offer progression to independent living, further study or supported employment. Some full-time students live in specialist supported accommodation, Briar Patch, which provides an extended independent living programme.

134. There are three part-time courses for adults with learning difficulties. 'Starting out' is for adults with profound and multiple learning difficulties; and 'essential skills' and 'moving on' are for adults with a range of learning difficulties who want to develop more independence and skills for work. Some students have work placements supported by social services. There are over 200 adult students on these modular programmes. A summer scheme is a link into the college for new students and provides an opportunity for existing students to maintain their skills.

135. 'Learning and coping' comprises a range of specialist courses for adults who have mental health difficulties or sensory impairments. These are run in the local mental health unit, day centres, residential homes and other community venues as well as on the college sites. As their confidence improves, some students progress from off-site venues to college-based classes.

Achievement and standards

136. Students' achievements are good, and sometimes excellent, when they learn through practical activities. In the domestic-style kitchens, students with mental health or severe learning difficulties learn to work independently, confidently and to a high standard. Women in a class for those with mental health problems, none of whom had any previous sewing skills, learned some sophisticated sewing techniques and were producing work of a good standard. Students with learning difficulties set up and ran a Valentine's café. Students on the innovative moving on programme, who are learning to train non-disabled people about disability, used equipment and made their own overhead projector slides.

137. All students have individual action plans, and teachers used these effectively to plan lessons that centred on individual needs and targets. The achievement of these targets is monitored with students in lessons and in tutorials. However, in spite of teachers' efforts, the attainments and achievements of students with learning difficulties are significantly depressed by their poor access to vocational and other practical settings. Lower levels of achievement are most evident when vocational lessons take place in classrooms and when less able students, who need to learn practically, are unable to do so because they are also in classrooms. In addition, some of the students' significant achievements are not currently recognised. This is mainly, but not exclusively, on those courses based on external accreditation. Here, the records of units gained can exclude other major achievements, such as changes in behaviour, that enable students to be employable, or gains in making choices which make students more independent. In those courses where the students' essential skills needs are identified, these achievements are recorded. Students at Briar Patch make significant gains in independent living skills, social skills and basic skills but these are not linked to their individual action plans.

138. Too few students progress to foundation level courses in areas such as health, social care and public services or catering. Foundation level courses are not available in all areas of the college.

Quality of education and training

139. The quality of education and training ranges from excellent to very poor. Although some 60% of lessons observed were graded as better than satisfactory, some 14% were unsatisfactory. Schemes of work are generally well structured and lesson plans are meticulously detailed. In many lessons, students' individual targets are identified at the beginning of the lesson and their progress against

them is reviewed at the end. In the best lessons, teachers effectively differentiate the work so that students with different targets can achieve them successfully. In an excellent cookery lesson, students with different skills and capabilities were all learning to be more independent, and progressing towards targets within their own capabilities. In one lesson, the teacher presented information in three ways - verbally, in text supported by graphics and in writing - to meet the needs of students with varying abilities. Students learn best in environments that match the requirements of their learning. For example, in a ceramics class taught in a well-equipped studio, students could produce work of a high standard because they had the most appropriate tools, materials, equipment and working space.

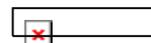
140. Lessons are unsuccessful, or less successful than they could be, when they are taught in classrooms where teachers rely on simulation, or paper-based activities for students who cannot read or write. Students with learning difficulties have too little access to the vocational areas of the college both as part of their pre-vocational courses or as opportunities for progression to foundation level courses. For example, a health and safety lesson on safe lifting for students on a vocational course was taught imaginatively, but would have been more successful in a vocational setting. In another lesson, students who could not read or write completed worksheets to record learning when they had already demonstrated real learning in the same lesson through role-play and discussion.

141. Full-time teachers are well qualified and have appropriate experience. In both adult part-time provision for students with learning difficulties and in learning and coping courses, the use of a large number of part-time and agency staff has an adverse effect on the consistency and quality of the teaching.

Leadership and management

142. Management is satisfactory. Three curriculum area managers, located in two of the college's centres, manage the extensive provision. Managers work hard to ensure that their students have access to courses where they can learn effectively. Some aspects of the provision, such as Briar Patch, the summer scheme and the moving on programme are unusual and innovative in a college of FE. However, as there is no clear overall strategy for the provision, there is no flexibility in timetabling which would enable students to have individual programmes that best meet their needs. The lack of cohesion also prevents a strong, united pressure to improve the access of students to the facilities they need. Although the supported learning programmes are managed within the vocational provision for other younger students, the students on these courses do not benefit from this. There are few opportunities for the dissemination of good practice between different areas.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- much good teaching

- good achievements of students against their individual targets

- effective support

- very good management.

Weaknesses

- lack of formal detailed diagnostic assessment for students on non-accredited courses

- lack of workplace basic skills provision.

Scope of provision

143. Provision is at three main sites in Stevenage and Hitchin and consists of part-time and full-time discrete literacy and numeracy courses, from entry 1 level to level 2 and additional support for students on other courses. The provision includes programmes designed to meet the specific needs of students. For example, parents and students can develop their ICT skills. There are 953 students enrolled on literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses. Over 500 students receive additional literacy and numeracy support for their main courses of study. Provision is offered in a range of community venues, including community and youth centres, family centres and local schools and nurseries.

Achievement and standards

144. Students' achievements on part-time and full-time programmes are high. In 2001/02, 88% successfully reached the appropriately challenging and realistic targets in their individual action plans. These targets are set following initial assessment. Progress is recorded during each lesson and assessed each term. Achievement of targets is tracked and verified by the curriculum manager. When appropriate, students are entered for external accreditation. Students who take up the offer of additional learning support and continue to attend regularly are successful in achieving their primary learning goals. The numbers of students retained on their main programme of study as a result of additional learning support increased in 2001/02 to 85%; above the retention rate for the college as a whole.

Quality of education and training

145. Teaching is well planned in lessons with individual students and in group sessions. All teaching observed was satisfactory or better and there were many examples of good teaching. In one example of outstanding teaching, students were inspired to model their own writing on the results of a group exercise in which a sophisticated model was used to analyse the structure of newspaper articles. This gave them confidence to progress from individual pieces of creative writing to working collaboratively as an editorial team. They prepared a report on the imminent visit of the Queen to open a new college building. Good teaching encourages students to develop their skills on an individual basis and through group work. They use individual action plans to monitor their own progress and their effective use allows students' views to influence the teaching and learning. All individual action plans are cross-referenced to the adult core curricula for literacy and numeracy.

146. Learning support is effective. Referrals come from academic and vocational programmes at all

levels on all three sites. Good new initiatives provide support for students, predominantly aged 16 to 18, in key skills lessons. Learning support staff work effectively with vocational staff to promote learning and achievement. All full-time students take an assessment on entry and those identified at risk of leaving their course are provided with support in their key skills lessons. In one key skills lesson, a group of students on a childcare course were being supported to study at a level commensurate with their learning needs. Three members of staff provided differentiated but inclusive support to help students achieve their programme aims. A project theme was set and students worked in small groups or on an individual basis with support from tutors. Two students who had scored below level 1 on their assessment were working with another tutor on preparation work at entry level 3. Sometimes, the support for students, although adequate, lacks variety and stimulation and the use of resources is unimaginative. Part-time programmes are arranged to suit the needs of adult students. They offer a secure foundation for adults returning to education who can then progress to vocational and academic programmes within the college. In these programmes, students speak highly of the support they receive from tutors.

147. There is no formal detailed diagnostic assessment for students on non-accredited courses. This can result in students being set inappropriate targets in their learning plans. The assessment of non-accredited courses, which are monitored and verified using a system developed in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Development Agency, is effective. The results of the reviews each term are used well to record progress and plan for further learning.

148. Well-qualified staff ensure that curriculum provision in both learning support and separate specialist programmes is broad and of a good quality. Good staff training and professional development ensure up-to-date teaching of literacy and numeracy. Many staff are qualified to assess or support students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. ICT is used effectively in some lessons to promote IT skills. Drab rooms and displays of work do not accurately reflect the good quality of teaching and learning.

149. Excellent partnership arrangements exist with eight local primary schools. Short courses take place within local schools and are designed to help parents understand the demands of the national curriculum. They also provide good links into college for those who need help with their own basic skills. There is insufficient provision for basic skills students in the workplace, although partnerships with the local borough council and a number of local nursing homes are being developed.

Leadership and management

150. The management of this area of work is very good. Managers have been active in introducing the new skills for life strategies. All staff meet periodically to share good practice and update skills. There is good support for training for all staff, including part-time and agency staff. Staff with management responsibilities meet on a regular basis and decisions are recorded and shared with teaching teams. All staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report, which is detailed, realistic and identifies strengths and weaknesses effectively. Communication within the programme area is good. To help ensure quality of learning and standards within non-accredited courses a rigorous verification system has been introduced.

Part D: College data

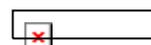
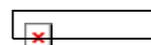


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



| Level | 16-18 % | 19+ % |
|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 1 | 15 | 38 |
| 2 | 26 | 13 |
| 3 | 46 | 12 |
| 4/5 | 1 | 3 |
| Other | 12 | 33 |
| Total | 100 | 99 |

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Note: percentages in column 19+ have been rounded and hence do not equal 100

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

| Curriculum area | 16-18 No. | 19+ No. | Total Enrolments % |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Science and mathematics | 257 | 996 | 12 |
| Land-based provision | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Construction | 0 | 19 | 0 |
| Engineering, technology and manufacture | 21 | 24 | 0 |
| Business administration, management and professional | 146 | 745 | 8 |
| Information and communication technology | 227 | 775 | 9 |
| Retailing, customer service and transportation | 0 | 54 | 1 |
| Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel | 297 | 118 | 4 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 288 | 303 | 5 |
| Health, social care and public services | 184 | 404 | 5 |
| Visual and performing arts and media | 283 | 387 | 6 |
| Humanities | 202 | 858 | 10 |
| English, languages and communication | 178 | 268 | 4 |
| Foundation programmes | 36 | 414 | 4 |
| Other | 366 | 2,922 | 31 |
| Total | 2,487 | 8,287 | 99 |

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Note: percentages in column 19+ have been rounded and hence do not equal 100

Table 3: Retention and achievement

| Level (Long courses) | Retention and pass rate | Completion year | | | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | 16-18 | | | 19+ | | |
| | | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
| 1 | Starters excluding transfers | 215 | 430 | 217 | 1,094 | 1,129 | 2,165 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 84 | 85 | 72 | 81 | 82 | 65 |
| | National average (%) | 80 | 80 | 79 | 78 | 78 | 78 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 55 | 53 | 68 | 62 | 47 | 64 |
| | National average (%) | 59 | 65 | 68 | 60 | 66 | 68 |
| 2 | Starters excluding transfers | 920 | 788 | 688 | 1,129 | 906 | 883 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 77 | 81 | 73 | 80 | 82 | 71 |
| | National average (%) | 76 | 76 | 76 | 79 | 79 | 78 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 67 | 59 | 67 | 66 | 69 | 75 |
| | National average (%) | 65 | 66 | 69 | 62 | 65 | 69 |
| 3 | Starters excluding transfers | 1,472 | 1,119 | 1,218 | 1,135 | 1,024 | 935 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 87 | 80 | 76 | 85 | 80 | 74 |
| | National average (%) | 75 | 76 | 77 | 78 | 78 | 78 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 63 | 68 | 75 | 56 | 59 | 66 |
| | National average (%) | 72 | 74 | 76 | 62 | 66 | 69 |
| 4/5 | Starters excluding transfers | 24 | 13 | 7 | 615 | 447 | 278 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 92 | 85 | 57 | 93 | 91 | 89 |
| | National average (%) | 83 | 79 | 82 | 84 | 81 | 84 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 90 | 91 | 50 | 45 | 46 | 36 |
| | National average (%) | 64 | 66 | 55 | 56 | 56 | 53 |

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

2. College rates for 1999 to 2002: provided by the college in 2003.

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) | 57 | 38 | 5 | 97 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 50 | 46 | 4 | 56 |
| Level 1 (foundation) | 74 | 26 | 0 | 31 |
| Other sessions | 76 | 15 | 9 | 33 |
| Totals | 60 | 35 | 5 | 217 |

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