

West Thames College

Inspection Report 14-18 May 2007

Audience Post-sixteen	Published July 2007	Provider reference 130447
--------------------------	------------------------	------------------------------

Contents

Background information	3
Summary of grades awarded	5
Overall judgement	6
Key strengths and areas for improvement	7
Main findings	8
Sector subject reports	13

Background information

Inspection judgements

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 – outstanding*
- *grade 2 – good*
- *grade 3 – satisfactory*
- *grade 4 – inadequate*

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body; and where appropriate the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); reports from the inspectorate annual assessment visits or quality monitoring inspection; and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:

- overall effectiveness of the organisation and its capacity to improve further
- achievement and standards
- quality of provision
- leadership and management
- specialist provision in: care and early years; information and communications technology (ICT); hairdressing, beauty therapy and specialist make-up; visual and performing arts and media; preparation for life and work; and business.

Description of the provider

1. West Thames College is a medium sized further education college situated in the London Borough of Hounslow. The college's mission is 'to provide high quality education and training to organisations and individuals, by meeting local skills and labour needs'.
2. The main campus is in Isleworth with a skills centre in Feltham. The college's main catchment area consists of an ethnically diverse population with a large number of refugees and asylum seekers. Some wards have high rates of unemployment and deprivation. In 2005/06, the college had approximately 6,500 students on roll, with around a quarter aged 16-18. Based on those that completed the declaration, approximately two-thirds of students were from minority ethnic groups. Of these, the largest groups were of Indian and black African ethnic heritage.
3. The college offers education and training in 13 of 15 sector subject areas (SSA). Around 40% of full-time equivalent learners aged 16-18, and over half of adults, take courses at level 1. Just over a quarter of learners aged 16-18 study at level 3. Most of these learners study vocational programmes, and around 10% study general certificate of education (GCE) AS or A levels.
4. Around 30% of learners aged 16-18 and 30% of adult learners study courses in SSA 14 (preparation for life and work), including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The college has an expanding programme for pupils aged 14-16 from local schools. This programme currently accommodates around 450 learners across five different occupational areas.
5. There are work-based learning programmes in hairdressing and Entry to Employment (E2E), which account for around 60 learners. Franchised ESOL programmes are community-based. As part of a joint venture with the London Borough of Hounslow, the British Airport Authority (BAA), local schools and the LSC, the college opened the Skills Centre in Feltham in September 2003. In some vocational areas, it is possible to progress from pre-entry through to degree level. The college is an associate college of Kingston University.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: grade 2
Capacity to improve	Good: grade 2
Achievement and standards	Good: grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: grade 2
<i>Equality of opportunity</i>	<i>Outstanding: contributory grade 1</i>

Sector subject areas

Care and early years	Satisfactory: grade 3
Information and communications technology	Satisfactory: grade 3
Hairdressing, beauty therapy and specialist make-up	Good: grade 2
Visual and performing arts and media	Good: grade 2
Preparation for life and work	Good: grade 2
Business	Satisfactory: grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

6. The quality of the provision is good. Good leadership and management through the college's 'Going for Gold' campaign have led to sustained improvement in success rates which are generally high for almost all groups of learners. Achievement and standards are good and learners progress well to employment and further study.
7. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There has been a strong focus on improving teaching and learning throughout the college over the last two years, but the proportion of teaching judged satisfactory has remained largely unchanged. There are some significant differences in the proportion of good or better lessons observed in different curriculum areas. The quality of key skills provision is uneven across the curriculum areas, and some aspects of college policy for key skills development are applied inconsistently across the college. Management information is not always available in the most helpful form or always used effectively to sharpen focus on quality improvement.
8. The curriculum is well planned and meets the needs of learners, employers and the local community well. Educational and social inclusion and the promotion of equality and diversity are outstanding. The college's values and commitment in this area are demonstrated extremely well through the actions of staff.
9. Guidance and support are good. Pre-entry information and initial assessment for most learners are comprehensive and ensure that learners are enrolled on appropriate courses. Personal and academic support are strong.
10. The vision and values of the college are successfully shared by all staff and learners.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

11. The college demonstrates good capacity to improve its provision for learners. Good leadership and management, coupled with comprehensive quality assurance procedures, have led to a strong trend of improvement in students' achievements. The self-assessment report is largely accurate. It is self-critical and highlights the main strengths and weaknesses in provision. However, the grading of lesson observations is not yet fully consistent and

the proportion of teaching judged satisfactory has remained largely unchanged for each of the last three years.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

12. The college has made good progress since the 2003 inspection. It has built on its strengths and addressed many of the areas for improvement reported. Notably, success rates have continued to increase and are now generally well above national averages. Some teaching and learning has improved, although the proportion of teaching judged satisfactory has remained largely unchanged for each of the last three years. Information learning technology (ILT) is still not being fully utilised to promote learning in some curriculum areas. The coordination of key skills is uneven across the college. Students' attendance and punctuality have shown a marginal improvement. Links with employers are now good. Tutorials are managed well and effective support is provided for level 2 and 3 students. Two curriculum areas that were judged inadequate at the last inspection, business and ICT, are now satisfactory.

Key strengths

- strong leadership and management leading to sustained improvements in success rates
- high rates of progression for most learners
- well planned curriculum meeting the needs of learners
- outstanding educational and social inclusion
- comprehensive pre-entry information and initial assessment for most learners
- strong personal and academic support for learners
- shared vision and values throughout the college.

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- the significant proportion of teaching that remains only satisfactory
- the inconsistent quality of key skills provision across curriculum areas
- the uneven use of management information across curriculum areas to sharpen focus on quality improvement.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: grade 2

13. The college's self-assessment accurately judges that learners' achievement and standards are good. Success rates for most learners on long courses at levels 1 to 3 have been consistently above the national averages for similar colleges since the last inspection in January 2003, and in most instances are very high. There has been a sustained and significant improvement in success rates for learners aged 16-18 at levels 1 and 2 and for adults at levels 2 and 3. Although success rates for adults at level 1 declined in 2005/06 from the previous year, they remain very high. Success rates for learners aged 16-18 on level 3 courses have improved since the last inspection, but they have remained around the national average as a result of under-performance in GCE AS and A level courses. Most learners make good progress onto employment or further study.
14. Learners' achievements are good in visual and performing arts and media, ICT, and hairdressing, beauty therapy and specialist make-up. They are satisfactory in the other curriculum areas inspected. Learners generally make at least the progress expected of them. The standard of learners' work is good and they are well equipped for employment. Attention to health and safety practices is good. The college's concerted efforts to improve attendance have, as yet, met with only limited success, and attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality has improved and is now good.
15. Success rates in key skills and adult literacy and numeracy qualifications are above average. Success rates for learners who receive additional learning support are higher than the college average.
16. Although success rates for learners aged 14-16 are uneven across the occupational areas, they are high overall and many learners progress onto higher level courses. Framework achievement for hairdressing apprentices is broadly satisfactory. Progression into further education or employment for the small numbers of learners on E2E programmes is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

17. The quality of provision is good. This agrees with the college's self-assessment. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There has been a strong focus on improving teaching and learning throughout the college over the last two years. The learning development team provides good staff development activities for curriculum teams and individual teachers.

18. Internal lesson observations in 2006/07 show an increasing proportion of good and better lessons. The college introduced a revised system for observing lessons and acknowledges that further refinements are needed to ensure consistency of grading. The proportion of teaching judged satisfactory has remained largely unchanged for each of the last three years. There are some significant differences in the proportion of good or better lessons observed in different curriculum areas.
19. In the best lessons, teachers plan well to ensure that activities meet the needs of all learners and maintain their interest. They regularly check learners' understanding and use focused questioning well to develop their learning. Learners develop good practical skills and produce good standards of work. They enjoy their work and make good progress.
20. Where lessons are less effective, too many learners do not participate fully in the lesson. The planned activities do not meet all needs and abilities and learners do not make as much progress as they could. Teachers do not ensure that all learners understand key points and learning is not always reinforced.
21. The college has increased its investment in ILT resources and training. In some areas, these resources are used extensively and creatively to enhance learning, but in many areas, usage is still underdeveloped.
22. The college has good arrangements to identify learners' additional support needs. This is particularly effective for learners on entry and level 1 courses, where interviewers use results from screening assessment to ensure learners are enrolled on appropriate courses. Support is provided promptly and effectively integrated into entry and level 1 programmes. Literacy support for learners on level 2 courses has improved through the introduction of skills development sessions, but is less well developed for level 3 learners. The college policy for key skills development for level 2 and 3 learners who do not already have a level 2 qualification in English or mathematics is not applied consistently across the college.
23. In many areas, assessment is well planned and feedback to learners is clearly focused on how they can improve their work and achieve better results. The use of individual learning reviews is well established across the college and learners' progress towards targets is reviewed at least termly. In some areas, targets are not yet sufficiently precise to support improvement.
24. The college's response to meeting the needs of learners, employers and the local community is good. The curriculum is reviewed annually to take

account of changing circumstances. It is broad and well planned with good opportunities for progression. Collaborative work with the community is particularly effective with local schools and with a major construction employer. There are strong links with local higher education providers. Further links with other employers are developed by the employment engagement manager.

25. Educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college provides a safe and inclusive learning environment at both main sites. The Fresh Start programme provides pupils at risk of exclusion with a structured programme offering basic skills, vocational training and good progression opportunities. A good range of enrichment activities is offered through the college and in collaboration with the student union. The uptake is generally good. Equality and diversity are very actively promoted, including courses to facilitate black minority ethnic (BME) applicants to the Metropolitan police and the promotion of black staff. Learners with disabilities are encouraged and well supported.
26. Guidance and support are good. The college provides a good range of pre-entry information, well matched to target groups. The 2005/06 prospectus won a national award and publications since have maintained a particularly clear and welcoming style. Parents and guardians are well informed with advice and guidance and ongoing support to enable them to guide young people in their care.
27. All students receive a welcoming and informative induction. Students feel well informed about their courses and the support available to them.
28. Tutorial planning is comprehensive with a particularly detailed resource pack available to support tutors. However, tutorials at level 3 are often used for additional teaching or revision. The benefits of tutorial-led broader personal development are not available to all learners in the college.
29. Attendance monitoring is well managed. Retention officers play an active part in monitoring and addressing poor cases of attendance. The communication between tutors and support staff is good. The college works well with a range of internal and external agencies to support learners and help keep them on course.
30. Careers and progression advice are well planned. The college arranges events throughout the year to support students' decisions on future learning or work opportunities. Careers guidance is readily available to all learners and they particularly appreciate the support they receive from the college in researching and applying for higher education.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

Contributory grades:

Equality of opportunity

Outstanding: grade 1

31. Leadership and management are good. The strong leadership of the principal, reported in the previous inspection, is still evident. Governors oversee and monitor the strategic direction of the college well, but they have not maintained close curriculum links recently. Clerking is effective. The college's 'Going for Gold' campaign is leading to an overall improvement in the quality of provision. However, progress to raise the quality of teaching and learning is still uneven across curriculum areas.
32. Quality assurance procedures are rigorous and comprehensive. Course reviews are self-critical. The self-assessment report is accurate. Student complaints are monitored carefully and dealt with promptly. The quality of teaching and learning is evaluated through a comprehensive system of lesson observations. However, the moderation of some of these judgements is insufficiently robust.
33. Curriculum management is satisfactory. A recent re-structuring of middle managers has effectively increased the focus of managers on improving teaching and learning. As acknowledged by the college, management information is not always available in the most helpful form or always used effectively. The use of performance indicators based on value added measures is underdeveloped.
34. Staff are well qualified with all teachers having or working towards teacher qualifications. Support staff play a key part in the progress of learners. Staff development opportunities are good. Successful events are held regularly for all college staff to share good practice. An extensive management training programme, with external accreditation, is in place. Overall, accommodation and specialist resources are satisfactory with some very high quality facilities. There are well established plans to improve the quality of accommodation.
35. The college's promotion of equality of opportunity is outstanding and its values and commitment are demonstrated extremely well through the actions of staff. The composition of the governing body reflects the diversity of the local community. Managers and a black staff group are having an impact to increase the proportion of staff of minority ethnic

heritage. All statutory duties for race, sex and disability are met fully and rigorous child protection procedures are in place.

36. Senior managers have built on the effective communication strategy seen at the last inspection. Communication continues to be very good and the open-door policy of senior managers is highly valued by staff. Staff morale is high. The learners' voice is taken very seriously and groups such as the student disability forum have a real influence on relevant college policies. Effective strategies to improve students' behaviour, such as the introduction of 24-hour suspensions, have led to a decrease in permanent exclusions.
37. The college has strong partnerships with local schools and higher education institutions and is a lead member of the local 14-19 partnership. It works closely with local community groups to develop policy and give advice to improve community cohesion. For example, after consultation, sensitive advice was issued on the wearing of veils by Muslim students.
38. The college has maintained sound financial health consistently for many years. The budgeting process is effective and active measures are taken to ensure provision is delivered cost-effectively. The college provides good value for money.

Sector subject area

Care and early years

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

39. The college offers full-time and part-time courses in health and social care, early years and counselling. Courses offer progression from entry level to level 4 in care and from level 1 to level 4 in early years. There are 115 full-time learners mainly aged 16-18, and 188 part-time, mainly adult learners.

Strengths

- high success rates on early years courses in 2005/06
- high standard of learners' work on the certificate in childcare and education course (CCE)
- good use of information and learning technology in lessons
- good links to key skills in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on many full-time care courses
- poor retention rate on the CCE
- lack of challenge and insufficient checks on learning in a significant minority of lessons.

Achievement and standards

40. Learners' achievements are satisfactory overall. Success rates on early years courses were high in 2005/06. The level 1 course had 100% success rate.
41. The success rates on many full-time care courses are low. The introductory diploma in health and social care had success rates in the past two years of some thirty percentage points below the national average.
42. The retention rate on the CCE has been consistently below the national average for three years. The standard of learners' assessed work on the CCE course is high. Learners demonstrate a good depth of understanding and use well examples from their practical experience in their assignments. The standard of learners' work on other courses is satisfactory or better.

Quality of provision

43. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is good use of information and learning technology in many lessons, with good links to key skills. Teachers and learners make good use of interactive white boards. Key skills are fully integrated into the courses and most teachers make good links between course work and key skills. In the better lessons, the learners all worked purposefully and demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of the topics they were covering.
44. There is a lack of challenge and insufficient checks on learning in a significant minority of lessons. In the weaker lessons, learners are not sufficiently engaged and motivated. The work presented in a few lessons is too difficult for the learners and there is an over-reliance on worksheets. In a few lessons, teachers did not manage their time well and did not check learning at the end of the lesson.
45. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are satisfactory. Teachers mark work fairly and many provide detailed feedback which helps learners improve their work.
46. The range of programmes is satisfactory, although there is limited full-time provision at level 3 for early years. Employer links are effective in developing NVQ programmes and foundation degrees. Progression between levels is satisfactory. A good range of additional courses enriches the students' programmes.
47. Tutorial support is satisfactory. A Student Learning Advisor (SLA) leads on tutorials for level 1 and 2 learners in care, with a specific focus on retention and achievement. Current in-year retention rates for all care courses are good.

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management are satisfactory and have made adequate progress in addressing weaknesses from the last inspection. Staff teams work very well together. Staff are generally well qualified. The self-assessment report does not identify some significant areas for improvement.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

49. The college offers an extensive range of full-time and some part-time vocational courses in ICT from entry level through to higher education courses. In 2006/07, there are 304 learners enrolled. Around half of these are full-time learners aged 16-18. The remainder are adult learners on both full-time and part-time courses.

Strengths

- high and improving success rates on vocational programmes for adult learners
- innovative and effective use of ILT in lessons
- good support for learners.

Areas for improvement

- insufficient planning of learning activities to meet learners' needs
- insufficient use of data to support quality improvement
- weak employer engagement.

Achievement and standards

50. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates on most full-time courses in 2005/06 were above the national average. Success rates for adult learners have been consistently high for a number of years and are improving. Learners aged 16-18 at levels 1, 2 and 3 perform at the national average and rates have continued to improve. The standard of most learners' work is satisfactory. However, too many learners do not acquire appropriate and relevant workplace skills. Progression to further study is strong.

Quality of provision

51. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers use innovative methods well to improve learning; for example, a "one minute" test to check learning, and focused learning materials that enable learners to work at their own pace. Teachers make good use of ILT to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning; for example, they use the "Quizdom" to check learning in an engaging and exciting way. These activities are well planned and managed. However, in too many lessons,

learning activities do not challenge learners, and teachers do not check the understanding of individual learners with sufficient frequency or rigour. Pilot ILT strategies for improved learner tracking and progress monitoring are effective. Overall, the suitability and rigour of assessment are satisfactory. Teachers' feedback on learners' assessed work is helpful in enabling them to improve.

52. The college offers a broad range of ICT courses for both 16-18 and adult learners with clear and appropriate progression routes. Guidance and support for learners are good. The college takes care to ensure that learners are enrolled on courses appropriate to their needs and prior attainment. The proportion of learners progressing internally to higher levels is good. Learning support provided in lessons is good and sensitive to learners' needs.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have made reasonable progress in addressing weaknesses from the last inspection. They use the outcomes of graded lesson observations effectively in staff appraisal but there is not enough updating of teachers' vocational skills. There continues to be a lack of work experience opportunities for learners aged 16-18 and employer engagement is weak. Staff are suitably qualified. Accommodation and resources are very good and are well utilised. The self-assessment report accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement but lacks rigour in evaluating teaching and learning. The use of management information for target setting and monitoring performance at course team level is insufficiently developed.

Hairdressing, beauty therapy and specialist make-up

Good: grade 2

Context

54. Around half the students study beauty and holistic therapies with the remainder in hairdressing. There are 285 full-time students of whom two-thirds are aged 16-18, and 254 mainly adult part-time students. Courses offer progression from entry level to level 4. There are around 80 learners aged 14-16 on a schools link programme, and a small number of work-based learners.

Strengths

- high success rates on most courses
- good internal progression for ESOL learners
- responsive curriculum that meets the needs and interests of learners
- good personal and academic support for learners.

Areas for improvement

- inconsistent assessment practice on a few courses
- insufficient use of ILT in teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

55. Learners' achievements are good. Success rates on all full-time courses are high, and exceptionally high in beauty therapy levels 2 and 3 and in hairdressing level 1. However, in 2005-06 on level 3 hairdressing and the national diploma in media make-up, too many students left the course before completing it, though all those who stayed passed. In hairdressing, learners develop practical skills appropriate to the level of course and the stage of training and exhibit satisfactory subject knowledge. On the media make-up course, learners demonstrated good skills in applying prosthetics and in fantasy make-up application. However, skills development in work-based learning is poor. Apprentices' framework achievement rates are broadly average.

Quality of provision

56. Teaching and learning are good. In the better lessons, teachers effectively used strategies such as self-evaluation and peer assessment to enhance learning. In the less successful lessons, learners lacked focus on their

learning and assessment targets, and opportunities to enhance learning with ILT were missed.

57. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are satisfactory. Where assessment works well, learners have specific and agreed targets and their progress towards these is carefully monitored. However, too many learners are not clear of their targets or progress towards completion.
58. There is a good match between the interests of the learners and the programmes offered. ESOL learners make very good progress from entry level to level 2. The curriculum is responsive to learners' needs and offers provision from entry level through to level 4. Programmes that combine ESOL and vocational study provide good opportunities to learners with specific needs and aspirations. A popular Asian bridal make-up course runs each year. However, the college key skills policy is inconsistently applied at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and many learners do not take up numeracy and literacy qualifications or their equivalent.
59. Guidance and support for learners are good. Learners speak highly of their teachers and receive good individual support in tutorials and salon sessions.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management are good. The provision has grown in numbers whilst maintaining and developing quality. The efforts of the highly motivated staff and robust self-assessment have had a positive impact on the success rates of many courses since the last inspection. Equal opportunity training is regular and awareness is high. On some courses and provision, insufficient attention has been paid to management of assessment practices to provide structure and support to assessors and learners. There has been insufficient use of work-based learning data to monitor and track the progress of learners, and to inform action plans for teachers.

Visual and performing arts and media

Good: grade 2

Context

61. The college offers courses in art, design, performing arts, media and music. The majority of courses are at level 3. Level 1 and 2 courses in each curriculum area provide learners with pathways to higher levels. Almost all learners are aged 16-18. At the time of inspection, almost 40% of learners were on art and design courses, with 34% on music and media courses and the remainder on performing arts courses.

Strengths

- high success rates on most art, design and performing arts courses
- high standards of work in art, design and music at all levels
- imaginative range of cultural stimuli and resources used in music teaching
- very extensive and popular range of enrichment activities
- comprehensive progression pathways from entry level to levels 3 and 4
- good strategic leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- success rates on media and music technology courses
- inadequate arrangements for developing level 3 learners' literacy and numeracy key skills
- weak aspects of accommodation and access to resources.

Achievement and standards

62. Learners' achievement is good on most art, design and performing arts courses. Success rates have steadily improved over time and many are well above national averages. Success rates in music technology are satisfactory. In media, they are poor and declining at first diploma and A level.
63. Standards of work in art, design and music are good at all levels. Learners' work combines high levels of craft skills and creativity. For example, music technology learners frequently combine good musical and technology skills to create very accomplished pieces and learners are stimulated to explore unfamiliar musical styles through an imaginative range of musical sources. A very extensive and popular range of enrichment activities is provided for learners each year. There are some very productive contacts and working links with theatres, designers, dance companies and other industry professionals.

Quality of provision

64. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lesson planning is often good, but the extent to which students learn and develop skills and knowledge in class is frequently variable. Teachers' use of information learning technology is good in art and design, less so in other areas.
65. The range of courses and opportunities for progression from levels 1 to 3 meet the needs of learners well. Consistently high percentages of learners stay at the college on successive levels of courses. Many successful learners move on to higher education. Around half of national diploma performing arts and design learners enter employment.
66. Assessment and the monitoring of learners' progress are good. Learners' work is frequently improved through good assessment and supportive feedback by teachers. Teachers have a good knowledge of how their learners are progressing, but the depth of detail and usefulness of action points formally recorded is inconsistent. Tutorials and guidance by teachers and other specialists are effective and highly valued by learners.

Leadership and management

67. Strategic leadership and management are good. Managers use a wide range of information well to monitor and develop the curriculum. All staff are involved in robust self-assessment and quality improvement. Actions to effect improvement since the last inspection have been largely successful. However, arrangements for developing level 3 learners' key literacy and numeracy skills are inadequate and are insufficiently embedded within the curriculum.
68. Some aspects of accommodation and access to resources are weak. There is insufficient access to music technology and media facilities for individuals' skills development during the working day. Soundproofing in music facilities is inadequate.

Preparation for life and work

Good: grade 2

Context

69. The college provides full-time and part-time adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes from entry level to level 2 for learners aged 16-18 and adults at the college and in the local community. There is discrete provision for 85 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). Fifty six learners are studying on discrete adult literacy and numeracy programmes and 1,011 on ESOL programmes. Almost 800 learners on main college programmes are offered the opportunity to achieve either adult literacy and numeracy or key skills qualifications in application of number and communication at levels 1 and 2.

Strengths

- very high success rates
- high progression rates
- good teaching and learning
- very good range of programmes and partnerships
- very good support for learners.

Areas for improvement

- the uneven quality of key skills provision
- insufficient access to and use of ILT.

Achievement and standards

70. Achievement and standards are good. Success rates for learners on literacy, numeracy, ESOL and for learners with LDD on discrete courses, are very high and well above national averages. This has been a common trend for the last three years for learners of all age groups. However, a small number of learners with profound and multiple learning disabilities are not as successful.

71. Progression rates are high onto other discrete courses or into mainstream vocational courses at higher levels that provide more challenging goals and aid progression to further and higher studies.

72. The standard of learners' work is good and skills are effectively developed. Attendance rates are satisfactory but punctuality is not always sufficiently addressed by tutors.

Quality of provision

73. Teaching and learning are good. In better lessons, teaching is inspirational and learners are challenged to achieve well. Assessment and reviews of learning are satisfactory and ample checks are made on learning in sessions. Targets are regularly reviewed during lessons. There is insufficient access to and use of ILT in many lessons.
74. The quality of cross-college key skills provision is uneven and differs within curriculum areas. In some areas, key skills are fully integrated in planning and delivery of vocational training and learners are on schedule to achieve the qualification. In less successful areas, key skills are not contextualised, and this impacts adversely on participation and achievement. There has been insufficient planning to meet the numeracy needs of learners on vocational programmes.
75. A very good range of programmes is offered to learners at different levels, in discrete provision, within the mainstream curriculum as well as in the community. Partnerships with local schools are well established and the college provides good opportunities for learners to study in an adult environment. Links with employers are well established, providing learners with good access to work experience. Learners make good use of enrichment activities.
76. Support for learners is very good. Learners with severe learning difficulties receive high levels of support in lessons. Support assistants are experienced and well managed. External agencies are used very effectively to provide additional support. Satisfactory arrangements are in place for enrolment, induction, tutorial support and transition from the college.

Leadership and management

77. Curriculum management is good. Much improvement has been made in raising the quality of teaching and learning and addressing weaknesses since the last inspection. However, the monitoring of some aspects of quality improvement is inconsistent across the range of cross-college provision, and managers make insufficient use of data to bring about quality improvement. Self-assessment is largely accurate.

Business

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

78. The college offers full-time vocational and academic courses from entry level through to level 3, and part-time provision in management and accounting. Full-time courses include introductory diploma and first diploma in business, national award and national certificate in e-learning, and GCE AS and A level accounting, law and business studies. Part-time provision includes association of accounting technicians (AAT) courses at foundation and intermediate level, certificate in book-keeping and accounting and introductory certificate in management. 226 learners aged 16-18 are on long programmes, with around 75% studying at level 3. Around 100 adult learners are on long programmes; almost half of these are studying at level 3.

Strengths

- improved and good standard of learners' work
- good teaching and learning
- very good academic and pastoral support for learners
- good leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- low success rates on significant minority of courses
- insufficient links with employers.

Achievement and standards

79. Learners' achievements are satisfactory. Overall success rates for both learners aged 16-18 and adults on long courses have been increasing over the two years to 2005/06 when they were around the national average. A significant minority of courses have low and falling success rates. Learners' work is of a good standard at all course levels. Written work exhibits good understanding of business concepts and the ability to apply them in practical situations. There is good use of IT skills. Learners exhibit good skills of research and analysis. In lessons, they articulate their ideas confidently and well.

Quality of provision

80. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned, with clear and well communicated learning objectives that are reviewed with learners at the end of lessons. Teachers use a range of well designed activities to meet

individual learner needs and enable them to develop and demonstrate their learning. There is effective use of ILT, with positive impact on learner enjoyment, engagement and learning. Assessment is carried out well. Teachers give clear and constructive feedback on assignments.

81. The curriculum meets the needs of learners well. Work experience and vocational enrichment activities are an integral part of full-time business courses. They are well planned and linked effectively to assessment and skills development. However, there are insufficient ongoing and robust links with industry to inform curriculum design, delivery and assessment. Resources are used effectively to support learning. Teaching accommodation is generally good.
82. Support for learners is very good. Individual tutorials have a clear focus on learner achievement, with effective monitoring of performance and target setting. They contribute effectively to student motivation and attainment. Learners value the high levels of support, academic and pastoral, provided by teachers on an informal basis outside lessons.

Leadership and management

83. Leadership and management are good. Course teams work together well in the interest of learners and to raise the quality of provision. However, it is too early to assess the impact of improvement strategies on learner success rates. Communication within the area is good. There is extensive and effective sharing of good practice. Teachers make good use of staff development opportunities to enhance their practice. They have appropriate qualifications and experience and have had, or are undergoing, professional training. However, there are no formal arrangements to support industrial updating for teachers. Self-assessment is broadly accurate.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
1 Long	03/04	1,055	71.4	60.3	11.1	1,888	78.7	59.1	19.6
	04/05	1,187	80.5	64.2	16.3	1,707	87	61.6	25.4
	05/06	1310	88			920	80		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04								
	04/05								
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	114	29.8	61.0	-31.2				
	04/05	28	71.4	67.2	4.2	18	50	70	-20
	05/06	53	87			45	82		
Other	03/04	893	77.7	60	17.7	1,873	79.2	59	20.2
	04/05	1,154	80.9	63.6	17.3	1,688	87.4	61.4	26
	05/06	1257	88			875	80		

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	<i>Diff</i>
2 Long	03/04	769	68.8	56.3	12.5	487	66.9	53.6	13.3
	04/05	848	65.3	60.9	4.4	559	69.6	59.5	10.1
	05/06	965	75			550	73		
GCSEs	03/04	277	74	61.3	12.7	112	75	58.8	16.2
	04/05	382	64.4	64.1	0.3	153	83	62.3	20.7
	05/06	414	78			133	83		
GNVQs and precursors	03/04	94	42.6	63	-20.4				
	04/05	56	64.3	66.8	-2.5				
	05/06								
NVQs	03/04	101	69.3	51.9	17.4	105	39	53.5	-14.5
	04/05	126	72.2	57	15.2	144	47.2	59.6	-12.4
	05/06	131	74			152	70		
Other	03/04	297	72.1	54.1	18	249	77.1	52.7	24.4
	04/05	284	63.7	60.1	3.6	233	78.5	58.8	19.7
	05/06	400	73			244	70		

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age, 2004 to 2006, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts – Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	03/04	622	60	64.1	-4.1	623	59.6	53.5	6.1
	04/05	632	65.3	67.5	-2.2	557	61.2	57.3	3.9
	05/06	660	64			582	70		
A/A2 Levels	03/04	73	79.5	83.8	-4.3	58	67.2	65.5	1.7
	04/05	69	87	85.6	1.4	73	79.5	69.1	10.4
	05/06	113	67			70	81		
AS Levels	03/04	260	51.5	62.9	-11.4	75	57.3	49.6	7.7
	04/05	254	57.5	65.5	-8.0	68	51.5	52.2	-0.7
	05/06	310	59			98	65		
GNVOs and precursors	03/04	101	66.3	52.4	13.9	55	65.5	43.5	22
	04/05	48	45.8	60.2	-14.4	30	63.3	52.9	10.4
	05/06								
NVOs	03/04					89	41.6	47	-5.4
	04/05					45	40	53.9	-13.9
	05/06					105	66		
Other	03/04	180	59.4	56.3	3.1	346	62.4	55.7	6.7
	04/05	239	69	60	9.0	341	61.9	58.3	3.6
	05/06	210	68			294	71		

* Note to the achievement tables: qualification types with low numbers or that have been discontinued have been omitted from the table for the benefit of clarity

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes managed by the provider/college 2004 to 2006.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	2	0	48	0	31
		timely	2	0	30	0	19
	04-05	overall	4	25	48	0	19
		timely	5	20	31	0	21
	05-06 +	overall	14	0	54	0	44
		timely	14	0	34	0	27
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	27	26	47	26	32
		timely	27	26	24	26	16
	04-05	overall	12	0	50	0	38
		timely	13	0	29	0	22
	05-06 +	overall	38	52	58	45	53
		timely	38	27	38	24	33

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

+ LSC return to the end of period 12 unvalidated.