Harlow College

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Harlow College
Type of college:	General Further Education College/Tertiary College
Principal:	David Ellerby
Address of college:	Velizy Avenue
	Harlow
	Essex
	CM20 3LH
Telephone number:	01279 868000
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Chair of governors:	Martin Coleman
Unique reference number:	130676
Name of reporting inspector:	Ian Seath HMI
Dates of inspection:	13-23 October 2003

Part A: Summary
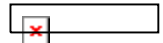
Information about the college
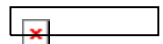
Harlow College is a medium-sized tertiary and general further education (FE) college located in Harlow, Essex. It serves a rapidly growing population which is increasing at a faster rate than most of Essex. There is much new housing, and significant growth around the nearby M11. Harlow

and numeracy levels. The college is a major provider of post-16 education in the area. About 60% of its students aged 16 to 18 and 40% of students aged 19+ are Harlow residents. For the year 2001/02, 89% of students described themselves as white, and 42% were male. Unemployment in the area is around 2.5%, which is slightly higher than the average for Essex. The main college campus is located close to the centre of Harlow. The college is the lead partner in the Harlow On-Line Learning Initiative in which a number of community-based learning venues have been established. These include centres at the local sports centre and nearby Stansted airport. The college also operates a learning centre at Bishops Stortford, nine miles from the main campus. Extensive recent additions to the college accommodation have been made, including a new learning resources centre and creative arts building. The college has recently cleared a long-standing financial deficit.

The college has extensive links with local schools, particularly in its work with pupils aged 14 to 16 through the `increasing flexibility project'. At the time of inspection, over 300 pupils from local schools were participating in college programmes. It also has a sixth form centre for students aged 16 to 18 which offers a wide range of General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced-level (GCE AS and A-level) and vocational courses. A specialist journalism centre is located on the main campus. This offers a wide range of specialist higher education (HE) and FE courses.

The college's mission commits it to providing access to high quality learning opportunities and to achieving excellence in the development of individuals, within a professional, innovative, caring and flexible college community.

How effective is the college?
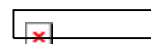
The quality of provision is satisfactory in science and mathematics, construction, engineering, business administration and management, hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, hairdressing and beauty therapy, visual and performing arts and media, and humanities. It is good in information and communications technology (ICT), health, social care and public services, English, languages and communications, literacy and numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and in support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Work-based learning is satisfactory in engineering and hairdressing and beauty therapy, but unsatisfactory in construction, business administration, and hospitality. FE provision within the journalism centre is outstanding. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- individual support for students

- provision of a diverse range of courses to the benefit of the community

- journalism courses

- retention rate of students on courses

- teaching of students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities

- strong and effective collaborative partnerships.

What should be improved

- the quality of teaching so that there are no dull and uninspiring lessons

- the identification and dissemination of good teaching practice

- the learning environment in some teaching areas

- access to, and use of, information learning technology (ILT)

- achievement in key skills

- the proportion of completed apprenticeship frameworks in work-based learning.

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

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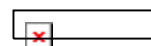
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment

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Science and mathematics	**Satisfactory.** Overall, retention rates are good. Pass rates are inconsistent. Achievement is very good on the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate science course, but it is poor in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) mathematics. Links with local industry and schools are good. In too many lessons teaching methods lack variety. There is insufficient availability of, and access to, ILT and inadequate tracking and monitoring of student progress.
Construction	**Satisfactory.** On most courses retention rates are good, but pass rates are inconsistent. Teaching in theory classes is unsatisfactory, but in practical sessions teaching and training are good. Resources are generally satisfactory, but, in brickwork, accommodation for practical activities is cramped. Systems for recording, monitoring and tracking of student progress are effective.
Engineering	**Satisfactory.** Pass rates on many courses are good, in particular on National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and GNVQs. Overall, retention rates are satisfactory or better. Framework achievements for motor vehicle apprentices are poor, but they are satisfactory for general engineering. The percentage of good or better teaching is low and too much teaching in theory lessons is unsatisfactory.
Business, administration and management	**Satisfactory.** Retention and pass rates are satisfactory for most courses. Pass rates are good in GNVQ intermediate and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) provision, but poor in GCE A2 accounting. Progress towards framework completion in work-based learning is poor. Teaching and learning are generally satisfactory. There is good individual support and monitoring of students, but little challenge or differentiation in lessons. Resources to support learning are poor.
Information and communications technology	**Good.** Pass rates on full-time programmes are very high. Retention rates are good on all programmes. However, pass rates for computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and computer technology are poor. Individual teaching support for all students is good, but the teaching of theory to full-time students is unsatisfactory.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	**Satisfactory.** The curriculum is well structured and progression routes meet the needs of students. Tutorial support and target setting are effective and there are very good pass rates for AVCE courses. Resources for ILT are inadequate, especially in the realistic working environments. Achievement of NVQs and framework completion for work-based learners in hospitality are very poor.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	**Satisfactory.** Retention rates and support for students are good. Attendance and punctuality are good. Physical resources are of a poor standard, and much equipment is outdated. In theory lessons, teaching methods lack variety and students are not challenged. There are insufficient clients for realistic practice and assessment.
Health, social care and public services	**Good.** Retention rates are well above national averages with good pass rates on part-time courses. Students are well supported and effectively managed work placements have a positive impact on learning. Some classroom teaching lacks sufficient planning to address the needs of individual students and there is inappropriate guidance of students to level 2 programmes.
Visual and performing arts and media	**Satisfactory.** There is a comprehensive range of courses at all levels. There is very good teaching in journalism which draws upon the wealth of industrial experience and links that staff bring. Pass rates in GCE AS and A2 drama, art and music are unsatisfactory, with the majority of students achieving below their target minimum grade.

	Students are not consistently told what they need to do in order to improve.
Humanities	**Satisfactory.** Students are well-motivated and effectively develop new skills. Assessment is detailed, well-planned and leads to clear improvements in students' work. Too much teaching is inappropriate for the needs of students aged 16 to 18. Resources for students are often of poor quality and do not support their learning.
English, languages and communications	**Good.** Pass rates are good on GCE A-level and short language courses, but poor in GCSE English. Much teaching is good and the curriculum is well planned and co-ordinated. There is good access to a wide range of courses in English and languages. Accommodation in English is poor and there is limited access to and use of ILT in English and languages.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	**Good.** The range of programmes is good and enables progression. Teaching in practical sessions is good and some teaching is outstanding. There is an emphasis placed on preparation for employment. Links and partnerships with community agencies and local schools are good. Specialist resources are inadequate and some target setting is ineffective.
English for speakers of other languages, literacy and numeracy	**Good.** A wide range of programmes which meets the needs of students is provided. Teaching and learning is of a high standard and communication at departmental level is good. ESOL achievement is poor, but students are now making satisfactory progress towards their learning goals. Resources are insufficient to meet the needs of students with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

How well is the college led and managed?
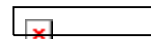
Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college governors are well informed and, together with the senior managers, have ensured good strategic planning. The college has many productive external partnerships. The quality assurance framework is good, however, insufficient attention has been given to improving pass rates. The college's own self-assessment report is not sufficiently critical of teaching and learning and consequently development plans do not adequately deal with this fundamental aspect of the college's work. The management structure is clear, with well-defined roles and responsibilities which are understood by all concerned. There is good teamwork throughout the college. Communications are good. Monitoring of the allocation of resources is inadequate to ensure maximum benefit for students and to provide evidence of value for money. Monitoring the benefits of other college operations is underdeveloped.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?
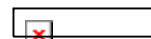
The college's commitment to social inclusion is good. Governors and managers are clear on the college's responsibility to meet the diverse needs of students. The college is fulfilling its duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act. It has approved and implemented an equal opportunities policy and action plan. There is very good provision for pupils aged 14 to 16. The effective relationship with the local social services provides key support workers for adult students on programmes to improve

placements. Staff awareness sessions have been included in training days. However, there is a lack of clarity and practice across curriculum areas. The college has assessed its accommodation against Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) criteria and has developed an action plan with targets and dates for completion. Recently completed new and refurbished buildings have appropriate access and decoration, in line with Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) recommendations, which anticipate the individual needs of students. The college has responded well to the needs of people in the local community whose first language is not English. The college's provision of ESOL and of literacy and numeracy courses is good. ESOL courses are provided in local community venues in collaboration, for example, with members of local Muslim and Chinese communities.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?
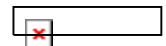
Pre-entry guidance and support are good. There are strong links with local schools and the community. Clear course guides help students to make informed choices from the wide range of provision available. The induction of full-time students is effective, and includes the assessment of key skills and additional support needs. A wide range of support for literacy and numeracy is available, but many part-time students do not take up these opportunities. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by qualified staff and specialist resources. Tutorial provision for students aged 16 to 18 is generally effective. A combination of individual and group tutorials is used to set targets, monitor progress and provide pastoral support. There is inconsistent quality of tutorial support for part-time students. The arrangements for students' counselling, welfare, finance, childcare and transport are well organised and effectively used.

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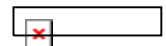
Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

What students like about the college

- practical sessions

- supportive and helpful staff

- being treated as an adult

- induction and pre-course guidance

- easy bus routes - convenient for town

- good facilities, especially information technology (IT) suite and learning resources centre

- feels comfortable - a welcoming college

- assessment and target setting

- careers guidance

- work placements

- timetabling allows full-time students to do part-time jobs.

What they feel could be improved

- some boring lessons

- food too expensive and poor quality

- room temperature - ventilation and heating

- car parking

- art and design tables

- more information about costs before enrolment

- key skills guidance and teaching

- access to computers (including out of hours)

- more enrichment

- more lunchtime activities for wheelchair users

- decor and litter

- pace of teaching too fast in some lessons

- no common room.

Other information
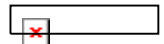
The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The 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 should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole
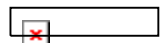
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect and 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	49	43	8
19+ and WBL*	72	27	1
Learning 16-18	45	46	9
19+ and WBL*	68	27	5

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

*work-based learning

Achievement and standards

1. Harlow College offers an extensive range of education and training in all 14 of the LSC areas of learning. The number of students studying land-based and retail courses is small. The inspection covered 12 areas of learning. Work-based learning is offered in seven of these, of which construction and engineering are the largest. At the time of inspection, there were a total of 311 work-based learners. The majority of full-time students (approximately 83%) enrolled in 2002/03 were aged 16 to 18, and the majority of part-time students (approximately 94%) were aged 19 and over. Of the total of 5,640 students enrolled in this period, 24% were on full-time courses. In 2002/03, 30% of enrolments were on level 1 courses, 31% on level 2 courses, and 16% on level 3 courses. During inspection week, the overall attendance at sessions observed was 84%, above the national average. The average number of students in each class was 11.5, significantly above the national average.

2. Students' practical work and skills development are generally of a high standard. In ICT, students on full-time programmes demonstrate a high level of proficiency in practical IT skills. Part-time ICT students quickly gain basic IT skills and work confidently with course handbooks. Students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively develop new skills in cookery, creative crafts, car valeting and horticulture. A few of these students work successfully in the college restaurant. In hospitality practical sessions, students work safely and professionally, and written work is of a high standard. In GCE AS English, students quickly develop confidence in the analysis of texts and transcripts. Construction students are able to build good brickwork models and demonstrate competent use of hand tools. Portfolios are well presented. Pre-entry literacy and numeracy students produce work of a high standard. Practical coursework is of good quality in visual and performing arts and journalism. Hairdressing work-based learning students employ good customer service skills in placements. In a few lessons, progress is inhibited by the nature of the group. For example, in ESOL, large groups prevent one-to-one work and in GCSE English small rooms limit the variety of teaching methods that can be used.

3. The college has effective systems to measure student progress against prior attainment. Value added data based on GCSE entry scores are used extensively. These data indicate satisfactory

value-added when students' achievements at the college are compared to their GCSE results on entry. In 2002, student performance by this measure was significantly above the average. However, provisional data indicate that student performance overall fell to below the average in 2003. Performance in 2003 was particularly good in GCE AS French and GCE A2 general studies and physics. Performance was particularly poor in GCE AS psychology, sociology, art, physical education and theatre studies, and GCE A2 media studies, art and theatre studies. Full-time students are given a target minimum grade based on their prior achievements. The college has devised its own system of calculating target grades for all other courses. The target grades are recorded on individual learning plans and used effectively to monitor student progress in one-to-one reviews.

4. College success rates are good overall. Success rates for level 1 courses fell between the years 1999 and 2002 to around the national average for students aged 16 to 18. In the same period, the rate for adult students rose significantly from 54% to 61%, which is well above national average. The success rate at level 2 has remained 3% above the national average in the same period for all student categories. Overall, success for level 3 courses rose from slightly below to slightly above national averages in the same period.

5. Overall, pass rates improved between 1999 and 2002, and with the exception of level 1 provision for students aged 16 to 18 now lie at or about national averages. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 on level 3 courses improved to national average between the years 1999 and 2002. For adult students on level 3 provision, pass rates improved overall to 4% above national average in the same period. Pass rates for level 1 adult students rose from 61% to 74%, just above national average, in the same period. Pass rates at level 1 for students aged 16 to 18 have remained below national average. At level 2, pass rates have remained at or about national averages for students aged 16 to 18. Although these have risen significantly for adult students, they still lie just below average for this group.

16 to 18 year olds

6. In 2002/03, 83% of the college's full-time students were aged 16 to 18. Within this group, 22% of enrolments were on level 3 courses, mainly GCE AS and A levels. A further 41% of enrolments were on level 2 courses, mainly GCSEs.

7. Overall, retention rates of students aged 16 to 18 are good though they are inconsistent between individual courses. For the years 1999 to 2002, retention rates for courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 have been above national averages, although levels 1 and 2 overall have shown a decline. Rates for the same period fell significantly to below national averages for level 1 NVQs, but remained significantly above national averages for levels 2 and 3. For example, in NVQ level 2 construction, the retention rate was 29% above national average in 2001/02, and in NVQ level 2 engineering production it was 14% above. The overall retention rate for GCSE students has declined to national average, but for those following GNVQ intermediate courses it has remained significantly above. In GNVQ intermediate business and health and social care, retention rates were 16% and 8% above national averages in 2001/02. Retention rates for GCE AS and A-level courses have remained consistently slightly above national averages.

8. Overall, the pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 are satisfactory. Results for level 1 GNVQ and NVQ courses were above national averages for the years 1999 to 2002. At level 2, pass rates exceeded national averages for GCSEs and GNVQ intermediate. In GCSE mathematics, the pass rate was 8% above national average in 2002, with a large number of students enrolled. GNVQ intermediate business was 30% higher than the national average. NVQs are at national averages for level 2, however. At level 3, pass rates for GCE AS and A-level courses showed improvement between 1999 and 2002, when they were just above national averages for this type of college. NVQs at this level show markedly higher achievement than national averages, being 15% higher overall, but numbers are relatively small. In NVQ accounting, the pass rate was 17% above national average in 2001/02.

9. There are numerous examples of outstanding personal achievement amongst students aged 16 to 18. For example, one student with learning difficulties successfully progressed through art and

design courses and is now successfully studying for a design degree at a prestigious art and design HE institution. Another student with multiple learning difficulties successfully completed an NCFE employment skills course and is now employed at Stansted airport. The college monitors the progression of its students into HE. In 2003, 76% of full-time students on level 3 courses progressed into HE.

Adult learners

10. Retention rates of adult students are satisfactory. Overall retention rates for students aged 19+ at levels 1, 2 and 3 were around or above the national averages for this type of college between 1999 and 2002. Within this, however, a number of courses show declining retention rates. For level 3 provision, overall the retention rate in 2001/02 was 1% above national average, having fallen from 8% above the previous year. Retention rates at all levels fell between 2000/01 and 2001/02. Retention rates for level 1 NVQ courses in 2001/02 were 27% above national average, but this was for a relatively small number of students. At level 2, the retention rate in GCSEs is just below national average and for NVQs at level 2 and 3 it is significantly above average. Retention rates of adults in GCE AS and A levels fell over the period 2000/01 to 2001/02, to about national average. GNVQ advanced retention rates for adults also fell to below national average for this period.

11. With the exception of work-based learning, the pass rates of adult students on full-time courses are satisfactory and improving. Pass rates for adult students have risen at all levels. For provision at levels 1 and 3, overall averages were just above national figures for this college type in 2001/02, though at level 2, the pass rate was just below national average for the same year. The pass rate for level 1 NVQs was poor in 2000/01, but improved markedly in 2001/02. At level 2, the pass rate for GCSEs was above national average, and at the national average for NVQs. At level 3, pass rates of adults on GCE AS and A-level courses improved to just above national average between 1999 to 2002.

12. Students do not achieve the full framework on most work-based learning courses. Only in general engineering is achievement in line with national average. Pass rates are poor in motor vehicle, construction, hair and beauty and business and administration work-based programmes. Retention rates are also poor across all areas. Many students have left with no qualifications. Standards of work on most programmes are satisfactory or better and students demonstrate good practical skills and perform tasks competently. Employers of these students report that they are particularly impressed with the way they develop the necessary skills and knowledge for the workplace.

Quality of education and training
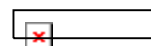
13. Inspectors graded teaching, learning and attainment in 253 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 56% of lessons, satisfactory in 38%, and less than satisfactory in 6%. Since the last inspection by the Further Education Funding Council in October 1998, the proportion of satisfactory grades has increased and there has been a corresponding decrease in good or better grades. The proportion of unsatisfactory grades has decreased slightly since the last inspection. There is some unsatisfactory teaching in 8 of the 13 graded areas. Inspectors graded teaching as very good or excellent in 15% of lessons, 10% below national average for this type of college. The best teaching is in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, English, languages and communications, journalism, ICT and in work with students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

14. Where groups mainly consist of adults (excluding work-based learning), teaching is more effective overall with 75% of lessons being good or better and 23% of lessons very good or excellent. Teaching on level 2 courses is significantly better than on level 3 courses. Inspectors found the highest proportion of unsatisfactory lessons on level 1 courses. In engineering, the best teaching is at level 2. In visual and performing arts, media and journalism, English, languages and

communication, there is good teaching at all levels. In health and social care, there is good teaching at level 3. Teaching for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at entry level is also good. The percentages of lessons graded good or better, satisfactory and less than satisfactory for learning were 52%, 40% and 8%, respectively.

15. There is too much dull and uninspiring teaching. The percentage of satisfactory classes is significantly above the national average for this type of college. The percentage of lessons graded good or better and very good or excellent is significantly below the national average. In all curriculum areas, except visual and performing arts and media and ESOL, literacy and numeracy, there are too many lessons that fail to stimulate students. These sessions do not contain sufficient variety of appropriate activity to engage students and sustain interest. They lack pace and include overlong teacher exposition. Too often, students are given little opportunity to participate in the lesson. There is little group work or use of ILT to stimulate learning. Transparencies and handouts are frequently inadequate. In many classes, students are required to copy notes directly from poor quality transparencies. The teaching of theory sessions in vocational subjects often fails to stimulate students, who lose concentration, and occasionally become disruptive. Sufficient attention is rarely given to the needs of students with different abilities and experience and there is often only cursory checking of learning.

16. The best lessons are well-prepared and students benefit from a variety of teaching approaches which maintain their interest. For example, in journalism, classes are skilfully managed and teachers carefully prepare students to make effective use of written resources to stimulate analysis and discussion. In humanities, teachers use a varied approach to successfully engender confident development of research and analysis skills. Teachers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively enable the development of practical skills by using well-prepared and structured delivery methods to build on skills as the lesson progresses. In ESOL lessons, teaching is often innovative and effective in maintaining the interest of students by actively engaging them in the learning. There is much good teaching of practical subjects. For example, practical physics lessons are effective in enabling students to understand underlying theory. Construction students benefit from good preparation and learning materials and clear assignments. There is good checking of learning by questioning and marking. In engineering, practical sessions clearly illustrate the application of underlying mathematical principles.

17. There have been inconsistencies in the delivery and management of key skills. The college recognises this, and a centralised system has recently been established as a result. A new policy has been introduced and all full-time students complete key skills in application of number, communication and IT. Students on advanced courses are required to achieve at least one key skill at advanced level. Development and assessment of key skills have been integrated into academic and vocational courses. Lessons on student timetables are identified for IT, communications, and application of number. Part-time students, where appropriate, can choose to work towards a key skill qualification. Students on entry-to-employment courses are effectively supported in developing their skills for progression in work-based learning or FE. There is a clear system to assess and moderate student work. The college's data on key skills achievement is unreliable. There are indications that the number of students completing tests and portfolios increased in 2003, but there is insufficient data to judge overall success rates. The college recognises this and the key skills manager is working with the new management information system (MIS) to produce accurate records. Too many work-based learning trainees do not achieve key skills qualifications and so are unable to complete the full modern apprenticeship qualification framework.

18. Assessment practice in the college is good. Polices are comprehensive and sound procedures cover key activities including accreditation of prior learning, homework, late submission of coursework, external verification, internal verification and appeals. Effective use is made of three standards moderation days each year, which are devoted to quality assurance of assessment practices. There is an effective programme of initial assessment for all full-time students based around key skill testing. This results in an individual learning plan that is used in tutorials to monitor progress and set targets. Learning support needs are identified through this process. However, there are inconsistencies in the application of individual learning plans across the college. For example, in a few areas, the results of basic skill assessments are not sufficiently embedded in student learning plans.

19. Assessment is carefully linked to the standards required by the awarding bodies. It is thoroughly planned and student progress methodically monitored. Student work is regularly, accurately and speedily marked, with helpful comments to assist them to improve their performance. A minority of comments are vague and do not refer sufficiently to the assessment criteria or give guidance on how the student could improve. In some areas, for example engineering, little guidance is given to students regarding spelling and grammatical errors which often pass uncorrected. In hair and beauty, there are insufficient clients and the assessment of practical skills is slow. There is effective use of target setting based on target minimum grades which are evaluated individually with each student during induction. Internal verification procedures are clear and support good assessment practice. Regular meetings and development days ensure that practice is consistent across the college.

20. The assessment of trainees on work-based learning and NVQ programmes is often unsatisfactory. Qualified and vocationally competent assessors visit the workplace and an appropriate blend of assessment approaches is used. However, much assessment of work-based learning is not systematically planned. Too often, there is little co-ordination of the off-the-job activities and assessment in the workplace. Although there are frequent progress reviews and assessment visits, many work-based learners make slow progress or fail to meet their qualification aim and wait too long for unit accreditation to take place. Assessment of key skills is often poor and not sufficiently linked to other vocational assessment activity. The college is making efforts to remedy this by the provision of addition tutorial support sessions.

21. There are sufficient well-qualified and experienced staff in all curriculum areas. The college has an effective professional development programme. Targets have been set to ensure all staff have appropriate vocational qualifications at level 4 as well as an appropriate teaching qualification. In some areas, notably journalism, staff are respected practitioners in the vocational area. The balance of full-time and part-staff is appropriate, and many bring current industrial and commercial practice to their teaching. There are regular and frequent staff training days that focus on issues relating to raising standards in retention and pass rates. However, there is little effective analysis of the impact of this training on key performance indicators.

22. The college operates from a single, centrally located town centre site. The accommodation is a mixture of new and old buildings offering variable quality learning environments. The room utilisation policy is underdeveloped and fails to effectively measure room usage. The college also supports community education programmes within the Harlow On-Line Learning initiative. These Harlow On-Line Learning initiative centres are well equipped and in conveniently situated community and business centres. They offer training and skills improvement in computing, basic skills and business-related training. Maintenance and refurbishment is planned and results in most of the accommodation being serviceable, clean and well decorated. However, many areas do not have a clear identity with the curriculum and there is little celebration of student work. Some accommodation does not provide a suitable setting for good teaching. For example, the hair and beauty and business administration rooms are in a poor state of repair. In care and English, rooms are small and cluttered. There are good resources to support journalism, music, micro-electronics, vehicle electronics, carpentry and joinery and some aspects of media. However, there are out-dated teaching resources in science, hospitality, and hair and beauty where the salons do not reflect a realistic working environment. Music practice rooms are good and have effective sound insulation, but the dance studios are not effectively soundproofed and produce a noisy background for adjacent classrooms.

23. Computers are sufficient to meet the needs of most students. There is a reliable and robust IT infrastructure. However, there are insufficient ILT resources to support staff initiatives to increase the use of ILT in the delivery of the curriculum. Staff have limited access to equipment that would enable them to produce good quality teaching materials. Many poorly produced handouts and overhead transparencies are used, and no use is made of data projectors or smart-boards. In some areas of the curriculum, appropriate IT resources are lacking and this affects students' understanding and experience. For example, in travel and tourism, there is no access to computerised booking systems, and in hospitality no access to restaurant booking software or point of sale equipment. Staff access to IT and management information is also limited. Senior managers have access to information regarding key indicators for performance. However, this does not extend to programme

and course managers who make limited use of MIS data to monitor improvements in quality. The range of books and other learning materials in the learning resource centre is satisfactory, however, there is a limited variety in some curriculum areas. Internet access for research is good, and the college is in the early stages of developing a managed learning environment.

24. The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time programmes that enable students to progress. Courses meet the needs of the local community. There are courses from pre-entry level literacy and numeracy to NVQ level 4 and GCE AS and A level. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and includes an extensive range of practical-based subjects. The college has developed strong links with local community-based organisations, schools and employers to widen participation and develop the curriculum. It successfully provides literacy, numeracy, ESOL and IT provision in some 15 community-based venues including the local library, sport centre and schools. Provision includes online learning centres and discrete ESOL provision for students in the Chinese community and for young Muslim women.

25. The Entry to Employment (E2E) programme is provided for young people who may have low levels of literacy and numeracy or do not know which vocational area they wish to enter. There is a wide range of programme options on E2E including literacy and numeracy, vocational taster courses such as retail, admin, construction and early years care. Some students may also attend work experience placements.

26. The college has productive links with local employers and responds well to their needs. It is well represented in local strategic employer groups, and offers a range of specialised short courses which are often delivered on employers' premises. There are good links with nearby Stansted airport where the college has a good-quality learning environment. There are close links with a nearby pharmaceutical company, and students regularly visit to both enrich their learning and gain an appreciation of working in science. Links with engineering employers have improved facilities on a number of courses.

27. Links with local schools are good. Several curriculum areas offer provision for pupils aged 14 to 16 of 6 local schools through the `increasing flexibility project' and other school link programmes. In conjunction with the youth service, there is a programme offering an alternative education programme for students in Years 10 and 11. The increasing flexibility project partnership is well organised and collaboration between college and schools is good. Students work well and enjoy their time at the college. At the time of inspection, there were in excess of 300 students aged 14 to 16 on courses in bricklaying, motor vehicle, vocational GCSEs in ICT, health and social care, leisure and tourism and engineering, and NVQs in catering, hairdressing, and construction.

28. Personal and academic support for full-time students are well planned and closely monitored. Effective pre-entry guidance is provided by a team of specialist staff. Well-prepared course guides help students to make informed choices from the wide range of provision available. Initial interviews effectively identify the additional support needs of individual students.

29. The induction programme is valued by students and helps them to settle quickly into college. The results of initial assessments are used to determine students' key skill levels and additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. All full-time students are given a target minimum grade based on their prior achievements. These are used effectively to closely monitor student progress in one-to-one reviews. The college has recently reorganised additional support and it is now more effective in meeting students' varied needs. However, at the time of inspection, some 20% of full-time students who were diagnosed as needing additional support were not receiving it. Learning support assistants provide valuable extra help in lessons, small groups and on a one-to-one basis. There is no initial assessment of part-time adult students and few benefit from additional support. In response to student requests, the college is providing evening support for key skills development, evidence gathering, and portfolio building. Students with dyslexia and specific learning needs or disabilities are well supported. The effect of additional learning support on achievements has not been systematically monitored or evaluated.

30. All full-time students have a weekly tutorial session. Group tutorials have improved since the last inspection. Personal tutors follow a common scheme of work and share a good range of teaching

materials. Tutorials for part-time students are built into their main course and these vary in their effectiveness. Individual student progress and attendance are closely monitored. For students aged 16 to 18, progress and concerns are regularly reported to parents.

31. The college's guidance service meets the needs of students and is advertised throughout the college. Welfare services and counselling are delivered by external agencies, A learner-support fund gives financial assistance for childcare, travel, visits and equipment costs. The careers advice and guidance centre is well equipped with qualified staff and a good range of relevant resources. The service has obtained matrix accreditation. It is well used to support students in progressing to HE and employment. There is a wide range of activities to support progression including regular workshops and job fairs. In one group tutorial, a stimulating presentation on personal statement completion successfully challenged insufficient individual ambition.

32. The range of vocational enrichment activities available to students is satisfactory. Students further develop their skills by attending activities within their area of learning. For example, in English, modern and foreign languages, there are a creative writing club and reading club and in visual and performing arts there is a drama club. Guest speakers from travel companies regularly provide talks on the industry and students go on trips abroad and then effectively link their experiences to their study. A broad range of cross-college enrichment activities includes sports activities, music, nail art, sign language and public speaking. Most activities are well attended. Some students are unable to attend lunchtime activities due to conflicting timetables.

Leadership and management
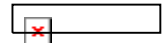
33. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Weaknesses identified during the last inspection have been successfully addressed. Governors now receive a good level of information to support their decisions. They receive regular written reports from the principal and are regularly briefed by senior managers on significant aspects of the college operation. Financial information is good and is produced frequently. Governors are able to monitor all aspects of the college's operation. Since the last inspection, the governors and managers have dealt progressively with a significant financial debt, and with the assistance of the LSC the college is now in a better financial position. During the same period, they have made substantial improvements to the accommodation and maintained a good range of programmes that meet the needs of most students. At the time of the inspection the college was experiencing an annual increase in both full-time and part-time student numbers. However, the college has failed to achieve its agreed student targets in each of the last three years.

34. Governors and managers fully recognise the college's role as the area's main provider. They have a good understanding of the issues which influence strategic planning and the college's community role. Governors have extensive professional and strategic experience and, with their commitment to the college and its many strong partnerships with the community, ensure that strategic planning is good. The budget planning system is good; it includes a programme approval process that incorporates a minimum student recruitment requirement to ensure financial viability. The strategic plan informs operational and staff development planning. Strategic objectives are shared with all staff in the college through good communication systems. Governors pair with curriculum areas and are well known to college staff through observing performance review and taking part in celebrations of student achievement.

35. During the last year, substantial improvements have been made to the student and course information system. Managers now have good access to reliable data regarding programme performance. This information is not, as yet, regularly used to inform improvements to programme performance.

36. A performance review of all aspects of the college's operation forms the basis of the college's good quality assurance system and informs the self-assessment report. The college has an

extensive programme of observing teaching and learning with a team of trained observers. In a few curriculum areas, the grades awarded by the college observers were higher than those awarded by inspectors for teaching. The college system does not separately grade teaching, learning and attainment. The self-assessment report does not fully reflect the teaching and learning issues identified by the college's observation system and consequently there are few examples of development plans to improve the students' experience. The college has appointed some teachers as professional practice advisors. These provide effective mentoring of new teachers and support improvement in teaching performance.

37. Overall, there is insufficient focus on the improvement of quality of teaching and learning. Although the college has been successful in reducing the small number of unsatisfactory lessons since the last inspection, action planning to improve teaching overall is ineffective.

38. The leadership and management of English and languages, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, literacy, numeracy and ESOL, ICT, and visual and performing arts and media are good. In all other curriculum areas, leadership and management are satisfactory. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory overall, but some significant weaknesses persist in this area. There is a clear system for quality assurance, but too much emphasis is on the process rather than on the monitoring of outcomes. Key data are not as yet fully analysed or used to ensure continuous improvement.

39. A senior manager has responsibility for equal opportunities. The equal opportunities committee meets regularly. The college makes discrete provision to meet specific student needs and has a close working relationship with other providers which ensures needs are met and that the college is inclusive. The college is establishing data information on participation, retention and pass rates whereby it can measure its effectiveness in providing for students from different groups in the community. The college meets its obligations regarding the Race Relations Amendment and the Special Educational Needs Disability and Discrimination Act.

40. Systems for monitoring the efficient use of resources are inadequate. There is no course costing system to inform resource allocation. Staff costs are not measured at programme level and accommodation utilisation is inadequately monitored. Systems to monitor the benefits of other college expenditure are underdeveloped and the college does not routinely benchmark costs. The college was unable to produce the information necessary to support a judgement about value for money.

41. There is a clear management structure that is understood by all staff. Managers have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Senior managers work well as a team, and good teamwork is clear at all levels throughout the college. All managers have benefited greatly from an extensive and appropriate management training programme. Curriculum management is effective with the head of department taking responsibility for programme development and resource allocation. The deputy head has responsibility for student performance. These roles are complementary and benefit students.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas
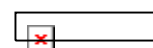
Science and mathematics
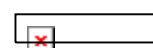
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

Strengths

- very good pass rates on GNVQ intermediate science

- good attendance on level 3 courses

- good industrial and schools links in science which enhance learning.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates in GCSE mathematics

- lack of variety in teaching

- insufficient availability of ILT to support science and mathematics teaching.

Scope of provision

42. The range of provision in science and mathematics at levels 2 and 3 is good. Courses in science include GCSE science, access to HE, GNVQ intermediate science, GCE AS and A level in biology, chemistry, physics, environmental science and geology. In mathematics, there are day and evening GCSE courses, GCE AS and A-level mathematics, and students are able to study GCE AS and A-level further mathematics through a workshop system. There are no evening GCE A2 courses running. There is no level 1 provision in science, however, the college does offer a pre-GCSE mathematics course. The majority of students are aged 16 to 18 and are full time. At the time of inspection, there were a total of 548 full-time and part-time enrolments in science and mathematics.

Achievement and standards

43. Retention rates are good in GCE A-level biology, geology and physics courses; they have been 100% for the last two years. Overall, pass rates are satisfactory. In GNVQ intermediate science, the pass rate was 100% in 2001/02 and 2002/03, with the number of high grades significantly above the national average. Pass rates in GCE A-level physics have been well above national average at over 90% in each of the last three years. However, in GCSE mathematics (grades A* to C), the pass rate was low, at 26%, in 2002/03. Pass rates on GCE AS biology and physics courses were significantly below the national average in 2003. Student attendance is carefully monitored and unexplained absences are followed up. Attendance at the level 3 lessons observed was high, at 90%. Students are punctual arriving at lessons. The few students who arrive late are required to provide an explanation.

44. In both science and mathematics, students demonstrate a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding for the stage of their course. In science practical sessions, students effectively develop their practical skills. For example, GCE AS physics students investigated

trolleys on a runway using light gates and a computer to calculate accelerations and investigate Newton's second law. Their understanding was consolidated by doing their own experiments using falling masses. Overall, work observed during class and in student folders is of a satisfactory standard. In a GCE AS mathematics lesson, students effectively used the sine and cosine rules to solve simple problems. In a GCE A-level mathematics lesson, students were able to successfully differentiate functions with powers other than positive integers, although some weaknesses were evident with the use of indices and fractions. In a biology class for students aged 19+, the teacher used `labelled students' as an innovative and effective approach to teach peptide bonds.

A sample of retention and pass rates in mathematics and science, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics grades A* to C	2	No. of starts	136	155	184
		% retention	88	74	65
		% pass rate	29	34	26
GCE AS chemistry	3	No. of starts	23	25	21
		% retention	91	92	86
		% pass rate	43	78	67
GCE AS physics	3	No. of starts	21	31	23
		% retention	76	81	96
		% pass rate	81	76	50
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	32	27	23
		% retention	78	100	100
		% pass rate	96	93	83
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	48	50	38
		% retention	96	80	76
		% pass rate	85	75	48
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	62	71	*
		% retention	76	83	*
		% pass rate	45	59	*
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	53	18	31
		% retention	45	89	100
		% pass rate	50	56	84

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college 2003

*data not available

Quality of education and training

45. All the teaching observed was satisfactory or better. Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach with confidence. In the best lessons, objectives are made clear at the beginning. Lessons end with a review of work covered and good use is made of targeted questions to check understanding. Individual one-to-one support is good when students are working individually.

46. In too many lessons, there is a lack of variety in teaching. Teacher exposition is often overlong

and dull. As a result, students often become bored. Student understanding is not checked often enough and students spend too long on the same task. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. GNVQ students have a clear understanding of coursework assessment.

47. Most teachers set homework every week which is marked and returned with written comments. Too often, the quality of marking within science and mathematics lacks sufficient detail for students to improve their work. In environmental science, however, students appreciate the detailed feedback they get which helps them to improve.

48. Overall, monitoring of student progress is satisfactory. Target minimum grades are set for students on GCE AS and A-level courses. However, their use in monitoring student progress is inconsistent. Often, there is informal discussion, but little formal documentation of progress. Guidance and support for students are good. Pre-entry guidance is helpful and initial screening to target literacy and numeracy support is effective. However, the college's response to the referral of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by tutors following enrolment is slow in mathematics and science. One-to-one support by teachers in lessons is good and there is additional learning support available in some GCSE mathematics lessons. Pre-entry guidance on key skills is not effective. Many students reported that they were unprepared for the work involved.

49. Resources are satisfactory. However, some classrooms and laboratories are in a poor state of repair and too small for the numbers of students who use them. In many rooms, blinds are broken or missing making parts of the room too bright for projector use, while in several the furniture is in a poor state of repair, and notice boards and wall displays are often outdated. There is little evidence of the celebration of student achievement. Availability of ILT is limited and its use is often restricted. There is a good range of reference texts and videos available in science and mathematics. Limited material is available on the college intranet.

Leadership and management

50. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. Operational management of science and mathematics courses is effective. Management has responded well to local needs. A broad range of courses is available. Liaison with local industry and schools is good and this enhances the students' experience. Ongoing development and planning enables progression within the centre. There is insufficient emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning in self-assessment. Weaknesses in teaching are identified during internal classroom observation sessions. Where teaching has been graded as unsatisfactory, there are examples of effective action planning to support teachers. However, where weaknesses are identified in other lessons, actions to deal with these weaknesses are often not specified and when they are there is no effective system to monitor progress.

51. Documentation of team meetings lacks detail. For example on the occasions when actions are specified they seldom have measurable outcomes or timescales. Individual teachers keep their own student records, but there is little consistency of approach between staff, and there is no central record of student progress. There is little evidence of the identification or dissemination of good teaching practice.

Construction

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

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

Strengths

- good retention rates on most programmes

- good practical teaching and training in brickwork and carpentry and joinery

- very effective recording, monitoring and tracking of student progress

- thorough work-based learner progress reviews.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rate on level 1, 1-year part-time electrical courses

- unsatisfactory teaching in most theory classes

- inadequate accommodation for practical brickwork activities

- low retention and pass rates on apprenticeship frameworks.

Scope of provision

52. There is a broad range of full-time, part-time, and evening courses. Most are at foundation or intermediate level, including advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships. Level 3 provision is confined to the advanced modern apprenticeship work-based programme. There is no full-time provision at level 3. Courses are well-matched to the needs of students, employers and the local community. There is a total of 525 students enrolled on construction programmes. This includes 115 full-time, 273 part-time and evening-only students and 56 on short course provision. There are 81 work-based learners. Of these, 10 are advanced modern apprenticeships, 52 are foundation modern apprenticeships and 19 are on NVQ only programmes. In addition, there are 35 Year 11 students from local secondary schools on linked courses.

Achievement and standards

53. Retention rates for all courses are good and are above the national averages for most programmes. In electrical installation competencies level 1 (one year), they have been well below the national average, but improved significantly in 2002/03 to above the national average. Pass rates are inconsistent, with courses in some years above the national average and in others well below. In electrical installation competencies parts one and two however, the pass rate has declined significantly to well below national average in 2002/03. The college has recognised that retention and pass rates for all work-based learners are too low. In the six years leading up to the inspection, only 12% of apprentices out of a total of 181 starters achieved the apprenticeship framework. To address this, extra key skill evidence collection and portfolio building sessions have been arranged

in the evenings. These are presented by the vocational assessors and training officers who regularly visit learners in the workplace. Student work is of a higher standard in practical sessions than in theory lessons. Students acquire good practical skills in the use of hand tools and the practical tasks associated with their vocational area. For example, brickwork students build good quality models. Carpentry and joinery students produced good woodworking joints and demonstrate their expertise in hanging doors. Student work is well-presented in projects and portfolios.

A sample of retention and pass rates in construction, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Electrical installation competencies part 1, 1 year	1	No. of starts	36	31	51
		% retention	64	55	86
		% pass rate	87	88	32
Electrical installation competencies part 1, 2 years	1	No. of starts	33	47	17
		% retention	88	98	88
		% pass rate	83	63	93
Foundation construction award	1	No. of starts	**	26	*
		% retention	**	88	*
		% pass rate	**	87	*
Electrical installation competencies part 2	2	No. of starts	31	46	42
		% retention	90	87	95
		% pass rate	54	53	25
NVQ construction bricklaying	2	No. of starts	15	26	**
		% retention	53	73	**
		% pass rate	50	79	**
NVQ in construction carpentry and joinery	2	No. of starts	37	48	**
		% retention	35	56	**
		% pass rate	62	59	**

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* data unreliable
** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

54. The quality of teaching and learning in most theory classes is poor. Aims and objectives of the lesson are not always shared with students. Schemes of work and lesson plans are poorly developed and not always complete. Few lesson plans make reference to the preferred learning style or the varying level of ability or prior attainment of students. Most lessons are tutor led and there is little change of activity. There is a lack of well-prepared learning materials and too much use of dictated note taking. Students often copy from poorly prepared and illegible projected transparencies. Theory classes are dull and uninspiring and do not challenge or extend students sufficiently. There is little effective checking of learning.

55. Practical training and instruction in brickwork and carpentry and joinery are good. Tutors are well-prepared for practical lessons and have good detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Lesson aims and objectives are shared with students, who understand what is required of them. Assignments are well produced and students understand and follow instructions. Tutors are well

qualified and experienced and they share that experience in training sessions. Learning is frequently checked and effective use is made of questioning of students. Practical work and questions are regularly marked. Learning materials are well-prepared by tutors. Theory is well linked to practical work and good reference to industrial applications and standards are made. Systems for monitoring student progress are effective. Students appreciate this high level of practical training and speak highly of the instruction they receive and the support of teaching staff.

56. Assessment is regular, fair and accurate. Recording, monitoring and tracking of student progress and achievement is effective. Well-constructed and informative recording and tracking charts are prominently displayed in workshop areas. Students can at any time identify what they have achieved, milestones reached, and what needs to be done to achieve their intended goal. Students have ownership of their monitored progress and are motivated to complete and succeed. Qualified assessors from the college visit work-based learners in the workplace. Effective use is made of employer-and supervisor-witness testimony. Good use is made of the collection of naturally occurring diverse evidence from the workplace. Assessment procedures and practices have recently been reviewed and revised in response to poor pass rates. Attendance in those classes observed during the inspection was good at 80%, 7% above national average.

57. Support for students is satisfactory. Initial assessment is effectively used to assess basic and key skills levels of prior attainment. In addition, initial assessment identifies the programme most suited to the students' needs. Once identified, learning support is effectively carried out by suitably qualified staff either to groups or to individual students. In direct response to students' views, additional support is conducted in the vocational classes and not as a discrete class activity. Full-time groups of students have timetabled tutorials. These are often used effectively to give individual support to students and map their progress.

58. There is insufficient student workspace in brickwork practical areas. Resources in other areas of construction are satisfactory and meet the requirements of the courses on offer. In brickwork, there is only one relatively small brickwork workshop. Students have little room and brick models are constructed too close together. Students often work in cramped conditions. Many brickwork classes use recently constructed outdoor practical areas.

59. Achievement in work based learning is poor. In 2000/01, a single learner from 43 starters successfully completed in line with their learning plans. In the year 2001/02, 11 learners from 51 starters successfully completed. In 2002/03, 2 learners have so far completed from 79 starters. The college has committed resources to allow learner reviews and assessment to be carried out in the workplace. Co-ordinators now carry out effective reviews and this involves both learners and employers. Assessment is planned to provide a wide range of tasks to meet the requirements of the NVQ qualification. In addition, key skills and portfolio building sessions have been added to learners' programmes. These are supported by work-based co-ordinators giving support and guidance to students which is intended to increase the number of framework achievements.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A programme area leader has curriculum leadership responsibility for the area. Staff review programmes annually and incorporate these in the college self-assessment report process. Data are readily available to all staff and are used for analysis and continuous improvement purposes. There has been recognition of the poor pass rates in some courses and action has been taken to improve. Significant changes have been made in work-based learning programmes, for example, assessors are now in place to assess in the workplace and the delivery of key skills sessions has been changed in response to student views. However, the impact of these changes is not yet apparent.

Engineering

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

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

- good retention and pass rates on the NVQ in production engineering and GNVQ foundation engineering courses

- effective development of student skills using ILT in motor vehicle programmes

- good NVQ assessment practice in work-based learning

- wide range of learning and progression opportunities.

Weaknesses

- poor framework achievements for motor vehicle modern apprentices

- retention rate declining to below average on GNVQ intermediate engineering and computer-aided design courses

- too much unsatisfactory teaching in theory lessons.

Scope of provision

61. The technology department offers full-time GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses in engineering. AVCE single and double awards in engineering are offered on a full-time and part-time basis. Full-time students can also gain an additional motor vehicle qualification or an NVQ to levels 1 or 2 in performing engineering operations.

62. Day-release courses in light motor vehicle engineering are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3. Heavy motor-vehicle apprenticeships are only offered in workplace-based learning. The college also offers evening courses in basic welding, computer-aided design, and car and motorcycle maintenance. At the time of the inspection, there were 127 students on full-time engineering courses and 44 part-time students. Of these, over 90% were aged 16 to 18. A further 98 learners were taking a modern apprenticeship in a range of engineering disciplines. There were 97 pupils attending school-link programmes, including the vocational GCSE in engineering, computer-aided drawing or practical engineering studies in motor vehicle and welding skills. Progression opportunities are good.

Achievement and standards

63. Retention rates have fluctuated in recent years and in most cases are now satisfactory or better. Pass rates for most courses are at or above the national averages. Both pass and retention rates on

the GNVQ foundation engineering course have been consistently high for the last three years. Similarly, the NVQ course in production engineering has shown continuous improvement with pass and retention rates now significantly above the national average. Enrolments for this programme have varied considerably, reflecting changes in industrial demand. Pass rates have remained above the national average on the GNVQ intermediate course. However, retention rates have declined to below national average. Retention rates have also declined on computer-aided design, whilst achievement has remained close to national averages. Following the introduction of the single award, retention and pass rates improved on the AVCE engineering.

64. Achievement of advanced modern apprenticeship framework in motor vehicle engineering is poor. In other engineering areas achievement is satisfactory. Between 1999 and 2001, only 17% of starters completed their full award compared with 37% of those in other engineering disciplines. Retention rates are poor, with between 4% and 19% of starters remaining in learning in those areas. The college has recognised the importance of improving the achievement in key skills for motor vehicle learners, and responsibility for their delivery has been moved from the workplace to the college.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
City and Guilds 3992 motor vehicle repair and maintenance skills	1	No. of starts	*	16	27
		% retention	*	94	81
		% pass rate	*	93	82
GNVQ intermediate in engineering	2	No. of starts	*	25	18
		% retention	*	84	72
		% pass rate	*	62	92
NVQ in engineering production	2	No. of starts	*	121	26
		% retention	*	97	100
		% pass rate	*	79	96
City and Guilds 4351-01 computer-aided draughting and design	2	No. of starts	21	45	49
		% retention	86	76	73
		% pass rate	50	68	69
GNVQ advanced/AVCE (double award) in engineering	3	No. of starts	16	18	**
		% retention	69	44	**
		% pass rate	11	75	**

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 starters
** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

65. Most teaching is satisfactory or better, but the proportion of good or better lessons observed is significantly below the national average. The better teaching takes place in practical rather than theory sessions, too many of which are unsatisfactory. Many theory lessons are characterised by poor preparation, a failure to fully involve the student in the learning process, a lack of challenge and little testing of learning. In the poorer lessons, some students react to lack of stimulation by becoming disruptive, which adversely affects the learning of others. In one of the better lessons, the development of posters by foundation level students was used to stimulate learning on health and

safety issues within engineering. In another, the use of the computer numerical control (CNC) machining of a simple engineering component provided added interest to a session based on the development of mathematical principles. Good teaching was observed in most practical sessions.

66. Staff are supportive of students and committed to helping them to develop their full potential. For example, a recently introduced team-teaching approach enables motor vehicle students to switch from self-paced computer-based learning to related practical tasks in the adjoining workshop. Students make good progress, which is tracked until they are ready for online testing. Students are able to borrow the motor vehicle computer software for home use.

67. Attendance at lessons during the inspection week was good, at 82%. The standard of student work overall is satisfactory, and in practical work it is good. Work-based learners effectively develop skills. Two students have recently gained prestigious national awards. Learners' skills are demonstrated in a wide range of occupations including the servicing of buses, the welding of workshop equipment and the servicing of engines for commercial aircraft. Learners gain employers' confidence very quickly and are given responsibility for the completion of skilled work.

68. The progress of full-time students is effectively monitored. These students are issued with an assignment timetable. Course assignments incorporate clear briefs and grading criteria for the student. Staff comments on student work are constructive, supportive, and detailed, although validating signatures are often missing. Insufficient attention is given to the correction of grammatical and spelling errors. The standard of students' completed assignments is satisfactory with the better examples showing good use of IT, additional research and a high standard of presentation. Target minimum grades are set and reviewed termly to update individual learning plans. This review includes progress in key skills. Additional learning support is available to all students with identified needs. NVQ assessment practice in the workplace is good. Learners receive frequent visits from their vocationally qualified assessors. Good use is made of the direct observation of learners' competence in the workplace. Training officers and workplace assessors provide constructive feedback on learner performance and assist them to cross-reference their evidence to NVQ standards. Learner progress is carefully tracked. Assessment visits result in the preparation of an action plan that sets clear targets to encourage learner progression with clear dates for their completion.

69. There is a small team of suitably qualified teaching staff with a good level of technician support. The need for industrial updating for these staff has been recognised. There have been difficulties in recruiting specialist part-time staff into the team. Accommodation and equipment are adequate and there are good facilities for computer-based learning in the automobile and electronic areas. Computer-aided drawing facilities are well-used, however, software needs upgrading. During the inspection, the system was prone to malfunction. Motor vehicle, welding and general engineering workshops contain a good range of traditional machine tools, a CNC machining facility and a pool of older vehicles that are fit for purpose. Good attention to health and safety includes the displaying of risk assessments throughout workshops. Classrooms and corridors in the block used by engineering students have little vocational identity. Some accommodation is cluttered and lacks space for proper storage of students' belongings. Texts in the library are modern and there are videos covering a range of engineering topics.

70. The engineering curriculum offers a wide range of progression opportunities from levels 1 to 4. Students can enrol on additional courses. For example, GNVQ intermediate students can also achieve craft motor vehicle qualifications. In 2002/03, 62% of these students progressed on to a modern apprenticeship. The AVCE double award has been split into two, one-year, programmes to improve progression, retention and pass rates. The college is responsive to employers' requests for special courses. Recent examples include specialist training in fibre optics and telematics. There are good links with local schools. Courses include motor vehicle, CAD, and welding courses as well as a vocational GCSE. These courses attract significant numbers of pupils aged 14 to 16 and provide a progression route on to further college courses. In one lesson, pupils worked enthusiastically to produce component parts for a rocket-propelled vehicle project. In another session, pupils manufactured welding tongs for their own toolkits.

Leadership and management

71. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Management roles are clearly defined and well understood. Department staff work well as a team, but there is little formal recording of minutes of meetings or the monitoring of actions arising from them. Programme management files have a common format, but little consistency in the quality of their completion. Department staff work well with work-based training officers for the benefit of students. Changes in the nature and scale of the engineering provision have reduced the flexibility of staffing arrangements. On some programmes, staff changes have adversely affected the quality of teaching. Managers have acted upon weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report to bring about improvements in the delivery of key skills through the introduction of integrated assignments. Access to management information is unsatisfactory.

72. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. Although most work-based learners have a basic awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity issues, there is insufficient promotion and monitoring with employers.

Business, administration and management

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

Strengths

- good pass rates in GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business

- effective individual support for students in lessons and in the workplace

- effective target setting and monitoring of students' progress.

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion in work-based learning

- insufficient variety and challenge in most lessons

- poor resources to support teaching and stimulate learning.

Scope of provision

73. The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time courses at foundation, intermediate, advanced and higher levels. There are full-time courses in business studies, administration and accounting. Approximately 100 students follow advanced GCE AS and A-level courses in business studies and accounting. There are 71 students enrolled on AVCE business which is offered as a double, single or GCE AS award. Some 21 students are studying for GNVQ intermediate business. There are 12 students enrolled on level 1 business administration and part-time courses in NVQ

accountancy and bookkeeping are available in the day or evening. There is off-site provision for management courses at nearby Stansted Airport.

74. Approximately 200 full-time and 130 part-time students are enrolled on business courses. The majority of full-time students are aged 16 to 18 and most part-time students are aged over 19. There are 7 advanced modern apprentice and 21 foundation modern apprentice students on work-based learning programmes, most of whom are following an administration course.

Achievement and standards

75. Students' achievements in business are satisfactory. For most courses, retention and pass rates are around the national averages. Performance on GNVQ intermediate business is good with retention and pass rates exceeding the national averages by 10% and 30%, respectively. Achievement on AVCE in business is good, with retention and pass rates consistently exceeding the national averages. Achievement on GCE A-level accounting is poor, with a pass rate below the national average and most students fail to achieve the grade that would be expected based on their performance at GCSE. Progress towards framework completion in work-based learning is very slow. At the time of inspection, only one student who started in 2002 had achieved the full framework.

76. In most lessons, students make satisfactory progress. They listen attentively, apply themselves to tasks set, and generally respond well to questions. In a few lessons, students make spontaneous comments and give extended answers to questions, although overall there is little discussion or debate. On the whole, students achieve at the level expected for their course. For example, students on GNVQ intermediate business were able to produce a business memo to a professional standard that utilised their research skills on the Internet.

77. Students have a satisfactory understanding of business terminology and key concepts, and can apply these concepts to case studies and other lesson materials. However, their analytical and evaluative skills are poorly developed. There are few examples of students being able to apply their learning to business situations. Students generally work well with numbers and graphical presentation. For example, part-time students following an Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) intermediate course were able to produce final accounts for a sole trader from an extended trial balance.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, administration and management 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	16	22	*
		% retention	100	91	*
		% pass rate	94	95	*
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	34	29	26
		% retention	91	93	81
		% pass rate	71	85	71
GCE AS accounting	3	No. of starts	26	27	36
		% retention	81	85	81
		% pass rate	67	43	59
GCE AS business	3	No. of starts	37	45	39
		% retention	84	71	79
		% pass rate	71	66	84
NVQ 3 accounting	3	No. of starts	45	31	39

		% retention	78	81	95
		% pass rate	54	76	62
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	53	19	15
		% retention	**	95	93
		% pass rate	85	83	93

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

*fewer than 15 students enrolled
** data unreliable

Quality of education and training

78. Teaching is mostly satisfactory or better. There is a professional working atmosphere and students are well supported by their teachers. In the better lessons, teachers make effective use of students' work experiences to illustrate business concepts. For example, in a VCE business lesson, students' part-time work experiences were used to learn about areas of potential conflict in organisations. Key skills were well integrated into a GNVQ intermediate lesson, with good documentation to support learning and assessment. On the level 1 administration course, a paired support system has been introduced to try to develop mutual understanding and confidence for the quieter members of the group. Tutorial support for work-based learners is effective and there is a new system in place to track their progress.

79. In most lessons, students are passive and there is little variety of approach in teaching to motivate and stimulate learning. In many lessons, the pace is too slow and there is little to challenge students to think about their learning and to question or criticise. There are few examples of extension activities for the more able students and teachers have little regard for the wide ability range of the students who are present in most lessons. Too often, lessons involve teacher-led activities using notes and a whiteboard, with learning checked by the use of open questioning. There are few effective examples of the use of ILT to enhance learning.

80. Students' work is regularly, accurately and speedily marked with some helpful comments to assist them to improve their performance. Coursework in AAT accounting contained detailed comments from teachers to support the students and help them to improve their work. However, some of the written feedback from teachers is brief and of limited value to the students. The monitoring of students' progress is effective. Target grades based on prior achievement at GCSE are used with most full-time students and there are good referral systems to support students who are not attending or are in difficulty. Teachers effectively challenge poor attendance and punctuality.

81. Resources to support teaching and stimulate effective learning are poor. Many rooms are too hot and noisy. Few examples of students' work are on display and the state of decoration is generally poor. Most written handouts provided for students are of poor quality. There are very few examples of well-targeted learning materials and many handouts are duplications of chapters from textbooks that fail to focus on the needs of the students in the lesson. Resources to support learning such as overhead projectors and televisions are of poor quality.

Leadership and management

82. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been a significant contribution to the development of value added measures in the college and the use of target grades to monitor the progress of students. Teaching teams meet regularly and outcomes are recorded, but action planning to defined timescales is poor. All staff participate in the self-assessment process, with each course team completing a primary report which then feeds into an overall departmental report. However, the process is insufficiently critical and does not provide a sufficient focus on the quality of teaching and learning. For example, some issues identified during lesson observations are not

followed through in the self-assessment process and there is no action plan to address the problem. Teachers have limited access to management information which inhibits the effectiveness of the department in improving standards in teaching and learning.

Computing and information technology

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

Strengths

- very good pass rates on full-time programmes

- good retention rates on all programmes

- good individual teacher support for all students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on CLAIT and computer technology programmes

- uninspiring teaching of theory to full-time students.

Scope of provision

83. The college offers IT courses to 285 full-time students and to over 1,100 part-time students throughout the year. Full-time students study AVCE in ICT at level 3 and the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first diploma at level 2. The AVCE is offered as a three-unit advanced subsidiary course to 70 GCE AS students and to adult part-time students. There is no level 1 provision for full-time students within ICT. Students are guided towards the certificate in business administration, but progression from this course on to IT programmes is low. Part-time courses are offered on the main college site, in learning centres at Bishop's Stortford and Stansted Airport and at a number of sites as part of the Harlow On-Line Learning initiative. The college also offers a vocational GCSE in ICT to pupils aged 14 to 16 from local secondary schools.

Achievement and standards

84. Pass rates on all full-time programmes are very high. For example, the pass rate for the AVCE in ICT has improved over three years to 89% in 2003, which is significantly above the national average. The number of students achieving a high grade in the AVCE double award ICT and the AS VCE in ICT is also well above national average. The pass rate for BTEC first diploma in IT was significantly above national average, at 94% in 2003. This replaced the equally successful GNVQ intermediate ICT programme. There are low pass rates on some part-time programmes. The City and Guilds 4248 Start IT programme and the City and Guilds 7261 IT certificate have pass rates at least 20% above national average. However, computer technology and CLAIT have below average pass rates for the years 2000/03 and pass rates for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) fell sharply

in 2003. Retention rates on all programmes are good, being generally at or above national averages.

85. Students on full-time programmes demonstrate a high level of proficiency in practical IT skills. The Internet is used effectively for research and students speak knowledgeably about their studies. Assignment work produced by full-time students is comprehensive and imaginative in content. On part-time programmes students are well motivated and quickly gain basic IT skills to work confidently with course handbooks. Attendance is satisfactory and there is close monitoring of full-time student absence by subject tutors and personal development tutors. There is good progression of full-time students on to courses within college, employment or HE.

A sample of retention and pass rates in computing and information technology, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
City and Guilds 7261 short IT certificate	1	No. of starts	192	118	91
		% retention	92	75	88
		% pass rate	82	60	83
CLAIT 1 year	1	No. of starts	215	194	46
		% retention	99	88	87
		% pass rate	20	18	30
City and Guilds 4248 start IT short	1	No. of starts	*	179	346
		% retention	*	97	97
		% pass rate	*	88	86
GNVQ intermediate ICT and BTEC first diploma in IT	2	No. of starts	47	43	43
		% retention	87	81	81
		% pass rate	93	91	94
Computer technology 1 year	2	No. of starts	93	84	39
		% retention	87	82	77
		% pass rate	49	32	43
AS VCE in ICT	3	No. of starts	*	104	120
		% retention	*	80	77
		% pass rate	*	77	75
AVCE double award in ICT	3	No. of starts	*	40	47
		% retention	*	93	83
		% pass rate	*	81	97

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

86. Individual teacher support for both full-time and part-time students is good, particularly during practical work. Most teachers respond promptly to queries and at the same time maintain an awareness of the learning needs of other students. Clear explanations are provided which extend learning. In lessons for full-time students, there is good time management and the staff keep students on task. Students are given clear targets for completion of work. Staff are experienced in supporting students and are knowledgeable and sympathetic. In Workprep, a programme for

students with a range of physical or mental disabilities, teachers effectively adjust their teaching methods to enhance and facilitate the students' progress. All part-time students receive a comprehensive student handbook for their programme. This contains the scheme of work, personal progress charts, assessment details and other materials to support learning.

87. There is too much uninspiring teaching of theory to full-time students. Too often, there is a lack of variety of teaching style. Too many lessons consist of a very brief introduction to the topic followed by practical work where students follow workbooks or guidance notes. In some lessons, there is insufficient detail in the theory section. In other lessons, there is a lack of student involvement, and insufficient use of directed questions to check learning. In the weaker sessions, staff wait for students to attract their attention and there are limited checks on learning.

88. In the best lessons, there is thoughtful planning with differentiated material to ensure students are able to work at their level of ability. The delivery of theory is crisp and confident and students respond well to frequent questions. In one lesson, exercises on ASCII code were based on coding and decoding messages which maintained student interest. A mix of individual and group work made sure the task did not become too arduous.

89. Assignments are clearly mapped to awarding body criteria which helps students to maximise achievement. Students receive constructive feedback on assignments and good use is made of practice exercises. Completion of assessments is effectively tracked and students' work is closely monitored. In the satellite centres, each student has a progress review sheet which is used to record the progress made that session, thus ensuring continuity of learning.

90. Personal support for students is well planned and is effective in improving retention and pass rates. All students have individual learning plans. However, in many instances, they are too brief and there is no evidence that they are used effectively. Full-time students are set target minimum grades which are monitored in individual tutorials. All students are assessed for individual learning needs on entry and support is provided to those with identified additional support needs.

91. There are good resources to support learning in ICT. The majority of computers are of a high specification with up-to-date software. There is a good range of exercises, practice assessments, training manuals and course notes; most of which are available to students on the college network. Students with disabilities have access to specialist equipment for example adjustable height desks, one handed keyboard and enlarged screens. A number of computer rooms are uncomfortably hot and a few theory classes were inappropriately timetabled in workshop areas where noise from adjacent classes was a distraction.

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management are good. A strong sense of team work is evident amongst staff teaching on full-time and part-time programmes both within college and in the satellite centres. Tutor handbooks have been developed for all units on the AVCE IT programme, which ensures a consistent approach to delivery across a broad team. All staff attend regular team meetings. Minutes are comprehensive. Communication is good and the managers are responsive to student requirements. Effective deployment of resources is achieved in the IT learning centre, where multiple classes are located to maximise use of space and computers. There is a gender imbalance on the AVCE double award and the BTEC first diploma where the number of female students is very low.

Hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism
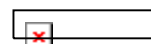
Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

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

Strengths

- very good retention and pass rates on AVCE courses

- good tutorial support with effective target setting for college-based students

- good progression routes that meet the needs of students.

Weaknesses

- poor and declining pass rates on GCE AS physical education

- poor punctuality in many lessons causes disruption to learning

- inadequate ILT resources

- very poor NVQ and framework completion for work-based learning in hospitality.

Scope of provision

93. The college provides a good range of courses in hospitality, leisure, sport and travel. In hospitality these include NVQs in food preparation and cooking at levels 1, 2 and 3, and food service at levels 1, 2 and 3. A range of part-time courses includes NVQ 2 catering quick service and the national licensees' certificate. In leisure and travel, courses are available in foundation GNVQ in leisure and tourism, first diploma in travel and tourism and AVCE single and double awards in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation. In sport, courses range from first diploma in sport to national diploma in sport. A certificate in teaching exercise and fitness is offered on a part-time evening and Saturday basis. In addition to full-and part-time college-based courses, the college offers foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships to work-based learners. Approximately 235 full-time students, 97 part-time students and 29 work-based learners were enrolled at the time of the inspection.

Achievement and standards

94. Pass and retention rates on the AVCE leisure and recreation and travel and tourism courses are good. In 2003, the pass rate was 92% for the leisure and recreation AVCE and 100% for the travel and tourism AVCE, both significantly above the national average. There are also good pass rates on food preparation and cooking NVQ at level 1 and serving food and drink NVQ level 2. Pass rates

have declined for GCE AS physical education over the last three years. Student attendance is good at 86%, which is well above the national average. Punctuality is poor in a number of lessons and late arrivals cause disruption to the learning of others.

95. Students are generally well prepared for lessons and produce work of a good standard. They work well independently and display a professional attitude. In practical lessons in hospitality and sport, students display a good awareness of health and safety issues. In practical lessons in sport, students effectively demonstrate their understanding of fitness training theory. In hospitality, realistic working environments help students to develop customer service and organisational skills alongside technical skills. In travel, students are able to use the Internet competently to research United Kingdom travel destinations.

96. In work-based learning, completion rates are very poor. There is poor framework completion with no advanced modern apprenticeship achievement and only two foundation modern apprenticeship achievements in the last three years. Discrete key skill provision is available to learners through a drop-in facility, or through joining the day-release provision. This does not adequately meet the needs of the learners due to their work-based shift patterns. Approximately 75% of the learners learn on the job and have no off-the-job component. Progress rates to employment are satisfactory. A minority of learners leave programmes without completing due to moving to a job that is not sympathetic to training. There is little evidence of certification of component parts of a full qualification and most learners who leave the programme without completing the full NVQ qualification leave without any formal vocational qualification.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sport, leisure and tourism between, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	53	46	30
		% retention	89	83	93
		% pass rate	98	74	71
NVQ food preparation and cooking	2	No. of starts	31	15	20
		% retention	48	80	75
		% pass rate	87	92	80
GCE AS physical education	3	No. of starts	*	22	23
		% retention	*	86	83
		% pass rate	*	58	47

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)
* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

97. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. An appropriate range of teaching methods is used in both theory and practical lessons. In the good lessons, there is a wide range of tasks and activities that involves all students. In one lesson, students were encouraged to write answers to some questions on a laminated card and hold it up. This motivated other students who took some delight in comparing their answers. In another good lesson, use was made of case studies to test and reinforce health and safety and additional activities were given to more able students.

98. In practical hospitality lessons, students are encouraged to work independently and to solve operational problems. There is good one-to-one coaching and correcting of technical skills, good collaborative working and due care and attention to health and safety. Students are encouraged to work precisely, but understanding is not always checked or reinforced. Students can not always

relate theory to practice and do not always know how to correct technical difficulties, such as how to ensure adequate lift in a baked chocolate soufflé, or how to correct a split frangipane mixture.

99. Many of the satisfactory lessons lacked pace and did not challenge students. They were uninspiring and often too reliant on teacher's input with students taking a predominately passive note-taking role.

100. The planning, design, and delivery of assessment are good. Initial assessment is used to set appropriate targets for students at the start of their course. These targets are regularly reviewed by teachers and students. Regular targets are also set for assessment in realistic working environments. Assessment and internal verification are consistently conducted in accordance with awarding body standards. There is good tutorial support for students with effective target setting for college-based learners. Students are set targets for the achievement of grades within the vocational qualification. The initial assessment of students' needs is good, but there is little evidence to suggest that many students benefit from regular additional support.

101. ILT resources are inadequate for the delivery of the curriculum. There is no computerised billing, reservations or stock control system for the restaurant and no use of ILT in the realistic working environments. Suitable software is in short supply and no CD-ROMs related to the curriculum area are available in the library for students' self-study. Travel students do not have access to central booking systems software or online booking. Too much of the equipment in practical hospitality areas is in need of repair and/or updating. There is a shortage of some specialist equipment in the kitchen. There is a sports hall, gym and dance studio, which provide good facilities for practical sport sessions. Regular use is made of the sports hall, and students also attend the local sports centre for a range of sporting activities and specialist qualifications such as the national pool lifeguard qualification.

Leadership and management

102. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Communication is good and course teams are involved in annual programme reviews and curriculum design. Team meetings are held regularly. Minutes of meetings are not recorded in a format that identifies responsibilities for actions with review dates. Insufficient attention is given to evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on student retention and pass rates. There is a standardised approach to course management including the maintenance of course files. There is a common approach to schemes of work and lesson plans.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

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

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

Strengths

- good retention rates on hair and beauty courses

- effective monitoring of attendance and punctuality

- effective strategies employed to engage employers to promote work-based learning in hairdressing

- good support for learners.

Weaknesses

- physical resources are poor and inhibit learning

- theory lessons lack variety and fail to challenge the learner

- poor achievement of key skills in work- based learning

- insufficient clients for realistic practice and assessment.

Scope of provision

103. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy for both students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. Hairdressing is available at NVQ levels 1 and 2 and beauty therapy at NVQ levels 2 and 3. There is a range of other vocational qualifications including advanced nail techniques, body massage, sports massage, aromatherapy, Indian head massage, manicure, pedicure, waxing and reflexology. Level 2 hairdressing and beauty therapy is offered at various times during the week including Saturday. Courses are accessible to a wide variety of learners including pupils aged 14 to 16 in the hairdressing department. At the time of inspection, there were 259 students age 16 to 18 and 232 adult students enrolled on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. In addition, 29 students were enrolled on modern apprenticeships.

Achievement and standards

104. Overall achievement is satisfactory. Pass rates on NVQ level 3 beauty therapy have improved over the last three years and were well above national averages in 2002/03. Pass rates on other courses have varied over the last three years, being mainly satisfactory. Retention rates are good on most courses. Students' attendance is good at 86%, which is above the national average overall. The standard of work observed in lessons and in students' portfolios is satisfactory. In work-based learning, 75% of foundation modern apprentices achieved their NVQ 2 in hairdressing. However, completion of individual apprenticeship frameworks is unsatisfactory. In 2002/03, only one student achieved the full framework. Pass rates for key skills are poor, and this has been recognised by the college. A new system for key skills was introduced in September 2003, including delivery of some key skills by a vocational specialist. On placement, work-based learners employ good customer service skills and work in a commercially acceptable manner as part of the salon team.

A sample of retention and pass rates hair and beauty, 2001 and 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ hairdressing 1	2	No. of starts	15	30	18

year		% retention	67	80	72
		% pass rate	60	38	92
NVQ beauty therapy 2 year	2	No. of starts	48	57	44
		% retention	50	70	91
		% pass rate	96	93	88
Manicure and pedicure certificate	2	No. of starts	17	27	38
		% retention	88	81	82
		% pass rate	67	91	71
NVQ beauty therapy 1 year	3	No. of starts	16	32	30
		% retention	100	97	100
		% pass rate	75	90	93
Body massage certificate 1 year	3	No. of starts	26	37	30
		% retention	88	100	87
		% pass rate	96	92	77

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

105. Most teaching is satisfactory or good, but more able students are often not challenged because there is insufficient differentiation of the work to meet their needs. In the better lessons, there is a good pace and a range of effective strategies is employed to maintain motivation. For example, in one lesson, the teacher used a model skeleton, herself and the students to demonstrate the movements of joints. This was then effectively consolidated with printed worksheets and diagrams for the students to label. In less effective theory lessons, there is a lack of variety of teaching methods. Students spend too much time listening to the teacher and copying notes from poor quality overhead transparencies. In one theory lesson held in the hairdressing salon, some students could not see the notes on the board. The noise from the practical lesson in the same room was distracting and little learning took place. Overall, there are too few clients for the students to work on.

106. Students receive good pre-course guidance at interview. Their progress is monitored carefully by their personal development tutor. Good use is made of individual learning plans to set realistic targets and motivate individual students. Tutorial support is welcomed and valued by students. Assessments are carefully planned. Students are given clear written and verbal feedback on their practical work. Assessment of practical skills is slow and there are too few clients. Written assignments are marked promptly, but very few students receive detailed feedback to enable improvement. Internal verification lacks consistency. Student portfolios do not effectively show their skills development. They are not presented clearly or consistently referenced. There is no planned work experience for full-time students. Progress reviews for modern apprentices take place regularly and are thorough and effective in monitoring attendance, punctuality and progress. Placement providers are involved in the process and give useful feedback to the student and placement supervisor. There are insufficient qualified assessors in work placements.

107. There is too much dull and inappropriate accommodation for hairdressing and beauty therapy that does not always provide a suitable setting for good teaching, training and learning. Three salons are in need of updating and do not meet commercial standards. In one of the hair salons, there is only one backwash basin, no natural light and the fixtures and fittings are dated. General housekeeping is poor and salons appear neglected and untidy. Two salons are located very close to the dance studio and external noise makes teaching and learning difficult. Most full-time and fractional staff have teaching, assessing and verifying qualifications.

108. The college uses a range of placements to provide varied learning opportunities for work-based learners. These students have good opportunities to use skills learned at college and in the workplace. In one salon, where the client base was mostly elderly, special rates were offered on a variety of services to ensure good experience for the trainee. There are good opportunities for students to study a range of additional qualifications such as Indian head massage and artificial nail techniques. Students receive training in the use of commercially available products and there are opportunities for visits to trade shows.

Leadership and management

109. Leadership and management are satisfactory; communication is good and course teams meet regularly. All staff are involved in producing the annual self-assessment and operational plan. The team has been successful in raising retention rates on most courses. The reviews do not place sufficient emphasis on teaching and learning. Targets are identified, but often do not lead to improvements. The staff work well as a team and are supportive of each other. The college work-based placement officer is effective in coordinating on-the-job and off-the-job training. Employers are kept up to date and are closely involved with the trainees through regular reviews.

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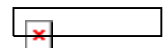
Overall provision in this area is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- very good retention rates on all courses in care

- good pass rates on part-time courses

- good teacher support for individual student learning

- well managed and effective work experience for full-time students.

Weaknesses

- inappropriate guidance of students to level 2 programmes

- inadequate focus on individual students' learning needs in lessons.

Scope of provision

110. Health, social care and early years provision ranges from level 2 to level 3 in health and social care and from level 2 to level 4 in childcare. Foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships are offered in childcare. Part-time provision includes first aid, British sign language courses, foundation and advanced counselling skills, NVQs in early years and childcare and care at levels 2 and 3 and the advanced diploma in childcare and education.

111. In 2003, there are 101 full-time students of whom 96% are aged 16 to 18. Of 281 part-time students, 142 are on NVQ programmes and the majority of these are enrolled on early years childcare and education. There are 14 foundation modern apprentices. In 2002, the department introduced a vocational GCSE course in health and social care for pupils aged 14 to 16 from four of the local secondary schools. There are 30 students on this course.

Achievement and standards

112. Retention rates are well above national averages for courses in health and care. On full-time courses in childcare, retention rates have been high in recent years reaching 100% on the diploma in childcare and education. Retention rates on NVQ 3 early years care and education have improved significantly over the last three years and in 2002/03 was 45% above national average. Retention rates are very good on NVQs in childcare and care.

113. There are good pass rates on most part-time courses particularly on the advanced certificate in counselling skills. There have been delays in the assessment of NVQs in care and the college has recently appointed additional assessors for care and childcare programmes. Standards of attainment observed in lessons and in students' work and portfolios are generally satisfactory. However, the standard of work sampled from students with low entry qualifications was too low. Assessment is thoroughly planned and students have clear information regarding deadlines for submission of assignments. The department has a methodical system for monitoring student progress from initial enquiry through to final action plans for progression. All full-time students on childcare courses have individual learning plans.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, social care and public services, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Certificate in childcare and education 1 year	2	No. of starts	25	19	15
		% retention	80	89	93
		% pass rate	90	100	79
NVQ care 2 year	3	No. of starts	22	17	**
		% retention	95	47	**
		% pass rate	33	100	**
NVQ early years care and education 2 year	3	No. of starts	**	25	20
		% retention	**	52	85
		% pass rate	**	46	82
Diploma in childcare and education 2 year	3	No. of starts	15	15	15
		% retention	100	87	100
		% pass rate	80	77	80
National diploma in	3	No. of starts	15	**	21

year		% pass rate	93	**	83

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

** fewer than 15 students started the course in this year

Quality of education and training

114. There is much good teaching. In the best lessons, students' progress is effectively monitored and individual help is given to complete action plans. For example, one student in a care lesson identified and discussed examples of suitable evidence obtained from his place of work. He planned an assignment on how to assist clients eating their meals, whilst maintaining their dignity. In another lesson, a student made progress in the understanding of mathematical concepts through preparing activities to help children develop mathematical concepts. Teachers are suitably qualified and draw upon their practical experience in schools and nurseries when planning lessons. In one lesson, students made resources to use with children on work placements. One student made a box containing a range of objects for children to use for sensory exploration through touch and sound. The teacher skilfully helped students identify ways to develop children's senses and ways that it could also be related to developing literacy skills.

115. Teaching is less effective in whole class activities. Students' individual learning needs are not systematically addressed. Lessons are planned to include a variety of tasks, but these are not systematically linked to the needs of particular students. In a few lessons, students are bored because they are insufficiently challenged whilst in others students find the level of work too demanding. In observations and sampling of students' work, some students struggled to meet level 2 standards. Students with entry qualifications appropriate for level 1 courses are inappropriately guided to level 2 work. Students are screened to assess their learning needs on entry to college, but this information is slow to reach the curriculum teams. Teachers are in the early stages of using this information to plan lessons.

116. In work-based learning, there is good one-to-one planning for assessment of activity. Students are effectively supported by the assessor. Attainment is satisfactory for the level of qualification studied. Work-based learners are well taught in college-based key skills sessions. For example, in an ICT lesson, learners designed a poster to promote their nursery to parents. They used cutting and pasting of images from the Internet to complete their poster. In numeracy, students constructed a line graph accurately depicting patients' temperatures taken at specific times. Key skills are taught effectively on full-time courses. Specialist tutors plan vocationally relevant assignments after consultation with subject teachers. In one key skills lesson, students prepared job adverts for childcare positions and then worked in pairs to role play telephoning an employer in response to one of the adverts.

117. Students are well supported at all stages of their programmes. There are regular tutorial sessions during which preparation for work placement, target setting, key skills and personal issues are covered as part of a planned scheme of work. Students on NVQ programmes receive good tutorial support. Tutorials are effectively used to negotiate actions and monitor progress. Students who fall behind schedule are encouraged to do work in manageable sections and set realistic goals. Tutors provide good levels of support for students to complete tutorial review worksheets and action plans. Average GCSE point scores are used by childcare tutors to help students set realistic targets for successful study. There is effective monitoring of attendance. Absences are promptly followed up by phone. Attendance in health and care is good at 85% and above the national average of 78%.

118. Students' work placements are effectively organised. There is good contact between tutor and work placement staff. Placements are carefully scrutinised and clear guidance is provided for placement. Students are prepared for work placement in tutorials and practical lessons. Students prepare resources to use with children and make appropriate links between the theory and practice of childcare. Supervisors' assessment in the workplace is followed up with student reflection and analysis on what was learned and what the student needs to do to improve. Employers' and parents' comments recognise the quality of work placement arrangements and the benefit to student

learning.

119. Some classrooms are too small and inhibit learning opportunities for students. Specialist equipment for childcare courses is available, but poorly maintained. Students' learning is restricted by the lack of practical equipment for care courses. Staff are suitably qualified for the courses they teach, but a significant number have had no recent and relevant professional updating. The library stock is satisfactory, but many books are old.

Leadership and management

120. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Team meetings at course and departmental level focus on issues of raising achievement and supporting all learners. There is satisfactory progress in addressing weaknesses, but development plans do not look in sufficient detail at monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. Self-assessment is satisfactory, but actions to address identified weakness have yet to be implemented. For example, there is an identified lack of provision at level 1 and low entry qualifications of school leavers to full-time programmes. Teachers cover topics that address equality of opportunity, but diversity is not openly celebrated as part of the learning environment. Staff teams communicate effectively at course team level.

Visual and performing arts and media

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

Contributory grade for journalism is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- high-quality, industry-standard practical work on post-graduate journalism

- very good teaching in journalism

- very good pass rate on national diploma graphic design

- good specialist accommodation and resources for journalism

- comprehensive range of courses at all levels with good progression

- effective links with schools and industry.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory pass rates in GCE AS and A2 drama, art and music

- low retention rate on GNVQ intermediate art and design

- inconsistent quality in the written feedback to full-time students aged 16 to 18 to secure improvement

- unsatisfactory punctuality and attendance by full-time students aged 16 to 18.

Scope of provision

121. Approximately 800 students study on a comprehensive range of courses at all levels in visual and performing arts and media. The majority are full-time students aged 16 to 18. There is good progression from level 2 to level 3 courses within the college. National diplomas are offered in multi-media, graphic design, fine art, dance, popular music and performing arts. GCE AS and A2 courses are available in music, dance, drama, art, media studies and photography. Advanced subsidiary courses are provided in film studies, graphic design and music technology. First diplomas are offered in design and performing arts with the GNVQ intermediate qualification in media. There is a foundation GNVQ in art and design. The college has a wide range of full-time and part-time specialist and short vocational courses including post-graduate journalism: newspapers and magazines, the foundation diploma in art and design, and home interior design. The majority of students attending these courses are aged 19 or older.

Achievement and standards

122. Retention and pass rates are inconsistent across the majority of courses in visual and performing arts and media. Retention rates on the first diploma in performing arts were above the national average in 2000/01 and 2001/02. GCE AS photography has had retention levels consistently below national average, but achieved a 100% pass rate in 2001/02 and 2002/03 with 58% of students achieving high grades. There are unsatisfactory pass rates on GCE AS and A2 drama, music and art courses. The majority of students achieved an actual grade significantly below the grade predicted by their GCSE grade. In GCE AS drama, good practical grades fell as a result of poor theory grades to result in a low overall grade. There are low retention rates in GNVQ intermediate art and design. Retention and pass rates are consistently good on the national diploma in graphic design.

123. Over the past three years, retention rates on the post-graduate journalism course have been outstanding. Students are highly motivated and produce high-quality practical work which matches the requirements of the industry.

124. Students' practical work across all courses is good. In the best lessons the professional expectations of the industry are applied creating a culture of discipline and high standards. In a national diploma dance class, all students wore the `uniform' black leotards and tights, tied back their hair and removed all jewellery. The students quickly learnt the new moves of the jazz routine they were working on and applied the corrections they were given. However, many lessons for students aged 16 to 18 were affected by poor attendance and punctuality. This is of particular significance for practical work which depends upon high levels of student commitment. No lessons on the first diploma in performing arts had had full attendance since the beginning of term. This had a negative impact on learning in a musical theatre class where students had members of their group missing for the assessment.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
National diploma in graphic design	3	No. of starts	24	22	18
		% retention	75	73	94
		% pass rate	94	100	100
Post-graduate journalism: magazines*	4	No. of starts	*	*	*
		% retention	*	*	*
		% pass rate	*	*	*
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	19	26	**
		% retention	84	65	**
		% pass rate	81	53	**
GNVQ intermediate media: communications and production	2	No. of starts	16	20	16
		% retention	50	75	81
		% pass rate	100	87	77
First diploma in performing arts	2	No. of starts	19	16	**
		% retention	79	75	**
		% pass rate	87	100	**
GCE AS art	3	No. of starts	32	36	31
		% retention	94	78	87
		% pass rate	77	68	37
GCE A-level art and design (including photography)	3	No. of starts	20	19	15
		% retention	55	100	100
		% pass rate	64	95	87
GCE AS photography	3	No. of starts	44	28	27
		% retention	70	64	70
		% pass rate	84	100	100
GCE AS media	3	No. of starts	32	37	37
		% retention	88	81	78
		% pass rate	86	80	97
Post-graduate journalism: magazines	4	No. of starts	28	54	46
		% retention	100	98	100
		% pass rate	96	70	100

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)
*** fewer than 15 students enrolled*

Quality of education and training

125. Teaching on the journalism courses is very good. For example, in one outstanding lesson, the teacher made very effective use of two different magazine articles about the actress, Lynn Redgrave. Skilful questioning drew some highly perceptive observations from the students which led to a clear identification of characteristics of good and bad feature writing. The journalistic experience

of the tutor made the discussion purposeful and allowed for a wide range of views voiced by this diverse group of students. In another class, the teacher's experience and skills gave confidence and motivation when students were required to produce and manipulate digital images. The teacher effectively managed the lesson so that by continually exchanging roles, there was no queuing for equipment and all students developed skills in use of digital photography. Teaching on all other courses is satisfactory or better. The best lessons are well planned with high levels of individual support for students. In a City and Guilds interior design lesson, all the students completed their first-scale drawing from a site survey plan. The teacher broke the activity down into manageable sections and individually supported the students to achieve the high levels of accuracy required. In less successful lessons, planning is inadequate with no indication of what the `tasks' might be. Questions are not used effectively to check or extend the students' understanding and large sections of work are not broken down into manageable sections.

126. In all classes observed, teachers had a very good rapport with students. Students value both the academic and pastoral support and guidance they are given. Opportunities to attend workshops, theatre visits, museums and art galleries enhance their experience of their subject and extend their knowledge.

127. There is inconsistent quality in the feedback given to students on assessed work. Teachers on the post-graduate journalism course give very specific feedback, with helpful and supportive comments which clearly identify areas for improvement. The feedback is valued by the students and results in action leading to improvement. In the best examples, assignments provide a clear rationale with a date for submission. Teachers' comments on the assessment decision are recorded on a feedback sheet along with the date of the assessment. Feedback is detailed and helpful, confirming what has been achieved and what needs to be done to improve. In less successful assessments, assignments have minimal feedback from teachers. There is a lack of clear guidance on how the student could improve.

128. There are good specialist accommodation and resources for journalism. All courses have recently moved to a journalism centre which provides students with a distinctive environment in which to work. This has a professional newsroom ethos which is highly valued by the students. The vocational expertise of journalism staff ensures that lessons are vocationally relevant and linked to the industry which students aspire to. Art and design and music courses have a new building which provides high quality, accommodation. However, no new furniture has been purchased recently, and many of the art tables are heavily scarred. Students' work is not displayed on the walls of the classrooms and this detracts from the building being established as a centre for the arts.

129. All curriculum areas have established links with local schools and industry. First diploma performing arts students are currently working on a commission for a local playgroup to perform a musical theatre piece based on nursery rhymes. Second-year national diploma fine art students work in conjunction with local artists and the Harlow Arts partnership on a year-long community arts project to create murals in Harlow's underpasses using recycled materials.

Leadership and management

130. Leadership and management are good. Staff value the direct support they receive from management in their curriculum area. Substantial parts of the curriculum area have undergone recent change. New courses have been successfully introduced and staff relocated. Weaknesses across the area have been identified and much work has been undertaken to address issues and deliver improvements. However, opportunities to share good practice have not been taken. For example, good practice in the quality of feedback given to students has not been shared across all courses.

Humanities

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on GCE AS history and GCE AS and A-level general studies

- good development of students' research and study skills

- detailed feedback on students' written work leading to improvements in learning

- well-planned and effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory pass rates on GCE A-level geography, GCE AS psychology and GCE AS sociology

- low retention rate on GCE AS law

- too much teaching which is inappropriate to the needs of students aged 16 to 18

- unsatisfactory resources for students.

Scope of provision

131. The humanities area offers a wide range of full-time programmes in GCE AS and A level in history, psychology, sociology, geography and general studies. GCE AS is offered in law and government and politics. There are also part-time adult courses in psychology and archaeology. There is an Access to HE programme which includes a social studies option. At the time of inspection, there were 477 subject enrolments in humanities, of which 414 were full time and 63 part time.

Achievement and standards

132. Overall, pass and retention rates are satisfactory, but there is a lack of consistency between individual subjects on GCE AS courses. For example, the retention rate on GCE AS law has declined to below the national average, but in the same period GCE AS history has improved to above national average. In GCE AS history, the pass rate has also improved and was significantly above the national average for 2002/03. In GCE AS general studies, the pass rate has been above the national average for the last three years, rising to 27% above the national average in 2003. However, in GCE AS sociology and psychology, the pass rates for 2003 were significantly below the national average. In 2002/03, GCE A-level psychology, government and politics and economics all

achieved 100% retention rates. In 2002/03, most GCE A-level pass rates were at or above national averages for the college type.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCE AS-level history	3	No. of starts	36	42	48
		% retention	94	83	90
		% pass rate	88	83	93
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	83	64	88
		% retention	75	81	75
		% pass rate	60	75	65
GCE AS sociology	3	No. of starts	56	54	78
		% retention	91	91	76
		% pass rate	86	84	68
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	23	16	15
		% retention	65	100	93
		% pass rate	80	81	79
GCE AS general studies	3	No. of starts	17	53	31
		% retention	100	79	74
		% pass rate	88	71	91
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	18	36	41
		% retention	94	56	63
		% pass rate	47	75	73

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

133. Students successfully develop a wide range of skills. In the best lessons, they are able to analyse source materials and develop wider and more informed views. In a few cases, students have undertaken extra research and can confidently discuss complex topics. In one history lesson, students examined footage relating to the Mississippi freedom movement which led them to explore issues of racism and social justice in the modern world, successfully relating important historical events to their own lives. In a psychology lesson, in groups, students intelligently debated how territories were established and owned. Access course students produce work of a high standard.

134. In a significant number of lessons, teaching is uninspiring. Teaching materials are often poorly produced and used unimaginatively. For example, students are given photocopied pages from books, with no exercises to help them learn. In too many lessons teachers use poor transparencies which students are unable to read. Pair work is often used in lessons, but is poorly managed. Students are given tasks to complete, but when they fail to start work or discuss issues teachers do not intervene and time is wasted. Teachers are aware of students' different abilities but often fail to meet their individual learning needs. In a few lessons, there are no checks on learning and there is insufficient student involvement.

135. The monitoring and assessment of student progress are effective. Homework is set and marked regularly. In many subjects, homework is given after every lesson and returned promptly. Clear guidance on extended reading is provided. Feedback includes extensive suggestions for students on

ways to improve. In some cases, brief examples of model answers are provided and key terminology is clearly explained. Staff consistently check students' progress against assessment feedback. There are well-developed links between subject and group tutors. Individual learning plans are monitored in tutorials and action is taken by subject staff to address weaknesses. Students are aware of their preferred learning styles, but this has not led to improvements in teaching.

136. There are very good external links with local secondary schools and students are well prepared for the transition into FE. For example, key skills are assessed at interview and support needs are identified early. Students receive effective support throughout their courses. There is insufficient subject-based enrichment.

137. The learning resources centre has a large stock of materials that are matched to students' needs, particularly in modern history. Archaeology students communicate quickly and effectively on the virtual learning environment, but other subjects do not use it. Staff produce very few high-quality materials for their courses. Students are referred to websites, but ILT is not used in lessons. Some of the classrooms are too small, which limits possible teaching methods.

Leadership and management

138. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers set a clear direction to staff. However, the impact of strategies to improve teaching and learning is not yet apparent in the classroom. Performance is monitored via appraisal and lesson observations, however, peer observation does not take place. Staff are aware of college objectives. Course teams review teaching and learning, but there is little monitoring of progress against action plans. Overall, communication is effective and staff value the leadership they receive from management in the curriculum area. There is a clear target-setting process which benefits students. Managers have a very good understanding of how to motivate students by this process. There are regular meetings with clear agendas, but subsequent action is not always clear. For example, students' achievements against targets are analysed, but this does not always inform decision making.

English, languages and communications

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on most courses

- much good teaching

- good access to a wide range of courses in English and languages

- effective planning and co-ordination of the curriculum.

Weaknesses

- low pass rate in GCSE English

- poor teaching accommodation in English

- limited access to and use of ILT.

Scope of provision

139. There is good access to a wide range of courses in English and languages. Three languages, French, German and Spanish, are available at GCE A-level for full-time students on the Harlow campus. GCE A-level French is available in the day and evening for part-time students. There are part-time courses in French, Spanish, German and Italian in the day and evening at Harlow and in the evening at the Hockerill Anglo-European College. At the time of the inspection, there were 26 full-time languages students aged 16 to 18 and 600 part-time adults. There are 310 full-time students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on English courses. GCE A-level courses are provided in English language, English literature and English language and literature. At intermediate level, the college offers GCSE English. There are 44 part-time students aged 19+ on GCE AS English language and GCSE English courses. A number of courses operate flexibly to cater for a range of needs. For example, in the day time and evening, there is a level 3 French class. Some students will be working towards a GCE AS, some GCE A2 and some a level 3 Open College Learning (OCN) course. A good range of GCE A-level English courses and GCSE English are available for adults in the day and evening. A similarly good range of enrichment courses for students aged 16 to 18 includes, for example, a creative writing group and a reading club. Students speak positively of the responsiveness of the college.

Achievement and standards

140. Pass rates on most courses are good. On the three GCE A2 English courses, retention rates are good. All were well above the national average in 2003. Retention rates on short courses in French, German, Spanish and Italian in 2003 are outstanding. At entry level, with over 600 enrolments, they were 97% and on level 1 courses with over 300 enrolments retention rates reached 99%. Pass rates in GCE AS French and in all three English GCE AS courses are good; all are above the national average. In GCE A2 English literature and English language and literature, there have been good pass rates for the last three years. In both GCE AS and A2 English language and literature, most students achieve high grades. This was particularly good in 2002 when the figures were 10% above the national average. The college's own data indicate that achievements are better than predicted by GCSE results alone. However, in 2003, pass rates in GCE A-level English language fell to 82%; well below the national average. There are good levels of achievement on short languages courses, with pass rates in excess of 76% at level 1. Pass rates in GCSE English are low; in 2003, only 25% of students achieved a grade C or above compared to 50% nationally. This has declined from 35% in 2002. Retention rates have been poor on this course for the last two years.

141. Students taking GCE AS English language and English language and literature quickly develop a sound grasp of many technical aspects of language. They are confident in analysing texts and transcripts. In one GCE AS class, students enjoyed analysing features of the speech of a Gloucestershire woman, picking out features of accent and dialect. Adult students on part-time languages courses are confident speakers in the language, and on beginners courses are quickly able to use sustained dialogues. In many English classes for students aged 16 to 18, there is a minority of students who are unable to maintain concentration. Sometimes this disrupts the learning of others.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, languages and communications, 2001 to

2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Languages short courses	entry	No. of starts	94	375	669
		% retention	97	88	97
		% pass rate	31	47	70
Languages short courses	1	No. of starts	*	25	344
		% retention	*	61	99
		% pass rate	*	72	76
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	172	192	152
		% retention	81	67	67
		% pass rate	56	35	25
GCE AS English language and literature	3	No. of starts	20	39	59
		% retention	80	87	76
		% pass rate	94	97	93
GCE AS English literature	3	No. of starts	27	35	25
		% retention	89	100	80
		% pass rate	92	77	90
GCE AS English language	3	No. of starts	52	25	35
		% retention	83	76	80
		% pass rate	91	68	89
GCE AS French	3	No. of starts	25	32	25
		% retention	72	53	76
		% pass rate	44	65	74
GCE A2 English language and literature	3	No. of starts	58	**	28
		% retention	62	**	96
		% pass rate	94	**	93
GCE A2 English literature	3	No. of starts	44	23	19
		% retention	57	96	95
		% pass rate	92	95	94

Source: ISR (2001 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run
** fewer than 15 students started the course in this year

Quality of education and training

142. Overall, teaching is good. In most lessons, there is confident and lively delivery by teachers who convey an enthusiasm for their subject. Many lessons are well structured with a series of activities that engage student interest and motivation. In most languages lessons, teachers move effectively through short learning activities. There is a good balance between consolidating and practicing previous learning and introducing new grammar and vocabulary. The target language is used extensively in the majority of language lessons and all provide good opportunities for students

to practice speaking. Pair work is used effectively in languages to enable students to engage in dialogues in the target language.

143. Teachers work hard to cater for the differing levels of skills of adult students. Part-time GCE A-level French students worked as a whole class in the first part of their lesson. Then, the more confident students undertook a challenging listening comprehension in the language laboratory. Others worked with the teacher to look again at a point of grammar. There is a strong emphasis on preparing students for the requirements of the examination in English. Teachers provide very good guidance on assessed tasks. In a GCE AS English language lesson, the teacher and students together analysed the linguistic features of an extract from a novel. By skilfully using overhead transparencies and coloured pens, the teacher helped the students to see the method they should use in their own work. Teachers take every opportunity to help individuals and place importance on building the confidence of students. In the best English lessons teachers demonstrate good management of discussion and close, supportive supervision of class work involving all students.

144. In a minority of English lessons, there is overlong teacher discourse or teacher-led question and answer. Students are unable to maintain interest in some lessons and important activities remain unfinished. There is very little group work to allow students to work together collaboratively in a sustained way.

145. Arrangements for the assessment of student work are good. In English, close attention is paid to examination assessment objectives. Discussion of the objectives is built into the teaching of the unit and students are helped to work with them as they prepare assignments. Students' work in both English and languages is carefully marked. Feedback is good and supportive, and specific and detailed guidance is provided on how to improve. Coursework is managed effectively, and there are rigorous standardisation and moderation processes.

146. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Many of the languages teachers are native speakers and there are part-time language assistants. Teachers participate in regular and varied staff development. Students in English have high-quality handouts, for example, guidelines on completing tasks. The team is collating resources into helpful booklets and anthologies, particularly in English language and literature. In language, teachers use a wide range of print to enable differentiated teaching.

147. There is poor teaching accommodation in English. Three of the five rooms regularly used are too small for the classes. Learning activities are limited. Several rooms are untidy and cluttered. In two of the rooms, little sense of the subject is conveyed and there is little student work displayed. There is no access to computers or IT equipment in any teaching rooms and little use of ILT in English. No use is made of ILT to support students' private study. In languages, there is no access to computers and no satellite television. Students have limited access to up-to-date current affairs material.

Leadership and management

148. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear commitment to maintaining strong provision in languages. Planning and co-ordination of the curriculum is effective. Schemes of work in English and languages are detailed and thorough. In English, planning is collaborative and resources shared. Co-ordination and supervision of the work of the large team of part-time languages staff is effective. Staff are supported in the planning and delivery of courses and there is a good cycle of meetings and staff development events. For example, at the start of this year, a training event was organised on using the language laboratory. Some of these meetings are poorly attended. The course-level programme reviews are successful in ensuring that all staff are involved in reviewing delivery and looking at retention and pass rates. Each review contains a few specific actions and there is evidence of resulting actions being carried out. Summary programme area reviews are less rigorous with less emphasis on teaching and learning.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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

Strengths

- wide range of courses and good progression

- very good teaching and learning

- good development of students' skills and potential for employment

- effective links with social services, community services and local special needs schools

- good development of students' skills and potential for employment.

Weaknesses

- inadequate specialist resources to meet complex student needs

- inconsistency in effectiveness of target setting for individual students.

Scope of provision

149. The college offers a wide range of courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities from pre-entry and entry 1, 2 and 3 for school-link pupils, young adults and adults. Students can attend part-time and full-time programmes. There are 27 full-time and 3 part-time students aged 16 to 18 and 22 full-time and 111 part-time students aged 19 or older on the courses. College certificates and national qualifications are taken in skills for life, skills for working life, catering and horticulture. Students take the opportunities to progress within this structure as well as to progress to other college vocational courses, supported employment and employment. An adult programme to learn new skills, as well as maintain skills, offers a choice of short courses in creative crafts, cookery, IT and office skills, environmental studies and horticulture, communication skills and performing arts.

Achievement and standards

150. Student achievements are good. There is a wide range of opportunities to develop good communication, team building skills and knowledge related to working life. Achievement is effectively measured against students' individual short and long term goals. Group and individual tutorial reviews are used to record progress. There is much evidence of personal achievements. This includes learning to travel independently and becoming a university graduate. In one recent

example, a student with no qualifications joined the vocational choices course, was set targets for improvement, and is now on a BTEC intermediate diploma course in art. There are good progression routes. Students can progress from pre-entry to entry 1, 2, 3 or NVQ level 1 in a number of vocational areas. BTEC foundation and intermediate awards are also available. Adult students are able to maintain and further develop their skills for employment. Students on skills for working life, work preparation and life skills develop confidence and communication skills which enable them to access further training and progression. It is not possible to complete a table of data due to the nature of recording information and the small numbers on courses.

Quality of education and training

151. There is much good or better teaching and training in entry and pre-entry practical lessons. Students develop new practical skills including using a range of equipment and tools. They learn to use practical numeracy skills of measurement, time and money and build on existing communication and social skills. In practical sessions, students spend time in real working environments and are able to use a range of equipment. Particularly good learning opportunities are provided for horticulture students creating a new garden and working in the campus grounds. Adult students in community arts work alongside national diploma students in very creative drama sessions which enable them to be autonomous and transform learning into a magical exploration. They are developing a short piece of drama and movement to entertain guests at the college's award ceremony. Students on skills for working life, work preparation and life skills develop confidence and communication skills required to access further training and employment.

152. Tutorials are used effectively to engage individuals in the development of their learning plans and students feel that their views are valued and taken into account. However opportunities for improvement are missed when the individual learning plan (ILP) does not detail sufficiently the small educational steps necessary for students.

153. Teaching is slow in a few lessons and teachers do not effectively use the ILP. Many of the less practical lessons lack pace and students are not sufficiently challenged. In these lessons, the teacher fails to engage all of the students in the activity or task and some students become bored with the process after a short time. There is a lack of planning to allow for alternative strategies and activities to stimulate the students and increase the level of interest and participation.

154. Opportunities are missed for teachers to identify achievement in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. There is insufficient integration of literacy and numeracy at pre-entry and entry level. Many practical activities such as cooking, craft work and horticulture provide opportunities for integrating these skills which are not exploited and not used as evidence of achievement for the `Access for all' milestones curriculum. Teaching methods are not sufficiently varied to meet the needs of students with complex learning difficulties. There is little or no reference to students' preferred learning styles.

155. In the best lessons, students are fully involved in activities and tasks set recognise individual learning plans. Practical programmes provide opportunities to develop confidence and skills that equip the individual for progression or provide improved skills for life. Good links with other areas of the college ensure that progression opportunities are provided where appropriate. There are strong links and good liaison with external agencies, social services, community action groups and local feeder special needs schools.

156. Staffing resources for teaching, training and learning are good. There are many well-qualified staff, and all have access to appropriate training. Assessor awards have been upgraded recently. Social services staff accompany adult clients to various craft sessions. A link teacher accompanies a group of pupils from a special needs school to vocational classes. Specialist resources are inadequate and there is insufficient specialist software. Computers and stock do not meet complex student needs.

157. Students learn in real working settings using a range of good resources. Provision is particularly good in the horticulture, cookery and motor vehicle areas. ICT is well resourced in the IT suites and

students are confident in using the range of equipment. Horticulture takes place in a well-resourced site with a garden where there is a greenhouse, as well as the grounds of the college campus.

Leadership and management

158. Leadership and management are good and managers set a clear strategic direction. Provision in the area is well managed. Daily informal meetings and regular team meetings are held. All staff participate in the planning and development of the self-assessment report. Course reviews follow the college quality procedures, and both internal and external verification processes are used to inform course planning and developments. Staff are well qualified and attend relevant staff development activities such as deaf awareness and sign language.

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages

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

Strengths

- wide range of programmes and levels

- much good teaching

- good monitoring of student progress

- effective communication at departmental level.

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of ESOL qualifications

- insufficient resources to support students with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

Scope of provision

159. There is a wide range of programmes and the college has carried out much development work to expand provision. Literacy, numeracy and ESOL classes are offered on a flexible basis and are mainly part time. Courses are provided from pre-entry level to level 2 or equivalent. Courses for more advanced students are offered including preparatory classes for GCSE mathematics or English, key skills in the application of number and communications and advanced ESOL classes. There are 79 enrolments on discrete basic skills programmes. The college also offers courses in community venues. There are 32 students attending the entry-to-employment programme for young adults who may have low levels of literacy and numeracy or are unsure which vocational programme

they wish to follow. Course titles are imaginative. Many of the courses lead to recognised qualifications such as certificates in adult literacy and numeracy, or key skills in the application of number and communications.

160. Entry-to-employment offers an extensive range of options for young people including driving theory, personal and social skills development and a range of vocational options such as retail, early years care and construction to meet educational, social and personal development needs. The college has been successful in working with other organisations within the community to provide literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses.

Achievement and standards

161. Achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications is satisfactory, however, achievement of ESOL qualifications is poor. Achievement of basic ESOL qualifications in 2001/02 was 28% and advanced ESOL was 18%, both considerably below national averages of 55% and 57%, respectively. Action has been undertaken to address this by extending the induction period for ESOL students to emphasise the importance of attendance at all sessions. Progress of ESOL students is now effectively managed. Students produce high-quality work and many of them are making good progress towards their learning goals. It is not possible to complete a table of data due to the nature of recording and the small numbers on course.

Quality of education and training

162. Most teaching is good or better. Teachers are often innovative and effectively maintain the interest of students. For example, in one ESOL class, students were singing and recording simple songs. Students made good progress in reading, listening and pronunciation skills and found the session interesting and fun. Teachers readily adapt their style to the nature of the group. In one class, a reassuring and friendly style ensured that students had sufficient confidence to share problems of low literacy and numeracy. Teaching is well-planned. In a carefully structured entry-level adult numeracy lesson, students were taught counting techniques using coins. They were progressively challenged as the complexity of the tasks increased and built upon previous understanding. This resulted in the development of good counting skills. Good individual support is provided in teaching sessions. In large ESOL classes, however, progress is slow due to the large number of students needing one-to-one support.

163. Monitoring of student progress is good. A comprehensive initial assessment is undertaken by students at all levels. This includes an initial screening of basic skills, literacy and numeracy and preferred learning styles. Reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of ESOL students are assessed effectively. A detailed individual learning plan is produced for each student and most have clear, measurable targets. Progress towards targets is efficiently monitored at the end of each teaching session. Many students progress to higher level courses. There is extensive use of the core curriculum.

164. Most qualifications are externally moderated. Arrangements for internal moderation are effective. Key skills assessment and verification arrangements are satisfactory, and review of key skills evidence against the standards is thorough. A moderation panel meets to review assessment practice and feedback is provided in order to continuously improve provision.

165. Staff are well qualified and most have teaching qualifications. Recent changes have increased staffing levels in the area and increased and widened the expertise of staff available. Resources to support students with low levels of literacy and numeracy are insufficient, being mostly paper-based. There are insufficient practical resources to provide alternative methods of teaching to students at pre-entry level. Access to ILT has improved recently with the addition of a new classroom and computers to enhance learning. Induction of students into learning programmes is thorough and students have a satisfactory understanding of key induction topics including heath and safety, equal opportunities and course content.

Leadership and management

166. Leadership and management are good. Programmes are well-managed and there is a clear strategic direction which is communicated to staff within the team. Communication and team work is good. There is effective day-to-day informal communication and weekly staff meetings including full-time and part-time staff. Meetings are effective in sharing ideas and addressing operational issues which may arise at short notice. The manager does not have a teaching timetable and is able to respond quickly throughout the day to queries that staff and students may have. There is a recognition of the importance of regular staff updating. Relevant and regular staff development events are well attended. The poor achievement of ESOL qualifications features regularly at staff meetings where performance and actions are discussed and agreed. Pass rates have improved in 2002/03. Staff contribute effectively to the self-assessment report.

Part D: College data
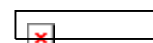
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	31	28
2	41	19
3	22	9
4/5	0	3
Other	6	41
Total	100	100
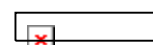
Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	1,027	222	6
Land-based provision	49	247	1
Construction	189	375	3
Engineering, technology and manufacture	158	173	2
Business administration, management and professional	197	244	2
Information and communication technology	884	1,588	12
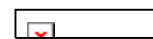
Retailing, customer service and transportation	6	15	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	604	165	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	303	435	4
Health, social care and public services	602	170	4
Visual and performing arts and media	418	642	5
Humanities	2,176	268	12
English, languages and communication	1,184	1,678	14
Foundation programmes	2,270	474	13
Unknown area of learning	991	2,664	18
Total	**11,058**	**9,360**	**100**

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	465	333	450	1,165	1372	1465
	Retention rate	85	82	83	88	86	83
	National average	76	75	76	73	69	70
	Pass rate	71	66	65	61	57	74
	National average	65	69	71	66	68	71
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,247	949	1,017	1,533	1,023	1,176
	Retention rate	81	80	75	70	80	73
	National average	72	71	72	70	68	68
	Pass rate	67	71	71	44	60	69
	National average	67	69	71	64	68	72
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,478	1,878	1,841	674	728	489
	Retention rate	69	70	81	72	76	71
	National average	67	71	77	69	68	70
	Pass rate	70	77	79	59	64	76

	National average	75	77	79	66	69	72
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	*	261	146	176
	Retention rate	*	*	*	75	83	91
	National average	66	73	71	67	67	67
	Pass rate	*	*	*	55	85	51
	National average	65	54	53	58	55	56

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

Sources of information:

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

2. College rates for 2000 to 2002: College ISR.

*numbers too low to provide a valid calculation

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)	46	48	6	107
Level 2 (intermediate)	59	34	7	83
Level 1 (foundation)	53	33	14	21
Other sessions	76	24	0	42
Totals	**56**	**38**	**6**	**253**

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