



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Wirral Metropolitan College

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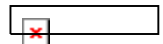
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Basic information about the college

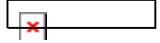


Name of college:	Wirral Metropolitan College
Type of college:	Further Education
Principal:	Ray Dowd
Address of college:	Borough Road Campus Borough Road Birkenhead Wirral CH42 9QD
Telephone number:	0151 551 7777
Fax number:	0151 551 7401
Chair of governors:	Alan Moody
Unique reference number:	130493
Name of reporting inspector:	David Martin

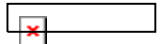
Dates of inspection:

14-18 October 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

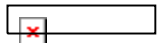


Wirral Metropolitan College is a general further education (FE) college and the main provider of general FE for the Wirral. It operates from three main sites, the Borough Road campus, the Carlett Park campus and the Conway Park campus, together with over 25 neighbourhood college and outreach community centres. In 2000/01, 15,236 students were enrolled, of whom 2,850 (18.7%) were full time and 12,386 (81.3%) part time. There were slightly more part-time than full-time students aged 16 to 18, but significantly more part-time students aged 19 and over. For the same period there were around 29,000 enrolments for all qualifications. Just over 23,000 of these were for students aged 19 and over. Overall, and for students aged 16 to 18 and 19 and over, the largest part of enrolments were for level 1 courses, followed by level 2, Other, level 3 and level H enrolments. Some 6% of students were enrolled on higher education (HE) programmes. In 2001/02, enrolments rose to around 32,000, of whom 75% were aged 19 and over.

The college serves both affluent and poorer areas. The unemployment rate in the Wirral in May 2002 was 5.8% as compared with 3.0% for England. Of those unemployed, 28.1% were aged 18 to 24, as compared with the England percentage of 25.3. The participation rates in school and college education for 16 and 17 year olds in the Wirral, 70% and 54%, are just below those for England, 71% and 58%. In 2001, the percentage of 16 year-old students in the Wirral, achieving five or more grades A* to C was 50.5%, as compared with the England percentage of 47.9%. Some 99% of the population in the Wirral are white. The largest minority ethnic group is Chinese, at 0.3%.

The college's mission is: 'To provide high quality education and training to meet the needs and aims of individuals and organisations within the community'.

How effective is the college?



Many students achieve satisfactory or better standards. The college's provision of trade union studies is outstanding. Education and training are good in construction, engineering, health and care, visual and performing arts and media, and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; satisfactory in business administration, management and professional studies, information and communication technology (ICT), sports, leisure and tourism, hairdressing and beauty therapy, humanities and social studies, English and modern foreign languages and literacy and numeracy; and unsatisfactory in science and mathematics. The college's main strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- vigorous pursuit of improvement since the last inspection

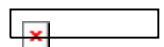
- improved quality of teaching and learning
- commitment to social inclusion
- good support for students
- outstanding provision in trade union studies.

What should be improved?

- teaching in some areas
- poorer pass and retention rates
- consistency and rigour of quality assurance
- curriculum managers' confidence in the college's data on students
- students' attendance and punctuality in some areas.

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



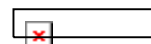
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how

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
Sciences and mathematics	Unsatisfactory. Many of the weaknesses in teaching and learning noted in the last inspection remain. Too little teaching is better than satisfactory and too much is unsatisfactory. Achievements are good on most General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses and for access to HE students, but they are poor on many General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) courses. Specialist resources at one site are inadequate. There is inadequate rigour in assessing the quality of teaching and learning.
Construction	Good. The area is well managed and there are high pass and retention rates on most courses. Most teaching is well planned and effective, but some students are not sufficiently involved in lessons and lose interest. Learning support is well planned, well managed and fully documented. Staff are well qualified and resources are good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good. There is much effective teaching by well-qualified and experienced teachers, although students' understanding is insufficiently checked. Pass and retention rates are often high and students' progression is good. Links with motor cycle manufacturers are strong and help to contribute to the exceptionally good resources in this area.
Business, administration, management and professional studies	Satisfactory. Most teaching is good, although schemes of work and lesson plans are not consistently helpful and there is insufficient use of information technology (IT) in lessons. Pass rates are good on accounting, management and professional courses, but retention and pass rates are poor on the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses. Accommodation for management and professional students is inappropriate.
Trade union studies	Outstanding. The trade union studies unit provides exceptional education and training. It is well managed and has enthusiastic and able teachers, with very relevant trade union and work experience. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. High standards are achieved and pass and retention rates are very good.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning on the community-based courses are often good, but teaching on other programmes is weaker. Pass rates on part-time vocational courses are high, but retention and pass rates on full-time courses are low. Students benefit from good resources and effective support. There is too much poor attendance and punctuality.
Leisure, travel and sports studies	Satisfactory. Most lessons are well planned, but too much teaching is no better than satisfactory. More able students are insufficiently extended. Pass rates on most courses are high. Travel students benefit from good accommodation and specialist resources, helped by strong links with industry. Internal moderation of students' work in assessments is weak and attendance in sports studies is low.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Most teaching is no better than satisfactory and some is weak. Pass rates on many course are high, but many retention rates are low. Standards of practical work are good and students use good modern salons and sports therapy facilities. Internal verification is insufficiently robust and aspects of management need improvement.
Health and care	Good. Much teaching is good, but able students are insufficiently

	stretched. On most courses pass rates are high, but on some key courses retention and pass rates are low. Students make good progress to HE or employment. Pastoral and academic support are good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good. Teaching and learning are good and students benefit from a broad and enriching experience. Students have a mature approach to study and achieve high standards. Many pass rates are high, but retention rates are declining and are low on some courses. Some practical activities are insufficiently demanding and some longer lessons are poorly managed.
Humanities and social studies	Satisfactory. Many lessons are effective, but there is inadequate questioning to check students' understanding and their oral skills are insufficiently developed. Pass rates on the GCE A-level and access courses are good, but retention rates are declining on most GCSE and GCE AS courses and on the access to HE course. Access students make good progression to HE. Good practice is inadequately shared.
English and languages	Satisfactory. Provision in modern foreign languages is better than in English. Teaching and learning in languages are good, but a narrow range of approaches is used for English. Pass rates are mostly good and assessment is thorough. Leadership in languages is strong, but there are shortcomings in the management and co-ordination of English.
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Good. Teaching is good and often very good, using innovative business enterprises as the basis for much work. Students have good opportunities for vocational and work experience. They are well assessed, monitored and supported, but support for students with poor communication skills is inadequate. Retention and pass rates are good, but students make inadequate progress to accredited vocational courses.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. Much teaching is good or better, but a significant minority is unsatisfactory. Teaching is inadequately informed by the outcomes of assessment and individual learning plans. The wide range of community provision serves many needs and the family learning programme is outstanding. Retention and pass rates are high on many courses. The implementation of the basic skills strategy is slow.

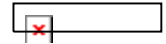
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has energetically sought improvement since the last inspection and re-inspection. Its financial position is much improved, although the financial recovery plan anticipates that the college will remain insolvent until 2004/05. Successful leadership motivates staff. Enrolment targets for growth have been achieved and the retention and pass rates of students have improved. Relationships with the local community are much better than at the last inspection, new accommodation is being built and the refurbishment of existing buildings is beginning to provide students with a good learning environment. Governors perform their tasks well and set a clear strategic direction, which they regularly review. The management information system provides largely satisfactory data, but they are not sufficiently timely or accurate to gain the confidence of some curriculum managers. Reports on performance to governors lack clarity. The

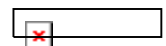
of opportunity is well promoted to staff and students and the monitoring of the impact of policies is good. Financial management has improved and the college offers satisfactory value for money.

To what extent is the provision of the college educationally and socially inclusive?



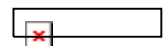
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. Strategies to increase participation and challenge stereotypes are used to good effect. Up-to-date policies on race relations and equal opportunities and diversity are well presented and written in clear, easy-to-read language. The equal opportunities diversity action plan has clear action points and timescales that are well understood by staff and regularly monitored by managers. Arrangements for students with learning support needs are good. Students of English for speakers of other languages progress to other college courses and achieve well. The characteristics of the local population and of the college's students are thoroughly analysed by the college marketing team. The results are displayed in a dynamic visual form and used with curriculum area teams for business planning, linked to the college's strategic aims. There is an emphasis on promoting under-represented groups and social inclusion and there are many effective partnerships with employers and local community groups. The positive visual images in the college's prospectus and posters, celebrating students' successes, were chosen in consultation with local school pupils and local communities. A good range of community venues is used to encourage the widening of participation. Pass rates on many literacy and numeracy courses are excellent. However, the college has been slow to implement its basic skills strategy.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for students are good. Comprehensive, sensitive and effective support arrangements reflect the inclusive nature of the college. Students benefit from an extensive range of personal and pastoral support services provided by individual tutors. The college's provision of students' services includes the counsellor, support tutors, learning support assistants and specialist staff who provide support for students with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Tutorial support, both group and individual, is well planned and carried out effectively in most curriculum areas. There is insufficient sharing of good practice. Action plans for some students are not specific enough. A successful induction programme and an effective careers advice and guidance service help students to make progress.

Students' views of the college



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

What students like about the college

- good range of courses

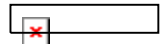
- excellent personal support, from approachable and knowledgeable staff
- friendly atmosphere
- availability of facilities, outside of lesson time, for part-time students
- useful initial information, advice and guidance
- good crèche facilities
- enjoyable lessons, including practical work
- learning resources in the library and in lessons.

What they feel could be improved

- value for money of food and the limited choice in the canteen
- car parking
- availability of outdoor eating facilities
- number of computers
- sports and social facilities

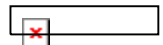
- female toilets
- some classroom accommodation.

Other information



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

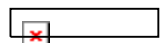


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	53	31	16
19+ and WBL*	69	27	4
Learning 16-18	49	38	13
19+ and WBL*	69	27	4

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. Inspectors used data on students' achievements, drawn from individualised student record returns to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the academic years 1999/2000 and 2000/01. They also used college data produced using kite-marked software on pass and retention rates for 2001/02, a sample of which had been validated in advance of the inspection. They found these data to be generally reliable, but sometimes incomplete, because of the timing of the inspection early in the academic year. During the inspection, some data, particularly for 2001, were found to be unreliable and were not used.

2. The college provides a broad range of vocational courses. Additionally, it offers general education programmes, including GCE AS/A levels, GCSE and access to HE courses. There is provision in all of the areas of learning defined by the LSC, with the largest numbers of enrolments in business, humanities, basic education, health and care and science and mathematics. The college runs very few work-based learning schemes itself. These are largely offered by Scientiam Limited, of which the college is a shareholder. The college provides the off-the-job training for most learners on these schemes.

3. For 2000/01, most college retention and pass rates, for all levels and ages, are above the national averages. This is a much-improved situation on the previous two years. The greatest overall improvement is at levels 2 and 3. Previously, overall pass rates were up to 10 percentage points below national averages, but they rose in 2001, at levels 1 and 2, for both age-groups, to well above these figures. Overall data for retention and pass rates for 2002 are incomplete, but those available indicate that the improvement achieved in 2001 has been maintained.

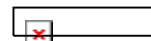
16 to 18 year olds

4. Overall, pass and retention rates have improved over the period 1999 to 2001. Pass rates at all levels are now at or just above national averages. Retention rates have risen at levels 2 and 3 to reach the national average and, at level 1, the retention rate is consistently at the national average figure. In 2001, pass rates rose on GNVQ advanced/AVCE and national diploma courses. Retention rates were above 80%. The overall pass rate for AVCE was 88%, with 39% of students awarded high grades. Pass rates for national diploma courses were high, at 96%. They rose to 84% on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 courses. Over 400 students are on NVQ courses at level 2. Pass rates rose significantly in 2001, to 94%, from very low rates in the previous two years. In 2002, the overall pass rate on GNVQ intermediate courses has fallen from 88% in 2001, to 72%. Small numbers of students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled on GCE A-level courses. Many have been in post-16 education previously. In 2002, the overall pass rates for GCE AS courses are low at 62%, with a low proportion of high grades achieved.

Adult learners

5. Overall pass rates for adult students are higher than for students aged 16 to 18. For all levels, they are now above national averages, having improved considerably since 1999. Over 4,000 adults are on level 1 courses. Pass rates at level 1 rose to 87% in 2001 and at levels 2 and 3 they are around 80%. On short courses, which constitute large numbers of adult enrolments, pass rates have improved significantly to around 90%. Many adults pursue GCE A-level and GCSE courses. Overall GCE A-level pass rates are low, at around 55%. Adult students were more successful than younger students on GCE AS courses in 2001 and 2002. GCE AS pass rates in 2002 were 82%, which is a further improvement on 2001 results. In GCSE mathematics in 2002, 79% of adult students achieved high grades at A* to C, compared to the national average of 53%. Over 600 adult students are enrolled on NVQ level 2. Pass rates rose in 2001 to 95% from very low levels in the two previous years. Pass and progression rates on the access to HE course are high. Retention rates are consistently high on long courses at levels 1, 2 and 3.

Quality of education and training



6. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded in 279 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 63% of lessons, satisfactory in 29% and less than satisfactory in 8%. The profile of grades awarded for learning was almost identical. The grade profile has improved considerably since the last inspection, undertaken by the FEFC. Teaching and learning were better for adults than for students aged 16 to 18. The teaching in 69% of lessons for adults was good or better, compared with 53% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. The teaching was better for adults than for younger students in all areas of learning except engineering. Students studying at levels 3 and 4 receive the best teaching, with level 2 students experiencing the largest proportion of less than satisfactory teaching. Both teaching and learning are better on vocational courses than on GCE A-level courses.

7. Most students make good progress on their courses and develop good personal and learning skills. However, the college does not have any systematic scheme for comparing students' final examination performance with their previous GCSE grades, in order to identify progress or establish a value added measure. A project is now underway to introduce a value added system in humanities and engineering.

8. There are significant variations in the quality of teaching between different areas of learning. The best teaching is in trade union studies, visual and performing arts and media, and on courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Only 35% of lessons in hairdressing and beauty therapy were graded good or better, with the majority graded as satisfactory. In science and mathematics, only 44% of lessons were graded good or better. Many areas of learning have very large percentages of teaching graded as satisfactory. The highest percentages of lessons that were less than satisfactory were in literacy and numeracy and science and mathematics.

9. Most of the effective lessons are very well planned and teachers readily adjust their plans in the light of students' progress and understanding. Teachers draw on their expertise and enthusiasm to organise interesting and demanding lessons. Students' interest is maintained by the sensible use of a range of activities within the lesson. Teachers make good use of their own experiences, and those of their students, to help them to understand the relevance of the topic being covered. Teachers regularly check students' understanding in lessons through focused questioning, by the application of small progress tests and through group tasks, the outcomes of which are assessed. In visual, performing arts and media, practical teaching is particularly good, encouraging students to explore their practical skills and experiment with new ideas.

10. Much of the teaching in the large number of satisfactory lessons fails to get the best from students. Teachers talk too much and inadequately stretch students. In the less than satisfactory lessons, teachers pay little attention to preparation. They give insufficient thought to what the students should have achieved by the end of the lesson. Lack of clarity of purpose is communicated to the students. Students' individual learning needs and expectations are not adequately met. Activities and teaching provide insufficient stimulus for the most able and insufficient help for the least able. Students sometimes become detached and occasionally disruptive.

11. Key skills assessment and teaching are largely effective. Students are assessed for their knowledge of and needs for key skills on entry to their courses. In many curriculum areas, such as science and mathematics, construction, and leisure, travel and sports science, key skills teaching is successfully integrated into students' core studies. Access to HE students participate in the college's wider key skills programme.

12. Staff are well qualified, and show good knowledge of their specialist areas. Teachers have appropriate higher level qualifications, and suitable industrial experience. They are expected to be qualified teachers. Some 85% of full-time, 56% of part-time and 38% of hourly paid teachers have teaching qualifications. Many general and specialist support staff have professional qualifications and display high levels of competence. Newly appointed staff receive a thorough induction. There is an established annual staff appraisal system. Staff development has a high priority and training is evaluated. Many staff have undertaken specific IT training to improve their effectiveness.

13. The college is significantly redeveloping its accommodation. One main centre that is no longer suitable is to be demolished and a further centre has been reduced in size and is to be completely refurbished. New, purpose-built accommodation, central to Birkenhead and convenient for transport services, is due to open in September 2003. Accommodation on some sites is uninspiring, but rooms are generally appropriately furnished and well resourced. There is good access for students with mobility difficulties on all main sites and at most community venues. Resources in curriculum areas are mainly good and are of a particularly high standard in ICT, travel services, motor cycle engineering, hair and beauty therapy and sports therapy. The college has no sport and outdoor recreation facilities, but uses a local sports centre to support the programmes in sports studies and student enrichment. At all sites, staff and students work in a safe, secure and clean environment.

14. Each main site has spacious, well-equipped and effectively managed learning resource centres, with good opening hours. There is a good supply of IT equipment and libraries are well stocked with appropriate books and journals. Effective support is available to students requiring assistance with independent study. The provision of computers, largely networked, for students' learning is very good. The ratio of computer to students is 1:4.8. A significant amount of external funding has been obtained to achieve this. Equipment is well maintained.

15. Assessment and monitoring of students' work are well managed in many curriculum areas. Students understand how they are assessed and how their progress is monitored, and tutors help them set targets for improvement. In English and modern foreign languages, science and mathematics and leisure, sport and tourism, assignments are well planned, assessment criteria are clear and students receive supportive and helpful written feedback. In some areas, for example ICT or humanities subjects, most work is marked fairly and accurately, but teachers' comments tend to be unhelpful. Students on supported entry level courses have access to their individual learning plans and progress and achievement records on the intranet. There is no overall assessment or marking policy to help develop greater consistency and in some curriculum areas, for example in hairdressing and beauty therapy, assessment and tracking of students' progress are less rigorous. The college plans to use value added measures and target minimum grades to strengthen its review and planning process.

16. Internal verification and moderation are good in construction, modern foreign languages, trade union studies, health and care, and visual and performing arts and media. They are weak in leisure, travel and sports studies. In some subjects, such as management and professional studies, there are too few internal verifiers. External verifier reports are tracked and monitored by the quality unit, which also identifies good internal practice.

17. There are good arrangements for initial assessment, including assessment of students' basic skills and key skills. These lead to effective additional learning support by learning support assistants working in curriculum areas. Initial assessment is used to help plan students' programmes, and works particularly effectively for supported entry level students. There are many examples of very good help for students with hearing or visual impairment or specific learning difficulties.

18. The college meets the needs of students, employers and the local community. It offers a wide range of courses, including those at over 60 community and employer venues in the Wirral. Adult students are particularly well served and the college addresses effectively the needs of work-based learners through its involvement with Scientiam Limited. There are good partnerships with employers. For example, electrical installation courses are taught at employers' premises and three major travel companies have helped teachers develop new vocational courses. In 2001/02, the college received approximately £18,000 in sponsorships from local companies, significantly supporting college developments. Co-operative working with schools has helped the development of construction, hairdressing and science taster courses for school pupils. The family learning programme, embracing literacy, numeracy and ICT, operates in 21 schools.

19. The college responds readily to meeting the needs of students with particular needs, including those with mental health problems, visual and hearing impairments and dyslexia, and for those requiring learning, social and behavioural support. Basic skills training is effective. Marketing and business planning of the curriculum are linked effectively to the college's strategic plan. The college has identified gaps in its provision, such as the shortage of entry level courses, now addressed in

construction and childcare, but not yet in sports. Courses mostly start in September, with few opportunities for students to join throughout the year, even with unit-based and modular qualifications. Links with HE are strong, especially for courses in engineering, modern foreign languages, care and access to HE courses. They promote good progression to HE and complement the internal progression to college-based HE.

20. The services for students unit provides effective arrangements for giving impartial advice to students and guiding them on to courses. Initial interviews by student advisers are reinforced by further information and advice from teachers. Good prospectuses and information booklets are produced for the different target audiences. A recent survey of students' views of enrolment shows high levels of satisfaction. Induction is designed to ensure that students settle quickly and care is taken to try to ensure that they are on the right course. In construction, for example, students sample a range of areas before choosing their main course. However, many community arts students are unclear about their programme and the level at which they are working. The 'Aim Higher' project, in partnership with local schools, supports students when they transfer into post-16 education and training.

21. There are comprehensive, sensitive and effective support arrangements for students. Students' individual needs are addressed well throughout their studies. In addition to additional support tutors and learning support assistants, learning mentors assist students identified as being at risk of not completing their course, or failing to achieve their potential. A wide range of specialists in counselling, mental health support, careers advice and guidance, welfare and financial support provide effective advice to students. Childcare support is good, including the provision of children's centres on five college sites. An international student adviser works with students from overseas and asylum seekers. The college has begun to evaluate the effectiveness of additional learning support and has evidence of higher than average retention rates for those students receiving it.

22. Tutorial support is clear, coherent and well managed. The tutorial manual is comprehensive and the student charter is detailed. Personal tutors play a central role in supporting students. Students speak very highly of the work of tutors in individual and group tutorials. Most tutorials are effective, but there is insufficient sharing of good tutorial practice. Some, but not all, curriculum areas provide reports and consultation evenings for parents, family or friends of students aged 16 to 18.

23. Careers education and guidance are well developed. The college's careers education and guidance team is complemented by Connexions advisers for students aged 16 to 19 and an adult guidance specialist. Two Connexions personal advisers work with vulnerable students. Well-stocked careers libraries are provided on the three main college sites and students have access to a careers folder on the intranet. They receive careers education through tutorials; individual interviews with careers advisers; work experience; and visits to places of employment or to HE institutions. There is good progression by students to other courses within the college and to education, training or employment outside.

Leadership and management

24. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection, the college has worked hard and successfully to address its priorities for improvement. Senior managers provide good leadership. They have managed to keep staff motivated to raise educational standards and improve services from previously very low levels. The college is attracting larger numbers of students and their retention rates and standards of achievement have improved. Its relationship with the local community is much better. New accommodation is being built and the refurbishment of existing buildings is providing students with a good learning environment. Since November 1999, the college has improved its financial position, reducing its accumulated deficit of £13.9 million to a deficit in July 2002 of £1.1 million. The financial recovery plan anticipates that the college will become solvent in 2004/05.

25. The strategic direction of the college is clear. The new strategic plan, for 2002 to 2005, focuses on the continually improving college courses and services, strengthening financial viability and efficiency, increasing inclusiveness and responsiveness, furthering the development of effective partnerships and ensuring that the location of courses and of the accommodation provided is

appropriate to meet students' needs. The college reviews the strategic plan quarterly. Student growth targets have been met in recent years.

26. Business plans are carefully linked to strategic objectives. They are costed and are sufficiently detailed, with clear measurable targets. National averages for the FE sector are used to help with monitoring progress towards targets, including students' achievements. Plans contain detailed needs analysis and risk assessment evaluations. They are critically scrutinised by senior managers to ensure compliance with college aims and have realistic and sound financial requirements. Students' retention and pass rates are reviewed, but the outcomes of this review are used inconsistently to inform judgements in the self-assessment report.

27. The management information system has improved and provides satisfactory data in most cases. However, there are problems with the timeliness and accuracy of some student data. Some curriculum areas do not fully rely on centrally produced data and are frustrated by the time it takes to recognise students' achievements on the central database. Quality assurance checks, seeking to develop closer links between curriculum managers and college data managers, have recently been implemented.

28. Curriculum management is well developed in some curriculum areas, for example, in trade union studies, construction, engineering and technology manufacturing where there is effective administration and good marketing of courses, successful management of teaching and learning and extensive staff development, benefiting the learner. Where operational management is less effective, for example, in hairdressing and beauty therapy, English and languages and science and mathematics, there is some poor leadership and direction, weak and unimaginative teaching and learning, underdeveloped self-assessment and inadequate continuing professional development.

29. Quality assurance is adequate. Self-assessment is an established process. The self-assessment report is clearly laid out and provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. The report is realistic in determining the standard of the college's provision, but it only contains a few judgements on standards achieved by students. A recently introduced tutors' journal provides teachers with clear directions on essential aspects of the college's approaches to improving quality and performance. The analysis of the outcomes of the internal scheme for teaching observations is detailed and thorough. However, the college's own profile of grades for lesson observations is overgenerous when compared with that determined by inspectors, which is very similar to the average for all general FE colleges inspected. In comparison with the last inspection, teaching and learning grades have improved significantly. In a minority of curriculum areas, there is insufficient internal verification and moderation, too little good practice is shared and resources are poor.

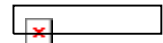
30. Internal communications are effective. Staff feel well informed through team meetings, newsletters, bulletins and briefings on the college's intranet and through meetings with senior and middle managers. Senior managers promote open and consultative management. Staff often have good opportunities for development, although in a minority of areas they are insufficient. Staff are critical of the standard of some recent in-college training courses. Annual staff appraisal is effective. Staff view it as constructive, in developing their effectiveness and efficiency and in promoting a better understanding of their job role.

31. Since 1999, the board of governors has invested much time and effort in promoting and monitoring the substantial financial recovery of the college. The well-chaired committee on quality and standards and achievement ensures that governors monitor effectively students' retention and pass rates. Similarly, governors check thoroughly and amend strategic plans, seeking reports from senior managers as necessary. Governors give clear direction, show good awareness and understanding of national curriculum initiatives and standards, and have good links with the wider educational and industrial communities. Governors are trying to find successful methods of working more closely with curriculum areas, but they have yet to accomplish this aim. Clerking arrangements are good. Minutes of board meetings provide a clear view of the discussions and outcomes. The format of data reports to governors, including progress towards college performance targets, lacks clarity. Governors' overall attendance at meetings is satisfactory, although for a few governors it is poor.

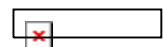
32. Equality of opportunity is well promoted with explicit aims, values and strategies. Well over 600 staff have recently received training on equality of opportunity awareness and updating. Some, including managers, have received training on deafness awareness and briefings on the Disability Discrimination Act. The college has produced a clear and comprehensive race equality policy and has procedures to monitor the implementation of the policy and of the associated diversity action plan. The ethnicity, gender and age of students are analysed, but there are no targets against which to monitor career progression for different racial groups.

33. Financial management has improved, although the college is in a weak financial position. Budgeting is sound and realistic to meet students' learning needs. Budget holders receive regular and accurate accounts. The deployment and management of resources are satisfactory. However, the college recognises that its staff and accommodation costs are high. Teachers' workloads are carefully monitored to ensure their time is used efficiently. The college is in the process of reducing its staff numbers, with a reduction of 37 in 2002 and a further reduction of 17 planned for 2003. The average size of classes is satisfactory. Staff absenteeism levels are acceptable. The college offers satisfactory value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Sciences and mathematics



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

Strengths

- high and improving pass rates on most GCSE courses
- good standards achieved and good progression for access to HE students
- broad range of academic and vocational courses
- good additional learning support.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on many GCE AS and A-level courses

- too little teaching that is better than satisfactory
- inadequate accommodation and specialist resources at one site
- lack of rigour in assessing the quality of teaching and learning.

Scope of provision

34. The area offers a broad range of vocational and academic courses, ranging from GCSE to degree level. The area reviews its provision regularly and seeks to meet local needs. For example, GCE AS physics is taught in community venues in order to extend access to local school pupils. The majority of courses are at intermediate and advanced level. GCE AS and A levels are offered in biology, chemistry, human biology, mathematics and physics. There is a wide range of GCSE subjects, in biology, chemistry, human physiology and health, mathematics, physics and science. Foundation level science was offered this academic year, but failed to recruit sufficient students. The access to HE in science course is well established. The vocational curriculum reflects the needs of local employers, with whom there are strong links, and includes the national certificates and diplomas in forensic and industrial science, as well as courses at levels 3 and 4 in safety, health and environmental management. In addition to daytime classes, many evening options are available.

Achievements and standards

35. Standards of achievements in science and mathematics are improving, but some retention and pass rates for key courses are low. Pass rates for GCE AS courses were below national averages in 2002, except in chemistry. They were very low for mathematics. Retention rates were well below national averages in chemistry, human biology, mathematics and physics. For GCE A-level subjects, of the 48 students who started their courses in 1999, only 8 achieved a pass in 2001. Pass and retention rates improved in 2002. Access to HE students achieve high pass and retention rates. Many progress to HE courses; 100% in 2002. Pass rates at grade A* to C on GCSE mathematics and for most sciences have improved and are above national averages: for GCSE chemistry, however, they are low. Pass rates for GCSE of adults are substantially better than those of younger students: on the national certificate course and the NVQ laboratory operations course they are low. The National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) health and safety certificate recruits well and students on the course achieve satisfactory standards.

36. Students' coursework is of a good standard. Written assignments of students on higher level courses are professionally presented and portfolios on the NVQ course are comprehensively developed. Where practical experiments take place, students show good practical skills. The standard of work by access to HE students in lessons and in assignments is good. Overall, students' attendance is low, at 72.6%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	245	164	252
		% retention	69	69	75
		% pass rate	51	56	60

GCSE biology	2	No. of starts	51	46	46
		% retention	59	76	80
		% pass rate	53	44	58
GCE A-level human biology	3	No. of starts	42	15	32
		% retention	57	93	78
		% pass rate	38	50	80
National certificate in science/applied science	3	No. of starts	9	12	10
		% retention	78	83	69
		% pass rate	57	100	40
NEBOSH certificate	3	No. of starts	*	127	156
		% retention	*	91	89
		% pass rate	*	65	67
Access to HE in science	3	No. of starts	28	21	23
		% retention	75	95	96
		% pass rate	86	90	91

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

37. Whilst most teaching is satisfactory or better, there is a high level of unsatisfactory teaching. Many of the weaknesses in teaching and learning, noted in the last FEFC inspection and re-inspection, remain. Too often, lesson content and the teaching are unimaginative and uninspiring. Course schemes of work and lesson plans are unhelpful and lack planning for effective teaching. In many lessons, students spend long periods copying notes from the whiteboard. They have little opportunity to express their views or demonstrate their learning and their questioning skills are poorly developed. In one lesson, students did not speak at all. Little attention is paid to students' individual learning needs. They are usually all engaged in the same activity, are expected to work at the same pace regardless of their starting point, and in some cases are bored and uninterested. Teachers make little use of IT in lessons and often, students are not given practical tasks to enliven their lessons. Teachers make little reference to key skills development in schemes of work or in lessons, except in vocational subjects.

38. In better lessons, there is sufficient variety to maintain students' interest. In a successful science lesson, students followed clear instructions and recorded measurements from a succession of experiments at a brisk pace. They responded well to the teacher and were confident in their responses. In environmental management and health and safety, course booklets and case study materials are used effectively. In some practical sessions, students are provided with clear written instructions with interesting well-illustrated examples.

39. At Borough Road, the poor quality of accommodation inhibits good teaching and learning. The laboratory is small and unsuitable for larger groups and it has no computers. Overall, at Borough Road there are insufficient computers to support learning. Science lessons at Conway Park are taught in classrooms that offer no scope for practical work. Accommodation at Carlett Park is good, with large rooms and ready access to computers. Teachers are well qualified. Most have a relevant degree and many have a higher degree. A minority have no teaching qualification. Technical staff provide good support, although it is insufficient for physics at Carlett Park. A good range of textbooks is available and is well used by students.

40. On most courses, assessment is fair and carried out regularly, although there is no agreed assessment framework. This leads to some inconsistent practice, as in GCSE mathematics, where students are not always aware of what is expected from them for homework. Coursework assessment is good. The marking closely matches external standards.

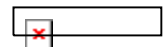
41. Students' needs for additional learning and support are identified effectively and teachers and learning support assistants provide sensitive support in lessons. For example, a GCSE chemistry student with a hearing impairment received good support, through the effective co-operation of the teacher and learning support assistant. Progress reports on students aged 16 to 18 are sent to employers, but parents do not receive a formal report on attendance and progress. There are no parents' evenings.

Leadership and management

42. Management of the area is made more difficult by the high percentage of part-time teachers. Communication with them is patchy and there is little face-to-face contact with managers. They do not always participate fully in self-assessment or take advantage of opportunities for staff development. Managers worked hard to provide accurate student data, but there were a number of changes to the data submitted during the inspection week.

43. Judgements in the self-assessment report rely heavily on the outcomes of internal lesson observations. However, these pay too little attention to students' learning and lessons are generously graded. Key weaknesses are overlooked. The well-established course review process has led to improvement. For example, better GCSE mathematics results have been achieved by ensuring that students meet the entry criteria; by creating separate provision for mature students, through identifying learning support needs early in the course; and by using full-time teachers.

Construction



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses
- good introductory courses for construction crafts students
- well-planned and effective learning support
- rigorous and comprehensive assessment
- well-managed provision.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on the part-time electrical installation course
- some teaching that fails to engage all students.

Scope of provision

44. The college offers a broad range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, including both craft and technician courses. The college also works with work-based training providers to offer the modern apprenticeship schemes. Students can attend for full-time, day-release, block-release or evening courses. Over 400 students are enrolled. These are split evenly between students aged 16 to 18 and students aged 19 or over. There are 120 students on full-time courses.

Achievement and standards

45. There are good retention and pass rates on most courses. Retention rates on the Merseyside Open College Network (MOCN) access to construction training and NVQ level 3 construction courses are very good. Those for the NVQ level 2, City and Guilds 2360 and technician courses have recently improved and are now good. Retention rates on construction technician courses have been poor, but have improved significantly in the past year. Pass rates on the access to construction training courses and for NVQ levels 2 and 3 are very good. Pass rates on technician courses are good. Pass rates on the City and Guilds 2360, electrical installation, fell considerably in 2002, to well below the national average, although many students are expected to be successful in the December series of retake examinations.

46. The standard of students' practical work is good, with industrial standards consistently being met. Portfolios of students' work are mostly well presented, accurate and tidy, with good examples of the use of ICT to research and present results. Technician assignments are well written and show good levels of attainment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
MOCN access to construction training	1	No. of starts	26	23	45
		% retention	81	87	91
		% pass rate	62	100	88
NVQ construction	2	No. of starts	175	116	64
		% retention	56	44	86
		% pass rate	50	90	87
City and Guilds electrical installation	2	No. of starts	39	35	12
		% retention	49	86	83
		% pass rate	63	100	20
NVQ construction	3	No. of starts	43	39	34

		% retention	86	90	94
		% pass rate	59	77	88
National certificate/diploma in construction	3	No. of starts	24	17	19
		% retention	38	53	89
		% pass rate	63	22	88

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

Quality of education and training

47. Most teaching is well planned, with lesson plans that set realistic learning objectives. These are communicated to students. Teachers often reflect on their teaching performance and modify their lessons as a result. Classroom and practical exercises developed for students are realistic and mostly set at the right level. Key skills teaching is good and integrated into students' majority programmes. Only one lesson was unsatisfactory. Some teaching fails to engage students, with too little variety of teaching methods, and in a minority of lessons learning is inadequately checked. There are good opportunities for enrichment activities and extra elements to main courses of study, including work experience at employers' premises.

48. All teachers have good vocational qualifications. Some 91% of full-time teachers have teaching qualifications. Most of the part-time teachers without a teaching qualification are studying for one. Teachers maintain their industrial skills and knowledge through frequent and regular secondments to local companies. Their development needs are identified in annual staff appraisals and met through the implementation of the continuing professional development plan.

49. The brickwork workshop is a very good facility. Other workshops are satisfactory. Students benefit from using some materials and surveying equipment, donated by local companies. Workshops provide a safe working environment for students. Health and safety arrangements in workshops are good with risk assessments and documentation regularly updated.

50. Assessment is well planned, rigorous and comprehensive. Portfolios and assignments are well marked with good feedback for students. Thoroughly applied internal verification assures the quality of assignment work given to students and the quality of the assessment of completed work. Students' progress is well recorded and readily understood by students and teachers. Achievement and progress are regularly reported to employers. Students' successes are celebrated through student of the month awards and an annual awards evening.

51. Learning support for students is well planned and effective. Induction appropriately prepares students for their courses, including monthly inductions to cope with the flexible start dates of many students. Initial assessment is thorough. A specialist tutor co-ordinates learning support. Test results are discussed with students and course teachers and are used to inform detailed learning plans. Where particular needs have been identified learning support staff are on hand to support students in workshops and classrooms. Records of support are comprehensive and record students' progress. There are good links with specialist support agencies external to the college. Good careers advice is given by both construction and specialist careers staff.

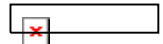
Leadership and management

52. The construction area is well managed and staff are well led. Their morale is very high. Curriculum management and staff meetings are well organised and effective in monitoring the quality of the curriculum. Teamwork is excellent across the area and there is much sharing of good practice. Staff contribute to the judgements in the self-assessments report and use these to help bring about improvement. Realistic targets for students' enrolment, retention rates and achievement levels, for teams and individuals, have been negotiated and progress towards them is monitored regularly at area team meetings. Staff are committed to the concept of continuous improvement of

courses.

53. The curriculum is well designed to meet the varied needs of students. There are now good introductory courses for craft students. Teachers identified that retention rates on lower level craft courses and progression to higher level craft courses were both poor. The MOCN access to construction training course, introduced as a result of this, allows students to sample different trades courses and to make an informed choice of construction trade. Progression on to construction crafts programmes is now good and retention rates have improved. There are good schools-links programmes taught both in the college and at the schools, and an electrical installation course is now being taught at the premises of the students' employers.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing



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

Strengths

- good range of courses and progression opportunities
- effective teaching and learning
- high pass and retention rates
- exceptionally good resources for motor cycle courses
- strong and effective links with motor cycle manufacturers.

Weaknesses

- some poor classroom facilities
- inadequate checking of students' understanding in too many lessons.

Scope of provision

54. The area offers full-time and part-time courses in electrical, electronic, general and mechanical engineering. In addition to GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses and national certificates in mechanical and electrical engineering, the provision includes, technicians courses in motor vehicle and motor cycle servicing; production competency courses in mechanical production and fabrication and welding; and a chemical engineering course for process plant operators, offered by open learning. A total of 200 students are enrolled on these courses. In addition, NVQ training in motor vehicle studies and engineering is also provided for learners from a local training organisation.

Achievement and standards

55. There has been a steady rise in pass and retention rates over the last three years. Most pass rates are now above national averages, with some well above. For the national certificates in mechanical and electrical engineering, they reached 100% for the last two years; 50 percentage points higher than the national average. Similarly, in 2002, pass rates of 100% have been achieved in mechanical production competencies, motor cycle repair and maintenance, and the City and Guilds motor vehicle progression award in service and repair. Retention rates are often above national averages and are particularly high on the GNVQ advanced engineering courses. The majority of most students' work is of good quality and they achieve good standards in their practical activities. The table below excludes Scientiam Limited students who attend the college for their off-the-job training.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
City and Guilds motor cycle repair and maintenance	1	No. of starts	18	19	25
		% retention	44	84	72
		% pass rate	50	88	100
City and Guilds motor vehicle progression award, service and repair	2	No. of starts	*	30	5
		% retention	*	46	80
		% pass rate	*	56	100
City and Guilds mechanical production competencies	2	No. of starts	11	10	5
		% retention	55	100	100
		% pass rate	67	**	100
City and Guilds fabrication and welding competencies	2	No. of starts	15	14	15
		% retention	60	86	93
		% pass rate	22	100	**
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	No. of starts	18	20	5
		% retention	72	89	100
		% pass rate	62	71	**
National certificates in engineering	3	No. of starts	21	29	17
		% retention	71	86	94
		% pass rate	80	100	100

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

* course not running

** data not available

Quality of education and training

56. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. The good working relationships between teachers and students promotes an environment conducive to good learning. Students gain in confidence and feel able to contribute to lessons, knowing that their comments will be valued. Lessons are well organised, within the framework of good schemes of work, and all have detailed lesson plans. In practical classes, students undertake vocationally relevant tasks and follow well laid out schemes for the development of competencies. Students are well motivated. During most lessons they are given work to do on their own whilst teachers provide effective one-to-one support and encouragement. In some lessons, however, insufficient use is made of questions to check individual students' understanding of lesson topics. Regular visits to automobile manufactures and national shows provide enrichment activities for students in the motor transport section.

57. The assessment and support of students are conducted effectively. Students receive and value the support of teachers. Teachers make a genuine attempt to relate basic skills to their teaching. For example, numeracy skills are linked to reading a vernier micrometer and a dial test indicator. Courses are offered at all stages from craft to degree level. Students benefit from this good range of engineering programmes and have good opportunities to move on to higher level courses, both within the college and outside. Internally, there are opportunities to progress from entry level courses to the second year of a bachelor of engineering qualification, with the final year taught at a local university.

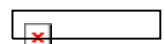
58. Teachers are suitably experienced and qualified. The area has a range of workshops which are all well looked after and present a positive image of modern engineering. The high ratio of staff to students in the workshops, often 1:4, contributes to effective learning. The motor cycle workshop is particularly well resourced. There are very good working relationships with major motorcycle manufacturers who regularly hold training events for their technicians in the motor cycle workshops. As part of this relationship, manufacturers donate motorcycles and equipment to the college. The specialist computer aided design (CAD) facilities are good and are also used for general IT by students. Additionally, all students have general Internet access, electronic access to journals and newspapers and e-mail facilities. The remaining practical resources for mechanical, fabrication and electronic engineering are adequate. However, a number of classrooms and their equipment are poor. Ineffective soundproofing disrupts some lessons. Some teaching takes place in laboratories, where immovable benches force students to face away from the teacher.

Leadership and management

59. The area is well managed. Teachers are concerned to improve quality and fully contribute to the development of the area's self-assessment report. They meet for two hours each week to address issues ranging from assessment to retention rate analysis. Retention rate statistics are collected weekly and acted upon by teachers eager to improve their students' retention rates and attendance levels. Workers supporting basic skills attend some of the meetings to facilitate the discussion of student's basic skills needs. Effective staff development, for which 10 days each year are allocated, includes such aspects as equality of opportunity, good practice visits to other colleges and industrial updating.

60. The area has been pro-active in seeking to attract women into engineering and teachers attend school career conventions in an initiative to promote engineering. Good links with schools have led to the introduction of a college-based pilot GCE in engineering for school pupils. The area has strong links with the local education service and disaffected pupils are integrated into fabrication and welding courses.

Business, administration, management and professional studies



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on accounting, management and administration courses
- good teaching and learning on most management, professional and administration courses
- well-organised work experience for full-time students
- well-motivated and confident students.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on GNVQ and AVCE courses
- insufficient use of ICT in lessons
- inconsistent quality in course planning
- inappropriate learning environments for management and professional studies students.

Scope of provision

61. The full-time and part-time provision is for students aged 16 to 18 and adults in business studies, business administration and management and professional studies. Courses cover all levels, from foundation to post-graduate qualifications. The area provides courses on the three main college campuses. There are 185 students on management and professional courses, including accountancy, marketing, personnel and general management, all of whom are part-time adult students. There are 114 full-time and 87 part-time business and administration students, 16 to 18 and adults, following the GNVQ, foundation and intermediate, the AVCE in business, NVQs in administration and the higher diploma in administrative procedures. Timetables allow students to follow mixed modes of attendance including full-time, day release and evening classes.

Achievement and standards

62. Pass rates on accounting, management and administration courses are often well above national averages. NVQ accounting, levels 2 and 4, the National Examining Board for Supervision and Management (NEBSM) certificate and the higher diploma in administrative procedures courses all achieved 100% pass rates in 2002. Retention rates for these courses are generally satisfactory. The pass and retention rates for the GNVQ intermediate and AVCE courses are poor. In 2002, no AVCE student achieved a full award and only 30% of the original starters remained by the end of the course. The performance of the GNVQ intermediate students dropped significantly in 2002, with only 50% achieving the award, as compared with 92% in 2001. The standard of students' work and attainment is satisfactory. Portfolios are generally produced to a good standard; some are very good. In lessons, students demonstrate commitment to their studies and interest in the subject. They support each other as they develop their skills and knowledge. They are keen to participate in discussion and debate and confidently raise queries or ask for clarification when necessary.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ administration	1	No. of starts	46	23	21
		% retention	84	83	86
		% pass rate	71	79	94
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	20	15	17
		% retention	90	87	76
		% pass rate	61	92	50
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	59	47	36
		% retention	75	93	82
		% pass rate	80	95	100
GNVQ advanced/AVCE	3	No. of starts	34	27	20
		% retention	35	85	30
		% pass rate	50	85	0
NEBSM certificate	3	No. of starts	31	54	52
		% retention	77	85	85
		% pass rate	71	91	100
NVQ accounting	4	No. of starts	31	23	29
		% retention	74	91	89
		% pass rate	67	100	100
Higher diploma in administrative procedures	4	No. of starts	22	27	29
		% retention	95	89	79
		% pass rate	81	64	100

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

Quality of education and training

63. On management, professional and administration courses, teaching is usually good or better. Students make good progress towards their learning goals. Most teachers manage their lessons well, providing a suitable range of activities that motivate and interest students. Very good use is made of appropriate and relevant case studies in management and professional lessons. These are

of a suitable level, helping students to develop their critical and analytical skills and enabling them to link theory to practical situations. In a supervisory management lesson on motivation theories, students were given details of a fictitious company with employee problems. Working in groups, using the theories of motivation, they identified the cause of the problems and suggested solutions. In a lesson on the higher diploma in administrative procedures, students organised a presentation for previous students. Each student had to present a proposed design for the invitations. They democratically selected the best design to be printed. This activity reinforced a number of skills, including IT.

64. Schemes of work and lesson plans are not consistently of good quality. They do not always take account of the differing needs of students. In some business studies lessons, although students worked steadily on relevant tasks, these did not provide a sufficient challenge for the more able. Plans have only a superficial time allocation to activities across the lesson and poor time management in some lessons denies the teacher the opportunity to summarise and explore the learning outcomes. This weakness is reinforced by the absence of learning objectives in plans and the inconsistent evaluation of lessons. There is also insufficient planning for assessment methods across courses. Lack of consistency in planning causes problems when teachers have to cover for colleagues' absence. ICT was not used in business and administration teaching and overhead projectors were used in only two lessons. PowerPoint presentations in management and professional classes, especially for accounting, are insufficiently used.

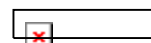
65. All full-time business and administration students have appropriate and well-structured work experience. NVQ administration students have a period of six weeks, during which some of their work competencies are assessed. Effective links with a Spanish college provide relevant work experience for some students. Administration students work in the area's training office; a well-structured and useful experience. Teachers are well qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects and students speak highly of the support provided by them. The positive working relationships between teachers and students, on all courses, are particularly noticeable.

66. An adequate number of computers are available in classrooms and in the library. However, although students use the Internet for research purposes, few learning materials for business are available on the college's intranet. Some student-printed handouts are of poor quality. Classroom accommodation at Carlett Park, for management and professional students, is not appropriate. Rooms are cramped for some classes; furniture layouts are inappropriate for group discussions and debate; whiteboards are poorly positioned; and chalkboards are still in use. Students indicated dissatisfaction with the location and the quality of the accommodation.

Leadership and management

67. Course management is satisfactory. Teachers work well in their teams and their morale has improved considerably over the last two years. College quality assurance procedures are fully implemented in business and administration. However, in management and professional studies they are not always followed. For example, many course files do not contain the audit checklist and lessons are not planned according to the college system. Data held at programme level do not always agree with data held in the college management information system. Staff at all levels are fully involved in self-assessment, with each section of the area contributing their own assessment towards the final report. The self-assessment report did not fully identify the strengths and weaknesses of this curriculum area.

Trade union studies



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- very good standards achieved and very high pass rates
- good retention rates
- very good teaching and learning
- highly qualified teachers and good resources
- courses which effectively meet the needs and interests of learners and the local community
- well-managed provision.

Weaknesses

- no weaknesses were identified.

Scope of provision

68. A broad range of courses for adults, at levels 1 to 4, is offered, embracing general trade union studies and IT for trade union members. Most courses are held on 1 day a week over 6, 10 or 14 weeks. Certification is usually provided by the Open College Network (OCN). Courses on health and safety and trade union representatives are offered on a flexible basis, throughout the year, irrespective of normal term dates. Pension trustee, risk assessment, training and development unit awards, and courses in change management are additional elements of a regularly changing course offer. IT courses include: using the Internet for research; computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT); and Integrated Business Technology stage 2 (IBT 2). Courses are held at the main base in the centre of Liverpool and at locations throughout the north west of England. Some courses are held at employers' premises, union premises or at other further education colleges. At the time of inspection, there were around 300 learners. Over a full academic year, the area would expect to enrol over 2,100 students.

Achievement and standards

69. The pass rates for trade union studies qualifications are outstanding. They are often 100%. Many students move on to higher level qualifications or take additional qualifications. This progression is particularly good as many students have no formal qualification or have been away from the classroom for many years. Retention rates are also high; students only leave for reasons of health or pressing employment commitments. Standards are high in classes. Students display growing confidence and are articulate. In one session, the tutor established a health and safety committee meeting with a student chair and secretary. The meeting then considered a variety of issues with

realism and using appropriate language and procedures. Incisive peer assessment followed with a written record to be produced at the next session. This exceptionally lively session was punctuated with humour, students gaining in both confidence and self-esteem.

70. Student portfolios produced for assessment are usually word-processed. Most case studies that are produced have a direct job relevance and display evidence of thorough research, good analysis and evaluation. On the assessor and verifier award programme assessment is thorough and well tracked. Moderator reports from the OCN comment on the high standards being displayed by the students. IT pass rates for union students are good on the CLAIT and IBT 2 programmes.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
TUC representatives, intermediate	2	No. of starts	155	86	113
		% retention	96	87	90
		% pass rate	93	99	97
TUC learning representatives	3	No. of starts	96	103	56
		% retention	96	88	98
		% pass rate	82	100	100
TUC induction programme	3	No. of starts	1,321	1,150	1,366
		% retention	98	98	91
		% pass rate	81	97	96
TUC representatives, advanced	3	No. of starts	10	35	33
		% retention	100	89	85
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

71. Most teaching is very good and some is outstanding. Lessons have clear aims and objectives that are shared with students. A variety of teaching and learning approaches are used, with good use of role-play, student presentations, group work, peer assessment and debate. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and take advantage of spontaneous contributions by students. In a health and safety lesson, the teacher's original plan was changed as students had a heated, but productive, discussion on the 11-hour rule. Students gave clear reasons why some trades union members are unwilling to enforce this employment right. Students show tolerance in discussion and are assertive without being aggressive. The quality of debate and the reasoned arguments used are impressive. Teachers stress the need for students to use the skills and knowledge developed in class within their workplaces. Teaching materials are specifically designed for union members. They relate to their experiences, are sensitive to equality of opportunity issues and stimulate students. Students are actively involved in lessons and bring examples from their own workplaces to support the learning of others. In a union representatives' lesson, students gave well-presented oral reports of developments in their workplace over the previous week. Experiences were shared and used by the teacher to further the lesson objectives.

72. The trade union studies unit provides an excellent range of courses, at a variety of levels, for local trade unionists. The students value the courses for their vocational relevance and for the challenge that they provide. Their comments in course evaluations are extremely positive. On joining even the shortest courses, students are made aware of their rights to support and guidance and the methods by which these can and will be provided. The standard course introductory leaflet is imaginative. The 'rules' of the unit are expressed as 'teamwork' and stress is placed on tolerance

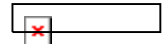
and active participation in lessons. Students with profound deafness and total blindness have successfully completed courses with unit support. The short courses, the majority of provision, are thoroughly assessed by staff and students at the end of each day. Written records are used to improve subsequent courses. The performances of the teacher and of the students during lessons are often assessed by the whole group, with a view to making positive suggestions for improvement.

73. Staff are experienced and highly qualified for this work. They are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and take every opportunity to update their skills. They understand the key issues which active trade unionists face and quickly gain respect. They have good dedicated accommodation at their disposal and a range of excellent learning resources.

Leadership and management

74. The trade union studies unit is well managed. A clear direction is set, leading to good quality training. Quality assurance practices are good. The self-assessment report produced by the unit is realistic, self-critical and accurate. Course assessments are thorough and place stress on improvement. The observation of teaching is detailed, positive and supportive. Good practice is shared. Marketing and administration of programmes are efficient. Accommodation and staffing resources are well used.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on part-time vocational courses
- good teaching on community courses
- good resources to promote learning
- strong support for students.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on GCE AS, ICT and GCSE courses
- poor punctuality and attendance on some courses

- some weak teaching.

Scope of provision

75. A wide range of part-time and short courses, from entry level to level 4, are provided on three main college sites and at over 21 outreach centres. The latter include schools, libraries and communication learning information centres. Over 1,700 students follow such courses as the national certificate in IT, IT for beginners, through to level 3 in computing, Internet technology, the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL), CLAIT, IBT and a wide range of MOCN programmes. Some 190 full-time students are enrolled on the GNVQ foundation and intermediate awards, the AVCE advanced ICT and the entry level course in computing. The college also offers a number of part-time higher national courses in computing.

Achievement and standards

76. Students on part-time vocational courses achieve well. Pass rates on CLAIT, the ECDL, IBT modules and OCN courses are well above the national averages. Retention rates on part-time programmes for the last three years are satisfactory. However, for the largely full-time GCE AS ICT and GCSE IT, it was poor in 2002, at some 20 percentage points below the national averages. Pass rates for these two qualifications are also well below national averages, having declined in 2002. Pass rates for the GNVQ foundation and intermediate levels are just at or above the national averages.

77. Students demonstrate a good level of practical IT skills and have a good understanding of theoretical concepts. Use of the Internet for research is a feature of many lessons. The quality of work produced by students following the ECDL and MOCN courses is good. Progression is satisfactory, with a significant proportion of students continuing their education or finding employment. For example, in 2002, 69% of GNVQ foundation students gained employment. Also in 2002, all AVCE students and 70% of students on the national diploma in computing progressed to HE.

78. Overall attendance in the lessons was 76%, but was much lower in some lessons. Many students are not punctual and some teachers fail to deal with latecomers effectively.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
ECDL	1	No. of starts	74	117	191
		% retention	97	82	84
		% pass rate	11	89	99
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	16	19	13
		% retention	81	89	58
		% pass rate	85	94	71
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	1,738	1,421	822
		% retention	77	82	79
		% pass rate	64	82	81
MOCN - short	1/2	No. of starts	251	1,416	1,557

		% retention	90	91	94
		% pass rate	54	81	93
GCSE IT	2	No. of starts	40	39	26
		% retention	53	59	38
		% pass rate	81	85	50

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

Quality of education and training

79. The standard of teaching and learning for many courses is satisfactory or good. The quality of teaching is particularly good on courses based in community centres. At these, lessons are well planned and the students' progress is closely monitored. Friendly and informal teachers provide the adult students with the confidence to continue with their studies. Students work at their own pace, but teachers ensure that they are prompted to meet challenging targets in their learning. Students are well motivated. In the best college-based lessons, teachers are well prepared and use a variety of activities to develop good learning. Such lessons are effectively managed and there are constructive working relationships between students and their teachers. Teachers regularly check that students understand their work. They use effective questioning and short practical activities where students check their own progress.

80. There is some weak teaching, especially for full-time students. In such cases, teachers are unable to manage group discussions and fail to achieve the best from them. Others have no effective strategies for dealing with the poor behaviour of students. Lessons are sometimes poorly planned and a few students are allowed to dominate, rather than participate effectively.

81. Teachers support their students well and constantly encourage them. Students receive strong support to develop their confidence and practical skills. For example, in one practical lesson, the teacher succeeded in motivating and advising every member of the class and monitored his/her progress with sensitivity, patience and careful attention. Students value this support. They express the view that their teachers listen to them and are willing to help them outside the classroom. Teachers teaching the ECDL, CLAIT and MOCN programmes mark work regularly. The detail of written feedback given to students varies. Across the area, at times written feedback is too brief, vague or general and does not provide students with effective guidelines to improve their work. Some assignments do not contain clear assessment criteria. This weakness was identified by the area's internal moderation and by the reports of external verifiers. The competences in basic skills of full-time students are determined at enrolment and additional support is provided for those with any deficits. Some students have learning support assistants. Course tutors have responsibility for monitoring the progress of students and agreeing action plans with them. The need for prior learning for part-time students is determined through subject-based initial assessment.

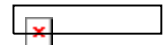
82. Specialist resources are good. A wide range of computer hardware is available for students. Most computer equipment is modern and has industrial-standard software with Internet facilities. Access to this equipment and to well-structured paper-based learning materials is good and regularly used by students. Learning materials and course documentation on the intranet are extensive and are regularly accessed by teachers and students. There are adequate open-access and drop-in facilities for the computer workshop. Most teaching rooms are well laid out with good lighting and ventilation and appropriate teaching equipment. Most staff have relevant vocational and teaching qualifications, although some do not have recent industrial experience.

Leadership and management

83. The management of courses is satisfactory. Programme leaders and their teams work well together. For example, the IT in the community education teams has developed joint approaches in offering some courses. Teams meet monthly to discuss performance targets and follow a comprehensive and relevant agenda. All teachers meet weekly to monitor progress towards

performance targets, share good practice or undertake staff development. However, there is still too little exchange of good practice across the area, for example, in relation to developing effective schemes of work and lesson plans. Courses are reviewed termly by each team and student representatives, but this takes too little account of the evidence from the internal observation of lessons, and the emphasis is often on meeting standards rather than raising them. Course tutors do not have individual targets and are not accountable for recruitment and retention and pass rates. Internal moderation and verification are satisfactory. The staff appraisal programme results in relevant staff training.

Leisure, travel and sports studies



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- some well-planned lessons with appropriate learning activities
- good accommodation and specialist resources for travel
- strong links with the travel and tourism industry
- effective learning support for travel students.

Weaknesses

- lack of co-ordination between different managers for this area
- more able students insufficiently extended in learning
- weak internal moderation

- low attendance in sports studies.

Scope of provision

84. There are 268 full-time students; 69 undertaking sports science courses and 199 following travel and tourism courses. Provision in travel allows for progression from pre-entry school links to higher education. College courses are related to the GNVQ in leisure and tourism, foundation and intermediate levels and the AVCE in travel and tourism. Courses in sport consist of level 2 and level 3 courses in sport and exercise science. Sports therapy courses are available in a different college area whilst GCE AS and A-level sports studies and physical education are taught in another. Newly developed travel courses are offered at level 2 for overseas resort representatives, leisure leaders and cabin crew training. Some 46 part-time adult students follow the NVQ and overseas resort representative courses.

Achievement and standards

85. Pass rates for most courses are well above national averages, although retention rates are usually at or just above national figures. Retention and pass rates are good for the GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism, first diploma in science (sports studies), national diploma in science (sports studies) and NVQ travel services courses. However, significant numbers of students leave before completing the two-year AVCE travel and tourism course and the national diploma in sports science. Pass rates for these courses are based on relatively low numbers of students. Retention and pass rates, including passes at the higher grades, are very high for the GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism. Travel students are prepared effectively for the workplace; cabin crew students wear a uniform and regularly attend a local airport to experience work. Students following the national diploma in science (sports science) sometimes have poor levels of attainment, they experience difficulty in relating and applying science theory to their practical studies. Students progress well into employment or into more advanced level courses at the college. Absence rates in some courses are high, with typical attendance for sports classes of between 53% and 70%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism	1	No. of starts	11	15	15
		% retention	73	73	80
		% pass rate	38	91	100
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	19	24	36
		% retention	68	71	86
		% pass rate	77	53	83
NVQ travel services (2 year)	2	No. of starts	19	39	22
		% retention	63	74	89
		% pass rate	63	74	67
National diploma in science (sports studies)	3	No. of starts	14	19	7
		% retention	50	89	71
		% pass rate	67	100	100
AVCE travel and tourism (single award)	3	No. of starts	*	21	25
		% retention	*	62	71

		% pass rate	*	77	75
First diploma in science (sports studies)	3	No. of starts	*	*	11
		% retention	*	*	82
		% pass rate	*	*	100

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

86. Lessons are often well planned to achieve the outcomes determined by teachers. They use a variety of teaching and learning methods to engage students and build confidence, particularly for students at levels 1 and 2. In many lessons, teachers engage students' interest quickly and maintain a good level of activity and learning. AVCE travel and tourism students develop and integrate practical and theoretical skills and are encouraged to become independent learners. Some teaching is only satisfactory. Here, teachers do not manage to extend the learning of the more able students who sometimes become disruptive or unco-operative. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by the use of inappropriate teaching methods, insufficient and irregular checking that learning is taking place and ineffective learning resources. Students benefit from strong industry links that provide professional training and employment opportunities. Most full-time students are able to access a range of enrichment activities including offsite visits, recreational sports and additional qualifications.

87. The teaching of key skills is integrated into core subjects for travel and sports science. NVQ students' portfolios are well presented and contain much good evidence. Feedback to students on assessed work is given quickly, is often supportive and provides advice for improvement. However, for some coursework assignments, students are inadequately encouraged to improve the standard of their work from a pass to a higher standard.

88. There is good initial diagnosis for learning support for full-time students. A team of learning support assistants work with students in the curriculum area. Learning support is used well to help improve the achievements of students aged 16 to 18, but the support needs of adult students are not systematically identified or addressed. Learning support for level 3 travel students, in their lessons and in assignment workshops, is particularly effective. Tutorials are helpful. They are linked to a whole college syllabus and help to develop study skills and provide careers guidance as well as pastoral support. Assessment activities are continuous and developmental and are integrated into schemes of work. The internal moderation of work is inadequate and there are inconsistencies and deficiencies in the grading of coursework.

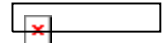
89. Most teachers are experienced practitioners and have current industrial experience. However, some inexperienced teachers have not received support and struggle with their teaching. Teachers in travel are knowledgeable about the sector, provide positive role models and use their work experience skilfully to give insight into the tourism industry. In sport and exercise science, teachers have good subject knowledge. In travel, students benefit from excellent learning resources including classrooms, library, college travel office and use of community venues for practical sports sessions. In some cases, IT resources are available in classrooms, but are not used as they do not have Internet or network access.

Leadership and management

90. Management of leisure, tourism and sport is the responsibility of different curriculum managers, located on different sites. As there is little co-ordination of their activities and courses, they have not considered the adequacy of provision overall and whether it meets students' needs. A few teachers, largely those who are inexperienced, have not been systematically observed or supported. Some are unaware of how to check learning, levels of attainment or the vocational application of theory.

Most teachers understand their roles and those of others, are clear about the targets they have been set and are able to interpret student-related data effectively. Meetings are held frequently and teachers are supportive of managers and the direction of the college. Internal teaching observations, which are a major source of evidence for the area's self-assessment report, give a more favourable impression than is justified by external evaluation.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- good standards of practical work
- well-presented portfolios, with a wide range of evidence, and use of IT
- good modern salons and sports therapy facilities.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on many courses
- too much weak teaching
- insufficiently robust internal verification
- underdeveloped aspects of curriculum management.

Scope of provision

91. There are 135 students aged 16 to 18 and 122 students aged 19 or over on full-time courses.

Full-time courses include beauty therapy levels 2 and 3, diplomas in sports therapy, advanced sports therapy and hairdressing, levels 1 and 2. There are 27 students aged 16 to 18 and 172 students aged 19 or over on part-time courses in hairdressing, NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3; beauty therapy, NVQ levels 2 and 3; in aromatherapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, body massage, fashion and photographic make-up, theatrical and media make-up, anatomy and physiology. The college has one New Deal client and one college work-based student. In addition, the college is sub-contracted to deliver work-based learning for another provider. 'Taster' courses are provided for school pupils in hairdressing, with progression to level 1. No weekend courses are available. The option to gain additional qualifications and skills is offered in related areas.

Achievement and standards

92. Many pass rates are now high, having improved considerably since 2000. However, retention rates are often below national averages. This is exemplified in two of the key full-time courses. Whilst the retention rate on the NVQ level 2 beauty therapy is below the national average for 2002, the pass rate is 100% for 2001 and 2002. Similarly, the retention rate on NVQ level 2 hairdressing has been below the national average for the last three years, but the pass rate has improved over the last two years to 100% in 2002. On most part-time courses, retention rates are well below national averages but for some there are 100% pass rates in 2002, and 100% in 2001 and 2002 for reflexology, aromatherapy and Indian head massage. The diploma in sports therapy has good retention and pass rates. Students' attendance is low.

93. Students' attainment is generally good and the majority make good progress in lessons. Standards of students' practical work are good. They enter competitions with success and produce a number of hairdressing and beauty shows throughout the year. All students look smart and wear professional dress. Students take pride in their work. Portfolios are well presented and referenced with a wide range of evidence, photographs, scanned images, Internet research and demonstrate good use of IT.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
NVQ beauty therapy (full time, 1 year)	2	No. of starts	58	53	63
		% retention	66	84	71
		% pass rate	39	100	100
NVQ hairdressing (full time, 1 year)	2	No. of starts	34	21	63
		% retention	76	71	70
		% pass rate	58	83	100
Indian head massage (short course)	2	No. of starts	46	51	68
		% retention	93	88	88
		% pass rate	59	100	100
Reflexology (part time)	3	No. of starts	13	31	39
		% retention	38	48	56
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Aromatherapy (part time)	3	No. of starts	20	11	13
		% retention	85	82	69
		% pass rate	82	100	100
Diploma in sports	3	No. of starts	17	17	16

year)		% pass rate	80	80	100
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

Quality of education and training

94. Most teaching is satisfactory, whilst some is good or better. In the better lessons, teachers demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and enthusiasm, manage the class well and use methods to engage students in productive activity for the whole lesson. Many lessons are adequate, but provide little stimulation to improve learning. In weaker lessons, students are not given clear aims and objectives or an overview of the teacher's intentions. Some lesson plans are too brief to be an aid to effective teaching and teachers insufficiently identify key points of the lesson to guide their students. Teachers do not always deal promptly with students' lapses of attention or manage to maintain their interest, even in practical lessons. There is insufficient effective use of teaching resources such as a whiteboard, overhead projector, diagrams, videos, photographs and journals. In some lessons, teachers fail to establish if learning has taken place. Teachers insufficiently reinforce good hygiene practices in some salon lessons.

95. Most students have a very clear understanding of course requirements and the stage they have reached with their assessments. They often receive good support in group and individual tutorials, which they value, although some group tutorials are poorly planned and become extensions of lessons. Full-time students can also 'drop in' for further support and advice if required.

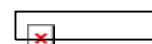
96. There is insufficient internal verification of teachers' assessments and students' portfolios of work. This weakness is identified in the college's self-assessment report. Whilst internal verification systems and procedures are now in place they have not been implemented long enough for their effectiveness to be evaluated.

97. Students use good modern salons and sports therapy facilities. The new town centre site has recently been extended to create more space. There are three beauty salons and three hair salons. The accommodation and equipment are of a high standard. The suite is light, spacious and attractively decorated and salons reflect a realistic working environment. At the time of the inspection the new accommodation had only just been re-opened and some initial problems in relation to noise and ventilation were yet to be addressed. Some sports therapy lessons are delivered in the new local leisure centre that has excellent facilities to meet the needs of the course. Students enjoy their new facilities that have easy access to transport. Teachers are adequately qualified, but lack sufficient recent commercial experience.

Leadership and management

98. The head of this area has been in post for only a few weeks. A number of aspects of management require attention, many of which the college has identified. The priorities for action are to identify and implement key training needs, including commercial updating for teachers, to implement the new procedures for internal verification, to improve teaching and to facilitate the sharing of good practice between teachers. Course review, particularly as a contributor to the self-assessment report, is effective.

Health and care



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses
- effective range of teaching methods
- good progression to HE or employment
- comprehensive range of courses in response to community needs
- good pastoral and academic support for students.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on key courses
- able students are insufficiently stretched.

Scope of provision

99. The inspection covered childcare and education, health and social care and counselling, offered by the school of humanities, care and science. The area offers full-time and part-time courses during the day or evening at levels 1 to 4, both in college and recently at community venues. Full-time provision in early years care and education includes a foundation course in childcare studies; a certificate of childcare and education; and the diploma in childcare and education. Part-time provision includes courses in playwork at levels 2 and 3; a mid-day supervisor course; a teaching assistant course and childminding at levels 1 to 3; and the advanced diploma in childcare and education. Full-time courses for health and social care include the GNVQ at foundation and intermediate levels and the AVCE. NVQs at levels 2 and 3 are offered in care and early years, and in care and education. Counselling courses include an introduction to counselling skills, and a certificate and diploma in counselling. Students take a range of additional qualifications including first aid, manual handling and basic food hygiene.

Achievement and standards

100. Pass and retention rates on most courses have steadily improved to exceed national averages. On NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in care, early years, care and education and an access to health programmes, pass rates are well above the national figures. On the NVQ level 2 health and social care, pass rates improved from 32% in 2000 to 100% in 2002, whilst student numbers grew from 28 to 186. However, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care fell significantly below the national average in 2002. The foundation course in childcare, introduced in 2001, has good pass rates. Retention rates have consistently improved on the NVQ and GNVQ level 3

programmes, but poor retention rates on the certificate in childcare and education courses are significantly below national averages. All students are encouraged to work towards an appropriate level of key skills in application of number, communication and IT. Wider key skills offered include promoting independent learning and working with others.

101. Students progress well to other courses in the college and to HE and employment. For example, in 2002, 71% of foundation students progressed to the intermediate course in health and social care, and 67% of intermediate students to the AVCE. All of the access to health students and 73% of the AVCE health and social care students progressed to HE in 2001. Some 80% of the diploma in childcare and education students progressed to employment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ health and care	2	No. of starts	16	17	21
		% retention	56	88	71
		% pass rate	78	100	43
NVQ health and social care (direct care)	2	No. of starts	28	83	186
		% retention	91	73	81
		% pass rate	32	64	100
Counselling skills	2	No. of starts	30	32	37
		% retention	83	78	76
		% pass rate	100	100	86
GNVQ health and social care	2	No. of starts	19	16	15
		% retention	53	75	87
		% pass rate	67	100	85
NVQ early years and education	3	No. of starts	46	50	63
		% retention	74	94	98
		% pass rate	94	100	100
Access to HE in health	3	No. of starts	*	45	50
		% retention	*	80	96
		% pass rate	*	100	100

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

*course not running

Quality of education and training

102. Teachers employ a good range of methods to promote learning. For example, in an applied biology lesson, a brief presentation was given by the teacher to provide students with a sound theoretical basis. A short videotape was played, followed by explanations from the teacher. Students then worked in groups to create models of the several stages of mitosis. Students were well motivated and enthusiastic. Good use of questions by the teacher confirmed individual learning throughout the lesson. A lesson to explore the dietary needs of young children engaged students in four different activities, including role-play, preparation of food, research on the Internet to prepare a budget for food expenditure and a brief written exercise. Each activity was designed to develop knowledge and skills essential for the unit assignment. In most lessons, however, the needs of the more able students are inadequately addressed. There is insufficient planning to ensure that lessons

will provide them with appropriately demanding tasks to improve their learning. Checking of individual students' understanding is ineffective in a minority of lessons. Positive use is made of students', particularly adult students', experiences to extend learning.

103. Teachers use their relevant occupational experiences to enhance learning. Visits to workplaces and a programme of guest speakers on specialist topics extend students' learning. Work placement is well organised and students use their experiences to extend learning and complete course assignments. A wide choice of enrichment programmes supports their studies and furthers their social development; these include visits to the theatre, museums, national conferences and sporting activities.

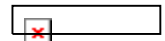
104. Students are well supported. Initial assessment identifies individual learning needs. Individual learning plans set targets that are regularly reviewed and updated, although short-term targets are insufficiently specific and lack timescales. Students with learning difficulties are well supported. For example, in one lesson, a learning assistant helped with note taking and in clarifying issues raised in a discussion to support a student with hearing impairment. Assignments encourage students to make good links between units of study, their work and their general experience. Clear assessment criteria and constructive written feedback ensure that students improve their work. Internal verification is effective. Written termly reports keep parents, guardians or employers up to date on students' progress.

105. Textbooks, videotapes and specialist journals appropriately support learning. A counselling suite provides flexible accommodation for large and small groups. Teachers use space creatively. They provide good handouts and course handbooks. The librarians have built a range of folders to support topics studied. The Internet is increasingly used for research purposes by students at all levels. Equipment for practical activities in childcare is limited, for example a lack of cooking facilities inhibits the range of activities.

Leadership and management

106. The area is well managed, with comprehensive systems to plan and monitor learning at all levels including good use of the area's self-assessment report. Regular staff meetings review students' progress towards targets for retention and pass rates, using national averages for comparison. Teachers are positive about the management of their area and the effectiveness of communications with managers. Good liaison with a wide range of local organisations has led to the introduction of a comprehensive range of courses at all levels across the area. Strong links with the statutory, voluntary and the independent sectors include the early year development and childcare partnership, Play-work Council and the Macintyre Foundation. Close teamwork between college staff and work-based assessors has contributed to the high pass rates for NVQs.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- good imaginative teaching in practical lessons

- high standards of practical work and performance
- skilful teaching of theory
- well-managed provision.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on two courses
- some insufficiently demanding practical activities
- inadequate monitoring of students' performance in longer lessons.

Scope of provision

107. A range of full-time and part-time programmes are offered in art and design, drama, dance, music and media at the Borough Road campus and a large programme of art and craft provision is available at community venues. Courses include BTEC, GNVQ, AVCE, GCE AS and A level, GCSE, City and Guilds and OCN. Courses are available at intermediate and advanced levels during the day and evenings. There are 205 students aged 16 to 18 and 1,656 students aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

108. Achievement by students is good. Most reach their full potential and some exceed expectations. Pass rates are high for adults on OCN courses at levels 2 and 3 and for full-time students on most courses in media and communications, art and design, performing arts and music. The pass rate for the GNVQ intermediate in art and design fell to below national average in 2002. The retention rate is often high, although it has declined on the GNVQ intermediate art and design, to well below the national average, and on the diploma in foundation studies, to around the national average.

109. Many students progress into HE in art and design, performing arts and media. Community arts students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress into college-based courses. A current teacher was an adult learner, who began her art career in community education classes, progressed into an access to HE course and completed her degree and teaching qualification at the college.

110. Students' practical work and performance skills are good, including the sequential development and use of a range of specialist techniques in all subject areas. Art and design students' work shows

a strong development of visual ideas in drawing and bold application of colour. Their specialist studies portfolios and sketchbooks contain good work. GNVQ intermediate students working from direct observation of a vase of lilies showed imagination and resourcefulness in producing a collage of the flowers. They explained their ideas confidently to the rest of the group. In drama, dance and music, students perform well, their work is lively, colourful and confident. They adopt a sensitive and mature approach to their improvisation work. In media studies, students are capable of good camera work, photography, editing and sound recording.

111. Students are enthusiastic and focused in their approach to learning. Punctuality is good and they arrive well prepared for lessons with appropriate clothing and homework. They quickly demonstrate increased knowledge and confidence. A senior citizen, who had never played an instrument before, had enrolled on the community arts 'guitar for beginners' course. She was carefully following the teachers' directions and by the end of the lesson was able to play a simple tune effectively with a very apparent sense of achievement. Students' families and the wider community benefit from their achievements. One student designed and made a set of costumes for a local production, another is writing and illustrating a children's book for a primary school.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
OCN credit target 2	1	No. of starts	121	**	158
		% retention	86	**	86
		% pass rate	69	**	92
OCN credit target 3	2	No. of starts	21	**	33
		% retention	76	**	91
		% pass rate	75	**	97
Desk top publishing	2	No. of starts	35	**	99
		% retention	77	**	79
		% pass rate	59	**	53
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	24	16	28
		% retention	75	94	60
		% pass rate	50	93	73
GNVQ advanced media communication and production	3	No. of starts	16	**	14
		% retention	63	**	71
		% pass rate	70	**	100
Diploma in foundation studies	3	No. of starts	41	48	50
		% retention	95	92	86
		% pass rate	97	98	100
National diploma performing arts/drama	3	No. of starts	60	**	18
		% retention	47	**	89
		% pass rate	63	**	100
National diploma popular music	3	No. of starts	*	**	15
		% retention	*	**	100
		% pass rate	*	**	100

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

**course not running*

***unreliable data*

Quality of education and training

112. Most teaching is good or better, especially in practical lessons. Lessons are well structured and coherent with concise introductions. Lessons plans are consistently good with clear learning outcomes. Teachers make good use of written, visual and aural stimulus as starting points for practical work. Well-written student workbooks support individual learning in community arts. In a drama lesson, students explored revenge tragedies using the speech in which Lady Macbeth summons the spirits. An improvisation activity explored how Lady Macbeth might feel. A student in the centre of the group wore a blindfold. The other students each chanted a line of the speech whilst circling around the student. The teacher kept absolute control and the activity was used to develop the performance of the speech. In a few lessons, some practical activities do not extend students full potential. In the community provision, some level 3 students rely too heavily on secondary source materials, such as pictures photocopied from books and magazines, to develop design ideas. In some life-drawing classes, there is a tendency to aim for a finished drawing before all mistakes have been corrected.

113. Theory is skilfully taught. Students demonstrate an understanding of music principles, popular culture, improvisation and characterisation. There is a strong emphasis on analytical drawing and the use of visual language. In community arts, students are encouraged to use accurate design terminology, such as form, line and tone when presenting their work. In some longer lessons, students' performance is inadequately monitored. The thoroughness of questioning to check on learning occasionally decreases and is insufficiently rigorous. Students who do not participate in the group discussions are not challenged. Opportunities for peer evaluation of performances are not maximised. In a few lessons, teachers do not always provide the level of support and clarity of feedback some students need.

114. Students are well supported with good pre-entry guidance and good induction. Guidance on progression is good. In performing arts, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported to progress to mainstream programmes. Assessment is thorough and matched to the different needs of students and their learning. Projects are challenging and assignments are well written and imaginative, with precise criteria for assessment and achievement that are well understood by students. Clear assessment and internal moderation in community arts help part-time teachers to standardise assessment. There is good use of self-evaluation by students. Many teachers provide constructive feedback on levels of achievement and areas for improvement.

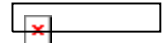
115. Resources at Borough Road are generally good. In art and design, there are large studios, high specification computers and good printmaking facilities. All areas make the most of the use of displays and visual materials to create a stimulating environment, and helping students to improve their own work. The performance spaces are used effectively and are adequate in size. External venues for performance are well used to enhance students' experience. Good, industry-standard media equipment ensures that students are well prepared for employment. The quality of accommodation and resources in community arts venues is very mixed. Crèche facilities help to widen participation. There are well-qualified staff. The majority work in their specialist fields and have higher level qualifications. Staff development activities for all teachers are well supported.

Leadership and management

116. Leadership and management are effective. Staff are clear about the direction of the college and the role to be played by their area of work. Communications are good, with regular formal and informal team meetings. Curriculum development is given a high priority and equal opportunities are continually and strongly promoted. Provision has been designed to meet specific local needs and has widened access and participation. Systems for quality assurance are consistently good in art and design and performing arts and media. In community arts, they are underdeveloped.

117. Teachers have become much more aware of the importance of interrogating and analysing data on students' achievement. In spite of this, insufficient weight is given to reviewing data as an aid to improving quality. Some student data for 2001 were unreliable. Self-assessment is continually developing: the self-assessment reports are not particularly evaluative, but contain some accurate judgements.

Humanities and social studies



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on GCE A-level and access to HE courses
- well-organised lessons by experienced teachers, who use specialist knowledge comprehensively
- effective development of student handbooks and learning materials
- wide range of courses to meet students' needs
- good progression to HE from access courses.

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on most GCSE, GCE AS and access courses
- inadequate development of oral skills
- insufficient questioning to check students' understanding
- little sharing of good practice across subjects.

Scope of provision

118. A broad range of humanities and social science courses is offered to full-time and part-time students. Adult students account for approximately half the enrolments. Some 100 students are enrolled on GCSE daytime or evening classes in law, psychology and sociology, and 86 students follow mainly daytime courses at GCE A level in these subjects, as well as in history and geography. The seven subjects are offered for GCE AS, including archaeology and philosophy, have attracted 277 enrolments. Provision is made for pupils from local schools where GCE AS law, psychology and sociology are not available. The area makes a major contribution to the pre-access and access to HE courses for adults. Most courses are taught in the Borough road or Conway Park sites. Programmes in local history and archaeology are taught as part of the MOCN programme, some of which take place in community venues.

Achievement and standards

119. There is no consistent pattern of achievement by students across courses and subjects. Adult students on the access to HE course achieve consistently high pass rates and last year all were offered places of their own choice. Adults also do particularly well on GCSE courses. GCE A-level students, in small subject groups, achieved high pass rates in 2002 especially in history, law and psychology. In archaeology and geography, where numbers are very small, pass rates are low. In 2002, pass rates fell in history and sociology, but remain above national averages. Whilst there is significant improvement in the GCSE law pass rate, it has fallen to below the national average in psychology, and in sociology, it has fallen in each of the past three years. Retention rates on GCSE courses show a downward trend since 2000 and fell to below national averages in all GCE AS subjects except history, which has improved from well below to well above the national average. Progression routes for students between courses and to HE are good.

120. Students work industriously, particularly in small groups, and most achieve satisfactory or better standards. Adult students generally fulfil their potential. Most students acquire detailed knowledge and a good understanding of their subjects. They demonstrate a satisfactory level of confidence in reasoning out answers to short tasks and in handling different sources of information productively. Oral skills are not well developed and students rarely use statistical data. Written work is satisfactory and extended assignments, such as coursework are well presented and reflect good learning skills. Well-motivated access students of law were thoroughly prepared for their first major written assignment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE law (1 year)	2	No. of starts	47	31	32
		% retention	70	81	63
		% pass rate	52	26	60
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	*	*	15
		% retention	*	*	87
		% pass rate	*	*	100
GCE A-level sociology (1 year) adult evening	3	No. of starts	25	*	22
		% retention	76	*	68
		% pass rate	53	*	83
MOCN access to HE in humanities	3	No. of starts	35	32	29
		% retention	76	83	64

		% pass rate	91	89	96
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

**course not running*

Quality of education and training

121. Most lessons have plans with clear aims and objectives and are organised effectively to meet course requirements. Teachers are prepared and use their specialist knowledge to ensure comprehensive coverage of topics. This was demonstrated in a sociology lesson examining causes of divorce. The most effective lessons are those which engage students in individual or small group tasks at an early point in the lesson and which employ a variety of teaching and learning techniques and resources. In a very good psychology lesson on Piaget's theories, GCE A-level students learned systematically from a well-crafted integration of various resources that included text, visual stimulus and simple practical experiments to test theories. Most lessons focus on developing understanding and learning skills. This is generally by the use of handouts of textual material and worksheets. In history, a selection of reference books is used and tasks are differentiated to meet the needs of the individual student.

122. Students' understanding is not tested thoroughly enough. Testing can be peremptory, does not seek to probe understanding, stimulate discussion or involve students. This approach hampers particularly the development of students' oral skills. Recognition of the different learning needs of students is not always apparent in lessons, except for access to HE students. Learning is less effective in the few lessons where teachers talk too much. In difficult circumstances teachers enrich learning with external visits. For example, access history students visit Ironbridge, law students visit Birkenhead and Liverpool law courts, sociology students use the local museum of Primitive Methodism, geographers look at landforms and river processes near Wrexham and archaeology students frequently visit sites, including Stonehenge.

123. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are improving. Full-time students' knowledge of key skills is tested when they start their courses. A college system to measure students' progress against targets for examination grades, based upon their GCSE grades is at an early stage of development. Access to HE students are subject to rigorous, continuous assessment and monitoring procedures. Half-termly reports are made on all students. Appropriate assignments are set to monitor progress, but the quality of marking varies. Teachers' comments on work are sometimes unhelpful and there is no common format for feedback to students. In psychology, there are examples of cross-marking. More attention is being given to patterns of attendance and punctuality. Additional support and guidance are given on an ad hoc basis in non-teaching time, although access students receive integrated support, particularly in key skills. Most students consider teachers accessible and supportive.

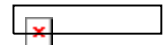
124. Teachers are experienced and well qualified. They bring high standards of specialist knowledge to their teaching. Accommodation is mostly good for learning, but some rooms are too small for large access groups. All rooms have overhead projectors, but chalkboards show signs of wear and are ineffective for providing visual reinforcement of learning. Wall displays include useful course information and examples of students' work. There has been significant improvement in the development of learning materials and students' study books, which are now very good. Although sociology teachers are promoting the greater use of IT, few IT applications are evident in the curriculum. Good links have been established with the libraries and teachers make regular checks with the librarian on the suitability of stock.

Leadership and management

125. A programme team leader has a broad range of responsibilities for overseeing the effectiveness of the curriculum area, including access courses. There are no designated managers or leaders of subjects. The leadership involved in introducing improvements to management systems is good. Weekly programme team meetings are held, guided by monthly agendas.

Administrative issues occasionally assume priority over curriculum specialist needs. No formal arrangements exist for subject meetings, and subject teachers meet informally in college or externally. The curriculum area shows a sense of progress and commitment to improving the quality of its provision. Better use is being made of data on students' performance, although teachers are not confident of its reliability. The sharing of good practice by teachers requires development. For example, more consistency is required in the design and development of schemes of work and the agreed policies for marking, monitoring and assessment, and differentiation in lessons need to be implemented more effectively.

English and languages



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- good teaching and learning in modern foreign languages
- thorough assessment practices
- wide range of languages in response to community need
- strong leadership in modern foreign languages
- hard working and motivated students.

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching and learning approaches in English
- little use of the target language in some modern foreign language lessons

- negative impact of unqualified teachers on the quality of teaching and learning
- some shortcomings in the management and co-ordination of English.

Scope of provision

126. The college makes extensive provision in modern languages. More than 600 students are enrolled on 63 courses in 10 languages. The courses are taught across 16 sites and at all levels. The majority of courses are accredited through the MOCN. Fifty students are studying for the GCSE and GCE AS. The GCSE Chinese course builds on the work of a voluntary Saturday Chinese school, allowing members of the Chinese community to gain academic recognition for their bilingual skills. More than 300 students are studying English. English language is offered at GCSE; English language/literature and English literature at GCE AS; and English language/literature at GCE A level. A pre-access course and an access to HE course both include English literature modules. Most English is taught at the Borough Road campus with only two GCSE courses delivered in the community. The college offers GCE A-level communications as part of an arrangement with local schools.

Achievement and standards

127. Pass rates are good, reaching or more usually exceeding national averages. In 2002, GCSE English had an A* to C pass rate of 72% compared with a national average of 59%; all GCE A-level English results are above 90%; and there are 100% pass rates in Spanish GCSE and GCE AS Chinese. OCN languages pass rates are 80% and above. Retention rates are satisfactory when compared with national averages. Retention on MOCN programmes are below the college average, but in line with adult evening classes nationally.

128. The standard of students' contributions in class is satisfactory in most cases and, in adult classes, often demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the subject. Students work hard and are well motivated. Students' written work is at an appropriate standard for this stage in their studies.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
MOCN modern languages	1	No. of starts	*	349	453
		% retention	*	86	69
		% pass rate	*	83	79
GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	179	196	208
		% retention	67	73	67
		% pass rate	56	79	72
GCSE Spanish	2	No. of starts	26	10	14
		% retention	77	75	71
		% pass rate	80	100	100
GCE A-level English	3	No. of starts	*	*	31

year)		% pass rate	*	*	91
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

*course not running

Quality of education and training

129. Teaching and learning in modern foreign languages are good. In many lessons, there are number of open-ended activities that allow students to respond in greater depth at their own level. In a Spanish class for adult students in West Kirby, the lesson, taught entirely in Spanish, progressed in a structured way, beginning with a simple vocabulary extension exercise leading to an active demonstration of the vocabulary of parts of the body, good use of amusing drawings on a handout, and culminating in a modern aerobic song that provided challenge and entertainment. In a few lessons, unqualified teachers make insufficient use of the target language in classroom management and use too much English in their teaching.

130. Teaching and learning in English are satisfactory, though there is little variety in approaches. Teachers do not sufficiently vary their approach or materials to accommodate the needs of individual students. Topics are thoroughly covered, but lessons are sometimes flat and uninspiring. Students work purposefully and show effort in developing their understanding of the subject. They are motivated, but often lack confidence to respond more enthusiastically in classes.

131. Learning resources to support foreign language teaching are adequate. Access to video and audio equipment is good. There is no language centre, which means that the provision of tape-recording is problematic for drop in students. Social facilities in some centres are limited. Resources available to English students are extensive and easily accessible. Students have easy access to IT facilities in the library and to two IT workshops when there are spaces in timetabled classes. One teacher of English has created an interactive site on the college intranet where students can develop their understanding of prescribed GCE AS and A-level English texts and topics.

132. Students feel the information and guidance they receive before their course prepares them well. An effective induction helps full-time students to settle in to their studies. Students value the support they receive from their teachers. There are regular group tutorials for full-time English students who meet individually with their personal tutors to discuss their progress. Additional learning support is effective and students with hearing and visual impairments, accompanied by support workers, play a full part in lessons.

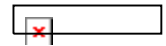
133. Assessment is thorough. Students are clear about assessment demands and deadlines. Marked work is returned promptly and feedback to students on their progress is extensive and constructive. Assessment arrangements meet awarding body requirements and internal standardisation of grades takes place. Initial screening identifies support needs and these are met. A pilot scheme is underway in English to identify target minimum grades for students, based on what they have achieved in previous examinations. Where modern foreign languages students decide they do not wish to take examinations, assessment of progress remains an integral part of the teacher's task.

134. Within the initiative on widening participation, one interesting project is the beginners' Spanish course, which is included in a `recovering alcoholics' programme in Tranmere. This is much valued as a contribution to the therapy, by building confidence in the participants. Good internal progression routes are available in foreign languages and access to HE English courses. A good flexible drop-in scheme meets the needs of those who wish to make rapid progress. Provision in English has changed each year and is determined by the expertise and preferences of teachers rather than in any strategic way. There are plans to expand this provision so that it becomes more responsive to the initiative on widening participation.

Leadership and management

135. Leadership in modern foreign languages is strong. Managers have a clear vision of what they are trying to achieve. At all centres, strong teamwork results in well co-ordinated delivery that meets the needs of a wide range of students. There are good quality assurance practices. Targets are set and progress against them is monitored. The area runs a 'Network' group, as part of a national initiative for the dissemination of good practice in further education language teaching. The management and co-ordination of English has some shortcomings. English teachers miss opportunities to work as a subject team to share subject expertise, and teaching materials; assess their performance; and plan provision.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- comprehensive initial assessment for students aged 16 to 19
- high retention and pass rates
- careful monitoring of students' progress
- good opportunities for vocational and work experience
- innovative and well-resourced courses.

Weaknesses

- lack of specialist support staff for students with poor communication skills
- little progression to college vocational courses.

Scope of provision

136. School-leavers join programmes at one of three levels. The levels begin with an independent options course, which is an introduction to the college for students with complex and profound needs, to develop their basic, social and independence skills. The vocational options level aims to develop these same skills. The third level is the pre-vocational and basic skills course, accredited through the vocational access certificate. There are 50 full-time students on the individual supported courses at entry level and 80 adult part-time students on the skills for adult life and passport courses. These were developed in conjunction with social services departments to support students in becoming as independent as possible and to take an active part in the local community. The Princes Trust volunteers programme and the six-week army preparation training courses focus on providing personal development opportunities. The latter is aimed at young people identified by Connexions as requiring additional support to progress to FE and employment. The Princes Trust volunteers programme is based around contributions to the local community. There are 8 and 12 students, respectively, on these programmes.

Achievement and standards

137. Students make excellent progress on their courses. Many of the first level and second level students complete college accredited courses, which are not shown on the table below. These courses have 100% retention and pass rates. Students entering at the pre-vocational level are all encouraged to take specific entry level awards to enhance future employment opportunities. Pass rates are often 100% and retention rates are very high. Some 20% of these students, over the three-year period 2000 to 2002, gained employment and a further 56% took further entry level options. A number of qualifications are taken during the army preparation course, including the British Canoeing Union certificate, the Royal Yachting Associations power boat qualification and the English Basketball Associations qualifications. Pass rates for these courses are 100%. Students progress to the college's pre-uniformed services course or in many cases join one of the armed services.

A sample of retention and pass rates in students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
LCCI vocational access certificate	entry	No. of starts	20	23	30
		% retention	100	97	73
		% pass rate	100	100	100
City and Guilds preliminary cookery certificate	entry	No. of starts	8	10	10
		% retention	100	89	88
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Basic food hygiene	entry	No. of starts	8	7	7
		% retention	100	89	88
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NCFE certificate on independent living	entry	No. of starts	9	10	8
		% retention	82	100	100
		% pass rate	83	100	100
English speaking board certificate of achievement	entry	No. of starts	8	8	8
		% retention	88	88	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

138. Overall teaching is of a particularly high standard. Most teaching and learning are good or better. Teachers have high expectations of their students. Lessons and activities are well planned and often based upon the operation of three innovative small business enterprises, run by the students. 'Snacks 4 Us' is a café within the college, selling sandwiches and drinks made by the students. Café sessions are followed by accounts lessons, in which simple accountancy skills are practised to manage the business. The 'paper station' sells stationery and the recent purchase of some land will enable an allotment project. Students have been involved at all stages of the planning for the allotment. The students work well in all of these lessons, make good progress and develop a degree of autonomy where they learn to think for themselves.

139. Teachers consistently help students to achieve their own personal goals. These range from the need for personal safety to thinking for themselves, in a way that enables them to present and sustain a point of view and restrain impulsive behaviour. For students for whom speaking to other people is difficult, the approach adopted by teachers, of students working in pairs, helps the development of confidence and communication. However, there is a lack of specialist support staff to communicate with students who have limited verbal communication.

140. Weekly individual tutorials and a group tutorial are a valuable part of students' programmes. In one group tutorial the teacher evaluated students' knowledge of which college staff they should know. All teachers and members of the support staff and their roles were successfully identified. Students could not remember what the principal looked like but they did know where his office was. Asked by the teacher what they should do, they used the computers in the classroom to e-mail the principal to ask him to come and to see them, which he did.

141. The general standard of students' work is good. A thorough initial assessment includes an evaluation of educational background, successes, personal and social needs and any specific learning or medical support required. It leads to an individual learning plan with short-term and long-term goals. These are recorded on the college's secure intranet and at the end of each lesson, teachers update the information for progress and achievements. They share the information with the students, who are keen to know what the database says about them and to be involved. The initial assessment also identifies particular learning support personnel. A nurse supports one student at all times in order to monitor a possible life threatening condition.

142. Students have good opportunities to gain vocational and work experience. Tasters in vocational areas of the college curriculum help them to establish their preferences for possible careers. All students have work experience, choosing from a broad range of employers, and covering many occupational areas. Some students are working in large shops, the local ferry service, catering companies, a bus company and on farms. One student who is blind is working in the college's student services offices.

143. The army preparation course skilfully assists the further development of essential life skills in the context of the work and disciplines of army life. The army works closely with the college. They are involved with induction and an army sergeant works alongside the course tutor throughout. The course includes a two-day stay at a military camp and lessons in interview techniques and team building. The college organises a presentation event that provides a forum to recognise and celebrate individual achievement with students and their families. On this course and the others, students are supported by well-qualified teachers and support staff. Ongoing professional development has contributed to their effectiveness.

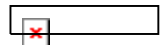
144. Although many students progress to take other elements of the introductory courses, few move on to vocational courses in the college. The lack of accredited vocational progression routes in other college areas, such as entry level units, results in students repeating similar work. The most able enrol for NVQ level 1 courses in the limited number of curriculum areas where they are offered. This

option is unsuitable for most students because of the theoretical content.

Leadership and management

145. Leadership and management are good. All courses have targets for retention and pass rates. At regular course team meetings, teachers identify and discuss students' needs and implement the college's quality policies and practices. Staff development has been very substantial in the last year. All staff have taken part in risk assessment training and the new core curriculum training for basic skills. Others have attended specialist courses for autism and for teaching students with dyslexia. The self-assessment report was omitted from the main college document. It lacks rigour and fails to identify any of the strengths within this area.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- excellent pass rates on many programmes
- high pass and retention rates on the family learning programme
- good teaching in many lessons
- good range of community locations to widen participation.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory aspects of teaching in a significant minority of lessons
- insufficient linkage between assessment, individual learning plans and lesson plans
- slow implementation of a basic skills strategy.

Scope of provision

146. The college offers a wide variety of programmes in literacy, numeracy and ICT. There are 570 students studying on 63 courses, from entry level to level 2. Students may attend neighbourhood colleges and community learning centres or various community venues, including libraries, a Methodist church centre and a school. An extensive family learning programme runs in 21 local schools with a planned expansion to 32 schools during the academic year. Effective links and partnerships exist with external agencies that include the local authority, the library service, probation and health services, local colleges and a range of professional and employer organisations. The inspection covered discrete courses for literacy and numeracy; those integral to vocational programmes; and additional support either in lessons or on an individual basis.

Achievement and standards

147. The family learning programme, literacy and numeracy, has excellent retention and pass rates, significantly in excess of the national averages. Pass rates are high on the English with computers, City and Guilds numeracy stage 2 and MOCN basic literacy courses. Retention rates are at least satisfactory on all courses other than the City and Guilds stage 2 numeracy, where it is improving but is still below the national average. On their programmes, students clearly gain in confidence and make good progress. Students on the computer supported English programmes generally develop good IT skills.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
MOCN basic literacy (1 year)	entry	No. of starts	354	878	617
		% retention	69	**	73
		% pass rate	27	**	90
English with computers (1 year)	entry/1	No. of starts	*	369	413
		% retention	*	79	78
		% pass rate	*	50	83
City and Guilds numeracy stage 2 (1 year)	1	No. of starts	100	112	132
		% retention	61	65	72
		% pass rate	67	73	92
Family literacy (short)	1	No. of starts	***	246	362
		% retention	***	93	98
		% pass rate	***	96	86
Family numeracy (short)	1	No. of starts	***	335	300
		% retention	***	94	95
		% pass rate	***	77	95

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

*course not running

**unreliable data

***data not available

Quality of education and training

148. Teaching and learning are often good, and sometimes excellent. In the family learning

programme, teachers creatively match the content of lessons to the school literacy, numeracy and ICT curriculum so that the learning benefits both parent and child. In one lesson, parents were able to observe a mathematics lesson. They practised what they had seen for themselves to help them understand the national numeracy strategy. In other lessons, teachers introduced unusual and occasionally controversial ideas to promote critical discussion. One group of students examined why animals cannot be 'evil' and related this to common predators and our feelings about them. Schemes of work are often detailed and are consistently matched to the core curriculum.

149. A significant minority of teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers use a narrow range of teaching methods and create few opportunities to match teaching to the learning needs of students. For example, in one lesson, students with different course entry levels worked on whole group tasks that took no account of their individual learning needs or styles. There was an over-reliance on worksheets and a lack of creative resources to support learning.

150. Whilst most lessons are clearly planned, too little attention is paid to matching lesson content to students' learning goals and targets and opportunities to monitor and reinforce individual learning are missed. Learning plans often fail to make clear to students their learning goals. Priorities and targets are general, with few demanding or achievable short-term targets. Self-assessment for students has been recently introduced online for the pre-GCSE numeracy programme. These assessments enable students to check their own progress and identify where they might need additional help. Clear and effective procedures are in place to assess and verify students' work internally. All students have an initial assessment of their skills, followed by a recently introduced diagnostic assessment. It is intended that this assessment will be used to improve the imprecise targets currently in learning plans.

151. Teachers continually update and extend their knowledge and skills. All teachers of literacy and numeracy, including part-time teachers, have completed basic skills training to national standards. Some have undertaken training in deaf awareness, dyslexia and equal opportunities. Resources in the community are good, but some of the rooms used on the Borough Road campus are drab and lack stimulation. Teachers have a shared resources area on the college intranet, but the range of literacy and numeracy resources is limited; the storage system is underdeveloped and their use is insufficiently monitored.

152. Students speak highly of the support and direction they receive from their teachers. Learning support assistants provide on-course support for students requiring additional help with literacy and numeracy in vocational programmes. This support contributes to improved learning for students, but where there is no joint planning between the teacher and the assistant the support is unstructured and ineffective. Good support is provided for students with specific learning difficulties.

Leadership and management

153. Although the college has recognised the need for a strategy to integrate literacy and numeracy into vocational areas and has set up a group to implement this strategy, progress has been slow. The management structure of the basic skills area has recently been re-organised and new managers and teams have been introduced. New full-time and fractional appointments have reduced the reliance on part-time teachers. A clear vision of basic skills has been agreed and an action plan has been implemented, although it is too early to judge the impact of this development. There is a strong team spirit in the area with good communication, aided by regular team meetings. All staff are involved in the production of the self assessment, but no consistent system is in place for identifying and sharing good practice, both within dedicated provision and across the college as a whole.

Part D: College data

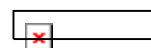


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	36	12
2	27	16
3	14	9
4/5	0	1
Other	23	62
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in summer 2002

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	1,326	2,466	12
Agriculture	5	25	0
Construction	263	444	2
Engineering	270	300	2
Business	538	7,943	27
Hotel and catering	555	673	4
Health and community care	1,133	3,741	15
Art and design	390	1,500	6
Humanities	2,410	2,739	16
Basic education	938	4,042	16
Total	7,828	23,873	100

Source: provided by the college in summer 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	927	1,526	952	5,636	4,298	4,510
	Retention rate (%)	80	82	77	80	82	81
	National average (%)	81	80	79	79	79	77
	Pass rate (%)	55	66	87	66	72	87
	National average (%)	60	65	69	61	65	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,705	1,483	1,362	4,467	3,638	3,454
	Retention rate (%)	72	69	77	82	80	81
	National average (%)	76	77	76	80	79	78
	Pass rate (%)	51	50	79	59	66	83
	National average (%)	65	66	69	62	65	70
3	Starters excluding transfers	876	698	939	1,871	1,749	2,024
	Retention rate (%)	63	64	77	74	78	81
	National average (%)	75	76	78	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	49	60	80	52	57	82
	National average (%)	73	75	77	63	66	70
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	27	20	19	586	373	145
	Retention rate (%)	70	75	89	78	78	88
	National average (%)	84	80	83	84	80	84
	Pass rate (%)	44	71	100	33	58	96
	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)	66	26	8	106
Level 2 (intermediate)	54	32	14	85
Level 1 (foundation)	60	33	7	42
Other sessions	85	7	8	46
Totals	63	29	8	279

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