



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

St Helens College

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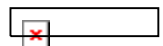
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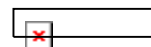
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Name of college:	St Helens College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Pat Bacon
Address of college:	Brook Street St Helens Merseyside WA10 1PZ
Telephone number:	01744 733766
Fax number:	01744 623402
Chair of governors:	Roy Clarke
Unique reference number:	130488
Name of reporting inspector:	David Lindsay
Dates of inspection:	7-18 October 2002

Part A: Summary

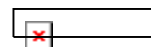


Information about the college



St Helens College is a general further education (FE) college serving the borough of St Helens which lies to the south east of Merseyside and has a population of about 179,000. Although some areas of the borough are comparatively affluent, others have high levels of social and economic deprivation. The college provides courses in all 14 areas of learning funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In several of the college's areas it is possible to progress from entry level to degree level. The college has three campuses: one in the town centre; a technology centre about two miles away; and another five miles away in the town of Newton-le-Willows. The college also offers courses at a number of other centres within the borough. At the time of the inspection, there were over 200 work-based learners following National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and modern apprenticeships. During 2000/01, there were 45,132 enrolments; 80% of students were over 19 and 2.2% of minority ethnic origin. Some 65% of student enrolments were on part-time courses. The overall rate of unemployment in the borough is 7.7%, but has reached 28.5% among the 18 to 24 year old age-group. Minority ethnic groups make up about 0.5% of the population. In 2001, the proportion of school-leavers with five or more grades at C or above for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was 45.8%; 6.3% of school-leavers gained no GCSEs. The college's mission includes a commitment 'to provide an accessible range of high quality education, training and services matched to the needs of learners, the economy and the local community'.

How effective is the college?



The college's provision in half of the curriculum areas inspected is good. The other areas are satisfactory. Education and training are good in construction, engineering, business and management, information and communication technology (ICT), hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, visual and performing arts, and humanities. Education and training are satisfactory in science and mathematics, land-based provision, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health, social care and public services, English, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and literacy and numeracy. Work-based learning, which constitutes a small part of the college's provision, is satisfactory in construction and engineering, but unsatisfactory in business, ICT and hairdressing and beauty therapy.

Key strengths

- good governance
- accurate self-assessment
- good external links
- excellent specialist facilities

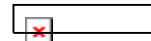
- a broad range of provision on campus and in the community centres
- good support for students
- a wide range of enrichment opportunities
- good pass rates for adult students
- good teaching of practical classes.

What should be improved

- integration of the teaching of key skills within programmes of study
- the standard of teaching of theory lessons in some areas
- the co-ordination of both English and mathematics across the college
- retention and pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3
- the quality of work-based learning
- accommodation in some areas
- the take-up of learning support.

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

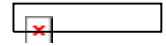


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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. Pass rates are good for most courses, particularly for adults, although the retention rate is average or below average on many courses, especially on courses for students aged 16 to 18. Teaching and learning are good in science and sport science, but only satisfactory in mathematics. Full-time students are well supported throughout their courses, many of which are organised so that students can enrol throughout the year. There is a lack of co-ordination of mathematics across the college.
Land-based provision	Satisfactory. Student achievement is generally satisfactory; pass rates are high, but retention rates are low in floristry and animal care. Teaching is good in horticulture and floristry. Inadequate or underdeveloped on-site resources are effectively enhanced through very good industry partnerships and students are well supported. Target setting and action planning are weak and key skills is not well managed.
Construction	Good. There are excellent resources and much good teaching. Pass rates are high on NVQ courses in painting and decorating and carpentry and joinery, but low in electrical installation. There are effective external links and work-based learning is satisfactory. Students are often late for lessons which hinders learning. The integration of key skills into course teaching is under-developed.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good. There is an extensive range of engineering courses and enrichment activities. Staff use appropriate teaching methods, and have good resources, and link theory and practical work effectively. There are high pass rates on many courses. The management of the curriculum is good, links with industry are excellent and students are well supported. There is insufficient emphasis on health and safety in workshop lessons and insufficient integration of work on key skills within courses. Planning of work-based learning is weak.
Business administration, management and professional	Good. Pass rates on most administration, management and professional courses are high. However, achievement on work-based learning is below average. There is much good teaching, learning and attainment. Some teaching accommodation is inadequate. Support for all full-time and part-time students is good.
Information and communication technology	Good. Pass and retention rates on many of the ICT courses have been at or above the national averages over the three years to 2002 and have included some high overall achievements. Teaching is good or better in most lessons. There is an excellent range of general

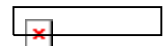
	information technology (IT) and vocational courses. The retention rate for students on work-based learning is low, as is the rate for completion of frameworks.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Good. There are good pass rates on NVQ level 2 courses in food preparation and cooking and food and drink service. Teaching of practical skills and the standard of specialist facilities are good; most students progress to further study or employment. However, insufficient demands are made on the most able students in some classes, and retention rates on a few courses are low.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. There is a wide range of provision that includes good vocational opportunities. Some courses have low pass and retention rates. Much teaching is well planned and effective and students learn well; their progress is carefully monitored. Assessment of work-based students is not well managed and there has been low achievement of frameworks.
Health, social care and public services	Satisfactory. Much teaching is good and there are effective links to work in the field. Retention rates are good on some programmes, students made good progress but, together with pass rates, remain low on other courses. Tutorials and key skills provision do not meet the needs of all students.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good. There is much good teaching. Most retention and pass rates are good. Students enjoy good support from tutors, course staff and support staff. There is a wide range of part-time and community provision. Management of data is poor.
Humanities	Good. Retention rates on access to higher education (HE) courses are good and improving, pass rates are high and progression is very good. There are poor retention rates in General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and GCSE psychology. Courses are well planned and over two thirds of the teaching observed was good or better. There is insufficient action planning in tutorials and monitoring of additional support.
English, language and communications	Satisfactory. GCSE pass rates are good, but the retention rate in GCE Advanced-level (GCE A-level) English language is low. Most adult students develop their skills and knowledge well, but the needs of less confident students are not adequately met. There is insufficient sharing of good practice and inadequate co-ordination between the teams who teach English. There are good learning resources that are produced by the college.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Satisfactory. There is a good range of courses. The standard of work is very good; there is a strong emphasis on the improvement of personal and interpersonal skills, although some teaching does not meet the needs of individual students. Specialist equipment and learning support are good. There are insufficient opportunities for the integration of students within the mainstream of college life. Sharing of good practice between curriculum areas is inadequate.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. The arrangements for courses are flexible and help teachers to be responsive to students' needs. Students receive a thorough initial assessment and attain good levels of achievement. However, individual learning plans are not sufficiently specific to help teachers and their students to set suitable short-term targets and develop reviews. Study support is not linked adequately to students' main programmes of study.

How well is the college led and managed?



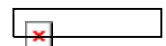
Leadership and management are good. The college is well governed and benefits from effective links with outside bodies. It has a broad range of provision that is responsive to local needs. Retention and pass rates are above national averages for the sector for adult students, for students aged 16 to 18 at level 1 and for students on short courses, but pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3 are below national averages. Curriculum management in most areas of the college is effective, though aspects of the management of work-based learning are unsatisfactory. Effective monitoring of performance by managers shapes staff development activities. Equality of opportunity is promoted and analysed. There is good financial management and effective pursuit of value for money. Quality assurance procedures have led to an honest and largely accurate self-assessment, but there is some ineffective implementation of action plans.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



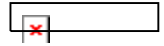
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. The college provides good opportunities for people who have a wide range of experience and come from diverse educational background. Courses meet the needs of the local community, school-leavers and employers. The college places strong emphasis on courses that match individual needs. Effective policies have successfully widened participation and attract new client groups, for example, adults returning to education, people enrolling from disadvantaged backgrounds, and students wishing to study part time. Support for all these students is effective. They are largely successful on their programmes. The college recognises that it has missed opportunities in its approach to people with disabilities and has sometimes taken a stereotyped approach in the context of gender. There are some examples of equal opportunities being promoted in the teaching of the curriculum. Equality of opportunity is not monitored sufficiently for work-based students. The college has produced a clear race equality policy that has been communicated to all staff; there are procedures to monitor the policies. Some good progress has been made in implementing the well-devised action plan, but the staff training programme had not been completed at the time of the inspection. Not all statistics are analysed by racial groupings.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for students are good. Pre-entry guidance and support are thorough and impartial. The central admission service deals speedily and efficiently with applications and enrolment. Most students benefit from effective induction programmes. They have their learning support needs assessed on entry, but take-up of learning support is poor and has continued to decline. Students are well supported by their tutors. Full-time students receive good tutorial support from their personal and academic tutors. Most part-time students receive some informal support. The college provides a wide range of specialist support for individuals with particular learning difficulties or physical disabilities. Appropriate careers education and guidance, including support for entry to HE, are available through the tutorial programme and advice sessions. The college provides appropriate welfare services including confidential counselling, and help with childcare and transport.

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

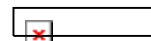
- helpful, supportive and friendly staff
- being treated as adults
- the central location of the main site
- specialist resources in many areas
- the wide range and flexibility of accessible qualifications and enrichment activities
- practical classes
- crèche facilities.

What they feel could be improved

- provision of car parking at the town centre campus
- some features of the accommodation
- the cost of meals

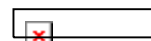
- aspects of key skills teaching.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that 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



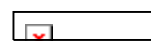
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors



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	60	31	9
19+ and WBL*	74	21	5
Learning 16-18	54	38	8
19+ and WBL*	71	24	5

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

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers a wide range of provision in all areas of learning; there are courses from foundation level to advanced and HE. There is some work-based learning, mainly in areas such as construction, engineering, business administration and hairdressing. In 2001/02, 76% of enrolments were from students over the age of 19, and 24% were from students aged 16 to 18.

2. Overall, the performance of adults is considerably better than that of students aged 16 to 18, particularly at levels 2 and 3. For example, in GCSE mathematics and English, pass rates for adults were significantly higher than for students aged 16 to 18. Most retention and pass rates are close to national averages for the sector and in many cases above. However, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3 have fallen significantly since the last inspection in 1998 and were 14 points below the national average, although at level 1 they had risen. Both students aged 16 to 18 and adults do well in short courses and key skills qualifications.

3. The standard of work of adults was better than for students aged 16 to 18. In engineering, management and professional, ICT and art and design standards were particularly high. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well in developing personal skills and in their academic work. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students are successful in national competitions. In the most effective lessons in science, students demonstrated high levels of analytical and evaluative skills.

4. For work-based learners, retention and pass rates of framework are low in some areas. NVQ achievement is high in engineering and construction, but only average or low in the other areas.

5. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C provide more detail about students' achievements and the standards reached on particular courses.

16-18 year olds

6. For level 1 courses, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 have shown an upward trend. They were seven points above the national average for the sector in 2000/01, but fell to around the national average for 2001/02. Pass rates rose over the three years to 2002 to a level now 9 points above the national average, following a 14-point increase in the year 2000/01. For level 2 courses, retention rates fell to around the national average by 2002. Pass rates also declined to four points below the national average. For level 3 courses, retention rates fluctuated and in 2002 were just above the national average, but pass rates had fallen to 14 points below the national average. For those students who take short courses, the retention rate has risen, excluding key skills, to above 90%, and pass rates have also risen to around 80%. In work on key skills, the numbers taking the qualification have increased by a factor of eight between 1998/99 and 2000/01; both retention and pass rates have stayed well above national averages.

7. The numbers sitting GCE A-level examinations have fallen since the last inspection and were only taken by a very small proportion of the student population. Although retention rates were around the national averages, pass rates were low. GCE AS entries have increased, but are still relatively small. On GCE AS courses retention rates have risen, but pass rates are poor. At GCSE, at the time of the inspection, retention rates were around the national average and pass rates at grades A* to C were very low although at the time of inspection not all achievement data had been entered.

8. Over the same three-year period, for courses such as General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and its precursors, at level 2 retention rates fell to the national average and pass rates rose from below to above national averages. At level 3, retention rates rose above the national average and pass rates were at national averages. At NVQ level 2, retention rates were at the national average and pass rates above the national average for the years 1999/2000 and 2000/01; the retention rates at level 3 were above the national average, but pass rates very low.

Adult learners

9. For level 1 courses, retention rates have been stable and in 2002 were seven points above the national average. Pass rates were 12 points above the national average although they had fallen over the three-year period. At levels 2 and 3, retention rates rose and in 2002 were seven points above the national average. Although pass rates at level 2 were also seven points above the national average, at level 3 pass rates, which had been stable, fell to four points below the national average in 2002. Both retention and pass rates were above 90% for short courses, excluding key skills. On key skills courses retention and pass rates were very good; numbers taking the

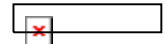
qualification increased almost tenfold in the three years to 2002.

10. As with the 16 to 18 age-group, the number of students taking GCE A level has decreased and forms only a very small part of the overall enrolment. Retention rates for adults had been above and pass rates close to the national average, but in 2001/02, although the retention rate fell, pass rates improved significantly. At GCSE, numbers also declined, but retention rates remained above the national averages and pass rates significantly above.

11. At GNVQ level 2, pass rates and retention rates were close to the national averages. At GNVQ level 3, retention rates remained above, but pass rates fell significantly below national averages in 2001/02. Large numbers of adults take NVQ courses and, at level 3 and level 2, pass rates have been around national averages and retention rates slightly above.

12. Students on access to HE courses do particularly well and a high proportion progress to university.

Quality of education and training



13. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 241 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 68% of sessions, satisfactory in 26% and less than satisfactory in 6%. The profile of grades awarded for learning was slightly different. There were fewer good or better lessons and more were satisfactory. The profile was 64%, 31% and 5% respectively. Teaching and learning were considerably better for adults than for students aged 16 to 18. The teaching in 77% of lessons for adults was good or better, compared with 60% for students aged 16 to 18. Similarly, adults' learning was judged to be significantly better. Teaching and learning for adults were better than for younger students in most curriculum areas, exceptions being courses in science and mathematics, construction, and health and social care. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, there was no difference. The most noticeable difference between the age-groups was for ICT. Students studying at level 2 receive better teaching than at level 3 or level 1. Teaching was particularly good on open College Network (OCN) courses. Learning at different levels is similar in its achievement level to teaching, except that students' learning at level 3 is much more effective than at level 2.

14. There are significant variations in the quality of teaching across different curriculum areas. The best teaching was in construction, ICT, health and social care. Although teaching in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities had a high proportion of good or better teaching, there was also a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in science and mathematics, land-based provision, visual and performing arts and English and communications. Teaching was significantly better in science than in mathematics lessons. There was little outstanding teaching. Less than 60% of teaching was good or better in numeracy and literacy. In most cases, students' learning was not as good as the teaching that they received. In science and mathematics, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, however, learning was actually better than the teaching was. Attendance, overall, was satisfactory. The better attendance records were in hospitality, sports leisure and travel, land-based provision and business, and management and professional.

15. The more effective lessons are well structured and use a suitable range of activities to aid learning. Teachers set clear objectives for the lessons and use question and answer techniques effectively to check that students understand the work. In many lessons, teachers use their past experience and specialist knowledge to relate theory to practice. Students respond well, take part in discussions and role-play, and work well in groups. They are confident and articulate. Teachers are sensitive to the individual needs of students and provide appropriate activities and materials. The teaching of practical subjects was generally good throughout the college; theory was effectively linked to practical work on many courses and most students developed good practical skills.

16. In lessons that are less than satisfactory, teachers give little thought to what they want the students to achieve. Some lessons are timetabled into three-hour blocks and some teachers do not plan appropriately to use a suitable range of teaching methods that maintain students' interest and motivation. In weak lessons, teachers talk at the students too much and students become bored. In some lessons, students waste time copying notes. In some cases, too many students arrive late and disrupt lessons. Teachers are not always aware if students are learning and fail to make appropriate checks. Insufficient use is made of visual aids and in some areas there is not enough application of ICT.

17. The arrangements for the teaching and assessment of key skills changed in 2002/03. Key skills specialist staff teach the relevant communication, application of number and IT skills, and prepare students for external tests. Portfolio evidence is now assessed through vocational assignments, rather than through separate specially designed key skills assignments. Key skills staff are allocated to vocational areas to support vocational staff and promote the integration of key skills with courses. This approach is not yet effective in many curriculum areas. Many students do not see the relevance of key skills to their main programme of study. Many staff are not clear about the arrangements for the assessment of portfolio evidence. There are areas where the integration of key skills is effective, for example in sports science. For some work-based students, who commenced their programmes before 2001, insufficient attention was given to key skills until a late stage. Where there are low pass rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks, failure to pass the required key skills qualifications has often been a significant contributory factor. Steps have now been taken to ensure that key skills for work-based students are taught and assessed from an early stage.

18. The college has a comprehensive property strategy. There are excellent specialist facilities and resources in many areas including engineering, construction, visual and performing arts and media, hospitality and catering and sport. In some areas, partnerships with industry have provided high specification equipment.

19. The college intranet includes a wide range of materials for both staff and students. The 'virtual campus' offers courses on-line, including attractive college-produced interactive materials. A virtual learning environment was installed in November 2001. Over 200 staff have been trained in its use. Materials produced are of a high standard, but the range is small. There are links to national on-line learning resources. Students can access the intranet and virtual learning environment outside college. Little actual use of virtual learning environment was seen during the inspection. A bus for community use has been purchased containing 10 workstations with Internet access. There are good staff development opportunities in IT. The overall ratio of computers to students is close to the average for the sector of 5.5 students to each computer.

20. Most accommodation is of good standard and classrooms well furnished and equipped. Electronic whiteboards are available on all sites, but little use appears to be made of them. Students with mobility difficulties are able to reach most parts of the college. Induction loops are available at all sites. There are no adjustable-height computer workstations. Libraries have an appropriate range of books, periodicals and resources such as videos and CD-ROMs. The library on the Newton site is shared with the local authority library.

21. Staff are well qualified. Industry partnerships have enabled many staff to keep abreast of current practice in industry. In some areas, including business and animal care, some staff have had too little industrial experience or no recent updating. There is no college-wide policy specifically addressing industrial updating.

22. In some areas, initial assessment is used well to guide students on to appropriate courses. On access courses, for example, the choice of access to FE or access to HE is determined largely by the results of this initial assessment. Assessment schedules are designed to ensure that a student's assignment workload is evenly spread. Assessments are planned to meet the requirements of the awarding body and include clear briefs. Work is marked promptly, but the quality of written feedback is uneven. In some areas, including health and social care, comments from staff offer suggestions for improvement. In other areas, such as business, written feedback is not sufficiently detailed to enable students to improve their work.

23. Comprehensive internal verification procedures operate effectively in most areas. The requirements of awarding bodies are met and the issues identified in external verifiers' and moderators' reports are acted upon.

24. For full-time students aged 16 to 18 information on the progress they are making on courses is collected by pastoral tutors as part of the system used to gauge progress against that which is expected from entry qualifications. There are differing interpretations of how the system should operate to review progress and arrive at individual targets. There are no college-wide procedures for providing written reports to parents of students aged 16 to 18 or to employers. Most curriculum areas hold parents' evenings that provide an opportunity for parents to obtain information about students' progress. Some are not well attended. Arrangements for reporting to employers of work-based students differ between curriculum areas. There are plans to improve the provision of information to parents and employers through the opportunities available in the new management information system. Arrangements for work-based assessment are good in some areas, less satisfactory in others.

25. The college has an extensive and diverse curriculum that seeks to meet the needs of the local community. Programmes are designed to provide good progression opportunities for full-time and part-time students. In many subjects, the offer ranges from entry level to level 4 and in some to degree level. A curriculum audit and internal validation system ensure the curriculum is well planned and developed.

26. However, some areas, for example performing arts and media, have no courses at level 1 and level 2. The college's arrangements for adult students enable them to plan their study around their personal or family commitments. Courses are often modular with multiple entry points during the year. Courses are offered during the day, evening and at weekends. Adults also have opportunities to gain additional qualifications. Work-based learning is offered in eight areas and was inspected in five of these. Franchise provision is mainly for students on care courses and involves seven local training providers.

27. The college has responded to the aims of Curriculum 2000. Most courses offer work experience, but in some, for example hairdressing, there are insufficient opportunities. The range of enrichment activities is very good and participation is high, but key skills provision is underdeveloped and in some curriculum areas integration into vocational courses is poor.

28. The college has strong links with the community, industry and commerce which enables it to assess and respond to local needs. Industrial links are particularly strong in engineering. Collaboration with local schools is well established and includes extensive vocational provision for 14 to 16 year olds. The college is committed to widening participation in FE. Staff take an active role in local regeneration projects and have been successful in gaining additional funding to support projects that widen participation. Market research is successfully used to identify demand and to develop new courses. The college has identified the need to promote the college more effectively to people with disabilities and to avoid a stereotyped approach to job roles in the recruitment of men and women to courses. For example, it seeks to recruit women to construction courses.

29. Student support is well managed and co-ordinated. A spacious and welcoming centre for student services at the main site is well used. Students are aware of the services available. Support teams communicate effectively with students. Pre-entry guidance and support are good. Well-designed student handbooks provide appropriate and helpful information. On the web site further information is clear and easy to use. There is an effective central admissions service, which deals quickly and efficiently with enrolment. Students' feedback on the quality of this provision is analysed and acted upon.

30. Students value highly the sound guidance and support that they receive from teachers and tutors. The college obtained the information and guidance kite mark in 2001. Tutorial arrangements are co-ordinated effectively and take account of the wide range of students. Full-time students aged 16 to 18 have an academic and pastoral tutor and attend weekly tutorials. The amount of tutorial support depends on course length. Tutorials are satisfactory, but some areas do not set sufficiently challenging targets for students. Students and some staff are unsure of college policy on attendance

and punctuality. Some part-time adults do not receive formal tutorial support. The college recently appointed three learning mentors who work with students in tutorials. They also concentrate on one-to-one with students at risk of leaving before the completion of their courses. It is too early to judge the effect this is having on improving retention rates. Youth workers spend time in the college sixth form centre.

31. Financial support for students is well managed. There are several sources of finance for such support and clear criteria to determine eligibility. Free childcare and travel are available to most full-time students. Students with additional physical or communication needs are provided with the necessary aids, for example, communicators for the hearing impaired. Some 25% of college students are addressed as needing additional study, but take-up remains low. In some areas, for example, business administration and ICT, effective support is available in lessons. In other areas, there are poor links between the vocational and learning support staff. Good use is made of the results of initial assessment to ensure students are on suitable programmes. A 'Right Choice' interview explores students' career aspirations and the match with their programmes of study. Counselling and welfare arrangements are well co-ordinated, managed and are effective.

Leadership and management

32. Leadership and management are good. There is strong leadership. The college is well governed. Governors and senior managers work together effectively. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to the success of the college and to its effective contribution to education and training in the locality and further afield. They set clear and appropriate strategic objectives and communicate well with managers and staff. The strategic planning process is consultative and takes full account of local and national priorities. The principal and senior managers initiate the process. Governors and external contributors make their input at a planning weekend. Governors carefully assess progress against the previous year's plan and review the strategic direction of the college. They use their specialist and local knowledge effectively when shaping the plan. Governors have been actively involved in substantial improvements to the college's premises and equipment since the last inspection.

33. The corporation sets reviews and monitors challenging targets. Its effective committee structure has been strengthened by the introduction of a standards sub-committee that meets bi-monthly to monitor and evaluate the college's performance. The corporation also diligently monitors its own performance against clear objectives and measurable targets. Members evaluate their own contributions to the work of the corporation and its committees. All members take part in a governance health check. Standards fund money has been used in partnership with another college and a training organisation to disseminate good practice to other colleges in governance and the role of the clerk.

34. There are many effective external links with outside bodies, particularly, though by no means exclusively, those based in the local community. The college demonstrates a strong commitment to its own community. Initiatives to widen participation have resulted in the recruitment of students from groups who are not traditionally well represented in FE. The curriculum has been reviewed and adapted in some areas to improve provision for students. Pass rates have improved, in some cases significantly. These changes have formed part of an overall strategy to seek to improve students' achievements. Retention and pass rates are above national averages for adult students at all levels, for 16 to 18 year olds at level 1 and for students on short courses, but pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3 and GCSE students are below national averages. Many teaching areas of the college have excellent links with industry and work collaboratively with local companies and national bodies to provide education and training that is highly regarded. The college runs some effective programmes on company premises. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory in some areas, but in others the planning of learning in the workplace is weak. There is insufficient co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job learning. Progress reviews do not always result in clear and challenging targets for students and individual learning plans are not always kept up to date. In some of the provision, few assessments are carried out in the workplace.

35. Curriculum management is effective in most areas. Communications between managers and staff are good and open. The college intranet is used extensively by teachers and managers.

Managers visit course teams in order to keep staff well briefed and well informed. Information from such briefings is recorded and minutes circulated. Target setting is firmly established across the college. Teachers are aware of programme performance in terms of retention and pass rates and are involved in setting realistic recruitment targets for the college at course level as part of their business planning process. In some areas, the impact of target setting has yet to be fully realised at team and class teacher level. There is little evidence of a strategic approach to the low retention and pass rates on some courses, although these are recognised by teachers as being significant issues. Communication between the managers of two curriculum areas and staff running the management information system staff was unsatisfactory; awareness of relevant data was inadequate.

36. Quality assurance procedures, which extend to the franchise provision, are well established and staff are familiar with the processes. Improvements and innovations are continuously sought. College policies and procedures are well publicised through the college's quality assurance manual and policy file. Course reviews are effective in identifying areas for improvement. Staff are responsive to the comments of students, whose opinions are sought regularly and systematically. When complaints are received, managers take prompt and effective action.

37. Performance management is largely effective and makes a positive contribution to the determination of the development needs of staff. Managers who have been trained in classroom observation assess teachers' classroom performance at least once each year. Prompt action is taken to support the few staff whose teaching is judged to be unsatisfactory. The lesson observation procedures have been adapted to mirror more closely those of the common inspection framework. Outcomes from lesson observations are not always used to improve teaching.

38. The college has a strong commitment to equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is promoted and the impact of policies is analysed. Management teams are committed to the values of social inclusion and effectively promote courses to groups of potential students that are traditionally under-represented in FE. In the context of the population of St Helens, a key aim of the mission is to provide accessible and appropriate programmes to a broad range of students, in particular, to those drawn from areas of social disadvantage. In some subject areas, teachers address equal opportunities through a range of course material; some staff explore themes of prejudice and social awareness effectively. Sometimes there is a failure to monitor adequately the equality of opportunity of students in the workplace. Close attention is paid to health and safety.

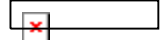
39. The race equality policy and implementation plans are clear. The plan is contained within the overall action plan for equality of opportunity and is not regarded as a separate issue. The plan has clear action points, measures of success, and appropriate timescales. Progress, which is carefully monitored, is good. Briefing sheets have been circulated to all staff and the policy is on the intranet. Governors have had a training event, but training has not yet taken place for all staff. Statistics for staff have been analysed by racial grouping, but students' achievements have not.

40. The self-assessment was honest and largely accurate. Inspectors found provision in three curriculum areas to be better than the college's own report had concluded; there was evidence of improvement in three curriculum areas between the completion of the self-assessment and the inspection. Courses are reviewed thoroughly and students' opinions sought. In a few areas, the conclusions from student surveys are not fully incorporated into the evaluation process and some action plans are not effectively implemented. The college's evaluation of teaching by lesson observation was broadly similar to the inspectors, although their evaluation of lessons found more good or better and more unsatisfactory lessons than did that of the college.

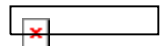
41. There is good financial management despite the under-achievement of unit targets that were set by the LSC in the 2001/02 financial year. Senior managers have made considerable efforts to monitor and promote procedures that secure value for money. Capital bids are judged against performance indicators that include anticipated improvements in pass and retention rates. Internal audit procedures evaluate both service departments and curriculum areas. The departments are required to demonstrate how their work enhances the experiences of the students. The excellent accommodation and outstanding equipment in a number of areas have been largely achieved from the college's own revenue budget. Good links with industry and matched funding from the European Community have added to this provision of excellent resources. The college provides a number of

specific courses for companies. Some curriculum areas have formed partnerships with external agencies and work closely with employers and local community services.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on most courses
- good retention rates on part-time adult GCSE mathematics
- good teaching and learning in many science lessons
- inclusive provision for access and national diploma courses
- good pastoral and academic support for full-time courses.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the majority of courses for students aged 16 to 18
- poor pass rates in GCSE mathematics for students aged 16 to 18
- lack of attention to the needs of individual students in mathematics lessons

- inadequate co-ordination and development of mathematics courses.

Scope of provision

42. The college offers a range of mathematics and science-based courses from level 1 to level 4. Science courses include part-time GCSE single-subject sciences, full-time and part-time access to FE and HE courses and the day-release national certificate in applied science. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 130 full-time and part-time students in science, 100 students were aged over 19. HE courses are also available.

43. GCSE mathematics is taught on all three college sites, on daytime and evening courses to part-time adults and also to students aged 16 to 18 who are following other courses in the college. GCE AS mathematics is taught on two sites. Over 200 students were studying GCSE mathematics; the number of adults and of students aged 16 to 18 taking the course was similar. Of the 45 students on GCE AS mathematics courses, two thirds were adults. Sports science courses include the first and national diplomas in applied science (sport studies); there were 65 students on these courses.

Achievement and standards

44. Pass rates on most courses are good. At GCSE, the pass rates for adults in chemistry have been consistently above national averages for the sector for the three years to 2002. In 2002, the pass rate exceeded the national average by 52%. In human physiology, the pass rate improved to 20% above the national average in 2002. In mathematics, the overall pass rates have been above national averages for the three years to 2002. The pass rates for adult students are high, but for students aged 16 to 18 they are low. After two years of low pass rates, the pass rate for GCE AS mathematics improved in 2002. Pass rates on adult access to HE courses are high. The pass rate for the national diploma in sport science increased to 14% above the national average in 2002.

45. Retention rates have been at or below national averages on many courses for several years. Low retention rates are primarily on courses with younger students. In GCSE mathematics, the retention rate of students aged 16 to 18 was below national averages for the three years to 2002. Similarly, the national diploma sports studies course has a low and declining retention rate. There was also a fall in retention rates in GCSE chemistry in 2002. Courses with good or improved retention rates are GCSE mathematics for adults and the access to HE course. Attendance at lessons averaged 80%.

46. In most of the lessons observed, students were working at or above the standard that would be expected. In the most effective lessons students demonstrated very good analytical and evaluative skills. The level of attainment was generally higher for adults than for younger students.

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	194	196	202
		% retention	78	67	73
		% pass rate	60	44	50
GCSE chemistry	2	No. of starts	15	13	11
		% retention	80	100	64
		% pass rate	58	77	100

GCSE human physiology and health	2	No. of starts	44	20	33
		% retention	77	75	76
		% pass rate	32	87	58
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	21	40	24
		% retention	86	58	67
		% pass rate	39	22	67
Access to HE science	3	No. of starts	26	21	21
		% retention	77	100	95
		% pass rate	100	90	100
National diploma in applied science (sport studies)	3	No. of starts	24	44	43
		% retention	71	64	58
		% pass rate	100	85	95

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

Quality of education and training

47. Two thirds of science and sport studies lessons observed were graded good or better, but only 43% of mathematics lessons achieved these grades. The better lessons were well structured and used a suitable range of activities, materials and equipment. Poorer lessons lacked sufficient interest and teachers made little attempt to accommodate differences among students in their rates of learning. Schemes of work are well structured. Good handouts and course booklets are used in access courses. They contain clear sign posting to appropriate web sites and other resources to allow students to develop their subject knowledge outside the classroom. Handouts used in sport science lessons are clear and effective. Course booklets are less well developed in the single sciences. In mathematics, the learning materials are pedestrian and uninspiring, usually consisting of examples for students to practice.

48. Lessons that included the skilful use of question and answer promoted discussion and conceptual development. Access students studying a biology unit used information gained from a practical demonstration, a PowerPoint presentation and visual aids to develop understanding of enzyme structure and function. They readily responded and extended their understanding of the concepts in discussion with the teacher and other members of the class. Demonstrations and practicals follow appropriate health and safety procedures. Good practical sessions linked observations to the understanding of theory. In a chemistry lesson a series of small demonstrations, linked to clear, instructive handouts, helped students to comprehend the properties of ionic and covalent compounds. In the less effective lessons the teachers talked too much and insufficient use was made of models or visual aids; there was too little questioning to check that students understood the work. Students produce satisfactory work in most mathematics lessons, but there is too much dull, didactic teaching, coupled with an over-emphasis on practice of examples. In lessons observed, no use was made of computers in mathematics or sport science and insufficient use was observed in science lessons.

49. The science laboratories include a specialist laboratory containing analytical equipment of industry standard specification. Two chemistry laboratories are old and have not been refurbished. Science staff are supported by two instructor/technicians who prepare and assist in practicals. Mathematics rooms are large and are well stocked with learning materials. Some rooms are also used for teaching key skills. Facilities for sport science are good; students have access to the college central sport facility. The classrooms used for teaching sports science are often small for the size of the class. Staff are suitably qualified and possess appropriate degrees and teaching

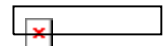
qualifications.

50. Initial assessments are used to direct students onto the most appropriate course. In access and sport studies courses there are detailed assignment briefs where extensive feedback is given. Monitoring of the progress of GCSE students and GCE AS mathematics students is less effective. There is no evidence of target setting or action planning for any of the GCSE courses. Full-time students value the support offered in tutorial sessions. Good practice was observed in sport science tutorials in which students were given clear evaluation of their progress and advice on how to improve. Tutorials have been introduced this year for part-time GCSE and GCE AS courses, but they are not yet effective. The development of key skills is well integrated into sport science assignments. There is excellent progression to HE from the access course. In 2001, 15 out of 19 students went on to study nursing or science-related courses, primarily at local universities.

Leadership and management

51. Course management is effective. Course teams meet regularly to discuss course development and students' progress. These meetings are led by programme managers who answer to curriculum resource managers. Strategic issues are communicated from senior management through curriculum managers on a weekly basis. The mathematics area has been without a team leader for a considerable time. Provision is fragmented; there is a lack of co-ordination and insufficient curriculum development. The curriculum resource manager for science has recently taken responsibility for co-ordination of some of the mathematics provision. Target setting does not have a significant impact. Self-assessment involves all staff and results in action plans. These action plans are monitored periodically.

Land-based provision



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

Strengths

- good retention rates on NVQ horticultural programmes
- mostly high pass rates on floristry and animal care programmes
- good teaching in horticulture and floristry
- very good use of industry partnerships
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on some full-time programmes
- weak planning in several practical sessions
- some unsatisfactory management of key skills
- weak target setting and action planning.

Scope of provision

52. The college offers courses in animal care, equine studies, horticulture, floristry and conservation at the Newton-le-Willows site. Full-time programmes are available at foundation and intermediate level in all subjects, and advanced level courses are available in animal care and equine studies. Most enrolments are on foundation and intermediate level courses. There is a good range of part-time and evening programmes that provide access for those in employment. There is a range of community, schools link and outreach programmes. Courses are available for people with severe learning difficulties or recovering from long-term illness. Recruitment on courses is generally declining. The college has recognised this decline and is developing strategies to address the issue. Access to additional qualifications to enhance employment prospects is inadequate. Students have good access to enrichment activities offered both across the college and within their specialist areas.

Achievement and standards

53. Pass rates on most courses have been around or above national averages for the sector for the two years to 2002. Pass rates in floristry and animal care are high both for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. In amenity horticulture, all students achieved their qualifications in 2002. Retention rates for NVQ horticulture qualifications are good, but there are poor and declining retention rates on some full-time courses, particularly within the 16 to 18 age-group. Few students progress directly into employment. The use of accreditation of prior learning is well established in NVQ programmes but less developed for other qualifications. Full-time students develop effective study skills and personal skills on the college academic tutorial programme that benefits from a useful range of study materials.

54. Standards of practical work are high in floristry and satisfactory in other areas of the land-based provision. Students' files are generally well organised and written work is satisfactory. Overall, NVQ portfolios are satisfactory; those in horticulture are of a good standard.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ animal care	1	No. of starts	17	21	19
		% retention	59	62	58

		% pass rate	0	100	82*
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	No. of starts	51	30	10
		% retention	39	83	80
		% pass rate	50	50	100
NVQ floristry	2	No. of starts	26	20	28
		% retention	73	70	64
		% pass rate	63	100	100
NVQ amenity horticulture	2	No. of starts	16	12	13
		% retention	81	100	85
		% pass rate	50	100*	100
First diploma in animal care	2	No. of starts	35	32	15
		% retention	77	66	60
		% pass rate	64	100	100
National diploma in animal care/management	3	No. of starts	**	21	15
		% retention	**	62	80
		% pass rate	**	***	92

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

* college data

** course not running

*** no completers in 2000/01 as first year of a two year course

Quality of education and training

55. Most teaching is satisfactory; teaching in horticulture and floristry is good. Teaching is good in adult classes, but less effective in the 16 to 18 age-groups. In the most effective lessons, students are enthusiastic and industrious and produce high standards of work. Students work effectively on their own, for example on group work in animal care lessons. In less effective lessons, teachers fail to provide students with appropriate opportunities to learn. In one animal care lesson, students spent most of the lesson copying notes. They did not have opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding. There is good individual support in practical lessons, particularly in floristry and conservation where students work towards different levels of qualifications and produce high standards of work. Some practical lessons are poorly planned and organised. Literacy and numeracy support is effectively integrated into NVQ horticulture sessions, but this good practice is not developed in other subjects. Animal care lessons integrate the development of key skills effectively into teaching and assessment, but in other subjects there is poor integration. There is little use of IT to support learning. Attendance is good and students are punctual. Equal opportunities issues are not always effectively emphasised and explained in classroom teaching.

56. Adequate specialist resources are enhanced by very effective use of industry partnerships. This strategy has been particularly effective in horticulture and conservation where students use local amenity sites and community projects. Nevertheless, some horticultural facilities are underdeveloped and students lack access to on-site estate maintenance teaching facilities. The number and range of animals for animal care practical resources are insufficient. There is insufficient attention to health and safety in the provision of floristry resources. The use of learning packs to support classroom teaching is well developed. Materials used in key skills workshops are not set in a vocational context and some materials make insufficient demands on students. There is good access to general learning resources on the Newton-le-Willows site. Students have access to a good range of books in

most subject areas, although provision is only adequate in the equine and conservation subjects. Computer and Internet facilities are readily available, but use of the college intranet and access to CD-ROMs is inadequate. Most staff have appropriate vocational qualifications, but some have little relevant industrial experience. The college has recognised this shortcoming and has implemented a programme of staff recruitment and development for both full-time and part-time staff.

57. Assessment for vocational qualifications is well managed on most programmes. There are thorough internal verification and moderation systems for most assessed work. The quality of feedback to students on assessed work varies considerably and often lacks sufficient detail for work graded at a pass level. Good attention is paid to correcting spelling and grammar.

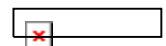
58. Support for students is good. They are well informed and very positive about the support available for their personal welfare. Induction is well planned and managed; the support materials are good. There are thorough processes for initial assessment, but these do not always result in the provision of timely and appropriate additional support. Some students are enrolled on inappropriate levels of qualification. There is no systematic approach to reporting of progress to students, employers, and where appropriate, their parents. Arrangements for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are unsatisfactory. Arrangements for initiating the development of learning plans at pre-entry stage, and for target setting and action planning processes to support student progress, are weak.

Leadership and management

59. Management is generally effective; there is good communication between staff and managers. Part-time staff are well managed. Teaching observations are systematically carried out, but there is insufficient attention to learning. Where unsatisfactory teaching is observed, no plans are drawn up for improvement. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching at the equestrian centre are underdeveloped. There is no formal consultation process with employer groups on curriculum development.

60. The self-assessment report provided an accurate reflection of the provision. Staff are aware of the issues over retention and pass rates. There are some strategies to improve retention rates, but no effective action plan.

Construction



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- good pass rates for NVQ at level 2 in painting and decorating and carpentry and joinery
- much good teaching in classrooms and workshops
- excellent resources

- effective external links
- good support for work-based learners.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates at NVQ level 2 in electrical installation
- insufficient integration of key skills within courses
- some late arrival at lessons.

Scope of provision

61. There is a good range of provision of craft and technician courses that meet the needs of the local industry and that of students. This range includes a schools-link course. Individuals can progress through craft or technician studies and on to a degree or professional membership of a construction institute. Many of the courses build on earlier attainment and experience; there are procedures to assess and accredit prior achievement. The main courses provide occupational training in bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, electrical installation, painting and decorating and plumbing. The Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and GNVQ in construction and the built environment courses are being replaced by the new EdExcel and diploma courses. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 2,000 students enrolled on full-time and part-time courses. Over half the students were adults. Over 80 of the students aged 16 to 18 were on the work-based learning courses, many having joined as a result of attending the successful school-link programme.

Achievement and standards

62. Pass rates are at or above the national averages for the sector in most courses. Pass rates for NVQ level 2 in painting and decorating and carpentry and joinery were close to or above the national average for the three years to 2002. However, the pass rate for NVQ level 2 in electrical installation has been below for the same period. The three-year decline of students progressing on to NVQ level 3 has successfully been addressed. Retention rates on most courses have been consistently at or above the national averages, although the retention rate for the GNVQ in built environment fell below in 2002. In work-based learning, most students achieve the NVQ level 2 but not the framework. A value added tracking system has been introduced to monitor students' progress.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ electrical	2	No. of starts	53	88	18

installation		% retention	91	80	94
		% pass rate	43	27	38
NVQ bricklaying	2	No. of starts	16	22	22
		% retention	69	55	77
		% pass rate	57	40	67
NVQ painting and decorating	2	No. of starts	24	21	10
		% retention	71	76	70
		% pass rate	56	64	100
NVQ carpentry and joinery	2	No. of starts	31	42	27
		% retention	77	71	81
		% pass rate	78	87	100
GNVQ built environment	3	No. of starts	14	22	20
		% retention	79	73	65
		% pass rate	100	46	92
Mechanical services (plumbing)	3	No. of starts	17	27	24
		% retention	59	81	96
		% pass rate	0	56	88

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

Quality of education and training

63. There is much good teaching in both classroom and workshops and most of the lessons observed were good or better. Many classes contained both adults and students aged 16 to 18; the teaching met the needs of both groups. In the most effective lessons, individual learning is supported by team teaching using learning packs; students achieve a high standard of work. Most lessons are well organised; demonstrations of craft skills are excellent. Students receive good individual tuition in practical activities. Adult students are particularly well motivated.

64. Theory is integrated well with practical craft activities. Lessons on technician courses involve students well. However, in some lessons a few disruptive students were insufficiently challenged and the content of the lessons did not meet the course requirements. There is insufficient integration of key skills, in particular in the work-based learning provision that has affected achievement of frameworks. The tutorial and review procedure for full-time and part-time students was good and valued by most students. In some instances, students' late arrival and the disruption created on leaving and returning to the lessons had a detrimental affect on learning. This behaviour was only evident in lessons for students aged 16 to 18.

65. Staff are well qualified and have good, relevant industrial experience. There is sufficient technical support in the workshops. Risk analysis is well documented and most staff have a good knowledge of health and safety requirements. There are excellent facilities at the technology campus. The purpose-built workshops are spacious and well equipped and have a good range of modern equipment. Students have good access to IT facilities and videos. The library provides a good service and suitable range of materials; tutors link the provision well into courses. Internal verification is effective and well documented, and assessment is accurate. Work-based learning courses are included in the process. Students get good feedback and in some workshops progress charts are displayed. In NVQ programmes, a combination of site-based evidence is used effectively alongside

a series of planned college assessments.

66. Students' progress on work-based learning is monitored well. Placements are generally well chosen, although two could not supply the full range of opportunities for students to develop their skills. Students are well supported and receive a training grant. Many students progress into employment.

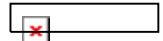
67. All construction students take basic skills tests during induction and additional support needs are determined. A large number of students have effective additional support that is often provided within lessons. The overall support is of a high standard. There are good regular student reviews and feedback is provided to employers and where appropriate, to parents. Parents' evenings are organised each term and informal contacts made which necessarily address issues such as poor attendance.

Leadership and management

68. Leadership and management are very good. The construction provision within the college is part of the faculty of technology. There is positive leadership and the construction management team gives clear guidance and direction to staff. A new timetabling system is being used effectively to monitor both accommodation and use of staff. Links with industry are effective and employers are complimentary about the provision. The college runs the St Helens construction curriculum centre, which is popular and well supported by schools and industry. The large school-link programmes provide an effective avenue in encouraging students to follow a career in construction.

69. A self-assessment report was accurate and identified most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. Good progress has been made in addressing weaknesses before the inspection began.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- an extensive range of engineering programmes
- very good resources
- effective linking of theory and practical training
- high pass rates on many courses

- well-managed programmes and resources
- a wide range and take-up of enrichment activities
- very effective support for additional learning needs.

Weaknesses

- poor emphasis on health and safety by some staff
- insufficient integration of key skills into vocational teaching
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- weak planning of work-based learning.

Scope of provision

70. The college offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time engineering courses from foundation to degree level at the technology campus. These courses include motor vehicle, welding, mechanical and electrical and electronic engineering and advanced manufacturing and computer-aided design. The college also provides a range of short courses for industry on a commercial basis and programmes for 14-16 years olds. Some 75% of the students are aged 19 and over, and 116 students are on work-based learning programmes. Work-based students attend the college one day each week for practical skills training and vocational education courses. Some adult NVQ programmes are run at employers' premises.

Achievement and standards

71. Pass rates on many courses are above national averages for the sector. Retention rates are at or close to national averages for most courses. The retention and pass rates on the NVQ in engineering manufacture have been particularly high for the three years to 2002. Pass rates for welding and telematics courses are also particularly high. Pass rates on the motor vehicle mechanical and electrical systems were well below the national average in 1999 and 2001. Many students progress on to more advanced programmes of study. The standard of most students' practical work is good. Within the vehicle repair and finishing workshop, students are producing good paint finishes to vehicles. They demonstrate highly technical repair techniques. Some of the techniques used are currently being introduced by trade bodies into commercially operated vehicle body repair garages. Examples of weld test pieces and machined components are of a high

standard. A high proportion of foundation modern apprentices achieve an NVQ at level 2 and progress on to more advanced programmes. Most courses contain a mixture of students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. There is little discernible difference in performance between these age-groups.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Telematics intermediate (one year)	2	No. of starts	64	109	47
		% retention	78	79	98
		% pass rate	82	83	89
Electrical and electronic engineering (one year)	2	No. of starts	50	36	53
		% retention	80	69	79
		% pass rate	72	53	*
Vehicle mechanical and electrical systems unit replacement	2	No. of starts	23	19	22
		% retention	88	63	82
		% pass rate	88	36	*
NVQ engineering manufacture (foundation)	2	No. of starts	33	10	12
		% retention	85	82	83
		% pass rate	100	100	100
City and Guilds 2290 Welding/fabrication	2	No. of starts	45	51	53
		% retention	78	90	92
		% pass rate	89	86	*
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	No. of starts	59	39	**
		% retention	71	59	**
		% pass rate	54	75	**

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

* full results not yet available

** course not running

Quality of education and training

72. Most teaching is satisfactory or better and in most lessons adult students and those aged 16 to 18 are taught together. In the most effective lessons, teachers make good use of the excellent resources to demonstrate the practical application of theory. A range of techniques such as individual tuition, group exercises, technical assignments and classroom debate are used well. Most teachers set clear objectives for the lessons, which are then reviewed at the end; they make good use of visual aids and models. Teachers make effective links between theory and practical skills training. Electronics classrooms and laboratories have been combined as a single teaching resource. In a lesson on wheel balancing, the teacher illustrated the theory at regular stages during the lesson with practical demonstrations. In many lessons, teachers use their extensive industrial knowledge to relate theory to workplace practice. In these lessons, students were attentive and sustained an interest in the subject. Students benefit from work experience. However, in many

lessons teachers do not check regularly that students understand the work. Directed questions are not used to identify students who are finding the course difficult. Teaching in a few lessons was unsatisfactory. In one lesson, the teacher attempted to teach the use of a micrometer using only paper-based learning aids and demonstration. Students were bored and made little progress.

73. The workshops are comprehensively equipped. Students have access to an adequate range of tools and equipment during practical lessons and are provided with some good learning support materials. Some workshops have tools and equipment of very advanced design, particularly in the motor vehicle workshops. Some of this equipment is more advanced than is commonly available in the workplace. The college has excellent resources for advanced manufacturing training. Teachers have good vocational and teaching qualifications. Many staff have extensive industrial experience.

74. There is regular assessment throughout the year and students are reminded of deadlines. Good feedback is given on most assignments and enables students to identify where improvements are required. Marking sheets for many practical tasks clearly show the criteria that have been applied and the results achieved. However, in a few practical lessons there was insufficient monitoring of students' work and inadequate feedback to help them progress. The assessment of theoretical knowledge for a few NVQs is superficial. For example, answers to questions are accepted even when they do not adequately demonstrate sufficient understanding. The college has recently introduced a policy of integrating the teaching and assessment of key skills within a vocational context. However, at the time of inspection, training in key skills was included in very few lessons; teachers plans failed to identify adequately where such skills could be developed in lessons and practical sessions.

75. A series of diagnostic tests clearly establishes students' additional learning needs. All students receive feedback on the results. Where appropriate individual action plans are agreed. Take-up of additional mathematics and English programmes is good. Numeracy and literacy support is vocationally related for motor vehicle students. Effective additional support is provided within lessons.

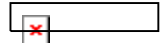
76. Students enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities. These include extensive opportunities for outdoor pursuits and visits to companies. The technology centre is also used to provide enrichment activities for other students in the college who wish to experience engineering.

77. Some staff do not give sufficient emphasis to the importance of health and safety issues in workshops. In the motor vehicle workshops, some staff do not ensure that students use gloves or barrier cream or set a good example themselves. Some students were working in an unsafe manner in mechanical workshops and the use of personal protection in welding areas was not always rigorously enforced.

Leadership and management

78. Programmes are well managed and course reviews are effective in identifying areas for improvement. Staff are responsive to the comments of students. Where complaints are received, staff take prompt and effective action. The department has a strong commitment to equal opportunities, but fails adequately to monitor the experience of students in the workplace. The department has excellent links with industry and works collaboratively with local companies and national bodies. The college runs some programmes on companies' premises where it has established base rooms to manage the programmes. Much of the excellent resources are provided through good links with industry; the college provides many courses that are specific to a single company. The planning of learning in the workplace is weak. There is insufficient co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the job learning. Progress reviews do not always result in clear and challenging targets for students and individual learning plans are not always kept up to date. There is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. The department's self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of the quality of provision and has a clear action plan for improvement.

Business administration, management and professional



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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most administration, management and professional courses
- much good teaching
- a very broad range of provision
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- inadequate integration of key skills into vocational training
- some inadequate teaching accommodation
- unsatisfactory achievement on work-based learning.

Scope of provision

79. There is a very broad range of provision that meets local needs. Programmes range from level 1 to level 5. Full-time courses include GNVQ intermediate, AVCE single and double awards and NVQs in business administration. These courses mainly recruit students aged 16 to 18. Most students attend on a part-time basis, taking courses that range from GCE A levels and secretarial subjects through to FE teachers' certificate courses, and professional courses in accountancy, marketing, purchasing, management and personnel. A small group of students were on modern apprenticeships in accountancy and business administration. There are clear progression routes, flexible arrangements for study options are available on many courses. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 400 students aged 16 to 18 and 4,000 adult students. Approximately 6% of students attended full time and 94% part time. There were 31 work-based students. In May 2002 the

development plan for a business and IT centre of vocational excellence got under way. Early indications are that good progress is being made in the achievement of the plan.

Achievement and standards

80. Most adult students are on management and professional courses. Those on business courses are mainly students aged 16 to 18. Retention and pass rates are high on most management and professional programmes. Pass rates on NVQ accounting courses and the certificate and advanced certificate in management are outstanding. Retention and pass rates on the FE teaching certificate stage 1 course are high and consistently above the national average. Business administration courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 all have high and improving pass rates. Over the three years to 2002 the GNVQ intermediate business programme has had a 100% retention rate. Achievement on work-based learning is unsatisfactory. Whilst over half of most cohorts move from work placements to employed status over the period of their apprenticeship, the achievement of NVQs is unsatisfactory and achievement of the full framework is low.

81. Most attainment in lessons is good. Students have a sound understanding of business concepts and can put theory into practice. They are able to use technical business language fluently and are knowledgeable about topical business issues. Assignments are generally completed well and good use is made of IT applications. Most management and professional students demonstrate good levels of knowledge and have sound critical skills; they make good progress to higher level qualifications and employment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Word processing (short and one year)	1	No. of starts	399	257	222
		% retention	85	85	89
		% pass rate	56	54	74
NVQ administration (one year)	2	No. of starts	100	70	62
		% retention	80	80	82
		% pass rate	69	85	89
NVQ administration (one and two year)	3	No. of starts	62	38	39
		% retention	84	87	92
		% pass rate	87	86	94
NVQ accounting (one year)	3	No. of starts	59	49	51
		% retention	95	83	88
		% pass rate	83	82	100
Further and adult education teacher's certificate stage 1	3	No. of starts	99	101	141
		% retention	93	92	99
		% pass rate	100	96	97
NVQ management	H	No. of starts	55	23	33
		% retention	95	91	100
		% pass rate	64	90	100

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

Quality of education and training

82. Teaching is good or better in most lessons. Overall, the teaching profile for management and professional courses is better than for business and administration courses. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. Most lessons are well planned, and have clear aims and defined learning outcomes. For example, in one lesson the teacher led a workshop on the communication process in which students played a full part. The teacher made effective use of a wide range of role-play exercises, and students demonstrated a good understanding of the success factors and barriers to communication. Effective guidance is given to individual students, and additional support is provided through academic tutorials and a popular accounts workshop. Students are confident, articulate and responsive, and make good progress in their studies. In a few lessons, teachers do not hold students' interest or sufficiently challenge them or make adequate use of teaching aids; they do not always intervene enough to check that students understand the work. Students on work-based programmes attend the college one day a week to undertake off-the-job training.

83. There is inadequate integration of key skills development into the vocational training. On work-based learning, key skills training has been completed by students after the NVQ. Achievement on the modern apprenticeship framework has been low. On GNVQ and AVCE programmes inadequate use has been made of vocational assignments to provide key skills evidence. Students do not see the relevance of key skills to their vocational studies.

84. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, and are well informed about current commercial practice. Students have access to a good range of learning materials to support their independent learning. Library resources are satisfactory. Most of the accommodation at the Brook Street campus is satisfactory, but one large room divided into three teaching areas is noisy and provides an unsatisfactory base for learning activities. Some of the larger groups are housed in rooms that are barely large enough and restrict the range of teaching methods and activities that can be used. This weakness is recognised by the college and plans are well developed for new accommodation. Accommodation at the Newton-le-Willows site is good.

85. There is good support for students. Students value the weekly academic and pastoral tutorials for full-time courses. In addition to the tutorials, a number of additional workshops are provided to help students with their academic studies and business skills. Teachers give freely of their time to provide students with extra help and support. The review of individual students' progress is effective. A system of value added has been introduced into the progress reviews, but had not been fully established at the time of the inspection. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of adult students and make arrangements to accommodate their family or work commitments.

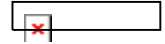
86. Assessments are well planned. Internal verification assures the standard of assignment briefs and the quality of the marking. Students' assignment work show they have good communication skills and writing techniques, and use IT well. Students' assignments also show well-developed Internet research skills and the ability to seek out other sources of evidence. GNVQ and AVCE students receive written and oral feedback after completing assignments. In some instances, the quantity and quality of the written feedback is too brief. Business administration and teacher training portfolios are particularly well presented and clearly cross-referenced. An appropriate variety of evidence is produced including observation, witness testimony, documents, screen dumps, photographs and personal statements.

Leadership and management

87. A director and three curriculum resource managers (CRMs) manage the area of management and business technology. Two of the curriculum resource managers have line management responsibilities for lecturing staff whilst the third has a responsibility for curriculum development and quality assurance across this provision. Courses are well organised and curriculum management is effective. Teachers work closely and effectively in their teams and share common schemes of work

and lesson plans. Staff meetings are held regularly although the standard of the recording of actions arising is uneven. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory. Staff are involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report was accurate in identifying most strengths and weaknesses; inspectors identified one additional strength and one additional weakness.

Information and communication technology



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

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

Strengths

- consistently high retention and pass rates on many courses
- good teaching in practical lessons
- much good and some excellent equipment
- an excellent range of appropriate general ICT and professional vocational courses
- very good progression opportunities
- effective quality assurance arrangements.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on the Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE) ICT dual award
- poor retention rates on national diploma courses
- inadequate checks on learning in a minority of theory lessons

- a poor retention rate of modern apprenticeships.

Scope of provision

88. The college offers an excellent range of general ICT courses covering the use of applications software from entry level to level 3 and a good range of professional courses from level 1 to foundation degrees. Full cost courses in subjects such as networking and requested short courses are also available. At the time of the inspection, the college had 33 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs in ICT. A pre-16 schools programme includes a GCSE in ICT. The full portfolio of courses meets the needs of the local community and many employers. Many courses are offered as day, evening, weekend and community provision, either full time or part time. There are good progression opportunities. For example, students enrolling on NVQ level 2 programmes are successfully progressing to national diploma courses and then on to HE. The college has been funded to develop a centre of vocational excellence in business and ICT and good progress is being made.

Achievement and standards

89. Pass and retention rates for many of the ICT courses have been at or above national averages for the sector over the three years to 2002. Particularly good results have been achieved on computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), European computer driving licence (ECDL) and City and Guilds 7261 IT diploma programmes, where both pass and retention rates have been consistently well above the national average. The large numbers of students recruited to these particular programmes are mainly adults. A number of other programmes, such as the GNVQ intermediate, have had consistently high pass rates. The pass rate for the recently introduced VCE ICT dual award has been low. While the retention rate overall is above average or higher, the retention rate on several programmes is low. These programmes include the national diplomas where retention rates have been below 40% and on some NVQs the retention rate has fluctuated. The retention rate for the cohorts shows for 2002/03 significant improvement on the previous year.

90. Standards for assignment and project work were at least above average; some work was of a high standard. For example, on the GNVQ intermediate course, the best assignments were completed to a high standard; some of the work in progress on ECDL courses was very good. Students who had started an NVQ web site design course in 2002 were moving with confidence between a software package for manipulating photograph images and a web design package, and beginning to produce work of a high standard.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT (one year)	1	No. of starts	620	665	508
		% retention	85	86	89
		% pass rate	75	78	77
NVQ using IT (one year)	1	No. of starts	102	10	25
		% retention	68	60	80
		% pass rate	84	50	88
ECDL (one year)	2	No. of starts	66	210	365

		% retention	82	91	92
		% pass rate	91	91	96
City and Guilds 7261 IT diploma	2	No. of starts	337	301	207
		% retention	76	86	95
		% pass rate	95	90	100
NVQ using IT (one year)	2	No. of starts	102	10	29
		% retention	73	83	86
		% pass rate	42	100	73
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	44	29	30
		% retention	80	90	70
		% pass rate	86	81	95
GNVQ advanced IT	3	No. of starts	8	14	*
		% retention	100	71	*
		% pass rate	63	78	*
NVQ use and support of IT (two year)	3	No. of starts	19	19	6
		% retention	68	79	100
		% pass rate	83	71	50

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

* change of course to AVCE

Quality of education and training

91. Teaching in most lessons is good or better, and satisfactory in most of the remainder. The teaching is good in practical classes. Lessons are generally well planned and prepared. Most teaching and learning materials are of a high standard and support lesson objectives well, although some overhead transparencies are showing their age. In several lessons, effective use was made of resources in the college virtual learning environment. These materials are also available for students' revision and are accessible from their homes. Most teachers form good working relationships with their students. Teachers structure lessons to meet students' needs, especially adult students. In an ICT for beginners' lesson, students were being encouraged to work at a pace that suited them and to use the Internet to complete searches on subjects that interested them. They gained confidence, thoroughly enjoyed the experience and many wanted to progress to other courses. In a lesson on a GNVQ foundation course, students were well supported yet challenged to develop a range of stationery for a small company. Several students had little experience of computers before starting the course, but all were making good progress and several had created a good quality web page advertising the company. In practical lessons, teachers generally monitored student progress and understanding well and provided good support. In a CLAIT lesson, a short informal quiz was used to check that students understood the work. This quiz was then followed up by students in small groups working together on specific points that had not been fully understood. Recording of students' progress on most courses was completed conscientiously. In the less well-planned lessons, teachers tended to talk for too long, or students copied notes from overhead slides without teachers checking that students understood what they were doing.

92. Assignments are set regularly to a published schedule, criteria for assessment is clear and student receive feedback on their performance. Moderation of assignments ensures consistency of standard between parallel groups. However, the quality of the feedback to students varies

significantly and lacks consistency within and between courses. The most effective feedback is written, detailed and thorough, and provides students with an agenda for improving their work.

93. Students' progress is recorded and the marks are held centrally. This information is shared with the whole team, with personal tutors for their one-to-one progress interviews and with academic tutors. Progress interviews are valued by students. Academic tutors are required to place emphasis on the academic needs of each individual student rather than to provide general help on topics to whole groups.

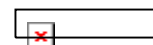
94. Most resources to support learning are good. Most computing hardware and software is of industry standard and meets course requirements. Links with industry and sponsorship have resulted in excellent facilities and accommodation being available for teaching telecommunications and networking. Although most accommodation is good, some detracts from the students' learning opportunities. For example, large rooms with temporary dividers can be so noisy that students are distracted. Some practical rooms are used inappropriately for theory teaching. There are no height-adjustable worktops for users of wheelchairs. Teachers are suitably qualified for the courses they teach and show enthusiasm for their subjects.

Leadership and management

95. There is a clear organisational structure and responsibilities are clearly defined. Curriculum development is effective. Programmes are generally well managed. Schemes of work, lesson plans, assignment schedules and course information provided for students are all suitably detailed. There are regular, minuted meetings and decisions are recorded. However, reports on action taken are not always monitored at subsequent meetings. Staff are involved in target setting and most are aware of their responsibilities. Procedures for improving the quality of courses are effective. Course representatives attend a meeting each term and their comments have led to improvements in facilities. Internal verification has highlighted issues to be addressed. Student feedback on each course module is carefully analysed. The course self-assessment reports are honest and provide a realistic assessment of quality and the actions required. Improvements to the quality of courses and facilities have been made. Staff development priorities have matched curriculum developments. For example, staff have attended fibre optic training courses to broaden the base of expertise available in the college.

96. Work-based learning placements are carefully matched to students to ensure that they are able to undertake appropriate tasks. Reviews and pre-assessment planning are linked so that students are well prepared for assessments which are carried out effectively. There is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities although close attention is paid to health and safety issues. Although employers are provided with the relevant NVQ standards, they are unsure of their role in supporting students in their NVQ work. They have little knowledge of the training that students receive at the college; the tasks allocated to students are not planned to link to the NVQ. Assessment of key skills is delayed until late in the course for NVQs or after their completion. In the NVQ on the use of IT, the retention and pass rates of students were both low.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel



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

Strengths

- some good pass rates

- good progression to employment and higher level courses
- good teaching of practical skills
- good industry links
- good specialist facilities.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on a few courses in hospitality and sport
- too little challenge for the most able students on some travel courses.

Scope of provision

97. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses from level 1 to level 4. Courses meet the needs of industry and provide good opportunities for student progression to employment or higher levels of study. Courses include NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 for full-time and part-time students in food preparation, NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in food and drink service and NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in sport and recreation and allied occupations. Part-time courses for adults include cake decorating, creative cookery and intermediate food hygiene. Other courses include the national certificate in hospitality supervision and a variety of travel options, including new courses in preparation for cabin crew and overseas resort representatives. At the time of inspection, there were approximately 400 students enrolled on hospitality, catering and travel courses and around 90 on courses in sport and recreation. Just over half of the students are adults.

Achievement and standards

98. Pass rates on most hospitality, catering and travel courses are good. On NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking and level 2 food and drink service in 2002, pass rates of 88% and 89%, respectively, were well above the national averages for the sector. In NVQ sports courses, pass rates have improved significantly, from 23% in 2001 to 70% in 2002. In the same year, pass rates on the national diploma in travel and tourism rose from 60% in 2001 to 95% in 2002. Retention rates on some courses are below average. In 2001, retention rates on the national diploma in hospitality and catering were 50%, well below the national average of 72%. On some NVQ level 2 courses in sport, the retention rate for students aged 16 to 18 was low.

99. Most full-time students gain awards in addition to their main qualification. All catering students achieve a basic food hygiene certificate. National pool lifeguard is a popular and successful option with NVQ sports students. In kitchens, restaurants and sports gymnasium areas, students work to industry standards. They demonstrate appropriate awareness of health, safety and hygiene and

develop good technical, teamwork and customer service skills. Most progress to higher level courses or employment. For example, in 2001 85% of catering students and 80% of travel students progressed to related employment. Students' written work is of a satisfactory standard. Attendance at classes observed during the inspection was good, at 86%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ in catering and hospitality (serving food and drink) one year	2	No. of starts	13	28	9
		% retention	100	96	89
		% pass rate	100	88	89
NVQ in catering and hospitality (food preparation and cooking) two years	2	No. of starts	58	71	33
		% retention	72	69	79
		% pass rate	81	95	88
Travel agents certificate primary	2	No. of starts	76	59	59
		% retention	76	88	88
		% pass rate	72	88	78
NVQ in sport recreation and allied occupations (one year)	2	No. of starts	57	59	75
		% retention	54	64	85
		% pass rate	90	23	70
BTEC national diploma hospitality and catering	3	No. of starts	17	18	12
		% retention	74	94	50
		% pass rate	83	80	100
National diploma in travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	37	40	36
		% retention	61	80	83
		% pass rate	80	60	95

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

Quality of education and training

100. There is much good teaching of practical skills. In the most effective practical sessions, activities are well planned and students have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They work to industry standards under appropriate pressure. Teachers manage the learning needs of mixed ability groups skilfully and students make good progress. Adult students and students aged 16 to 18 work well together, and on occasions are joined by pupils aged 14 to 16 from a local school. Students benefit from opportunities to develop their skills in the well-equipped specialist facilities. These operate as popular commercial businesses. Specialist equipment is at least at industry standard and in many cases significantly better.

101. In the most effective theory lessons, theory is linked to industry practice using innovative and interesting teaching methods. A customer service lesson for students on an air cabin crew course took place in a simulated aircraft environment. Role-play activity engaged students in dealing with passenger boarding, safety routines, and difficult customers during in-flight service. Students were well motivated and enthusiastic, gaining confidence from the experience. In some theory lessons,

inappropriate teaching methods are used that fail to challenge students appropriately or sustain their interest. The use of IT is underdeveloped. There is little challenge for the most able students on some travel courses.

102. Assessment is usually well planned and there are appropriate arrangements for internal verification. Most students are aware of the extent of their progress towards their qualification and receive good feedback from their teachers. There are productive links with industry. An international hotel chain promotes careers opportunities through industrial visits for students and guest speakers in college. Students are often invited to participate in high profile hospitality and catering events. A partnership between the college and three professional sports organisations has resulted in the development of football and rugby academies for young people who show good potential.

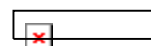
103. Students have appropriate access to computers in college and the library book stock is adequate. Staff hold appropriate professional qualifications and several have undertaken recent industrial updating.

104. All full-time students are interviewed and receive guidance in the choice of their programme. Initial assessment identifies individual support needs at induction. This information is not always used effectively to support students in their main courses of study. At course level, students speak highly of the informal support that they receive from their tutors. A new tutorial system involves the setting of progress targets; this is not always proving to be effective. In many cases, individual targets are too general and students are unclear about the processes involved.

Leadership and management

105. Overall the provision is well managed. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Students are encouraged to serve as representatives at course team meetings. Course team members make appropriate contributions to self-assessment and course planning. Lesson observation has not identified the significant differences that exist in the quality of some aspects of teaching and learning. Development plans contain strategies for improvement and there was evidence in 2002 of improved retention and pass rates in several areas. Target setting is under developed. There is no evidence of systematic monitoring of equal opportunities at course team level.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

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

Strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- a good system for monitoring students' progress
- the wide range of provision

- good vocational enrichment opportunities.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on NVQ level 2 hairdressing and level 2 beauty therapy
- low retention rates on NVQ level 2 beauty therapy
- slow resolution of staffing and resource issues
- poor management of assessment on work-based provision
- poor management of data.

Scope of provision

106. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and other related therapies that have been developed to meet the needs of students. Classes are timetabled with late starts and early finishes to help mature students with family commitments. At the time of inspection, there were over 300 students aged 16 to 18 and 407 adult students. Courses include NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and a wide range of other therapies including the beauty specialists diploma, Indian head massage certificate and diplomas in aromatherapy, reflexology and holistic therapies. The beauty therapy and other related therapies courses are offered on a part-time basis and can be taken by both full-time and part-time students. At the time of the inspection, there were 35 students on modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes. Students attend college one day a week, where they study theory and develop practical hairdressing and key skills.

Achievement and standards

107. The pass rates, compared to the national averages, are low on NVQ level 2 in hairdressing, NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy and beauty specialist diploma. However, the NVQ beauty therapy level 3, Indian head massage, diploma in reflexology and diploma in aromatherapy matched or exceeded national averages for the sector. There is low framework achievement on the work-based provision. Of 27 starters in 2000/01, only two had completed the full modern apprenticeship framework by the inspection.

108. Retention rates are low and below national averages at NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy and body massage diploma. Retention rates at level 3 in NVQ hairdressing and Indian head massage matched or exceeded national averages.

109. Retention rates at NVQ level 2 in hairdressing have been below national averages for the three years to 2002, although in that year the retention rate was close to the national average. Pass rates have varied, but were below the national average in 2001 and 2002.

110. Students' work is of a satisfactory standard, portfolios contain sufficient theory, but lacked sufficient evidence on performance. There are good standards of work in most practical sessions. Students do well in national competitions.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ hairdressing	2	No. of starts	107	141	137
		% retention	58	51	60
		% pass rate	86	67	74
Other therapies	2	No. of starts	99	175	133
		% retention	79	89	83
		% pass rate	74	66	*
NVQ beauty therapy	2	No. of starts	80	93	118
		% retention	69	70	69
		% pass rate	52	84	71
NVQ beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	20	35	10
		% retention	75	74	90
		% pass rate	57	77	100
NVQ hairdressing	3	No. of starts	19	28	7
		% retention	63	93	86
		% pass rate	100	63	100
Other therapies	3	No. of starts	225	381	188
		% retention	72	81	81
		% pass rate	84	75	66

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

* awaiting results

Quality of education and training

111. Teaching is well planned and effective. Most lessons are well organised and supported by common lesson plans that help in the organisation of the teaching and in meeting the individual needs of students. Most plans also contained alternative activities for students, particularly in salon-based activities where there may be insufficient customers. Generally, theory sessions are interesting and lively and students join in debate and discussion. Mature students are continually encouraged to refer to their own personal experiences to help to illustrate lessons. The use of small group activities for the 16 to 18 age-group maintains interest and motivation. Tutors use effective questions to test students' understanding of the work. There is good integration of theory and practical work.

112. There is a good system for monitoring students' progress. Students use 12-week 'planners' to set personal targets for progress. These are negotiated and agreed with the personal tutor, and used as a basis for producing personal action plans. These two documents are then used as part of the review process on full-time courses. Tutorial sessions are well planned and students feel the support is good.

113. Vocational enrichment is good and the college encourages all students to participate in competition work. The college has had sustained success in several national competitions. Students are stimulated and motivated by this type of work. Competition success stories are prominently displayed along all corridors in the hair and beauty suite, and the reception area displays the current trophies and cups awarded.

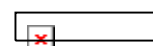
114. The accommodation is large, spacious and fit for purpose, if a little untidy. It represents commercial practice, although the décor and styling are rather dated. There are five large salons with 96 workstations, three large beauty salons with 31 workstations, two small high street style salons with three workstations in each and a ground floor high street style salon with six workstations. There is a lack of display material in the main college salons. The staff are well qualified and have taken up recent opportunities for staff development.

115. Students have the opportunity for realistic work experience in the college commercial salon and take part in a weekly rota. Students do not always take up the opportunity for wider work experience. They are assessed on the retail requirements of the course through this salon, but not in the main college salons. Hence opportunities for assessment and for experiencing full commercial practice are missed. There is a lack of clients in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Most clients are allocated to second-year groups. Students in the first year are not set achievable targets as the opportunities for assessment are limited by the lack of clients. Client logs, which show the details of treatments and client feedback, are used well to record students' work. There are no active work-based assessors and assessment for work-based students is normally through the college salons, which reduces the opportunity to work on clients for the full-time students. There is insufficient use of work-based evidence. Employers are largely unaware of the assessment plans and off-the-job training undertaken by the students. However, employers are enthusiastic and keen to support the students.

Leadership and management

116. Leadership and management are not wholly effective. There is little evidence of a strategic approach to improving the low retention and pass rates on some courses, although these issues are recognised as significant. There have been many staff changes caused by prolonged staff sickness sustained over at least two years; the college was slow to address these staffing issues. In beauty therapy, there has been a failure to ensure standardisation of assessment for the team. There is, however, good communication between the curriculum manager and the staff. Student feedback is obtained and analysed, but students are not made aware of the results. A team of observers conducts lesson observations regularly. Few assessments are carried out in the workplace on work-based provision. There is poor management of data. Data provided by the college management information system had not been reconciled with the courses actually offered in this area, and work-based learning data were not clear. All staff were involved in the development of the self-assessment report.

Health, social care and public services



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

Strengths

- good retention rates on AVCE and NVQ in care
- good progression rates
- much good teaching
- strong and effective links with external agencies for public services courses
- good work placements on care and early years courses.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on level 2 programmes for students aged 16 to 18
- poor pass rates on NVQ in care programme
- poor target setting in tutorials
- insufficient integration of key skills.

Scope of provision

117. There is a broad range of courses for full-time and part-time students in early years, health, social care, youth work and public services. At the time of the inspection, there were 361 students aged 16 to 18 following full-time courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Courses include: AVCE; national and first diploma in social care and public services; Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma, certificate and foundation courses; and National Council for Further Education (NCFE) preparation for uniformed services. There were also a small number of adults enrolled on these courses. There were 4,974 adult students following part-time courses including counselling, youth work and care programmes. NVQs in care at levels 2 and 3 are available as flexible programmes for people employed in the care sector. In addition, there are franchise arrangements with seven training providers who were training approximately 800 adults.

Achievement and standards

118. Most pass rates on full-time level 3 and adult part-time short courses are good. In 2002, pass rates on the AVCE course in health and care were well above the national average for the sector, at 79%. However, many pass rates remain below the national average, for example the NVQ care and the national diploma in public services. However, on five courses pass rates improved in 2002. The standard of students' work is good. They have a clear understanding of the vocational context of their work and are able to relate theory to practice effectively. During discussions, they are able to demonstrate appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Many students progress successfully from foundation courses through to diploma level and beyond.

119. Retention rates are generally high on a minority of programmes, for example on AVCE and NVQ care, but low on many level 2 programmes. The first diploma in public services, GNVQ intermediate health and social care and certificate in childcare and education remain below the national average. The retention rates for two-year courses showed some improvement midway through the course. Attendance is at the national average, at 77%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	22	19	27*
		% retention	91	79	59
		% pass rate	100	73	82
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	36	15	16*
		% retention	67	60	69
		% pass rate	88	100	73
First diploma in public services	2	No. of starts	28	34	35*
		% retention	64	79	60
		% pass rate	94	48	71
NCFE preparation for uniformed services	2	No. of starts	37	43	59*
		% retention	65	79	64
		% pass rate	100	97	100
Diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	40	66	53*
		% retention	80	74	55
		% pass rate	83	95	86
AVCE health and care	3	No. of starts	**	57	42*
		% retention	**	53	79
		% pass rate	**	74	82
National diploma in public services	3	No. of starts	34	61	51*
		% retention	74	49	66
		% pass rate	90	55	50

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

* college data

** course not running

Quality of education and training

120. Most teaching is good. Of lessons observed by inspectors, most were good or better. Lessons are well structured, lesson plans and schemes of work follow a standard format and aims and objectives are shared with students. Lessons build on previous learning that is confirmed at the beginning of each lesson. There were several examples of theory being applied to real work situations in a very effective manner. In lessons, students solve problems for themselves and organise their learning with confidence. A suitable range of teaching methods is used effectively including student presentations, discussions and practical activities. Good use is made of external speakers and student trips, particularly on public services courses. In health, social care and early years courses, work placements provide sound opportunities to learn. Most students are enthusiastic and demonstrate good knowledge. A few lessons failed to make appropriate demands on students. Teachers made insufficient checks to find out if students understood the work.

121. Most staff are qualified and experienced, although staff shortages caused problems in 2001/02. Accommodation is generally good, but some small rooms hamper the learning in lessons as staff do not have the space to circulate around groups. Students make good use of the library and information learning technology (ILT) equipment to gain information.

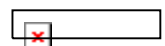
122. College-based assessment is good. Students are given a clear idea of the standards and expectations of the national awarding bodies. Students regularly receive feedback on their work that helps them to identify how they can improve their performance. Students assessed in the workplace are sometimes delayed by a lack of contact with work-based assessors. Key skills teaching is not always closely related to the vocational area in teaching, learning and assessment.

123. Students receive high levels of support from their tutors, both pastoral and academic. All full-time students have tutorials on a weekly basis. Part-time students have a more informal system related to the length of the programme. NVQ care students have only recently received formal tutorial support following the modification of the tutorial system. Initial assessment is thorough for most students, but the results are not always used by teachers when deciding how their lessons can benefit the differing abilities and needs of learners.

Leadership and management

124. Courses are well managed. There are effective procedures for monitoring students' progress. Teams meet regularly and lines of communication are clear. However, these meetings are not always well recorded. The department has formed partnerships with a number of external agencies. It works closely with employers and local community services. For example, youth worker training is provided in conjunction with the local council and students use a local police training centre. Target setting is underdeveloped. At the time of the inspection, targets had just been set for retention and pass rates for 2002/03, some of which were over ambitious and others below the rates achieved in the previous year. Lesson observations are conducted and appraisals identify staff development needs. Many of the issues in the self-assessment report had been at least partially addressed at the time of inspection. There are seven franchise arrangements with local training providers. Quality assurance procedures and activities for this provision have improved in 2002 and are satisfactory. However, pass and retention rates for this provision are low.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- much good teaching
- high standards of accommodation and equipment in all areas
- high retention and pass rates in part-time level 1 and level 2 courses and full-time performing arts courses
- a responsive staff development programme
- a wide range of part-time and community provision in art and design
- effective support by all staff for all students through tutorials.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates in AVCE art and design and AVCE media
- poor management of data.

Scope of provision

125. The college offers full-time courses in art, design, media and performing arts. Courses include BTEC national certificates, AVCEs, GNVQs, access and the diploma in foundation studies in art and design. A very wide range of part-time levels 1,2 and 3 day, evening and weekend courses is offered in arts and crafts at the main college, and at 20 other venues in the area as part of the community provision. A 'women into media' programme, funded through the European Social Fund, has been successful and a 'Pathways' project has taken courses to students in socially deprived areas. Opportunities are offered to Year 10 and Year 11 pupils from schools to attend college. The curriculum area also contributes to the college enrichment programme, offering eight art, design, media and performing arts options. At the time of the inspection, there were almost 1,300 students enrolled in the curriculum area, of whom nearly 300 were full time, and most aged between 16 and 18. There were almost 1,000 part-time students, of whom most were aged over 18.

Achievement and standards

126. Adults attending part time achieve very high pass rates, consistently around 90%, on the level 1 and level 2 art and design courses taught both at the main college site, and in various venues as part of the community programme. GCSE three-dimensional and photography, and GCE A-level

three-dimensional, are also mostly followed by part-time adults, show good pass rates with many high grades, and are well above the national average for the sector. Pass rates in full-time performing arts national diploma courses, and the diploma in foundation studies in art and design are high. Most other courses have satisfactory pass rates, but GNVQ intermediate art and design has recorded pass rates well below the national average for the three years to 2002. Student retention rates show a similar pattern. There were high rates on the part-time level 1 and level 2 art and design courses, GCE A-level and GCSE three-dimensional courses, and the national diploma in performing arts. AVCE art and design had only a 56% retention rate in 2001/02, 18 percentage points below the national average. Most other courses were satisfactory. Many level 3 students progress to HE particularly those from art and design courses. Some 78% of completers in 2000 and 74% in 2001 went on to HE.

127. The standard of work produced in art and design and performing arts is high. Student achievements in art and design are celebrated in displays at the end of year and in work shown around the corridors near the art and design studios. There is also a fashion show that includes contributions not only from fashion students, but students of music, performing arts, media, and hair and beauty among others. Performing arts and media students are involved in public performances, for example, film/video records, shows in the college theatre, video productions for local television, and radio broadcasts.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Art and craft studies	1	No. of starts	459	366	379
		% retention	83	80	88
		% pass rate	88	89	89
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	46	49	24
		% retention	78	76	71
		% pass rate	64	71	65
National diploma in media	3	No. of starts	19	20	**
		% retention	74	70	**
		% pass rate	85	64	**
Diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	No. of starts	30	26	33
		% retention	87	88	85
		% pass rate	100	100	93
AVCE in art and design	3	No. of starts	*	20	44
		% retention	*	65	56
		% pass rate	*	38	96
National diploma in performing arts	3	No. of starts	14	27	*
		% retention	86	74	*
		% pass rate	100	95	*

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

* course not running

** not applicable

Quality of education and training

128. In the 26 lessons observed, no teaching was found to be less than satisfactory and much of it was good, particularly in art and design and performing arts. All work is well planned. Key skills opportunities are included in project briefs, although some students and even some staff do not seem to understand the concept of portfolio building from coursework. Health and safety training is effectively incorporated into the practical teaching. Work and projects are individualised and teachers work with students skilfully to develop experimentation. Students learn successfully through both theory and practical work. Full-time art and design students develop lively creative drawing, good experimental printmaking, collage and surface pattern skills, and are confident in handling colour in a range of materials. However, research for visual and contextual studies is often under-developed, and observational drawing is used insufficiently as the starting point for projects. Students on the part-time level 1 and level 2 art and craft courses demonstrate very good practical skills, but often the design element is lacking. Performing arts practical classes are good and students respond very well. Teachers direct individual students' work with a sense of purpose. Students are confident; they perform and criticise freely and openly. In some media classes, students have built successfully on their existing knowledge of the subject and discuss ideas fluently.

129. In some cases, there is inappropriate timetabling. For example, some lessons last up to three hours. GNVQ intermediate and foundation critical studies units are taught one morning a week over a term. There is insufficient integration of practical work with contextual studies. In the national certificate, photography and textiles students are taught together much of the time because numbers are relatively low and there are some common units. However, this approach has resulted in full-time photography students actually doing photography for only three hours a week.

130. Accommodation is very good. Specialist rooms, the photography and media studios and the college theatre are equipped to industry standard. However, noise in the atrium affects teaching. At times, large groups are taught in a small room, making it airless and uncomfortable. Some community classes are taught in non-specialist rooms, and there is some shortage of equipment for them. Teaching staff are well qualified and many are practising professionals. There are difficulties in finding multimedia teachers. Technical support is appropriate. There are good staff development opportunities, for example to gain additional qualifications, to update and to develop new skills. Students are positive about the extensive library provision, the range of materials and resources, the good cataloguing system and Internet access. They have good access to IT in the teaching areas.

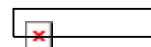
131. Assessment of students' work is fair and thorough. Assessment criteria are included in project briefs on most courses, and students are clear about them. A very effective academic tutorial system operates on full-time courses, and tutors track the progress of student work against an individual added value system. In performing arts, assessment can take place 'live' during a performance with feedback and grades provided by teachers and peers. Internal verification is thorough.

132. There is a good tutorial system and students value support from staff. All full-time students have tutors and part-time students have access to a tutor if necessary. Students are well supported by teaching and support staff, very often out of class time, and help and advice are readily available from cross-college staff. Individual needs are met. Mature students with jobs, and people with childcare needs are dealt with sympathetically, and financial help is available for students if needed. A member of staff follows up and supports students who are at risk of dropping out.

Leadership and management

133. Courses and programmes are well managed and full records are kept. Staff work well together and there are regular course team meetings that include part-time staff. However, line management in the curriculum area is unclear, and there are only informal briefing meetings to include staff in planning and development. Data management is unsatisfactory. Much information from the management information system is inconsistent with course records, which makes tracking of targets by course team leaders difficult. Staff spend much time providing and checking information for the management information system. Administrative and quality assurance requirements often result in staff repeating the same information in different forms. Inspectors found accurate data, even timetables, difficult to locate.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- good pass rates in access to HE courses
- a high retention rate in access to HE courses
- very good progression of access students
- very well-planned courses
- particularly effective procedures for gathering and responding to students' views.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates in GCE AS psychology and in GCSE psychology
- insufficient monitoring of additional support
- weak action planning in tutorials.

Scope of provision

134. Courses in the humanities curriculum area are well planned to meet the needs of a wide range of students, especially adults wanting to return to education. Part-time GCE AS and A level are offered in psychology, sociology and classical civilisation. There is a successful access to FE course that prepares students for more advanced study. Students on the access to FE course may complete over one academic year or in one or two terms. They can start in September, January or April. The access to HE course has two entry points, in September and January. There is an evening access to HE course that leads on to social science, nursing, law and teacher training. This course

may be studied by attendance for one evening a week for one year or by distance learning. The distance learning route is being piloted in the nursing pathway; the intention is to develop this route for the other pathways. Assignments in access to HE demonstrate very good levels of student achievement.

Achievement and standards

135. The pass rate for access to HE significantly exceeds the national average for the sector. In 2002, 97% of access to HE students achieved the qualification. The pass rates for 2000 and 2001 were either better than or close to the national average for the sector. There is a year-on-year improvement in retention rates on the access to HE course. In 2000, the curriculum area retained 69% of its access to HE students; this figure improved to 71% the following year and to 85% in 2002, which is much higher than the national average.

136. Retention rates in GCE AS psychology and in GCSE psychology are well below national averages. In the latter qualification, the retention rate declined to 35% in 2001, rising to 50% in 2002. In GCE AS psychology, the retention rate in 2002 was 41%, having been in decline for the preceding two years. All results relate to courses that are predominantly for adult students.

137. The college does not formally measure value added. A pilot value added project using access students was undertaken recently, but the system has not yet been introduced for all students.

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	30	26	12
		% retention	57	35	50
		% pass rate	82	89	100
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	27	26	17
		% retention	70	54	51
		% pass rate	79	62	86
GCE A-level sociology	3	No. of starts	11	8	9
		% retention	55	75	67
		% pass rate	100	50	100
Access to HE	3	No. of starts	118	104	74
		% retention	69	71	85
		% pass rate	94	84	97

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

Quality of education and training

138. Over two thirds of the lessons observed were good or better; all but one were for adult students. Teachers are purposeful and encourage students to respond. Learning is good in most lessons. Students are well motivated and demonstrate good levels of understanding through their responses to questions, their contribution to discussions and in their assignment work. In one access to HE psychology class on philosophers, the teacher set students very challenging and difficult questions to which they responded enthusiastically and demonstrated good levels of attainment. Teaching is well suited to adult students. They are encouraged to work on their own and to organise

their studies effectively. In the less effective lessons, the teaching does not engage all students. Question and answer sessions are too brief to allow confident students to develop quickly or for less confident students to respond effectively. In these lessons, teachers rely on an inadequate range of teaching methods and resources; students are neither inspired or motivated.

139. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. All are graduates in relevant disciplines, hold teacher training qualifications and most have, or are working towards, post graduate qualifications. The college library is well resourced. There are up-to-date copies of appropriate textbooks in psychology and in sociology and a good range of journals in these disciplines. Resources to support the recently introduced GCE A level in classical civilisation are still being developed. There are enough computers for students and they have access to the Internet. There are additional computer facilities available.

140. Assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Assignments are appropriate and students are able to demonstrate their understanding in a range of tasks. Assignments are returned promptly. There is some good, helpful feedback that tells students how they can improve. However, in a significant minority of assessments, there is a tendency to tick the students' work without explaining why. Some teachers pay special attention to students' spelling, punctuation and grammar, but this practice is not consistent. There is a thorough and effective system of internal moderation for all courses in the humanities curriculum area.

141. All students have a comprehensive college induction, supplemented by additional induction which is specific to their own programme. There is a separate induction procedure for students who start late. Access students have good opportunities to progress. In 2001, 85% of the students who passed the access to FE course proceeded to the access to HE course. In 2001, 99% of students who successfully completed the access to HE course went on to study at university. Destination figures for 2002 indicate similarly high levels of progression.

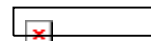
142. All students receive an initial assessment and are referred as necessary for additional support. However, there is an over-reliance on informal communication for monitoring the take-up and quality of additional support. Some students progress from access to FE to access to HE programmes without having taken up the additional support. The review of additional support in tutorials and student evaluations focuses on attendance and not on the impact of additional support on learning and progression.

143. Action planning in tutorials is weak. Details recorded on action plans are too descriptive, non-specific and informal. Action points are often recorded without deadlines for completion. Insufficient attention is paid to academic progress. There is little evidence of target setting and formal review within the action plans.

Leadership and management

144. Leadership and management in this curriculum area are good. The departmental management team is committed to the values of social inclusion and effectively promotes its courses to groups traditionally under-represented in FE. There are very effective procedures for gathering students' views about their courses. Curriculum managers analyse the responses and plan and implement actions as a result. In addition to the college surveys, the humanities area surveys its own students in each subject area and responds quickly and effectively to issues raised. Induction is evaluated, a report is produced and action taken. Teaching staff meet regularly to consider the results from mid-term reviews of students and from end of programme evaluations. All teachers are observed annually by a member of the management team. An evaluation and review form is produced at the end of the observation. There is insufficient detail on the forms and few judgements are made on the impact of the lesson on learning. All lessons were graded accurately. The member of staff observed is able to offer feedback on the form.

English, language and communications



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

Strengths

- good GCSE English pass rates for adult students
- good development of the skills of adult students
- good college-produced learning resources.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GCE A-level English language
- insufficient attention to the needs of less confident students
- insufficient sharing of good practice.

Scope of provision

145. The college offers courses at GCSE and GCE A level. English options in aspects of literature and language studies also form part of the access to FE and HE courses in humanities. There are 13 GCSE English groups. Four of these are mainly for students aged 16 to 18 and nine groups for adult students, one of which is taught in a community centre. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 120 students on GCSE English courses, 19 students on GCE A-level English literature and 18 on GCE A-level English language. There were 17 students following access modules in English.

Achievement and standards

146. Pass rates in GCSE English are at or above the national average for the sector for one-year courses; 86% of all students who entered achieved grades A* to C in 2002. However, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 are significantly lower than those for adult students. Pass rates in GCE A-level English language and GCE A-level English literature were well above the national average in 2002; GCE A-level English language showed a steady rise in achievement over the three years to 2000. However, retention rates on GCE A-level courses have been below the national average in 2001 and 2002.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	114	111	123
		% retention	75	75	73
		% pass rate	80	57	86
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	16	15	15
		% retention	75	60	60
		% pass rate	64	78	100
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	21	18	17
		% retention	90	72	65
		% pass rate	75	69	100

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

Quality of education and training

147. Teaching in all lessons observed was satisfactory or good. Most lessons are planned thoroughly and incorporate effective learning resources. Teachers have very good specialist subject knowledge in linguistics and literature of different genres. In one GCE A-level English language lesson, students were skilfully encouraged to discuss the effectiveness of the language in *The Flea* by John Donne and most students gained an understanding of the use of the metaphorical conceit. The teacher used effective techniques to extend students' skills of linguistic analysis and to develop their confidence in the discussion of ideas. In a language studies class, students extended their knowledge and understanding of morphology by working together on well-designed exercises on language structure. Students worked on suitably demanding tasks that enabled them to develop their skills of language analysis. Booklets used in the lesson were carefully designed to make complex topics accessible to students who were at different stages of understanding.

148. In a GCSE class in the community on *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, the students who were new to learning were encouraged to discuss the characters of George and Lennie and find supporting evidence in the text in order to prepare for writing a coursework assignment. For many, this was their first experience of exploring characters from literature in this way. The film adaptation of the text was used effectively to enable students to make comparisons relating to characterisation in the book and the film.

149. In less effective lessons, teachers used methods that did not engage or gain response from all students. They relied predominantly on a question and answer approach and did not encourage group or paired work. Some less confident students did not have sufficient opportunity to develop their skills of independent analysis.

150. Learning and teaching resources are good. Revision guides and booklets are used for extending students' knowledge of prescribed literature. Teams use a resource bank of materials that give guidance to students in basic essay writing techniques and the skills of technical accuracy. Booklets on linguistics are available, stimulating and topical in content. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and many have higher level qualifications in their subject areas.

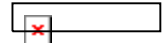
151. Assessment is fair and accurate. However, in some cases, feedback is brief and does not offer sufficient guidance on improvement or make explicit references to criteria for assessment. Full-time adult students receive good ongoing informal support and tutorials are readily available on request. However, there is no timetabled tutorial system for part-time students. Staff provide informal opportunities for additional academic support for students, although these meetings are not recorded. Progression for access students is satisfactory. Many students successfully complete the access to FE course and progress to the access to HE course within the college. Diagnostic

assessment is thorough and is effective in guiding students towards appropriate courses. However, it is not used in target setting or for monitoring the progress of students throughout their courses. Students' additional learning support needs are identified, but these are not always adequately met. English staff are not always kept informed about students' progress in learning support sessions.

Leadership and management

152. Leadership and management are satisfactory. English teams meet regularly and discuss issues relating to the curriculum. Quality assurance systems are not used rigorously to improve teaching. For example, student questionnaires are analysed, but the results are not used to improve the planning of teaching and relevance of learning methods. Staff attend awarding bodies' subject support meetings, but the focus of staff development is narrow. Staff address equal opportunities through the diversity of literature taught and some staff explore themes of prejudice and social awareness effectively in language teaching. There is no cross-college English co-ordinator. Resources and good practice are shared within teaching teams, but there is insufficient sharing between teams teaching across the college.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- a wide range of suitable courses and projects well suited to the students
- a strong emphasis on improving personal and interpersonal development
- a high standard of work
- good specialist resources.

Weaknesses

- insufficient sharing of good practice between curriculum areas
- inadequate monitoring and recording of students' progress
- little opportunity to experience the mainstream of college life

- insufficient attention to some students' need in some lessons.

Scope of provision

153. There is a wide range of courses and projects for students. There are seven full-time courses and four part-time courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of the inspection, 152 students had enrolled on these courses. Most courses take place on the main town centre site. Courses also operate in conjunction with social services at several venues in the community. One is based in a café within a community centre that provides a realistic work environment staffed by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are also venues that provide sessions for people with mental health problems. Two-year courses offer core units that can lead to external qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Students can choose from ten vocational and enrichment options including motor vehicle maintenance, painting and decorating, horticulture, and animal care.

154. Students come to college through collaboration with local special and mainstream schools and the sixth form college, including school-link programmes, other agencies or by self-referral. They receive an in-depth initial assessment to ascertain their educational, medical and learning support needs. Individual learning plans are developed from this assessment. The school-link programme is organised in collaboration with nine local special and mainstream schools. Students almost ready for mainstream education can spend between half a day and two days each week in one of ten vocational areas of the college. These sessions can take the form of a discrete group within the vocational work environment or individuals working alongside students on mainstream courses.

Achievement and standards

155. Students achieve well in the development of their personal and academic skills. They are well motivated and the standard of work is high. Students are willing to talk about their lessons and many are able to recall the objectives of previous lessons. There is a strong emphasis on developing personal and interpersonal skills. For example, students were able to read aloud to the group a homework exercise that presented their own positive features as identified by their friends. After only five weeks in college they were all confident. Students also take part confidently in external events such as an arts festival and a five-a-side football competition.

Quality of education and training

156. Staff-student relationships are very good and students are constantly encouraged and helped. They respond co-operatively and work well. Of the lessons observed, 80% were good or better. However, the range of teaching methods is inadequate in some lessons. There is little evidence, for example, of a sufficient range of activities for students such as the use of video and role-play. Teachers' expected learning outcomes rarely vary from student to student. There is little evidence of planned extension activities for the more able. Many lesson plans are identical; they list the same activities for each lesson.

157. The learning materials are interesting, relevant and appropriate. Students learn and progress. Classroom management is good and students concentrate on the tasks that they have been set. Imaginative use is made of WIDGET, an IT programme which helps students, who are unable to speak, to communicate. This program helps students with restricted language and reading skills to express themselves in picture and word form without the need to spell individual words on a conventional keyboard. Enlarged keyboards are available for partially sighted students, and communicators for hearing impaired people.

158. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. Learning support staff generally make a

positive contribution to students' learning. The rooms used by students with learning difficulties and disabilities on the town centre site form self-contained suites. Some rooms have no windows. Students feel comfortable within the suites. They are offered little opportunity to be part of the main body of the student population in the rest of the college buildings.

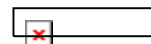
159. Assessment is appropriate to students' needs. Students' progress is monitored thoroughly through day-to-day observation by key staff. However, such observation is not always recorded. There is little use of individual learning plans to develop differentiated teaching related to learning materials and learning outcomes. There are options available in ten vocational areas. There is good communication between some but not all departmental staff and vocational staff, to ensure that students' preferred learning styles or medical needs are understood. Within the motor vehicle maintenance programme only one of five starters remained on course after five weeks of the term. Student support is not always arranged to help settle students into potentially intimidating environments.

160. The college has a good network of community projects that attract students from under-represented groups. For example, there is liaison with the learning Gateway and Tamcos, two projects for disaffected students, in conjunction with Connexions. These projects refer young people, who would otherwise find difficulty in coming forward, to enrol. Good work experience projects have been developed. A group of students work in a café within a community centre that gives them opportunities to integrate within the community as well as practise their skills. These projects are most successful when they are lead by experienced, qualified staff. Support workers are sometimes too eager to help students. For example, in a catering outlet the support worker approached customers to ask them for their orders and cleared tables whilst the students stood around uncertain of their role. During a session where the students were required to produce a large wall poster, the support worker spent much of the time drawing for them whilst they 'coloured-in'.

Leadership and management

161. Leadership and management of courses are satisfactory. Systems are being developed to improve and monitor quality within the courses. At regular daily meetings with the curriculum leader, student issues are reviewed and problems can be discussed as they arise and be quickly resolved. Courses are reviewed once a term. Quality assurance documentation is not always completed by staff. Course files vary in terms of the number of meetings documented and in some cases there is little evidence of suitable action being taken. Students' progression within college is neither monitored thoroughly nor well documented.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- good achievement
- flexible arrangements and suitable provision for adults
- thorough initial assessment of student's literacy and numeracy skills.

Weaknesses

- the uneven quality of group work
- ineffective individual learning plans
- weak integration of basic skills support.

Scope of provision

162. The college offers discrete English and mathematics workshops for adults in college and additional study support on the three main college campuses. In 2001/02, over 300 adults enrolled on literacy programmes and nearly 200 on numeracy programmes. Some 81 students attended short courses in community locations. In addition, over 150 students have attended a three-hour taster session. All full-time students whose literacy and/or numeracy skills are identified, on assessment, as being below level 1 are offered a diagnostic assessment and literacy, numeracy and language support either individually or in groups. Specific staff have responsibility for liaising with curriculum areas and providing additional support in lessons. At the time of the inspection, nine students were receiving individual support, 10 students were receiving English for speakers of other languages support, and approximately 200 students were receiving support in study support groups. The take-up of study support remains low.

163. The college is developing a range of courses to encourage participation and meet the needs of adults in the local community. Workplace basic skills training has been established in partnership with a local employer and in a trade union learning centre. Flexible, modular courses have been arranged in partnership with voluntary groups and tenants associations to develop their members' oral communication and writing skills to enable them to participate effectively in meetings, write letters and complete applications for funding.

Achievement and standards

164. Levels of achievement of nationally recognised qualifications are generally high. Pass rates on entry level and level 1 courses are above the national average for the sector. Adult students in college and community provision and in classes in the workplace make satisfactory progress. Whilst attendance can be irregular, often because of domestic or work commitments, retention rates are high. The attainment of adult students on literacy and numeracy courses is appropriate to the level of course they are studying. They make good progress and are successful in achieving their learning goals. As progress is made and achievement formally recognised, many adults and young people make significant gains in skills and confidence. The standard of work produced by students is high. There is good progression by adults from entry level to level 1 courses, and by young people from literacy and numeracy programmes to work on key skills. There is no systematic analysis of the impact of study support on pass and retention rates on students' main programmes of study.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Achievement tests	1	No. of starts	56	419	149

literacy (one year)		% retention	77	98	97
		% pass rate	79	98	97
Achievement tests literacy (two year)	1	No. of starts	21	7	*
		% retention	86	57	*
		% pass rate	86	100	*
Achievement tests literacy (short course)	1	No. of starts	234	277	59
		% retention	87	83	100
		% pass rate	80	79	96
City and Guilds 3750 numeracy stage 1	1	No. of starts	16	16	11
		% retention	69	69	82
		% pass rate	82	82	89
City and Guilds 3793 wordpower foundation	1	No. of starts	24	39	*
		% retention	67	100	*
		% pass rate	94	67	*
City and Guilds 3793 wordpower stage 1	1	No. of starts	45	20	*
		% retention	84	70	*
		% pass rate	95	78	*

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

* courses not offered

Quality of education and training

165. Most teaching is satisfactory and some is good. Teachers promote a relaxed and effective working atmosphere. In the most effective lessons, teaching is well planned and well organised. Teachers provide stimulating learning activities that take account of students' individual learning needs and interests. Group work is an integral part in these lessons. Teachers use a range of appropriate teaching styles and good, suitable learning resources. In the less successful lessons, teaching lacks a sense of purpose and both methods and materials do not meet the needs of all students. Lesson plans do not always contain objectives against which learning outcomes can be measured effectively. They are not sufficiently detailed to give enough structure to three-hour lessons. Where basic skills teaching takes place in vocational settings, it is often very effective. For example, in horticulture and motor vehicle engineering, teachers ensure that students recognise and understand the literacy and numeracy elements of the vocational tasks undertaken. They provide a good range of materials to support individual learning. Students respond well to being taught the concepts of literacy and numeracy in a vocational setting.

166. Students' work is marked regularly and teachers provide good oral feedback, but make few written suggestions to help students identify how they can improve. Adult students and those receiving study support have regular informal reviews of their progress. The recording of progress on individual action plans is mainly a record of activities covered rather than a charting of the progress students have made in developing their skills. Learning goals within students' action plans are too general to enable students to understand their targets clearly, or to measure how far they have progressed in the short term.

167. The study support activities for students with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills are not linked effectively to the literacy and numeracy demands of the student's main programme of study.

Study support staff are often not aware of what topics the student is covering on the course or what learning materials are being used. Individual learning plans are not shared with all the teachers who work with the students. Course materials are rarely used in support sessions to develop the skills students need to complete their courses successfully.

168. Staff are experienced and well qualified. Several have specialist qualifications. Staff are encouraged to undertake training. They make sound use of the good range of staff development opportunities. All staff have completed training in the new basic skills standards and the core curricula for literacy and numeracy. The quality of the accommodation for support work on the main college campuses is good. Accommodation elsewhere is satisfactory. Students have access to IT on most courses. Little use of IT was observed in study support sessions or identified in individual action plans. Worksheets are generally attractive and well produced. The college is developing a range of learning materials aligned to the new basic skills standards. However, there is an over reliance on worksheets and standard assignments, particularly in study support sessions, that do not always meet the needs of individual students.

Leadership and management

169. Leadership and management of courses are satisfactory. There is a commitment to improving standards and developing learning opportunities for adults and young people. Communication between programme area managers, course team leaders and teachers is good. There are weekly meetings of course teams which focus on attendance, retention and pass rate targets, students' progress and development, and the sharing of good practice. Staff are involved in self-assessment and development planning and feel well informed on the department's targets and priorities. There is insufficient, regular communication between the study support team and course tutors. Data are collected, but not analysed regularly to enable the college to measure the effectiveness of study support in improving retention and pass rates on students' main programmes of study.

Part D: College data

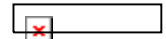
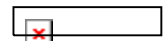


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	37	21
2	37	32
3	19	15
4/5	2	6
Other	5	26
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2002

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	1,065	1,265	5
Land-based provision	91	426	1
Construction	401	946	3
Engineering	483	2,417	7
Business administration, management and professional	450	4,585	11
Information and communication technology	1,122	8,905	22
Retailing, customer service and transportation	50	719	2
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	687	2,474	7
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	278	761	2
Health, social care and public services	855	5,184	14
Visual and performing arts and media	253	2,025	5
Humanities	46	974	2
English, languages and communication	728	1,508	5
Foundation programmes	2,435	3,999	14
Total	8,944	36,188	100

Source: provided by the college in 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	886	847	775	3,581	2,856	3,258
	Retention rate (%)	76	78	86	80	79	80
	National average (%)	81	80	79	79	79	77

	Pass rate (%)	61	65	79	79	77	76
	National average (%)	60	65	69	61	65	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,752	1,878	1,641	3,863	4,314	4,842
	Retention rate (%)	79	77	73	78	78	81
	National average (%)	76	77	76	80	79	78
	Pass rate (%)	75	70	69	76	73	77
	National average (%)	65	66	69	62	65	70
3	Starters excluding transfers	926	1,045	1,084	2,717	2,930	2,802
	Retention rate (%)	80	68	74	80	81	84
	National average (%)	75	76	78	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	68	74	63	68	67	68
	National average (%)	73	75	77	63	66	70
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	82	91	19	117	1,155	838
	Retention rate (%)	83	73	100	88	88	81
	National average (%)	84	80	83	84	80	84
	Pass rate (%)	72	82	0	72	71	67
	National average (%)	65	65	57	58	57	54

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/00: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1998/99: Benchmarking Data 1997/98 to 1999/00: Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

3. College rates for 1999/00: provided by the college in spring 2002.

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)	64	32	4	28
Level 2 (intermediate)	69	22	9	80
Level 1 (foundation)	64	32	4	91
Other sessions	79	14	7	42
Totals	69	26	5	241

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