



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Abingdon and Witney College

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Basic information about the college



| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Name of college: | Abingdon and Witney College |
| Type of college: | General Further Education |
| Principal: | Bob Challis |
| Address of college: | Abingdon Campus Wootton Road Abingdon OX14 1GG |
| Telephone number: | 01235 555 585 |
| Fax number: | 01235 553 168 |
| Chair of governors: | Lorna Hipkins |
| Unique reference number: | 130793 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Vivien Bailey HMI |

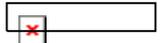
Dates of inspection:

3-7 February 2003

Part A: Summary



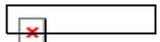
Information about the college



Abingdon and Witney College is a medium-sized general further education (FE) college. It was formed in April 2001, when the former West Oxfordshire College was dissolved and its assets were transferred to the former Abingdon College. The college has six main sites: the Abingdon campus; the Witney campus; the Warren Farm campus to the north of Oxford; the Common Leys stud just outside Witney; and the Didcot and Carterton information technology (IT) centres. The college draws its students from the rural areas of the Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire, the south and west of the city of Oxford, and a major part of South Oxfordshire. The college's catchment area is one of the top ten employment growth areas in Britain, where 51% of the population is employed in the service industries, with a further 25% in public administration, education and health. The unemployment rate is less than 1% in Oxfordshire.

The areas served by the college have a population of about 300,000. In 2001/02, the college had nearly 13,500 students of whom 1,500 were full-time students funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), 8,500 were part-time students funded by the LSC, and 200 were on higher education (HE) courses, some of which were funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). There were approximately 400 trainees on work-based learning programmes, and 750 beneficiaries of programmes funded by the European Social Fund. The remaining students were on self-funded programmes, including community education. The college has a low proportion of students from 'widening participation' postcode areas. About 7% of students following substantial programmes are of minority ethnic origin, compared to 3.3% of the population of Oxfordshire. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18. The college offers provision in all 14 areas of learning, although numbers are small in construction, retail and hospitality. The college's mission is to be 'a source of learning of undisputed quality for towns and rural communities in Oxfordshire'. The mission is supported by separate statements of its intentions relating to young people, adults, businesses, the community, all learners and staff.

How effective is the college?



All of the 13 curriculum areas inspected were judged at least satisfactory by inspectors. Provision was good in business and professional studies; information and communication technology (ICT); leisure, travel, sport and recreation; visual and performing arts and media; and English, modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language (EFL). In engineering, work-based learning was unsatisfactory. The proportion of lessons in which teaching was good or better was above the average for FE colleges in 2001/02. Support for students is generally satisfactory, with good advice and guidance, and effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Not all tutorials are effective, and provision for the development of students' key skills is more effective in some areas than others. The main strengths and areas for improvement are set out below.

Key strengths

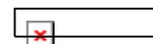
- collaboration with external partners
- effective management of change
- good retention and pass rates
- clean and tidy working environment
- accessibility of principal to staff and students
- good resources for learning
- much good teaching.

What should be improved

- links with employers in some areas
- teaching of practical skills on some courses
- proportion of very good or outstanding lessons
- expectation of, and stimulation for, the most able students
- enrichment and key skills programmes.

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

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

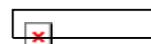


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

| Area | Overall judgements about provision, and comment |
|--|---|
| Science and mathematics | Satisfactory. Retention rates are high, but pass rates are below average on General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) courses. There are effective access to HE courses. Students respond well to learning activities on advanced level courses. |
| Land-based studies | Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are high on sports turf courses and courses for amateur gardeners, but the pass rate was below average on the national diploma in animal care in 2002. Theory teaching is good. Practical work is good on most courses but is not well developed on animal care and agriculture courses. Students are well supported with regard to personal and learning problems. |
| Equine studies | Satisfactory. Most courses have high retention and pass rates, and the standard of students' theoretical work is good. Theory teaching is satisfactory or better, but some practical teaching is poor and students have unsatisfactory practical skills, particularly at higher levels. Some practical and learning resources are inadequate. |
| Engineering | Satisfactory. There is much good teaching, and some retention and pass rates are high. There is a good range of courses, and good ICT resources and accommodation. There are low pass and retention rates for work-based learners, particularly in motor vehicle studies. |
| Business and professional studies | Good. There is a high standard of teaching. There are high retention and pass rates for professional programmes, which provide for the majority of students, and on the intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). Pass rates are low on some other programmes. |
| Information and communication technology | Good. The retention and pass rates are high on many courses. There is good teaching and learning, well supported by resources. There is a lack of extension activities for more able learners. |
| Leisure, travel, sport and recreation | Good. There are high pass rates across the range of sport and travel courses, and improving retention. Teaching is good and there is very effective tutorial support. There are good facilities for sport courses. There is a narrow range of occupational qualifications and a lack of progression opportunities for some students. |
| Care and counselling | Satisfactory. Most teaching is at least satisfactory. There are low retention rates on some courses, but pass rates are satisfactory or high. Support for individual students is effective and good use is made of students' work experience to enhance their learning. Insufficient |

| | |
|---|--|
| | use is made of ICT in learning programmes. |
| Visual and performing arts and media | Good. Pass and retention rates are mainly high in vocational and general vocational courses, but are lower for GCE AS and GCE Advanced level (GCE A-level) courses. Students are committed and enthusiastic, and produce work of a good standard. There is much good or very good teaching. |
| Humanities | Satisfactory. Most teaching is good or better, but some lessons fail to provide enough stimulation or extend students' learning sufficiently. Pass rates are mixed and in law, some students fail to achieve their potential. The standard of work achieved is good, in particular on the access to HE course. Retention rates are low on part-time GCE AS courses, where students receive insufficient guidance and support. |
| English, modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language | Good. Retention rates are high on English courses and very high on modern foreign languages and EFL courses. Pass rates in GCE AS/A-level English are in line with national averages and are above average on modern language and EFL NVQ courses. There is good provision in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), integrated into the EFL programme. There is much good or very good teaching. |
| Literacy and numeracy | Satisfactory. There is good teaching and use of individual learning plans (ILP) in separate specialist basic skills courses. There are high pass rates on accredited courses. In foundation vocational programmes and study support sessions, the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. There is inadequate use of ILP and learning materials with a vocational context. |
| Foundation programmes | Satisfactory. There are high retention and pass rates for students on foundation programmes. There is good provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties matched to the needs of individuals. The Education to Employment (E2E) programme is well managed and effectively offers a wide range of opportunities. There is some poor teaching on foundation programmes, and inadequate staffing on the programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. |

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been successful management of change following the merger of the two former colleges, and the new institution has developed its own ethos and priorities. Communication is generally effective. Governors and managers have developed clear strategic objectives in consultation with staff and external bodies. There is a strong commitment to working with partners. Quality assurance systems are leading to improvements in some areas. The proportion of teaching which is good or better is above average, and college data show that overall retention and pass rates at most levels were above national averages in 2001/02, the college's first full year of operation. The management of performance is still developing. For example, the quality of the support for students in tutorials, the development of students' key skills and the provision of additional learning support all vary from good in some areas to poor in others. The use of individual learning targets for students is not well established in some areas, notably in GCE AS and A-level provision. Governors and managers are aware of their responsibilities regarding equal opportunities legislation. Policies and procedures are in place to promote equal opportunities, backed up by staff development, but the promotion of equal opportunities is not uniformly good across the curriculum areas. Managers pay attention to value for money and have identified some aspects where this

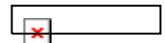
success of the college's accommodation strategy.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



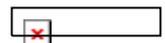
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is satisfactory. It has in place appropriate policies to promote equal opportunities and avoid discrimination. Governors and managers have taken into account changes in legislation for planning purposes. Staff development has taken place in compliance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The college has produced a good race equality policy and plan, which it is beginning to implement. Further staff development is planned in relation to this. Data on students' retention and achievement are monitored by gender and ethnicity, but there is no consistent approach to following up this analysis with effective action. The college is successful in attracting students from disadvantaged groups, such as those with profound disabilities and asylum seekers. It is working well with partners in the local community to address needs, such as those associated with rural isolation. There is much good informal support for students, but the availability of formal additional support varies across the college. Access for those with restricted mobility at the college's Witney site is limited. The college's accommodation strategy intends to remedy this deficiency. There are good facilities on the site for students with profound and multiple disabilities. Most lessons and learning materials are designed to meet the needs of all students.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for students are satisfactory. The information and guidance given to prospective students are good, and there are effective arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students to their courses. There are particularly good arrangements to ensure that 16-18 year olds in the town of Abingdon receive impartial information and advice through the consortium of schools and the college, which provides a single information booklet. Support for students on their courses is satisfactory. Good advice and guidance on course choices and careers are supplied by specialist officers and Connexions advisers. Childcare for the under-fives is available at both Abingdon and Witney campuses. Tutorials, particularly on academic courses, are not always effective. There is good practical and pastoral support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The arrangements to support students identified as needing additional help with literacy and numeracy vary in their efficacy, depending on the course the students are taking. There is a long waiting list for students requiring dyslexia support, owing to staff shortages.

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

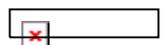
- being treated like adults

- helpful and approachable staff
- friendly college atmosphere
- support for individual needs
- good teaching
- good accommodation and facilities at the Abingdon campus.

What they feel could be improved

- opportunities for enrichment activities
- conditions in the examinations hall
- arrangements for covering staff absence
- scheduling of homework to avoid `bunching' of assignments
- accommodation and facilities at the Witney campus.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to

The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

| Aspect & learner type | Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) % | Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) % | Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) % |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Teaching 16-18 | 67 | 24 | 9 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 69 | 26 | 5 |
| Learning 16-18 | 57 | 33 | 10 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 71 | 26 | 3 |

Key: The range of grades includes: Excellent (Grade 1), Very Good (Grade 2), Good (Grade 3), Satisfactory (Grade 4), Unsatisfactory (Grade 5), Poor (Grade 6) and Very Poor (Grade 7).

*work-based learning

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers full-time and part-time vocational courses at all levels from entry level up to HE courses. Work-based training provision covers foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQs. A large proportion of the students aged 16 to 18 study vocational courses such as GNVQ, AVCE, first and national diploma, and NVQ courses. The range of GCE AS/A-level courses is good, boosted by the college's working partnerships with secondary schools in Abingdon and Witney. There are GCSE courses in English and mathematics. Most adults are enrolled on vocationally oriented courses, NVQs and other short and long courses in IT, work-related skills and recreational subjects.

2. College data on students' achievements were analysed as part of the inspection. For the period 1998 to 2001, data from the two former colleges were aggregated. Overall, these data indicate that retention and pass rates have been generally in line with, or well above, national averages. The data for 2001/02 provided by the college indicate lower retention rates, but these were nevertheless still at or well above average in all areas, except the retention rates of students aged 16 to 18 at level 1. Pass rates at most levels increased in 2001/02.

3. In most areas of learning there are a minority of courses where retention and/or pass rates are below average. These have been identified by the college in its self-assessment report. An analysis

of the retention of students from minority ethnic backgrounds carried out in 2001/02 showed that students from these groups had a similar retention rate to white students.

4. Students' attainment was good or better in 54% of the lessons observed and less than satisfactory in 8%. These figures are broadly in line with the average for all colleges inspected in 2001/02. Particularly good standards were achieved by students in lessons in visual and performing arts and media, access to HE in humanities, English and modern foreign languages. During the inspection, students' attendance was good at 80%. Attendance in ICT lessons was very good at 91%.

16 to 18 year olds

5. In 2001/02, approaching half (42%) of enrolments by students aged 16 to 18 were for qualifications at level 2, while 32% were at level 3 and 18% at level 1. The largest numbers of enrolments for this age group were in the areas of humanities, ICT, science and mathematics, and English, languages and communication.

6. Using merged data from the two former colleges, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 from 1999 to 2001 were at, or more frequently, well above the national average. The first data for the new institution in 2001/02 show a drop in retention at level 1 to 72%, which is below the national average. There was also a drop at level 2 to a figure in line with national averages. At level 3, data show an increase in retention to well above average for this level. Pass rates through the same period have also been above average at levels 1 and 2, and in line with the average at level 3. In 2001/02, pass rates increased and were well above average at all levels.

7. Similar patterns emerge when data is considered by qualification type. Looking at GCE A-level achievements from 1999 to 2001, retention declined but did not fall below the national average. Pass rates improved and were broadly in line with the average in 2001; the proportion of high grades (A and B) achieved was also close to national figures. Retention rates improved on both intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses to well above average. Pass rates fell but were still in line with national averages. There were high retention rates on first and national diplomas, and particularly good pass rates at intermediate level.

8. Data provided by the college on achievements in 2001/02, indicated examples of high retention and pass rates on courses in most areas. At entry and foundation level, there are high retention and pass rates in foundation studies, and high pass rates on accredited basic skills courses. There are high pass rates in some NVQ courses at level 1, for example, vehicle maintenance and service replacement. Pass rates at level 2 have been well above the national average in media studies, ICT and business, and in leisure and tourism they were 100% in 2001 and 2002. In the first diploma in performing arts, students produce performance work above the standard normally seen at this level. There are good achievements in the first diplomas in science (sports studies) and in sport.

9. In some GCE AS subjects, retention and pass rates have been below national averages, for example, in art, media studies, mathematics and biology. Retention and pass rates in sociology have been consistently high, and students in this subject and in psychology show good theoretical and research skills. A high standard of work was observed during the inspection in many areas. This was particularly the case in visual and performing arts courses, especially in two-dimensional artwork. In most science GCE AS/A-level courses there are good standards of practical work. The numbers of students who choose to progress from GCE AS to A level is low in some subjects. Progression rates into HE are about average for a general FE college.

10. Some national diploma courses have particularly high retention and pass rates. These include the first and national diplomas in performing arts, and the national diploma in equine studies. The pass rates on the first diploma in animal care are in line with national averages. However, the national diploma in animal care had a pass rate of 71% in 2001/02 compared to the national figure of 81%. Many students do not complete the assignments for the national diploma in engineering within the course time and submit work after completion. Pass rates in AVCE travel and tourism and leisure and recreation are well above national averages. Although pass rates on AVCE courses have been unsatisfactory in business, some coursework has been of a high standard. ICT students are

competently using advanced tools for designing databases, comparable to those used on level 4 courses.

11. Pass rates on work-based learning programmes are generally poor, for example, on NVQs in care, engineering, motor vehicle and horticulture. Engineering has the largest number of work-based learners, but retention and pass rates have been consistently below 50% in both foundation and advanced programmes. There has also been poor framework achievement for foundation modern apprentices in horticulture, although this improved in 2002/03 as a result of improved key skills provision. In agricultural engineering, good progress was being made at the time of inspection towards the achievement of key skills, and all learners were due to complete either on or before target dates.

Adult learners

12. In 2001/02, 59% of enrolments by adult students were on courses designated as 'other'. These include access to HE courses, long courses lasting over 24 weeks, and many short courses in IT and other work-related skills, as well as basic skills and recreational studies. In addition, 16% of enrolments by adults were at level 1, 11% at level 2 and 11% at level 3, with a further 3% at HE level. By far the largest number of enrolments for this age group was in ICT, representing 26% of all enrolments by adults. Other curriculum areas with substantial numbers of enrolments were business and professional studies, health care and public services, visual and performing arts and media, and English, languages and communication.

13. Using merged data from the two former colleges, retention rates from 1999 to 2001 for adult students were above, or well above, national averages at levels 1, 2 and 3. In 2001/02, retention rates dropped at level 1 and level 2, but were still broadly in line with the average. Pass rates have also been consistently at or above average. In 2002, pass rates were well above average and rose at levels 2 and 3. Retention rates are high on HE courses. Pass rates have risen from below average in 1998/99 and 1999/2000, to well above average in 2002. There were very high retention and pass rates on short courses in 2002, with pass rates showing an improvement from previous years.

14. When data for 1999 to 2001 are considered by qualification type, a similarly strong picture emerges. On access courses, although retention rates fell, they were still in line with national averages, and pass rates rose to above average. On other long courses, lasting over 24 weeks, both retention and pass rates rose to well above average. The retention rates on both level 2 and level 3 NVQ courses were about average. Whilst NVQ pass rates at level 3 were average in 2001, they were below average at level 2.

15. Data provided by the college on achievements in 2001/02, indicated examples of high retention and pass rates on courses in most areas. There are good pass rates on accredited courses in basic skills programmes. In foundation programmes, adult learners make good progress against their ILP. There has been a growth in the number of part-time students over the past two years, particularly in modern foreign languages and ESOL courses, ICT, and professional programmes in business and accounting. In these curriculum areas retention and pass rates are well above national averages. Almost all students on the college's well-subscribed modern foreign languages courses are adults. Both retention and pass rates on these courses are well above average. There is a similar pattern in EFL provision. In ICT pass rates are also well above the national average for basic computer literacy courses and European computer driving licence (ECDL) programmes. Most students on professional courses in business and management are over 19. Their achievements are very good. Basic counselling skills courses also have very high retention and pass rates.

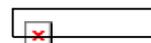
16. There is no vocational provision on the college's main sites for adults in leisure, travel, sport and recreation, although sports coaching is available through franchised arrangements at community venues. Over 70% of students on land-based courses are adults. There are high retention and pass rates on courses for amateur gardeners and in Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and garden design courses. Students are highly motivated and much work is done in this curriculum area to encourage mature students who lack the confidence to take examinations. Many mature students produce work of a particularly high standard on horticultural programmes. Mature students also succeed well on a

range of courses in equine studies. These courses are mainly offered off site, and provide good progression opportunities to level 3 and beyond.

17. Evening class provision of GCE AS/A level is small. Archaeology is only offered in the evening and recruits well at GCE AS, though numbers are low on the GCE A-level course in the current year. Pass rates in archaeology are well above national averages, although the proportion of students gaining high grades has been low. Students who attend evening classes at GCE AS/A level find their courses demanding, but they are highly motivated and pass rates are generally good.

18. There is a good range of well-established access courses with good progression to HE. Recruitment at Witney on the general access to HE course has declined this year, but recruitment on other access courses remains strong. The provision in access to healthcare is good, with good progression into employment or further training. Access programmes in humanities and science have good pass rates and progression into HE. Students are given good support on all these programmes. Many students lack confidence when they start the programme and have modest prior qualifications. With the support of college staff, many overcome considerable difficulties, for example dyslexia, and go on to achieve well. Access students also gain key skills qualifications as part of their course and value the opportunity to achieve these qualifications. In visual arts, students' portfolios on the national diploma and art foundation courses show a high level of competence in drawing, design development and experimentation with media. Progression to HE from both courses is satisfactory.

Quality of education and training



19. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 214 lessons covering 11 curriculum areas and the work-based learning provision in three areas. Teaching was good or better in 68% of these lessons, which was above the national average of 65% for all colleges in 2001/02. Only 3% of lessons were judged outstanding, compared to a national average of 11%. Teaching was satisfactory in a further 25% of lessons and less than satisfactory in 7%. Learning was good or better in 63% of lessons, satisfactory in 30% and less than satisfactory in 7%. The proportion of lessons in which teaching was good or better was the same for both students aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 and over. However, 9% of lessons for the younger age group were less than satisfactory, compared to 5% of those for older students. The quality of learning was better amongst older students: it was good or better in 70% of lessons predominantly for adult students, and in 57% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. Learning was unsatisfactory in 10% of lessons for younger students and 4% of lessons for older students. There was little difference in the quality of teaching and learning by level of study. There was a slightly higher proportion of good or better teaching at level 3 and the lowest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was at this level.

20. Consistently good teaching was observed in lessons in ICT, leisure, travel, sport and recreation, and English, modern foreign languages and EFL, where teaching in over 80% of lessons was good or better. There was also a high proportion of good teaching in visual and performing arts and media. The areas with the lowest proportions of good or better teaching were science and mathematics, land-based provision, equine studies, and care and counselling. In land-based provision, equine studies, engineering and foundation studies, teaching in more than 10% of lessons observed was less than satisfactory.

21. In the lessons where teaching was good or better, there was careful planning to ensure that account was taken of students' differing needs. Teachers displayed good subject knowledge and confidence, and established friendly but business-like working relationships with students. Techniques were used to consolidate and check learning, including the effective questioning of individual learners. Students were encouraged to extend and develop their oral answers. Where possible, teachers drew on students' prior knowledge and experience, and made reference to topical examples and students' interests. Students were guided to analyse problems for themselves, and

given good individual help and encouragement. Good learning materials were in evidence, supported by the effective use of aids such as video and ICT. In these lessons, students responded well to questioning and also asked questions themselves. They were able to work under their own initiative and demonstrated good collaborative skills.

22. In the weaker lessons, teachers failed to take sufficient account of the differing needs of students. Students' specific learning needs were not always taken into account. There was sometimes insufficient stimulation for more able students, who were not provided with further activities to enable them to proceed at a pace suited to their ability. Another common weakness was a failure by teachers to make adequate checks on students' learning. Questions to the group were often too general, and teachers accepted the first answer called out, rather than using further questions to encourage individuals to explore answers in greater depth. In these lessons, students demonstrated inadequate understanding and were hesitant about using key concepts. They sometimes needed constant coaxing to participate in activities.

23. On vocational courses the teaching of theory is sometimes better than the teaching of practical skills. In the best theory lessons, teachers use a good range of techniques to enable students to reflect on their practical skills and experience, and link them to theoretical knowledge. Weaknesses in theory teaching include a failure to check that students are making notes of and understanding key technical terms. In the best practical teaching seen, teachers provided good demonstrations of skills, which students were then able to practise effectively under supervision. Weaknesses in practical teaching included: lack of attention to appropriate dress or aspects of health and safety; inadequate skills amongst teachers; inadequate encouragement of students to identify and correct failings in their own performance; and lack of technician support which undermined the teacher's ability to supervise adequately the activities of the students.

24. The college's Abingdon campus is welcoming, with teaching rooms which are well lit, clean and maintained to a high standard. Staff accommodation has recently been refurbished. All of the teaching rooms are accessible to students with restricted mobility. The Witney campus is close to the town centre and has a range of buildings varying in age and style. In some buildings, access for users of wheelchairs or others with restricted mobility is limited. Some rooms, such as the science laboratories, do not offer a pleasant environment for study. There are plans for the redevelopment of the Witney site to address these issues as part of the college's clear and detailed accommodation strategy. The stud farm at Common Leys has good specialist yard facilities. At the Warren Farm site, classrooms and student communal areas have recently been refurbished, a refectory has been developed within the existing accommodation, and cooking facilities and vending machines have been installed. A new teaching block has provided much-needed classrooms, a small library and computer facility. There are some poor quality temporary classrooms in use. The accommodation and resources for animal care are poor and inadequately maintained.

25. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified in their subjects, and are experienced and vocationally competent. Many have relevant degrees or higher qualifications, and most have a teaching qualification. All new staff undergo a thorough induction which covers college policies on equal opportunities and health and safety, as well as staff development and the management information system. Staff are supported on a good range of training and development activities. The college has appointed two information and learning technology (ILT) 'champions' whose role is to support staff in using technology such as the college's intranet, interactive whiteboards and assistive software, and to provide help in designing teaching materials for the computer.

26. There are good specialist resources in most curriculum areas. For example, ILT is used effectively in engineering, EFL and in the development of literacy skills. Interactive whiteboards are in use in some areas and increased provision of this aid is planned. The large sports hall is a particularly good facility, although somewhat underused, and there is a well-equipped fitness centre that is used effectively for sport and exercise courses. There is a spacious and well-equipped block housing facilities for art and design, although there is a lack of storage space for artwork. The new theatre provides a flexible space for a range of performing arts and other activities.

27. The college has developed a thorough and effective ILT strategy and there has been substantial investment in computers and associated equipment over the last two years. All teaching staff have

access to relevant and up-to-date reports from the management information system. Computers are located in classrooms and workshops. 'Drop-in' computer facilities are of good standard and available to all students. There is a good range of industrial standard software available in all study areas. In some lessons observed at the Witney campus, equipment was poorly set up and maintained and, in one instance, a video could not be shown.

28. The college's learning resource centre provides, on main sites, drop-in computer facilities, quiet study areas, and careers and HE information. Students have a thorough induction to the library facilities. The book stock is adequate, although some books are dated. The staff in the learning resource centre provide much help and support for students.

29. The initial assessment of students' additional learning needs is thoroughly carried out for those on full-time and many part-time courses. Some of these assessments include vocational aptitude and free writing tests, which give a better understanding of students' needs. The use made of the information gathered from these initial assessments is generally effective. However, on foundation courses insufficient use is made of the information to plan learners' programmes. Identification of those students with dyslexia has been good in the past, but at the time of the inspection there was a long list of students awaiting an assessment, mainly owing to a shortage of qualified staff.

30. The monitoring of students' progress is good. There is regular and productive use of assignments and homework, testing and the assessment of practical skills on most courses. The marking of work is generally thorough, with good annotation to help students improve their work. The assessment and review processes for students with moderate or profound learning difficulties are particularly effective. The use of individual learning targets and action plans for students is not well developed. The college's system of predicting GCE AS/A-level students' examination grades, based on their entry qualifications, is not being used effectively to help students monitor their progress and achieve improvements to their learning. Many of the learning targets set are not easily measurable and are not reviewed sufficiently frequently with students. For example, in literacy and numeracy, students' ILPs are not recorded adequately to help them meet their goals during study support sessions, and there is no recording of ILP at all on some foundation programmes.

31. There are good arrangements for the internal and external verification of assessments on NVQ courses. On other vocational courses, the rigour of the arrangements varies. In engineering, new assignments are checked rigorously against standards and there is effective feedback to tutors. On the animal care national diploma course, assignments are sometimes not set at the times specified in the handbook and arrangements for internal verification are weak. The moderation of marking on academic courses is not well established. In science there is no common assessment procedure, and marking on GCE AS and A-level courses is not clearly related to the grading standards of GCE A-level programmes. Similarly there are variations in the quality of assessment on GCE AS/A-level programmes in humanities, particularly between the Abingdon and Witney sites.

32. The college has a well-defined strategy to meet the needs of local communities, including those of disadvantaged and under-represented groups. The strategy is promoting work with a wide range of different partners, including charities, local authorities, community representatives and private training companies. The purpose is to provide training for those who are not involved in education, including members of minority ethnic groups and people living in isolated rural areas. The college is successfully working with a range of partners in South Oxfordshire in 14 centres to provide IT training in villages and a market town, and to a lesser extent in West Oxfordshire, where there are another four centres. One of the college's targets is to increase the numbers of adults taking courses in basic skills. At the time of the inspection the number of adults on community-based courses in basic skills was comparatively low.

33. The college provides a good range of learning opportunities and progression routes for the communities and individuals it serves. It is a member of a successful consortium with local schools in Abingdon and has a developing partnership with schools in Witney, to extend the provision for students aged 16 to 18. The college offers 30 subjects at GCE AS/A level with the help of these partnerships. Access to HE courses for adults are provided in six different study routes. Many vocational qualifications are offered in both full-time and part-time options, including some well-developed specialist areas such as engineering and equine studies, and provision for young people

with profound and multiple learning difficulties. There is an extensive range of courses in modern foreign languages and English studies. Professional qualifications for adults are also available, for instance in business subjects, as well as an extensive programme of recreational courses. In a minority of areas, such as sport and tourism and health and social care, there is a lack of lower level programmes. The college has offered these in the past but the take-up has been low. Provision at this level through E2E programmes has been more successful in attracting lower level entrants onto vocational courses, and numbers are growing.

34. There is little consistency across the college in the degree to which students' courses are enriched with key skills and other activities. There is insufficient development of the teaching and assessment of key skills, such as communication skills, application of number and IT skills. There is some good practice, for instance in GCE A-level sociology and psychology, and on equine studies, land-based, and leisure, sport and travel courses, where the development of key skills is integrated with subject lessons, but this practice is not widespread. Many students have a low regard for key skills and dedicated key skill lessons are often poorly attended. On work-based learning programmes in motor vehicle studies, the lack of effective key skills programmes has damaged students' achievement of the overall training framework. There is no systematic approach in the college to the provision of other enrichment activities for students. Some enjoy a rich diet of additional courses and activities, including foreign travel, but many do not participate in any supplementary activities beyond undertaking work experience.

35. A co-ordinated college approach is being established to create formal links with local industries and to ensure that curriculum areas take into account employers' needs. In some areas such as care and engineering, there are strong and productive links with industry. In others, there are no systems in place to ascertain local companies' needs and requirements. The college is taking part in a local LSC project to identify local industries' training needs.

36. The information and guidance given to prospective students are good. Initial information and guidance on courses are readily available through well-situated student services. The prospectuses and leaflets are informative, with clear explanations of the requirements of courses. There are good links between the college and schools, both at Witney and Abingdon. The marketing of all courses for students aged 16 to 19 in the town of Abingdon is carried out on a consortium basis between the college and the schools. All full-time and many part-time students are interviewed prior to enrolment. These arrangements are efficiently carried out and students speak highly of the help given to them in making course choices. Students from local schools visit the college and are able to try different courses during 'taster' days in the summer term. Enrolment and induction arrangements are effective.

37. The support provided for students whilst on their courses is generally satisfactory. There are very good arrangements to help adults, including those with young children. Children's day care centres are available on the two main sites. Effective welfare advice and guidance are given through the student services sections. Two adult guidance officers, Connexions personal advisers, and other specialist support staff are available and well used. The academic help given by individual teachers to their students is good. There is effective tutorial support for students on vocational courses, where tutorials are more integral to the course as a whole. For example, in a productive group tutorial on a sport programme, good use was made of team-building exercises, and of contact with former students. Tutorials on academic courses are more variable in their quality and in the success with which they engage students' attention. There is no systematic way of evaluating the effectiveness of tutorials. Attendance is poor in a number of tutorial programmes and some students do not value these sessions. For example, some students expressed the view that the tutorials are mainly for the college's benefit and of little value to them. Individual interviews with students to monitor progress are more effective than group tutorials, although these can be hampered by poor use of individual learning targets and plans. There are good arrangements for reporting progress to students, parents/carers and employers.

38. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are effectively helped throughout their time at the college. Strong links with students' previous schools, parents/carers, social services and other agencies ensure good progression to the college and appropriate help when on courses. There is good pastoral support for these students, which is particularly noteworthy for students with profound

or multiple learning difficulties. Students identified as having dyslexia are assisted well, although currently there is a waiting list for assessment owing to staff shortages. The quality of the study support for students identified as needing additional help in literacy, numeracy or IT is not consistently good. The analysis of the numbers requiring this help has improved, but there is little evaluation of the effectiveness of the service. In horticulture the specific needs of individuals are identified clearly, recorded and made known to the teachers, who make good use of the information in lessons. In business studies courses and equine off-site courses, there are weak arrangements for providing the additional support.

39. Careers guidance is provided by personal advisers from the Connexions service. They guide students onto courses and assist those requiring help in making decisions when they are on college courses. These arrangements are effective, with both students and staff speaking highly of the services provided. Most schemes of work for tutorials in the college make reference to careers education and have sessions earmarked for this work. Owing to the inconsistencies in group tutorial practices it is not possible to be assured that this entitlement is provided to all students.

Leadership and management



40. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been successful management of change in the college, ably led by the principal. Following the merger of two former colleges in April 2001, the new institution has developed its own ethos. Governors and managers have drawn up clear strategic priorities for the college in consultation with staff, students and external partners. There is strong emphasis on the importance of the students' experience. Communication is generally effective and staff morale is good. As well as regular team meetings and newsletters, there are opportunities for staff to meet with members of the senior management team, both formally and informally.

41. Quality assurance procedures are leading to improvements in some areas. The proportion of lessons in which teaching was graded as good or better by inspectors is slightly above the national average. According to college data, students' retention and pass rates are broadly in line with or better than national averages. The college has carried out a thorough and realistic self-assessment, which has led to successful action to address weaknesses in some areas, for example in sociology and psychology, ICT, and languages. Staff development is well managed. It is well linked to college priorities and staff have good opportunities to update their skills.

42. However, the monitoring of performance is weaker in some areas and students' experiences are not always of a consistently good quality. Tutorials, the development of key skills and additional learning support all vary in quality, from good in some areas of the college, to poor in others. Good practice is effectively shared in some curriculum areas but not in others. There is insufficient observation of lessons taught by part-time teachers, for instance in care, business and foundation studies. The use of learning targets for students is not well established in some areas, particularly in the GCE AS and A-level provision. The management of the curriculum is good in visual and performing arts and media, ICT, leisure, travel, sport and recreation, and languages. In most other areas it is satisfactory. There are weaknesses in the management of care courses and some foundation programmes. Literacy and numeracy support is not sufficiently well co-ordinated across the college.

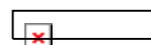
43. The college is developing its management information systems and this has been hampered by the difficulties of merging data from the two previous institutions. Some new systems have been put in place and levels of staffing improved. At the time of inspection the college's achievement of funded units against its targets had not yet been finalised for 2001/02. The college was predicting a shortfall, some of which it attributes partly to inadequacies in the college's and the LSC's information software.

44. The governing body monitors the college's progress against its objectives. The performance committee scrutinises self-assessment reports from curriculum areas. The remuneration committee carries out appraisals of performance against targets for senior postholders. The finance committee and the full board receive reports on the financial position of the college, although there is a need to strengthen professional financial skills on the corporation as a whole. The college's financial position is seriously adversely affected by repayment of debt following the merger. The ability of the college's financial plans to address this problem is heavily dependent on the future success of its accommodation and estates strategy, including the rationalisation of its estates. Managers pay attention to value for money. External consultants have worked with the college to compare their costs against similar colleges in the sector. They have identified some aspects where value for money might be improved. Issues include the small numbers in some classes and the need to rationalise accommodation.

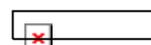
45. The college is strongly committed to work with external partners. There is a well-developed federation with the schools in Abingdon, leading to a wider and more flexible programme on offer to young people. Links are in place with schools in Witney and these are being developed further. The college is part of the national project to broaden the curriculum on offer to pupils aged 14 in the area. Provision is made for disadvantaged groups, such as those isolated in a rural setting or asylum seekers. Some of this provision is through franchised arrangements or within a partnership. There are some effective employer links, although the self-assessment report acknowledges that this is an area for further development in some curriculum areas. The college's training provider, Abingdon and Witney Training (AWT) manages E2E programmes through a 'Pathfinder' project.

46. Progress towards developing the college as an inclusive institution is satisfactory. Policies and procedures are in place to promote equality of opportunity and avoid discrimination. Governors and managers take account of changes in legislation in developing college strategy. Staff development has taken place on the implications of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. The college has produced a good race equality policy and plan, which it is beginning to implement. Further staff development is planned in relation to this. Data on students' retention and achievement are monitored by gender and ethnicity but there is no consistent action taken as a result. The college recruited an increased number of students with profound disabilities or learning difficulties in 2002/03. The self-assessment report noted some weaknesses, for example limited access for people with mobility difficulties at its Witney site, but arrangements are made to address individual needs where possible. The college identified the lack of systematic monitoring of teaching and learning materials in its self-assessment and has started to address this weakness. Active promotion of equal opportunities is not uniformly good in all subjects.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- high standard of students' experimental work

- high retention rates
- extensive and productive links with partner schools.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on GCE AS courses
- poor laboratory provision at Witney campus
- insufficient use of ICT in science.

Scope of provision

47. The college offers GCE AS and A-level courses in mathematics, biology, human biology, chemistry and environmental science. GCE AS and A-level physics, and GCE A-level mathematics are available to students through the partnership with local schools in Abingdon. The access to HE programme includes courses in biology and mathematics. GCSE mathematics is available.

Achievement and standards

48. Retention rates have been high or improving on mathematics and science GCE AS and A-level courses, on access courses and on GCSE mathematics courses. Pass rates in GCE AS mathematics and science have been low, with a low proportion of high grades. The exception is human biology, where the pass rate has improved since 2001. Pass rates at grades A*-C on GCSE mathematics courses have improved significantly. There is a good progression rate to HE by the students following the mathematics and science courses on the access programme. The results of the small numbers of students taking GCE A levels in science subjects and mathematics through the school partnership arrangements are broadly in line with national averages for students with similar prior attainment.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| GCSE mathematics | 2 | No. of starts | 265 | 222 | 152 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 87 | 87 |
| | | % pass rate | 29 | 31 | 59 |
| GCE AS mathematics | 3 | No. of starts | * | 30 | 36 |
| | | % retention | * | 68 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 28 | 22 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---------------|---|----|----|
| GCE AS human biology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 17 | 20 |
| | | % retention | * | 82 | 65 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 47 | 69 |
| GCE AS biology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 22 | 21 |
| | | % retention | * | 86 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 58 | 58 |
| GCE AS chemistry | 3 | No. of starts | * | 9 | 9 |
| | | % retention | * | 67 | 89 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 83 | 50 |

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

49. Most teaching is well planned and leads to effective learning. Practical laboratory work is often used effectively to promote learning in science. In most practical lessons, students showed good experimental and manipulative skills. For example, in a practical lesson in biology, the students were able by dissection to develop a good understanding of the working and functions of organs. Some practical lessons, however, are carried out at too slow a pace with students doing little more than carrying out simple instructions. Little use is made of IT in experimental work in science. Students, particularly adult students, question and participate well in lessons and value the teaching and support given them. They make lively contributions to class discussion. In one effective lesson, students of GCE AS mathematics were able to comment on and use a variety of sampling techniques following discussions based around their common experiences. The use of computers in an application of number lesson enabled students with a wide range of prior attainment to improve.

50. Teachers undertake much corrective marking and students appreciate the prompt return of marked work. On some courses, such as the access to HE programme, students have a clear idea of their progress. However, on GCE AS and A-level courses, they have no clear indication of the examination grades towards which they are working. Teachers and students have good working relationships, and teachers give time to support students outside normal lesson times. Teachers are suitably qualified and have the necessary knowledge and expertise for the courses they teach. Most have undertaken relevant staff development.

51. Some activities are hindered by poor facilities. Laboratories at both sites have good basic equipment, but do not contain the computers required for experimental work using data. The laboratories at the Abingdon campus have recently been refurbished, but the accommodation at the Witney campus for both mathematics and science is unattractive, making it more difficult for teachers to create an atmosphere which encourages learning.

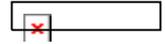
52. The range of courses meets the needs of students and is increased through the links with partnership schools. Courses provide good opportunities for progression to HE, both for students aged 16 to 18 and for mature students. Students obtain different levels of support and guidance from the tutorial programme, although most are aware of how to obtain more detailed advice when necessary.

Leadership and management

53. Annual course reviews play a central part in identifying and addressing weaknesses, and the processes are well managed by course leaders. These reviews form an integral part of the college self-assessment review. The provision made jointly by the college and partnership schools is well

co-ordinated. There is little use of data on students' achievements to indicate how they relate to their previous attainment, and on the achievements of students analysed by ethnicity or other factors. There are very small class sizes on some courses.

Land-based studies



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

Strengths

- good teaching in horticulture

- high retention and pass rates on sports turf and gardening courses

- good personal and learning support.

Weaknesses

- low pass rate on national diploma in animal care in 2002

- lack of achievement of qualification framework for horticultural work-based learners

- poor practical skills development for animal care and agriculture students.

Scope of provision

54. There are courses in horticulture, animal care, floristry and agriculture. Most students (70%) are taking courses in horticulture; 20% of students are on courses in animal care. Animal care students are mostly aged 16 to 18, on full-time courses and working towards the first and national diplomas. A full-time certificate course in agriculture started in the current year and has nine students. Thirteen students are working towards an NVQ level 2. Most horticulture learners are aged over 19. There are horticulture courses at levels 1, 2 and 3; these are taken mainly by amateur gardeners. Courses in amenity horticulture leading to NVQ qualifications include sports turf, landscape and decorative horticulture. Work-based learning has 57 trainees working towards foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships in horticulture, animal care and agricultural engineering. Horticulture and animal care trainees attend the college one day a week for off-the-job training. Work-based learners in agricultural engineering attend block courses at other colleges for off-the-job training. An entry level course has recently been introduced to help work-based learners to enter work. This programme

combines work experience with basic skills support and an NVQ level 1 qualification. Short courses are provided for industry and for leisure interest.

Achievement and standards

55. Pass and retention rates on NVQ sports turf courses are high. Adult students on gardening courses are successfully encouraged to take examinations; in the current year all students have entered. Last year, all students on the RHS certificate programme completed the course and pass rates were well above the national average. Pass rates on first diploma in animal care courses are mostly in line with national averages. The pass rate on the national diploma in animal care, which has to date only been completed by one cohort of students, was below average in 2002. The programme was severely disrupted for several weeks by the closure of the Warren Farm centre, due to foot and mouth disease.

56. Work-based learners have high pass rates in terms of NVQ awards, but horticulture trainees have not achieved their full qualifications framework, owing to failure in the area of key skills. By contrast, agricultural engineering trainees on work-based learning programmes, whose training is sub-contracted to another college, have good overall achievement in terms of their qualifications framework.

57. The standard of students' written work is good. On horticulture programmes, both written and practical work are very good. NVQ students have developed good portfolios of work. Adult students complete work of a particularly high standard. Practical work on animal care programmes is of a poor standard and students are working at too low a level. The practical work of students on agricultural courses is good, although the range of practical skills developed is narrow. The achievement of key skills qualifications has been poor on most programmes, but effective action has now been taken to improve this aspect. Students are now working well and are motivated by vocational work which integrates key skills. There have been good results in key skills tests taken in the current year.

A sample of retention and pass rates in land-based studies, 2000 to 2002

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| First diploma in animal care | 2 | No. of starts | 19 | 6 | 22 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 83 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 100 | 89 |
| NVQ sports turf amenity horticulture | 2 | No. of starts | 24 | 6 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 96 | 100 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| NVQ floristry | 2 | No. of starts | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 87 | 55 |
| | | % pass rate | 62 | 71 | 100 |
| NVQ horticulture (decorative) | 2 | No. of starts | 16 | 21 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 71 | 68 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 46 | 81 |
| RHS general certificate | 2 | No. of starts | 40 | 32 | 44 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 87 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 65 | 85 |
| National diploma in | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 18 |

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|---|---|----|
| animal care | % retention | * | * | 77 |
| | % pass rate | * | * | 71 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

58. Most teaching is satisfactory or good, and there is particularly good teaching in horticulture and for adult students. Lessons are well planned and have clear objectives. In most lessons, students are stimulated to achieve and are highly motivated. In horticulture, theory and practical teaching are very well linked. In a lesson on surveying, students measured and surveyed the playing field and produced scale drawings. Theory classes are well prepared and teachers use a wide range of teaching methods, supported by well-designed, interactive handouts and workbooks. In a revision session for a gardening course, students worked in pairs to test each other's knowledge using a variety of textbooks and a useful workbook. Work-based learners use experience from their workplaces very effectively during lessons.

59. In some agriculture and animal care lessons, teachers do not always take sufficient account of the wide range of students' ability in the class to ensure that all students are sufficiently engaged at the right level. The teaching of practical animal care is weak. Protocols are set for the safe operation of the animal care unit, but not observed. For instance, a 'traffic light' system for indicating the safety of handling particular animals is in place, but is not used on the outdoor unit. Students do not wear any overalls, although the student handbook specifies this requirement. In a lesson on handling reptiles, the space was too small for all eight students in the group to see a demonstration of catching and handling a snake. The method of catching the harmless snake did not help students to become confident enough to touch or handle the reptile for themselves. Students in agriculture undertake good practical work, but are not regularly involved in the conduct of realistic agricultural duties, and this has an adverse effect on their practical skill development.

60. Horticulture learners make good use of gardens and specialist areas such as poly tunnels and potting shed. Animal welfare is good, but the animal care unit does not provide a wide enough range of species or number of animals, and standards of housing are poor. Agriculture students make good use of practical work opportunities on local farms but do not have sufficient access to a range of animals. The college's use of the tenanted farm is restricted by its limited range of enterprises, and by the lack of any formal agreement to use the farm for students' practical work. Library and learning resources are well organised and up to date. There have been recent improvements in books and computers at the Warren Farm centre, which are well used by learners.

61. Students undergo thorough initial assessments of their key skills and literacy and numeracy, and this assessment is used to agree their ILPs and the arrangements for learning support. There is some poor planning of assessment for students on the national diploma course in animal care, with insufficient assessment of prior attainment and of skills developed during the early part of their course. There is little effective practical assessment for students on the national diploma course in animal care and the national certificate course in agriculture. There are good arrangements for the internal verification of assessment on horticulture courses, but the system for animal care courses lacks rigour. There is insufficient check on the quality of assessment and marking. Good evidence is used from work experience in the assessment of work-based trainees. There are missed opportunities to assess the skills of full-time students on work experience. Portfolios demonstrating the competence of work-based learners show good records of the monitoring of learners' progress and demonstrate a range of assessment methods.

62. The range of courses for amateur gardeners is good and relevant courses are available at the Abingdon, Witney and Warren Farm centres. The full-time national certificate in horticulture, which is in its first year, provides good progression for keen gardeners. The certificate course in agriculture was introduced this year in response to pressure from local farmers. Work-based learners have very

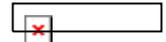
supportive employers. Enrichment activities include visits to industry and relevant events, and there is a European exchange opportunity for agriculture students. There is a lack of provision for part-time learning in animal care, and no current provision for 'companion animal' courses.

63. There is good personal support for students from staff and the college's support services. Students value highly the support available to them, and enjoy the pleasant environment and informality of this small rural campus. The individual needs of students are identified and learning styles are adjusted to meet specific needs. There is good learning support with effective arrangements for support in literacy and numeracy. Reviews for work-based learners involve the employer and trainee and set clear targets for progression. All students receive regular, well-planned and recorded tutorials.

Leadership and management

64. The curriculum is well organised. Schemes of work are detailed and lesson plans have clear objectives. Work-based learning is well managed and the monitoring of learners' progress is rigorous. Students are given good information on equality of opportunity and health and safety during an effective induction. There is strong involvement of industry in most areas and there is no formal arrangement for this. There is good communication with both employers and students. Some staff teaching on animal care courses lack industrial experience and there are insufficient qualified and experienced staff to enable the college to use the dog-grooming parlour.

Equine studies



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

Strengths

- good standard of students' theoretical work

- good teaching and achievement of key skills

- high retention and pass rates on some courses.

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching of practical skills

- lack of some resources

- ineffective diagnosis of, and support for, students' basic skills needs on off-site courses.

Scope of provision

65. The equine school has 31 full-time students aged 16 to 18 on the national diploma in horse management, based at the Witney site. These students also take NVQ levels 1 and 2 in horse care in their first year, and British Horse Society (BHS) examinations in their second year as additional qualifications. There are no full-time level 1 or 2 courses, although some lower level students are taught within the national diploma course. There are 12 off-site, privately owned, equine yards which have a total of 149 students funded directly by the college, who study on flexible weekly attendance programmes over one or two years. There are over 120 students taking NVQ courses currently, mainly in horse care, although some are in racehorse care. A further 30 students are taking BHS or national certificate courses. Most students on the off-site provision are aged 19 or over.

Achievement and standards

66. Retention and pass rates on most courses are high and above national averages, and have been particularly high on the national diploma course. Pass rates on the two-year NVQ level 2 and level 3 courses improved from 31% and 19% in 2000, to 64% and 86% respectively in 2002. The NVQ level 1 course has maintained high retention and pass rates for three years. Pass rates on the BHS stage one course improved from 26% in 1999/2000 to 64% in 2002. Provision has been removed from 15 off-site centres where retention and achievement were unsatisfactory. Standards of achievement are not as good on the higher level BHS courses. Retention on the BHS stage 2 course has fallen and pass rates on the BHS stage 3 course were poor for two years. All students aged 16 to 18 took key skills qualifications in 2001/02 and pass rates were 100%.

67. The standards of students' theoretical work are high. Written work is detailed and well presented. Students demonstrate good knowledge of their subject and use appropriate illustrations. They take part in presentations to their group and demonstrate good communication skills. In lessons, students contribute sensibly and knowledgeably, showing good understanding of the technical and scientific areas of their subject. By contrast, students' practical skills are less well developed. Higher level students are not encouraged to take on additional practical responsibilities or review and evaluate their practical skills. More experienced students do not always progress at a pace which makes best use of their prior experiences. Students are not effectively encouraged to achieve the high standards of practical work and riding which will enable them to succeed in higher level equitation qualifications.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---------------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| BHS | 1 | No. of starts | 57 | 23 | 11 |
| | | % retention | 67 | 100 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 26 | 48 | 64 |
| NVQ horse care (one year) | 1 | No. of starts | 54 | 76 | 72 |
| | | % retention | 78 | 91 | 89 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 92 | 89 |
| NVQ horse care (one year) | 2 | No. of starts | 68 | 81 | 82 |
| | | % retention | 79 | 88 | 60 |
| | | % pass rate | 87 | 92 | 73 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| City and Guilds national certificate in horse management | 2 | No. of starts | 21 | 10 | * |
| | | % retention | 85 | 80 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 86 | * |
| BHS | 2 | No. of starts | 20 | 9 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 89 | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | 7 | 38 | 78 |
| National diploma in horse management | 3 | No. of starts | 18 | 14 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 71 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 86 |
| NVQ horse care and management | 3 | No. of starts | 17 | 7 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 76 | 100 | 79 |
| | | % pass rate | 31 | 100 | 64 |
| BHS | 3 | No. of starts | 20 | 12 | * |
| | | % retention | 95 | 67 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 26 | 25 | * |

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

68. Off-site courses provide good opportunities, offering a range of study patterns to suit students' differing needs and backgrounds. Additional practical experience is often arranged outside of the course to give extra experience. Students are able to carry out other work. Attendance is rigorously monitored and recorded to ensure minimum hours are met.

69. The teaching of theory is satisfactory or better. Teachers set stimulating, vocationally relevant assignments. Students respond well and contribute effectively to lessons. Most teachers use a variety of methods to check students' progress, such as the use of group and individual questioning, the completion of handouts, and discussions of students' experience. Links are made to practical aspects of their courses. Occasionally teachers do not fully explain technical terms or check that all students are able to make notes or spell difficult words. Tasks designed to develop students' key skills are effectively integrated with learning programmes. Portfolios of evidence for NVQs are well organised. Students are clear about their progress. Teachers mark work promptly and provide written comments, which are particularly helpful on the national diploma course. Some tutors also give additional verbal feedback to students.

70. Some teaching of practical stable management and equine duties is unsatisfactory. There is little testing of related knowledge and errors in routine procedures, such as grooming, the use of protective clothing and health and safety precautions, are not always corrected. Assessment sheets for practical activities are not always promptly completed. The teaching of riding skills in some off-site centres is weak. Some teachers do not teach to current equitation standards. Students are not encouraged to think for themselves, for example, about position corrections. The organisation of groups for routine duties are not sufficiently structured and less able students sometimes just watch more experienced students.

71. Pastoral support is good. Students appreciate the help they receive from tutors. Tutorials on college courses are carried out satisfactorily. Students are sure of their goals and these are monitored by the course tutor. On the off-site provision, some teachers fail to set and monitor adequate targets for their students. However, students have clear career or course progression aims

and staff give good informal advice. There is a need for more advice about entering BHS examinations.

72. There is insufficient promotion of learning support to help learners succeed. The key skills and basic skills of all students aged 16 to 18 are effectively screened on entry, to identify their support needs. A co-ordinator with equine experience gives students, in college and off site, frequent help to ensure they achieve their learning goals. However, older students and those taking courses above level 1 receive less help with their studies. Some students are nervous of being 'singled out' by asking for extra help. Some more able students voluntarily help struggling students in class.

73. Classrooms and other practical areas are satisfactorily equipped with overhead projectors, white boards, and models. However, some classrooms lack effective heating and students wear their coats. The commercial stud at Witney provides a realistic working environment with good opportunities for students to experience work with brood mares, young stock and a stallion. There is a small indoor riding school, but it has a sand base. In wet, freezing or windy conditions, it is unsafe to ride and lessons have been cancelled twice this year. Teachers provide alternative learning sessions but students' progress is affected. Off-site centres have few computer resources, with no Internet access at off-site centres. Often only the students aged 16 to 18 taking key skills are able to access the laptop computer brought when the key skills co-ordinator visits. There is no planned allocation of books or other learning materials to out-centres and access is limited to the personal supply belonging to yard managers. Many centres are long distances from the main college and no alternative provision is in place.

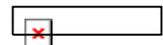
74. The arrangements for the internal verification of assessment are satisfactory on the national diploma course. On the NVQ course, action plans arising from internal verification are not routinely followed up. There is planning of internal verification, but this does not detail coverage of all assessors, or ensure effective sampling across the range of assessment methods.

Leadership and management

75. Management of off-site provision is generally good. Communication with the college is effective with planned meetings, workshops and detailed information provided. Staff regularly visit the centres which are expected to achieve good standards. The range of courses has increased the opportunity for working students to access study from level 1 to level 4. There are few opportunities for study at level 1 and 2 in college. There is a first diploma course planned to start in 2003/04.

76. The self-assessment report for equine studies identified many of the strengths and weaknesses noted in the inspection. However, some lesson observations were insufficiently rigorous and actions identified for improvement were not always written down or revisited at subsequent observations. Therefore, some poor practical teaching had not been improved.

Engineering



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

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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates

- much good teaching
- high level of individual support for students
- good ICT resources and classrooms
- good liaison with employers.

Weaknesses

- late achievement of awards for national diploma in engineering students
- insufficient technician support in some practical workshop sessions
- inadequate management of work-based motor vehicle assessments
- low retention and pass rates for engineering and motor vehicle work-based learners
- poor promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace.

Scope of provision

77. Courses are offered in mechanical, electronic and motor vehicle engineering for full-time and part-time students, and are available at levels 1, 2 and 3. Mechanical engineering courses include production engineering, fabrication and welding. There are currently 74 students on engineering courses. Motor vehicle courses include a general foundation course, vehicle mechanical and electronic systems, and vehicle maintenance and service replacement. There are currently six students on a full-time motor vehicle course. Electrical and electronic courses include a national certificate in electronics and a part-time computer-aided design course. There are currently 40 students on these courses. The college offers foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships, and NVQ training in engineering and motor vehicle. These students are recruited by the college's training agency and there are currently 71 engineering and 74 motor vehicle learners on the programmes. Courses are taught on two sites and, additionally, some work-based students receive training at another FE college.

Achievement and standards

78. There are high pass rates on most courses, such as the NVQ level 1 course in maintenance and service replacement, the NVQ level 2 course in engineering manufacture and the level 3 basic training of engineering craftsmen certificate course. On the national diploma and certificate courses, pass rates are at or near national averages. However, some students on the national diploma course do not complete assignments on time and are still submitting work after completion of the course of study. Of the 11 students completing the intermediate GNVQ course in engineering, none achieved the award. This was owing to a misinterpretation of the requirements in terms of the criteria for passing courses starting in the year 2000. Action has been taken to avoid a recurrence of this situation and to assist the students concerned. Retention rates are high on the NVQ level 2 engineering manufacture course, and are below national averages on the national diploma and certificate courses.

79. There are low retention and pass rates for work-based students. In the years 2000/01 and 2001/02, 80% of students left without completing their awards. Of the 13 learners starting foundation modern apprenticeships in the year 2000/01, none have achieved the level 2 NVQ qualifications. Only one student was still in training at the time of the inspection. In the same year, of the 26 students who started training leading to NVQs, two achieved the qualification at levels 1 and 2; only one student was still in training during the inspection. Only 40% of foundation modern apprentices in engineering achieved a level 2 NVQ, and no students achieved their apprenticeship framework. Additionally, 64% of advanced modern apprentices in the year 2000/01 left without achieving either the NVQ or the apprenticeship framework.

80. The standard of work produced by students is generally good. In a minority of weaker lessons, however, the standard of their work was less than satisfactory and students had little pride in what they had produced.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| NVQ vehicle maintenance -service replacement | 1 | No. of starts | 24 | 16 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 56 | 58 |
| | | % pass rate | 67 | 89 | 100 |
| GNVQ intermediate engineering | 2 | No. of starts | 10 | 11 | 11 |
| | | % retention | 90 | 82 | 73 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 0 |
| NVQ engineering manufacture | 2 | No. of starts | 17 | * | 14 |
| | | % retention | 94 | * | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | * | 92 |
| Basic training of engineering craftsmen certificate | 3 | No. of starts | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 100 | 93 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 100 | 100 |
| National diploma in engineering | 3 | No. of starts | 24 | 33 | 24 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 79 | 58 |
| | | % pass rate | 93 | 84 | 80 |
| National certificate in engineering | 3 | No. of starts | 59 | 35 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 71 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 71 | 59 | 63 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

81. There is much teaching that is good or better. Teachers are well prepared and all lessons are well planned, with detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Previous lessons are routinely appraised and any identified needs of individual students that may affect learning are clearly recorded. Learning materials, including assignments, are well presented and reproduced. All learning materials are also posted on the college intranet. Good use is made of ICT in many lessons. In some electronic engineering sessions, complex computer programs are used to simulate electronic circuitry. There are clear explanations of topics and teachers use questions effectively to test students' understanding. There is good practical teaching. Students are able to use a range of machines, hand tools and testing equipment, following comprehensive demonstrations by the teacher. There were few examples of imaginative activities that engaged students wholeheartedly.

82. There is insufficient technician support for one practical workshop session. As a result, in the workshop sessions observed, the teacher spent much of his time issuing tools and other equipment. This made it difficult for the teacher to supervise the group effectively. It reduced the time available for practical demonstrations and for supporting students with their tasks. There are good arrangements for the internal verification of assessment and the quality of assignments.

83. The tutorial system works well and provides students with the opportunity to discuss a range of issues that may affect their learning. Tutors have a good working knowledge of local engineering companies and are able to give students relevant careers advice. Tutors also use the college careers staff and the Connexions service. Individual support is also given during lessons. Teachers are aware of the wide ability range of some groups and try to ensure that weaker students receive additional help to enable them to progress satisfactorily.

84. There are good specialist facilities in engineering. Students work on modern computers equipped with industrial standard software in mechanical and electronic engineering. Classrooms are of a high standard, with modern furniture and suitable teaching aids. Machines in the workshop facilities are adequate, although some require updating to meet current industrial standards.

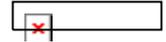
85. Students benefit from the support and guidance of their employers. Some engineering companies encourage students to attend college full time in their first year and continue their learning to level 3 and above on a day-release basis subsequently. In one company, there are opportunities for students who successfully complete their apprenticeship framework to progress on to higher level or degree courses. Another employer has made a significant investment in modern computer-controlled equipment which enables learners to develop their skills and meet the requirements of their NVQ. Employers understand the requirements of students' programmes. Good relationships have been made with many companies over a long period of time.

Leadership and management

86. College-based courses are well managed. There are good links with local industry. Engineering staff assist companies in developing the skills of their workers. Companies speak highly of the communications they receive from the college. There is effective quality assurance including a programme of lesson observations. There is clear direction given by the manager to staff. A strategy to improve students' attendance has been successfully implemented on most courses. There is some inadequate management of work-based motor vehicle programmes. Roles and responsibilities are sometimes unclear. An example of this is in the area of key skills, where there is some uncertainty of how they are to be developed for work-based students. This has contributed to the low achievement of apprenticeship frameworks in engineering. Learners do not always use the opportunities available, for example during theory sessions, to gather evidence for their key skills portfolios for NVQ qualifications at the college.

87. The motor vehicle staff are unable, with their present staffing levels, to carry out the number of work-based assessments now required by the awarding body. Training programmes do not adequately promote students' understanding of equality of opportunity. During the frequent progress reviews, learners are invited to comment on equal opportunities but few do so. The engineering self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors, but there was inadequate evaluation of work-based learning.

Business and professional studies



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on intermediate GNVQ and professional programmes

- much good and very good teaching

- wide range of professional programmes

- good management of professional and business programmes.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on AVCE and business administration programmes

- ineffective management of key skills.

Scope of provision

88. There is a satisfactory range of full-time business and administration courses, principally for students aged 16 to 18, and a wide number of professional and management courses for adult students. At the time of the inspection there were 1,253 students, of whom nearly 1,100 were adults. There were 31 learners on work-based programmes taking qualifications in accounting and administration. The range of full-time courses includes GCE AS and A level, GNVQ, AVCE and certificate programmes. Professional courses include accounting, personnel practice, marketing, credit management and management. There are also some HE and commercial courses.

Achievement and standards

89. There are high pass rates on many programmes including those leading to the intermediate GNVQ, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) certificate in personnel practice, and the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) foundation award. The intermediate GNVQ pass rate is significantly above the national average, and the pass rates on AAT and CIPD courses are consistently above national averages. There are low pass rates on the AVCE business and also on business administration programmes. There is good progression through the different levels of AAT programmes.

90. Students were able to relate theory to their own practical experience or to business case studies and scenarios. In one lesson, students discussed business ethics, using real case studies to distinguish between ethical and unethical behaviour. The quality of written work is good. In one assignment there were examples of effective critical analysis and excellent presentation skills on business planning.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| Certificate in administration | 1/2 | No. of starts | 6 | 15 | 20 |
| | | % retention | ** | 87 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | ** | ** | 24 |
| AAT foundation | 2 | No. of starts | 82 | 72 | 58 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 88 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 94 | 82 |
| GNVQ intermediate business | 2 | No. of starts | 19 | 10 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 63 | 90 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 78 | 83 |
| GNVQ advanced business | 3 | No. of starts | 50 | 43 | * |
| | | % retention | 84 | 86 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 95 | 92 | * |
| AVCE | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 25 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 32 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 40 |
| GCE A-level business | 3 | No. of starts | 30 | 32 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 87 | 75 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 72 | 81 | 75 |
| CIPD certificate in personnel practice | 3 | No. of starts | 13 | 19 | 29 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 89 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 92 | 100 | 100 |

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

* course not running

** data not reliable

Quality of education and training

91. Teaching was good or very good in most of the lessons observed. Lessons are well planned and managed, with clear objectives shared with the students. A variety of appropriate teaching methods and activities, such as case studies, individual and group work, and discussions are used to promote learning and to maintain students' interest. Teachers effectively checked students' understanding by the use of questions. For example, in one lesson, students practised the negotiating skills used in personnel work by means of role play. In a number of lessons, discussion was stimulated by the use of video clips. Students have good access to computers which they use to prepare practical work-related activities. Intermediate GNVQ and AVCE students take part in external business-related activities in addition to their main programme. Some able students were not always effectively stimulated by the level of work. There is insufficient development of students' key skills and planning to incorporate them into general lessons. Many students have little regard for key skills and dedicated key skills lessons are often poorly attended.

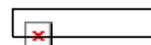
92. There is some good assessment and verification practice on the AAT programmes. There is insufficient written feedback to students on their work and how it can be improved. Tutorial support for students is good on GNVQ and AVCE programmes, with regular group and individual tutorials as well as workshop sessions. There is poor use of individual learning targets for students. Goals are too general and the timescales for achieving them are too vague, for instance on GCE AS and A2 programmes and administration programmes. There is regular feedback to parents and employers. Students on GNVQ, AVCE and management and professional programmes expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support from teachers, and general satisfaction with the college and their courses.

93. Some business studies classrooms are particularly well equipped with access to computers, large monitors and interactive whiteboards. The computer rooms used by business administration students are poorly designed with badly positioned visual display units and keyboards. A small number of business studies rooms are too small to accommodate the size of classes. Staff are suitably qualified, although some lack recent relevant industrial experience or professional development. Students have access to an appropriate range of learning materials. Although there is an adequate number of business and management books in the learning resource centre, many are out of date and there are few journals.

Leadership and management

94. Business and professional studies programmes are provided through three schools of the college. Standards of management vary between the three. In one school, managers provide clear guidance on the standards of teaching required and monitor it through schemes of work, lesson plans, use of learning materials and lesson observations. There are quarterly meetings to review and carry out detailed course planning by the head of school. In the other two schools there is little monitoring or quality assurance of the work of part-time teachers. Across all three schools there is little monitoring of the effectiveness of tutorials or of how key skills are taught and assessed.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- much good teaching

- high pass rates on many courses

- o high retention rates on most courses
- o good resources for learning.

Weaknesses

- o inadequate stimulation for more able learners
- o lack of enrichment activities.

Scope of provision

95. Full-time courses in ICT and computing at intermediate and advanced levels are offered at the main college campuses at Abingdon and Witney. Most of the students recruited to the full-time courses are male and aged 16 to 18. A variety of part-time IT courses ranging from entry level to HE are available. IT training for adults takes place at the main campuses and in a range of community locations. These include IT learning centres at Didcot and Carterton, training in village halls and other venues. There is a wide range of popular courses which attract over 3,000 enrolments.

Achievement and standards

96. The pass and retention rates on IT courses are high. Courses with very high retention rates in 2001/02 included the intermediate GNVQ ICT, the ECDL course, and computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) award. There were high pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ course in ICT, the City and Guilds 726 course, and the ECDL.

97. Students work diligently in class developing IT skills. They are able to share ideas and exhibit good teamwork. Students new to IT make rapid progress, developing competence and confidence. Portfolios of work are well organised and many are of a high standard. AVCE students are competently using advanced software tools for designing databases.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| City and Guilds certificate in computer applications (short course) | 1 | No. of starts | 54 | 178 | 74 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 78 | 61 |
| | | % pass rate | 58 | 84 | 96 |
| CLAIT (short course) | 1 | No. of starts | 610 | 538 | 283 |
| | | % retention | 97 | 95 | 92 |
| | | % pass rate | 63 | 69 | 59 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| GNVQ intermediate IT | 2 | No. of starts | 36 | 42 | 44 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 90 | 98 |
| | | % pass rate | 97 | 68 | 88 |
| ECDL | 2 | No. of starts | 18 | 42 | 32 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 88 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 94 | 86 | 75 |
| Integrated business technology (IBT) II (short) | 2 | No. of starts | 112 | 146 | 47 |
| | | % retention | 98 | 93 | 89 |
| | | % pass rate | 52 | 57 | 60 |
| AVCE ICT | 3 | No. of starts | * | 33 | 83 |
| | | % retention | * | 85 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 96 | 82 |

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

98. Teaching is consistently good, although few lessons observed were very good or outstanding. Teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to gain students' interest. Students value the quality of teaching and lessons are very well attended. There are good quality curriculum resources, many available in electronic form on the college's intranet. Tutors give good individual support to students in well-organised workshop sessions. Students are inducted into workshops and given initial training in groups before working individually. This is an effective system. Teachers make clear presentations and develop topics carefully, making effective use of questioning to check students' understanding. In a lesson on network topologies, after a powerpoint presentation by the teacher, on-line learning materials were used by students to check and consolidate their understanding. Students worked in groups and produced posters outlining the key points of the different topologies. The students worked very hard to achieve all required of them in a short time and collaborated well. In another good lesson, the teacher created an informal environment for adults, who made considerable progress in their word processing skills, and learned with enthusiasm and much fun.

99. Teachers assist the slower learners well, but often do not provide adequately stimulating activities for more able students. In some advanced level lessons, activities are not sufficiently demanding and do not provide scope for additional tasks for students who complete the work quickly. Within one otherwise good programming lesson, students were not encouraged to explore different ways of solving problems. The lack of a 'help' facility relating to the Visual Basic programming language on the network inhibits students' ability to work independently.

100. The learning support needs of full-time students are assessed on entry and support is provided, where necessary. Effective arrangements are in place to meet some of the requirements of individual learners. For example, a visually impaired student has been provided with a larger monitor, and the desktop settings for the network account have been customised to present a clearer image with larger characters. Teachers have also changed the colour of the marker pens used for lessons where the student is involved. Teachers mark students' work effectively and helpful written comments indicate how students could improve their performance. Vocational courses feature well-constructed assignments with clear assessment criteria and students know what is required to achieve particular grades. Personal tutors on full-time courses know their students well. They regularly review students' progress but little use is made of calculations of expected grades to set individual learning targets.

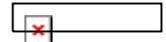
101. There is a good range of provision to meet the needs of the community in terms of levels of study, methods of tuition and range of locations, in order to attract people who might not otherwise have entered FE. There is a lack of enrichment activities to enhance students' learning and most courses do not make use of work experience. There are some limited links with industry but these are being developed through a successful bid to become a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in ICT. The CoVE specialises in IT system support and covers the installation and maintenance of computer hardware and software, and networking technology.

102. Teachers have good technical knowledge and are well qualified. Curriculum resources are good and support learning well. There is good computing equipment, such as multimedia projectors and large monitors, in every computer room on the main campuses. Some of the accommodation is small with little desk space available for the students to work on. There are well-stocked libraries, although some of the books at the Abingdon campus are obsolete.

Leadership and management

103. There is good management of this large and widespread provision, which has coped with considerable change in recent years. Schemes of work and lesson plans are carefully planned and used. The process of self-assessment is thorough and appropriate action is taken to make improvements. Quality assurance procedures, including internal verification, provide effective monitoring.

Leisure, travel, sport and recreation



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- much good and very good teaching

- good facilities for sports courses

- effective tutorial support.

Weaknesses

- lack of progression opportunities for some students

- o lack of a broad range of occupational qualifications.

Scope of provision

104. The college offers a range of courses in leisure, travel, sport and recreation. Almost all students at the main college sites study full time and are aged 16 to 18. Approximately 89 full-time students enrolled in 2002/03. All the courses are at intermediate and advanced levels. The full-time level 2 courses lead to the intermediate GNVQ in leisure and tourism and the first diploma in science (sports studies). At level 3, students can study for AVCE awards in travel and tourism, and leisure and recreation, or the national diploma in sport and exercise science. The college has entered into franchise agreements with leisure centres which provide part-time coaching awards. There are also some short courses provided by the college available to full-time students, including two sports governing body awards.

Achievement and standards

105. There are high pass rates on courses in leisure, travel, sport and recreation. In 1999/2000, retention rates on most courses were high. These declined between 2000 and 2002, with some low rates on level 2 and level 3 courses. During 2002, a new assessment and tutorial support process was introduced, which has significantly improved retention on these courses. Retention rates for the courses currently running are very high. The standard of students' work on most courses is at, or above, expected levels.

106. There is a broad range of ability amongst students, demonstrated in practical and theoretical sports lessons. Some students have well-developed planning and organisational skills. Under the supervision of the teaching staff, these students take responsibility for arranging and providing services to the college and wider community. Students on travel courses give advice to clients of the college travel office, and sports students provide a fitness service for patients of the local health trust. In addition, sports students lead weekly sports sessions for children attending local schools.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism | 2 | No. of starts | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 70 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 89 | 100 | 100 |
| First diploma in science (sports studies) | 2 | No. of starts | 8 | 11 | * |
| | | % retention | 100 | 91 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 100 | * |
| First diploma in sport | 2 | No. of starts | * | * | 14 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 89 |
| GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism | 3 | No. of starts | 10 | 23 | * |
| | | % retention | 90 | 83 | * |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | * |
| AVCE travel and tourism | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 19 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 47 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|----|----|-----|
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
| National diploma in applied science (sport studies) | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 17 | 26 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 76 | 62 |
| | | % pass rate | 91 | 92 | 88 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

107. Teaching is of a consistently high standard. It was good or very good in all the lessons observed. Teaching programmes are well planned. Teachers successfully gain and hold the interest of students, motivating and encouraging them to learn. They are enthusiastic and make good use of students' questions and contributions to develop themes in lessons. Teachers use work in pairs and groups, and individual work, to good effect. They use relevant industrial visits, together with work placements, to enrich the learning and experience of students. Most of the teaching of key skills is successfully integrated within the vocational work of full-time courses. Travel and sports services, planned and provided by students, significantly enhance their learning.

108. There are good sports facilities which are effectively used by teachers in practical lessons. However, the large sports hall and the fitness facility both have long periods during each week when they are not used. The college misses the opportunity to provide a wider range of sport and fitness activities and qualifications. Resources for travel courses are satisfactory. There is good availability of computers in the classrooms and the learning resource centre, and teachers make appropriate use of computers in their teaching. Teachers are appropriately qualified and have appropriate industrial experience. Full-time and part-time staff regularly undergo staff development to develop their vocational and teaching skills.

109. Tutors provide very regular and highly effective individual support, much appreciated by the students. They monitor students' progress and advise them about their assignments. Initial assessment of students' prior attainment is used to set appropriate learning targets at the start of their courses. These targets are regularly reviewed by teachers in discussion with students. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Feedback to students is both constructive and timely.

110. There is a lack of progression opportunities for some students. The college provides entry level courses which include sport and leisure studies. There are no level 1 courses for students who successfully complete entry level courses. A small number of students currently on level 2 courses would be more suited to level 1 courses. The range of occupational qualifications offered by the college is narrow. Additional qualifications available for college-based sport students are mainly related to general sports leadership. Part-time sports qualifications are offered by franchise partners in some of the community locations. The college does not offer any part-time or additional qualifications in travel. Some students are not on their preferred course as this is no longer being offered. Several courses recruit low numbers of students.

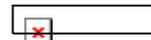
111. The teaching staff have made beneficial links with local community organisations such as schools and the local health trust. Both travel and sport students make regular visits to local, regional and national employers. Employers also visit the college to talk to students about their organisations.

Leadership and management

112. Teachers, the curriculum leader and manager work effectively together. The teaching teams operate well and there is effective informal communication, which is enhanced by regular meetings. There is a strong team-working ethos. There is a standardised approach to individual course management, which is monitored and well supported by the head of school and the curriculum

leader. This includes the maintenance of a course file, a common approach to schemes of work and lesson plans, and the provision of tutorial support. The self-assessment report identified the weakness of poor retention on AVCE courses and effective action has been taken to remedy the problem.

Care and counselling



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

Strengths

- good individual support for learners

- high standards of work by adult students

- effective use of students' work placement experience in theory lessons.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates

- low pass rates on some courses

- lack of access to IT facilities in lessons.

Scope of provision

113. The college offers provision in childcare, health, social care and counselling. The provision is managed in two different schools of study and across two sites. Childcare and education provision includes the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate with 12 students, and a national diploma in early years with 43 students. There are a number of part-time courses for adults, including the CACHE diploma in pre-school practice and an NVQ in early years, which is shared with a group of modern apprentices undertaking work-based learning. The health and social care provision comprises the AVCE programme offered to 21 full-time students on one site, and the NVQ in domestic, residential and day care at levels 2 and 3 for part-time students. There is a programme for adults wishing to enter nurse training and HE, which has 48 students. A recent development to this programme is a level 2 course which prepares students for the diploma in health care, developed in partnership with the Oxfordshire NHS Trust and Oxford Brookes

University. There is a programme in basic counselling skills and a certificate in counselling course, both of which are popular evening courses with good progression to study at HE or into further practice training.

Achievement and standards

114. Retention and pass rates on the counselling and access courses have been mainly good for several years. Retention and pass rates on other courses have generally declined over the past three years, notably on the foundation and intermediate GNVQ programmes, which have been discontinued. The one-year level 2 CACHE course has the highest retention rate of the full-time courses. Retention rates on the national diploma and AVCE courses were low in 2002.

115. Students are attentive in lessons. They work effectively in groups and are responsive to teachers' questions. Their assessed work is of an appropriate standard for the course. Full-time students' attendance at lessons is good. A wide range of relevant work experience placements prepares students well for employment. Students draw effectively on their work in these placements to support their learning. Relatively few students progress to HE.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| CACHE certificate in childcare and education | 2 | No. of starts | * | 8 | 16 |
| | | % retention | * | 88 | 69 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 71 | 91 |
| GNVQ advanced health and social care | 3 | No. of starts | 41 | 23 | 29 |
| | | % retention | 65 | 61 | 52 |
| | | % pass rate | 96 | 86 | 80 |
| BTEC national diploma in early years | 3 | No. of starts | 38 | 31 | 17 |
| | | % retention | 74 | 71 | 42 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 73 | 71 |
| NCFE certificate in counselling | 3 | No. of starts | 36 | 21 | 20 |
| | | % retention | 78 | 76 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 96 | 100 | 62 |
| Access to HE in healthcare | 3 | No. of starts | 8 | 18 | 14 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 83 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 80 | 80 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

116. Schemes of work were well matched to course requirements. The quality of the teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons. The better teaching engaged the students' enthusiasm and inspired them to extend their knowledge and improve their performance. All teachers used questioning techniques to engage the students and make them think for themselves. The more skilful teachers succeeded in enabling students to analyse concepts and relate theory to practice. Examples included a successful lesson on the access to HE programme which focused on obedience and authority, and a childcare lesson on security issues in a nursery. In some lessons a

lack of careful planning meant that opportunities were lost to encourage students to analyse issues in depth. The students' use of IT for research and presentations is actively encouraged, although there are no computers in classrooms.

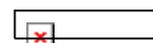
117. Assignments and other assessments are carefully designed to cover course requirements. These are conscientiously marked and there is effective internal verification of assessment. Feedback to students is not always given consistently, and in a few cases is inadequate to help students improve their work. The scheduling of assignments sometimes results in too many being set at the same time. Students' progress is carefully monitored and individual students are well supported. The use of individual learning targets for students is not established on all courses. Where they are used, some teachers' lack of constructive feedback impedes their effectiveness. There is a good awareness of matters relating to equality of opportunity amongst staff and students.

118. The staff have relevant vocational experience and qualifications, and participate regularly in staff development. Almost all staff have teaching qualifications, but only one person has had any industrial secondment in the last three years.

Leadership and management

119. Curriculum management has been affected by staff illness. As a result, monthly team meetings are led by a senior manager. Course teams meet twice termly to discuss students' progress. Where appropriate, student representatives are invited to meetings. Overall, there is a lack of management and direction of the curriculum across care courses. Teachers currently plan their units of study in isolation; previous attempts to develop joint approaches and integrate the content of units have not been successful. Teachers do not relate their unit content to the rest of the programme. There is no co-ordination of the approach to tutorial support, target setting for students and key skills. This has led to different standards of entitlement for learners in these areas. Good practice is not being identified and disseminated. There is no clearly defined strategy to address the decline in retention. The self-assessment report did not identify or address some of the key weaknesses in the curriculum area.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on the national diploma in performing arts course
- high quality two-dimensional work in art and design
- high quality performance work in the first diploma in performing arts
- much good and very good teaching

- wide range of enrichment opportunities available within courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass and/or retention rates on GCE AS and A-level courses
- lack of storage space for three-dimensional artwork.

Scope of provision

120. The college offers a wide range of courses. There are 142 students on national diploma courses in performing arts, media, fine art and graphics. A further 62 students are taking the diploma in foundation studies in art and design, including 9 who are part time. Just over half of the students are aged 16 to 18. There is an intermediate GNVQ media course and the college has recently introduced a first diploma in performing arts. There is no level 2 provision in art and design and no full-time level 1 courses. When lower level courses have been offered in the past, take-up has been low. There is a diverse range of part-time courses in the day and evening. Over the last few years, GCE AS and A-level subjects have been available, mainly as additional courses for national diploma students. Students have met with mixed success on these courses, with the result that the college has ceased to offer GCE AS art and design. In 2003 the college is introducing courses in music technology and a technical course in performing arts.

Achievement and standards

121. There are high pass rates on diploma courses, but GCE AS and A-level retention and pass rates vary, and are sometimes well below national averages. The pass rate in the national diploma in performing arts has been outstandingly high for the last three years. In 2002, there were 100% pass rates in the diploma in foundation studies in art and design, as well as the national diplomas in art and design and graphic design. The pass rates on the intermediate GNVQ media course have significantly exceeded the national average for the last three years.

122. Students produce a high standard of work in art and design, particularly in two-dimensional studies. Students' portfolios on the diploma in foundation studies course show a high level of competence in drawing, design and experimentation with media. On the first diploma in performing arts course, students produce performance work of greater maturity than is normally found at this level. On the intermediate GNVQ media course, students were shooting their own advertisements on video using sophisticated creative techniques.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GNVQ intermediate media | 2 | No. of starts | 10 | 19 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 84 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 81 | 75 |
| GCE AS art and design | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 32 | 20 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | % retention | 100 | 59 | 50 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 56 | 80 |
| National diploma in graphic design | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 14 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 72 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |
| GCE AS media studies | 3 | No. of starts | * | 56 | 53 |
| | | % retention | * | 84 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 85 | 63 |
| Diploma in foundation studies (art and design) | 3 | No. of starts | 20 | 25 | 33 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 100 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 89 | 100 |
| National diploma in performing arts | 3 | No. of starts | 14 | 20 | 25 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 80 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

123. Teaching was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed, and none was less than satisfactory. Teachers produce detailed lesson plans and schemes of work which promote effective learning. In art and design, students are particularly motivated by the enthusiasm which teachers show about their specialist areas. In performing arts, teachers stimulate students to extend their learning and have high expectations of them. In a national diploma lesson on dance, the teacher maintained a rigorous pace. The students responded well to this and by the end of the session a large group of non-specialists had learned a complex dance sequence, which they performed with confidence. In a first diploma music lesson, as part of preparations for a performance of 'My Fair Lady', the students were asked to speak the lyrics in an improvised setting which helped them to understand the style of singing required in a musical. In film studies, students made presentations to the group which demonstrated knowledge and understanding, a high level of analytical skills and confidence in using appropriate terminology. In a few lessons, inadequate classroom management hampered learning. Teachers sometimes failed to make adequate checks on students' knowledge, and did not always use a variety of teaching materials and references.

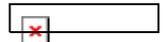
124. There are many opportunities for students to enrich their studies. The national diploma performing arts students visited a theme park in France and this experience provided the basis for an assignment in finance and management. There are plans for art and design students to visit Prague, and media students to visit Paris. There are residencies at the college for professional theatre companies and also an artist in residence. Media students run the college radio station. There is very good support for students' coursework in tutorials.

125. A purpose-built arts block was completed in 2002. It provides spacious, well-equipped accommodation. There are light, airy studios with drawing, printmaking, computer and photography facilities. Included within the area is a small gallery space for exhibitions of students' work. There is, however, a lack of storage space for three-dimensional work. The theatre provides a flexible space for practical lessons, lunchtime recitals and full-scale productions. There is also a well-equipped media area with three digital editing suites and a sound recording and editing room, which is the base for the college radio station. Many staff have recent relevant professional experience from which students benefit.

Leadership and management

126. The area is well managed. There are regular, minuted meetings in the school of study, and course team meetings are effective. Team members collaborate closely in providing their students with an integrated programme. The fact that GCE AS and A-level courses are provided within a different school of study means that responsibilities for the line management of staff are not always clear. The area produced a good self-assessment report, which is detailed and self-critical. Teachers have good internal and external staff development opportunities. However, there are some staff without teaching qualifications who are not currently working towards them.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in GCE AS and A-level sociology

- much good or very good teaching

- thorough and detailed feedback on students' work in psychology, sociology and politics

- good standards achieved by access to HE students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on psychology courses

- failure of some GCE AS and A-level law students to achieve their potential

- inadequate guidance and support for students on part-time GCE AS courses

- insufficient use of IT in teaching and learning on GCE AS and A-level courses.

Scope of provision

127. The provision consists mainly of GCE AS and A-level courses in psychology, sociology and law. They are provided at both the Abingdon and Witney sites, with archaeology, economics and politics available at one or other campus. Psychology and sociology are included as options within general access to HE courses. At the Witney campus, the access course also includes history. There are approximately 80 enrolments on general access to HE courses. GCE AS and A-level courses account for approximately 300 enrolments. Of these, 100 are part-time students, mostly adults, studying psychology, law and archaeology in the evening. Of the 200 students aged 16 to 18, just over 70% are full-time students based at the college. A further 57 students are drawn from local schools with whom the college works in partnership. The GCE AS and A-level provision at Abingdon has twice as many enrolments as that at Witney. About two thirds of all GCE AS and A-level enrolments are on psychology courses, which attract similar numbers of adult students and students aged 16 to 18. The size of GCE A-level classes is generally small, with fewer than ten students.

Achievement and standards

128. Pass rates have improved in sociology, in particular on the new GCE AS and A-level courses in 2001 and 2002, when they were high. Pass rates in law are in line with the national average. However, some law students fail to achieve the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Pass rates at GCSE and GCE AS and A level in psychology have been low, but current standards show a clear improvement. The percentage of students achieving high grades in humanities subjects at GCE AS and A level is low. Retention rates are generally satisfactory. Archaeology courses have high retention rates. There are consistently good pass rates on access to HE courses.

129. Students achieve well in lessons. Many students display good standards of knowledge and understanding in discussion. Their responses are confidently expressed and often extended. Some students show an ability for critical and independent thinking. Adult students in a psychology lesson produced definitions of abnormal behaviour which they compared with the results of research studies. They were able to evaluate the research and build on each other's views. A few students have a narrow range of vocabulary and rely upon anecdotal responses. Students' written work shows a wide variation in standard. Access students show good levels of attainment. They make swift progress in their essays as their study skills and key skills develop. At GCE A level, the higher attaining students write convincingly, using a good range of evidence to produce well-argued answers. Other students, in particular at GCE AS, have difficulty in presenting their written work in a relevant and orderly way. GCE A-level psychology and sociology students have good research skills.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-----------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| GCSE psychology | 2 | No. of starts | 51 | 39 | 29 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 64 | 41 |
| | | % pass rate | 26 | 40 | 42 |
| GCE A-level sociology | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 36 | 32 |
| | | % retention | 50 | 67 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 64 | 75 | 100 |
| GCE A-level law | 3 | No. of starts | 22 | 28 | 26 |
| | | % retention | 59 | 57 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 85 | 75 | 81 |
| GCE AS psychology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 58 | 79 |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---------------|----|----|----|
| | | % retention | * | 90 | 72 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 83 | 60 |
| GCE AS sociology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 36 | 33 |
| | | % retention | * | 86 | 82 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 90 | 96 |
| GCE AS law | 3 | No. of starts | * | 48 | 54 |
| | | % retention | * | 85 | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 68 | 71 |
| GCE A-level psychology | 3 | No. of starts | 30 | 25 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 60 | 44 | 95 |
| | | % pass rate | 67 | 55 | 81 |

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

* course not running

Note: all courses ending in 2002 were one-year courses

Quality of education and training

130. There is much good and very good teaching. In many lessons, teachers respond effectively to the needs and interests of their students. At the start of a psychology lesson, the teacher set different objectives for students to take account of their previous learning. A group of access students made good progress in their historical understanding by examining the changing role of women since the eighteenth century. In a politics lesson about the functions of the two houses of Parliament, students selected their own research topics and the sources of information they would use. This encouraged students' active participation and sustained their concentration. Group work and discussion are often lively. In psychology and sociology, teachers make effective use of diagrams, anecdotes and examples to deepen students' understanding of the significance of research studies and theories. Learning resources are good and include up-to-date textbooks and handouts devised by teachers to support students' learning in a structured way. There is little use of ICT in teaching and learning. Some teaching is less effective because teachers fail to give students sufficient stimulus or initiative. Some teachers' question and answer techniques are weak. Questions are not directed at individual students and students are allowed to give short, undeveloped answers.

131. Staff are suitably qualified. They have made good use of opportunities for professional development to keep up to date in their subjects and share good practice. The bookstock in the learning resource centre is adequate. The range and usefulness of the Abingdon collection varies between subjects. There is insufficient specialist software for humanities in the learning resource centre. The college intranet offers lists of recommended Internet sites, but no other learning materials. This reduces opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills. At the Abingdon campus, GCE AS/A-level students have a useful base room with computers. A few classrooms lack audio-visual aids or screens for overhead projectors.

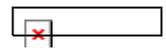
132. The assessment of students' work is thorough in all subjects except law. In some cases, teachers maintain very detailed records, matching students' progress against the criteria used in assessment. In some subjects, written work is not set at regular intervals, and in psychology and law, there are no schedules of assignments to help students plan their work. Tutors help students to improve their performance through termly reviews of progress, but subject teachers do not make effective use of individual learning targets for all students. Insufficient information from subject teachers is available in the early stages of a student's course to enable tutors and students to make an overall assessment of their progress.

133. Overall, guidance and support for students are mostly satisfactory and sometimes good. Guidance on the choice of course is effective for access to HE students. Insufficient use is made of data on students' previous attainments to help guide them onto GCE AS courses. Advice and guidance for part-time students on GCE AS courses are inadequate. Some students enrol for inappropriate courses and the arrangements for additional learning support are not working effectively. A few GCE AS and A-level students do not take up the offer of support to improve their written English.

Leadership and management

134. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The partnership between the college and local schools in Abingdon and Witney is well managed and benefits the students. There has been effective action to improve students' achievements in sociology and to secure good standards on the access to HE courses. Changes in the staffing of psychology courses have begun to address former weaknesses. Elsewhere, quality assurance procedures have not led to consistent improvement. There is insufficient evaluation of the GCSE and GCE AS/A-level provision in the self-assessment report, which did not identify some weaknesses found by inspectors.

English, modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates
- much good and very good teaching
- good learner progress relative to prior achievement
- effective assessment practice in modern foreign languages and EFL.

Weaknesses

- little use of ILT in modern foreign languages
- low conversion rates from GCE AS to A2 courses in English.

Scope of provision

135. There are 175 enrolments in English at GCE AS/A levels and GCSE. French, German, Spanish, Italian, modern Greek and Portuguese are offered on both sites, with nearly 650 part-time enrolments. French and German are taught within the consortium to GCE A level to very small groups. ESOL for asylum seekers is integrated into the EFL provision at 5 levels with about 200 on roll (60 full time).

Achievement and standards

136. There are very high retention and pass rates on all modern foreign languages and EFL programmes. There has been a year-on-year increase in overall numbers in modern foreign languages. The college uses National Languages Standards (NLS) NVQ accreditation for all adult courses in modern foreign languages. In 2002 there were over 500 enrolments, with 91% retention and 81% pass rates. These achievements are well above national averages. There is a similar pattern in EFL, which also uses NLS accreditation. On GCE AS and A-level modern foreign languages courses, students are sometimes entered through consortium schools, but when the college enters students in its own right there are good pass rates. An exception was NVQ Spanish level 1, where a group of students aged 16 to 18 were reluctant to undertake the NVQ tasks and results were poor. Attainments were satisfactory or good in most lessons. Languages were used with increasing confidence as students progressed. Written work is of an appropriate standard and well marked by teachers, who provide good diagnostic comment and suggestions for improvement.

137. On English courses at GCE AS/A level, retention rates are satisfactory or high and pass rates are broadly in line with national averages. Students learn effectively and make good progress on all courses. Most achieve their qualification and learning goals, many to a high level. The progress and development of many students in comparison with their prior achievement are considerable. GCSE pass rates at grades A*-C improved to about average in 2002.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, modern foreign languages and English as a foreign language, 2000 to 2002

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| NLS NVQ French | 1 | No. of starts | 43 | 76 | 59 |
| | | % retention | 98 | 92 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 67 | 94 |
| NLS NVQ Spanish | 2 | No. of starts | 24 | 28 | 20 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 88 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 83 | 87 | 80 |
| GCSE English | 2 | No. of starts | 178 | 134 | 69 |
| | | % retention | 84 | 78 | 63 |
| | | % pass rate | 43 | 20 | 49 |
| GCE A-level English language and literature | 3 | No. of starts | 36 | 39 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 77 | 84 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 88 | 90 | 89 |
| GCE AS English literature | 3 | No. of starts | * | 65 | 33 |
| | | % retention | * | 78 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 74 | 90 |
| NLS NVQ English | 3 | No. of starts | 83 | 69 | 144 |

| | | | | |
|-------|-------------|----|----|----|
| (EFL) | % retention | 95 | 97 | 96 |
| | % pass rate | 38 | 90 | 63 |

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

* course not running

Note: GCE AS and A-level courses ending in 2002 were one-year courses.

Quality of education and training

138. The general standard of teaching is high with much good and very good teaching. Teachers on English courses are very effective in identifying and meeting their students' needs, both academically and in terms of personal support. In languages and EFL, the use of NLS enables staff to use language in realistic contexts. On-course assessment removes the disincentive of a final examination, which many adults find demotivating. In a German lesson held for modern apprentices at a motor vehicle factory, the teacher quickly engaged students in conversation, then used illustrations to develop domestic and office vocabulary and knowledge of case structure. The group, who are working towards work placements in Germany, were highly motivated.

139. Teachers are skilled and knowledgeable. Many are native speakers of the languages they teach. New staff are encouraged to take appropriate teaching qualifications. Resources are good. Accommodation is spacious and well furnished, although one room at Witney with a harsh acoustic and noisy heater is unsatisfactory. The language laboratory at Abingdon has recently been refurbished and the adjacent resources area holds an impressive array of teaching materials. There is, however, no computer in any of the teaching areas used for modern foreign languages or EFL teaching. There is a satisfactory supply of tape recorders and video players, but these are not installed in rooms. Resource problems at Witney include defective video players and poor copies of videotapes.

140. Assessment procedures are very thorough. In English and EFL, there is early assessment of students' previous attainment. In English, the college has developed effective systems for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress, particularly on the Abingdon campus. In EFL and modern foreign languages, the use of NLS and the arrangements for internal verification are very effective. Assignment tasks are set regularly. In a part-time evening EFL lesson, students had to read a news article and try to understand the gist of it. This was a realistic task which grew naturally out of the work the class was undertaking.

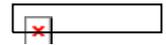
141. The college offers a good range of courses at different levels in modern foreign languages, supplemented by its partnership arrangements with schools. There is a full range of courses in EFL, from elementary to advanced. EFL staff have mapped provision against standards of the new ESOL national core curriculum. There is an extensive supplementary programme for EFL students, including IT and business English. EFL provision closely mirrors students' requirements, especially those needing qualifications to progress into HE. There are GCE AS and A-level courses currently available in English literature and English language and literature, including evening courses. GCE AS and A-level English language is to be offered in 2003/04.

142. In English, students receive an impressive level of guidance, although use of minimum grades as targets and data on students' previous attainments are not fully effective on both the Abingdon and Witney sites. All students are screened on entry to identify any study support needs. In modern foreign languages and EFL, there is an equally good awareness of individuals' needs. Many class files contain information about preferred learning styles, which are taken account in lesson planning, and special measures are taken for those with hearing or visual impairment. EFL and ESOL students have effective ILP and a form of this has been piloted in modern foreign languages. International students enrolled on main college programmes have a special support class.

Leadership and management

143. The modern foreign languages team is well managed. E-mail is used effectively to maintain communication and disseminate good practice. There is particularly good advice about strategies for improving retention rates, including the use of letters to be distributed to students. The EFL team is also well managed and meets regularly on a formal and informal basis. It has taken the new ESOL curriculum on board in order to integrate asylum seekers into the provision. The co-ordinators meet regularly with the head of school and courses are efficiently reviewed. For English courses, there is clear leadership and direction to improve achievements. There is not yet consistent practice between the two main sites in the use of information showing how far students' achievements improve on their prior attainment.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- effective use of ILP in discrete basic skills lessons

- good teaching in basic skills lessons

- good use of IT to develop literacy skills

- high pass rates on accredited courses.

Weaknesses

- lack of cross-college co-ordination of basic skills provision

- poor ILP in foundation level vocational programmes and in study support

- lack of learning materials with a vocational context

- inadequate provision for the assessment of dyslexia.

Scope of provision

144. There are currently 33 basic skills classes held at the Abingdon and Witney sites, providing for 197 students aged both 16 to 18 and over 19. A further four short courses have run in the current academic year. There are also four basic skills classes held in the community. The numbers of students on some courses are low. In the current year, 211 learners have received additional literacy, numeracy, language or dyslexia support on the three main college sites. There are also literacy and numeracy lessons within the foundation level vocational programmes for students aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

145. Students following separate specialist basic skills programmes achieve good standards of work following ILPs. There are good pass rates on accredited programmes, particularly on wordpower, numberpower and OCN courses. All students demonstrate good IT skills and the presentation of work in files is good. Some learners on foundation level vocational programmes are working towards the entry level certificate in adult literacy. They are producing work of the required standard. On some programmes, students have not been provided with ILPs, and it is therefore difficult for students and their teachers to assess and demonstrate progress. Students on skills for work courses have produced project work of a good standard.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|--|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Numberpower | Entry | No. of starts | 7 | 28 | 19 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 93 | 84 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 62 | 100 |
| City and Guilds 3793 communication skills (one year) | Entry | No. of starts | 6 | 43 | 27 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 95 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 59 | 100 |
| City and Guilds 3793 communication skills (short) | Entry | No. of starts | 40 | 89 | 23 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 85 | 87 |
| | | % pass rate | 13 | 79 | 100 |
| OCN basic numeracy | Entry | No. of starts | 7 | 17 | 65 |
| | | % retention | 86 | 100 | 98 |
| | | % pass rate | 67 | 100 | 100 |
| OCN basic literacy | Entry | No. of starts | 23 | 108 | 196 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 89 | 97 |
| | | % pass rate | 53 | 83 | 100 |

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

Quality of education and training

146. There is consistently good teaching in specialist basic skills classes, which uses a variety of methods suited to the age and learning needs of the students. Teachers develop good working relationships with students. A class of adult learners tackled spelling through activities which suited their learning styles, and developed their own methods of learning new words. Students are responsive in discussions and question and answer sessions. IT is well used and integrated with

schemes of work. There is insufficient use of relevant vocational contexts for the development of literacy and numeracy skills. In study support sessions, the teaching is not based sufficiently on the assessed needs of individual learners. The tasks set for students on foundation level vocational programmes are too easy, and their activities are often not concluded and evaluated adequately.

147. Teachers of basic skills are suitably qualified and some have knowledge of current national developments in the basic skills curriculum. However, part-time teachers have not yet received full training in this area. There are good resources for the development of basic skills, but these are not equally available across the college. There is good availability of computers for basic skills students. There is a good selection of basic skills reading material at both the Witney and Abingdon learning centres. The learning centre at Warren Farm is noisy for support sessions and lacks learning materials and aids. The accommodation at the Witney campus is poor.

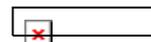
148. There are well-documented and developed ILP for students on separate specialist basic skills courses. They include constructive written commentary on students' work and are regularly reviewed with students. Within the foundation level vocational programmes and study support, ILP are poorly developed and underused, and do not record adequately the steps required for learners to achieve their goals. Teachers are carrying out a small trial of a new ILP format to improve this aspect of the work.

149. Learning support assistants effectively prompt students to complete literacy and numeracy activities, but they require further training in new curriculum initiatives. On foundation level vocational programmes, there was sensitive intervention by staff who used approaches suitable for adults to encourage participation in lessons. Teachers enable dyslexic students to plan and present their work through ICT, making good use of assistive software. Writing frames and coloured overlays are used to assist reading and writing skills. However, owing to a shortage of specialist teachers, 22 dyslexic learners are currently awaiting assessments for examination concessions. Attendance at study support sessions is low. There is no additional learning support currently available in community venues.

Leadership and management

150. The management of the separate specialist basic skills provision is satisfactory. There is inadequate overall co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college. There is no forum for the development of the teaching and learning of basic skills across the college. There is a need for basic skills training, for example, in relation to the national basic skills curriculum, particularly amongst part-time teachers and those working with vocational learners. There is no mechanism to measure the impact of support on learners' achievements. An outreach worker in basic skills has been appointed, but this had not yet had an impact on recruitment to community-based courses.

Foundation programmes



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

Strengths

- good teaching and support for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties

- good teaching in practical lessons for E2E students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- high retention and pass rates on foundation programmes

- good pastoral support in all areas

- well-equipped teaching and training area for E2E programme.

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching on foundation programmes

- inadequate action by managers to address weaknesses in provision

- poor access for individuals with restricted mobility at the Witney site

- some unsatisfactory teaching areas at Witney

- poorly developed process for monitoring students' progress.

Scope of provision

151. The college offers a range of courses for adults and young people at the Abingdon and Witney sites. Programmes include courses at pre-entry and entry level, and some leading to NVQs. The college is a 'Pathfinder' centre, running a pilot E2E programme for 150 young people, which aims to develop employment skills and skills for life. Programmes for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are offered at both sites as 'initial skills training'. There are 43 students aged 16 to 18 and 29 students aged 19 or over on this programme. Some courses lead to qualifications. There are opportunities for students to develop skills such as cookery, art and craft, and IT, as well as to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. A good proportion of E2E students progress to employment or mainstream courses at the college. There are few opportunities for adult students to progress in the foundation area.

152. The college is piloting a new E2E programme for young learners who have not achieved at school. A separate programme for school pupils enables a number of young people to enter the college before the age of 16 and provides learning opportunities in a wide range of vocational options. There is also good course provision for students with more complex needs, enabling them to increase their confidence and skills.

Achievement and standards

153. Students following entry level programmes at the Abingdon and Witney sites develop a range of additional skills and have the opportunity to achieve certification in food hygiene, first aid and health and safety. In the best lessons, teachers set learning activities which build on the successful attainment of targets. Students demonstrated skills in problem solving and teamwork. Students at the Witney campus run coffee mornings for the public and use this practical work as a very good way of developing skills in cooking, food hygiene, literacy, numeracy and communication. Students at the Abingdon campus run a lunch club, at which they prepare and serve meals to paying customers. For most students, achievement is something wider than the achievement of externally recognised awards. For example, a wide range of skills is developed through enrichment activities that have included residential and day trips away from the college. Most students enjoy their time at college and the opportunities that the programmes provide for the development of appropriate skills.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Foundation programmes | 1 | No. of starts | 189 | 242 | 232 |
| | | % retention | 97 | 96 | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | 92 | 89 | 90 |
| Foundation programmes | 1 | No. of starts | 202 | 232 | 218 |
| | | % retention | 96 | 91 | 95 |
| | | % pass rate | 48 | 67 | 72 |
| CACHE foundation | 1 | No. of starts | * | * | 25 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

154. Teaching was satisfactory or better in most of the lessons. Teaching and training are good in practical lessons. In one effective lesson, students on initial skills training programmes worked in the woodwork shop using a range of hand tools and equipment to produce items for use around the home. The development of students' motor skills, communication skills and teamwork was good. In weaker lessons, the work was set at too low a level, leading to boredom and underachievement amongst students.

155. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are set, and achieve, realistic targets in most lessons. Teaching and learning on pre-entry level programmes are good. Teaching and learning for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties at the Witney campus are particularly effective. A building on the campus has been especially adapted to provide ease of access for these students, and the recent inclusion of a multi-sensory room has added to the range of experiences on offer. Teachers, therapists and support staff provide well-planned learning opportunities, which provide new and stimulating experiences. There is very good use of augmentative communication to support learning.

156. All students undergo an initial assessment process to identify their current skills and support needs. In the best practice, individual targets arising from the assessment are identified on students' learning plans. The monitoring of students' progress in the provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties at Witney is systematic and effective. Advocates are involved in the

review and assessment process and learners are engaged at an appropriate level. Progress is measured in small manageable steps, with milestones clearly identified and celebrated. However, on some other courses, programmes of work and lesson planning are not always specific enough, and systems for the monitoring of learners' progress are insufficiently developed.

157. Resources at the Abingdon site are satisfactory overall, as are staff qualifications. Recent long-term sickness and staff shortages have directly affected learning opportunities for students on two courses. The dedicated training area for E2E programmes provides a good base from which students are able to integrate into the college. Physical access is poor for learners with restricted mobility in some areas on the Witney campus. The dedicated ICT provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the campus is underdeveloped. It lacks essential items, including large screen monitors and adaptations for learners with visual and motor skills difficulties.

158. Pastoral support for learners is very effective in all areas. Support for learning on individual programmes is satisfactory. Some learners have not been adequately supported to achieve their aims owing to staff shortages. Support for learners on work placements is good. There are productive relationships with employers and the support they provide in the workplace assists learners to achieve their goals. Tutorial and learning support for many students on foundation and E2E programmes is good. For a small minority of learners it is unsatisfactory.

Leadership and management

159. The management of provision is satisfactory overall. An inadequate response to staff illness has affected the management in one area. Unfilled staff vacancies have resulted in some students not receiving an appropriate or adequate learning programme. There has been no observation of the teaching of part-time teachers.

Part D: College data

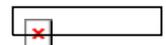
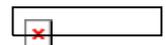


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



| Level | 16-18 | 19+ |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| 1 | 18 | 16 |
| 2 | 42 | 11 |
| 3 | 32 | 11 |
| 4/5 | 0 | 3 |
| Other | 8 | 59 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

| Curriculum area | 16-18 | 19+ | Total |
|--|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | No. | No. | Enrolments % |
| Science and mathematics | 1,246 | 261 | 7 |
| Land-based provision | 218 | 1,002 | 5 |
| Construction | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Engineering, technology and manufacture | 161 | 94 | 1 |
| Business administration, management and professional | 347 | 1,652 | 9 |
| Information and communication technology | 1,419 | 4,333 | 26 |
| Retailing, customer service and transportation | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel | 307 | 933 | 6 |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | 27 | 179 | 1 |
| Health, social care and public services | 215 | 1,263 | 6 |
| Visual and performing arts and media | 546 | 1,905 | 11 |
| Humanities | 1,921 | 787 | 12 |
| English, languages and communication | 1,124 | 1,228 | 10 |
| Foundation programmes | 194 | 1,067 | 6 |
| Total | 7,725 | 14,704 | 100 |

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

Table 3: Retention and achievement

| Level (Long Courses) | Retention and pass rate | Completion year | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | | 16-18 | | | 19+ | | |
| | | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
| | | 1 | Starters excluding transfers | 840 | 674 | 638 | 947 |
| | Retention rate | 89 | 89 | 90 | 84 | 82 | 85 |
| | National average | 80 | 80 | 79 | 78 | 78 | 78 |
| | Pass rate | 57 | 69 | 80 | 56 | 71 | 81 |
| | National average | 59 | 65 | 68 | 60 | 66 | 68 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 2 | Starters excluding transfers | 891 | 849 | 883 | 1,117 | 1,032 | 1,080 |
| | Retention rate | 81 | 86 | 85 | 83 | 87 | 87 |
| | National average | 76 | 76 | 76 | 79 | 79 | 78 |
| | Pass rate | 73 | 73 | 68 | 60 | 66 | 78 |
| | National average | 65 | 66 | 69 | 62 | 65 | 69 |
| 3 | Starters excluding transfers | 1,043 | 919 | 1,436 | 1,255 | 1,216 | 1,138 |
| | Retention rate | 84 | 82 | 79 | 85 | 87 | 82 |
| | National average | 75 | 76 | 77 | 78 | 78 | 78 |
| | Pass rate | 70 | 77 | 76 | 63 | 59 | 66 |
| | National average | 72 | 74 | 76 | 62 | 66 | 69 |
| 4/5 | Starters excluding transfers | 20 | 14 | * | 448 | 349 | 297 |
| | Retention rate | 85 | 71 | * | 90 | 89 | 84 |
| | National average | 83 | 79 | 82 | 84 | 81 | 84 |
| | Pass rate | 69 | 33 | * | 34 | 43 | 54 |
| | National average | 64 | 66 | 55 | 56 | 56 | 53 |

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

**numbers too low to provide a valid calculation*

Sources of information:

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

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

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level

| Courses | Teaching judged to be: | | | No of sessions observed |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | Good or better % | Satisfactory % | Less than satisfactory % | |
| Level 3 (advanced) | 71 | 25 | 4 | 101 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 65 | 26 | 9 | 57 |
| Level 1 (foundation) | 67 | 23 | 10 | 30 |
| Other sessions | 65 | 23 | 12 | 26 |
| Totals | 68 | 25 | 7 | 214 |

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