# SOUTH BIRMINGHAM COLLEGE

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**Basic information about the college**

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|---|---|
| Name of college: | South Birmingham College |
| Type of college: | General Further Education |
| Principal: | Alan Birks |
| Address of college: | Hall Green Campus |
| | Cole Bank Rd |
| | Hall Green |
| | Birmingham B28 8ES |
| Telephone number: | 0121 694 5000 |
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| Chair of governors: | John James |

| Unique reference number: | 130461 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Lorna Fitzjohn |
| Dates of inspection: | 15-19 October 2001 |

## Part A: Summary
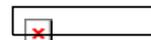


### Information about the college
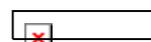


South Birmingham College is a large further education (FE) college. The college operates from five main sites located in the south and centre of the city of Birmingham. The main site is in Hall Green. There are also three smaller sites located close to the centre of the city. Course provision on some sites is specialist, for example, sixth form studies and construction. In addition, the college operates from over 150 local learning centres in and around the south and centre of Birmingham. The college offers courses in all the 14 areas of learning, at levels ranging from foundation to undergraduate. In 1995, the college merged with St Philips Sixth Form College, Edgbaston. The largest proportion of college learners come from, or near to, the southern and south-eastern inner city areas of Birmingham. In inner city wards, minority ethnic groups make up around 70% of the population. In widening participation, the college faces the difficulties associated with a `very high' index of deprivation.

In 2000/01, the college had 29,314 enrolments, 27% of which were students aged 16 to 18 and 73% aged 19 and over. Of these enrolments, 77% were on part-time courses. The largest areas of provision in 2000/01 were science (20%), humanities (16%), engineering (14%) and business (14%). At the time of the inspection, there were 44 learners on modern apprenticeships following construction programmes and four New Deal clients across two areas of learning. Unemployment rates across Birmingham are relatively high and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes for students aged 16 at grades A* to C remain below average, at 41%, compared with a rate of 49% for England. The college defines its mission as to `provide high quality, post compulsory education and training in response to local need'.

### How effective is the college?
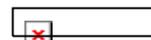


Inspectors judged teaching and students' achievements to be good in three of the curriculum areas and satisfactory in seven. Two of the curriculum areas, science and mathematics, and business administration, management and professional, were judged to be unsatisfactory. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

*Key strengths*

- good pass rates for adult learners

- good personal support for students

- clear strategic direction

- good governance

- effective strategies to widen participation in education and training

- success in celebrating cultural diversity

- wide range of courses offered in response to local and community needs

- good specialist equipment.

***What should be improved***

- proportion of students aged 16 to 18 who complete qualifications at level 3

- teaching in some subject areas

- methods for recording and measuring learning support

- co-ordinating and monitoring provision across college sites

- accommodation which inhibits teaching and learning

- implementing of procedures for internal verification

- access for people with restricted mobility.

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
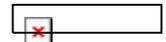


*The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

| Area | Overall judgements about provision, and comment |
|---|---|
| Science and mathematics | **Unsatisfactory.** Retention and pass rates are low for students aged 16 to 18 and the range of courses is narrow. The standard of much teaching is less than satisfactory. Students are well supported and assessment is good. Liaison between sites is poor. |
| Construction | **Satisfactory.** There are good pass rates in foundation and vocational courses. Teaching is generally good. Retention rates are declining and below national averages at foundation and intermediate levels. Work-based training is unsatisfactory. |
| Engineering, technology and textile manufacturing | **Good.** Teaching and assessment are well planned. Engineering and textiles retention and pass rates are good. Good learning materials support a range of practical workshop experiences. |
| Business administration, management and professional | **Unsatisfactory.** There are low pass rates on a number of programmes. Retention rates are low on programmes for students aged 16 to 18. Teaching on office studies and teacher training programmes is good. Teaching on business and professional programmes is poor. Tutorial support is good. |
| Information and communication technology | **Satisfactory.** Course provision for the majority of students in information and communication technology (ICT) is of a good standard. The standard of teaching and learning on foundation level courses is good. There are significant weaknesses in the provision of courses at levels 2 and 3 for students aged 16 to 18. |
| Hospitality | **Good.** Overall retention and pass rates are good. The students benefit from good human and physical resources and practical teaching. The range of courses offered is closely matched to the needs of individuals and the local community. The assessment and verification of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) is weak. |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | **Satisfactory.** Pass rates are good for adult learners. Retention rates are good for adult learners on NVQ level 2 beauty therapy and |

| | hairdressing courses. There is insufficient use of commercial work experience. Internal verification is poor. |
|---|---|
| Health, social care and public services | **Good.** Pass rates and progression are good from foundation level to level 4 courses. Provision is responsive to local needs and there is good support for students at all levels. Most teaching is good and particularly strong with adult groups. Management of courses at St Philips is, however, ineffective and adversely affects the quality of learning. |
| Visual and performing arts and media | **Satisfactory.** Teaching is good. Staff offer students good support and monitor progress thoroughly. Specialist accommodation is good, but on some sites, access for those with restricted mobility is limited. Retention rates are poor on some programmes and there is no vocational provision at level 1, or at level 2 in art and design. |
| Humanities | **Satisfactory.** Pass rates are good in General Certificate of Education Advanced-level (GCE A-level) sociology and psychology, but pass rates in GCE A-level and GCSE law are poor. There is effective and stimulating teaching but good practice is insufficiently shared, and in a majority of classes, students are not adequately engaged or challenged. Tutorials are well organised and valued by the students. |
| English, languages and communications | **Satisfactory.** Good retention and pass rates in community languages and communications. The range of provision matches the needs of the local community and widens participation. There is low achievement in GCSE and GCE A-level English. Most teaching is good or better. |
| Foundation programmes | **Satisfactory.** Teaching is good. Pass and retention rates are satisfactory in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD) and improving in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Support for individual students on foundation programmes is poor. Management of cross-college basic skills support is underdeveloped. |

## How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are satisfactory and the college provides adequate value for money. The college is responsive to local education and training needs and has succeeded in widening participation by quadrupling enrolments since 1993. Retention and pass rates for adults are, in many cases, above national averages, but generally below average for students aged 16 to 18. Governance is good. The college has a comprehensive quality assurance system but this is not implemented effectively across all college departments. Departmental action plans and operational plans do not always reflect the college's strategic objectives and are not implemented effectively across all sites. There is a wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning between different sites in over half the areas of learning being inspected. Performance data are used to set and monitor progress towards targets for attendance, retention and achievement, but the college makes insufficient use of value added data. Quality assurance is not implemented fully for franchised and work-based provision.

## To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's promotion of equal opportunities is good. Equality of opportunity is fundamental to the mission of the college. The college's commitment to multicultural education and to the celebration of diversity is evident in all its work. Detailed statistical monitoring supports the implementation of strategy. The college has raised the proportion of staff and students from minority ethnic groups considerably. Training for staff is extensive. Links with the local community are excellent. There is poor access to parts of the college for those with restricted mobility. The monitoring of some aspects of equal opportunities in the work place is weak.

## How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Students are highly appreciative of the guidance and support they receive from teachers and tutors. Tutorial arrangements are effectively co-ordinated across the college but the quality of tutoring varies considerably. Counselling and welfare arrangements are well co-ordinated and managed. There have been recent improvements in the co-ordination, staffing and structuring of learning support, which is being increasingly integrated into classroom activities. Last year, the college did not claim funding for almost all its learning support. Records are incomplete, making it difficult for the college to measure the volume and quality of learning support. In many parts of the college, punctuality and attendance are satisfactory, but in some areas learning is disrupted by habitual lateness and absenteeism. Attendance during the inspection was low in several areas with an average of 72%.

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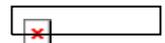
Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

### *What students like about the college*

- good support from staff

- feeling of security and support for women students

- college responsiveness at recruitment

- good facilities at most main and community sites

- thorough induction

- course tasters

- tutorials

- wide range of courses available.

***What they feel could be improved***

- some boring lessons

- safety in car parks and on walkways

- overcrowded accommodation

- poor public and social facilities at St Philips

- quantity of library books in some areas

- access for people with restricted mobility.

## Other information
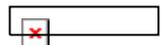
The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

**Part B: The college as a whole**
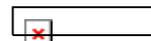


**Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors**



| 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 | 51 | 33 | 16 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 70 | 20 | 10 |
| Learning 16-18 | 47 | 38 | 15 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 65 | 27 | 8 |

*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**
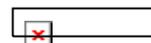


1. South Birmingham College offers a wide range of provision that can be studied part-time and full-time at various levels in all 14 of the LSC areas of learning. The work-based training provision is offered primarily in manufacture and construction. Inspection covered 12 of the areas of learning. The college has enrolled some 29,300 students in 2000/01 of which some 73% are aged over 19. The majority of students aged 16 to 18 are on full-time programmes, while many adults are on part-time or short courses at a range of college and community venues across the city. A large number of adults enrolled on community programmes have few educational qualifications. Overall, college achievements are above the FE national averages in many of the levels of study over the last three years, although there are significant variations between curriculum areas. Achievement at foundation and intermediate levels for all students has been consistently well above the national average and trends have been upwards. Achievement in short courses, a major area of provision for adults, has also been consistently at or above national averages in 1999 and 2000. The one significant exception is level 3 programmes for students aged 16 to 18, where in spite of consistent improvements over three years, achievements remain below the national average. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 have been more variable, dropping to below the national average on foundation, intermediate and advanced programmes and for adults on intermediate programmes.

**16-18 year olds**
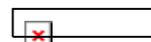
numbers of students studying GCE A levels, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), Advanced Vocational Certificates of Education (AVCE) and national diploma courses. The pass rates for GCE A levels are generally poor. In 1999/2000, only 59% of students were successful. Pass rates and retention rates for advanced GNVQs are 71% and 63% respectively, and below national averages. National diploma programmes are more successful, with retention rates at the national average but with low pass rates. Relatively small numbers are enrolled on NVQ level 3 programmes and overall results are at the national averages.

3. Students taking GCSE at the college generally do well with a pass rate of 88%, which is above the national averages for FE colleges. However, the achievements at GNVQ intermediate are less good, with only 58% of those completing the course being successful. NVQ level 2 provision is small for students aged 16 to 18 and while pass rates are at the national average, retention rates are generally low.

4. GNVQ foundation programmes are offered in a limited range of subject areas and numbers studying for this qualification are relatively small. Overall pass rates are generally above national averages. NVQ level 1 recruits significant numbers: the pass rate is 66% and the retention rate is 64%.

5. Work-based learning involves small numbers of students on advanced modern apprenticeships and clients on New Deal programmes. The majority of students aged 16 to 18, are mainly on construction courses and results are very poor.

## Adult learners
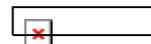


6. Adult learners generally achieve well at the college. About one third of all GCE A-level learners at the college are adults. Retention and pass rates are well above the national averages. GCSE achievements are also good with 84% of the students completing their course being successful. However, the students' achievements on the access to higher education (HE) courses are generally below average, although there are exceptions such as in English, where achievement is good. National certificate course pass rates are generally above national averages, as are NVQ level 2 and level 3 programmes, with both pass rates and retention rates well above 80%. Short courses leading to qualifications form a significant part of the adult provision. Pass rates, although showing a slight decline in 1999/2000, are at or above national averages with high retention of over 90%. The retention and pass rates for students studying textile manufacturing and engineering in the workplace are very good. The overall pass rates on franchised provision are poor, although students' progress towards awards is improving.

7. The inspection also identified some features of students' general skills related to their level of study. Students at all levels generally gain good information technology (IT) skills in their programmes of study and use these effectively to further their studies. Oral presentation skills vary considerably between groups: some are very good but others are poor at all levels of study. The standard of written work varies considerably between groups at the same level of study, and some students studying at GCE A level did not demonstrate the analytical skills expected of this group of students. The standard of students' specialist subject work is commented on in detail in Part C of this report.

## Quality of education and training
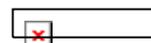
8. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 295 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 61% of these, satisfactory in 26% and less than satisfactory in 13%. These overall figures mask unacceptable variations in teaching quality across different areas of learning. In two of these, over 20% of the teaching was unsatisfactory. Most teaching is satisfactory or better, but only 6% of lessons were outstandingly well taught. The best teaching was in engineering, hospitality, visual, performing arts and media, languages and discrete programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The weakest teaching was in science, mathematics and humanities. Adult students on discrete courses were better taught than students aged 16 to 18: some 70% of classes were graded good or better, compared with 52% for learners aged 16 to 18. In some lessons there was a mixture of younger and older students, including those on work-based learning programmes and New Deal clients.

9. Most teachers have a good knowledge of their curriculum area and recent industrial experience. Classes were generally well planned and resourced with specialist equipment. Tutors support learners well with regular reviews of progress and individual help, which regularly boost the confidence of learners. Rapport between teachers and learners is good. Many classes used a variety of teaching techniques, which sustained learners' interest. They included good examples of appropriate questioning, which were often used to check learning had taken place. In good classes, all students participated in the learning experience. Expectations of learners were high and activities were challenging.

10. The poorer classes lacked challenge, the pace was slow, many learners were passive throughout and just a few students dominated the discussion. Some lessons were poorly planned and noise from adjoining classrooms hampered learning. Teachers did not always check learning had taken place and key skills were not integrated into the work as opportunities arose. In a proportion of classes, poor punctuality affected learning adversely and no action was taken when students were late.

11. Overall, the teaching on level 1 and 3 courses was marginally better than on level 2 courses and other types of sessions. For example, a group of adult learners working for GCE A-level Urdu in a community venue, benefited from a well-prepared class which used a variety of materials, including short stories, novels and songs suited to the needs of the learners and explored through a range of teaching methods. The adult learners were enthusiastic and contributed well to the lesson and attendance was good. Similarly, on a level 1 textile manufacturing course, all students were fully involved and interested. The session followed a stitching demonstration and included individual coaching: both practical and theoretical learning was checked by the tutor and used as part of assessment for the qualification. Teaching was generally good or better on GCE A-level and vocational programmes whereas over 25% of lessons were less than satisfactory at GCE Advanced Subsidiary level (GCE AS level) and GCSE. In one GCSE science class, the instructions given were unclear. Few students took part in the practical activity which formed most of the lesson, and little learning took place.

12. Students speak highly of the support given by tutors and teachers, but practice remains inconsistent. Basic skills are taught separately for some full-time students aged 16 to 18. Often these sessions, or the support that is integrated into teaching sessions, are not sufficiently related to the course of study. Support for basic skills is poorly recorded.

13. The effectiveness of key skills teaching is variable. Some examples of good practice include the integration of application of number into science and mathematics lessons, and the teaching and assessment of key skills in the workplace on manufacturing courses. There is poor use of IT in science and mathematics. In construction, key skills are insufficiently developed, particularly for students aged 16 to 18 and those on work-based learning programmes. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, key skills need to be strengthened and more use made of work-based evidence. Students do not understand the importance of key skills for their programmes of study. Good practice is not disseminated across the college. The introduction of key skills teaching and assessment in 2000/01 showed weaknesses. Several hundred students from last year's programme have still to gain a qualification. Initial testing and the start of sessions and activities have been more timely this year, and in the case of ICT, have been innovative and quick to yield results. There are good examples,

such as in textile manufacturing, of successful key skills teaching well integrated into programmes.

14. Currently, all the work-based training programmes are in construction, one of the 12 areas of learning. These programmes are unsatisfactory. Employers and some trainees do not know of the requirements of the framework. Key skills are poorly developed. There is weak co-ordination between learning in college and that `on the job'. Learners' progress is not sufficiently monitored. Some learners benefit from some good teaching when they are part of other groups.

15. The college has made staff efficiency gains over the last few years at the same time as increasing student numbers. Three quarters of staff hold an appropriate teaching qualification. A third of staff have benefited from recent industrial experience. Some 30% of staff are qualified as assessors and over 50% as internal verifiers. There are 105 work-place supervisors qualified as assessors. Less than 10% of teaching is carried out by part-time staff. These staff are employed by the college on a proportional contract and benefit from the same staff development and appraisal arrangements as full-time staff. The turnover of staff in some areas is high. Recruitment of staff in some areas is difficult. The college works actively with the local community and with past students to promote careers in teaching.

16. There is an established system of continuing professional development for all staff. The college has identified key development areas, including improving teaching, IT and management development. A system of staff self-assessment and action planning based on FE national training organisation standards has been introduced. Performance-related pay initiatives are linked to this system. Staff engage in a wide variety of appropriate staff development, although some do not always take up the training opportunities on offer. Every year, a mixture of full-time and part-time teaching and support staff are following teacher-training programmes run by the college.

17. Over the last three years, the college has made a significant investment in IT equipment. The specification of equipment is high. The overall ratio of learners to computers is good. However, the distribution of computers does not follow students' demand. The main teaching area is split into bays and is a poor environment because of noise and other distractions affecting students' concentration. There is good access to IT for staff. Teaching rooms are furnished and equipped to a minimum standard. Overall, learning and resources centres are adequate. Some libraries do not provide a sufficient range of up-to-date books and other learning materials. Specialist facilities such as workshops, kitchens, studios, hairdressing salons and laboratories are generally good, but group sizes are such that accommodation is often cramped and does not properly support learning. Where health and safety are critical, good provision has been made.

18. The college does not offer good access for those learners with limited mobility across all sites. In some cases, central learning and resource centres are located on the first floor. There are few lifts and access ramps. The college sites do not offer all students a safe environment in terms of well-lit and traffic-free walkways. The college employs administrative staff to manage the available resources and accommodation. It is too early to assess whether this offers good value for money. At some sites, canteens and social areas are too small.

19. Policies and procedures are in place to give staff guidance on the most appropriate form of assessment to meet students' learning needs. For most learners assessment is fair, accurate and provides supportive feedback: learners' progress is carefully monitored. The quality and recording of assessment varies widely. NVQ assessments are administered to a very high standard, whilst others meet the bare minimum standard. Some records of assessment are poor. Workplace assessment is excellent, with high numbers of supervisors qualified as assessors. In some cases, work placements are not used well for the assessment of competence. There is an over-reliance on college-based assessment for work-based students. Employers, parents and others are informed of students' progress where appropriate. Action planning following assessment is not widely used.

20. The system for assuring the quality of assessment on vocational programmes is inadequate. The college's internal verification procedure relies upon assessors and verifiers meeting the requirements of awarding bodies. There is insufficient written guidance on the college's internal verification and, on some NVQ programmes, it is inadequate. In these instances there are no arrangements for the verification of assessment before it is used or observed by assessors. Some

departments and individuals operate systems for the moderation and standardization of assessments. No formal arrangements are in place for the representative sampling of students' completed work. External verifiers have pointed out the college's deficiency in this area. A clear system is in place to monitor actions set by external verifiers.

21. Widening participation and ensuring equality of opportunity are major components of the college's strategic planning. In practice, these issues underpin its operational values. This strategic emphasis is realized effectively in the large number and wide range of courses at different levels in all major areas of learning, and in the variety of locations and modes in which courses are offered. The college develops its community provision in partnership with community organizations. Many examples of specialist provision are devised in response to the ethnic diversity of local communities. The provision of courses in English for speakers of other languages is a particularly flexible and responsive part of the college's contribution to achieving equality of opportunity, and widening opportunities for learners in Birmingham.

22. The college provides a wide range of opportunities at over 100 outreach centres, in addition to its five main centres, across the southern part of the city. The timing, location and duration of courses are adapted to fit the needs of learners. Courses are provided at weekends and in holiday periods. The main college centres are given autonomy in the development of provision to suit their locations. One site is a sixth form centre, another specializes in community provision and a third is the main centre for courses in visual and performing arts. There is some duplication of courses to increase opportunities for learners to make progress. However, such opportunities within the college are more effectively provided in some areas than in others. For example, health and social care students at Hall Green can progress from foundation level to level 4. Opportunities for students in visual and performing arts and media are not so clearly established and there is a lack of provision at levels 1 and 2. The college is aware of the need to secure and monitor progression routes more thoroughly.

23. Highly effective collaboration with other providers and local stakeholders is central to the college's strategic development. The college belongs to Birmingham Community College, a collaborative venture amongst seven colleges in the city. The community college has been used to place applicants and to rationalise provision between colleges, City College and South Birmingham College, in media education at Digbeth centre and in engineering and motor vehicle engineering at the technology centre. The college works productively with the city council, employers, schools and other agencies.

24. Possibilities for mixing course elements and subjects in response to the Curriculum 2000 reforms is limited by the separate nature of the college's centres. Nevertheless, the curriculum was planned across centres. The take-up of mixed course and subject options has been low, and confined to the offer at each centre. There is a good range of enrichment activities at St Philips. At Hall Green, students can take part in sporting activities and in very reasonably priced trips and visits. On other sites, enrichment takes the form of extension studies and activities to broaden the curriculum. Students are appreciative of these opportunities to broaden their experience. More broadly, the college enriches the life of all in it by celebrating the diverse history and cultures of its students, for example, through a black history week.

25. Students are highly appreciative of the close guidance and support they receive from teachers and tutors during their time in college. Tutorial arrangements are co-ordinated effectively to take into account the wide variety of learners. Common standards are drawn up for centres, whilst giving them the freedom to modify arrangements to suit their circumstances. For example, levels of tutorial support for part-time students are clearly defined according to the length of courses. However, the quality of tutorials varies considerably. Some are purposeful, well structured and productive, while in others little was accomplished and most students were not learning sufficiently. Students are entitled to individual guidance and monitoring meetings in which individual learning plans are checked and targets are agreed with students. Tutorial and pastoral support entitlements are publicised effectively, for example, to students at Sparkhill and Sparkbrook Centre, in a good handbook. Modern apprentices are less effectively informed of their entitlement to guidance and support.

26. The college tries to ensure that advice and guidance are impartial: last summer, recent graduates were employed and trained to provide objective guidance. Students are interviewed by the staff at the centre to which they have applied. There is no common interviewing process for students aged 16 to 18, and the college depends for full and effective guidance on the impartiality of interviewers and the knowledge they have of provision at other sites.

27. Counselling and welfare arrangements are well co-ordinated and managed. Students are appreciative of the financial advice and support offered, for example, to help with travel costs. There are trained counsellors at the major college centres and support sessions are carefully recorded and monitored. Careers and HE guidance is readily and widely available, either in tutorial programmes for full-time students and part-time students on long courses, or as part of general guidance and support entitlements for other part-time students.

28. There have been improvements in the co-ordination, staffing and structuring of learning support. Last year, the college did not claim funding for almost all its learning support, and records are incomplete. This weakness makes it difficult for the college to measure the volume and quality of learning support. For example, retention rates among students progressing from foundation to higher-level courses last year were lower than for students joining the higher-level programmes direct. Guidance to enable learners to secure progression routes provided by the wide range of courses is not being effectively assessed and monitored, and has been too reliant on drop-in arrangements. However, this academic year, there is an increased emphasis on individual support and the setting of targets. Initial assessment arrangements have also been streamlined and improved, particularly on ICT programmes. Learning support staff across the college meet regularly to agree standards and disseminate good practice. Students value the additional learning support they receive. The college takes steps to provide effective additional help to learners at outreach centres. Learning support is increasingly being integrated into classroom activities in order to make it more accessible, relevant and easily acceptable.

29. Common policies operate across sites for the management of students' punctuality and attendance. Attendance during the inspection was low in several areas, and on many courses, students who had clearly ceased attending were still on the register. The census date for confirming withdrawals is 1 November. Consequently, the attendance figure of 72% for lessons observed during the inspection should be treated with caution but balanced with the retention rates achieved at this stage of the course. In many parts of the college, punctuality and attendance are managed effectively, particularly given the disadvantaged background of many students, but in other areas, habitual lateness and absenteeism caused disruption.

## Leadership and management
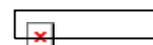
30. The college has been successful in achieving its first strategic aim, to be responsive to local education and training needs. It has widened participation, quadrupling its enrolments since incorporation in 1993, and promoting equality of opportunity. Its aim to raise standards has been, to a large extent, realised. Rates of retention and levels of achievement for adults are, in many cases, above national averages. However, they are generally below average for students aged 16 to 18, particularly at GCE A level. Enrolments for students aged 16 to 18 have declined over the last three years.

31. Governors and managers set a clear direction for the college. The college's mission, values and strategic aims are well communicated and staff share a common vision of the college's role in the community. The strategic planning cycle enables governors, managers and staff to play an appropriate part in planning the college's development. The resultant strategic plan and operating statement clearly outline the college's priorities and the actions to be taken. However, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college's strategic objectives are insufficiently reflected in the plans of departments and units. They are not implemented effectively across all sites.

32. Governors monitor the quality of provision and their own performance regularly and effectively. They receive good quality information to enable them to carry out their role, and training needs are accurately identified and well met. At every corporation meeting, they monitor the implementation of the strategic objectives. They have developed a set of service standards and targets for governance, which are regularly monitored and reviewed. Through the work of the standards committee, governors scrutinise learners' performance and ask challenging questions about courses where standards are low. The student services committee acts as a useful channel of communication between governors and learners, enabling learners' views to be heard and acted upon. Some governors have formed links with particular curriculum areas, in order to familiarise themselves more fully with the college's work. At an annual three-day retreat, which is very well attended, governors reformulate their vision for the future direction of the college and review their own performance over the previous year.

33. Each college site is semi-autonomous with its own budgets and organisational structure. This decentralisation of the college allows it to tailor its provision, and the environment in which it is taught, to the needs of particular groups of learners. Each site is headed by an assistant principal, who also has cross-college responsibilities. There are cross-college co-ordinators for aspects of the college's work such as equal opportunities, basic skills, quality improvement, and community development. They oversee the work of teams of representatives from the different sites. Overall, the seven assistant principals share responsibility for the management of the curriculum. The college has not put in place an effective mechanism to ensure curriculum co-ordination and opportunities for sharing good practice and learning resources. Many staff have little contact with their counterparts in different centres and some are isolated. In some subject areas, there is considerable inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning between different sites. This weakness was identified in over half the areas of learning inspected.

34. Each year, teachers and managers lead a comprehensive quality assurance process. They review their work continuously, following a published calendar, and produce a twice-yearly report and action plan. In some cases, the action plans lead to improvements, and in others, they are insufficiently monitored to affect any improvement. This inconsistency was identified in the last inspection. Self-assessment is an integral part of the process. All teachers are involved in the development of the self-assessment report. For each course and department, the report includes a review of the targets from last year's plan, and an analysis of attendance, retention and pass rates against targets. Actions for improvement are clearly identified. The reports lack a clear summary of key strengths and weaknesses, and make insufficient use of evidence from lesson observations and student surveys. The grades awarded do not give a clear picture of the quality of provision by subject area.

35. Staff have good access to computerised management information which they find helpful for planning and evaluation. A comprehensive and well-structured directory of information is available on-line through the networked IT system on all sites. Performance data are used to set and monitor progress towards targets for attendance, retention and pass rates at appropriate levels. In evaluating the quality of provision, the college makes insufficient use of value added data, which measure students' achievements against their previous attainments. This omission is particularly significant given the proportion of students who join the college with modest levels of previous achievement. Arrangements are inadequate for the quality assurance of franchised provision and work-based learning, as well as for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the work-based learning programme. Franchised provision does not form part of the self-assessment report or the lesson observation scheme.

36. Lesson observation is well established and the findings are used both to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to identify professional development needs. In discussion with staff, good practice and areas for improvements are identified. Grades have steadily improved from year to year. Comparison of the grades awarded in the current and previous inspection show that, overall, the quality of lessons has improved since 1997. As well as the formal programme, peer observation enables teachers to comment on each other's teaching methods and jointly develops new approaches. The lesson observations have sharpened the focus on teaching and learning but their effectiveness has been variable. Some poor teaching persists.

37. Twice a term, all staff have a performance review with their line manager in which short-term targets are set and progress towards them is monitored. Staff training needs are also identified at separate meetings held twice a year. Staff keep an individual self-assessment file which contains their targets and action plans, and details of the training received. Although this arrangement has only recently been introduced, it is proving useful in identifying actions for improvement.

38. The college's promotion of equal opportunities is good. Equality of opportunity is fundamental to its mission. Commitment to multicultural education and to the celebration of diversity is evident in all its work. A detailed and up-to-date policy includes a strategy for implementation and review. Reports are received as a standing item at every corporation meeting, and are supported by detailed and clearly presented statistical monitoring. The college has been successful in raising the proportion of staff, managers and governors from minority ethnic groups to a level which is high in comparison with other colleges, thereby providing role models for students. For example, 25% of senior and middle managers are from minority ethnic groups. The college has a strategy to recruit and train well-qualified people from the local minority ethnic community as teachers. In some cases, students taking part in community outreach programmes have progressed to teacher training within the college and are now on the teaching staff. Training for staff is extensive, and focuses on the promotion of equality of opportunity in teaching and learning. A range of specific programmes for under-represented groups has increased their participation in education and training. Links with the local community are excellent. Considerable attention has been given to removing barriers to participation. Timetabling is flexible and catch-up modules are provided for those who have missed parts of the course. As a result of the college's efforts in this area, some students from disadvantaged areas within the city have progressed from community outreach programmes to HE. There is poor access to parts of the college for those with restricted mobility. The monitoring of some aspects of equal opportunities in the workplace is weak.

39. The college has conducted a value for money study using external consultants. It is in good financial health. However, it has not claimed a substantial amount of funding available for additional support for students, thus reducing the potential resources available to them.

## Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas
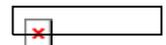


## Science and mathematics
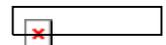


Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

*Strengths*

- improving retention and pass rates in GCSE science to above national averages

- good support materials for learners

- well-organised assessment and monitoring of progress in mathematics

- good support for learners.

*Weaknesses*

- declining retention rates on GCE A levels for learners aged 16 to 18

- poor GCE A-level pass rates for learners aged 16 to 18

- much poor teaching

- insufficient use of IT in some teaching

- some poor punctuality and attendance

- limited range of courses in science

- poor liaison in science and mathematics.

*Scope of provision*

40. The college offers a limited range of science courses on two sites, at Hall Green and St Philips. The provision consists of GCE A and AS levels in mathematics, chemistry and biology, and GCSE science, human physiology and health, mathematics and numeracy. Access courses for mature students that provide progression directly to university contain science and mathematics. An access course in radiography meets local community needs. Vocational courses have not recruited and there is no level 1 provision. The general decline in enrolments since 1998 has been halted, with a small increase in 2001. There are 867 students on full-time programmes studying science and mathematics of whom 503 are aged 16 to 18. Of the 195 part-time students, 45% are aged over 19. The inspection covered all full-time and part-time courses on both sites.

*Achievement and standards*

41. Students' pass and retention rates on GCSE science courses have improved over the last three years to above the national average. In the lessons observed, students worked enthusiastically and actively sought to improve their knowledge. They demonstrated good practical skills and knowledge

of their subject. GCSE mathematics pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 improved to reach the low national average of 32% in 2000/01. The pass rate for adults remains below the national average. Students enrolled without GCSE grade E or better are appropriately directed towards numeracy courses. However, the numeracy pass rate has declined and in 1999/2000, was well below the national average. In the best GCSE mathematics lessons, students were working successfully in groups or individually at their own pace. Those undertaking group work presented their solutions to the class, reinforcing learning and contributing evidence to their key skills portfolio. Students made good progress in most GCSE lessons and demonstrated good understanding of the topics covered. Some numeracy lessons failed to take account of students' prior knowledge and were insufficiently challenging.

42. Retention rates for adult learners are above national averages on GCE A-level science and mathematics courses, but have declined to below national averages for students aged 16 to 18. The pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are also low. Students' knowledge and understanding of work in GCE A-level physics is poor. Students were often unable to respond to questions and lacked the confidence to ask questions to seek clarification of the work in hand. Students' standards in chemistry lessons vary. The best students were able to recall previous work, apply their knowledge effectively and ask probing questions of the teacher. Students in biology were interested in their work and demonstrated an appropriate level of knowledge and skills. Out of 32 students who started on GCE A-level mathematics, only six passed in 2000/01. Access students, with a wide variety of academic backgrounds, were working co-operatively and saw the relevance of what they were doing. Many had previously had a poor experience of mathematics and were clearly enjoying a fresh approach and made good progress.

43. Overall, support for students is good and teachers readily provide extra support both in and after lessons. In mathematics, students are set initial assessment tests and the results of these are used to devise individual learning plans. There is an appropriate mix of whole class teaching and times when students use learning materials to work individually on topics in their learning plan. Staff keep a log of their progress and review this against the student's plan. This recently introduced approach for both GCSE and GCE A level is working effectively on one of the college sites.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Science and mathematics, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCE A-level biology (2 year) | 3 | No. of starts | 80 | 82 | 40 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 92 | 72 |
| | | % pass rate | 52 | 61 | 66 |
| GCE A-level chemistry (2 year) | 3 | No. of starts | 93 | 85 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 88 | 59 |
| | | % pass rate | 82 | 65 | 92 |
| GCE A-level physics | 3 | No. of starts | 38 | 51 | 20 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 81 | 65 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 31 | 44 |
| GCE A-level mathematics | 3 | No. of starts | 10 | 41 | 19 |
| | | % retention | 0 | 88 | 74 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 39 | 27 |
| GCSE mathematics | 2 | No. of starts | 533 | 345 | 290 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 72 | 68 |
| | | % pass rate | 15 | 34 | 35 |

| GCSE science | 2 | No. of starts | * | 39 | 23 |
| | | % retention | * | 44 | 61 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 35 | 29 |

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

*\* course not running*

### Quality of education and training

44. Of the lessons observed, 23% were less than satisfactory. In these lessons, there was poor planning, explanations lacked clarity and students were asked to undertake inappropriate tasks. The quality of notes and board work was poor. Students make good progress in key skills in numeracy and communications in GCE A-level mathematics lessons. Less progress in key skills was made in science. Laptop computers are used to include IT in the lessons, but teachers missed opportunities to enhance lessons through the use of IT. Only one site had a small number of computers available for science and mathematics.

45. The printed materials and background information that students receive in lessons are good. The materials are relevant and well presented. Students speak highly of these materials and feel they help their progress. However, some subjects still do not have textbooks. An appropriate range of resources is available for practical work in science and technician support is of a high standard. There is no access to the laboratories on one site for students with restricted mobility.

46. Tutorial support for students on science and mathematics courses is effective. There is a well-planned tutorial programme and students report that tutors take a strong personal interest in their progress. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress in mathematics is effective. Value added measures have only recently been introduced and it is too early to identify the impact upon teaching and learning. Most students speak confidently about their target grades based on previous achievements. Student induction is well organised but the results of students' evaluations have not been reported to them. Students felt they had good guidance on courses. Students' work is, in the main, well marked and returned promptly. Teachers' comments on marked work were helpful.

### Leadership and management

47. At the Hall Green site, science and mathematics are part of the department of humanities and social sciences. At the St Philips site, they are within the department of science, mathematics, computing, foundation studies and care. Liaison between staff at the two sites is poor. Staff rarely meet and some teachers feel isolated. Newly appointed teachers lack support. There is no sharing of good practice between teachers or technical staff. No member of staff has the overall responsibility for science and mathematics across the college. Self-assessment and action plans refer to one site only. The self-assessment reports were not concise, overstated some strengths and did not identify some key weaknesses. The range of performance indicators used in self-assessment is limited, and the targets set in action plans were not achieved.

## Construction
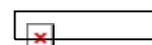


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Contributory grade in work-based learning is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

*Strengths*

- good pass rates in foundation and some intermediate vocational crafts

- excellent practical teaching in carpentry and joinery

- some innovative community-based projects

- broad range of enrichment activities and additional qualifications

- extensive specialist workshops with realistic training facilities

- good library facilities for construction students.

*Weaknesses*

- poor achievement of qualifications in the normally expected time

- declining retention rates on the majority of courses over the past three years

- poor progression of level 1 craft learners to level 3 or higher

- insufficient development of key skills

- unsatisfactory work-based learning

- some inadequate physical resources.

*Scope of provision*

48. The college offers an appropriate range of construction courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels that meet the needs of local industry and the community. These include craft, technician, foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and a New Deal programme. The college is one of only a few now offering plastering, wall and floor tiling. Large numbers are recruited to carpentry and joinery and plumbing. Despite buoyancy in the industry, recruitment to construction courses declined at all levels in the three years to 2000. There is some limited improvement in 2001. The department has recently improved its responsiveness to students, employers and the community. In one innovative project, it has developed an effective partnership with a housing association and building contractor in training homeless people and ensuring their employment in the industry. It has also successfully introduced a range of short courses to enrich and broaden employed learners' skills in alternative crafts and enhance their employability. Unemployed students may also sample a range of crafts before making choices. The construction department provides the majority of work-based learning in the college that is contracted with the Birmingham and Solihull local LSC.

*Achievement and standards*

49. Most students work well in lessons, particularly in the workshops. They produce practical work of an industrial standard. The excellent teaching of practical skills promotes particularly high standards in carpentry and joinery. Students are from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and cover a wide age range. They are inducted well into courses and are aware of the full range of student support services available. They work harmoniously and value the personal support provided by teachers. Women feel very secure in this traditionally male-dominated environment. Retention rates in technician courses are above national averages. However, retention rates have declined on the majority of courses over the three years to 2000. Pass rates are good in foundation crafts but are less satisfactory overall. Few craft students progress from level 1 to level 3. Less than 50% of students enrolling for NVQs gain the qualification in the normally expected time. This is unsatisfactory. Modern apprentices on programmes contracted with the college are not sufficiently challenged and their progress is not monitored effectively. No trainee has achieved the modern apprentice framework in the past three years. Few trainees are aware that they can use evidence from the workplace towards their qualification. The key skills of modern apprentices and of students aged 16 to 18 are not developed or recorded effectively. In 2000/01, only 31% achieved the qualification. Few students understand the importance of key skills to improve their personal development.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Construction, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Foundation vocational (crafts and general operations) | 1 | No. of starts | 284 | 283 | 218 |
| | | % retention | 70 | 62 | 63 |
| | | % pass rate | 56 | 72 | 72 |
| Intermediate vocational (crafts) | 2 | No. of starts | 276 | 261 | 198 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 71 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | 35 | 66 | 68 |
| Advanced vocational (crafts) | 3 | No. of starts | 125 | 94 | 95 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 78 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 48 | 71 | 57 |
| Advanced vocational | 3 | No. of starts | 62 | 50 | 63 |

| (technician) | | % retention | 87 | 96 | 87 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | % pass rate | 19 | 54 | 73 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000)*

### *Quality of education and training*

50. Teaching is generally good. Teachers plan to meet students' individual learning needs. Most lessons are well organised and have high levels of student activity. Students' practical projects are realistic and meet industrial standards. Teachers often relate theoretical aspects to industrial situations, using the students' own experiences to exemplify how practical problems can be overcome on site. Some teachers use humour effectively to break down cultural barriers and encourage students to work well together in teams. In a few lessons, students are not participating effectively.

51. Many of the text-based learning materials in carpentry and joinery are of excellent quality, in contrast to some poorly presented learning resources in other crafts. A few have spelling errors or contain stereotypical wording, and there is no house style. Most part-time teachers bring their own materials. Some materials do not provide sufficient guidance to students on appropriate sources of information.

52. Work-based training programmes are unsatisfactory. Recent changes to staffing and operational procedures have been introduced to improve the quality of provision, but it is too early to assess their effectiveness. Trainees receive a comprehensive induction to the training programme. However, most trainees and all employers interviewed were not aware of the requirements of NVQs or of the framework within which they operate. The introduction of key skills has been slow and they are not adequately covered in trainees' reviews. There is weak co-ordination between college work and that undertaken on site. Trainees were unaware that skills developed on site could be used as evidence of competence. Insufficient assessment of competence is undertaken in the workplace. No trainees have completed the framework in the past three years. Reviews of trainees' individual needs and progress have not been routinely monitored in recent years.

53. Most teachers have appropriate technical qualifications. However, 19% of full-time teachers employed at the college for at least ten years do not hold a teaching qualification. All full-time teachers hold appropriate assessor and verifier qualifications. There is insufficient technician support in most workshops, and it is barely adequate in carpentry and joinery. In painting and decorating, the high level of staff sickness is affecting learning. Library resources have been improved since the previous inspection and are now good. Most workshops provide extensive and realistic training facilities. The training rigs and tool store in carpentry and joinery are excellent. However, in construction, overcrowding in temporary classrooms and some workshops has hindered the supervision of students, restricted the ability to provide appropriate problem-solving exercises and has led to unacceptable industrial practices. In carpentry and joinery, four students worked at each bench. Few resource areas are provided close to workshops to enable students to develop, at their own speed, the practical competencies required for NVQs. Access to upper levels is difficult for people with restricted mobility.

### *Leadership and management*

54. Safety and safe working practices are promoted rigorously. However, in plumbing, safe practices are not observed by students and technicians when working with lead. The leadership and management of courses are variable in their effectiveness. Communication between managers and staff is good. Business and operational planning relies heavily on self-assessment. The self-assessment report did not address some weaknesses in the quality of provision. For example, it understated the poor and declining retention rates on many programmes. It did not comment on, or identify, significant weaknesses in work-based training or physical resources, and how these may be overcome in reasonable timescales. This undermines the effective management of the provision. Few staff are aware of recent publications highlighting good practice.

## Engineering, technology and textile manufacturing
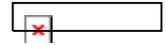
Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

*Strengths*

- high retention and pass rates on many programmes

- high practical skill levels of textile trainees

- effective training and learning

- well-managed and resourced training provision

- well-planned and well-managed assessment, monitoring and support of students

- flexible training responsive to individual needs

- supportive work environment with committed employers.

*Weaknesses*

- poor monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace

- poor access for students with restricted mobility to upper floors of the technology centre.

*Scope of provision*

55. The engineering provision of the college encompasses textile manufacturing and some engineering training carried out in the workplace. A good range of motor vehicle programmes for

full-time and part-time students is also provided in the college. Textiles manufacturing currently has 1,200 students enrolled. The remaining provision in engineering covers the training for 85 trainees in 2 national companies, and some 300 students on full-time or part-time programmes. These include up to 100 students on 12-week vocational sampling courses, covering a broad range of engineering and motor vehicle skill areas. The latter courses have a waiting list.

*Achievement and standards*

56. Retention and pass rates are well above national averages for all those training courses in manufacturing and engineering that are provided mostly in the workplace. For the textile manufacturing programmes, retention rates average 87% and pass rates 99% and, for engineering, the averages for retention and pass rates are both 100%. Pass rates for college-based motor vehicle courses are at the national averages, and trainees often achieve success in parts of the course. Workplace students are gaining excellent practical skills and are able to successfully complete complex and difficult tasks. Challenging learning goals and targets are set which help to motivate students and enhance achievement. Work-based trainees value their achievements and their certification. Portfolio work is of a high standard and includes a wide range of assessed competencies.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Engineering, technology and textile manufacturing, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| City and Guilds motor vehicle courses | 1 | No. of starts | 141 | 45 | 71 |
| | | % retention | 72 | 64 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 40 | 76 | 56 |
| Open College Network (OCN) sewing and textiles | 1 | No. of starts | * | * | 1,117 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 87 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 99 |
| NVQ manufacturing sewn products | 1 | No. of starts | * | * | 57 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 82 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 86 |
| City and Guilds motor vehicle courses | 2 | No. of starts | 57 | 21 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 90 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 47 | 84 | 65 |
| National certificate engineering | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 39 | 24 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 82 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | 45 | 44 | 53 |
| City and Guilds repair and servicing | 3 | No. of starts | 41 | 7 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 90 | 86 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | 41 | 83 | 62 |
| City and Guilds electronic servicing | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 18 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 72 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 31 | 0 | 60 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000)*

*\* course not running*

### Quality of education and training

57. The quality of teaching and training is good. Lessons are well planned and well taught. Knowledge is made relevant by reference to industrial practice and students' own experiences, and teaching includes demonstrations and practical exercises. In one computer-aided design class, architects, toolmakers and students new to technology were all able to learn using well-prepared materials that allowed them to work at an appropriate level. Tutors identify opportunities to assess key skills within mainstream technology programmes. Trainers were able to work with trainees individually in the workplace. High quality learning materials were available to students both in college and in the work place. However, there was some poor teaching in motor vehicle theory lessons, with little interaction between teachers and students.

58. Learning materials are well designed and easy for students to use. They reinforce learning and support practical exercises. Resources provide excellent support for students to achieve high levels of practical skills and generally enhance their learning. All training workshops have appropriate levels of resources. Students benefit from good social and recreational facilities including a lounge, cyber café, pool room and physical recreation room. Teaching staff are well qualified and all have appropriate assessor awards, but their recent industrial experience in engineering and motor vehicle provision is limited. The technology campus library has a good stock of materials, but has restricted opening times. Students with impaired mobility cannot gain access to the first floor of this campus building.

59. Regular reviews of progress take place in tutorial sessions. If required, additional support is provided by subject specialists or additional support tutors as appropriate. Work-based engineering trainees can obtain assessment on demand from the college as they progress through their training programme. Peripatetic assessors operate in the textile companies. Portfolios are generally of a high standard and assessment is carried out effectively. Portfolios are sampled regularly. Students' progress is tracked monthly by the college co-ordinators.

60. The work-based training element in textiles manufacture and engineering courses benefits from industrial advice, and is well matched to the requirements of industry and the needs of students. Employers and college staff work as a team to ensure they meet learners' needs. The engineering and motor vehicle department runs introductory `taster' programmes lasting 12 weeks to help students make a choice of career. Textile students are all able to practise their skills in the work place, but this is not possible for motor vehicle students. All students are enthusiastic and motivated by their well-balanced training programmes.

61. The initial guidance and support for students is good. Courses and programmes are well matched to learners' aspirations. Early diagnostic testing of all full-time students during induction into the college enables individual plans to be drawn up, covering any identified needs in basic skills or ESOL, and sets the levels for the development of key skills. The teaching staff on the textile manufacturing course offer multi-lingual language support if required, and health and safety learning materials are available in several languages. There is a newly developed system for dealing with students' absence, lateness and for those students who are identified as being at risk of not achieving their primary learning goals. Case studies were available of students who had been at risk, and who had significantly improved to achieve appropriate outcomes. Some tutorials lack confidentiality: additional support for full-time students is provided outside of their normal timetabled programme.

### Leadership and management

62. Leadership and management of engineering, motor vehicle and textiles manufacture programmes are very good. Governors have a close relationship with the textiles manufacturing provision. There are also strong links with industry, the community, awarding bodies and schools, and with the other aspects of engineering in the college. Regular course and departmental meetings ensure that communications within the department are good. There are effective links between self-

assessment action plans and the strategic and training plan. Interesting learning materials have been developed in engineering and motor vehicle provision to improve teaching practices and retention and pass rates. Staff are fully involved in self-assessment and an effective system of staff development and appraisal is in place. Internal verification has improved and now meets awarding body requirements. Many staff have completed in-house training programmes during the last 18 months, but these have not met the need for an industrial updating. Some textile employers do not monitor equal opportunities effectively. College co-ordinators, while monitoring health and safety requirements in the workplace, do not give the same emphasis to equal opportunities.

## Business administration, management and professional
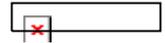


Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

### *Strengths*

- broad range of provision from level 1 to level 4

- good tutorial support for full-time and part-time provision

- good teaching on office studies and teacher-training programmes.

### *Weaknesses*

- poor retention rates on programmes for students aged 16 to 18

- pass rates well below national averages on a number of programmes

- some unsatisfactory and poor teaching on business and professional programmes

- lack of rigour in course reviews, self-assessment and action planning.

### *Scope of provision*

63. The college offers a broad range of business provision from level 1 to level 4. Learners study at a number of sites, but mainly at the Hall Green and St Philips centres. Some provision is made on employers' premises, including NVQs in customer care and administration, full-time and part-time programmes in business and office studies, as well as part-time programmes in management, professional, trade union studies and teacher and trainer education. One New Deal client was on a

business administration course. The provision is socially inclusive. Students are able to progress between levels. In the area of office studies, one student with learning difficulties had successfully progressed from a foundation studies course to an advanced programme and was undertaking work experience.

### Achievement and standards

64. Retention rates on some programmes are close to, or marginally above, national averages. Retention rates on programmes for students aged 16 to 18 are poor, for example, on GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced programmes in business. Pass rates are at, or a little above, the national average on some programmes, including teacher training, trade union studies, and NVQ level 3 administration operated on employers' premises. Pass rates are significantly below national averages on a number of programmes. These include GCE A and AS-level business studies, GNVQ intermediate and advanced, and NVQ accounting level 4. Students' knowledge and understanding in full-time programmes for students aged 16 to 18 are not extended sufficiently to allow the achievement of high grades. Little effective use is made of value added data to set targets for student achievement.

### *A sample of retention and pass rates in Business administration, management and professional, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Word processing | 1 | No. of starts | 49 | 96 | 81 |
| | | % retention | 87 | 76 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 44 | 84 | 73 |
| NVQ accounting | 2 | No. of starts | 44 | 48 | 54 |
| | | % retention | 70 | 66 | 69 |
| | | % pass rate | 76 | 84 | 64 |
| GNVQ intermediate | 2 | No. of starts | 85 | 72 | 61 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 47 | 59 |
| | | % pass rate | 28 | 72 | 55 |
| NVQ administration | 2 | No. of starts | 56 | 43 | 36 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 72 | 58 |
| | | % pass rate | 68 | 94 | 51 |
| GCE A-level business studies | 3 | No. of starts | 55 | 83 | 25 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 92 | 72 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 78 | 43 |
| GNVQ advanced | 3 | No. of starts | 103 | 99 | 43 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 69 | 46 |
| | | % pass rate | 55 | 54 | 61 |
| NVQ accounting | 4 | No. of starts | 11 | 27 | 29 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 88 | 76 |
| | | % pass rate | 35 | 24 | 20 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000)*

*Quality of education and training*

65. Teaching is particularly good in office studies and teacher-training courses. Students learn effectively because the teaching is well planned with work matched to individual needs, supporting students with a range of skills and abilities, and from a range of ethnic backgrounds. There was some poor and unsatisfactory teaching on business and professional programmes. In these lessons, teaching was uninspiring and unimaginative. In two observed lessons, students were given factually incorrect information. Teaching materials were poor and few of the interesting resources available for business education were used. In these lessons, attendance was low, students did not participate and there was little evidence of learning taking place or progress being made. In some advanced level lessons, students were not able to analyse or interpret basic business data.

66. Most students have a period of induction to introduce them to the college and their course. In some cases this has included a team-building residential visit which was valued by students and helped to build group identity. Tutorial support has recently been given a higher priority and was effective for students on both full-time and part-time programmes. The quality of most tutorials is good and the more effective sessions include a mixture of group and individual guidance and support.

67. Most classrooms used for business and professional courses are adequate but there are some overcrowded rooms on the St Philips site. The IT provision used by business students on the Hall Green site is an open-plan area divided into rooms by screens. This arrangement proved to be unsuitable for some classes which were disrupted by extraneous noise. Students have good access to IT resources though there was limited evidence of significant take up of this facility. The dedicated office studies area is small but well equipped. The library is a pleasant working environment but it is not well resourced for students on a range of business and professional programmes. The library opening times restricted access for evening-class learners. Others made good use of the study facilities at weekends.

*Leadership and management*

68. The provision in the business area is made by four departments and several divisions of the college. Teams operate separately, even when teaching the same programme on different sites, or the same subject area on one site. Course teams follow the college's self-assessment and reporting procedures. However, these procedures are not rigorously implemented. Targets for retention and achievement are set, but are not focused on previous figures, and do not produce improvement. Action plans are not monitored effectively to complete the quality improvement cycle. Some improved procedures are being used but it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

## Information and communication technology
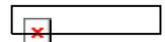


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

*Strengths*

- good level of achievement on the GNVQ foundation programme

- effective organisation of the GNVQ foundation programme

- good provision of part-time courses in response to community need

- good teaching on part-time courses for adults

- wide range of specialist IT resources.

*Weaknesses*

- poor achievement on full-time courses at level 2 and level 3

- low retention rates

- high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching on full-time level 3 courses

- lack of consistency in the quality of course management

- inappropriate use of teaching accommodation.

*Scope of provision*

69. An adequate range of full-time and part-time courses is provided in ICT, ranging from level 1 to level 4, with opportunities for progression between levels. The majority of students aged 16 to 18 are full time and are enrolled on courses at Hall Green and St Philips Sixth Form College. The Sparkhill and Sparkbrook Community College manages the ICT courses in the community. There are effective partnerships between the community college, local schools and the community council. In particular, the Sparkhill and Sparkbrook parent-partnership project provides advice on the range and location of part-time courses in the community. Adult students value the accessibility of the wide range of courses and the good quality ICT facilities available. A small number of full-time students also attend these courses to improve their employability in the IT industry. The access to HE course provides a valuable opportunity for students to progress to HE courses in computing and ICT.

*Achievement and standards*

70. The pass rates for the GNVQ foundation ICT course are good and consistently above the national average. The number of students enrolled on this course has risen significantly to 13% of the 16 to 18 age group. The standards set by teachers on this programme are high. Students, many

with English as a second language, are undertaking challenging tasks and are developing high levels of ICT skills. Pass rates for computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and integrated business technology (IBT) level 2 courses are comparable with national averages. The achievements on these courses are good, as the courses make considerable demands on the majority of students enrolled who are adults with low levels of literacy and numeracy. The pass rate for GCSE ICT is above national benchmarks, but retention rates are low and declining. Pass rates on all level 3 courses are significantly below national averages. Retention rates are improving on the GNVQ intermediate programme but remain low on all other courses. A high proportion of students progress to a higher ICT course in the college. A significant number of the members of the technical support staff and teachers of community courses are former ICT students of the college.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Information and communication technology , 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GNVQ foundation ICT | 1 | No. of starts | * | 38 | 49 |
| | | % retention | * | 89 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 77 | 73 |
| CLAIT | 1 | No. of starts | 569 | 611 | 834 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 67 | 63 |
| | | % pass rate | 43 | 56 | 62 |
| GNVQ intermediate ICT | 2 | No. of starts | 76 | 71 | 115 |
| | | % retention | 79 | 70 | 60 |
| | | % pass rate | 20 | 59 | 51 |
| GCSE ICT | 2 | No. of starts | 32 | 34 | 31 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 56 | 45 |
| | | % pass rate | 46 | 63 | 91 |
| IBT 2 | 2 | No. of starts | 116 | 143 | 197 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 81 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | 6 | 65 | 58 |
| GNVQ advanced ICT | 3 | No. of starts | 26 | 50 | 61 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 68 | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | 5 | 44 | 62 |
| GCE A-level ICT | 3 | No. of starts | 31 | 47 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 87 | 10 |
| | | % pass rate | 24 | 47 | 50 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

*\* course not running*

### *Quality of education and training*

71. All teaching on part-time courses for adults was at least satisfactory, and the majority was very good or excellent. Students on these courses are highly motivated and benefit from an enthusiastic and committed team of teachers. Schemes of work for part-time courses and lessons are well

planned, and include interesting and challenging tasks. Students on the Internet technology course receive valuable information electronically, including copies of their forthcoming lesson plans. This enables them to rapidly improve their knowledge, skills and understanding of a significant part of their course. Teachers of community-based CLAIT and IBT 2 courses place great emphasis on supporting students with English as a second language. These students are given a glossary of ICT terms and taught how to access worksheets in their native language. Good learning materials enable students with low levels of literacy to follow clear graphical instructions.

72. There have been significant improvements in the organisation and co-ordination of the GNVQ foundation course. Students develop their vocational and basic skills through an integrated programme delivered by a small team of teachers. Students have developed confidence and establish effective relationships with staff and one another. Teachers have high expectations: the standard of behaviour is high and the quality of work is good. This model is to be used with other vocational programmes.

73. While the majority of teaching of students aged 16 to 18 is satisfactory, much poor teaching was observed in lessons at level 3. Some teachers do not set sufficiently high standards for advanced-level students, and do not provide sufficient guidance on practical projects. In one lesson, the teacher failed to take sufficient account of students' prior understanding of programming principles. This led to much confusion and little progress for the majority of students. Other lessons failed to motivate and engage the interest of students. In the majority of lessons, students are working at an appropriate level. In some instances, a lack of initial assessment and inadequate knowledge of students' prior achievements in ICT lead to students undertaking unchallenging tasks. Teachers do not share resources and ideas effectively to ensure consistently good teaching and learning. Insufficient use is made of the college intranet to distribute learning materials to students and other teachers. All students are given good levels of individual support and constructive verbal feedback in practical lessons. Computers are of high quality and appropriate specialist software is available across the college. Multimedia projection facilities are available and used effectively in many teaching rooms at Hall Green. High noise levels, noisy air conditioning and occasional overcrowding reduce the quality of the teaching and learning in the ICT centre at Hall Green. Second-year AVCE students studying web page design were working in a classroom with access only to paper and pens. The college is developing a sophisticated system for linking the curriculum opportunities for learning on the college network. Technical support is good.

### *Leadership and management*

74. There is a lack of consistency in the management of ICT courses and insufficient sharing of good practice. Each course has a different management team at each centre. The management of community ICT programmes is effective. Much of the college research into the use of interactive learning materials and electronic assessment is having a positive impact on community-based ICT courses. There have been some recent improvements in the quality of co-ordination of GNVQ foundation and AVCE courses. Schemes of work are detailed, include accurate references to teaching and learning styles, and demonstrate the positive impact of recent staff development in this area. Teachers from both college sites meet to discuss improvements and there is some cross marking of assignments. GCE A and AS-level courses in computing and ICT are poorly managed. The quality of internal verification and the assessment of students' work are unsatisfactory. Poor attendance, punctuality, retention and pass rates have been identified as significant weaknesses in successive self-assessment reports, but actions have failed to address these problems.

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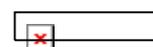
Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

### *Strengths*

- good pass and retention rates

- challenging learning programmes leading to high levels of practical skills

- good resources for practical teaching and learning

- particularly well-qualified and experienced specialist staff

- learning programme content well matched to the needs of the local community

- good tutor teamwork to support learners.

*Weaknesses*

- poor recording following assessment

- poor internal verification

- lack of evaluation and monitoring in curriculum area.

*Scope of provision*

75. The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time provision in hospitality and catering. NVQ courses are available in food preparation and cooking at levels 1, 2 and 3, and preparing and serving food at level 1. Courses are also available in vegetarian wholefood cookery, cake decoration, sugarcraft and world cuisine. There are currently 38 students aged 16 to 18 and 15 adults on full-time courses, five students aged 16 to 18 and 83 adults on part-time courses. School-links courses are also offered. The inclusion of ethnic cookery courses has helped to meet the needs of the local community. Induction and tutorial programmes are well planned and include introductions to health and safety, food hygiene, applying for jobs and other employment topics.

*Achievement and standards*

76. The overall retention and pass rates on courses are above the national average. Retention rates are satisfactory on the NVQ programmes and cake decoration and sugarcraft courses. Retention

rates on vegetarian wholefood cookery and world cuisine courses are good. The pass rates for NVQs in catering and hospitality are well above the national average at levels 1 and 2. The standard of students' work is at least satisfactory and much of the work is good or very good. The majority of students gain awards in addition to their main qualification. All students achieve a basic hygiene certificate. Students' progression within the curriculum area is good. Most students go on to gain relevant employment in the industry or continue into HE. Students demonstrate a high standard of technical skills in the kitchens and restaurant. They achieve good standards in food preparation, cooking and food service. Students work well together as a team and display good social skills when dealing with customers. However, students' portfolios are poorly maintained and lack detail.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Hospitality, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NVQ food preparation and cooking | 2 | No. of starts | 65 | 47 | 40 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 74 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 98 | 86 | 87 |
| NVQ preparing and serving food | 1 | No. of starts | * | 15 | 27 |
| | | % retention | * | 93 | 78 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 93 | 95 |
| Various ethnic cuisine | | No. of starts | * | 46 | 63 |
| | | % retention | * | 98 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 98 | 98 |
| Cake decoration and sugarcraft | | No. of starts | * | 44 | 90 |
| | | % retention | * | 64 | 73 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 93 | 95 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

*\* course not running*

### Quality of education and training

77. Much of the teaching in both practical and theory lessons is good. Practical lessons are well structured. Students have well-defined roles in production kitchens and in the restaurant that is open to the public. There are some good learning materials for theory and practical subjects. One teacher uses computer presentations in lessons that are innovative and popular with students. However, some handouts used for practical lessons were inaccurate and in need of updating. Teachers link theory to practical examples from industry and from work, which has, or will take place in the college. In most lessons, good use was made of questions to check understanding and ensure learning. During lessons in kitchens and restaurants, students work under appropriate commercial pressure. The NVQ programmes have been adapted to match the needs of individuals and the local community. The food preparation and cooking courses include many ethnic dishes and methods, for example, halal. These courses ensure a challenging programme which recognises the multi-cultural nature of the student population and community.

78. The assessment of vocational courses, such as cake decoration, is well planned and organised. Teachers give constructive comments and students' work is accurately marked. While the practical assessment of NVQs is thorough, the recording of the assessments and outcomes is poor. All assessments are made by observation and questioning. Dates recorded in portfolios are sometimes inaccurate and no use is made of alternative methods of assessment, such as witness statements. Little internal verification takes place. No records detailing assessor observations or sampling plans

are available.

79. Students' learning experiences are enhanced by working on functions which take place in the college. The majority volunteer to work on functions even when they are not supposed to be involved. Students are complimentary about the support they receive from their tutors. Student absences are systematically followed up. Their progress is rigorously monitored and regularly reported to parents, guardians and employers. Students at risk of failure are set clear targets for improvement and provided with additional support as required.

80. All staff have recent industrial experience and most are particularly well qualified and experienced in ethnic cuisine. One member of staff is currently the `international Indian chef of the year'. All staff work well together as a team and support each other during practical lessons. The catering facilities include a training kitchen, production kitchen and a restaurant. Both kitchens have a variety of specialist equipment to support the work on ethnic cuisine and provide excellent environments that prepare students well for employment. All the equipment is up to date. The dry food storage facilities are very small. Most food is stored in walk-in refrigerators and freezers that are located in the training kitchen. Staff and students using the cold storage facilities in the training kitchen sometimes interrupt demonstrations. The library book stock is adequate. Students have access to computers and the Internet to aid research, and a computer system supports the catering and hospitality students' learning of theory.

### *Leadership and management*

81. Management of the curriculum area lacks evaluation and monitoring. Although a clear direction is set, quality assurance arrangements are not systematic. Staff appraisals are effective and ensure that continuous professional development takes place. Retention and achievement targets are not set. Staff meetings are held regularly and appropriate action is taken to address issues which arise. Course committees, which include student representatives, meet each term and actions agreed at meetings are regularly followed through. Lesson observations take place regularly and inform staff appraisal.

## Hairdressing and beauty therapy
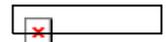


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### *Strengths*

- good retention rates of adult students

- high pass rates on adult courses

- good standards of work.

### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient use of commercial work experience

- poor quality and use of some college learning resources

- difficult access to some salons for people with restricted mobility

- poor internal verification.

*Scope of provision*

82. Currently, there are 58 hairdressing students and 190 beauty therapy and holistic therapy students at the Hall Green campus. Full-time courses are in beauty therapy at NVQ levels 2 and 3, hairdressing at level 2, holistic therapy and complementary therapy. The part-time courses include: stress management, Indian head massage, advanced nails/nail art, the beauty specialist diploma, reflexology, aromatherapy and Asian beauty, including modules in mendhi, threading and Indian head massage. The provision addresses the needs of the local community. There are no evening, weekend, or work-based hairdressing courses for New Deal clients. Some 64% of full-time students and 90% of part-time students are aged over 19. Some 66% of students aged 16 to 18 and 79% of students aged over 19 are on beauty and holistic therapy courses. Full-time courses for adult students last 15.5 hours a week, and for students aged 16 to 18, 25 hours a week. Professional qualifications are offered on aromatherapy and reflexology part-time courses.

*Achievement and standards*

83. The 1999/2000 pass rates were above the national averages for learners aged over 19 in NVQ level 2 beauty therapy and level 3 epilation. In 2000/01, there was a 100% pass rate in both qualifications. Pass rates in hairdressing at level 2, and beauty therapy at level 3 were also above national averages. Retention rates in most courses were at or above national average. The exception is with students aged 16 to 18 studying NVQ level 2 beauty therapy, where the retention rate is very low. This weakness is identified in the college self-assessment report. Also identified by the college were the low retention and pass rates in NVQ level 3 hairdressing and in the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in beauty therapy. Both courses have been dropped. The part-time aromatherapy programme had a retention rate below the national average and there has been more pre-enrolment guidance to address this problem. In hairdressing, retention rates have improved from well below the national average in 1999, to above the national average in 2000. Attendance is generally good, with an average of 75% for classes observed during inspection. The new systems introduced to address concerns about poor punctuality and attendance are effective.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1999 to 2001*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NVQ beauty therapy | 2 | No. of starts | 38 | 30 | 30 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 46 | 73 |
| | | % pass rate | 81 | 100 | 93 |

| NVQ hairdressing | 2 | No. of starts | * | 17 | 19 |
| | | % retention | * | 65 | 84 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 93 |
| NVQ epilation | 3 | No. of starts | * | 29 | 23 |
| | | % retention | * | 79 | 74 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 96 |
| NVQ aromatherapy | 3 | No. of starts | * | 51 | 70 |
| | | % retention | * | 68 | 74 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 87 | 67 |
| NVQ beauty therapy | 3 | No. of starts | * | 26 | 14 |
| | | % retention | * | 73 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 79 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

*\* course not running*

### *Quality of education and training*

84. Some of the teaching is good and stimulating. Effective use of questioning encouraged students to share practical experiences. In one tutorial class, skilful use was made of role-play to introduce the topic of body language. In some classes, however, poor quality resources were used. Poor handouts and overhead transparencies had writing and diagrams that were too small for students to see and use easily. Documents had spelling mistakes and were poorly reproduced. Salon activities for the first-year hairdressers take place in cramped conditions. Teachers are not effectively supporting learners and there are insufficient resources. Students are not always able to see the demonstrations. Some staff do not use teaching approaches, salon space, resources or time effectively.

85. Students' practical work is at a good standard for this stage of their course. Students use their own cameras to take photographs of their clients. The photographs in projects show good standards of work on a broad range of clients, who reflect the multi-cultural nature of the local community. Many students said that the wide range of courses on offer was the reason they chose to study at the college. There is good use of IT in hairdressing projects. Full-time students take key skills for the Curriculum 2000 initiative. They are currently researching the Internet for assignments which relate to their occupational area. The self-assessment report accurately identifies that the links between key skills and the students' NVQs need to be strengthened.

86. Students are not set challenging targets to ensure good progress and achievement throughout the course. There is a slow start to assessment in hairdressing as clients are not booked until students have been at the college for four months. In all areas, there are insufficient clients for students to be assessed working under the pressures of a busy commercial salon. The college salons close in the college holiday periods, losing the continuity of client contact. The salons' reception area is on the college's ground floor, adjoining the college shop. The self-assessment report, which identifies the rotas for students' work and assessment, is not successful. The salons do not stock products for the students to sell in order to be assessed for the NVQ. No use is made of evidence from students' part-time jobs in salons towards their NVQs. No evidence from the students' annual week of college work experience is used towards their NVQs or key skills. The self-assessment report identifies that the college has recently started to develop links with employers and industry. Guest speakers give presentations and talks. Students visit trade exhibitions, shows and competitions.

87. The first and second floor salons are reached by stairs, making it difficult for people with restricted mobility or health problems. The three beauty/holistic salons and two inter-connecting hairdressing salons enjoy a good deal of natural light. There is a small area with a sauna and showers. Salons are adequate with lockable cabinets for consumables. The ground floor holistic salon has inadequate storage space. The clear glass at the windows requires blinds to be closed for privacy, so blocking out natural light. No dimmer light switches or small lamps are available to create a commercial holistic environment. No laundry facilities are available at the college and excessive amounts of disposable gloves and aprons are used. Some refurbishment is required to create a realistic commercial environment. Staff are generally well qualified. Each has a personal development file, with annual planning for continuous staff development. The staff profile reflects the multi-cultural community served by the college and there is an adequate gender balance.

88. Internal verification is poor. The beauty therapy and holistic programmes have started to introduce new systems to address the action points in external verifier reports since 1997. The weak hairdressing assessment practices and poor recording of assessments are not being identified by internal verification. Many completed portfolios have no assessors' signatures, dates or recording of achievement against unit requirements. Little guidance and support is available for assessors. The next external verifier visit is imminent and many actions have not yet been started.

89. Good links have been established with local schools, and pupils who attend college for `taster days' often subsequently enrol on courses. However, the staff do not systematically monitor take-up. These `taster days' also enabled students to make informed choices about the courses they wished to follow and thereby reduce withdrawal. These sessions, together with dexterity tests, were introduced following the analysis of reasons for withdrawals in the first few weeks of courses. There are new tutorial programmes in place which have group and individual sessions.

*Leadership and management*

90. Hairdressing, beauty therapies and holistic therapies each have a co-ordinator who reports to the programme area leader. All staff are involved in decisions about curriculum and programme area changes. Co-ordinators are encouraged to use their initiative and implement change to improve their areas. Quality assurance is monitored insufficiently across the programme area. Good practice is not shared. There is little innovation or drive to effect change. Best use is not made of existing resources and the potential for creating realistic working environments is not being realised. Opportunities to expand the programmes to create progression routes and provide training for the community and local employers are missed. The new end-of-session evaluation strategies vary; some are laborious and boring. Many of the problems identified during inspection had not been included in the self-assessment report.

## Health, social care and public services
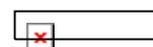
Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

*Strengths*

- good achievements in early years courses

- effective assessment of most NVQ programmes

- good progression and pass rates from foundation level to level 4 courses

- good support for all students at all levels

- wide range of provision for adults

- strong partnership with employers and community groups.

*Weaknesses*

- poor quality assurance and management of NVQs offered through franchise

- weak leadership and management of GNVQ and AVCE courses at St Philips.

*Scope of provision*

91. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in health, social care, childcare and public services. Courses in these areas are offered at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and there are good opportunities for students to progress beyond these levels. The scope and variety of community-based provision is good. There is strong evidence of partnerships with voluntary, public and private sectors. These have significantly widened participation and provide opportunities for flexible attendance, both during the day and in the evening. The college has responded well to the needs of adult learners by introducing a range of NVQs. It has recently taken responsibility for the management of NVQs through a franchise.

*Achievement and standards*

92. Pass rates for most advanced courses are above the national average. At advanced level, the standard of attainment in lessons and in students' portfolios is generally good. At this level, the best students are able to analyse and interpret information, and present it as part of a coherent argument. They have a clear understanding of the vocational context of their work and are able to relate theory to practice effectively. Students' written work for AVCE is only satisfactory. During discussion, they are unable to demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. At intermediate and foundation level, for those students who complete the course, pass rates are generally good. In 1999/2000, the pass rate of 79% for GNVQ intermediate health and social care is above the national average. A high number of part-time adult students successfully achieve NVQs. In 1999/2000, NVQs in care and early years exceed the national average. Where NVQs are provided through a franchise, pass rates are poor. Retention and completion rates on childcare courses are consistently good. However, for 1999/2000, the retention rate on the GNVQ intermediate course was well below the national average of 76%.

93. Childcare students progress successfully from foundation courses to diploma level and beyond.

An appropriate selection of students, sponsored by social services to work towards NVQs, ensures good progression to management levels. The few students who complete AVCE enter HE.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Health, social care and public services, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GNVQ intermediate health and social care | 2 | No. of starts | 41 | 24 | 29 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 83 | 55 |
| | | % pass rate | 36 | 53 | 79 |
| AVCE health and social care | 3 | No. of starts | 34 | 41 | 24 |
| | | % retention | 74 | 88 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | 63 | 45 | 88 |
| National diploma in caring services | 3 | No. of starts | 83 | 50 | 17 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 78 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 81 | 93 | 100 |
| NVQ care | 2 | No. of starts | 409 | 155 | 122 |
| | | % retention | 88 | 85 | 87 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 81 | 97 |
| NVQ early years care and education | 2 | No. of starts | 117 | 163 | 57 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 75 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 93 | 96 |
| NVQ early years care and education | 3 | No. of starts | * | 108 | 77 |
| | | % retention | * | 96 | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 93 | 98 |
| NVQ care | 3 | No. of starts | 92 | 75 | 84 |
| | | % retention | 97 | 83 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 47 | 71 | 98 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

*\* course not running*

### Quality of education and training

94. Most teaching is good. It is particularly strong with adult groups who are highly motivated and want to achieve. The unsatisfactory teaching was predominantly on full-time courses with students aged 16 to 18, where some staff have an insufficient knowledge of the qualifications to which the courses are leading: in these courses, students not did make appropriate progress. Quality assurance and management of NVQs offered through the franchise are poor and candidates make insufficient progress. Lessons across the provision contained a good variety of vocationally relevant activities. The public services courses provide good opportunities for students to learn about the emergency agencies and armed forces. Links with employers are good. The visits and residentials add significantly to the students' learning experience.

95. Completed NVQ portfolios are of a high standard and assessment of competence in the workplace is appropriate. The effective induction period includes initial assessment and successfully

introduces students to the college. Staff ensure that tutorial support is available and effective. Staff are well qualified and have appropriate professional experience, except at St Philips. Many teachers use their recent professional practice to enhance students' learning. Accommodation is generally good and student base rooms reflect this vocational area well. Where students' work is displayed in the community, it is of a good standard. Accommodation at St Philips is not suitable for health and social care.

*Leadership and management*

96. Curriculum management at Hall Green is effective. It is less effective at St Philips. The six section leaders at Hall Green have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Staff follow college quality assurance procedures and review courses appropriately. Targets set for recruitment, retention and achievement are realistic. The quality of teaching is monitored through systematic, direct observation of all staff, and its evaluation is linked to appraisal. The self-assessment report accurately identifies courses that perform well and those that underperform. However, the report did not highlight the weaknesses in the franchise agreement or the lack of leadership at St Philips.

## Visual and performing arts and media
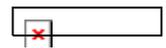


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

*Strengths*

- good teaching

- effective tutorial support and monitoring of progress

- good specialist multimedia accommodation and resources at Digbeth

- good standard of practical work

- wide range of courses available at level 3.

*Weaknesses*

- ineffective checking of learning in some lessons

- low retention rates on some courses

- poor access for people with restricted mobility at Digbeth

- poor punctuality and attendance

- limited full-time vocational provision at levels 1 and 2.

### *Scope of provision*

97. The visual and performing arts and media curriculum is delivered on four of the college's sites: Hall Green, Digbeth, St Philips Sixth Form Centre and Sparkbrook and Sparkhill Community College. The college offers a broad range of provision at level 3 and a more limited programme at level 2. The majority of the courses, being full-time, attract students aged 16 to 18. The Hall Green campus concentrates on art at GCSE and GCE AS level. The Digbeth centre offers BTEC national certificates and diplomas in popular music, media production and music technology, OCN art and design, sound engineering and access to HE. At St Philips, students are studying for AVCE performing arts, GNVQ intermediate performing arts, and art and design, GCE AS-level media, drama, design and art, and GCSE art and media. The Sparkbrook and Sparkhill Community College offers a range of courses validated by the OCN, which include radio and video production and Asian music.

### *Achievement and standards*

98. The pass rates at GCE A level are satisfactory. GCE A-level performing arts has had 100% pass rate in two of the last three years. In 1999, GCE A-level art achieved a 100% pass rate: 70% were at a high grade. GCE A-level media has had pass rates below the national benchmark for the past three years, but the retention rate has been consistently high during the same period. Retention rates on several courses across the provision are poor and in steady decline. These courses have now been withdrawn, but this reduction in courses has had an adverse affect on students' progression opportunities. GCE A-level art had a retention rate significantly below the national benchmark in 1998/99 and 1999/2000. The standard of attainment in lessons is good; work in portfolios is satisfactory; and much of the work produced in radio/video production is very good. Students have very good access to HE.

99. Practical work is a particular strength; the majority of students are confident about what they have learned and able to demonstrate skills and techniques at, or above, the expected level. In the best lessons, students are inspired by creative and well-structured tasks that encourage critical reflection between theory and practice. In GCE A-level and GCSE art and design, students' technical skills are of a high standard. They are able to manipulate a wide range of media with confidence and conviction, and can articulate abstract ideas and concepts well. At 69%, attendance in the lessons was poor. Punctuality was also erratic and teachers sometimes failed to counsel late-comers appropriately.

### *A sample of retention and pass rates in Visual and performing arts and media, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCE A-level performing arts | 3 | No. of starts | 19 | 36 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 68 | 86 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 42 | 100 |
| GCE A-level art | 3 | No. of starts | 10 | 41 | 21 |
| | | % retention | 90 | 68 | 70 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 67 | 100 |
| GCE A-level media | 3 | No. of starts | 41 | 38 | 25 |
| | | % retention | 98 | 82 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 72 | 47 | 86 |
| GNVQ advanced art and design | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 10 | 10 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 100 | 50 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 90 |
| National diploma popular music | 3 | No. of starts | 9 | 9 | 13 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 97 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 100 | 89 |
| GNVQ intermediate art and design | 2 | No. of starts | 50 | 26 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 76 | 62 | 38 |
| | | % pass rate | 57 | 67 | 100 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

***Quality of education and training***

101. In the majority of lessons, teaching is good or very good. Most lessons were well planned with some detailed schemes of work, assessment and feedback. In the best lessons, there was a lively, informed exchange of ideas amongst the students. For example, in one music lesson, the teacher's knowledge and passion for the subject allowed for development and extension of ideas beyond those initially being explored. Although some of the students' knowledge was limited, they learned with enthusiasm, acquired and applied knowledge and understanding and made progress. Less successful lessons had no clear aims and objectives, and students' learning was not evaluated. Some activities were insufficiently challenging to maintain the interest of the students and do not help them to make progress.

102. Students' needs are addressed with skill and sensitivity. For example, an entry-level short course in radio production was established to encourage disaffected young people back into education. The course recruited 19 students in 1999/2000, all of whom completed the course, and five progressed into FE. The radio/video production course has also been designed to build flexibility around the individuals' learning requirements.

103. Students speak highly of the support they receive in all aspects of their learning. For example, the Digbeth centre has a crèche, offers counselling facilities and provides teaching support. Accommodation and resources across the centres are appropriate and of a high standard. There has been significant expansion of IT and multimedia resources. However, the growth and development of media courses at Digbeth have reduced the range and quality of facilities for art and design. Underdeveloped links between the four centres restrict students' access to the full range of resources. Access for people with restricted mobility at Digbeth is poor. A lack of continuity within the core teaching team in performing arts has adversely affected learning, but since recent

appointments of well-qualified, experienced staff, provision has been more coherent and students' learning has been of good quality.

## *Leadership and management*

104. Each centre is managed discretely. Artistic direction is not co-ordinated across the sites. All centres operate separately and there is very little sharing of good practice. Quality assurance and self-assessment procedures are good. Planning is comprehensive and self-assessment is used effectively. Systems are in place for identifying and rectifying specific areas of weakness. For example, one-year level 3 courses in art and design and media have been introduced to help improve low retention rates and to accredit achievement. Recent management appointments at St Philips and Digbeth have given both centres clear individual direction, and the quality of the learning experience for students has improved.

## Humanities
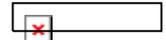


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### *Strengths*

- good pass rates and retention rates in GCE A-level psychology and sociology

- some stimulating and effective teaching

- well-organised tutorials which are valued by the students

- good assessment and monitoring of students' progress.

### *Weaknesses*

- poor achievement in GCE A-level and GCSE law

- insufficient sharing of good practice in teaching and learning

- some inadequate teaching accommodation.

*Scope of provision*

105. The humanities provision offers a suitable range of courses for all students and includes nine subjects at GCE A/AS level, a similar number of GCSEs, and access to HE courses. The inspection covered the access to HE courses and GCE A/AS levels in history, law, psychology, archaeology and sociology. It also covered GCSE history, law, sociology and psychology.

*Achievement and standards*

106. Students taking the two-year GCE A-level courses in psychology and sociology achieved improving pass rates in both subjects. In the one-year GCE A-level psychology course, adult learners also achieved pass rates considerably above national averages. Retention rates on GCE A levels were generally at or above the national average, with the exception of the one-year GCE A-level psychology for learners aged 16 to 18 and the one-year GCE A-level sociology for those aged over 19. GCE A-level history achievement has shown a steady improvement and is now at or above the national average. Results in GCE A-level law are poor for all age groups in both one and two-year courses. Pass rates in GCSE law have also been low and declining. In both GCE A-level and GCSE law, pass rates are considerably below the national average. Access to HE pass rates are satisfactory and have risen over the past three years, whilst the retention rate has improved after a decline in 1999/2000.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in Humanities, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCSE law | 2 | No. of starts | 46 | 31 | 24 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 47 | 59 |
| | | % pass rate | 4 | 7 | 33 |
| GCSE sociology | 2 | No. of starts | * | 20 | 36 |
| | | % retention | * | 48 | 42 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 12 | 43 |
| GCSE psychology | 2 | No. of starts | 62 | 42 | 28 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 67 | 36 |
| | | % pass rate | 14 | 24 | 55 |
| GCE A-level history | 3 | No. of starts | 46 | 56 | 17 |
| | | % retention | 87 | 71 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 56 | 51 | 26 |
| GCE A-level law | 3 | No. of starts | 103 | 111 | 55 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 77 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 33 | 27 | 35 |
| GCE A-level sociology | 3 | No. of starts | 119 | 98 | 71 |
| | | % retention | 79 | 71 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | 45 | 56 | 58 |
| GCE A-level psychology | 3 | No. of starts | 160 | 217 | 98 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 79 | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | 31 | 34 | 61 |

| Access to HE | | No. of starts | 14 | 67 | 79 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | % retention | 93 | 60 | 46 |
| | | % pass rate | 89 | 70 | 64 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

*\* course not running*

### Quality of education and training

107. There were many well-planned and stimulating classes where teachers used a variety of teaching strategies. In these classes, students were able to participate fully and respond enthusiastically to subjects that challenged and interested them. In one psychology class, students were introduced to Milgram's experiments on obedience by being shown the original newspaper advert and a tape recording of the sounds that the volunteers would have heard. Students then used these and other well-prepared materials, to work in small groups to discuss and explore the ideas and outcomes of the experiment. The subsequent discussions were focused and productive, and showed good progress in students' understanding of the subject. In both GCSE and GCE A-level history classes, students demonstrated an interest in, and a good knowledge of, pre-war Nazi Germany. In another lesson, an access teacher engaged the learners through a well-planned, small-group activity where a complex article was summarised and discussed. The teacher also positively supported debate in which all learners were involved. Lesson materials were well produced and helpful, and subject handbooks provided detailed information on content, assessment and study skills.

108. In classes where teaching is less effective, there is an over-reliance on sustained teacher-led activities and students' interest is not maintained. In some classes, the slow pace of teaching and the lack of challenge led to a loss of concentration by the students. A minority of lessons were insufficiently prepared and planned. Schemes of work for all subjects are clear and detailed, but the lesson plans varied in quality from those that comprehensively addressed all aspects of teaching and learning, to those that were brief and poorly presented. Although there are opportunities to develop and improve teaching and learning, there has been insufficient sharing of good practice: quality in classroom practice is inconsistent.

109. Teachers set relevant and appropriate written work, and students frequently respond to these by producing good assignments and essays. GCSE archaeology students produced an impressive set of assignments on Sarehole Mill using a variety of sources and showing an excellent standard of research and understanding of their subject. Students' work is marked carefully and accurately with detailed written comments designed to help students to progress and analyse their own performance. Work is returned promptly and accompanied by verbal feedback that students reported is helpful and supportive. There are effective subject handbooks, which include guidance on assessment, and generic skills lists that allow students and teachers to monitor progress within a subject. Teachers establish good relationships with their students and the atmosphere within the classrooms is relaxed and courteous.

110. Tutorial provision is effective and valued by the students. In an access tutorial, students were encouraged and supported in their learning by exploring the different ways of approaching a difficult article, in order to recognise the barriers to understanding the language and content. This learning was closely linked to future requirements of the course. Students report that they appreciate the close support they receive from their personal and subject tutors. Students are well supported in their Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications and receive information and guidance from an early stage in their course.

111. The learning and resource centres have an adequate book stock and selection of journals. Access to IT facilities at the Hall Green site is good. There was little use of IT during the inspection; many examples of students' work had been produced using college IT facilities. A significant amount of teaching takes place in unsuitable and inadequate classrooms. The quality of teaching

and learning is affected by a lack of soundproofing and blackout facilities, both of which affect the range of teaching methods that can be employed.

### Leadership and management

112. Courses are generally well managed and regular departmental meetings discuss general and subject-specific issues. Targets are set for students' attainment and retention rates but only limited discussion takes place on whether they have been achieved. In the most effective meeting, achievements are analysed by age, gender and ethnicity, and followed up by clear action plans. However, there are also subjects where poor performance is insufficiently examined and the recording of specific action to be taken is inadequate. Data to analyse students' progress are available for the students at St Philip's sixth form centre, and students' GCSE point scores on entry are compiled for both sites. However, little use is made of information which compares students' actual achievements with those predicted for them.

## English, languages and communications
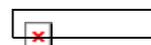


Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### Strengths

- very good retention and pass rates in Urdu and communication

- effective teaching of community languages and communication

- well-developed schemes of work matched to students' personal needs and qualification requirements

- accurate and constructive marking of students' work

- community language provision widening participation and meeting individual needs.

### Weaknesses

- low pass rates in GCSE and GCE A-level English courses

- some uninspiring teaching of English

- inadequate use of resources for community languages

- lack of teamwork and sharing of good practice across sites for English.

*Scope of provision*

113. A good range of provision meets the needs and interests of students aged 16 to 18 and adults. GCE A and AS-level courses are offered during the day and evening in English language, English literature and Urdu. City and Guilds qualifications in wordpower and communication skills are offered at different levels, and have proved a successful alternative to GCSE for many students. A beginners' course for both native and non-native speakers of Urdu accredited by the OCN is also offered. The English and communication courses are run on the college's two main sites, while the Urdu classes are provided in the college's community centre. Strong community partnerships successfully support the Urdu provision and widen participation by women from minority ethnic groups who would not normally attend college-based courses.

*Achievement and standards*

114. Retention and pass rates are high and consistently above the national averages on all the Urdu and communication courses. Most of the students on the Urdu courses achieve the highest grades. Pass rates on all the GCSE and GCE A-level English courses are below the national averages, although there was a significant improvement in the GCE A-level results in 2001. Having English as their second language disadvantages many of the students on these courses. Retention rates for GCSE and GCE A-level English are generally close to the national averages.

115. The standard of students' work is high on Urdu and communication courses, and variable on English courses, where many students' written work is weak in expression, grammar and spelling. In some English and communication lessons, students work well, both individually and in groups, and contribute thoughtfully and perceptively to class discussion. However, in other lessons students find it difficult to work in groups and are unresponsive in discussion. IT is used extensively in communication courses, but is little used in English, although a few students use it for research and to word process their assignments. Attendance and punctuality are poor in a minority of lessons.

*A sample of retention and pass rates in English, languages and communications, 1998 to 2000*

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1998/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCE A-level English language and literature (2 year) | 3 | No. of starts | 43 | 58 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 88 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 62 | 36 | 38 |
| GCE A-level English literature (1 year) | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 24 | 19 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 77 | 69 |
| | | % pass rate | 56 | 69 | 50 |
| GCE A-level English (2 year) | 3 | No. of starts | 60 | 56 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 86 | 86 |

| | | % pass rate | 58 | 61 | 44 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GCE A-level Urdu | 3 | No. of starts | 51 | 25 | 31 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 72 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 78 | 96 | 86 |
| GCSE English language | 2 | No. of starts | 470 | 230 | 198 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 62 | 68 |
| | | % pass rate | 26 | 42 | 41 |
| City & Guilds 3611 communication skills level 1 | 1 | No. of starts | 49 | 53 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 92 | 83 | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 71 | 82 |

*Source: ISR (1998, 1999 and 2000).*

### *Quality of education and training*

116. The courses are well planned, with detailed and appropriate schemes of work. Most teaching is very good. In the best lessons, teachers made appropriate and effective use of a range of techniques to involve all the students and sustain their interest. In a lively and well-paced GCE AS-level English literature lesson on `Othello', the students listened with rapt attention while the teacher imaginatively described the setting for the play. They then undertook a timed activity in pairs on the opening scene, and worked quickly, enthusiastically and effectively. Further activities included discussion, watching a brief video extract, sharing ideas and the preparation of a presentation. By the end of the lesson they had acquired a good understanding of some of the basic elements of the play, had expressed their ideas well in discussion, and had practised and further developed a range of skills. In a GCE A-level Urdu lesson, the teacher successfully used a taped short story extract followed by a song to generate listening, discussion and dictation exercises. Teachers make good use of handout materials, which are well produced and helpful. In some English lessons, the teaching is uninspiring. For a variety of reasons teachers fail to stimulate or sustain the interest of their students. For example, the language used is sometimes too difficult for the students to understand, little use is made of the students' own experiences, or the students are set tasks which are insufficiently structured or insufficiently challenging.

117. Most teachers have appropriate qualifications and experience. Relationships between teachers and students are friendly and relaxed, and students speak highly of the help and support they receive from their teachers, both in lessons and outside. Induction programmes are effective in enabling students to settle quickly into the college and their courses. Teachers mark students' work in detail and provide written comments to help them improve. Moderation of students' coursework is thorough and meets the requirements of the awarding bodies.

118. Both the libraries on the college's main sites have good up-to-date collections of books, magazines and videotapes to support English language and literature. The extensive collection of modern literature includes a wide selection of Asian and Black fiction. Most classrooms provide an appropriate environment for learning, but some are too small for the size of group using them, and others suffer from noise from adjoining rooms or the corridor. In some of the language courses, inadequate use is made of audio-visual resources and textbooks.

### *Leadership and management*

119. Each of the college's two main sites has its own English and communication teachers who belong to different departments. Although some informal liaison is established between the two teams, there is virtually no sharing of good practice or working together to develop the curriculum and resources. Within the two groups, course teams meet regularly to plan and review their courses. Nearly all the teachers are full time. Part-time teachers can be paid for attending

curriculum meetings or staff development activities. Self-assessment reports and action plans at course level are completed twice a year. These identify many of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, and improvements have been made as a result.

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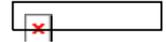
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### *Strengths*

- successful teaching

- good support for students

- effective staff training

- range of community locations to widen participation

- responsive, flexible provision meeting diverse needs

- good accommodation at community centres.

### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient co-ordination of basic skills across the college

- insufficient links between basic skills support and vocational areas

- unsystematic sharing of good practice

- underdeveloped use of individual learning plans

- narrow ESOL curriculum.

*Scope of provision*

120. The college provides responsive and flexible foundation programmes in a wide range of college and community venues that meet the diverse needs of the multi-cultural community. There are 3,013 students on foundation programmes across the college, of whom 84% are adults. The college offers ESOL from entry level 1 to level 4 (higher intermediate). There are 327 students on full-time courses and 119 on part-time courses. Of these, 410 are adults and 36 are aged 16 to 18. Young people attend full-time courses in three of the college's main centres, rather than those provided by the community. Classes take place during the day, evening and at weekends.

121. The college also offers a range of courses for adults and young people with poor basic skills and learning difficulties and/or disabilities at one of the main centres. They are designed to provide a choice of vocational options, basic skills, personal and learning skills and work experience. There are 144 students aged 16 to 18 and 44 adults on these courses.

122. In addition, the inspection covered three strands of basic skills provision; courses in which basic skills tuition is an integral component; cross-college basic skills support usually provided through the learning development centres; and specific basic skills classes. Of the 2,405 students, 89% are adults; 263 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on this provision.

*Achievement and standards*

123. Retention rates on courses for students aged 16 to 18 with learning difficulties and/or disabilities increased from 74% in 1998/99 to 95% in 1999/2000. In the same period, retention rates increased from 95% to 99% for adults. Initial data for 2000/01 show a significant drop in retention rates. This fall in retention rates for both groups reflects a change of client group. The curriculum for 2000/01 has been changed to fit the needs of the students. A staff training programme has also been provided on working with students with emotional or behavioural difficulties. Progression from courses into mainstream provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. However, the subsequent retention and pass rates for these students are low. Less than 25% of students who progressed into mainstream provision at the end of 1999/2000 were successful on their courses in 2000/01.

124. Retention rates on ESOL courses are adversely affected by the dispersal of asylum seekers who have enrolled. On part-time ESOL courses, accredited by OCN certification, achievement is difficult to assess as many classes contain learners working at different levels. Retention rates are below the national average in evening classes and community provision delivered in schools. The college has recognised this weakness and restructured programmes on a termly basis with college certification. Data for 2000/01 indicate that retention rates are improving significantly for the community classes and steadily for the evening classes. Achievement of external accreditation on these courses has increased over the last three years by some 30%. Retention rates on full-time courses are generally satisfactory. Pass rates are above the national average at all levels, except at level 4. However, from 1999/2000 to 2000/01, achievement at this level has improved by 13%. Initial assessment is comprehensive and used effectively to place students on the appropriate level course. The standards of attainment in lessons and in students' work are mainly satisfactory.

125. The college is moving away from basic skills external accreditation. The support adults receive is integral to the vocational qualifications they are working towards. Young people also receive basic

skills support, which is separately timetabled but not integrated into the main area of study. The standards of attainment are variable.

*Quality of education and training*

126. Most teaching is good on ESOL and SLDD courses, and ensures high levels of student motivation and participation. Classroom management is good. Teaching on basic skills classes ranges from excellent to very poor. There is insufficient transfer of good practice in basic skills between staff and across different sites. Individual learning plans for students are in the early stages of development. They are written after initial assessment and identify long-term learning goals. These goals are not broken down into short-term, achievable targets. Individual learning plans are not systematically used to inform the planning and delivery of teaching and learning.

127. In general, ESOL teaching focuses effectively on language development, incorporating practice of the four skills. Students' experience and prior learning is used at all levels to enrich learning and develop skills of comparative analysis. IT is used not only to develop computer skills but also to broaden teaching and learning strategies for language development. However, the content of ESOL curriculum is narrow, particularly for full-time students. Schemes of work and lesson plans lack explicit reference to study skills. Teachers make little use of projects to develop language and study skills alongside one another. Students learn English in the context of everyday language rather than through topics related to mainstream courses and the world of work. Some paper-based resources do not adequately reflect students' experiences and cultures.

128. The college is responsive to the development needs of staff. The approach to staff training is systematic and focuses on the needs of students and of the college. For example, all support staff study for the basic skills initial certificates to raise awareness of students' needs.

129. The quality of basic skills provision across the college is inconsistent and there are examples of both good and poor practice. On some full-time courses for students aged 16 to 18, basic skills is taught as a separate subject. These sessions concentrate on improving students' general literacy and numeracy skills. The basic skills requirements of full-time courses have been mapped against the national standards, but this mapping is not informing the teaching of basic skills in vocational areas. No direct links are made between general basic skills development and those skills needed for students to be successful on their courses. Basic skills learning materials, such as handouts and worksheets, do not provide students with work that is related to their course. For example, in a basic skills class, students on a childcare course were learning about nouns and pronouns. One task was to identify nouns and pronouns in sentences provided on a worksheet. The sentences were general rather than related to childcare. Similarly, basic skills support in the learning development centres is not sufficiently linked to the courses students are following.

130. Students feel well supported by their tutors and by staff. The college employs a wide range of strategies to enable students to continue and focus on learning. The class support provided by support assistants is excellent and contributes significantly to students' learning. Teachers and support staff work well together to encourage and motivate students. Student services officers work closely with students especially those who are experiencing difficulties. Where appropriate, they encourage and refer students to the learning development centres for support in basic skills.

131. The college provides ESOL and basic skills in an impressive range of locations throughout the community in south Birmingham and further afield. The work of the community development unit has been instrumental in effectively widening participation in learning for a significant number of adults in particular. For example, ESOL classes are held on employers' premises to enable women to improve their English while at work. In addition, classes for bilingual students are held in community centres, schools and places of worship. Provision is not only available in a wide range of locations but is also responsive and flexible to meet the diverse needs of students. Basic skills support is successfully integrated into a wide range of vocational qualifications based in community centres. The range and suitability of courses available to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have been improved for 2000/01 following the introduction of redesigned provision. The SLDD team is responsive to requests from schools and the needs of students in relation to link programmes. Accommodation in community venues is of high quality. Buildings are welcoming, well

decorated and maintained, with appropriate furniture and resources to facilitate learning. Students have access to computer equipment of industrial standard with Internet access in most locations.

***Leadership and management***

132. The management of ESOL courses and SLDD is based on individual sites. A head of department has been recently appointed to co-ordinate ESOL and basic skills across the college. Basic skills provision and support has developed at different sites and locations in isolation from each other. The college recognises that basic skills is not sufficiently co-ordinated. Senior management has recently approved a basic skills policy. It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these developments.

133. The leadership and management of ESOL and SLDD courses are satisfactory. The college is committed to improving standards and developing learning opportunities for adults and young people. Course team meetings are held regularly. They focus on retention and achievement targets, students' progress, curriculum review and sharing of good practice. Both curriculum teams follow the college's quality assurance procedures. Monitoring of teaching of both full-time and part-time staff is systematic, and informs staff development needs. The self-assessment report is generally accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses. However, it is insufficiently focused on the experience of the learner. Action plans contain strategies for improvement and set targets for completion. Progress against action plans is monitored. Practical implementation of equality of opportunity is apparent in all aspects of the department's work. Diversity is celebrated. Liaison between departments is poor and no formal system is in place whereby good and developing practice is shared. For example, effective teaching and learning in one curriculum area are not shared with other areas in the college.

## Part D: College data
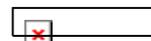


## Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 1999/2000



| Level | 16-18 % | 19+ % |
|-------|---------|-------|
| 1 | 26 | 35 |
| 2 | 35 | 28 |
| 3 | 33 | 24 |
| 4/5 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 5 | 12 |
| Total | 100 | 101 |
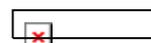
*Source: provided by the college in summer 2001.*

*Note: The percentages in column 19+ have been rounded up and hence do not add up to 100%.*

## Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 1999/2000

| Curriculum area | 16-18 No. | 19+ No. | Total Enrolments % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Science | 1,051 | 1,550 | 14 |
| Agriculture | 10 | 72 | 0 |
| Construction | 237 | 796 | 6 |
| Engineering | 345 | 1,584 | 10 |
| Business | 422 | 3,469 | 21 |
| Hotel and catering | 74 | 349 | 2 |
| Health and community care | 438 | 2,518 | 16 |
| Art and design | 239 | 498 | 4 |
| Humanities | 882 | 2,017 | 16 |
| Basic education | 408 | 1,600 | 11 |
| **Total** | 4,106 | 14,453 | 100 |

*Source: Provided by the college in summer 2001*

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

| Level (Long Courses) | Retention and pass rate | Completion year | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 16-18 | | | 19+ | | |
| | | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 | 1997/98 | 1998/99 | 1999/00 |
| 1 | Starters excluding transfers | 773 | 899 | 892 | 2,698 | 1,498 | 3,064 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 84 | 79 | 73 | 88 | 71 | 76 |
| | National average (%) | 77 | 75 | 76 | 76 | 73 | 76 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 59 | 78 | 75 | 74 | 68 | 88 |
| | National Average (%) | 48 | 59 | 64 | 55 | 58 | 66 |
| 2 | Starters excluding transfers | 2,337 | 1,427 | 1,331 | 2,914 | 1,876 | 2,041 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 84 | 71 | 65 | 87 | 72 | 72 |
| | National average (%) | 75 | 72 | 73 | 76 | 74 | 74 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 48 | 79 | 74 | 50 | 77 | 79 |
| | National average (%) | 57 | 65 | 69 | 57 | 63 | 66 |
| 3 | Starters excluding transfers | 1,846 | 1,760 | 989 | 1,907 | 1,778 | 1,980 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 87 | 80 | 73 | 87 | 80 | 80 |
| | National average (%) | 77 | 73 | 75 | 76 | 75 | 76 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pass rate (%) | 46 | 50 | 63 | 49 | 73 | 73 |
| | National average (%) | 59 | 65 | 66 | 59 | 63 | 67 |
| **4/5** | Starters excluding transfers | 9 | 21 | 3 | 501 | 404 | 294 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 100 | 33 | n/a | 89 | 74 | 79 |
| | National average (%) | n/a | n/a | n/a | 81 | 78 | 75 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 50 | 100 | n/a | 44 | 54 | 62 |
| | National average (%) | n/a | n/a | n/a | 50 | 56 | 55 |

*Note: Summary of retention and achievement for the last three years by age and level of course, compared against national averages for colleges of the same type (that is general FE/tertiary or sixth form colleges).*

*Sources of information:*

*1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

*2. College rates for 1997/8 - 1998/9: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/2000: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*

*3. College rates for 1999/00 provided by the college in summer 2001.*

## 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) | 63 | 24 | 13 | 118 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 57 | 27 | 16 | 96 |
| Level 1 (foundation) | 66 | 26 | 8 | 53 |
| Other sessions | 50 | 33 | 17 | 30 |
| **Totals** | **60** | **27** | **13** | **297** |

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