



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection report
The Oldham College

Dates of inspection: 23–27 February and 2–4 March 2004

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	The Oldham College
Type of college:	General Further Education College
Principal:	Kath Thomas
Address of college:	The Oldham College Rochdale Road Oldham OL9 6AA
Telephone number:	0161 624 5214
Fax number:	0161 785 4234
Chair of governors:	Cyril Brandford
Unique reference number:	130505
Name of reporting inspector:	Colin Evans HMI
Dates of inspection:	23–27 February and 2–4 March 2004

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

The Oldham College is a general further education (FE) college of medium size, situated close to the town centre. It serves the borough of Oldham, population 217,273, and also attracts students from surrounding boroughs. Most provision is delivered from the college's main campus on Rochdale Road. Construction is provided at Alexander House about one mile from the town centre. Basic skills, information and communications technology (ICT) and learndirect courses are provided by the college at a main centre in Union Street, and eight community (link) centres. The college provides infrastructure support at a further 12 link centres where other providers deliver the training. The link centres are situated in the most deprived wards. There are 15 maintained secondary schools, 11 community schools and 4 voluntary-aided faith schools. The college, a sixth form college and four secondary schools provide post-16 FE. There are two single-sex independent schools.

The college provides courses in all of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC) 14 areas of learning. Provision in science and mathematics, retailing, and land-based industries is small. The curriculum is predominantly vocational with almost no advanced academic provision, which is provided at the sixth form college. In 2002/03, the college enrolled 10,892 students, of whom 75% were aged 19 or over. Of the 2,669 full-time students, 70% were aged 16 to 18. The college manages work-based learning through its business arm 'skills@oldham'. At the time of the inspection, 1,468 work-based learners were in training. Of these, 548 were undertaking modern apprenticeships. Other learners were enrolled, for example, on entry-to-employment (E2E), New Deal and onsite assessment and training programmes. In November 2003 the college gained approval from the local LSC to develop a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) in financial management. The college is a partner in the Oldham Business Management School, a centre for 800 higher education (HE) students.

The borough is an area of high disadvantage. It is ranked 38 out of the 376 boroughs on the index of multiple deprivation for England and Wales. Some wards, including the one in which the college is situated, are in the top 1% of most deprived wards nationally. Parts of the borough are designated Education Action Zone areas and the borough benefits from initiatives such as 'Excellence in Cities'. In 2002/03, 43% of the students enrolled with the college came from areas of deprivation. A growing minority ethnic population comprises 13.9% of the total population and provides 24% of the college's student population.

The largest employment sectors are public administration, education and health, followed by manufacturing and construction. Most companies are small to medium-sized enterprises; there are few large companies or organizations. The college is one of the biggest employers in the borough.

The proportion of Year 11 pupils in Oldham's schools who achieved five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grades A* to C in 2002 was 43%; 7% below the national average. The staying-on rate in full-time education was 70% in 2002.

The proportion of Year 11 pupils who enter modern apprenticeships, other traineeships and life skills rose from 7% in 2001 to 9.1% in 2002.

In the wake of the 2001 civil disturbances in the town, the college has concentrated on vocational provision, increased its community presence and taken over the large work-based learning contracts previously managed by the Chamber of Commerce and the Metropolitan Borough Council. The college's mission and vision prioritize working in partnership, the meeting of the skills needs of employers, training for work and learning for life.

How effective is the college?

Inspectors judged teaching and learning and students' achievements to be outstanding in two curriculum areas, good in five areas and satisfactory in four. The four work-based learning areas, which were graded, were judged satisfactory. The E2E provision is good. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- a high proportion of enrolled students achieve their main qualification aim
- teaching on courses at levels 2 and 3
- the teaching of full-time teachers
- outstanding provision in visual and performing arts
- good specialist resources and accommodation
- the support provided for students
- the leadership provided by senior managers and governors
- arrangements to assure the quality of the provision
- partnership working with many external organisations, including employers
- strategies to widen participation and the work to promote equal opportunities and racial harmony.

What should be improved

- retention rates for adult students on courses at levels 1 and 2
 - the number of students who gain key skills qualifications
 - the rate of achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
 - the teaching provided by agency teachers
-

- individual learning plans and their use in teaching and learning.

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

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Construction	Satisfactory. Work-based learning is satisfactory . Work placement for full-time students is of high quality. The teaching of craft practical skills is good and students display high standards of craft skill in the workplace. Onsite assessment and training are good. The rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is low. Retention rates on some courses are low. Punctuality is poor.
Engineering	Good. Most pass rates are high. Retention rates on a few courses are unsatisfactory. Information and learning technology (ILT) is used well to enliven learning. In lessons, teachers pay insufficient attention to ensuring all the students understand. Resources are good. Support staff make an effective contribution to students' learning. Curriculum management is good.
Business	Good. Work-based learning is satisfactory . Pass rates on financial and legal courses are high. Completion rates on modern apprenticeship frameworks are low. Most of the teaching is good, but in a few lessons it is dull. Course provision is wide ranging and provides good opportunities for progression. Individual support for students is strong. Curriculum management is effective.
Information and communications technology	Satisfactory. Pass and retention rates are high on some courses, but low on others. ICT resources are used well in teaching. Work placement opportunities are productive. Some teaching fails to challenge the more able. The quality control and development of agency teachers are unsatisfactory.
Hospitality and sport	Good. Pass rates are high on most courses at levels 1 and 2. They are low on some advanced courses. Retention rates are low on some courses. Much of the teaching is good. Learning resources in hospitality and catering are of high quality. The use of individual learning plans is underdeveloped. Students receive wide ranging support. Curriculum management is responsive.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Hair and beauty	Good. Work-based learning is satisfactory . Pass rates are high on many college-based courses. Retention rates in beauty therapy at level 2 are low. The pass rate for apprentice frameworks is low. Much of the teaching is good and good use is made of ILT in the teaching. Reviews of the progress made by apprentices are now effective.
Health and social care	Good. Work-based learning is satisfactory . Pass and retention rates are high. The pass rate for apprentice frameworks is low. Much of the teaching is good. Assessment practice in work-based learning is good and curriculum management is also good. Some key skills teaching is underdeveloped. There are insufficient opportunities for students to study additional qualifications.
Visual arts	Outstanding. Pass and retention rates are high. Students' practical work is of a high standard. Teaching is skilful and there are excellent resources to promote learning. Studio space is insufficient for large-scale, three-dimensional (3D) work. Enrichment activities are excellent. There is a wide range of courses and very good curriculum management.
Performing arts	Outstanding. Pass rates are high. Teaching is very good. Assignments are well structured and there is an outstanding range of integrated production work. Staff work well together. Specialist accommodation and equipment is excellent. Opportunities for performance are many and varied. Retention rates on the national diploma course in media are low and part-time teaching is overused on this course.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in English for speakers of other languages	Satisfactory. E2E provision is good . Pass rates on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses are low. Teaching is good on E2E courses, and for students with sensory impairment and for those with mental health problems. A limited range of teaching strategies is used on ESOL courses and in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students receive good support and guidance. The use of individual learning targets to inform teaching is underdeveloped. Clear leadership impacts positively on the provision.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. GCSE and basic skills support teaching is good. Individual learning plans for students receiving basic skills support are used effectively. GCSE English pass rates are high. Few students achieve key skills qualifications. Some key skills lessons are unsatisfactory. There is no cross-college screening for dyslexia.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are good. Governors and senior managers provide clear strategic aims and set challenging targets which are closely aligned to the college's mission. The college has a good record of meeting these targets successfully. Staff are fully aware of the college's values and strategic aims. Governors use their wide ranging expertise and experience effectively to guide and monitor the work of the college. Curriculum management is satisfactory or good in the curriculum areas inspected. The management of work-based learning is satisfactory. Quality assurance policies and procedures are well established and effectively implemented. Communication within the college is good. The management information system (MIS) is easy to use, and supports learning and quality improvement well. Data are largely accurate. The recruitment, appraisal and development of staff are good. Staff appreciate the wide range of development opportunities available to them. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is outstanding. The college has developed good partnerships to promote these issues. The college is fulfilling its commitments under the Race Relations Amendment Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA). Financial management is satisfactory. The college offers good value for money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college's response to social inclusion is outstanding. It effectively promotes racial harmony and equality of opportunity and has developed a number of partnerships with external organisations to promote this work. There is a wide range of provision from entry level to level 4 which provides good opportunities for access and progression. The college successfully recruits students from areas of high deprivation, students from minority ethnic backgrounds and to all levels of provision. Arrangements to widen participation are extensive. They include well-established and extensive provision for Key Stage 4 pupils, extensive work-based learning, partnership working to deliver basic skills in the community and the joint marketing of provision with other providers. A high proportion of the students who start at the college achieve their main qualification aims. There is good support for students.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Guidance and support for students are good. There is a strong commitment to removing barriers to learning and meeting the needs of individual students. Links with local schools are productive. Advice before students enrol is impartial and guidance to students includes helpful taster courses. Arrangements to identify students' additional learning needs, including literacy and numeracy needs, are well established. There are no arrangements to formally assess whether students have dyslexia or whether adult students require additional language support. Induction procedures help students settle quickly into college life. Learning mentors provide excellent vocational support and help ensure that the progress of students who have been identified as at risk of dropping out, is carefully monitored. Tutorials are at least satisfactory. The content and use of students' individual learning plans are

underdeveloped. The support services promote equality of opportunity well. Staff have a good awareness of child protection issues. Good support is provided, for example, for students with physical disabilities, visual or hearing impairment, or problems associated with mental health difficulties. The counselling service is effective and well managed. Most full-time students receive excellent guidance in preparing for HE. The existence of financial support is effectively promoted and the service administered efficiently.

Students' views of the college

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

What students like about the college

- helpful support from staff and student services on all issues
- it is friendly and safe place to learn with good social atmosphere
- the resources and facilities, including ICT
- the integration of students of all types, backgrounds and ages
- not being treated like children and the adult environment
- the fair marking and helpful feedback on the quality of their work
- realistic working environments which prepare them well for work
- financial and personal support.

What they feel could be improved

- the price and range of food
- better support to catch up after absence
- the punctuality of some students
- limited car parking
- no student toilets in the Bronte building
- communications about teachers' absence
- more lockers
- the provision of a common room for students aged 16 to 18.

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	67	28	5
19+ and WBL*	63	31	6
Learning 16–18	69	26	5
19+ and WBL*	55	38	7

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. Students, both those aged 16 to 18 and adults, generally work at or above the level required for the courses they study. In lessons where practical work is the main student activity, standards are most often at or above the level required. In only a few lessons, mostly in lessons associated with work-based learning, and in lessons where theoretical work is the main activity, standards are lower than should be expected.

2. In lessons during the inspection, the average attendance rate was 81%, which is 5% higher than the average rate in the period 2001 to 2003 for general FE and tertiary colleges. Attendance is highest in engineering (88%) and in hairdressing and beauty therapy (85%), and lowest in construction (76%). In no area of learning, however, is attendance lower than the sector average for that area of learning.

16 to 18 year olds

3. Retention rates are mostly at, and sometimes above the average rates for similar colleges (general FE and tertiary colleges with a high widening participation factor). For courses at level 2, they were well above the average in 2001 and close to the average in 2002 and 2003. At levels 1 and 3, they are invariably close to the appropriate average.

4. Retention rates on courses leading to particular qualification aims are high. In 2003, retention rates were well above the sector average in 9 out of the 10 types of qualification where enrolments were substantial. Only on courses leading to national vocational certificates (NVQs) at level 2 were they at the average.

5. Pass rates are also mostly at, and sometimes above the average rates for similar colleges. For courses at level 2, the rate has been improving and in 2003 was well above the average, 76% compared with 68%. At levels 1 and 3 pass rates were close to the average in both 2002 and 2003. A broadly similar picture is presented when pass rates for particular types of qualification are compared with sector averages for general FE/tertiary colleges. In 4 of the 10 qualification aims, pass rates are well above average; in 5 they are at the average; and in only 1 category, NVQ level 3, they are below.

6. The college does particularly well when success rates (the proportion of students who, having started the qualification, achieve it) for the different qualification types are compared with sector averages. By this measure, in 2003, the college achieved significantly better results in 9 of the 10 qualification types. Only on NVQ level 2 courses were they at the average. In 2002, results were also good; seven were well above average, two were at the average and only on courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQ) at level 1 were they below average.

7. Achievement data for key skills courses were unreliable in 2001 and 2002. In 2003 only a small number of students were entered for the qualifications. Retention and pass rates for the students who were entered were high, but few of the college's full-time students actually gained a key skills qualification.

8. The GCSE higher grade (A to C) pass rate in English was high in 2003, 78% compared with a sector average of 41%, and considerably better than the 30% rate achieved in 2002. In GCSE mathematics, higher grade pass rates fell from 29% in 2002 to 19% in 2003 compared with a sector average of 28%.

9. The completion rate for modern apprenticeship frameworks is low in all areas of learning. Of the 794 apprentices who have started a foundation modern apprenticeship since 2001, only 3% have achieved the full framework. Some 39% are still in training. Of the 433 apprentices who have started an advanced modern apprenticeship since 2001, only 5% have achieved the full framework. Some 46% are still in training. Apprentices who have been more recently recruited are making better progress, gaining elements of their NVQs and key skills at an appropriate rate. Retention rates in the two years to 2004 have also improved. Achievements on jobcentre plus training are satisfactory. Of the 85 learners who have commenced jobcentre plus programmes since 2001, 35% have since gained employment. Some 8% have continued in training. Students who study for NVQs in the workplace achieve slow progress.

Adult learners

10. Retention rates for students enrolled on courses at levels 1 and 2 have been falling during the three years to 2003 and were low in 2003 at both levels. In 2001, the rate on level 1 courses was 3% below the sector average of 70%. In 2002 and 2003, the rates were, respectively, 7% and 11% below the sector average of 74%. The level 2 retention rate was at the sector average of 70% in 2001. In 2002 and 2003, the rate was 4% and 6%, respectively,

below the sector average of 69%. The retention rate on level 3 courses is high. In the three years to 2003, it has been consistently well above sector average.

11. Retention rates for students studying for particular types of qualification are invariably at or above sector averages. In the three years to 2003, in at least half of the six qualification types where enrolments have been substantial, retention rates have been significantly above sector averages. In these three years no qualification type has had retention rates below average. The rate has been particularly high on NVQ level 3 courses, at least 17% above sector averages.

12. Pass rates are generally high. On courses leading to level 3 qualifications, the rate has been at least 5% above sector averages in each of the four years to 2003. At level 2, the rate has been well above sector averages in three of these four years. At level 1, the rate was well above the average in 2003, well below in 2002 and at the average in the previous two years.

13. Pass rates on five of the six qualification types with substantial enrolments were high in 2003. On the sixth, NVQ level 3 courses, the rate was close to the average. In 2001 and 2002, the pass rates were generally satisfactory, close to the average on all courses except those leading to NVQ level 2 qualifications where they were low and, in 2001, on NVQ level 3 and national diploma/certificate courses where they were high.

Quality of education and training

14. Inspectors observed and graded teaching and learning in 246 lessons. The overall quality of the teaching was similar to that of the learning. Teaching was judged to be good or better in 66% of the lessons observed, satisfactory in 29% and unsatisfactory in 5%. The profile contains a slightly higher proportion of good or better lessons and a slightly smaller proportion of unsatisfactory lessons than is the case nationally in general FE colleges.

15. Teaching was much better in lessons for courses at levels 2 and 3 than at level 1. At level 2, 70% of the lessons were judged good or better, compared with an average of 61% for all general FE colleges. At level 1, only 59% of the lessons were good or better compared with 62% nationally. Teaching which takes place through practical work is good, 75% of these lessons were good or better and none unsatisfactory. It is not so good in theory lessons, with 61% of lessons good or better and 10% unsatisfactory, a profile which, nonetheless, is slightly better than that obtained nationally for this type of lesson. The teaching of full-time teachers is good, 73% of lessons were good or better and 3% unsatisfactory compared with 65% and 7% nationally for this category of teacher. Teachers employed from agencies provide poorer quality teaching. Only 44% of the lessons were good and 15% were unsatisfactory, compared with 52% and 13% nationally.

16. Teaching of school pupils aged 14 to 16 is good. Lessons are appropriately planned, and include a good variety of learning activities. In one lesson to a group of pupils following a childcare course, for example, the teacher used a wide range of literary material, gapped handouts, word search, card matching exercises and questioning to improve students' spelling

of technical words. Lessons are lively and relationships between students and teachers are constructive. In a lesson on information technology (IT) networks, a lively start and the use of pupils' names and direct questioning engaged the pupils' attention immediately. The pace of the lesson was appropriate, teaching was enthusiastic and knowledgeable. Pupils responded well, answering questions correctly and promptly, and making good notes.

17. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Nearly all full-time and part-time teachers and many other staff who support teaching and learning hold teaching qualifications. A high proportion are qualified assessors or internal verifiers. Arrangements for industrial updating are extensive, 40% of teachers have undertaken such activity in the last two years. Opportunities for professional development are good. The college has an excellent mentoring system to support new staff. The level of technician support is satisfactory in all areas. The library manager and assistant have appropriate library qualifications.

18. The college recently completed the implementation of a major three-year accommodation strategy which has addressed many of the issues raised at the previous inspection. The quality of the accommodation is good. The newly built Bellis building provides modern and well-equipped facilities for media, visual and performing arts, engineering, plumbing and electrical installation. The development of a purpose-built library supplemented by three learning resource centres across the college provides good access to computers and private study areas. Access to nearly all accommodation is good and is regularly reviewed by a group of senior managers and students. Since the last inspection, improvements, for example to pathways, lifts and parking, have been completed. Some accommodation, for example the first floor of the Alexander House building, remains inaccessible. Owing to the growth in student numbers the college currently relies on some portacabin accommodation. The college addresses these problems of accessibility and temporary buildings in its present accommodation strategy.

19. The IT infrastructure is good, uses industry-standard software and links all college sites. Substantial recent investment has provided a good ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students. Teachers have good access to computers and appropriate staff development. Significant investment has been made in developing a virtual learning environment which provides access to online learning support materials and online screening and diagnostic assessment. It is accessible from outside the college through the Internet. Some curriculum areas, for example ICT, hospitality and catering, and hairdressing and beauty therapy are making good progress in developing their use of the virtual learning environment, other curriculum areas have been slower to respond.

20. Most classrooms are well equipped and have attractive displays of student work. Modern teaching equipment including, for example, video, ICT projectors and Internet-linked computers are readily available. In most curriculum areas, specialist teaching resources are good. For example, performing arts and media have up-to-date recording and television studios and there are excellent facilities for two-dimensional (2D) and 3D visual art. A purpose-built restaurant provides a good learning environment. Soundproofing in some

classrooms is inadequate and, some areas, for example the shower and sauna area in hairdressing and beauty therapy, need updating.

21. Initial assessment procedures identify accurately which full-time students, and which work-based learners, have additional learning needs. In most cases, the results are used effectively to inform the development of individual learning plans. Assignments, including homework, are set regularly and their scheduling carefully planned to avoid students being overloaded with work. Students work is marked fairly, returned promptly and annotated with useful feedback on areas for improvement. In a few lessons, teachers make insufficient checks on whether all the students understand.

22. An electronic register system is used to accurately monitor attendance and punctuality. Teachers have frequent informal discussions with students about their progress. Formal procedures to monitor students' progress are satisfactory. Individual learning plans do not draw sufficiently from all the information that is available about a student, for example from initial assessment. Action plans, written following progress reviews with individual students, are not specific enough to be useful. The college is developing a value added system which, it is hoped, will enable tutors to measure more accurately the progress students are making against their incoming levels of attainment.

23. Where appropriate, parents are given accurate and regular information on student progress. Progress reports are provided termly. In the case of students who are underachieving, parents are informed of the strategies devised to effect improvement.

24. Arrangements to assure the validity of assessment and the accuracy of grading are thorough and effective. They are administered with the minimum disruption to teaching. Where external verifiers or moderators reports identify weaknesses, for example in the case of some NVQ qualifications in health and social care, they are acted upon promptly and effectively.

25. The college's strategies to widen participation are successful. A high percentage of the students are from areas of high deprivation. Some 24% of students are from minority ethnic groups compared to 14% in the local community. Examples of successful projects include Asian hair and bridal make-up programmes, and the provision, through the use of a bus which moves between community centres, of ESOL level 1 programmes. Do-it-yourself courses for Afro-Caribbean women have recruited successfully and basic ICT courses have been offered in four different Asian languages. Some programmes have successfully recruited young people who have been involved in drug abuse and/or car crime. The link programme, which provides basic skills, including ICT, has recruited many students from disadvantaged areas and has a good record at enabling them to progress to higher level work.

26. The college's extensive range of vocational courses provides good opportunities for progression. Provision is linked closely to the employment needs and skills shortages of the local area. College staff complete a detailed annual survey of local skills shortages in occupational sectors which informs annual curriculum planning. As a result, for example, gas training programmes have been offered to meet specific sector shortages and an E2E

programme provides high quality training in a range of occupational areas. The college's work-based learning programme is extensive. Nearly 1,500 learners are enrolled on a wide range of courses including modern apprenticeships, E2E programmes, employer training pilots, and onsite assessment and training provision. The college has recently been awarded CoVE status for financial management.

27. The college plays a leading role in the local learning partnership and has established strong links with many local and regional groups involved in regeneration and cultural integration. Wide-ranging partnership arrangements effectively broaden opportunities. For example, partnership working with HE institutions enhances opportunities for progression to level 4 and the college works closely with Oldham hospital and others to secure relevant work placements for college students. Close working with community groups enhances educational opportunities in the community.

28. Oldham's training and education providers have developed a common timetable which enables Key Stage 4 pupils to select a programme drawn from more than one provider, to suit individual interest and need. As part of this programme, the college provides courses for over 400 Key Stage 4 pupils drawn from all 15 local secondary schools. Pupils choose from three pathways; applied vocational GCSEs, a pre-apprenticeship programme, and a foundation programme aimed at re-engaging disaffected pupils. A high proportion of the teaching observed was good and none was unsatisfactory. A good variety of activity is used and the students are appropriately engaged in the learning and enjoy the experience. In one level 2 lesson, the students, who have a history of low achievement, were working below the required level. Attendance, behaviour and progress are closely monitored. Partly as a result of this and other programmes such as the summer taster for over 2,000 pupils, progression rates into FE or training are improving.

29. The college has a clear strategy for the delivery of key skills. A team of key skills co-ordinators and teachers, led by a senior manager, oversee the provision. Key skills teaching is generally satisfactory. It is best when taught in an appropriate vocational context. In some lessons, opportunities to link the teaching to a relevant vocational context are mixed. Assignment briefs are carefully designed to provide opportunities to apply skills appropriately. Some aspects of the management of key skills are unsatisfactory. For example, key skills pass rate data in 2001/02 are unreliable. In 2003, pass rates were high, but only a small number of students were entered for the full qualifications. A few students are working at too low a key skills level.

30. In most curriculum areas, opportunities for enrichment are well developed. Cross-college enrichment activities include visits, religious celebrations, diversity awareness, and theme weeks. Some curriculum areas provide short courses which allow students to gain further skills and qualifications which improve employability. Many provide residential visits, trips abroad or work placement to broaden experience. In a few curriculum areas opportunities are more limited. In some, opportunities to re-sit GCSEs in mathematics or English or to take general certificate of education advanced-level (GCE A-level) subjects are poorly developed.

31. Support for students is good. Productive links with the Connexions and careers services help ensure effective guidance for Key Stage 4 pupils and for adults. An extensive summer taster programme and the programme for Key Stage 4 pupils help ensure pupils are well prepared for entry to the college.
32. Well-structured induction programmes help full-time students settle quickly into the college and understand the demands of their course. During induction, students are given useful advice about important issues including managing their finances and accommodation. Student support funds are carefully managed and effectively allocated to students in need. All guidance and support staff are sensitive to equality of opportunity issues and act effectively to ensure that students are treated fairly and sensitively.
33. A key feature of the support system is the innovative and imaginative way learning mentors intervene in 'at risk' groups. These groups are defined on the basis of low attendance, retention or pass rates, or poor punctuality. The learning mentors' work helps improve students' achievements. The counselling service is highly valued by students and staff. It is well managed and its work is evaluated carefully; for example, by using retention and pass rate data where appropriate. The college nursery is popular and well managed. The specialist educational support unit effectively overcomes barriers to learning for a wide variety of students with additional learning needs, including visual or hearing impairment, and difficulties associated with mental health problems.
34. Tutorials vary in their effectiveness. They are at least satisfactory in all departments. In the most effective curriculum areas, such as performing arts, tutors undertake regular monitoring of each student's progress. Tutors are respected by students and often approached for informal pastoral support. An advanced practitioner monitors tutorial practice. Recent training has focused on improving the consistency of the tutorial process and on improving the quality of individual learning plans, which are sometimes too vague to be useful.
35. The support received by work-based learners has been improved recently. They can now access a wider range of support systems. The college recognises that there are still improvements to be made, for example, in the links between the findings of initial assessment and the content of individual learning plans, and the support provided for developing key skills.
36. Initial assessment of students is comprehensive. It includes assessment of literacy and numeracy, students' preferred learning styles and additional learning needs. Students are not automatically screened for dyslexia. Those who ask for screening and are diagnosed as dyslexic receive good support. A variety of methods are used to support students with literacy and numeracy needs, including formal support through one-to-one support workers, drop-in centres and the use of well-trained learning mentors and tutors. The support provided is effective. A high proportion of these students achieve their qualifications. There is no specialist language support available for part-time adult students from minority ethnic groups.
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37. The college has made an appropriate response to recent child protection initiatives. Support staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in relation to meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. The student support manager is identified as the named person to whom staff should report concerns of suspected abuse. Police checks are made on all members of staff directly working with young people.

Leadership and management

38. Leadership and strategic management are good. Governors and senior managers provide clear strategic aims, and provide effective leadership. They set clear and challenging targets which are closely linked to the college's mission. Progress towards their achievement is systematically monitored. Many of these targets, for example, its performance against its main FE allocation, are met successfully. Strategic planning is good. The priorities placed on positioning the college as a leader of regeneration in the local community, on maintaining the vocational nature of the curriculum and on the commitment to supporting minority ethnic students and recruiting students from areas of high deprivation are shared by staff. In the three years to 2003, the college has increased its student numbers by 23% and its income by 34%. Major expansion, in line with the strategic aim to contribute to local skills needs, has been achieved in work-based learning, where, with the absorption of the work of other providers, student numbers have increased from 165 to 645.

39. Governors use their wide range of expertise and experience well in guiding and monitoring the work of the college. A good range of clearly presented information is available to inform their decision making. Meetings are well managed and clearly minuted. Governors contribute well to the setting of overall college targets. In spite of strategies to improve attendance, the attendance of some governors is low.

40. Curriculum management is satisfactory or good in all areas. Curriculum performance is closely monitored. Courses are subject to regular and rigorous reviews of their effectiveness and efficiency. These reviews are informed by an extensive analysis of current and historical data. The viability and appropriateness of new course proposals are carefully researched and tested. Teachers and managers are well informed of these detailed procedures and appreciate the level of information and analysis provided. Teachers, including part-time teachers in some curriculum areas, are closely involved in the setting of course targets for recruitment, retention and pass rates, and in reviewing their achievement. Student attendance is closely monitored, using computerised registers and absences are quickly followed-up. The management of work-based learning has improved and is now satisfactory. Current apprentices are making good progress towards the completion of their frameworks. The college's work-based learning management unit 'skills@oldham' is expanding its work with employers.

41. Quality assurance policies and procedures are good. They are well established and effectively implemented. The college's quality steering group has a high profile. It is chaired by the principal and includes the chair of governors. The college's self-assessment report accurately reflects many of the inspection findings. The self-assessed curriculum grades agreed with inspection grades in 9 of the 11 areas inspected. The college's grade

profile for the quality of the teaching of its permanent teachers is in close agreement with that derived from inspection. Self-assessment failed to identify the poor teaching of many agency employed teachers. Teachers operate the self-assessment process effectively. All self-assessment reports are easily available on the college intranet. Teachers update them as part of a continuous annual cycle. Thorough and robust action plans are developed to address weaknesses. Teaching is observed annually by senior managers and outcomes inform appraisal and the staff development. A self-assessment report validation panel, seen as a 'critical friend' by teachers, includes members of the quality steering group, including the chair of governors. It rigorously validates self-assessment reports and monitors the progress of action plans.

42. Communications between staff are good. Reports of meetings, posted on the intranet, are readily available, and the principal provides regular and informative briefing papers on matters of interest. Full-time and part-time staff have easy access to the college e-mail system. An extensive meetings schedule, including curriculum team meetings, is in place and facilitates communication. Meetings are generally well attended and their outcomes are effectively recorded. Informal means of communication are promoted. Time is set aside each week to enabling staff from different areas to meet. These opportunities are well used. Members of the same course team and their administrators are normally based in the same office. Free non-alcoholic drinks are available in these areas and effectively encourage communication.

43. A well-developed and easy to use MIS is in place. Data held on the system are accurate and returns to the LSC timely. Systems for the initial capture of student information are efficient. Enrolment information, including digital photographs is completed online. Computerised registers are routinely used on the main site and provide accurate attendance records. Information to support the course review process is detailed, clear, and readily available. Financial management is satisfactory. Budgeting is prudent. The college has managed its recent three-year £7m building project well. Underperformance against contracts for work-based learning has resulted in the claw back of significant funds by the LSC. Cash reserves are currently limited. The college offers good value for money, attendance is high, average class sizes are above the sector average for similar colleges and retention and pass rates are consistently high for the main qualifications aims offered.

44. Procedures for the recruitment, appraisal, and development of staff are good. The induction of new staff is well managed. Appraisal procedures are clear and thorough and result in individual staff development plans. There is a good range of staff development activity which addresses both college and individual need. Staff appreciate the wide range of development opportunities available to them. The college prioritises the development of its staff and enables them to apply for internal promotion.

45. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is outstanding. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place which often exceed legislative requirements. The governing body reflects the ethnic diversity of the area. A senior manager carries responsibility for equal opportunities and student support. Appropriate targets, for example,

for the achievement of minority ethnic students, are set and performance against them regularly monitored. The college has responded well to the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act and SENDA. An equal opportunities executive committee sets and monitors clear targets. A new disability strategy has been agreed which incorporates the needs of current legislation. A small amount of college accommodation is inaccessible to wheel chair users. The college has robust, and well-publicised policies and procedures to address bullying and harassment. Trained staff handle complaints and a counselling service is available to complainants. The tracking of complaints, and the analysis of the issues raised, is effective.

46. The college is involved in many partnerships which promote equal opportunities and diversity. For example, a minority ethnic outreach project seeks to support unemployed young people who are not making use of appropriate services. The college is the lead member of a project group aimed at addressing the under-representation of minority ethnic staff in Manchester colleges. Staff training in equal opportunities and diversity is widely available and of high quality. An excellent, training manual forms part of a comprehensive induction and awareness raising programme. A good range of compulsory and optional training events are in place. An annual 'Celebrating Diversity' competition for college students attracts an impressive number of entrants. A student liaison team working with the Students Union is developing a multi-faith forum. The college gained an Association of Colleges Beacon award for its promotion of equal opportunities in 2003. Students feel safe in the college.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Construction

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

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

Strengths

- effective work placements for full-time students
- students' high standard of craft skills displayed in the workplace
- good teaching of craft practical skills
- good provision of onsite assessment and training.

Weaknesses

- low completion rates for apprenticeship frameworks
- low retention rates on some courses at levels 1 and 2
- poor punctuality which disrupts learning.

Scope of provision

47. Courses are provided by the school of construction and the built environment in bricklaying, paving, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, sign-work, construction and civil engineering operations. Plumbing and electrical installation courses are provided by the school of engineering. The provision is located on three sites in the centre of Oldham.

48. Some 95 full-time and 611 part-time students are enrolled, including 198 work-based learners. New Deal clients are provided for and onsite assessment and training is currently provided for 210 employees of construction companies. Approximately 35% of students are aged 16 to 18, 12% are from minority ethnic groups and 9% are female students. Courses for pupils aged 14 to 16 are available.

Achievement and standards

49. Students' achievements are generally satisfactory. Pass rates on plumbing NVQ level 2 courses and electrical installation NVQ level 3 courses are high. The onsite assessment and training provision achieves high retention and pass rates. Retention rates on NVQ level 2 courses in plumbing, and painting and decorating and on the level 1 intermediate construction certificate are low. A low proportion of students achieve full

apprenticeship frameworks and others make slow progress. The pass rate for key skills qualifications is low.

50. Most students develop high standards of craft skills. For example, in wood occupations, students produce industry-standard roof construction and high standards of work in fixing a range of joinery work including architraves and skirtings. The standard of portfolio work is satisfactory. Students on technician courses produce high-quality scale drawings. Attendance in lessons, at 75%, is similar to that nationally on construction courses.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Intermediate construction certificate 1 year	1	No. of starts	*	17	24
		% retention	*	88	50
		% pass rate	*	47	50
NVQ in mechanical engineering services (plumbing, 2 years)	2	No. of starts	30	27	33
		% retention	30	52	33
		% pass rate	89	86	91
NVQ in painting and decorating (construction, 2 years)	2	No. of starts	22	22	32
		% retention	50	27	38
		% pass rate	82	67	75
NVQ in wood occupations (construction, 2 years)	2	No. of starts	*	58	18
		% retention	*	60	89
		% pass rate	*	74	75
NVQ in wood occupations (construction, 1 year)	3	No. of starts	**	36	64
		% retention	**	100	95
		% pass rate	**	97	85

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ electrical installation (construction, 2 years)	3	No. of starts	27	16	11
		% retention	33	81	73
		% pass rate	89	85	100

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

* course did not run

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

51. Teaching is generally good. Few lessons are unsatisfactory. Teaching is especially good in practical work. These lessons are well organised, instructions given by the teachers are clear and the students make good progress. They benefit from helpful demonstrations of practical skills given by the teachers. In a plumbing lesson on flue gas analysis, students participated enthusiastically in the commissioning of a boiler. Theory lessons are well structured and make good use of ICT. In a few lessons, there is poor class management. In a significant number of lessons, poor student punctuality adversely affects learning. Key skills lessons sometimes fail to engage students' interest sufficiently.

52. Staff are well qualified and experienced and make good use of staff development opportunities. Those without teaching qualifications are currently undertaking teacher training. An effective induction programme is available for new staff. This includes mentoring and regular appraisal of performance. Technician support is satisfactory in most workshops. Accommodation is spacious and suitably equipped. Suitable arrangements are made to ensure the safe operation of, for example, wood working machinery. ICT is used widely by teachers for research and the production of teaching materials.

53. Assessment methods are thorough, well planned and suitably varied. They meet awarding body requirements and are promptly up-dated in response to changing national criteria. The results of assessment lead to individual student action plans which are helpful in enabling students to improve and prepare for the next stage of assessment. Apprentices undertake a high proportion of their assessments in the workplace. A team of well-qualified and experienced assessors undertakes prompt and rigorous assessment on the onsite assessment and training programme. Internal verification procedures effectively assure the validity of assessment. Reviews of students' progress make appropriate use of teachers' reports. Employers are often present at the review meetings and contribute effectively. Students make insufficient contribution to the progress reviews. Plans for future learning are sometimes too vague to be useful.

54. A broad range of courses is provided which meets the needs of students and industry well. Employers contribute appropriately to decisions about which courses are offered. The

school of construction and the built environment works well with other organisations on projects to widen participation. For example, community projects include housing refurbishment and the construction of mosaic panels for a local housing scheme and give students a taste of realistic working conditions and generate interest from minority ethnic groups in construction as a career. The onsite assessment and training programme meets the needs of employers and construction workers by providing assessment, training and qualifications for adult, experienced, competent operatives who do not possess formal qualifications. The school makes significant provision for Key Stage 4 school pupils. Good use is made of residential workshops held in North Wales, where building restoration work allows full-time students to develop practical skills and engage in team activities in real working conditions.

55. Prospective students are appropriately guided about the courses available. Information is available from guidance staff, the Internet and well-produced documentation. They are tested at entry to determine their suitability for their chosen programmes. Teachers are alert to possible individual learning needs and ensure those who need support receive it. Students whose attendance suffers, for example due to child minding duties, receive course materials electronically. Attendance patterns and other course requirements are modified to accommodate individual circumstances. Tutorials are provided for full-time groups and include an informative drug awareness programme.

Leadership and management

56. The curriculum is well managed. The organisational structure is clear and roles and responsibilities are understood by staff. School meetings often have useful employer input. They are effective in sharing good practice, for example in the use of ICT and developments in documentation. Students' attendance is monitored closely and, where necessary with the involvement of employers, problems effectively addressed. Accommodation and staff are employed effectively. In bricklaying, space utilisation has been improved by changing some attendance patterns from part-time day release to block-release modes of attendance. The onsite assessment and training provision is well managed. It is successfully managing a variable demand for its services whilst widening the provision and providing a good service. Staff understand the college's policies on equality of opportunity and recognise the importance of promoting equality of opportunity. Self-assessment is based on a careful evaluation of the provision. The college's views on the quality of the teaching are similar to those derived from inspection.

Engineering

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- widespread use of IT to enliven learning
- good physical and learning resources
- strong enhancement of learning by support staff
- good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the City and Guilds 2290 fabrication and welding course at level 2
- insufficient checks on students' understanding.

Scope of provision

57. Due to local circumstances, the college has determined that its provision should specialise in electrical/electronic engineering, computer-aided design, and welding. Other local providers meet the needs of students wishing to pursue mechanical/production, or motor vehicle engineering. Within the limited coverage of the provision, there are clear progression routes. Each of the specialisms has courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. There is also a level 4 higher national certificate (HNC) course in electronic engineering. Students with level 3 City and Guilds qualifications can take a course designed to prepare them for the HNC. At the time of the inspection 39 full-time and 111 part-time students were enrolled.

Achievement and standards

58. On most engineering programmes, the proportion of students that successfully complete their courses compared with those who start them exceeds the sector average. Retention rates on most courses are at or above the national average. The exception is City and Guilds 2290 fabrication and welding which has had poor retention in two of the last three years. Almost all pass rates are high. For example, the foundation and intermediate GNVQ courses have had 100% pass rates in each of the last two years. An exception is the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) course in engineering, which is being replaced by a national diploma course. Pass rates on this course have been low in the three years to 2003.

59. Students gain useful life skills and many progress from one level to the next within the college. Attendance at lessons is good. Students at level 1 have developed considerable

self-confidence and ask and respond to questions readily. Employers of GNVQ intermediate students on work placements were all positive about their students' progress, and many said they would willingly employ them in the future. Three quarters of GNVQ foundation students went on to the GNVQ intermediate and half of the level 1 and level 2 welding course students progressed to the higher level. Few bespoke courses are operated for employers. Some class groups at levels 2 and 3 perform disappointingly. Some student assignment work contains too much material drawn directly, and from Internet sites.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	No. of starts	26	24	15
		% retention	65	75	80
		% pass rate	80	100	100
City and Guilds 2290 fabrication and welding	2	No. of starts	22	18	26
		% retention	41	50	15
		% pass rate	67	89	100
City and Guilds 4351-01 computer-aided design	2	No. of starts	47	21	25
		% retention	68	95	100
		% pass rate	84	90	96
National certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	15	*	18
		% retention	67	*	67
		% pass rate	70	*	100

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

* fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

60. Most teaching is well planned. Students' learning is enlivened by the frequent use of IT in their lessons, and often benefits from the additional contribution of support staff to the teaching. Data projectors, linked to computers, are used in many lessons to successfully enrich the teaching. In one lesson, the teacher demonstrated how to operate electronic measuring equipment using an interactive virtual model displayed by the projector. Students

quickly understood the function of each control before they practised on the actual device. Technicians frequently assist teachers with demonstrations and activities in theory lessons. The understanding and quality of work of students in lower-level classes benefits from mathematics or communication specialists who often jointly teach with the engineers. In one tutorial, one of the college's learning mentors with specific training dealt with drug awareness. Students expressed their enjoyment of the lesson.

61. When developing theory, some teachers fail to check whether all students properly understand the concepts. In about one third of the observed lessons, theory was developed through a series of questions to the class, but not all students joined in the response and their level of comprehension was therefore unknown. The assessment of assignments is generally thorough and students are told how their work could be improved.

62. Students who have been diagnosed as needing help in mathematics or communication receive strong support. All students take a computer-based diagnostic test to assess their abilities in numeracy and communications, and also the learning styles they are likely to prefer. Extra specialist teachers in mathematics and communication are employed to good effect in a selection of their classes, as negotiated with the curriculum leader. Little action is taken on the basis of the learning styles diagnosis. Full-time level 1 students all take a four-week 'introduction to engineering' course which is valuable in assessing their abilities and allowing them to make a more informed choice of subsequent course.

63. The tutorial system is generally successful in monitoring each full-time student's progress, and in its pastoral content. Most full-time students have individual meetings with their tutor at least termly, at which their commitment and progress in assignments is discussed. At the time of the inspection, a few students had not yet had their 'autumn' meeting. The actions agreed between tutor and student are often too broad, for example to improve attendance, instead of offering a specific challenge. Student evaluations of each of the group tutorials managed by the learning mentors are positive.

64. Teaching rooms used by engineering students are all of high quality and encourage students' pride in their choice of programme. Almost all specialist rooms in the recently opened engineering accommodation have data projectors, and all electronics practical rooms have multiple computers for student use. Students move with confidence from theory to simulation, or research on the computers. The accommodation includes a large, well-used, learning centre dedicated to engineering and construction. This provides students with ready availability to networked computers with Internet access, PC workstations on which they can research and produce assignment work.

65. Specialist equipment used by students is generally good, and learning resources are excellent. Modern equipment is used by students in computer-aided design, micro-processing, electronics and welding. Much of the metal removing machinery is old, but adequate for its occasional use. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced for their duties, and regularly participate in both engineering and educational development activities.

Leadership and management

66. Students benefit from good management of the curriculum. Organisational and administrative systems are effective, full attention is paid to maintaining quality, and the provision is reviewed regularly to better match the perceived needs of students. Staff and managers meet regularly in a well-designed schedule of meetings. Meetings have good attendance and minutes are clear. Actions are followed-up. Course files are well-maintained working documents. Budget decisions are transparent and well understood by staff. Timetables are accurate. Attendance is checked at every lesson, and prompt action follows repeated lateness or absence. Meaningful course targets are set for retention, pass and attendance rates. The judgements in the self-assessment report largely agree with those from this inspection, but are overgenerous in regard to teaching and learning. All the suggested actions resulting from self-assessment are being implemented. The course offering is regularly reviewed in the light of current course performance, and local intelligence on the needs of local industry. Recent decisions include the cessation of the AVCE in favour of a more specialist national diploma. Attempts to engage engineering employers more closely in the work of the school have not been successful.

Business

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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on financial and legal courses
- good teaching
- the wide ranging provision providing good progression opportunities
- strong support for students
- effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- low completion rates for modern apprentice frameworks
- dull teaching in a minority of lessons.

Scope of provision

67. A wide range of courses is delivered at the college main site, the Oldham Business Management School, and in the workplace. Full-time courses are provided in business studies, business administration, finance and accounting, and legal studies. Part-time students can also attend courses in these subject areas, as well as management and a range of specialist professional provision such as marketing and human resource management. The main subjects are often provided at levels 1 to 4. For example, book-keeping and accounting students can begin at level 1 and progress through NVQ accounting levels 2, 3 and 4. Full-time business studies courses are delivered at GNVQ foundation, intermediate and AVCE levels. There is a small amount of work-based learning. At the time of the inspection, there were 182 full-time and 432 part-time students enrolled, including 79 foundation and advanced modern apprentices. Business administration, employability award and legal studies level 2 are provided for Key Stage 4 pupils from local schools. A CoVE in financial management has been recently awarded to the college. Developments are at an early stage. There are plans, for example, to develop a new financial centre, provide new courses in taxation and book-keeping courses and develop provision for gifted and talented school pupils. It is planned to launch the centre in September 2004.

Achievement and standards

68. Pass rates are high on many courses, particularly in accounting and legal studies. For example, pass rates on level 2 and level 3 paralegal studies and Institute of Legal

Executives (ILEX) courses have been consistently well above national averages for the three years to 2003. Pass rates on full-time GNVQ and AVCE business studies courses have been inconsistent, sometimes well above and sometimes well below sector averages. Retention rates are generally satisfactory. There has been improvement in pass rates on most courses in 2003, compared with 2002. Completion of full framework achievements for work-based apprentices is poor. The current apprentices are making better progress towards achieving the individual units than previously.

69. The standard of work produced by students is generally good. Written work is well presented and shows good evidence of the students' improvements in their business-related analytical and critical skills. Apprentices' portfolios are well organised and professionally presented, and draw heavily from their work experiences. Students work well in lessons and present clear and thoughtful answers to their teachers' questions. They demonstrate good practical skills. For example, business administration students can manage legal documents very sensitively in a confidential working environment, and deal appropriately with customer complaints. Many students progress well from courses at level 1 to level 4.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation business studies	1	No. of starts	28	35	17
		% retention	61	66	100
		% pass rate	63	26	71
Book-keeping and accounting	1	No. of starts	39	56	85
		% retention	82	82	86
		% pass rate	84	70	70
Certificate in paralegal studies	2	No. of starts	27	57	32
		% retention	70	79	78
		% pass rate	79	76	80
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	45	18	29
		% retention	80	94	72
		% pass rate	69	76	71

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
ILEX part 1 (2 years)	3	No. of starts	24	27	18
		% retention	54	56	39
		% pass rate	62	53	71
Higher certificate in paralegal studies	3	No. of starts	25	30	23
		% retention	88	73	78
		% pass rate	100	95	100

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

Quality of education and training

70. Teaching is generally good. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and are committed to their work. They plan their work thoroughly using detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Many use a good variety of teaching methods to stimulate their students' interest and involvement and thereby improve learning. For example, in one lesson, accounting students worked in pairs creating posters which described where to place financial transactions on balance sheets. In another lesson, supervisory management students had to answer a personal questionnaire about their preferred learning styles, and were then asked to relate this to the dynamics of managing a team project at work. Students stated that they enjoyed the use of different learning activities and felt they encouraged them to learn more effectively.

71. A strong feature of many lessons is the close link made between theory and current commercial and professional practice. A good practical example of this is the use of a simulated modern office environment which students on the Employability Award use. The use of this office environment greatly enhances business administration students' competence in a wide range of office-related skills. Teachers relate theory to current practice in many other areas of the curriculum, often using local examples or encouraging students to relate theory to their own experiences as consumers or employees. In a small number of lessons, teaching is too monotonous and does not challenge students. Teachers do not use ICT sufficiently in their teaching. In a few lessons, teachers give insufficient attention to checking whether the students understand the topic.

72. Most staff are experienced and have suitable academic and professional qualifications. In response to a criticism made during the last inspection that teachers lacked knowledge of current commercial and professional practice, commercial updating through visits and secondments is encouraged. Several teachers are currently using these opportunities to improve their understanding of current business practice. Teaching rooms at

the main campus are satisfactory, but many lack subject identity and do not present an inspiring learning environment. Library resources are adequate. The Oldham Business Management School site provides an excellent professional learning environment.

73. Written work is generally marked regularly and returned promptly. Students value the detailed and constructive feedback provided which helps them to progress. In a few cases, work is not returned within a reasonable timescale. Internal verification is well managed, and schedules for its application are published in advance. Reviews of college-based students' progress and work-based learning, and subsequent action planning processes are effectively managed. Students use these plans to manage effectively their work-based learning.

74. Students on both college and work-based programmes speak highly of the support given to them by teachers. For example, they value the advice, guidance and induction arrangements which help them feel comfortable in their choice of course. Students are also aware of the range of specialist support available to them. Several full-time students make use of the nursery facilities which have enabled them to return to education. Students benefit from the careers advice, supplemented by visiting speakers from HE and professional bodies such as Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), which is provided.

Leadership and management

75. The curriculum managers are focused clearly on making improvements. They hold regular meetings with team leaders to review performance, set realistic targets, and plan resources for the future. Robust and effective quality assurance arrangements are in place. These are leading to demonstrable improvements in a number of areas, such as rising pass rates. Better management and monitoring arrangements have been introduced to work-based learning. These are making improvements to the previously inconsistent tracking of students' progress. Teachers' morale is high. They say that this is due to managers who prioritise improvements to students' learning and achievement and the well being of students and staff.

Information and communications technology

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

Strengths

- consistently high retention and pass rates on the AVCE double award
- high pass and retention rates on the intermediate GNVQ in 2003
- good use of ICT resources to enhance learning
- productive work placement opportunities.

Weaknesses

- a low proportion of enrolled students who achieved the AVCE single award in 2003
- low retention or pass rates on some level 1 courses
- the lack of challenge for more able students
- unsatisfactory monitoring and development of agency employed teachers.

Scope of provision

76. Full-time ICT courses provide progression routes from the GNVQ foundation course to the GNVQ intermediate course and then to the AVCE single and double awards. There are full-time IT technician courses at levels 2 and 3. Part-time courses include Awarding Body Consortium (ABC) beginners' courses, computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), European computer driving licence (ECDL), City and Guild 7261, visual basic programming and Internet skills. Most part-time courses are delivered at the college main site and in a learning centre at a community venue. In addition, courses are offered on a partnership basis with other providers in several community venues located in deprived areas of the city. At the time of the inspection, there were 154 full-time and 471 part-time students. Most full-time students, 80%, are aged 16 to 18, and nearly all the part-time students are adults.

Achievement and standards

77. There is considerable variation in retention and pass rates. Overall, they are broadly satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on the two-year AVCE ICT double award are very high. Pass rates on the ECDL and GNVQ intermediate courses improved significantly between 2002 and 2003 and were high in 2003. Retention rates on the AVCE single award course and on the City and Guilds 7261 course have declined and were low in 2003. Pass rates on the foundation GNVQ, although improving, have been well below sector averages in

the three years to 2003. Pass rates on the AVCE single award are close to the sector average. Punctuality is generally satisfactory. Attendance during the lessons observed, at 81%, was slightly above the national average.

78. Most ICT students develop a good practical understanding of the software they are using and are competent and confident in its applications. On technician courses, students develop good vocational knowledge and related skills, for example, in the building of computers. Students on full-time courses are well motivated and are able to work both independently and collaboratively when required. For example, on the AVCE double award, students working on a group project used a variety of software and had developed a good understanding of teamwork. Many activities do not challenge the more able students sufficiently. For example, students are rarely given tasks designed to develop their skills of critical evaluation, research and analysis.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation ICT	1	No. of starts	36	56	49
		% retention	81	66	82
		% pass rate	38	68	70
City and Guilds 4242 basic IT	1	No. of starts	*	226	118
		% retention	*	82	73
		% pass rate	*	87	83
City and Guilds 7261 IT	1	No. of starts	206	430	311
		% retention	89	71	59
		% pass rate	76	74	79
CLAIT stage 1	1	No. of starts	43	397	235**
		% retention	96	87	83
		% pass rate	46	56	57

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate ICT	2	No. of starts	55	46	39
		% retention	84	72	87
		% pass rate	61	42	85
ECDL	2	No. of starts	*	89	73
		% retention	*	48	70
		% pass rate	*	63	76
AVCE ICT single award	3	No. of starts	31	33	35
		% retention	74	85	69
		% pass rate	52	68	67
AVCE ICT double award	3	No. of starts	*	18	20
		% retention	*	100	100
		% pass rate	*	94	95

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

* course did not run

** new CLAIT syllabus in 2003

Quality of education and training

79. Almost all the teaching is at least satisfactory. A lower proportion is good or better than is seen nationally in general FE colleges in this curriculum area and little is very good or outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers motivate and engage all the students with a good range of interesting and challenging work. For example, in one lesson on the use of e-mail and the Internet, the teacher kept the attention of a group of potentially disruptive students by maintaining a brisk pace, presenting them with short easily understood tasks and using challenging questions which engendered lively debate. The students responded well to the questioning and learned about the different systems and the use of e-mail in general society and in vocationally based contexts. In these lessons, good use is made of the virtual learning environment. Helpful resource materials and assignments have been put there to support students' learning.

80. In many lessons, teaching is lacklustre and is not differentiated sufficiently to meet the differing needs of individual students. Higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently. There is insufficient questioning of students or use of other means of checking

that they understand. In many of the lessons for adult students, students progress at the pace of the slowest. Teachers use too narrow a range of teaching methods. A high proportion of these lessons were taught by agency teachers.

81. Teachers have relevant technical expertise and are knowledgeable about their subject. Some have insufficient recent industrial and commercial experience. ICT resources are used well to enhance learning. The wide range of industry-standard equipment at the college's main site allows students to gain up-to-date vocational experience. The college has a large IT suite equipped with over 130 computers. All the main computing rooms have Internet access and printers, and some have data projection facilities. Students have e-mail and storage space available on the network. A learning centre in the town provides adult students with easily accessible courses. Access to this facility for students with restricted mobility is difficult. Some of the rooms are badly ventilated; open plan areas can be noisy.

82. Homework is set regularly and marked promptly. Assignments have clear grading criteria and they are well planned. The deadlines for the completion of work are scheduled carefully and successfully avoid overloading students. The assessment of students' work is satisfactory. Grading decisions are fair and students receive clear feedback on how to improve. Internal verification procedures are effective at assuring the quality of assessment processes. Accurate records of students progress are kept. On some, but not all, courses these are used well to monitor progress. The results of the initial assessment of students are not used by teachers to differentiate teaching to meet students differing needs.

83. Participation in work experience by full-time students is good. Students studying courses at levels 2 and 3 undertake productive work placements which enable them to link theory to current industry practice. Their learning is also enriched through a range of educational visits to industry, and the use of guest speakers. There are good progression opportunities from one level to the next and on to HE. A high proportion of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds.

84. Induction arrangements are satisfactory for full-time students who say they are welcomed into the college. Students have good access to personal counselling and careers advice services. Individual tutorials for full-time students take place termly. At these tutorials students' progress is reviewed. Written feedback on progress is often too brief and the targets to guide future work insufficiently specific. Poor attendance is quickly followed-up. Students who have, for example, visual or hearing impairments are effectively provided for. Support arrangements include individual support provided by support workers.

Leadership and management

85. Leadership and management of the curriculum area are satisfactory. The college MIS system provides accurate data on students' achievements, facilitating the setting of targets for retention and pass rates. Course files are well ordered and useful. Course team meetings are held frequently and are well attended. Their minutes indicate that appropriate attention is paid to many curriculum matters. Whilst curriculum managers have recognised the low retention and pass rates on some courses, insufficient attention has been given to

ascertaining the reasons why. Appraisal is carried out annually and staff development, which is appropriately focused on improving teaching, is readily available to full-time teachers. Good practice, for example in the tracking of students' progress, which is operated on some, courses is not shared sufficiently with other areas. The self-assessment report is largely accurate. It recognises that agency teachers have insufficient access to staff development opportunities, but does not recognise the weaknesses in the teaching of agency teachers.

Hospitality and sport

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses at levels 1 and 2
- much good teaching and learning
- good resources in hospitality and catering to enhance learning
- the wide range of support for students
- responsive curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- low pass rates on the AVCE courses
- underdeveloped use of individual learning plans.

Scope of provision

86. The college offers a range of programmes in hospitality, catering, sport, leisure, uniformed services, travel and tourism. At the time of inspection, there were 80 students on hospitality programmes, 90 on leisure and tourism and 70 on sport and uniformed services programmes. About 80% were studying full time and 85% were aged 16 to 18. Courses include GNVQs at foundation and intermediate levels and AVCE courses, in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation. Also available are courses leading to NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in food preparation and food service, NVQ level 2 in sport and recreation and a certificate in fitness instruction. There are a small number of part-time courses in catering and travel studies.

Achievement and standards

87. Pass rates are high on most courses at levels 1 and 2. For example, on the NVQ level 2 in food preparation and the NVQ level 1 in food and drinks service, pass rates are consistently well above the national average. On the GNVQ courses at foundation and intermediate levels, retention and pass rates have improved and in 2003 were well above sector averages. Pass rates on the NVQ level 1 in food preparation and cooking have declined during the three years to 2003 and in 2003 were low. Retention and pass rates in 2003 on the AVCE courses in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation were low.

88. Retention rates have declined on several courses. In 2003, retention rates were well below average on the preparation for entry to the uniformed services course and the NVQ level 1 in food and drink service. On some courses, most of the students who leave early do so to gain relevant employment. The current in-year retention rate for all courses is over 80%, a significant improvement on the rate in previous year.

89. Students demonstrate good practical skills in both food preparation and food service. Photographic evidence in students' portfolios illustrates well the good standard of work in catering. Students' speed of service in the restaurants is good and food is well presented. Level 3 students demonstrate good management skills when asked to work with students on lower level courses. In leisure and tourism lessons, students show a good level of understanding of the related theory. Students' attendance during the inspection was slightly above the sector average.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation leisure and tourism	1	No. of starts	28	23	**
		% retention	64	74	**
		% pass rate	33	76	**
NVQ catering and hospitality food and drink service 1 year	1	No. of starts	23	21	19
		% retention	83	76	74
		% pass rate	79	94	93
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking 1 year	1	No. of starts	**	32	29
		% retention	**	75	72
		% pass rate	**	96	71
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	41	47	37
		% retention	66	62	84
		% pass rate	78	69	84

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Preparation for entry to uniformed services	2	No. of starts	15	23	25
		% retention	73	85	48
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking 1 year	2	No. of starts	**	15	16
		% retention	**	73	56
		% pass rate	**	82	100
AVCE double award travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	*	22	25
		% retention	*	73	56
		% pass rate	*	69	64

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

* course did not run

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

90. In a high proportion of lessons, teaching and learning are good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Students in most lessons are well motivated and appropriately challenged. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed and guide the teaching well. There is a good structure to the lessons. Clear introductions ensure that students understand what is to be covered. Teachers use a good variety of teaching strategies, for example small group work, debates, practical exercises and presentations, which succeed in fully engaging the students. In one tourism lesson, students researched a wide range of travel documents in order to make a presentation on a specific tourist destination. In catering, students research a range of commodities and develop their own unique dishes that are served in the restaurant. Recreation teachers make good use of high-quality teaching materials such as workbooks and worksheets which require the students to take an active part in the learning, for example by requiring them to undertake research.

91. Students contribute well in lessons and readily take responsibility for their allotted tasks. In the restaurant, for example, students undertake the role of head waiter or bar supervisor with confidence and skill. Sports students lead practical lessons in fitness, exercise and sport activities, predominantly by teaching their peers. In a few lessons, the different abilities of students are not fully addressed.

92. Learning resources are good in hospitality and catering. Accommodation is purpose built, well planned and provides a realistic working environment. Students have access to a wide range of equipment that prepares them for employment. The well-subscribed restaurant caters for a good variety of other hospitality functions. The college does not own dedicated sport facilities. It leases premises locally that act as a fitness gym. The facility does not provide a suitably realistic working environment and access to it is poor. The college also hires local sports halls for some practical lessons. Staff are well qualified and many have recent industrial experience. Students have a range of good and well-presented learning materials to work with in lessons. The learning resource centre has a limited book stock. High-quality learning materials are available on the virtual learning environment.

93. Students have a good understanding of the assessment processes and play an appropriate part in deciding when they are ready for assessment. Assignment briefs are vocationally relevant. Students receive good written feedback on the quality of their work and how to improve it. Internal verification activity is appropriate and in line with awarding body requirements. Catering students develop a useful individual assessment plan which identifies what is to be assessed, when and how. Progress against this plan is reviewed regularly. Clear records are kept of students' progress and students are kept fully informed of their progress. Individual learning plans are underdeveloped. They lack sufficient detail about a students' full programmes of work and about what the students need to do. They are rarely updated.

94. Full-time courses offer good opportunities for progression from entry level to level 3. Some courses at entry level, for example in food preparation and service, are suitable for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and have effectively widened access to the curriculum. A pre-apprentice course recruits Key Stage 4 pupils and prepares them either for employment or for entry to full-time study.

95. Students benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities. They undertake visits to organisations, exhibitions and other events and, in some areas, residential trips abroad. Students on the uniformed services courses receive many guest speakers, visit the army and navy, and undertake residential periods with the army and at an outdoor pursuits centre. Many courses organise periods of work experience, which help to prepare students for employment.

96. Students are well supported. They speak highly of the support they receive from college staff on both academic and personal issues. They receive good pre-entry guidance, are interviewed by teachers, and are made fully aware of the commitment they need to make in order to be successful. Students are assessed to decide whether they need additional support. Where required it is readily available, often during lessons. In one practical lesson, support workers provided valuable support for individual students. Learning mentors work with students on a range of personal and academic issues. Attendance is closely monitored.

Leadership and management

97. Curriculum management is good. Regular school and course team meetings provide good channels for communication. Minutes record the discussions that take place, but do not always give a full account of the actions to be taken. The curriculum development plan identifies clearly the areas to be addressed and has resulted for example in changes to the course portfolio in response to some poor pass or retention rates and staff development where needed. Teachers have designated areas of responsibility and are clear about their roles and how to implement them. Teachers are appropriately involved in the setting of targets, for example, for recruitment, retention and pass rates. Progress towards achieving these targets is closely monitored. Self-assessment processes involve the completion of annual course reviews by course teams. The self-assessment report accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the area. Equality of opportunity issues are addressed, for example, during tutorials and teachers challenge inappropriate actions.

Hair and beauty

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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many college-based courses
- much good teaching
- good use of ILT in teaching and learning
- effective reviews of progress in work-based learning.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the beauty therapy level 2 course
- low pass rate of work-based learning frameworks.

Scope of provision

98. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty, and related subjects. Full-time provision includes hairdressing levels 1 to 3, beauty courses at levels 2 and 3, holistic therapies and sports therapy. Part-time courses include fashion and photographic make-up, beauty therapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, body massage, nail techniques, barbering and hairdressing. At the time of the inspection, there were approximately 200 full-time and 200 part-time students. About 80% of the full-time and 30% of the part-time students were aged 16 to 18. The college also offers courses to pupils in Key Stage 4. Some 74 work-based learners were following foundation or advanced modern apprenticeships programmes in hairdressing.

Achievement and standards

99. On most courses, pass rates match or exceed national averages. Pass rates are high on NVQ level 3 beauty and on the hairdressing one-year course at level 2. Pass rates on most short courses are often well above sector averages. For example, on the theatrical and media make-up course, the pass rate has been at least 10% above the average in each of the three years to 2003. On the Indian head massage course, they dipped from this high level in 2003 to well below average. A low proportion of modern apprentices achieves the full apprenticeship framework. For example, for foundation modern apprentices enrolled in 2001/02, only 19% have achieved the full framework compared with a sector average of 31%.

100. Retention rates fluctuate above and below the average. Only on the NVQ level 1 course in hairdressing and the theatrical and media make-up course have they been at or above the average in each of the three years to 2003. On the NVQ level 2 hairdressing course they were high in 2001, low in 2002 and recovered in 2003 to well above the average. They have been low in two of these three years on the NVQ level 2 beauty therapy course. Strategies taken to improve retention rates have proved effective in the current year with improvements in in-year retention rates for the current cohort of students.

101. Students have a good understanding of the programmes they follow. Hairdressing students manage their learning and assessments well. Beauty therapy students demonstrate high levels of skill in the commercial salon. Students work at or above the standards expected for their level of course. Attendance, at 85%, was high in the lessons inspected.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
NVQ hairdressing (1 year)	1	No. of starts	74	65	75
		% retention	76	80	81
		% pass rate	93	77	92
NVQ beauty (1 year)	2	No. of starts	39	29	76
		% retention	85	48	66
		% pass rate	91	36	84
Hairdressing (1 year)	2	No. of starts	29	44	38
		% retention	97	48	79
		% pass rate	79	86	80
NVQ beauty (1 year)	3	No. of starts	26	17	16
		% retention	81	84	75
		% pass rate	100	80	83
Theatrical and media make-up diploma	3	No. of starts	15	17	18
		% retention	73	76	89
		% pass rate	91	100	94

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Indian head massage		No. of starts	32	23	32
		% retention	78	87	81
		% pass rate	92	95	65

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

Quality of education and training

102. A high proportion of the teaching is good and little is unsatisfactory. Lessons are well planned and organised and many include a wide range of activity. Learning is enhanced by the highly developed vocational expertise of the teachers, many of whom have particularly strong links with the industry. On the theatre and media make-up course, in one lesson on burns, by using an effective mix of questioning, photographic samples, a demonstration and frequent reference to theatrical practice, the teacher succeeded in thoroughly engaging the students who contributed well and learned a lot. Peer assessment is used effectively to increase students' understanding of the standards they need to achieve. In the less effective lessons, questioning is used to check but not extend learning.

103. The use of ILT in the curriculum is very good. There is extensive learning material on the virtual learning environment. Students use this resource for revision, assessment and reflective learning. Assignments on courses at all levels are word-processed and use imported or scanned images to good effect. Online revision tests are used effectively to improve students' understanding.

104. Salons are adequately equipped to support learning and assessment. The hair and beauty learning centre, which is separate from the main provision, is utilised extensively by the students. The college salon provides a realistic working environment.

105. The tracking of hair dressing students' progress is good. Hairdressing students are confident in the assessment process and make appropriate progress. Beauty therapy students, whilst demonstrating high levels of skill, have insufficient completed and recorded assessments in some cases.

106. During induction, students are assessed to ascertain their levels of attainment in basic and key skills and their preferred learning styles during induction. There is insufficient use of the test results to inform the planning of teaching. In work-based learning, new progress review processes, which are held frequently and include students, employers and college assessors, are particularly effective. They have led, at least in part, to a recent marked improvement in students' progress towards achieving their qualifications.

107. A broad curriculum enables students from Key Stage 4 to progress to level 3 courses. The curriculum is enriched by competition work, technical seminars and collaboration with local theatre groups. Community programmes, delivered in community centres, widen participation attracting groups of students who would not otherwise participate. Students with childcare responsibilities attend college at times which suit them.

108. Arrangements to ensure that students are well informed about the provision are well established. They include an open evening, taster sessions and an interview. Induction activities are well organised and supportive. Additional support arrangements are provided where appropriate and are responsive to individual students' needs. For example, they may be provided in lessons or through drop-in sessions with timing to suit the student. The tutorial programme includes appropriate topics, including personal issues such as sexual health. Some apprentices are unsure about how key skills fit into their programme and what progress they are making towards these qualifications.

Leadership and management

109. Management of the curriculum area is effective. Curriculum managers listen and respond positively to the views of students. The self-assessment process accurately identifies many of the area's strengths and weaknesses. The implementation of the resulting actions to address weaknesses is monitored. The implementation of the recovery plan for work-based learning to address low framework achievement is particularly effective. The increases in staffing and the focus on review-linked assessment have had a marked effect on the achievements of work-based learners. Curriculum resources are managed well. Student groups are timetabled efficiently.

Health and social care

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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates
- high retention rates in 2003
- much good teaching
- good assessment practice in work-based learning
- good management.

Weaknesses

- low achievement of modern apprentice framework
- underdeveloped teaching of key skills in some vocational lessons
- limited opportunity to study additional qualifications.

Scope of provision

110. The school of care services offers programmes in early years and health and social care. At the time of the inspection, there were 362 full-time students and 464 part-time students. Nearly 80% of the full-time students and approximately 10% of the part-time students were aged 16 to 18. There were 191 work-based learners of whom 56 are advanced modern apprentices, 95 are foundation apprentices, and 38 are taking NVQs in oral healthcare at levels 2 or 3.

111. The range of full-time and part-time courses includes the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) foundation course, certificate and diploma courses in childcare and education, the national diploma in early years, NVQ courses in early years care and education, and health and social care, GNVQ courses at foundation and intermediate levels and an AVCE course. There is an access certificate in health professions and counselling. In addition, short courses are offered in first aid.

112. Advanced modern apprentices and oral healthcare students are directly employed. Most foundation apprentices are in work placements. All sub-contractors use their own assessors and verifiers, some workplaces have in-house assessors. All other assessment and verification is undertaken by the college. Underpinning knowledge is offered in a range of ways including teaching by sub-contractors, day-release college provision, evening provision

and a pilot study where 15 learners from two care homes come together one morning a week, during employer time, for onsite training delivered by the college.

Achievement and standards

113. There are high pass rates on many courses. The CACHE foundation award in caring for children has achieved pass rates which have been well above the national average in each of the three years to 2003. An improving pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care has resulted in high pass rates in 2002 and 2003. On the access certificate in health professions, the pass rate has been above 90% in the three years to 2003. On the advanced counselling skills course, the pass rate was 100% in 2003.

114. Many courses have both high retention and pass rates. In 2003, retention rates were almost all well above national averages. A college strategy to improve retention rates has resulted in marked improvements since 2002 on many courses. For example, on the GNVQ foundation course health and social care, the retention rate has risen from 60% to 73% and the CACHE diploma in childcare and education from 36% to 76%.

115. Students' work is of a high standard. Work is well organised and shows a clear understanding of the requirements of the specifications. Students display good research and other skills which will be useful in HE.

116. The achievement rate on modern apprentice frameworks is low as is the achievement of NVQs through work-based learning. Between 2001 and 2004, for example, only 6% of advanced modern apprentices achieved the full framework. In the same time period, only 20% achieved an NVQ compared to the national rate of 45%.

117. Attendance in lessons is good. During the week of inspection, there was an average attendance of 84% compared with a national average for this area of learning of 78%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ foundation in health and social care	1	No. of starts	31	40	33
		% retention	71	60	73
		% pass rate	86	96	71
CACHE foundation award in caring for children	1	No. of starts	***	27	20
		% retention	***	74	90
		% pass rate	***	90	94

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	No. of starts	47	41	44
		% retention	68	80	91
		% pass rate	75	91	93
NVQ early years care and education	2	No. of starts	*	35	34
		% retention	*	71	76
		% pass rate	*	76	85
Certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	16	22	20
		% retention	94	82	90
		% pass rate	100	89	94
Diploma in nursery nursing / diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	25	39	25
		% retention	80	36	76
		% pass rate	90	100	89
Access certificate in health professions	3	No. of starts	73	76	97
		% retention	82	89	75
		% pass rate	92	99	93
Counselling skills advanced	3	No. of starts	19	**	15
		% retention	100	**	93
		% pass rate	89	**	100
GNVQ advanced / AVCE double award, health and social care	3	No. of starts	22	15	32
		% retention	64	73	72
		% pass rate	71	100	83

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

* *course not running*

** *unreliable data*

*** *fewer than 15 students enrolled*

Quality of education and training

118. Much of the teaching is good and little is unsatisfactory. Learners are set challenging group and individual tasks. Formative assessment uses focused questioning and worksheets effectively. There are regular checks on whether students are learning appropriately and the students are given good opportunities to reinforce their learning through the wide range of activities set during the lesson. There is clear signposting of what is expected in assignments. In addition to teaching students to develop the concepts of professional practice, students are enabled to relate theory to practice and to develop analytical and critical thinking skills. Learning materials are of high quality. In one lesson, the teacher successfully used a 'talking heads' video as an example of an elderly person's perception of care workers, care and health and social care services. This stimulated a lively debate, which was skilfully facilitated by the teacher. The learners were able to identify how the quality of life could have been improved for the person in the video.

119. In less effective lessons, there is insufficient challenge. The teaching of key skills is under developed in some vocational lessons. Students are not enabled to develop these skills during their vocational lessons nor are they placed in a vocational context.

120. Classroom resources to support learning are good. They have Internet access, and up-to-date periodicals and books to support research and independent study. Teachers are vocationally competent, and undertake appropriate industrial updating. All hold relevant qualifications for their field. There is effective mentoring of new staff. Students' early anxieties about frequent changes in teachers on the AVCE in health and social care course have been allayed with new teachers appointed. Accommodation is good, with attractive displays of student work. Some of the rooms used for practical lessons are inappropriate and some lack adequate soundproofing. In work-based learning, resources are satisfactory, accommodation is at least fit for purpose, teachers, trainers and assessors are appropriately qualified. Learning materials are interesting and of a high quality.

121. Assessment is robust and feedback is thorough and helpful, enabling students to identify areas for improvement and resubmit their work to gain a higher grade. Managers have responded energetically to external verifier reports which were critical of assessment practice on some courses in January 2003. Action plans to address the weaknesses were prepared and have been implemented.

122. There is good assessment practice in work-based learning. Assessment is rigorous. Upon entry, all learners are assessed for literacy, numeracy and skills. All assessment is in the workplace and employers are consulted and informed in advance. Assessment plans are clear and comprehensive, feedback is detailed and formative. Action plans are specific and useful. The internal verification system is well established. Internal verifiers regularly observe assessors and provide them with informative feedback on their performance.

Students draw on a wide range of opportunities to collect evidence and the direct observation of students at work is frequently used for portfolio evidence.

123. Partnerships with nearby HE institutions help to promote progression to HE. The college works with both Oldham hospital and with employers through the early years development partnership to secure relevant and meaningful placement experience for students. Student placements are well managed and assessment of professional practice on early years courses is rigorous. Theory is closely linked to practice. Students are supported well in their placement by college assessors and work placement supervisors.

124. Opportunities for full-time students, to re-sit mathematics or English language or to take additional relevant advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) subjects such as biology or psychology are limited. This weakness can impact adversely on students' chances of gaining entry to HE or professional studies in the health and social care sector. There is a good range of other enrichment activities including visits to health and social care establishments, opportunities to listen to visiting speakers and to undertake basic first aid. Students do not have the opportunity to take some short courses such as manual handling or basic food hygiene which would further enhance their chances of employment.

125. Students' levels of prior attainment and early diagnostic assessment inform the content of individual learning plans. Appropriate attention is given to meeting students' specific learning needs both during lesson planning and in the planning of individual learning programmes. Academic and pastoral support in health and social care, early years and work-based learning are good. Students who are identified as needing additional learning support receive it both through central support services, by teachers during lessons and for work-based learners, where appropriate onsite. Students' attendance is monitored closely. Students who are deemed at risk of not gaining their qualification are appropriately supported.

126. Key skills are underdeveloped in work-based learning. Opportunities to develop and assess, in particular application of number, are missed, for example, in observations undertaken by assessors, in schemes of work and in lesson planning. Many key skills portfolios contain insufficient evidence generated from students' vocational work.

Leadership and management

127. Curriculum management and the management of work-based learning are good. Quality assurance systems are robust. They include effective strategies to secure improvement, such as, for example, mentorship, observations of teaching and clear reporting systems to monitor improvement. The self-assessment process is sufficiently self-critical and the findings are accurate. Work-based learning sub-contractors are appropriately quality checked. There are many images around classrooms and corridors which promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice. Professional development is encouraged and nearly all teachers have attended a comprehensive range of short courses or the means of updating their knowledge.

128. Strategies to improve framework achievement have been implemented and are having positive effects. They include more frequent assessments and review meetings, more involvement of employers, and more useful student learning plans. Entry requirements are now more rigorous. Advanced modern apprentices in early years, for example, who started an 18-month programme in September 2003 have already completed, and have ready for verification, nearly half their theory assignments.

Visual arts

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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on many courses
- high standard of practical work
- very skilful teaching
- excellent resources which promote learning
- excellent enrichment activities to enliven the curriculum
- a wide range of courses
- very good curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient studio space for the production of large-scale 3D work.

Scope of provision

129. The college offers a wide range of visual art courses. Courses are available at levels 1 to 3. These include foundation and intermediate art and design, a national diploma in multimedia, foundation diploma in art and design and AVCE 6-unit and 12-unit awards with fine art, graphics, multimedia and fashion pathways. AS-level art and design, fashion, video, life drawing, photography and graphics and ceramics are offered as additional subjects. The college also offers a wide range of open college network (OCN) part-time evening courses including ceramics, craft, photography, fashion and IT. As part of the induction programme, all students attend an introductory course, which helps them to confirm their choice of study. At the time of inspection, there were 241 students on full-time, and 34 on part-time, courses. Approximately 85% of the full-time students and 10% of the part-time students were aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

130. Both pass and retention rates are high, resulting in a very high proportion of students who start a course achieving the qualification. On the AVCE 6-unit and 12-unit awards in 2003, 90% of the 71 students who commenced these courses achieved the qualification. This is a rate which is much higher than the national average. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have improved and, in 2003, 86% of the starting students achieved the qualification. On the diploma in foundation studies, 89% of the students who started the

course with the intention of completing it in the three years to 2003 have achieved the qualification.

131. Work produced by students is of a high standard. The best work demonstrates excellent research and evaluation, a creative approach to problem solving and good visual skills. Students use a wide range of media confidently and produce professional results in fine art, 3D, graphics, fashion, textiles and ceramics. Digital final presentations in multimedia are of a particularly high standard. Sketchbooks are fresh and vibrant. Students are able to analyse complex concepts, abstract ideas and express their own ideas clearly. They are highly motivated, and well prepared to participate in studio work. Attendance during inspection was 86%, which is above the sector average.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	16	31	36
		% retention	88	87	86
		% pass rate	57	59	100
Diploma in foundation studies	3	No. of starts	40	58	43
		% retention	85	95	88
		% pass rate	100	100	97
National diploma in multimedia	3	No. of starts	62	22	18
		% retention	74	59	78
		% pass rate	93	92	86
AVCE 12-unit award	3	No. of starts	*	44	25
		% retention	*	82	96
		% pass rate	*	69	96
AVCE 6-unit award	3	No. of starts	*	45	46
		% retention	*	84	96
		% pass rate	*	95	93

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

** course not running*

Quality of education and training

132. Teaching is very good. Most of the lessons observed were good or very good, and some were outstanding. In many lessons, teachers are dynamic and give sparkling performances. In these lessons, the key skill of communication is firmly embedded in the teaching. Specialist art and design teachers also provide effective additional classes and support for key skills. Course schemes of work are detailed. Lessons are well planned and structured and reflect appropriately the needs of individual students. Learning objectives are shared with students during the introduction to lessons. Teaching is creative and uses a suitable variety of methods including mini-lectures, discussion, question and answer sessions, demonstrations and buzz groups. Peer assessment is used efficiently in critiques and helps to develop students' communication skills. Supporting handouts and visual aids are of a high quality. They are used effectively by students as an aid to revision. Teachers create innovative teaching and learning activities that are challenging, extending and enjoyable for students. In a foundation GNVQ lesson, colourful prints of Aboriginal art were used to motivate and inspire students' printmaking techniques. In a pre-degree foundation lesson, the work of Chuck Close and Cornelia Parker was used successfully to highlight scale and proportion. In an AVCE class, students produced a series of rich and energetic observational drawings of red mullet, langoustine, fresh garlic and hot peppers. Excellent use is made of ILT to enhance teaching. In a multimedia lesson, effective use was made of the interactive whiteboard to illustrate the use of Flash. Teachers have a good rapport with students. They clearly love their subjects and their enthusiasm is communicated to students. Support for students is excellent and they value highly the expertise and knowledge imparted by both academic and support staff.

133. Accommodation and teaching resources are excellent. Students have good access to an impressive range of learning resources and specialist facilities from spacious fine art studios to hi-tech media editing suites. The appearance of many studios is appealing. Workshops include ceramics, fine art, textiles, print, photography and computing. Display areas are used to maximum effect. Students value the opportunity to display their work in their own base rooms. The 3D workshop, though well resourced, is too small when all the equipment is in use and there is not enough space for students to work on larger pieces of work.

134. Teachers are highly skilled and well qualified. Many are practicing artists and designers, adding a professional dimension to the programmes. Several teachers are external verifiers. Teachers provide constructive feedback on students' work. Internal verification systems are rigorous and contribute to consistent standards of assessment

135. Teaching materials are of an exceptionally high quality. Assignments are imaginative and designed to reflect industry standards. Handouts are impressive, many have stimulating graphics and they appeal to visual learners. The library is well stocked with current titles and a good range of art and design periodicals are readily available. Students

are provided with free colour prints for assignment work. There are insufficient lockers for the storage of students' equipment.

136. The range and quality of enrichment activities is very good. Educational visits include trips to New York, Paris and Amsterdam. Students take part in many live projects set by employers and community groups. For example, fashion students have taken part in the Hathershaw multicultural fashion show. Design briefs were set for 'Oldham against domestic violence'. Students produced set design and costume design for *'The People's Opera'* based at the local art gallery. Pre-degree students have successfully submitted work for the Oldham open art exhibition. Students develop a broad range of additional skills and qualifications alongside their main course of study, including AS-level qualifications and IT-specialist courses such as dreamweaver and 3D studio max. The programme area has strong links with schools, community groups and employers.

137. The wide range of courses provides good opportunities for progression. The provision from level 1 to level 3 facilitates excellent full-time progression on to level 4 courses. In 2003, 92% of the students who achieved the diploma in foundation studies progressed on to degree courses. Many students benefit from the progression routes to more advanced course within the college. Over 80% of students who achieved the 6-unit AVCE qualification progressed on to the 12-unit programme.

Leadership and management

138. The visual arts curriculum area is well led and efficiently managed. Quality systems are highly developed and robust and teachers and managers share a clear focus on raising standards. All staff teams produce self-assessment reports which inform the schools main self-assessment report. Team meetings are held weekly and information is disseminated effectively. All teachers have ready access to a central resource of teaching materials which provides a sound foundation for the sharing of good practice. Staff appraisal is well established and leads to relevant staff development. The department has an effective staff mentoring programme which is highly valued.

Performing arts

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- very good teaching
- very well-structured assignments
- an outstanding range of integrated production work
- high standards of staff team work
- excellent specialist accommodation and equipment enhances learning
- many and varied opportunities for performance which extends students' experiences.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on the national diploma in media
- overuse of part-time teachers on the national diploma in media.

Scope of provision

139. The school of performing arts offers a wide range of full-time courses. These include a first diploma in performing arts and media which includes options in acting, dance, music, and production, national certificate and diploma courses in music practice, and national diplomas in performing arts, with options in acting, dance, musical theatre and entertainment technology, and in media and in music technology. All students take an OCN national award in performing arts as part of the course induction programme. A total of 172 full-time students are enrolled on these courses, the majority, 86%, aged 16 to 18.

140. Part-time OCN evening courses are offered in acting for camera, music recording and production, radio presentation skills, music technology and DJ techniques. Some 35 students are enrolled on these courses, of whom 80% are aged 19 or over.

141. There are close and productive links with all 15 secondary schools in the borough, resulting in 2 groups of students aged 14 to 16 following the introductory certificate in performing arts one day a week in college.

Achievement and standards

142. Students achieve high pass rates on most courses. The first diploma in performing arts and the national diploma in media have achieved 100% pass rates in each of the two years to 2003.

143. Retention rates are good on most courses. They are consistently well above sector averages on all courses except the national diploma in media. On this course, retention rates are low.

144. Students demonstrate a very high standard of practical work. Music technology students demonstrate strong IT skills, particularly in their use of computers for recording and editing sound, dance students are equally confident in their movement and choreographic skills. Students are encouraged to critically evaluate their performance skills and articulate these as a means to improve. In a dance lesson, students were paired as critical friends during an extended warm-up routine, which they did in two groups; after each routine the observing group were invited to give their partner one positive comment and one area for development. Thus, students acquired an extended critical vocabulary in a supportive context.

145. Performing arts students possess a very good understanding of the disciplines and etiquette of rehearsal. These highly motivated students have good listening skills and have developed a very high standard of team working. In an acting lesson managing and reviewing the devised work on a 'theatre-in-education' project which is performed in local schools, the students worked to a high standard of vocal, character and movement skills. The work was reviewed by the teacher/director in a notes session with the whole group fully involved in the critical discussion.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
First diploma in performing arts	2	No. of starts	17	22	**
		% retention	82	86	**
		% pass rate	100	100	**
National diploma in drama, technical theatre and dance	2	No. of starts	*	34	54
		% retention	*	71	83
		% pass rate	*	92	89

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
National diploma in media	3	No. of starts	18	**	15
		% retention	78	**	40
		% pass rate	79	**	100
National diploma/certificates in music technology popular music and popular music	3	No. of starts	*	23	30
		% retention	*	83	73
		% pass rate	*	90	73

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

* course not running

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

146. Staff create an exciting and dynamic vocational learning environment. There is very good teaching in this subject area. Teachers plan lessons and assignments carefully to ensure very high standards. The performance work in the spring term integrates students from different levels of the courses, from first diploma to HE. This work effectively promotes strong team working skills and peer learning and extends and develops all students' performance skills. The integration develops high expectations of their own standards of practical work from level 2 students and develops leadership and responsibility in level 3 students. Students come to recognise that the corporate working objective is more important than individual contributions. This integration increases the portfolio of option activities available for performance students, with four different performances in the spring term. It encourages creative risk taking and enables students to work with a wider group of students who possess different skill levels. Students speak very highly of the range of options available. The integration provides a realistic production model, with open auditions and results in a wider skills base within the cast. Some core skills such as singing are given insufficiently regular attention through the duration of the course.

147. There is a very strong staff team that works effectively together. Excellent use of the college intranet is made to co-ordinate assessment activities, share good practice on lesson and assignment planning and track the progress of students. Many of the students' learning materials are available through this virtual learning environment.

148. All teachers have good specialist knowledge of their subject, and many have extensive professional backgrounds. The music teachers are also current practitioners and able to advise students first hand about the nature of the music business. Many part-time

teachers also pursue professional careers. One media teacher is a sound editor for a music channel, two part-time visiting acting teachers combine professional acting careers with their teaching commitments. The media course is the only one not managed by a full-time teacher who is uniquely dedicated to that subject area. The school has been unable to recruit a full-time teacher for this academic year. This and a high turnover of part-time teachers have resulted in a fragmented learning experience and low retention rates.

149. Accommodation and specialist equipment are of exceptionally high quality. Students learn in dedicated studios equipped to professional standards. The recording studio is equipped with 16-track digital recording equipment, the radio studio uses a professional editing system, and entertainment technology students work with moving lights and lighting design software. The television studio can record multi-camera projects linked to a television gallery. The music teaching and practice rooms have good sound insulation. The performing arts students also use the professionally equipped Grange Arts Centre on the college campus for their productions and to see professional visiting companies. These resources are ably supported by a knowledgeable team of resource managers and support technicians.

150. Assessment is well designed and planned to ensure that students carry out complex activities to a high standard. Oral and written feedback is detailed and fair, providing students with clear guidance on how to improve. It is made clear to students what they need to do to succeed in their work, and they have every opportunity to discuss their assessments with staff. There is a mature culture of peer and self-assessment in response to all practical work. Students are well schooled in the discipline of giving and receiving constructive criticism. Verification and standardisation processes are well documented and thoroughly executed.

151. The school offers a wide range of full-time vocational courses and pathways for students at levels 2 and 3. Some have unique features. For example, the first diploma in media was chosen specifically to recruit more students from minority ethnic backgrounds. It has, unusually for this curriculum area, been successful in this. The overbooked evening DJ course develops practical DJ skills and an understanding of relevant business aspects of working as a DJ. Teachers are industry specialists. The final takes place in a local club with the students performing to a paying audience.

152. All full-time students follow an introductory national award in performing arts during induction. This helps students acquire common working practices and ensures that staff have a thorough awareness of their aspirations and potential. The school offers a high quality tutorial and guidance system which ensures that students' progress is regularly and carefully recorded and monitored. Careers guidance is provided through the tutorial system. Staff are very caring and attentive to the needs of individual students, both through the formal tutorial system and as course teachers. Parents, where appropriate, are provided with twice yearly reports on progress and are invited to attend open evenings where these reports can be discussed.

Leadership and management

153. The curriculum area is very well managed. There is close working between school management and teaching teams and a robust and well-established quality assurance system. Staff seek to continuously improve and regularly monitor their progress towards achieving this. Quality assurance reports are available on the college Internet enabling easy access to information by all staff who use the information extensively. The school sets itself appropriate targets and measures its achievements against national averages.

154. Communications and collaboration between staff are very good. They act as a very good model for students. Regular course team meetings have a strong focus on students learning. Attendance is closely monitored and absence followed up promptly. The many part-time teachers feel equally included in course team operation and are e-mailed information should they be unable to attend the regular staff meetings.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in English for speakers of other languages

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

The contributory grade for E2E is **good (grade 2)**

Strengths

- good teaching for students with sensory impairments, mental health problems and in E2E
- good support and guidance
- a relevant and appropriate curriculum framework
- clear leadership impacting positively on provision.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on ESOL courses
- underdeveloped use of learning targets to inform teaching and learning
- a limited range of teaching strategies in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and on ESOL courses.

Scope of provision

155. The area inspected covers ESOL, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and low achieving school leavers on E2E and access to foundation courses. The ESOL curriculum is mapped to the national core curriculum. Seven levels of classes, from entry level to level 2, are available on the main site during the day and evening with some twilight classes. All part-time courses lead to external accreditation with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES). At the time of the inspection, there were 199 ESOL learners, 90% of whom were adult students. A specific New Deal programme for ESOL clients, Building Employability and Training, has 53 full-time clients. Community provision is being developed in partnership with Oldham Lifelong Learning Service. There are no learners identified as receiving language support on vocational programmes.

156. Some 79 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are enrolled on a range of courses including a two-year work preparation course and six groups following an independent living skills programme. The college has introduced the essential skills award for those adults who live independently and wish to improve their skills. Last year, 11 pupils from schools and a specialist college attended taster courses. About 80 school leavers who have few qualifications attend courses which offer supported access to foundation studies in

business, care, sport and recreation. These students take courses leading to a ‘skills for working life’ qualification. Some 93 E2E students also take this qualification and undertake work which includes basic and life skills elements in vocational areas which include catering, manufacturing, IT, and art and craft. There is growing specialist provision for 30 students with visual or hearing impairments, mental health needs and students with specific learning difficulties. The education support unit offers individual support for students who need additional support in-class or on a one-to-one basis.

Achievement and standards

157. Retention rates are high across the curriculum area. Achievement is good in the E2E and access to foundation studies provision. Within ESOL programmes, pass rates have been significantly below average. Due to this low achievement and low achievement on discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities courses, the awards offered have been changed this year. The ESOL students show satisfactory progress in literacy skills at all levels. They demonstrate low attainment in spoken English, at the lower levels. Their development of personal and learning skills is weak.

158. A high proportion, over 90% of students with learning difficulties progressed last year into continuation discrete courses, but few have accessed mainstream provision. Most students, over 90%, on specialist courses for those with visual or hearing impairment or mental health issues progressed on to other college courses, gaining significantly in self-esteem and confidence. For example, one student with mental health problems completed courses in acting techniques at levels 2 and 3, while another has completed a level 2 care assistant qualification, and now works full time. The limited range of nationally accredited awards offered reduces the recognition of achievement.

159. Students on the E2E programme make good progress towards their individual learning goals, gaining skills and moving on to work placements and to more advanced courses or employment. One student attended for only six weeks before being assigned a work placement in painting and decorating. Records indicate significant improvement in behaviour and attitude, acknowledged and appreciated by parents.

A sample of retention and pass rates in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in English for speakers of other languages, 2001 to 2003

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Pitmans ESOL basic spoken short	1	No. of starts	48	178	148
		% retention	63	72	99
		% pass rate	7	45	20

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Pitmans ESOL basic short	1	No. of starts	34	94	86
		% retention	47	89	92
		% pass rate	19	26	35
Pitmans ESOL higher intermediate spoken short	2	No. of starts	60	14	56
		% retention	87	93	82
		% pass rate	67	38	62

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

Quality of education and training

160. Teaching is good or better in half the lessons. A significant minority of the teaching is unsatisfactory. The better ESOL lessons are well planned and have a clear focus on grammar and the use of language in context. The activities are varied and enjoyable and maintain an emphasis on learning, using language in relevant situations. One teacher encouraged students to discuss topical issues such as ‘whether asylum seekers should be allowed to work’. All courses have an appropriate IT component. The relationship between tutors and students is good, fostering a purposeful atmosphere in class. In some of the weaker lessons, too much time is spent talking about the language or introducing too many words at once. Presentations lack focus in these lessons and there is insufficient time for students to practice or generate language. Too much emphasis is placed on theory and completing written exercises.

161. In provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, good teaching often takes place when there is a practical focus to the work. In the better sessions on the discrete provision, planning takes account of individual needs, and uses effective communication strategies for those with poor communication skills. Learning targets, in these lessons, are precise, measurable and relevant. They are shared with each student who is asked to evaluate how well they have been met. Teaching strategies and the subject matter used within the study skills sessions for people with sensory impairment and mental health problems are directly relevant to the needs of the group. Students are actively involved in appropriate activities such as touch typing for the visually impaired. In some lessons, the teaching is less than satisfactory. Planning does not take note of the learning goals or specific individual needs and abilities. Too much of a focus on whole class activity, and too much copying and use of worksheets, for example, fails to support or enhance learning.

162. Teaching on access to foundation studies courses makes good use of vocational contexts to make learning relevant. Good use is made of ICT for presentation, making

learning resources and enabling students to access information independently. A good variety of activity is planned for each lesson which succeeds in maintaining students' motivation and engagement. The effectiveness of teaching on E2E and most access to foundation studies provision lies in the ability of staff to support the personal and learning issues of low achieving young people. The informal, but close, management of behaviour on E2E is particularly effective in allowing young people to make good progress in a practical context. The gentle discipline which is maintained allows students to appreciate their own abilities and to take more responsibility for their own learning and actions.

163. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. In ESOL provision all teachers have appropriate qualifications or experience. Many teachers on provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities courses lack specialist qualifications. There are good levels of class and individual support for those with learning difficulties, visual or hearing impairment and mental health issues. The E2E provision benefits from a good range of workshop spaces and external accommodation for construction and horticulture. These practical resources facilitate learning and skills development in realistic but sheltered settings. Classroom accommodation is generally of a high standard. There is inadequate accommodation and resources for independent living skill development. There are many attractive displays of students' work around the college. ICT is used effectively and widely, both as an aid to presentation of information, and by students to access information and develop writing skills.

164. There is inconsistent use of initial assessments or ongoing evaluation to plan for individual need. On the E2E provision, detailed assessments are made at entry and during the first eight weeks. These inform appropriately, the programme and the planning of teaching to meet individual need. Reviews build on detailed discussion and reporting of progress and there are many examples of changes to learning goals as a result of recorded success or identification of additional need. ESOL students benefit from good initial assessment allowing correct placement of students at each level. Many lessons in provision for students with learning difficulties and /or disabilities fail to use individuals' assessed levels of ability sufficiently in planning their learning. For example, the limited skills of some students are often not catered for in the tasks set. In the majority of lessons, assessment and evaluation concentrate on the tasks completed rather than on the learning achieved.

165. The college is responsive to local needs and opportunities. ESOL lessons delivered in community venues are part of Oldham's Lifelong Learning Partnership provision and not led by the college. College provision complements this by concentrating on entry level course and attendance at the college. The provision is expanding to meet local need. For example, adult students who already live independently and wish to enhance their skills are now offered a college course. The number of study skills courses for those with a sensory impairment or mental health problems has increased. Close links with local agencies enhance access to college provision for these groups. The work preparation course for students with learning difficulties provides a good introduction to the employment skills needed to access training or employment. The practically based and supportive E2E and access to foundation

studies provision is expanding. E2E provision now caters for 80 disaffected young people who cannot access the usual training or education routes.

166. Students have good access advice and guidance on entry. Individual support for students is sensitive and supportive. The information, support and guidance offered to students on the E2E and access to foundation studies programmes are good and benefit from close co-operation with the Connexions service. Initial advice and guidance are effective in placing ESOL students on appropriate levels. Students are supported well on their programmes both for learning and their personal needs. For example, many teachers will help with reading and understanding official letters to statutory bodies. Individual support for students in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, both in class and in one-to-one sessions. The support is structured during break and lunchtimes, contributes to their progress reviews, and is recorded in diaries. In some cases, individual learning plans are not sufficiently specific to enable the optimum support to be provided.

Leadership and management

167. The area has recently been substantially re-organised and the staffing complement has been increased. The course offer, qualifications and management structure have changed significantly and are now impacting upon the delivery and success of the areas as a whole. Staff feel well supported. Team working is strong. Regular meetings are held and appropriate minutes kept. All staff including agency staff are appropriately involved in the development of the self-assessment report. Lesson observation takes place, but there is insufficient analysis of the outcomes or action to address the weaknesses. Opportunities for training are good. There is good awareness of the changing legislative requirements and appropriate action is taken in response.

Literacy and numeracy

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

Strengths

- good teaching on GCSE mathematics and English and basic skills support
- effective individual learning plans for students receiving basic skills support
- high pass rates on GCSE English.

Weaknesses

- low achievement of key skills qualifications
- unsatisfactory teaching in some key skills lessons
- no cross-college screening for dyslexia.

Scope of provision

168. The range of courses in literacy and numeracy includes courses for adults, taught in the community and college, in-lesson literacy and numeracy support for students on college vocational programmes. Included in the inspection were the key skills of communication and application of number at levels 1 and 2 and GCSEs in English and mathematics. In 2002/03, 279 students received basic skills support, 200 students studied GCSE English and mathematics, 513 students enrolled for basic skills qualifications in the college and the community. Some 214 students were entered for key skills qualifications, but many more receive key skills teaching.

169. The college offers a limited number of courses in the community, including one group based on employer's premises and a group in a community school. Other provision in the community is delivered by community groups and is overseen by the Oldham Learning Partnership. Support for students is provided in lessons and through specialist dyslexia support to individuals.

Achievement and standards

170. Pass rates in GCSE English are high, significantly above the national average. In these lessons, students make good progress and are effectively prepared for the external examinations. The GCSE mathematics pass rate is close to national average. Retention rates for this subject are below the national average.

171. Students receiving basic skills support make good progress towards targets, which are based on the core curricula, set following diagnostic assessment. College data for 2003 show that students receiving basic skills support do well on their main course of study.

172. The college policy on key skills is to teach underpinning literacy and numeracy skills in communication and application of number lessons, leading to national tests in adult literacy and numeracy. Only a small proportion of students achieved these newly introduced certificates in 2003. Data on the achievement of key skills qualifications for 2002 are unreliable. In 2003, pass rates were high, but only a small number of students were entered for these qualifications.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2001	2002	2003
Key skills numeracy	1	No. of starts	*	*	39
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	100
Key skills communication level 1	1	No. of starts	*	*	103
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	99
GCSE mathematics (grades A to G)	2	No. of starts	133	100	105
		% retention	71	63	60
		% pass rate	71	71	76
GCSE English (grades A to G)	2	No. of starts	88	60	95
		% retention	63	65	71
		% pass rate	95	85	99

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

* unreliable data

Quality of education and training

173. There is good teaching on GCSE English and mathematics courses and in basic skills support. Basic skills support is delivered in lessons, with specialist tutors working alongside curriculum specialists. The support is relevant to course requirements and focuses on students' current work. For example, in a GNVQ foundation IT lesson, work on reading development centred on following the written instructions required to complete an IT assignment. In another lesson, performing arts students worked out the transport costs for

their imminent music tour. Targets are set within the core curriculum and recorded in detailed individual learning plans, which students and tutors complete together. In these lessons, students are positive about their progress in literacy and numeracy.

174. Adults in part-time literacy and numeracy lessons, including New Deal, make good progress towards achieving challenging targets. In part-time groups, local news stories and poetry produced by former students are used imaginatively to create activities which engaged students and helped them make good progress with literacy skills.

175. In the better GCSE mathematics and English lessons, teachers use a good variety of teaching methods and techniques. They give clear explanations and involve all of the students by using skilful questioning and a variety of small group and individual work. Students enjoy these lessons and make good progress. The lessons build on the students' previous learning and the teachers carefully check the students' understanding.

176. Key skills lessons for students studying vocational subjects are generally satisfactory. In the better lessons, good use is made of ILT, careful planning takes account of the differing needs of individual students, and the lessons are often closely linked to the students' work in their main programme of study. For example, in one performing arts lesson, key skills work was based on an entertainment company's tour and in another on the work of a recording studio. Students, working independently, applied themselves well and made good progress. There is some unsatisfactory teaching. For example, in some lessons, opportunities to engage students' interests by linking the work to their vocational interests are missed and in some the teaching is not well suited to all the students in the group. Worksheets are used excessively in some lessons, and the students learn few new skills.

177. Teachers of basic skills and those providing basic skills support are well qualified. Dyslexia support tutors have appropriate specialist qualifications. A qualified team of dyslexia teachers provides well-organised and well-resourced support to students who are referred to it. These students make good progress. Accommodation and resources are generally good. Many classrooms display student work or posters which help to remind students of the rules relating to spelling or mathematical techniques. Dictionaries and thesauruses are often available in literacy lessons. The virtual learning environment is used to hold some teaching materials, helping students who miss lessons to catch up.

178. Cross-college initial assessment effectively determines the literacy and numeracy levels of students at enrolment. It does not identify students who have dyslexia. Students who will benefit from basic skills support in lessons are identified. Individual learning plans, used in basic skills support and part-time basic skills courses, are detailed. They record the results of initial assessment, targets within the core curricula, ongoing records of achievement and regular reviews of progress. They are effectively used to guide learning. Some students are placed at inappropriate key skills levels.

179. The college has responded to student need with the introduction of new entry-level qualifications for students for whom key skills are inappropriate. A part-time course on study skills for dyslexic adult students provides effective help for adults who have previously had

negative experiences of learning. Several external organisations provide ESOL and basic skills in the community. The college contributes to this overall provision by providing a small number of part-time courses for adults in the college and community, including one programme based in employers' premises and an adult literacy course in the community, to which ESOL students have progressed.

Leadership and management

180. The management of the adult basic skills and basic skills support provision is good. Clear direction is provided by curriculum managers. Curriculum teams meet regularly and contribute effectively to the development of the provision. For example, the research and development group has been responsible for the detailed individual learning plan currently in use. The college has a major role in the staff development plans for the Oldham Learning Partnership. Some aspects of the management of key skills are unsatisfactory. For example, few students achieve the full qualification and pass rate data has been unreliable.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	36	41
2	28	22
3	17	18
4/5	2	7
Other	17	12
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in spring 2004

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	82	44	1
Land-based provision	2	27	0
Construction	555	1,276	11
Engineering, technology and manufacture	121	317	2
Business administration, management and professional	266	1,367	9
Information and communication technology	480	2,864	20
Retailing, customer service and transportation	7	57	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	309	444	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	275	330	3
Health, social care and public services	489	1,158	10
Visual and performing arts and media	719	695	8
Humanities	378	377	4
English, languages and communication	179	235	2

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Foundation programmes	56	1,046	6
Unknown area of learning	1,723	1,869	20
Total	3,918	10,237	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+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
1	Starters excluding transfers	734	562	685	679	629	1,079
	Retention rate %	75	71	77	70	67	63
	National average %	75	75	*	73	74	*
	Pass rate %	72	70	69	71	62	74
	National average %	64	66	*	68	69	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	977	964	795	1,191	1,137	928
	Retention rate %	75	69	67	69	65	63
	National average %	70	70	*	70	69	*
	Pass rate %	70	70	76	73	72	76
	National average %	67	68	*	65	69	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	689	556	671	1,374	1,228	1,205
	Retention rate %	69	74	71	74	77	75
	National average %	67	75	*	67	70	*
	Pass rate %	73	77	76	72	76	74
	National average %	70	73	*	65	69	*
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	**	**	**	179	138	198
	Retention rate %	**	**	**	65	63	69
	National average %	*	*	*	65	70	*
	Pass rate %	**	**	**	61	36	50
	National average %	*	*	*	49	49	*

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 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.*
2. *College rates for 1999/2000 to 2001/02: College ISR.*
** data unavailable*
*** fewer than 15 students enrolled*

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)	68	29	4	41
Level 2 (intermediate)	70	26	4	77
Level 1 (foundation)	59	34	7	77
Other sessions	59	27	14	51
Totals	66	29	5	0

Notes