



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Blackburn College

CONTENTS

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[How well are students and trainees guided and supported?](#)

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

[Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

[Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Science and mathematics](#)

[Construction](#)

[Engineering](#)

[Business](#)

[Information and communications technology](#)

[Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel](#)

[Hairdressing and beauty therapy](#)

[Health and social care, early years and public services](#)

[Performing arts and media](#)

[Visual arts](#)

[Humanities](#)

[English and modern foreign languages](#)

[English for speakers of other languages](#)

[Literacy and numeracy](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03](#)

[Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03](#)

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Name of college:	Blackburn College
Type of college:	General further education / tertiary
Principal:	Sheena Ewing
Address of college:	Feilden Street Blackburn Lancashire BB2 1LH
Telephone number:	01254 55144
Fax number:	01254 682700
Chair of governors:	Derek Hall
Unique reference number:	130736
Name of reporting inspector:	Jan Bennett HMI
Dates of inspection:	19-30 January 2004

Part A: Summary

- good initial assessment
- wide range of courses
- strong partnerships and responsiveness to the community
- good provision for students aged 14 to 16
- effective in meeting the needs of disadvantaged students
- widening participation and social and educational inclusion
- effective induction for students
- good support for students
- successful implementation of equal opportunities.

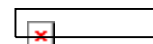
What should be improved

- key skills achievement
- challenge for more able students
- the use of ICT in teaching and learning in some curriculum areas
- individual action planning for students in most curriculum areas

- the consistency of the application of the quality assurance systems
- sharing of good practice across the college.

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

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas



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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Good. There are high retention and pass rates on most courses. Teaching is generally good but more able students are sometimes insufficiently challenged. There is good subject support and students' progress is carefully monitored, but individual action planning and target setting are weak. There is very effective leadership of subject teams.
Construction	Satisfactory. There are high retention rates on most courses but pass rates on level 1 courses are low. Teaching is good and the resources are of a very high standard. Support for students is very good but there are weaknesses in both the assessment and the monitoring of students' progress. On work-based learning courses, retention and pass rates are generally satisfactory but the co-ordination of training is weak.
Engineering	Satisfactory. Work-based learning contributory grade: unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and ICT is used very effectively. The new curriculum is well planned and there are good progression routes. There is very good support for individual students. The organisation of work-based learning is weak and learners are making slow progress.
Business	Good. Retention rates are high on many courses and pass rates are high on most full-time courses. Teaching is good but the more able students are not always challenged sufficiently. There is very good support for students and the range of provision is good, with clear progression routes. the quality of the written feedback given to students is variable and it is inadequate on a few courses.
Information and communications technology	Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: satisfactory. Retention and pass rates are high on courses for students aged 16 to 18, but they are low on courses for adults at level 1. Teaching is good

	and there is effective support for students with additional learning needs. The range of courses on offer is excellent. Courses for adult students are well planned and very carefully monitored.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Satisfactory. Work-based learning for hospitality, contributory grade: unsatisfactory. Retention rates are high on many courses and pass rates are satisfactory overall, but they are very low on the national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 bakery and NVQ level 1 food preparation courses. There is very effective development of students' confidence and general employability skills. The development of key skills is good in hospitality and sports. In work-based learning, retention rates are low and few students complete the framework.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Outstanding. Work-based learning contributory grade: good. Retention and pass rates are very high on most courses. Teaching is outstanding and the use of ICT is extremely effective in both teaching and learning. There is excellent pastoral and vocational support for students. The management of the area is outstanding and the organisation of work-based learning is good.
Health and social care, early years and public services	Good. Early years contributory grade: outstanding. Work-based learning contributory grade: outstanding. Retention and pass rates are high on most courses and there is much teaching that is good or better. Resources are good and are used very effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Teaching and support for students are outstanding in early years. The co-ordination of work-based learning is excellent.
Performing arts and media	Good. Retention and pass rates are high on many courses, but few high grades are achieved on a minority of courses. Teaching is good and teachers are well qualified. Key skills are not fully integrated into the curriculum and there is a lack of challenge for the more able students in a number of lessons. Support and guidance for students are excellent.
Visual arts	Good. There are high pass rates on most courses. Practical work is of a high standard especially, in fine arts subjects. Teaching is very effective on vocational courses and on courses for adults. Resources are good.
Humanities	Good. Retention and pass rates are good for most courses, but there are few high grades overall. Teaching is good and students' progress is carefully monitored. Resources are very good. Guidance and support for students are very effective.
English and modern foreign languages	Good. Achievement is good and there is much good teaching. The range of provision is wide and is responsive to local need. There are limited opportunities for the use of ICT in teaching and limited learning experiences for students in small foreign language groups. Leadership and management are effective.
English for speakers of other languages	Satisfactory. There is limited progression to mainstream courses and few students are working towards external accreditation. Teaching is closely matched to the learning needs of the students and develops all four language skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The provision is well resourced and there is good support for students. Assessment is weak on non-accredited courses.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. There are high retention and progression rates but there is some unsatisfactory teaching and learning. Resources are good and are used effectively. Initial assessment is very good and students are very well supported. Lack of punctuality by a minority of students is allowed to affect the learning of others.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are good. The principal and the senior managers provide strong leadership. The management of the curriculum is good overall and it is very good in some areas. A range of partnerships effectively supports strategies to widen participation, for both young people aged 14 to 18 and adults. There is a high standard of governance. Governors are representative of the college's stakeholders and are appropriately involved in determining the character, mission and strategy of the college. Equality of opportunity is embedded in the college's culture and its practices. College recruitment from minority ethnic groups is significantly higher than the proportion in the community. The college's response to recent legislation on race relations, special educational needs and disability is good. The self-assessment process, which is a core component of the quality assurance system, is not applied with equal rigour in all curriculum areas, and the teacher observation programme is not fully effective. The management information system is good and informs corporate and curriculum decision making. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

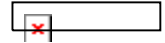
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college continues to attract a growing number of students who are traditionally under-represented in FE. There is very good liaison with local schools, employers, voluntary organisations and social and public services. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is greater than in the local community. Significant numbers of students are recruited from socially and economically deprived areas. The proportion of students from those postcode areas with the highest indices of social deprivation has risen from 31% to 37% in the last three years. Staff are successful in raising the aspirations of the students and in developing their personal, social and employability skills. The college has made good progress in fulfilling its duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. It has a comprehensive, coherent equality and diversity policy and action plan. There is rigorous analysis of students' performance data by gender, ethnicity and age at both curriculum and college levels. The performance of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also analysed. Action is taken to address any issues that are identified. Most students are aware of the college's equal opportunities and race equality policies, although action taken to promote equality is uneven. The college is improving its accommodation with regard to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) criteria. Access for people with restricted mobility is good at most centres and there is a clear action plan for full compliance. There is an effective and inclusive programme for supporting students in the college and at community learning centres. Fresh start courses have been introduced to encourage students with low levels of literacy and numeracy skills to join introductory courses in vocational areas. There is a wide range of literacy, numeracy and language courses offered at venues across the borough. Support for students with learning disabilities is outstanding.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

receive effective pre-entry guidance and a very good induction to the college. Initial assessment is effective in identifying individual support requirements and learning support is excellent. The college's support services work actively to engage and inform the parents of students aged 16 to 18. There is evidence of much good practice in tutorials but the quality of group tutorial sessions varies across the college. Welfare and support services are comprehensive and link successfully with other external support services. Careers and progression guidance for students are good.

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

- supportive and understanding tutors

- support and guidance available

- central location of the college

- induction

- flexible range of courses

- opportunities to access additional courses

- inclusiveness

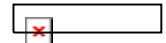
- students' views taken seriously

- library facilities.

What they feel could be improved

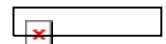
- availability and cost of parking in Blackburn
- organisation of key skills
- social spaces
- timetabling.

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 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

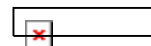


Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	71	26	3
19+ and WBL*	74	21	5
Learning 16-18	63	34	3
19+ and WBL*	69	26	5

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. In 2002/03, around 3,000 students aged 16 to 18 and nearly 700 adults were studying on full-time programmes and there were around 17,500 adults on part-time courses at the college.

16 to 18 year olds

2. Retention rates have been above the national average for the past three years on most courses for students aged 16 to 18.

3. Pass rates on courses at level 1 were below the national average in 2000/01 and 2001/02, but improved significantly in 2002/03 to around the national average. There has also been a marked improvement at level 2, where pass rates were around the national average in 2000/01 and 2001/02 but were above the national average in 2002/03. Pass rates on GCSE courses are good. The college runs a successful full-time GCSE re-sit course which enables students to take four or five GCSEs plus an advanced subsidiary level (AS-level) subject where appropriate. In 2002/03, the proportion of passes at grades A* to C was above the national average for eight out of the nine subjects offered and one-quarter of the students on the course gained five GCSE passes at grades A* to C.

4. Pass rates at level 3 have been around or above the national average for the last three years. Value added analysis shows that in 2000/01 and 2001/02, students on AS-level and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A-level) courses were achieving higher grades than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. In 2002/03, however, students achieved lower grades than predicted overall, but there were notable differences between subjects. Students on AS level and GCE A-level media courses, for example, achieved significantly higher grades than their GCSE results suggested, whereas students on AS-level and GCE A-level psychology courses achieved significantly lower grades.

5. The college is attracting an increasing number of students aged 16 to 18 from minority ethnic backgrounds and from widening participation postcodes. Between 2001/02 and 2002/03, there was a 36% increase in the number of students aged 16 to 18 from minority ethnic backgrounds and a 30% increase in those from widening participation postcodes. Analysis of college achievement data for 2002/03 shows that the retention rate for students from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly higher than that of other students but pass rates for both male and female students from minority ethnic backgrounds are slightly lower than those of other students.

Adult learners

6. Retention rates have been high on most courses for adult students for the last three years.

7. Pass rates on courses at level 1 were below the national average in 2000/01 and 2001/02 but have improved in 2002/03 to around the national average. The pass rate at level 2 has been below the national average for the last two years, and although it improved by 7% in 2002/03, it was still below the national average. Pass rates on GCSE courses are high overall. At level 3, pass rates have been around or above the national average for the last three years.

8. An analysis of college achievement data shows that the retention rate for adult students from minority ethnic backgrounds is significantly lower than for other adult learners. In 2002/03, the retention rate for female adult students from minority ethnic backgrounds was 82% compared with 91% for other female adult students. The corresponding figures for male adult students are 74% and 95%, respectively. In 2002/03, pass rates for female adult students from minority ethnic backgrounds were the same as those for other female students but the pass rates for male adult students were significantly below those of other students.

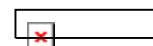
9. The college has almost 300 work-based learners, of whom around 65 are advanced modern apprentices, 130 are foundation modern apprentices, over 70 are on work-based learning courses for adults and 25 are on a course leading to an NVQ. The majority of work-based learners are on courses in early years, hairdressing and beauty therapy and ICT, where retention rates are high and a large proportion of learners complete the full qualification. Work-based learners in early years are the first in the country to achieve the technical certificate on part 2 of the framework, with a high pass rate of 67%. In leisure and hospitality, retention rates are low and very few learners complete the full framework, although many achieve an NVQ qualification. Retention and pass rates in construction are satisfactory.

10. Retention rates on key skills courses are high but the pass rates are generally around national averages. Pass rates on level 1 and level 2 courses are significantly above the national average. At level 3, many students either pass the test or complete the portfolio but few complete both. In general, students on AS level and GCE A-level courses are able to pass the tests, but many do not complete a portfolio and students on vocational courses at level 3 complete a portfolio but are unable to pass the test.

11. The attendance rate during inspection week was 76%, which is around the national average. There were a number of external examinations taking place during the week which reduced the attendance at lessons. Attendance was highest, at over 80%, in ICT and hairdressing and beauty therapy. Punctuality is satisfactory overall, but on literacy and numeracy courses the start of lessons is often delayed because students arrive late.

12. The standard of students' work is high. Students on media, performing arts, bakery, beauty therapy and hairdressing courses have won awards in regional competitions. In visual arts, students on advanced level vocational courses produce high-quality work at each stage of the design process. Science students work very productively, taking pride in their work, and they have well-organised folders. The standard of practical work is very high in a number of areas of learning, including early years, where the level of practical skills is outstanding. Hairdressing and beauty therapy students demonstrate very good practical skills that are enhanced by attendance at competitions and external training events. In humanities, the quality of the discussion in lessons is particularly good.

Quality of education and training



13. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 262 sessions. Inspectors judged that teaching was good or better in 72% of lessons, satisfactory in 24% and less than satisfactory in 4%. This profile is significantly better than the average for general FE colleges inspected in 2002/03. Teaching was most effective in hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care, early years and public services, and ICT. Teaching was least effective in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel and literacy and numeracy.

14. Teaching is slightly better in lessons primarily involving adult students. Some 75% of these lessons were good or better, compared with 71% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. Teaching tends to be better on level 3 courses, with 76% being good or better, compared with 72% at level 2 and just over 61% on level 1 courses. Outstanding teaching was observed at all levels and was seen

in almost 5% of lessons. There were less than 4% of unsatisfactory lessons, and these occurred at all levels. Just over half of these affected adult students and just under half were on level 3 courses.

15. The more effective lessons are well planned to address the needs of students who work at different rates and learn in different ways. Learning styles are assessed at induction, and the best lessons provide a mix of learning stimuli to reflect this. Students are encouraged to develop their ideas and thinking skills through careful and sensitive use of open questions. Where learning is checked by way of games and quizzes, it is particularly effective. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, realistic work environments develop good workplace skills. Key skills are well integrated in several areas. The most successful work-based learning experiences are carefully planned to ensure that students' learning in the workplace and at college support and complement each other.

16. There are several strategies to give further work to students who want it; for example, entry to competitions. However, inspectors commented on insufficient challenge to raise students' expectations in some classes in half of the areas inspected. Teachers too often dominate in classes, to the exclusion of students' involvement in learning. In the least successful of these, teachers were observed answering their own questions. A minority of classes had a low number of students, which limited their interaction and learning.

17. Learning is generally satisfactory or better, and learning experiences for adults are usually better than those for the students aged 16 to 18 or work-based learners. In a significant number of areas, all learning is good or better for adult students. Learning is at least satisfactory on foundation programmes but it is below the national average for the type of course. In this area, teachers make insufficient checks on students' learning.

18. Teachers are well qualified, with most having appropriate vocational and teaching qualifications. The college offers a very successful programme of staff training. Teachers without a teaching qualification are able to access training through the college's school of teacher education. The college has a policy of offering all its courses free to staff, and support staff often progress from leisure classes to those which increase their job skills. A significant number have progressed to courses at levels 3 and 4. For example, a senior member of the estates team has recently obtained a degree in construction, and staff on the information technology (IT) support and development team have recently been awarded higher national certificates in computer studies. The college has appointed 20 advanced practitioners who are working with other teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. They are working with staff to integrate key skills into the curriculum so that students find the skills relevant and they are promoting and supporting the development of innovative teaching and learning strategies using information and learning technology (ILT).

19. Students have access to good specialist equipment, much of which meets current industrial standards. The new construction building provides a light, spacious and welcoming environment for students. Many teaching rooms are enlivened by wall displays of students' work and relevant posters. The East Lancashire Centre of Excellence has specialist equipment for bespoke courses, including gas training. Although this facility is used mainly for the college's commercial activity, students from other courses are given the opportunity to use the sophisticated equipment as an incentive and reward for good performance.

20. The college's commitment to widening participation is supported by strategically located out-centres across the borough. For example, the First Step Centre for women is located near the community it serves and provides advice, guidance, childcare and learndirect provision. The centre has a particular focus on women of Asian heritage and provides a good learning environment for many who would not otherwise participate in education. Students have good access to ICT facilities. There are ten drop-in learning centres furnished with computers for the use of students. Six of these are located at the main site and four are at out-centres. The drop-in facilities are available in the day, in the evening and on Saturdays at the main site and at three out-centres. The college has provided the public library with computers linked to the college network so that students can easily access material when they are not in college. There is also a set of wireless computers for use by students in the sixth form centre, and another set for use in the community. Most centres have good access for people with restricted mobility. Wheelchair users have difficulty accessing one building on the main campus. The college is addressing this through a major building programme which will be

completed by September 2004. The new accommodation will meet the requirements of SENDA and will house art, hairdressing and beauty therapy, catering and campus-based English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. The provision of crèche facilities is good. There are crèches at the main site and some out-centres. There is also a mobile crèche which is used in community venues. The library is well resourced, with current and relevant materials including booklets to support specific learning modules. This is especially useful for part-time evening students who use these resources to catch up if they miss lessons.

21. There are good systems in place for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress, but they are working more effectively in some areas than in others. The initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language is thorough and is tailored to match the needs of the students. Appropriate reporting systems are in place for reviewing and monitoring students' progress. Students have an individual progress review interview with their tutor at least three times each year, and reports are sent out to parents and employers twice a year, where appropriate. Individual learning plans are in use, but the quality of action planning and target setting varies. There is good practice in early years and in literacy and numeracy provision. The monitoring of attendance is rigorous. Any unexplained absence is followed up quickly by telephone and employers are kept well informed about attendance. Students' attendance records are available to staff on the intranet and senior tutors analyse attendance reports regularly in order to identify and address any issues.

22. The quality of the feedback given to students varies. In early years and hairdressing and beauty therapy, for example, students are given very detailed feedback and guidance about how they can improve their performance. In some other areas, the amount and quality of the feedback varies between teachers and is sometimes inadequate. Poor spelling and grammar are not always corrected. Internal verification procedures are rigorous and meet examination board requirements.

23. The college offers a wide range of courses and progression routes from entry level to level 3 in nearly all curriculum areas. The college also has its own higher education (HE) provision and offers a range of level 4 courses in a number of areas. Events and programmes are effectively marketed to different student groups using innovative approaches such as text messaging. Work-based learning programmes are offered in seven occupational areas. The college has introduced a successful full-time pre-advanced course, which includes GSCE re-sits that is enabling students to progress and to find employment.

24. The college has very good links with local organisations and employers which ensure that its curriculum meets the needs of local communities. The links with local employers provide effective learning opportunities for vocational students in the workplace. These links are particularly successful in hairdressing and beauty therapy and in early years. Effective local partnerships lead to more cohesion and opportunities for new learners at the main college site and across the borough. Liaison with local schools is excellent and the college offers a summer activities programme and applied GCSE courses for gifted and talented students. A joint timetabling initiative with four partner schools has successfully mixed diverse groups of school pupils who are attending vocational taster courses at the college. Over 1,000 pupils from local schools participate in taster programmes and nearly half of them progress to vocational courses at the college.

25. Enrichment is independently co-ordinated and promoted by each of the nine college centres. Full-time students in many areas benefit from good curriculum enrichment activities including visits, guest speakers and competitions. However, there is little college-wide promotion of curriculum enrichment, or monitoring and evaluation of its effectiveness.

26. The college is committed to developing the key skills of all full-time students aged 16 to 18. There is a clear and effective strategy and an identified co-ordinator at each of the nine curriculum centres.

27. The quality of the delivery of key skills varies across the college. There is excellent integration of key skills on both hairdressing and beauty therapy courses and on courses in hospitality. In some other areas, key skills development is slower and less integrated. There is inconsistency in the rigour of internal verification of key skills portfolios and action is being taken to address this.

28. Students' support and guidance are effectively managed and given a high priority by the college. There is a wide range of readily accessible support services which includes financial and welfare advice, counselling and a multi-faith college chaplaincy. The college has good links with local specialist support agencies to provide comprehensive, impartial information about the support services that are available.

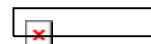
29. Arrangements for providing guidance and assessing the needs of individual students are comprehensive. Students' learning needs are effectively assessed at the start of their course and appropriate learning support is promptly put in place. The learning support team liaise closely with each other and with staff across the college, ensuring that support needs are met. Induction programmes are well organised and are successful in integrating students into the college and their courses.

30. The college works closely with the Connexions service. There is an effective system which allocates a learning mentor to students who have been identified as being 'at risk' of withdrawing from their course. Careers education and guidance are good. Students wanting to enter employment or to further their training are provided with guidance on modern apprenticeships and employment opportunities. Staff provide effective advice on writing personal statements, making applications and attending interviews. Support for students studying in the community is good. Many of the main college community venues have drop-in advice and guidance centres.

31. All full-time and substantial part-time students have weekly group tutorials. Students receive good support and assistance from their tutors outside their timetabled lessons. In many cases, group tutorials are well structured, paying close attention to equal opportunities and covering a comprehensive programme of guidance. However, the quality of tutorials varies across the curriculum. In a significant minority of curriculum areas, tutorials are not well planned or delivered. Tutorial support for part-time students is satisfactory. Tutorials are observed as part of the college's lesson observation programme.

32. Learning support for students is outstanding. The college has no discreet provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and all students access the mainstream curriculum. Support workers and tutors work together very successfully to enable students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to study alongside their peers. This innovative approach to support reflects the colleges' commitment to inclusion. All students have high aspirations and are actively encouraged to achieve their potential. Work with students with hearing and visual impairment is particularly impressive.

Leadership and management



33. Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers provide strong leadership and the standard of governance is high. The college has a clear sense of purpose which is communicated throughout the college.

34. Curriculum management is good and includes strong leadership at both course and curriculum area level. Retention rates are generally high, but pass rates are more variable. Pass rates on courses at level 1, which are an important part of the college's successful widening participation strategy, increased to the national average in 2003. There is wide variation in pass rates for work-based learners but retention and completion rates are high for the majority of learners. There is good progression of full-time and part-time students to higher level courses, both within the college and elsewhere.

35. There are effective partnerships at all levels. A range of successful partnerships is effectively increasing the number of adult students coming from areas of deprivation and low participation. The college works closely with local schools to deliver a very large link-course programme for students

aged 14 to 16, which is much praised by the partner schools and has a high progression rate for students after the age of 16. There are some excellent examples of workforce development in parts of the college, notably in hairdressing and beauty therapy and early years, and at the East Lancashire Centre of Excellence, which houses one of the six British Gas regional training centres and a rapid manufacture prototyping service.

36. There is a high standard of governance and the governors are strongly representative of the college's stakeholders. They provide a wide range of relevant experience. Governors are appropriately involved in determining the character, mission and strategy of the college. The review and determination of strategy is part of a well-planned and documented annual cycle which engages relevant contributors from both the academic and business support areas. A key element of the process is the robust business planning model. Governors use financial and quality performance data to ask challenging questions of the managers. Governors are kept well informed through training activities, contacts with the college and reports by managers. A strong feature is the visits to curriculum areas by governors from the curriculum and quality committee, which enhances their understanding of college issues. Governors have recognised that they need to be aware of any significant decline in academic performance much earlier than they have been in the past. Liaison between governors and college managers is good, and there is substantial governor and stakeholder attendance at college events.

37. Equality of opportunity and diversity are well embedded in the college culture and its practices. There is an effective equal opportunities group which celebrates and promotes diversity. It has led the review and update of the equal opportunities policy and practices. Equality of opportunity issues form part of the tutorial programme and are included in a range of curriculum activities, although these have had little impact in some curriculum areas. There is a wide range of initiatives to increase the cultural and ethnic diversity of the college, including community partnership projects. The college's recruitment of school leavers from minority ethnic groups is increasing and the proportion of minority ethnic students is significantly greater than the proportion in the community. Students' achievements, survey responses and data from disciplinary cases are analysed by gender, ethnicity and age, and appropriate action is taken where necessary. An analysis of the performance of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is carried out, but the college recognises the need for more detailed scrutiny. There is a need to recruit more teachers and other staff of Asian heritage. The college recognises this and is addressing the issue through a funded project in partnership with neighbouring colleges.

38. The college's response to changes in legislation on race relations and special educational needs and disability is good. All required policies were published by due dates. Substantial staff training has taken place and equal opportunities issues are successfully promoted and monitored in most curriculum areas. However, students have little awareness of these issues in two curriculum areas. The college carries out regular audits looking at the accessibility of the accommodation for wheelchair users. When the current building project is completed, 98% of the college's accommodation will be accessible to wheelchair users.

39. The self-assessment process is well documented, but it is not applied with equal rigour in all curriculum areas. Most staff are involved in the process and, in the best areas, management action is very effective in securing improved performance. However, in a significant number of curriculum areas, self-assessment reports contain insufficient evidence or critical analysis. Steps are taken to address poor performance in particular subjects through investigation by senior managers, but this does not extend to broader-scope internal quality reviews, either by curriculum areas or on college-wide issues. There are effective systems in place to monitor franchised provision and to ensure that appropriate action is taken to address any issues identified in external verifier reports. Students' views are sought through a range of questionnaires, on-course feedback and student committees. Inspectors awarded higher grades than were given in the college's self assessment report in four curriculum areas and they awarded one lower grade. Inspectors agreed with the remaining nine grades.

40. The teacher observation programme is not fully effective. The college has identified a need to increase the frequency of observation by moving to an annual cycle. Effective follow-up actions are evident in the best-managed curriculum areas but this is not systematic across the whole college.

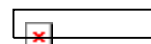
Central systems to identify and address any cross-college issues, identified as a result of the observation programme, are underdeveloped. The profile of the teaching and learning grades awarded by inspectors is good overall but there are key weaknesses in teaching and learning in some curriculum areas. The failure to stretch the more able students is an issue in many lessons. Staff development is well resourced and provides a wide range of opportunities. Sharing of good practice within and between curriculum areas is variable, but the advanced practitioners have made a significant positive impact in many areas.

41. The management information system is good and reliable. It is used effectively to inform corporate and curriculum decision making. Staff can access students' performance data on the college intranet. These data are used well in most curriculum areas to monitor progress and to inform investigation and actions for improvement. The location of data administrators in curriculum areas has given staff ownership of the data and increased their confidence in its reliability.

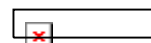
42. Communication throughout the college is good and includes a weekly briefing, the extensive use of email, regular bulletins, staff development days that involve all staff and ample opportunities for staff to contact managers.

43. Financial management is good. A well-developed course and area costing model informs operational and strategic decisions. The financial position is monitored closely by managers and governors. The college has regularly achieved budget surpluses, which have been used to carry out maintenance and to invest in new building projects and equipment. The college is aware of the major financial pressure that it faces in this and future years, and has a timely schedule of appropriate activities for determining the strategic response. Risk and disaster management systems are good and a recent disaster simulation event for staff was effective. The college provides good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses

- good subject support for students

- good curriculum enrichment for AS-level students

- very effective leadership of subject teams.

Weaknesses

- declining pass rates on AS-level courses
- insufficiently challenging teaching
- insufficient use of ICT in biology classes
- poor individual action planning.

Scope of provision

44. There are 202 students on AS-level and GCE A-level courses. There is a wide range of subjects including further mathematics, environmental science and geology. There are over 40 students on the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) science course, and there are 15 students on the general certificate of vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate course. Over 90 students are on the full-time GCSE re-sit programme, which includes GCSE mathematics and science, and a further 80 full-time students are taking a GCSE course in addition to their main programme. Over 100 students are on evening GCSE courses in biology, chemistry, mathematics and human physiology. There are also 64 part-time students on courses leading to open college network (OCN) qualifications.

Achievement and standards

45. Retention and pass rates are above the national average on most courses. Pass rates on AS-level courses fell significantly in 2003, but they remain above national averages. The proportion of students who gain high grades in their examinations, however, is below the national average in most subjects. Value added analysis shows that students on AS-level and GCE A-level courses have achieved higher grades than predicted on the basis of their performance at GCSE for a number of years, but in 2003 they achieved the grades that had been predicted. Pass rates on the AVCE and the GNVQ intermediate courses are high. The proportion of students on GCSE courses obtaining the high grades, A* to C, has been above the national average for the last three years.

46. Students are very well motivated, confident and willing to play a full part in lessons. They work productively and contribute positively towards their learning. For example, students in a GNVQ intermediate science lesson were working on photosynthesis and showed a particularly good recall of the ideas developed in their previous lesson. They progressed to experimental work which was performed with more care and enjoyment than is usual at this level. Students' files are well organised.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	292	239	280
		% retention	70	80	78
		% pass rate	56	49	50
GCSE science double award	2	No. of starts	108	57	63
		% retention	72	61	83
		% pass rate	53	57	48
AS level mathematics	3	No. of starts	122	76	90
		% retention	79	84	88
		% pass rate	67	72	59
AS level biology	3	No. of starts	74	63	84
		% retention	86	84	85
		% pass rate	84	83	73
AS level chemistry	3	No. of starts	60	56	76
		% retention	85	91	92
		% pass rate	92	90	74
GCE A2 mathematics**	3	No. of starts	77	37	42
		% retention	60	97	88
		% pass rate	98	97	86
AVCE double award science	3	No. of starts	*	23	22
		% retention	*	78	73
		% pass rate	*	89	85

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

** two-year GCE A level course in 2001

Quality of education and training

47. Teaching is generally good. In the better lessons, the pace is brisk and the teacher is clearly enthusiastic about the subject. The lessons are carefully planned to include a variety of activities that are well matched to the preferred learning styles of the group. The teacher asks probing questions that stimulate discussion, and takes care to include all students. Questions are skilfully targeted so that the more able students are stretched and challenged and the weaker students are also able to contribute. The main points of discussions are reiterated ensuring that effective consolidation of learning takes place. Any new concepts are related to earlier learning or to the students' previous knowledge and experience. In the weaker lessons, teaching is aimed at students in the middle of the ability range and insufficient attention is paid to ensuring that the more able students have work which challenges them sufficiently. Too many lessons are teacher-centred, with the students remaining passive. There is often insufficient checking that learning is taking place.

48. All teachers operate an open-door policy and students asking for additional help are usually seen immediately. When this is not possible, arrangements are made to see them as soon as possible. For example, four mathematics students who had obtained disappointing results in their mock examination were given extra lessons. Three of them made considerable improvements. High-

quality support materials are available on the college intranet. All subjects have excellent intranet sites, where students can access interactive packages and other information which re-enforces their learning or which can be used if they have been absent. The sites give information about to other useful resources and direct links to Internet sites. Students make much use of his facility. A student explained how it was extremely useful when his teacher was ill and the group was referred to particular resources on the biology site, enabling them to continue their studies.

49. Teachers are well qualified and many have higher degrees. Students receive the same high-quality materials regardless of who teaches them. Mathematics teachers make effective use of ICT in lessons, including a number of very good graphical and statistical packages. ICT is also widely used in physics lessons, where the AS-level and GCE A-level courses have been re-designed to include ICT as a major teaching tool. In one lesson, students' learning was enhanced by a visual illustration of the properties of waves. However, insufficient use is made of computers in biology laboratories. For example, data loggers could be used to enrich students' learning. There are no computers in classrooms and laboratories, but a set of laptops is available to book. Students have good access to computers in the college library. All the classrooms and laboratories are accessible to students with restricted mobility, and low-level work benches are available for wheelchair users.

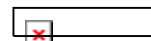
50. On chemistry, physics and mathematics courses, a very successful system is used to encourage students to monitor their own progress. This is done by issuing students with sets of folder dividers. On one side of the divider is the specification of the module plus useful information including references and websites. On the other side students self-assess the current state of their own knowledge and skills using the 'traffic light' system which they understand and find very useful. Satisfactory systems are in place to support students, to track their development against target grades and to report on their progress, but action planning with individual students is underdeveloped. Although personal tutors offer guidance and advice to students who are struggling, structured action plans with short-term and long-term targets are not in general use.

51. There is a good, innovative approach towards curriculum enrichment for AS-level students. In the summer, after their AS level examinations, they choose a course from a wide range of options, each leading to an OCN qualification. Attendance at these courses is good, and students benefit from them. For example, the laboratory techniques option is popular and students gain laboratory experience which is outside their main curriculum. Their GCE A-level work benefits from an enhanced ability in practical work. In some cases, students have become sufficiently interested in the chosen subject to pursue it as an AS-level subject in their second year. Further enhancement comes from longer courses, such as a pre-medical course for students intending to study medicine at university, which leads to qualifications in all three wider key skills.

Leadership and management

52. Leadership and management of the area are good. The subject leaders work closely with each other and collectively they provide strong and coherent leadership. There are weaknesses in the staff appraisal system and many science staff have not been appraised for two years. The grades awarded internally for lesson observations are generous and the failure to challenge more able students has not been identified in the self-assessment report. All staff in the area are sensitive to equal opportunities issues and they have received training in the new race relations legislation and SENDA. Student data are analysed in relation to race and gender and successful action has been taken to address some significant differences in performance which existed before 2001.

Construction



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

Strengths

- high retention rates

- good teaching

- high-quality resources

- very effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on level 1 courses

- poor planning and co-ordination of work-based learning

- weak assessment and monitoring of students' progress.

Scope of provision

53. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time construction courses at levels 1 to 3. They include bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, brickwork, electrical installation and plumbing. Short courses are offered on domestic natural gas core safety. There are 634 students on construction courses. Of these, just over one-quarter are full time and half are adult students. The college manages its own work-based learning programme of 174 students.

Achievement and standards

54. Retention rates are high on all courses and in many cases are significantly above national averages. In particular, retention rates on the British Technology and Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in building studies and on short courses in domestic natural gas core safety are excellent. Pass rates on part-time electrical installation courses and NVQ trowel occupations are low. The pass rates for City and Guilds electrical installation (part 1) are particularly low and have averaged 29% over the last three years. The standard of students' work and progress at the college are generally satisfactory.

55. Retention rates for work-based learning are satisfactory overall. Achievement on work-based learning programmes is generally satisfactory. The standard of students' work on site is good. Companies have a wide range of construction jobs that students can access. These quality tasks enable students to enhance their practical skills to a high level.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ in trowel occupations (construction)	1	No. of starts	15	15	*
		% retention	80	100	*
		% pass rate	67	27	*
City and Guilds electrical installation part 1 (theory)	1	No. of starts	30	54	40
		% retention	91	26	80
		% pass rate	24	29	33
NVQ mechanical engineering services (plumbing)	2	No. of starts	**	27	31
		% retention	**	63	68
		% pass rate	**	6	65
NVQ wood occupations (construction)	2	No. of starts	18	16	*
		% retention	89	94	*
		% pass rate	62	87	*
National diploma in building studies	3	No. of starts	**	19	16
		% retention	**	68	62
		% pass rate	**	91	100
Domestic natural gas core safety (short)	3	No. of starts	194	217	342
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	99	100	99

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* course not offered

** fewer than 15 starters enrolled

Quality of education and training

56. There is much good teaching in both practical and theory sessions. Lesson plans are detailed and lessons are well structured. Most practical lessons are good. Teachers are knowledgeable and they make very effective use of the high-quality resources that are available. Most theory lessons are teacher-led, but teachers use real-life examples which interest and motivate the students. Additional learning needs and support requirements are clearly identified in most of the group profiles. There is little use of effective questioning, either to develop students' understanding or to check learning.

57. Teachers and assessors are well qualified and have appropriate occupational qualifications and experience. Staff development and updating takes place regularly. Most lessons take place in the new, well-equipped technology building. This gives students access to high-quality, up-to-date equipment. Student learning and assessment packs, many of which have been developed by college staff, are of a high standard and are appropriate to the needs of students. Although there is little use of data projectors or electronic whiteboards in lessons, there is good use of overhead projectors and transparencies. The facilities for electrical installation are satisfactory.

58. High-quality work placements enhance students' practical skills. Good employers offer a wide range of tasks for students, ranging from bench joinery to site carpentry and joinery, brickwork and general construction tasks, painting and decorating. There is insufficient planning and co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Training in the workplace is not planned to link with work done in college. Students themselves are helped to identify the requirements of the NVQ and match these to the work available in the workplace, but there is no formal check to determine if an employer

covers the range of tasks that would satisfy the requirements of the NVQ.

59. The monitoring of students' progress is weak. Some individual learning plans are incomplete and some units do not have a planned completion date. Reviews take place regularly, but do not always include specific short-term targets. There is weak assessment practice in the workplace and at college. Qualified assessors do not visit the workplace to carry out observations. On-the-job evidence to meet NVQ requirements is collected in a site diary. Supervisors or employers sign the diary as a witness statement. The range of evidence gained in the workplace is narrow. Written feedback is limited to comments on progress and on what is missing or incorrect. The feedback does not help students to improve work that is satisfactory or better. There is good initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills but vocational aptitude testing is not carried out before students start their electrical installation or construction programmes. For example, potential electrical installation students are not tested for colour blindness, which is vital for anyone involved in electrical wiring. The internal verification system is satisfactory. There is a planned programme of verification activities including observations of assessors during assessment. The plans are effectively implemented and completed internal verification activities are recorded.

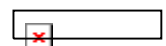
60. The range of courses provided is satisfactory. There is a coherent progression pathway from level 1 to level 3 and onward to a foundation degree. There is an innovative entry level course which started this academic year. Links with employers are good. Students are not aware of the enrichment activities available and few students take part in the college-wide programme, but they do go on visits for vocational and personal development.

61. There is very effective support for students. Teachers provide good advice to enable potential students to make informed career and course choices. When students start their courses, any additional learning and support needs are identified and a very effective programme is implemented. There is very good specialist support that enables the effective integration of students who would not otherwise be able follow the course and progress well. The support provided by tutors at college and advisors in work-based learning is well co-ordinated and frequent. Students find this both reassuring and motivating.

Leadership and management

62. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A new construction centre has been established to cater for the growing number of students and the needs of the industry. Staff have been actively involved in identifying the teaching and learning facilities needed in this new building. Although the building completion was delayed until after the start of the new term, effective management action reduced the impact of the delay on students' progress. The recent introduction of an entry level and a level 1 course has been managed successfully. There are good communications within course teams and the department and with senior management. Regular meetings take place at all levels. Minutes of meetings are detailed, with clearly identified action points, which are followed up in subsequent meetings. End-of-course evaluations and reviews inform the self-assessment report and future planning of courses. The self-assessment report identifies most weaknesses found by inspectors. Students work effectively together in mixed-gender groups. There is little active promotion of equal opportunities and it is not part of the tutorial programme. Students do not have a sound understanding of equal opportunity issues.

Engineering



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

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

Strengths

- very effective use of ICT in teaching and learning
- well-planned curriculum with good progression routes
- very good individual support for students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates for work-based learning
- insufficiently challenging teaching
- insufficient information and evaluation on lesson plans.

Scope of provision

63. There are 462 students on engineering courses. Over 240 are on full-time courses and around 220 are studying part time. Almost 80% of the full-time students are aged 16 to 18. There are around 90 students aged 16 to 18 studying part time and 130 adults. There are around 260 students in automobile engineering, 140 in general engineering and 60 on welding and fabrication courses. Included in these totals are 15 modern apprentices managed by the college, plus a further 79 apprentices from other training providers. An entry level programme has been introduced this year, which caters for students with poor literacy, numeracy and language skills. There are 216 school pupils on a school-link course and 9 Year 11 pupils have joined a full-time programme.

Achievement and standards

64. There have been major changes to the curriculum in the past two years. Prior to the changes, enrolment numbers and retention and pass rates were falling. It is too soon to determine the effect that the curriculum changes might have on pass rates. Only one new full-time programme, the first diploma in engineering, is mature enough to have both retention and pass rates. Since the change from the GNVQ intermediate course, the retention rate has risen from 64% to 78% and the pass rate has improved from 19% to 86%. Retention and pass rates on recently introduced short courses are high. Retention and pass rates for work-based learning are low.

65. The standard of students' practical skills and technical knowledge is satisfactory. Students at all levels are usually able to carry out routine practical tasks without constant supervision. They work in a safe environment and select and use appropriate tools in a competent manner. Some students are able to demonstrate the quick acquisition of high-level skills. For example, a number of students on the first year of a welding course demonstrated good ability in the production of weld pools and they produced high-quality welds themselves. In a more advanced lesson, auto-electrical students

working on engine management systems were quick to learn the skills and gain the confidence to use industrial standard equipment to test computerised systems. Students on more advanced programmes exhibit an appropriate range of more complex skills. Many of the students require further support in literacy and numeracy to progress successfully. Whilst their language skills are sufficiently developed to enable them to progress, the quality of their written work is sometimes poor and their numeracy levels are low. The progress made by modern apprentices is slow.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
City and Guilds introductory welding skills	1	No. of starts	**	34	26
		% retention	**	91	92
		% pass rate	**	77	83
GNVQ intermediate engineering*	2	No. of starts	27	25	**
		% retention	70	64	**
		% pass rate	0	19	**
NVQ in maintaining automotive vehicles	2	No. of starts	44	37	30
		% retention	61	46	63
		% pass rate	63	88	74
National certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	38	22	**
		% retention	82	45	**
		% pass rate	74	80	**
National diploma in engineering	3	No. of starts	42	53	30
		% retention	62	47	60
		% pass rate	50	76	83
City and Guilds autoCAD	3	No. of starts	42	33	21
		% retention	100	82	95
		% pass rate	52	78	65

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* change of qualification in 2002/03 to BTEC first diploma in operations and maintenance engineering

Quality of education and training

66. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the best theory lessons, teachers make regular checks on students' understanding using targeted and in-depth questioning and short exercises. The best teaching and learning are seen in practical lessons, where students remain actively engaged throughout. Teaching and learning are particularly effective when theory is quickly supported by practical reinforcement. In one lesson, Lego bricks were used to build cranes in order to demonstrate the moments of forces. The use of ICT is very effective in the classroom. Interactive whiteboards, data projectors, computer packages and the Internet are widely used. For example, on motor vehicle studies, commercial packages on the interactive screen enable realistic workplace situations to be brought into the classroom. Video clips are accompanied by sequenced questions to motivate students and encourage them to give accurate answers. Modern apprentices receive appropriate training on the job from experienced supervisors, though this is not the result of coherent planning. They attend college for day release. Lesson plans are not sufficiently detailed. These documents have space allocated for evaluation but none takes place, even for new courses, and

there are no opportunities listed for the collection of key skills evidence.

67. Resources are satisfactory overall, but there are out-dated machines for mechanical engineering and an inadequate number of modern college cars for students to work on. The East Lancashire Centre of Excellence has excellent motor vehicle resources which are used mainly for commercial courses, but other students are given access to the facilities as a reward for good performance. Handouts are of satisfactory or high quality. Handouts that require students to complete them are used extensively. As a result of changes to the provision and the establishment of a COVE in digital communications technology, significant investment has been made in engineering resources. The students on electronics and fibre optics courses have both benefited. Resources in the workplace supply the necessary evidence-gathering opportunities for work-based learners.

68. Assessment is fair and rigorous overall. Students' feedback is generally constructive and sufficiently detailed to enable students to improve, but some assessment sheets completed in lessons have not been marked and corrected. Students' work is set on a regular basis, marked, and quickly returned with comments. Students' progress is recorded on highly visible workshop charts and on staff, college and awarding body record sheets. Assessment and internal verification procedures meet with awarding body requirements. Though the internal verification process is sound, there is no audit of internal verifiers' comments on assessors' performance. The progress reviews for modern apprentices are satisfactory.

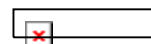
69. There is a well-planned curriculum that was devised in consultation with employers. There are two parallel progression routes that begin with a general entry level course, after which students can specialise in either general or motor vehicle engineering and then progress to levels 2 and 3. Pupils from schools can undertake tasters in all areas of engineering except vehicle body repair, and there is discrete provision for excluded pupils. Key skills are integrated and are taught through three assignments.

70. There are high levels of individual learning support. Individual needs are diagnosed accurately and quickly. Over 50 students are receiving literacy or numeracy support and 45 students are receiving dyslexia support. Engineering teachers and the literacy and numeracy tutors work together as a team to provide effective literacy and numeracy support. The support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. For example, a motor vehicle student with visual impairment was effectively supported throughout his course and became student of the year. The use of interactive whiteboards was very helpful for this student, enabling the magnification of images. Each lesson plan is accompanied by a profile of the group detailing preferred learning styles and the number of students requiring support. Specific individual needs are not recorded, however, and the system fails if there is a replacement teacher who has no prior knowledge of the group.

Leadership and management

71. The leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a clear strategy for improvement and development. The management team have made substantial changes to the curriculum and have restructured the department. The changes to the curriculum have yet to be evaluated, but there has been some initial success in raising retention rates. Staff are supportive of managers and appreciate their open management style and practical approach. Quality assurance procedures are satisfactory and all staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Teachers are unclear about performance indicators, however, and target setting is weak. The promotion of equal opportunities is not given a high profile but all staff have received the relevant training.

Business



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

Strengths

- high retention rates on many courses

- high pass rates on most full-time courses

- good teaching

- very good support for students

- broad range of courses providing good progression rates for students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient challenge for more able learners

- inadequate written feedback for students on a few courses.

Scope of provision

72. The college provides a broad range of full-time and part-time courses for students aged 16 18 and adult students in business, management and professional studies, trade union education and administration. There are 489 students aged 16 to 18 and 1,329 adult students on courses in this area of learning. Courses include AS-level and GCE A-level business, accounts and economics and GNVQ foundation and intermediate and AVCE business. Part-time courses, leading to qualifications at levels 1 and 2, include book-keeping, computerised accounts and secretarial skills. Professional courses include human resources, law, management, marketing and accounting. There are 17 trainees undertaking a modern apprenticeship in administration.

Achievement and standards

73. Pass rates are high on most full-time courses. In 2002/03, the pass rates on two-thirds of full-time courses were above national averages. In the same year, only one course had a pass rate that was below the national average. The pass rate on the GNVQ foundation in business has been particularly high for the last two years. At 96%, it has been significantly above the national average of 69%. However, the percentage of students gaining high grades on most GCE A-level and GNVQ courses is generally lower than the national average. Retention rates on full-time and part-time courses are high. In 2002/03, only one course had a retention rate that was below the national average. There are high progression rates to both FE and HE. In 2003, 91% of the students on GNVQ foundation courses progressed to other FE courses. More than 70% of students from the AVCE business course went on to HE courses. A significant proportion of those progressed to the

college's HE centre.

74. The standard of students' work in most lessons is good. Students are able to draw on examples from their own life and family experiences and apply them effectively to the business context. Most students use business terminology appropriately and they have a good understanding of business concepts. All students are well motivated. One group of GNVQ intermediate students was working on an assignment that explored the process of setting up a small business. They worked enthusiastically on applying the principles of market segmentation as it related to their chosen product.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation business	1	No. of starts	43	37	35
		% retention	81	73	80
		% pass rate	57	96	96
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	70	73	102
		% retention	73	82	74
		% pass rate	53	90	71
AS level business	3	No. of starts	78	74	75
		% retention	88	82	92
		% pass rate	91	92	84
GNVQ advanced/ AVCE business	3	No. of starts	57	18	52
		% retention	72	94	94
		% pass rate	97	65	69
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	36	38	22
		% retention	97	100	100
		% pass rate	89	95	100
NVQ accounting	4	No. of starts	25	20	24
		% retention	100	95	96
		% pass rate	52	68	48

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

75. Teaching is generally good. Most lessons are well planned and there is effective learning. Good recap of earlier work ensures the incremental development of knowledge and skills. There is good team teaching in some lessons and there is effective involvement of learning support staff where appropriate. Teachers work well together, complementing each other's strengths to give all-round support to students. Good questioning techniques are used, which encourage students to develop their reasoning abilities. In some lessons, there is insufficient involvement of the quieter students in both question and answer activities and in group discussions. The behaviour of potentially difficult groups of students is well managed. Teachers challenge inappropriate behaviour sensitively and effectively. The monitoring of learning in lessons is good, and teachers give additional assistance where needed. Good use is made of relevant high-quality and well-designed learning materials. The preferred learning styles of students are identified and used by teachers to devise appropriate teaching methods and learning materials. For example, in several classes, gapped handouts, handouts that require students to complete them, were successfully used as part of the teaching

strategies to assist students in structured note taking. In some of the weaker lessons, more able students are not sufficiently challenged. Opportunities for them to progress at their own pace are restricted by a lack of suitably differentiated tasks and materials. There is little variety in the learning activities used and students take a passive role in their learning. The questioning of students does not check their understanding. A minority of lessons have poorly defined learning outcomes or little indication of the activities that students will be engaged in.

76. Students in dedicated study centres have good access to computers. In addition, twelve laptop computers are available on overnight loan to students. Wireless network connectivity is available in 12 rooms within the business centre, but its use is underdeveloped. Access to computers for staff is more limited. Some staff have little expertise in the use of ICT, but this has been recognised by the college and the issue is being addressed. Staff are appropriately qualified and in some cases well qualified. There are good library facilities. The social space for students is good. The majority of rooms provide an appropriate learning environment but a few rooms are too small for the groups housed in them, which restricts the range of activities that can be undertaken effectively.

77. On most courses, assessment is used effectively to monitor progress through regular progress reviews. On a few courses, inadequate written feedback is given to students and there is no written feedback at all on some marked work. In other instances, the written comments do not give sufficient guidance to students on how to improve.

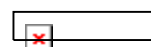
78. There is a broad range of provision giving good progression for students from pre-foundation to post-degree level. There is a wide range of vocational options, particularly at level 3, where the provision accounts for almost half of the full-time students. For example, students can combine business with legal studies, IT and animal care.

79. There is good support for students. Students receive a thorough initial assessment which enables teachers to provide appropriate support. Teachers cater for the needs of individual students; for example, by providing large-print handouts. There is good in-class support from learning support staff. Students who are at risk of withdrawing from their courses are identified and provided with more frequent tutorials. There is direct access to a senior member of staff within the centre who works to remove any barriers to learning. The 'route 16' project identifies students who cease attending courses to advise them on alternative provision, to refer them to other agencies, such as Connexions, and to support to them during their transition. There are effective systems in place to monitor students who arrive late or miss lessons.

Leadership and management

80. Leadership and management are good. Staff are highly committed to the mission of the college. Students have a good appreciation of equality and diversity, which is reinforced effectively through the tutorial programme and wall displays. Course teams meet regularly to discuss students' progress and monitor performance. Achievement of targets is a strong focus of the course review and evaluation procedures. Actions are taken to address issues. Management meetings at various levels are used to share good practice. Data from management information systems are easily available and used effectively. There are good course review and evaluation procedures that feed into the self-assessment report. Staff are actively involved in this process. The self-assessment report failed to identify some weaknesses that were identified during inspection.

Information and communications technology



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

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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates for students aged 16 to 18
- good teaching
- good support for students with additional learning needs
- excellent range of ICT courses
- good planning and monitoring of adult courses.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on level 1 courses for adults.

Scope of provision

81. There are approximately 670 students aged 16 to 18 studying on full-time courses. The courses range from entry level to level 3, and they lead to qualifications including foundation and intermediate level GNVQ ICT, AVCE double award, and AS-level and GCE A-level ICT and computing. Vocational students are offered a range of national qualifications that are recognised by the industry. Over 1,300 adults attend courses at the various centres and access points. The significant majority are enrolled on courses leading to the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR) certificate for IT users and the European computer driving licence (ECDL) qualification. Approximately 20% of adults study by distance learning.

82. The college has had a CoVE in digital communications technology since November 2002. There are currently 506 students on vocational courses at the CoVE, studying for qualifications in networking, fibre optics, web development and media production. Part-time provision within the centre ranges from taster courses for beginners to courses at level 3. There are work-based learning courses for adults in Cisco and web design.

Achievement and standards

83. Students make very good progress, quickly gaining confidence and rapidly increasing their skill levels and knowledge of hardware and software. Many students are confident of their ability and they are willing to share their knowledge with others, thus helping to advance the rate of learning of the whole group. Students' Internet research skills are good, and those following the CISCO course, in the CoVE, are able to assess their own progress using on-line testing. There are high pass and retention rates on courses for students aged 16 to 18. Most are 10% or more above national averages. In contrast, both retention rates and pass rates are significantly below the national average on courses for adults at levels 1 and 2. The retention and completion rates on the work-

based learning programmes for adults are good. In 2002/03, the pass rate was high, with 69% of learners achieving the full qualification; however, only 29% found employment; although around 30% of the learners were in receipt of incapacity benefit and not mandated to seek work.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
ECDL	1	No. of starts	552	58	650
		% retention	84	98	51
		% pass rate	22	46	67
CLAIT (short) *	1	No. of starts	611	712	107
		% retention	89	87	72
		% pass rate	40	49	61
Integrated business technology	2	No. of starts	164	59	44
		% retention	93	93	98
		% pass rate	56	73	74
Diploma in networking (one year)	2	No. of starts	15	**	30
		% retention	100	**	77
		% pass rate	0	**	74
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	79	93	90
		% retention	99	80	82
		% pass rate	69	88	77
GNVQ advanced/ AVCE	3	No. of starts	63	64	61
		% retention	62	67	84
		% pass rate	72	63	73

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* course changed to new CLAIT in 2003

** fewer than 15 starters enrolled

Quality of education and training

84. Most teaching is good or better. Lessons are well planned and attention is paid to students' learning styles, ensuring that an appropriate range of teaching strategies is used. In the better lessons, a good introduction captures the students' interest and the skilful use of different activities ensures that their interest is maintained throughout the session. Extension activities are used successfully to stretch the more able students. Students with special learning needs and disabilities receive good support from their teachers and learning support tutors. During practical lessons, teachers provide individual help and encourage students to think problems through for themselves.

85. Staff are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach, and most are qualified teachers. Those teaching on IT practitioner courses have recent and relevant industrial experience. IT resources are generally good; however, at some centres, the IT equipment is coming to the end of its useful life. There are sufficient computers for the students to disassemble and assemble in order to develop their practical skills. The standard of the accommodation is variable. There are bright, well-decorated and well-resourced classrooms, particularly in the CoVE, but there are also some drab and poorly ventilated rooms. There are several dedicated classrooms with independent

networks for the study of communications. Overall technician support is good.

86. Assessment practice is good, and meets external body requirements. Detailed and accurate records are maintained which monitor students' progress, particularly on part-time courses. The quality of teachers' feedback is variable. Some provide comprehensive and encouraging feedback and guidance for improvement, but in other cases, the feedback to students is minimal.

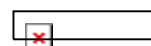
87. The college offers an excellent range of courses that includes IT software development, computer installation and support, and communications technology. Courses are available at all levels from entry level to level 3. Students can also progress to level 4 within the college. Lower level courses are available at all the college sites, at the four main access points in the local community and through the learndirect centre. Students are offered a variety of study methods from distance learning to full-time attendance. A Jobcentre Plus programme for the long-term unemployed is offered in the use of IT and in communications technology. Since the establishment of the CoVE, the college has significantly increased the offer of industry-recognised qualifications in fibre optics and communications technology. This is in direct response to industry needs and local skills shortages. There is limited employer participation in the development of the CoVE. A wide range of activities are offered to students aged 14 to 16, giving local school pupils the opportunity to benefit from the expertise and resources at the college. All students following ICT courses are given the opportunity to take additional qualifications. Adult students are offered additional courses at the learndirect centre and students aged 16 to 18 can take courses that are of general interest or that lead to vocational qualifications in ICT, or that prepare them for GCSE re-sit examinations.

88. Students are well supported in the classroom. Students who have disabilities are well catered for and large screens, adapted hardware and enlarged handouts are readily available. A large number of students in this curriculum area require the help of learning support assistants, and there is a high ratio of support workers to students. The tutorial system is appropriate to the course and students have good access to tutors for informal support. Target setting in students' individual learning plans is weak.

Leadership and management

89. Leadership and management of the area are good. Communication is good. There are regular meetings and staff are also kept up to date by e-mail. Appraisals are regularly undertaken and staff development needs are prioritised and met. There is good participation by students of different ethnic backgrounds and all students work well together within class. Most courses have a gender imbalance and the curriculum area has taken some limited actions to address this. All centres are accessible to wheelchair users. The quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. There is a good audit process of the franchisees, which includes spot-checking. Administrative staff provide excellent support to both management and teachers. Data are readily available and room allocation is well organised. The course review evaluations formed the basis of the self-assessment report, but failed to highlight some of the low retention and pass rates on adult courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings of the self-assessment report, although some of the strengths that had been identified are standard practice. The college has successfully introduced and met the requirements of the first year of the CoVE. Senior managers and governors take an active interest in its development and are carefully monitoring progress. The CoVE produced its second self-assessment report in autumn 2003 and inspectors found it to be largely accurate.

Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel



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

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

Strengths

- high retention rates on many courses
- outstanding development of students' confidence and personal effectiveness
- good learning materials to support individual learning
- effective development of key skills for full-time students in hospitality and sports
- wide range of relevant enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on level 2 bakery and level 1 food preparation courses
- low retention rates for work-based learning
- poor achievement of the framework by work-based learners
- unsatisfactory development of hospitality and catering students' practical skills
- insufficient research and investigation by students on advanced level courses.

Scope of provision

90. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time provision in hospitality and catering, sports, leisure and tourism. NVQ courses are available across the provision at levels 1 to 4. AVCE and GNVQ courses are also offered in sports, leisure and tourism. Other courses include GCSE leisure and tourism and AS level sports, games and recreation, plus a range of part-time courses such as cake decorating and the national licensee's certificate. There are 636 students, of which 60% are adults. Around 45% of students study part time. Work-based learning frameworks include food preparation and cooking, bakery, bar service, housekeeping, reception, and kitchen and larder.

There are 45 work-based learners on hospitality and catering programmes. Of those, 31 are on a foundation modern apprenticeship programme, 8 are advanced modern apprentices, 4 are undertaking NVQ training only and 2 are New Deal clients.

Achievement and standards

91. Retention rates are high on many courses but pass rates are variable. The pass rates on courses leading to an NVQ level 2 in bakery and a NVQ level 1 in food preparation have been very low for the last two years. In 2003, a high percentage of hospitality and sports students gained key skills qualifications. The students are able to apply their key skills to complex vocational activities such as calculating stock values. Hospitality and catering students show unsatisfactory development of their practical skills. They frequently use incorrect basic techniques including the use of inappropriate knives for a task and working in an untidy fashion. Soups and sauces are left simmering whilst being held for service and as a result the consistency and presentation are impaired. In food service, surplus cutlery is not always removed from the table. There is outstanding development of students' confidence and personal effectiveness to enhance their employment prospects. There is a strong emphasis upon attributes such as reliability and punctuality. Teachers frequently offer praise to students when it is earned and this helps to build self-esteem, especially of those who have previously underachieved in education.

92. There is poor framework achievement on both the foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships for hospitality chefs. There are also declining recruitment and low retention rates for this programme. A development plan is in place to address achievement on work-based learning programmes. There is early evidence that retention rates are improving.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ food preparation and cooking	1	No. of starts	34	39	15
		% retention	82	69	80
		% pass rate	75	67	58
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	37	37	30
		% retention	59	84	77
		% pass rate	59	100	78
NVQ craft baking (one and two year)	2	No. of starts	46	38	19
		% retention	43	50	89
		% pass rate	75	26	65
NVQ food preparation and cooking	2	No. of starts	20	24	31
		% retention	85	79	84
		% pass rate	59	79	96
National diploma in sports studies	3	No. of starts	*	31	29
		% retention	*	52	59
		% pass rate	*	94	82
AVCE travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	**	17	20
		% retention	**	88	95
		% pass rate	**	100	80
NVQ food preparation (kitchen and larder)	3	No. of starts	18	18	16
		% retention	67	83	88

		% pass rate	50	20	79
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* fewer than 15 starters enrolled

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

93. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is not enough very good or excellent teaching and too much that is unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, the learning outcomes are made clear at the start, an appropriate range of teaching strategies is used and a brisk pace is maintained. The most effective teachers communicate clearly, cater for individual students' needs and encourage the development of students' investigative skills. In one lesson, students used the Internet to find information about grassroots sports organisations, which they shared in a session that was very skilfully managed by the teacher. Too many teachers, however, rely heavily on the overhead projector and handouts to feed information to the students, and they do not develop the students' investigative skills sufficiently. ICT is under-utilised in teaching and learning. In some of the weaker practical lessons, teachers allow students using incorrect techniques to continue unchecked. In hospitality, vocationally related key skills lessons are successful. In one lesson, the teacher linked numeracy outcomes to stocktaking and control procedures which the students found relevant and stimulating. Lessons for work-based learners are generally well structured. Lesson plans contain detailed information and teachers provide students with clear instructions, using good examples to enhance learning. Occasionally, tasks are not sufficiently demanding.

94. Teaching materials are well designed and students find them helpful. In food preparation and bakery lessons, students receive recipes with clear methods and sometimes, graphic images that help them to present dishes. Materials are adapted when necessary to meet the needs of individual students. Sports teachers produce well-planned, stimulating and relevant assignments. There are good specialist resources for sports studies, including a spacious, well-equipped sports hall that can be used for a wide range of indoor activities. There is a wide range of equipment to support outdoor activities and in the fitness room. Students also benefit from the use of local facilities including the sports laboratory at a nearby HE college. In catering, facilities are of a commercial standard and include training kitchens, a bakery and a training restaurant with a production kitchen. The standard of facilities is satisfactory. The college has a travel shop that is operated in partnership with a regional holiday retailer. Teachers are generally well qualified and some are working towards higher degrees. A small number of teachers lack recent, relevant industrial experience.

95. Teachers usually provide good feedback, and some are diligent in correcting grammatical and spelling errors, but it can take too long for work to be returned to students. Some assignments take four weeks to mark. The portfolios of students on NVQ hospitality and catering courses do not always contain sufficient evidence and assessor notes are too brief and not sufficiently evaluative to inform assessment decisions. Work-based learning assessments are well planned and individual learning plans are completed, providing future action points for students.

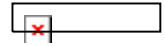
96. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities, including tourism and leisure study tours that contribute to assessment. Sports' students undertake outward-bound activities to develop personal and teamworking skills and hospitality students gain valuable experience by working in corporate hospitality operations at large-scale and prestigious sporting events. Guest speakers from industry visit the college to enhance students' learning. Most students develop a sense of community through fundraising activities and students studying for the community sports leader award work with children at a local primary school.

Leadership and management

97. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Quality assurance systems are well defined with a coherent cycle in which course reviews inform self-assessment reports. College strategic objectives are well communicated and feature in course reviews. Course team leaders are able to access up-

to-date management information, enabling them to monitor targets closely. This information is widely shared with teaching teams. Insufficient attention is given to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and linking this to staff development and training. Cultural and ethical issues are given a high priority within tourism and leisure, but in some other lessons, diversity is not promoted well and gender stereotypes are insufficiently challenged.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- very good achievement on most courses

- outstanding teaching and learning

- excellent integration of key skills

- highly innovative use of learning technologies

- excellent pastoral and vocational support for students

- very well-managed and well-co-ordinated work-based learning.

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses.

Scope of provision

98. The college offers a broad range of courses in hairdressing and beauty, holistic and sports therapies. Full-time courses include NVQ hairdressing at levels 1 to 3, NVQ beauty therapy at levels 1 to 3 and a BTEC diploma in sports therapy. A fast-track NVQ level 2 hairdressing course has been

developed for those students with the ability to progress quickly. The centre offers part-time day and evening courses in hairdressing and Saturday morning courses in beauty and holistic therapies. Courses are running at centres in the community that incorporate literacy, numeracy and language development within the vocational curriculum. The college works effectively in partnership with local schools. There are 157 pupils studying units at level 1 or on taster courses. There are 37 work-based learners on hairdressing courses taking foundation modern apprenticeships. Of the 612 students enrolled in the area, half are studying part time and the majority are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

99. Retention rates are very high overall. In 2002/03, however, the retention rate was low on the NVQ hairdressing course at level 1. In September 2003, students who enrolled on this course were skills tested and the more able students were placed on a fast-track programme accelerating achievement and enabling rapid progression. Very few students have left the course this year. Pass rates are very high on most courses and are well above the national averages. The pass rate on the level 2 NVQ beauty therapy course has been at 100% for the last two years.

100. The standard of students' work is excellent. Students work very professionally in practical lessons and demonstrate very high-level skills. Their vocational skills are extended by participation in training delivered by external companies.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ hairdressing (one year)	1	No. of starts	57	50	62
		% retention	74	70	60
		% pass rate	78	71	92
NVQ beauty therapy (one year)	2	No. of starts	49	29	42
		% retention	71	93	79
		% pass rate	91	100	100
NVQ hairdressing (one year)	2	No. of starts	41	31	44
		% retention	80	84	80
		% pass rate	91	73	80
NVQ hairdressing (two year)	2	No. of starts	60	42	46
		% retention	72	71	67
		% pass rate	97	100	100
Diploma in advanced nail techniques (one year)	2	No. of starts	18	32	37
		% retention	61	56	86
		% pass rate	45	94	94
Diploma in reflexology (one year)	3	No. of starts	38	19	20
		% retention	92	79	83
		% pass rate	91	93	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

101. Teaching and learning are outstanding. Enthusiastic and inspiring teaching across all courses

results in highly productive learning. The planning of lessons is skilful and thorough. Lessons are very well managed and include a wide range of activities that are designed to build students' knowledge incrementally. They are delivered with clear aims, use a wide variety of learning methods and generate very lively student participation. There is imaginative and effective use of learning technology. In one lesson, powerpoint and interactive whiteboards were used creatively by students to deliver presentations to their peers on careers in the hair and beauty industry. Key skills are effectively embedded into the curriculum and this enhances the standard of students' work. In a hairdressing lesson, each student researched information on disorders and diseases of the skin. Their work was then collated and a booklet of a high standard was produced, with clear text and numerous illustrations.

102. In practical lessons, the students have a very good awareness of the expectations of the industry. The students are punctual and present themselves professionally. They are encouraged to participate in both college and national competitions. Learning environments are busy, lively and productive. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. In one very successful practical lesson, students were developing their colouring and blow drying skills on clients and blocks. The students initiated their own learning by identifying their individual assessment needs on flipcharts. The teacher skilfully and unobtrusively monitored the students' progress by carefully observing and asking probing questions about the underpinning knowledge. The students were fully engaged throughout the session and displayed excellent teamworking, practical and communication skills.

103. All teachers are very well qualified and regularly update their skills. The advanced practitioner successfully supports staff in embedding key skills and ICT into the vocational context. There are high-quality learning materials, especially for beauty therapy, and an appropriate range of specialist resources. A wide range of professional products is available for students to use. Good use is made of ICT in salons.

104. Assessment of students' work is very rigorous. All students receive prompt, constructive feedback that clearly indicates areas for improvement. Individual learning plans are regularly reviewed and used effectively to set targets for progress and achievement. Work-based learners are visited regularly by a training advisor. During these visits, progress reviews and salon assessments are completed in the workplace. Care is taken to ensure that the salons being used are suitable.

105. There is a wide range of courses and good progression routes to HE and employment. For example, students assessed as being of higher ability are placed on fast-track courses which enable them to gain qualifications more quickly and progress rapidly. Most courses are available on both a full-time and a part-time basis. The college offers courses on a 41-week college year, with classes taking place during many of the academic holiday periods. Students are successful in competitions that are held both in college and nationally. The area has very good links with industry which enable the staff and students to keep abreast of current trends and practices.

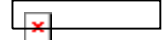
106. Support for students is outstanding. Students undergo a thorough initial assessment during induction which identifies their preferred learning styles as well as any additional learning support they may require. This information is used very effectively to plan students' learning. Staff with specialist support skills work closely with vocational tutors and give highly effective in-class support. Tutorials take place on a regular basis to identify individual needs and tutors are kept very well informed about their tutees progress.

Leadership and management

107. Leadership and management are outstanding. Work-based learning provision is well managed and there is good co-ordination between the college and employers. The self-assessment report is accurate. A proactive approach to reviewing and evaluation has led to significant improvements in retention rates on courses which were previously of concern. As part of the self-assessment process, students' views are sought regularly and a number of improvements have been made in response. Communication between staff and managers is very effective. There is a comprehensive staff development programme. Teachers acquire a range of specialist skills which have a positive impact on the students' learning experience. Teachers have been trained in both the latest race

relations legislation and the requirements of SENDA, and they actively promote equal opportunities in their work.

Health and social care, early years and public services



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

Contributory grade for early years is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **outstanding (grade 1)**

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on level 2 and 3 courses

- good work-based achievements

- good teaching

- good resources effectively utilised

- successful and productive partnerships in early years

- outstanding support for early years students

- good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- poor provision at level 1 in health and social care.

Scope of provision

108. The college offers a wide range of courses leading to awards in early years, health and social care, counselling and public services, from entry level to level 4. Around 130 full-time students are on public services courses at levels 1 to 3. On early years, health and social care courses, there are around 350 students aged 16 to 18 on full-time courses and 200 adults are on short part-time courses. There has been a significant expansion of NVQ programmes in both early years and social care in recent years. Around 150 adults are working towards an NVQ in early years at levels 2 and 3 and over 230 students working towards an NVQ in care at levels 2, 3 and 4. There are over 100 modern apprentices in early years. The college has a wide range of short courses designed to widen participation and encourage adults back to learning. In September 2003, the college was granted CoVE status in early years.

Achievement and standards

109. Retention rates are generally good and they are particularly high on the NVQ level 3 early years course and on BTEC national diploma courses in public services and caring services. Pass rates are high, particularly at level 3. Pass rates are above the national average on BTEC national diploma courses in public services and caring services, on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in early years and education, and on level 3 courses leading to NVQ early years, care and education. In 2002/03, the pass rate was 100% on the BTEC national diploma in caring and on the CACHE certificate in early years and education. Pass rates are high on short courses. Pass rates on the GNVQ foundation course in health and social care are low. On the foundation modern apprenticeship course in early years, the pass rate is very high: 67% of students achieved the complete framework, with a retention rate of 70%.

110. Students' practical work is of a high standard and it is outstanding on early years courses. The students participate well in discussions and demonstrate a high level of vocational knowledge and skills. In public service lessons, students demonstrate good interview and employability skills. Health and social care students can clearly articulate complex legislation on the impact of the Health and Safety at Work Act and their responsibilities in implementing the legislation. Students on early years courses demonstrate excellent vocational knowledge and skills which they successfully apply in a wide range of work placements.

111.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in public services	2	No. of starts	34	31	31
		% retention	71	94	74
		% pass rate	88	83	70
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	45	37	44
		% retention	82	86	82
		% pass rate	95	100	100
National diploma in caring services	3	No. of starts	49	75	74
		% retention	78	75	66
		% pass rate	95	91	100
CACHE diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	67	60	46
		% retention	57	68	74
		% pass rate	97	95	94
NVQ early years care	3	No. of starts	51	69	60

and education (two years)		% retention	84	83	70
		% pass rate	93	100	93
National diploma in public services	3	No. of starts	53	54	44
		% retention	57	61	77
		% pass rate	80	94	85

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

Quality of education and training

112. Teaching and learning are good. There is much teaching that is good or better and very little that is unsatisfactory. In most lessons, planning is based on the initial diagnostic assessment results and the preferred learning styles of the group. Tasks and activities are carefully planned to lead the less confident students towards a good understanding of the topic, whilst at the same time challenging the more able students to reflect and research. Effective use is made of any relevant cultural or life experiences of the students, and they are encouraged to relate theory to practice and to their work placement. In a well-planned study skills lesson for level 2 early years students, a lively and creative approach was used. The students' effectively developed their own independent learning skills and they learned to play a game that they could use in the workplace. There is good classroom management in most lessons. High-quality teaching materials are used that successfully stimulate and encourage learning. In the best lessons, the teacher gives careful thought to the use of resources. In a very successful foundation level lesson, the teacher had set out toys relating to different aspects of child development around the room. The students played with each toy in turn and had to identify which skill was being developed. This activity was followed by a group task involving students pooling their learning to produce a poster.

113. Resources are good, and they are used to effectively promote and extend teaching and learning. Vocationally relevant resources are available and are used extensively. The CoVE funding is being used effectively to provide a new centre for early years, to further enhance the learning environment. There is an extensive range of resources in the library and teachers are proactive in identifying material for case study files. Students also use the Internet to access a range of academic research databases. The efficient reprographics unit helps teachers to produce textual resources and handouts of a high standard. Students have good access to independent learning resources.

114. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Assignments are well structured, they link theory to practice and they identify awarding body learning outcomes. Students' achievements are carefully tracked and there is a well-planned schedule of assessments in each area. The feedback given on assignments is of varying quality. The assessment procedures on early years courses are particularly rigorous and support effective learning. The assessment opportunities for work-based learners are well planned and ensure flexibility and appropriate timing. Any skills achieved in the workplace are recorded on the students' individual learning plan, which motivates the students and places value on the contribution made by the employer. For example, students on an NVQ early years course who attended the staff development on play and practical activities, provided by a private nursery, were accredited for this learning on their NVQ course. Training advisors ensure that learners receive good training and fair treatment in the workplace and they also liaise very effectively with employers, tutors and assessors. In early years, in particular, there is excellent co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

115. There are good collaborative partnerships and community links. The early years partnerships are especially strong and include employers and community groups. The range of work experience placements that is available is extensive. Additional visits and lectures from outside speakers enhance the students' learning experience. There are clear progression routes from entry level to level 3 and beyond. The entry level parents as educators course is successful in attracting adults back into education and 40% of students progress on to further courses at the college.

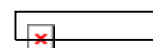
116. Support for students is generally good and in early years it is outstanding. Students receive good guidance which ensures that they are on the appropriate course. Specific learning needs are promptly identified through the initial assessment process. Learning support workers liaise effectively with tutors to provide individual support for students where appropriate. Work-based learners are also given a psychometric test that is used to inform their individual learning plan. Individual learning plans are used effectively by tutors and students on early years courses but there is inconsistent practice across the area and within course teams. On early years courses, there are very good examples of targets being used to support and accelerate learning and achievement.

Leadership and management

117. Leadership and management are good. In early years, leadership and management are outstanding. In September 2003, there was a successful internal restructuring which led to the appointment of a curriculum training co-ordinator who has a good overview of health and social care and early years. A consistent approach has been introduced across the provision and the training aspect of the area is being developed. All teachers are appraised and emphasis is placed on the key priorities for the college and on teaching and learning. There are clear lines of responsibility which are understood by course teams. There are good course files with detailed course reviews that feed into an accurate self-assessment system. All staff, including those who work part time, have been trained on the new race relations legislation and SENDA. Equal opportunities issues are discussed in lessons and tutorials and equality and diversity are promoted effectively using attractive wall displays. Teams work very well together to develop effective schemes of work and lesson plans and to share their resources. New and part-time teachers are very well supported, especially in early years. There is excellent co-ordination of work-based learning and employers are kept very well informed. Communication is good generally, and it is outstanding in early years.

118. The CoVE is well managed and there is very active community and employer involvement. Events have been organised in schools promoting careers in early years and specifically aimed at boys. A successful conference has also been staged which attracted good feedback from participants. There is a clear and detailed development plan with specific and measurable targets. Good progress has been made towards reaching the enrolment targets. Communications are good and the CoVE has its own newsletter which is distributed to key staff and partners.

Performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on most courses

- much good teaching by well-qualified staff

- robust and constructive assessment

- excellent support and guidance for students.

Weaknesses

- few passes at high grades on national diploma in media and AS-level dance and drama courses
- lack of challenge for the most able students in a significant minority of lessons
- insufficient integration of key skills into curriculum.

Scope of provision

119. A wide range of courses is offered in performing arts, media and music. Over 1,000 students are enrolled on courses in this area of learning. There are over 600 students aged 16 to 18 and around 80 adults on full-time courses. Around 300 adults are studying part time and there are almost 50 part-time students aged 16 to 18. At entry level, there are part-time courses in singing skills and song writing and, in addition, there are summer programmes in media, music, theatre and performance. At level 2, there are GCSE courses in performing arts and media plus an intermediate GNVQ in media production. Desktop publishing courses are also available at this level, and the level 2 access to music programme is growing steadily. At level 3, there is a wide range of provision. AS-level and GCE A-level courses are available in media, music, film/video production, dance, drama and performance studies. A national diploma course is offered in media. The college also offers foundation courses at level 3 for students who have completed their GCE A levels and want a career in the media industry.

Achievement and standards

120. Retention rates are high; on many courses, they are above the national average. On media studies courses, retention rates are particularly high. Pass rates are above the national average on many AS-level and GCE A-level courses, and on the post-A-level foundation media course. Students with modest prior attainment go on to achieve well on many level 3 courses. A strong emphasis is placed on developing students' personal and learning skills as well as their academic abilities. Students are able to discuss ideas in an articulate way and they approach their studies with maturity. However, although pass rates are satisfactory on AS-level dance, AS-level drama and national diploma in media, few students achieve high grades.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Access to music	2	No. of starts	29	19	19
		% retention	50	58	74
		% pass rate	92	83	43
AS-level media	3	No. of starts	78	65	74
		% retention	91	91	92
		% pass rate	97	92	96

National diploma in media (two year)	3	No. of starts	43	34	38
		% retention	70	85	71
		% pass rate	93	97	88
AS-level performance studies	3	No. of starts	39	27	17
		% retention	85	81	76
		% pass rate	94	95	100
GCE A2 media studies *	3	No. of starts	48	62	37
		% retention	69	100	95
		% pass rate	100	98	100
Foundation course in media studies	3	No. of starts	27	22	20
		% retention	81	82	75
		% pass rate	91	94	93

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

* two-year GCE A level course in 2001

Quality of education and training

121. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and interesting. Teachers work hard to motivate students and use a variety of techniques. Students are encouraged to be independent learners. In a BTEC national diploma lesson on film production, students carried out independent research in preparation for a discussion about the influence of key directors on their own films. The enthusiasm of the teachers encourages a committed approach from students. Most students work hard during lessons, taking careful notes and actively participating in discussions. Teachers use an effective range of techniques to build students' confidence. In a minority of lessons, students are not given sufficient time for questions and there is a lack of challenge for the most able students.

122. Courses are well resourced. Classrooms are spacious, with television and video facilities. There is a large theatre, a dance studio and a fully equipped CoVE-funded television studio. Music students benefit from good facilities for recording, and there is a very well-equipped computer suite which all students can access. Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable; many are experienced practitioners and most are teacher trained. Library facilities are good, with a wide range of books and journals. Students also make regular use of the learning resource centre to research on the Internet. There is insufficient rehearsal space for the growing number of students on access to music courses and for drama students in the Feilden building.

123. Assessment practices are robust. Written feedback is encouraging, detailed and clear. Very good guidance is given to students who struggle with their coursework. Students on the BTEC national diploma in media and those on the access to music course receive particularly clear and encouraging written feedback on practical work. Teachers work closely with student support services to help students with additional learning needs to complete their assignments. Internal verification is thorough, leading to improvements in assessment practice. External verifiers' reports are complimentary about the fairness and consistency of marking. However, the most able students do not always receive enough guidance on how to achieve the highest grades.

124. There is a wide range of courses. Part-time taster courses are available in singing, song writing and digital skills. A wide range of summer courses also attracts non-traditional learners into the college. Level 2 courses such as access to music are attracting a growing number of adult students with few prior qualifications. Students' feedback on the range of courses is positive. At present, few work placement opportunities are available for media, performing arts and music students. However, teachers simulate professional situations effectively and many good performance opportunities exist

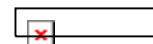
for students. There is good progression from level 2 to level 3, and progression to HE is above the national average.

125. Guidance and support for students are excellent. During induction, students are screened for learning support needs through well-designed diagnostic tasks. Students with specific learning needs, such as visual impairment and dyslexia, are very well supported, and there is good communication between student services and teachers. Students with severe learning needs are allocated support workers, who give excellent one-to-one help in the classroom. Tutorial practice is caring and effective. Good group tutorials focus on improving confidence as well as communications and learning skills. Very good individual tutorial support is also provided. The college provides a full counselling service which students can access through self-referral.

Leadership and management

126. Leadership and management are good. Self-assessment documents include good action plans with clearly defined targets. The area manager checks progress towards action points at regular team meetings, which are attended by part-time as well as full-time staff. Communication is good, and strategic decisions are made in consultation with teachers. Financial resources are well managed, leading to the provision of three new editing suites during 2003. Equality of opportunity is promoted actively in the department, and all staff receive diversity training. The effectiveness of this training is clear in the classroom, where every student is treated with equal respect. No targets are set for value added. The teaching observation profile in the self-assessment report over-estimates the quality of teaching, learning and attainment, setting them significantly above the national average.

Visual arts



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- high-quality practical work in fine art

- very effective teaching on vocational and adult courses

- good specialist equipment and accommodation

- good progression to FE and HE.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level art courses
- low retention rates on a few courses
- insufficient challenge for more able students on level 2 courses.

Scope of provision

127. The college offers a wide range of full-time visual art programmes that provides sound vocational progression. Courses include GNVQ foundation art and design, GNVQ intermediate art and design, AVCE art and design and a national diploma in foundation studies art and design. There is also a BTEC national diploma in design, and a small workplace learning provision consisting of NVQ qualifications in design, graphic design and print, and City and Guilds theory of printing and graphic communications courses at levels 2 and 3. GCSE and AS-level and GCE A-level art courses are also offered. There is a reasonable range of accredited and non-accredited part-time courses and evening courses, offered at venues in the community, that includes Asian sewing skills, art and design, life drawing, ceramics, interior design, glass and photography. The majority of these courses attract adult students. There are 279 students enrolled to full-time courses and 1,060 enrolled to part-time courses. The majority of the curriculum offered within visual arts is vocationally orientated and aimed at students aged 16 to 18. The college has its own HE provision.

Achievement and standards

128. Retention rates are high on most visual arts courses. However, retention rates were low on GNVQ intermediate art and design, GSCE art and the certificate in art and design in 2002/03. There are high pass rates on most full-time vocational courses. On the AVCE art and design, the national diploma in design and the foundation national diploma courses, pass rates have been well above the national average. In contrast, pass rates on AS level and GCE A-level art are poor, and they were well below the national average in 2002/03. The pass rate on the GNVQ foundation art and design course was also low in 2002/03. There is very good progression for students to FE and HE. A large proportion of students progress to higher level courses and several gain places at leading schools of art.

129. The standard of work across visual arts is high. Practical work is particularly impressive in fine art subjects. The work demonstrates high-quality outcomes at each stage of the design process, including samples, notebooks and solid drawing development. Most courses have access to life drawing, which has strongly impacted on the quality of students' line and sketch work. Students effectively experiment with colour, shape and texture to inform the choice of work they produce using a sequential method of working. Work on intermediate courses is satisfactory. Portfolio work is particularly good on the AVCE and the diploma in foundation studies courses. Students' practical glass work is impressive. The work for a graphic project on soup labelling was of high quality and used stylised illustrations of vegetables.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
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GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	34	39	26
		% retention	94	77	69
		% pass rate	72	77	83
AS-level art and design	3	No. of starts	60	97	56
		% retention	78	86	93
		% pass rate	70	42	40
GCE A2 art and design	3	No. of starts	*	78	77
		% retention	*	99	94
		% pass rate	*	77	46
AVCE art and design	3	No. of starts	*	48	41
		% retention	*	81	88
		% pass rate	*	92	89
National diploma in design	3	No. of starts	92	94	91
		% retention	71	74	77
		% pass rate	97	96	93
Diploma in foundation studies	3	No. of starts	43	83	65
		% retention	84	96	92
		% pass rate	83	93	98

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

130. There is much good teaching on vocational and adult courses. Sessions are well structured and build on prior learning. They effectively expand the students' range of techniques and their confidence in skills application. Teachers use ambitious assignments to stretch and excite students of varying ability. In one lesson, textiles students were required to design a room in a luxury hotel. The students were encouraged to develop their own style using colour, texture, shape and space. Commercial "mood" boards were used to show the quality and finish required for the project. The session was a mix of coaching, short periods of formal input, and firm target setting. In a level 1 adult evening lesson, the teacher effectively demonstrated the terms 'quality', 'intensity', 'contrast' and 'direction' in photography lighting, by illuminating a coconut using different light sources. The exercise enabled students to consider how to apply the techniques to their own still life arrangements. In a sculpture lesson, students created three-foot sculptures using card, wire and wood. The challenging brief and well-structured lesson allowed students to develop their understanding of form, space, colour and material manipulation. Students were highly motivated, and produced strong and imaginative three-dimensional sculptures. In less effective lessons, students are insufficiently challenged by the work and timescales they are set and the slow pace of some lessons hinders the progress of the most able students. Teachers do not always use question-and-answer techniques effectively to check learning.

131. Students have access to a wide range of specialist equipment and accommodation, both in and out of lessons. There are spacious and well-equipped photographic, life drawing, print and textile workshops. A dedicated studio for teaching decorative glass techniques includes a large modern kiln donated by a commercial organisation. Much equipment is of industry standard. ICT facilities are accessible to students for design and artwork both during and outside of timetabled lessons. There are good displays of students' work in classrooms and most drawing studios have good natural light. The quality of handouts is variable. Where paper-based resources are poor, they are either badly

reproduced or inappropriate for the type of student, or both.

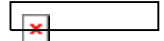
132. Overall, the assessment and monitoring of students progress are very good. Students receive clear feedback that indicates how they can improve. Strategies to address assessment issues on the GCE A-level programme have been implemented by managers, although it is too early to judge the impact of these. Teachers working on these courses have received training from the awarding body to improve performance. Internal verification is effective. Key skills are well integrated into most assignments.

133. There is excellent in-class support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pastoral and vocational support for students are good. Individual tutorial support is effective.

Leadership and management

134. Leadership and management are good. The self-assessment report is generally accurate but the assessment of the quality of the teaching in the area is over-generous and insufficiently critical. There are regular team meetings that focus on continuous improvement. Communication is good and decisions are made in consultation with relevant staff and management. Financial resources are effectively managed to provide an environment conducive to learning. A culture of equality of opportunity has purposefully been developed and diversity is celebrated. There are good staff development opportunities.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high retention rates on most courses

- high pass rates on most AS-level and GCE A-level courses

- good teaching

- good resources

- very effective guidance, monitoring and support.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level psychology and government and politics courses
- few passes at high grades on AS-level and GCE A-level courses.

Scope of provision

135. There are over 1,000 students on humanities courses. Around 430 are on AS-level courses, 225 on GCE A2 courses and 125 on GCSE courses. The remainder are on part-time programmes leading to OCN qualifications. The main AS level and GCE A-level subjects are law, history, psychology and sociology. There are smaller cohorts on classical civilisation, general studies, geography, philosophy, government and politics, and religious studies courses. An AS-level archaeology course is also offered. There is a smaller range of GCSE options, which includes geography, history, law and sociology. Psychology is the most popular subject taken at AS level and GCE A-level. The humanities area also offers courses for adult students in criminology, psychology and sociology at levels 2 and 3, with archaeology and Egyptology offered at level 3 only. The majority of students who enrol on humanities subjects are aged 16 to 18. The majority of part-time students are aged 19 or over and represent around 15% of the total humanities cohort.

Achievement and standards

136. Retention rates are high. Pass rates are high or very high on most courses. The majority of students either achieve the grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results or they exceed them. Particularly good results have been achieved by students on AS-level and GCE A-level history, GCE A-level law and GCE A-level sociology courses. Pass rates on AS-level and GCE A-level psychology in 2002/03 are low. Pass rates are declining on AS level and A level government and politics but remain above the national average.

137. The quality of students' discussions in lessons is often very high. Most are able to articulate meaningful contributions and participate in lively debates. Standards of written work vary considerably. The best student folders are full and well organised, but the weaker ones are untidy and badly maintained. The standard of work achieved by the adult students in evening classes is impressive, reflecting both enthusiasm and strongly developed academic skills.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	58	75	49
		% retention	90	83	86
		% pass rate	92	97	100
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	54	60	77
		% retention	91	82	88
		% pass rate	84	69	84
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	115	97	127
		% retention	88	86	86
		% pass rate	56	78	56
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	72	80	81

		% retention	85	81	84
		% pass rate	75	89	91
GCE A2 history *	3	No. of starts	36	39	39
		% retention	50	97	92
		% pass rate	89	100	100
GCE A2 law *	3	No. of starts	15	40	27
		% retention	73	90	100
		% pass rate	100	94	96
GCE A2 psychology *	3	No. of starts	70	45	39
		% retention	63	98	92
		% pass rate	64	91	75
GCE A2 sociology *	3	No. of starts	40	33	37
		% retention	73	94	92
		% pass rate	66	100	97

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* two-year GCE A-level course in 2001

Quality of education and training

138. Much of the teaching is either good or very good. None is unsatisfactory. Carefully developed schemes of work and detailed lesson plans incorporate varied activities and there is regular monitoring of students' progress. Subject teams have produced attractive and helpful handbooks and study guides which help students to organise and manage their learning. The best lessons include a rich variety of exercises and tasks designed to maintain students' interest and consolidate their understanding. In a GCSE geography lesson, the teacher helped the students to come to terms with the concept of population density by initially showing them world maps and giving them a local example based on Blackburn with Darwen. The students then went carefully through all the stages necessary to produce a Choropleth map of Europe. In an AS-level lesson on moral philosophy, students worked in groups to produce both overhead projector transparencies and posters to illustrate the definition of 'a person' and to explore the arguments for and against euthanasia. The members of the groups made effective presentations to the rest of the class. The weaker and less exciting lessons are characterised by the teacher's firm control of all of the proceedings, which reduces student initiative. During these lessons, however, steady progress towards the learning outcomes is consistently achieved. All teachers use appropriate handouts and other supplementary materials effectively during lessons, although there is little use of ICT in teaching. Key skills are actively promoted through subject teaching. This enables students to build portfolios from coursework and assists their preparations for the key skills tests.

139. Teaching staff are very well qualified. There are good base rooms for all subjects, with appropriate wall displays which help provide a highly creative and stimulating working environment. Most rooms have television and video equipment but few have computers. Students have good access research activities, including the use of ICT, through the college's learning resource centre. An innovative and exciting website has been developed for students taking AS-level and GCE A-level classical civilisation.

140. Assessment and monitoring of students are effective. Assessment criteria are clearly defined. Homework is set regularly and marked both promptly and thoroughly. The sixth form centre's procedure for monitoring students who are at risk of withdrawing from their course is highly effective. The system requires students to secure a staff signature and a written comment at the end of every

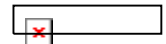
lesson and has proved successful in raising both retention and pass rates. Some students have actually asked to be put 'on report' to assist them in maintaining better standards of performance.

141. Support for students is particularly good. Attractive and interesting recruitment literature sets out what the college has to offer. There is effective pre-course counselling and additional support is readily available. The enrolment and induction processes help students to embark on the most appropriate courses with a realistic chance of success. On-course guidance is also very effective.

Leadership and management

142. Leadership and management are good. Firm leadership is provided in the sixth form centre. Subject leaders effectively carry out the quality assurance procedures, monitor teaching and results, order the necessary equipment and liaise with other subject staff. The internal review processes are thorough, and equal opportunities are fostered very positively. Communications within the sixth form centre are good, although the full self-assessment report was not widely circulated. Where there are pockets of less-than-satisfactory practice, the centre management and the subject teams are developing strategies to bring about improvements.

English and modern foreign languages



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates

- good teaching

- wide range of provision

- effective leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of ICT in teaching

- small group sizes which reduce the learning opportunities of full-time modern foreign languages students.

Scope of provision

143. There are AS-level and GCE A-level courses in English language, English literature, English language and literature, and communication studies. GCSE courses are offered in English language and English literature and English language and literature. In modern foreign languages, there are GCSE, AS-level and GCE A-level courses in French, German and Spanish. There is also an AS-level Italian course. OCN courses at levels 1 and 2 are available in French, German, Spanish and Urdu, and OCN courses are offered at level 1 in Arabic, Italian and Russian. There are 1,021 students enrolled in the area: 102 on GCE A-level courses, 243 on AS-level courses, 309 on GCSE courses and 367 on OCN level 1 and 2 courses.

Achievement and standards

144. Retention rates are generally above national average for AS-level and GCE A-level courses, but there are some low retention rates on GCE courses for adults. Pass rates are high. In the past three years, pass rates on most courses have been at or above the national average and sometimes significantly above. For example, the pass rate for AS-level English language exceeded the national average by 14% in 2001, and by 17% in 2002 and 2003. Some subjects have had 100% pass rates for the past three years. For example, the pass rate on the AS-level German course has been at 100% for the last three years. Similarly, all the students who sat the GCE A-level English literature and French examinations were successful in 2002 and 2003. The proportion of students achieving GCSE passes at grades A* to C is well above the national average. For example, the proportion of students achieving grade A* to C for GCSE English literature was 26% above the national average in 2001 and 28% above in 2002.

145. Students on AS-level English courses generally achieve higher grades than those predicted on the basis of their performance at GCSE. On the contrary, students on GCE A-level English courses often achieve lower grades than might be expected given their GCSE results. There has been a marked decline in enrolments on full-time languages courses over the past three years, and there are some very small groups for modern foreign languages. The college is aware of this decline and is taking steps to address the problem with initiatives such as closer links with partner schools and European days, but it is too early to judge the success of these initiatives.

146. The standard of students' written work is generally satisfactory for the stage of the course that has been reached, and in some cases it is better. Attainment in lessons is usually satisfactory, and sometimes good or better. English students have a satisfactory grasp of terminology and are able to apply their knowledge to technical aspects of language. Modern foreign language students display satisfactory speaking, listening and reading skills and, in general, have an adequate vocabulary and grasp of the grammar of the language.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and modern foreign languages, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GCSE English language (one year)	2	No. of starts	298	216	251
		% retention	69	74	78
		% pass rate	54	62	57
GCSE English literature (one year)	2	No. of starts	22	30	33
		% retention	86	87	79
		% pass rate	84	88	73
GCSE Spanish language (one year)	2	No. of starts	37	37	40
		% retention	84	81	83
		% pass rate	81	63	76

AS-level English language	3	No. of starts	36	40	30
		% retention	83	85	80
		% pass rate	97	100	100
AS-level communication studies	3	No. of starts	46	42	25
		% retention	85	88	88
		% pass rate	100	89	100
GCE A2 English language and literature	3	No. of starts	*	71	49
		% retention	*	96	98
		% pass rate	*	97	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2002), college (2003)

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

147. There is much good teaching. Lessons are well planned. They usually have clear, shared aims and objectives and varied activities which help students to progress. In an AS level English language lesson on the topic of language and gender, students first discussed the task together, then worked in pairs to find examples from their own experience, before going on to work individually on a well-prepared handout which led to further group debate. Modern foreign language teachers make very good use of the target language. An OCN level 1 French lesson for adults was conducted almost entirely in French.

148. In both English and modern foreign languages, students at all levels are encouraged to express their views and debate with each other, and in language lessons they are expected to do so in the target language. The opportunities for this are restricted in some of the very small groups on full-time modern foreign language courses. Teachers frequently use good questioning techniques to draw opinions from students, and employ a humorous approach to enliven classes.

149. On English courses, some well-produced workbooks support learning effectively. Students in a GCSE English language lesson, in the evening, used a very useful booklet on persuasive writing techniques. Modern foreign language teachers use authentic material to enhance learning. An OCN level 1 Spanish lesson on holidays was enhanced by a number of the teacher's own books in the target language.

150. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are well qualified, and either have or are studying for a teaching qualification. Some are native language speakers and some are examiners in the syllabus they teach. Classrooms are of an adequate size and often have attractive displays produced by students. The English stock held by the learning resource centre is good, with a wide range of up-to-date material which is sometimes held in multiple copies. The material for modern foreign languages is adequate. There is a well-equipped drop-in languages centre which has computers, a language laboratory, access to satellite television and a large stock of tapes, videos and printed material. In contrast, there are limited opportunities for the use of ICT in teaching. Few teaching rooms are equipped with ICT facilities and staff are not yet adequately trained to make effective use of interactive whiteboard technology.

151. Students' written work is usually promptly returned. In some cases, feedback is detailed, giving helpful advice on how to improve, but in others comments do not indicate areas for improvement. Important errors of spelling, grammar and punctuation are sometimes not corrected. Students have individual learning plans but these are not always used effectively when reviewing progress and setting targets.

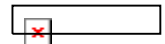
152. There is a wide range of provision. The college is responsive to local need and offers courses in Urdu at OCN levels 1 and 2 and in Arabic at level 1.

153. Students are initially assessed and individual learning needs and preferred learning styles are noted on group profiles and on individual learning plans. Lessons are planned to cater for individual needs. Students are well supported.

Leadership and management

154. Leadership and management are good. The area self-assessment report is very detailed, with measurable targets and a clear indication of responsibility for actions to be taken. There is thorough tracking of progress towards the achievement of targets from the previous year's action plan. Schemes of work are monitored to ensure that they are clear and detailed and allow regular assessment opportunities. There is a lesson observation programme in place. Communication with staff is good. All staff can make contributions to the self-assessment and planning processes. Staff are sensitive to equal opportunities issues and, in lessons which lend themselves to the topic, equal opportunities are discussed. In an AS-level English language lesson on language and gender, students explored the implications of how vocabulary could influence perceptions of women, and in an AS-level French lesson on education, students discussed reasons why boys and girls perform differently at school.

English for speakers of other languages



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

Strengths

- effective development of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills

- wide range of teaching strategies carefully matched to the individual learning needs of students

- well-resourced provision

- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards external accreditation

- weak assessment practices on non-accredited programmes
- poor progression from ESOL courses to mainstream provision.

Scope of provision

155. ESOL courses are an increasingly important part of the college's provision. There are over 100 asylum seekers on ESOL courses and they come from 23 different countries. The range of courses includes part-time day and evening classes, with a small number of Saturday classes run by a franchise partner. Most courses are based at the college's main site but there are also courses at numerous outreach centres around the local area, including some run by a franchise partner. There is no full-time ESOL provision. Courses are offered at all levels, with most provision being at entry level 1 (beginners). The majority of learners are aged 19 or over. Some courses include ICT and there is a work-based programme for learners with a language need. ESOL is also offered as language support within mainstream provision as well as on a one-to-one basis. There are 35 students aged 16 to 18 and 539 students aged 19 and over on ESOL courses.

Achievement and standards

156. Most students are on internally accredited courses. Achievement data are unreliable and there are no robust systems to record the achievement of students who do not attend courses for a full academic year. This is important, as many students are on courses that last for one term. Only 10% of ESOL students were entered for external qualifications in 2002/03. Some 69% of those entered passed. All courses use individual learning plans and all students are involved in setting their own learning goals. The targets are not always clearly defined and where they are not measurable they are of little use to students. In 2002/03, only 6% of students progressed from ESOL courses to mainstream provision, which is unsatisfactory. In the majority of lessons, students achieve satisfactory standards of work. Where students are practising their fluency skills, high standards are evident. The attendance rate observed during inspection was 75%, which is above the national average for ESOL, but there was poor attendance at some lessons.

Quality of education and training

157. The quality of teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers plan effectively and ensure that the content of the lesson is relevant to the needs and interests of the students. Lessons are drawn from well-planned schemes of work that are mapped to the national curriculum. There is much good teaching that develops all the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Students regularly take part in role play activities that are set in useful and relevant contexts. There is also much teaching that effectively addresses different learning styles. In one lesson, the students were asked to re-arrange picture cards, check from a recording and finally reconstruct the instructions on the board using the words on cards. In weaker lessons, instructions are often unclear and ineffective use is made of recorded listening material. Many teachers use a wide range of teaching resources. Good use is made of overhead projectors but video recorders and tapes are not widely used. There is successful integration of ICT in outreach centres. In one lesson, students were labelling diagrams on interactive websites by clicking and dragging. Students develop good study skills and they are encouraged to learn independently.

158. ESOL provision is generally well resourced. There is a high ratio of staff to students, with an average of nine students in each class. Most classrooms have good displays of students' work which celebrate the diverse backgrounds of the students. There are useful ICT posters that help develop keyboard skills, and there are others that advertise useful language websites. Excellent ICT facilities are available at the main site and they are used regularly by ESOL classes. ESOL students make

good use of the library. Some of the accommodation is drab, and one room was so small that it was difficult to open the door. A significant minority of handouts are unsatisfactory and some poor quality tape recorders are being used.

159. Students' progress is charted via modules. Most modular assessments are still under review and there is no standardised progress check for many of the modules. There is a rigorous final assessment at the end of the academic year, but the progress and achievement of students enrolling for shorter periods is difficult to verify. Individual targets are set for all students, but often they are not measurable and do little to help the students to monitor their progress.

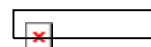
160. Courses are offered at different times and at venues across the borough that are close to where the students live, but the timing of classes is not always convenient for students with young children. ESOL support is readily available and accessed by many students on vocational courses, but few students from the discrete ESOL provision progress to other courses in college. Progression routes from ESOL courses are not sufficiently developed and promoted.

161. There is good support for students. One teacher works in student services and is an effective link with the ESOL provision. There is high-quality language support for ESOL students on mainstream provision. Language support tutors are able to utilise their subject-specific knowledge to help students. There are committed bi-lingual administrative staff who help with support issues involving the Home Office and lawyers. Students attend regular local advice days that offer translation, advice and counselling services. There is a very supportive relationship between staff and students. Teachers take time to help with pastoral issues and spend time with students outside the lesson. This has a positive effect on retention rates and attendance.

Leadership and management

162. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a common ethos and approach to ESOL that extends from recently qualified staff to the curriculum manager. The management team works well together and is supportive to staff. The team is committed to equal opportunities and celebrates the cultural diversity of the students in their lessons and in their wall displays. The self-assessment process is largely robust, but there is evidence of slight over-grading in lesson observations. The curriculum manager is quick to identify areas for improvement. There is an action plan in place which recognises many of the issues identified by inspectors and many of the issues have begun to be addressed.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- high rates of retention and progression

- good accommodation and effective use of learning resources

- very good initial assessment

- very good support for individual students

- successful implementation of the cross-college skills for life strategy.

Weaknesses

- high proportion on unsatisfactory teaching and learning

- lack of punctuality by significant minority of students.

Scope of provision

163. The college provides a very wide range of literacy and numeracy courses from pre-entry level to level 2. The provision includes discrete courses for adults, learning support that is embedded within vocational courses, and separately timetabled support lessons. There are around 220 adults on discrete literacy courses in literacy and 120 adults on courses in numeracy. In addition, around 240 students receive literacy support and 130 students receive numeracy support across the college. Over 160 students receive dyslexia support. The college provides literacy and numeracy courses in the community at 26 different venues around Blackburn with Darwen. More than 120 learners are following literacy and numeracy programmes in the workplace. The fresh start programme is designed for adults who are new to learning and it includes literacy and numeracy within short vocational courses. There are 115 students following fresh start courses in community venues.

Achievement and standards

164. There are high rates of retention and progression on courses that cater for significantly disadvantaged students. Retention rates are high across the programme area, and a three-year trend shows a steady improvement. In 2002/03, the overall retention rate on discrete literacy and numeracy courses was 88%. On some courses the retention rate was very high; for example, it was 93% for entry level literacy courses. Pass rates were high on courses leading to the adult literacy and numeracy certificates at level 1. A total of 15% of students on discrete provision progressed to higher level courses in 2002/03, and 22% continued with literacy and numeracy courses. Around 30% of Fresh Start students from 2002/03 enrolled on other courses in September 2003. The attendance rate during inspection was 79%, compared with a national average for literacy and numeracy of 74%. A significant minority of students arrives late for lessons.

Quality of education and training

165. There is some unsatisfactory teaching. In the best lessons, teachers use imaginative material and well-produced worksheets to stimulate and challenge learners. In an entry level literacy lesson on signs and their meanings, the tutor used cards showing the symbols and the words in a matching exercise before getting the students to apply their knowledge to a colourful worksheet. Teachers also use a range of different strategies and activities to engage the students. In a numeracy lesson for a group of enthusiastic adult students, the tutor ended the class with a game that involved setting questions for the other team. The game effectively checked learning and was greatly enjoyed by the

students. Teachers give good individual help during lessons, and students clearly benefit from the help they receive.

166. In the weaker lessons, teachers miss opportunities to consolidate learning and use ineffective questioning techniques. The same students are allowed to answer all the questions and the questions do not check students' understanding. In weaker lessons, there is also insufficient planning for students with different levels of skill. Teachers often use the same worksheets for all the students and there is little attempt to design activities that cater for the different levels of ability. In lessons where students regularly arrive late, teachers have not developed strategies to deal with this. The students who have arrived on time are kept waiting for half an hour or longer before any meaningful teaching and learning take place.

167. Learning support is integrated into the curriculum of all vocational courses at entry level and most courses at foundation level. On these courses, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is delivered jointly by a vocational tutor and a learning support tutor. The curriculum is cross-referenced to the core curriculum and the tutors work together to address the literacy and/or numeracy needs of the students to enable them to succeed on the course. This integration of support ensures that literacy and numeracy are relevant and effective for the students.

168. There are good learning resources and these are used effectively by teachers. There is a wide range of audio and visual resources. Most accommodation is good, including that at community venues, but a number of rooms used for teaching individual students are small and airless. Most classrooms provide sufficient space for tutors to circulate easily and provide individual help. Many of the rooms are equipped with computers and these are used to enhance learning. ICT learning is embedded within some literacy and numeracy lessons. Teachers are well qualified and all staff have completed the core curriculum training. The new level 4 literacy qualification for teachers is available at the college.

169. Assessment and monitoring of individual students' progress are good. Individual learning plans are used to agree targets with each student and these are reviewed each term. Students are actively involved in the review process and in setting new targets. The marking of students' work is inconsistent and sometimes poor. There are insufficient helpful comments and some work is not marked. Students' lateness is not handled consistently by teachers. Lack of punctuality often goes unchallenged and some tutors delay taking the register so that lateness is not recorded.

170. The college is flexible and responsive to community and employers' needs. There is a very wide range of courses provided at the college and in the community. There are strong links with local employers and literacy and numeracy courses are being taught in the workplace using ICT. The fresh start programme is successfully attracting adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to short vocational programmes that are designed to develop their literacy, numeracy and language skills.

171. There is very effective initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and dyslexia, and learning support is put in place quickly: usually within two weeks of the initial assessment. There are clear links between the results of the initial assessment and students' learning targets. Learning support tutors provide regular feedback to personal tutors and the curriculum centre support co-ordinator. Students receive very good pastoral support and guidance. They receive help from their teachers who give freely of their time outside of scheduled lessons and they are often referred to the college's welfare and guidance services. Drop-in advice and guidance sessions are available at many community venues.

Leadership and management

172. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has developed and implemented a 'skills for life' strategy that is central to all its work and has the full support of senior managers. Literacy and numeracy staff are managed in two departments and they work flexibly across discrete literacy and numeracy provision and learning support. Staff have received training on SENDA and the latest race relations legislation and they actively promote and monitor equal opportunities in their work. There are some weaknesses in the quality assurance process. The effectiveness of learning

support has not been evaluated sufficiently, although a system is being developed to address this. In addition, there are weaknesses in teaching and learning that have not been identified.

Part D: College data

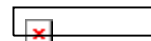
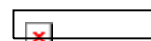


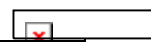
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2002/03



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	27	42
2	36	15
3	35	17
4/5	0	2
Other	2	24
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2002/03



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	1,666	625	6
Land-based provision	0	16	0
Construction	132	1,342	4
Engineering, technology and manufacture	351	1,798	6
Business administration, management and professional	898	1,666	7
Information and communication technology	1,992	1,978	13
Retailing, customer service and transportation	9	351	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	1,041	2,693	10
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	238	309	2
Health, social care and public services	1,009	8,432	25

Visual and performing arts and media	1,268	758	5
Humanities	1,286	1,360	7
English, languages and communication	1,644	814	7
Foundation programmes	706	2,058	7
Total	12,240	24,200	100

Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

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	1,921	1,322	1,630	5,590	4,183	1,544
	Retention rate %	68	86	82	86	84	86
	National average %	76	75	76	73	69	70
	Pass rate %	51	54	58	50	40	57
	National average %	65	69	71	66	68	71
2	Starters excluding transfers	2,784	2,357	2,143	4,609	3,731	2,209
	Retention rate %	68	78	79	63	76	81
	National average %	72	70	72	70	68	68
	Pass rate %	67	68	68	76	64	58
	National average %	67	69	71	64	68	72
3	Starters excluding transfers	2,887	3,807	3,428	3,143	3,486	3,405
	Retention rate %	36	75	82	79	86	84
	National average %	67	71	77	69	68	70
	Pass rate %	83	81	86	62	78	72
	National average %	75	77	79	66	69	72
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	127	83	67	863	481	412
	Retention rate %	86	94	91	57	84	88
	National average %	66	73	71	67	67	67
	Pass rate %	63	5	0	53	36	41
	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*.

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)	76	21	3	116
Level 2 (intermediate)	72	25	3	75
Level 1 (foundation)	61	35	4	26
Other sessions	67	27	6	45
Totals	72	24	4	262

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