



Bedford College

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

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

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

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

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

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

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

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

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Leadership and management](#)

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

[Construction](#)

[Engineering, technology and manufacturing](#)

[Business, administration, management and professional](#)

[Information and communications technology](#)

[Hospitality and catering, sport, leisure and travel](#)

[Hairdressing and beauty therapy](#)

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

[Visual and performing arts and media](#)

[Humanities](#)

[Foundation - literacy and numeracy and English for speakers of other languages](#)

[Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

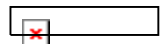
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age](#)

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

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

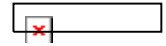
[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Basic information about the college

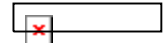


Name of college:	Bedford College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Ian Pryce
Address of college:	Caldwell Street Bedford Bedfordshire MK42 9AH
Telephone number:	01234 291000
Fax number:	01234 342674
Chair of governors:	Mervyn Weedon
Unique reference number:	130597
Name of reporting inspector:	Shaun Dillon
Dates of inspection:	27 September-1 October 2004

Part A: Summary



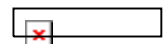
Information about the college



Bedford College is a large college and is the largest provider of post-16 education and training within the Bedfordshire county council area. Bedford is one of five colleges in the county. The college operates from seven sites in Bedford, Biggleswade, Kempston and Luton. It has centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) status in four areas: plumbing, house building, supervisory and management skills, and recently, health and social care skills. Its mission is 'to promote the value of learning, extend opportunity to enhance the social and economic development of the communities it serves, create purposeful learning environments that enable students to meet their aspirations, support and develop its staff and by so doing be perceived as the first choice provider of further education (FE) and training in Bedfordshire and its surrounding area'. Courses are offered in all areas of learning except land-based, although numbers in retailing, customer service and transportation are small. Higher education (HE) programmes are offered in arts, computing, engineering, care and leisure. Nearly 600 staff are employed by the college. It operates within six teaching centres: arts, technology, people and professional services, a sixth form and access centre, a foundation and community education centre (which also manages key skills and additional support) and 'Catalyst' which focuses on links with employers. Bedford College has one of the largest work-based learning training agencies in the county. Most of this is in the construction area, including electrical installation, but also includes hairdressing and a small care provision. Unemployment is low in Bedfordshire at about 2%.

The college services north and mid-Bedfordshire as well as Bedford itself. About half of its students come from Bedford and a further tenth come from Luton and Milton Keynes. The college has grown from 6,000 students in 1996 to 13,000 in 2004. In 2003/04, 49% of the full-time students and 53% of the part-time students were female. About 19% of the students, compared with 10% in the college's catchment area, were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college enrolls students from over 100 different countries, including significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. The county has one of the most ethnically diverse populations outside London. The college had over 17,000 enrolments, of which, 30% were by students aged 16 to 18. Nearly half the enrolments were on level 1 provision and about a fifth on level 3 provision. Approximately three quarters of the 13,700 students were aged over 19 and about 16% of students attended full time. The college enrolls 300 students on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. The discrete programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has few students, most of whom, are aged 16 to 19. The college is not involved with entry to employment provision. The college has about 200 young people on its increased flexibility programme. About 60 students aged 14 to 16 are on the 'Way to Work' programme and attend work for three or four days each week and the college for 1 day each week on craft-based provision.

How effective is the college?



The college provides satisfactory teaching and opportunities for learning for most of its students. Pass rates are above the national averages at all levels and for students of all ages. They have improved in most areas compared with previous years. Retention rates have improved considerably over time and are high on level 2 and short courses. However, they are below the national averages

and satisfactory in four curriculum areas. Work-based learning was judged to be satisfactory in construction and unsatisfactory in hairdressing.

Key strengths

- high and improving pass rates

- improving retention rates

- effective leadership and management

- very good financial management

- good new accommodation and resources

- good guidance and support for students

- clear and comprehensive college-wide strategies, policies and procedures

- effective provision for students aged 14 to 16.

What should be improved

- retention rates at levels 1 and 3

- management of work-based learning provision

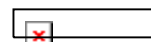
- monitoring of the implementation of policies and procedures

- use of information technology (IT) to aid learning

- o differentiation of teaching to take account of students' varying needs and abilities
- o the range of provision for adults and disadvantaged groups
- o the range of provision of full-time courses below level 3 for students aged 16 to 18
- o preparation for employment of full-time students aged 16 to 18.

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

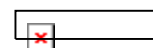


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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	Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: satisfactory . Pass rates are high on most courses. Teaching and learning are good in electrical installation, painting and decorating, and plumbing. Tracking of students' progress and action planning are effective. Reviews of work-based apprentices are unsatisfactory. The national vocational qualification (NVQ) students in wood occupations, painting and decorating and bricklaying do not receive assessments in the workplace.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good. Pass rates on many courses are significantly above national averages. Much of the teaching and learning are good. Management of the area is good. Assessment feedback is not always constructive and comprehensive. The tracking of students' progress against targets set at entry is poor.
Business, administration, management and professional	Good. Pass rates are high on most accounting and management courses. Teaching and learning are good or better on most courses. Management of the area is good. Retention and pass rates are consistently low on AS-level business. Insufficient use of information and learning technology (ILT) is made to enhance learning.
Information and	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on most courses. Resources are

communications technology	good and are used effectively to improve students' learning. Differentiation and challenge are insufficient in many lessons. Key skills provision is unsatisfactory.
Hospitality and catering, sport, leisure and travel	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high in hospitality and catering. Retention rates are improving on most courses. Target setting is used ineffectively. Differentiation to meet students' learning needs is insufficient.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good. Work-based learning contributory grade: unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. Resources meet industry standards and aid learning well. The provision of work-based learning is unsatisfactory. Monitoring of students' progress in the workplace is insufficient.
Health, social care and public services	Good. Pass rates are high on most courses. Much teaching and learning are good. Curriculum management is effective. Retention rates are low on full-time level 2 courses. Provision of short courses for adults in the community is insufficient.
Visual and performing arts and media	Good. Much teaching and learning are good. Students produce high standards of work. Industrial assignments are integrated well in art and design. Vocational practice in performing arts is insufficiently rigorous. New technology resources in art and design are insufficient.
Humanities	Good. Most pass rates are high. Good teaching and learning results in high standards of students' work. Curriculum management and leadership are good and focus on teaching and learning. Retention rates in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects are low. Group work in lessons is not always organised effectively.
Foundation - literacy and numeracy and English for speakers of other languages	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on most courses. Teaching and learning are good. Target setting and monitoring and recording of students' progress are insufficient. Retention rates on ESOL and levels 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy courses are low.
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Satisfactory. Pass rates in external assessments are high. Liaison with schools and external agencies are good. Students produce work of a high standard. Targets set in individual learning plans are not specific. Teaching and learning activities are not always appropriate and do not help students learn relevant skills. Self-assessment and action planning are insufficiently rigorous.

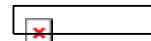
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The principal, governors and senior managers provide a clear strategic direction for the college. College staff benefit from good communications and a consultative and open management style. Financial management is very good. The college has successfully managed substantial growth since the last inspection. Pass rates are high in all areas. Retention rates are low on level 1 and 3 courses. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A wide range of effective provision for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools has been developed. Community-based provision has also grown since the last inspection. Quality assurance procedures to monitor effective compliance in all curriculum areas are insufficient. The curriculum area self-assessment reports do not always identify key weaknesses. Action plans do not always contain clear targets against which improvements can be checked. The college has appropriate policies and procedures to promote and monitor equality of opportunity, except in work-based learning. The

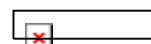
money.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



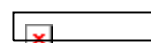
The college's response to education and social inclusion is good. The college offers many courses with good progression routes. However, few courses are provided below level 2 for full-time students. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is high compared with the local community. Their retention rates are low, but pass rates are high. Links between the college and local schools are good, and transition arrangements for students with learning difficulties are effective. The college has extensive and effective provision for school pupils aged 14 to 16 which enables them to progress to FE, training or employment. The quality of provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory; pass rates are high, but retention rates are low. The college is working towards the requirements of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) by September 2005. There are few students with physical disabilities or sensory impairment supported in the college and no action plans to increase them are in place. The college has a race equality policy which meets the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. The equal opportunities policy has been redrafted to include a race relations plan against which progress can be monitored. Student data is collected and analysed by gender, age, ethnicity and disability, but the college does not yet use this data systematically to inform recruitment and good practice.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support and guidance are good. Initial advice and guidance are effective and comprehensive. Confidential advice is available on a wide range of personal issues. Guidance staff have good curriculum knowledge. Course details are readily available although course handbooks lack detail. Induction processes are thorough. Initial assessment is successful in identifying additional learning and personal support needs. Identified support is provided promptly, and staff are effective in ensuring that students benefit from this. Access to support services is good. Careers advice and resources are comprehensive. Attendance is monitored carefully, and dedicated staff take appropriate action on unauthorised absences. Attendance levels overall are high. All full-time students receive both individual and group tutorials. Tutorial procedures are comprehensive; however, target setting and monitoring are inconsistent across the college. Guidance and advice on progression to HE are good. The college has satisfactory child protection procedures. Guidance and support for work-based apprentices are satisfactory.

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 staff and tutors

- friendly atmosphere
- treated as adults
- lack of bullying
- practical sessions
- additional learning support
- regular and well-attended course representative meetings
- flexible timetables for students with children
- good communications
- library.

What they feel could be improved

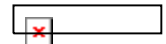
- access to computers at peak times
- timetabling of enrichment activities
- too many cancelled lessons

- NVQ portfolio building

- inconsistencies in application of attendance policy

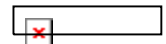
- noise in library.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC should send to Ofsted only action plans from colleges that have been judged inadequate or have been awarded a grade 4 or 5 for curriculum provision, work-based learning and/or leadership and management.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

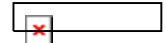


Aspect and learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	59	35	6
19+ and WBL*	64	31	5
Learning 16-18	55	38	7
19+ and WBL*	63	31	6

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

**work-based learning*

Achievement and standards



1. In the period 2002 to 2004, retention rates have improved in most areas of the college. However, they have declined at levels 1 and 3 for students aged over 19. Most retention rates are at, or above, the national averages, especially at level 4 for students aged over 19. However, they are below the national averages at levels 1 and 3. Pass rates over this period have increased in most areas of learning or have been maintained at high levels. Pass rates are above the national averages at all levels and for both age groups. In particular, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 1 and 2 and on short courses are well above the national averages. For students aged over 19, pass rates at levels 2, 3 and 4 are also well above the national averages. The overall success rates are high and are well above the national averages at levels 2 and 4. They have declined only at levels 1 and 3 for students aged over 19 and are only below national average at level 1 for students aged over 19. This is because the effect of the high pass rates outweighs the effect of the lower retention rates.

2. In 2003/04, college data indicate that retention rates at level 1 are below national averages, especially for students aged over 19 where they are in the bottom 25% of similar colleges. At level 2, retention rates are above the national averages and the data for both age groups show a continuing upwards trend. At level 3, the retention rates for both age groups are below the national averages and, for students aged over 19, the college is in the bottom 25% of similar colleges. The level 4 retention rate for students aged over 19 has risen dramatically to 90% and is in the top 10% of similar colleges.

3. Overall attendance during inspection was high at 84.1%. Although this inspection took place early in the academic year, this is more than 4.7 % higher than that for similar colleges in 2003/04. Attendance ranges from 77% in engineering to 91% in health, social care and public services. Attendance is high in construction, hairdressing and beauty therapy, humanities and information and communications technology (ICT). Attendance is low in the visual and performing arts and media, and business, administration and professional areas. Average class size is large at 12.4, compared with 10.8 for similar colleges in 2003/04.

4. Pass rates have increased over the last three years for students aged 16 to 18 on level 1 courses and for students aged over 19 on level 4 and short courses. Pass rates are well above national averages at levels 1 and 2 and on short courses for students aged 16 to 18, and at levels 2 and 3 for students aged over 19. In particular, pass rates are very high for students aged over 19 on level 4 courses.

5. The college training agency 'Catalyst' now oversees about 200 work-based apprentices. Work-based learning achievement levels, especially of full frameworks, have been low for several years. Most of the trainees are on apprenticeships as opposed to advanced apprenticeships due to their entry qualifications. Key skills pass rates in work-based learning hairdressing are poor. Work-based learning framework achievement and completion rates in hairdressing are low. In the last three years, only 1 out of 36 starters has achieved the full framework. The NVQ pass rate in this area is 47%. During the last three years, no full framework achievements have been made by the five advanced apprentices. In construction, 49 apprentices (34%) have left the work-based learning programme in the last three years without achieving their intended qualifications. Of the 82 apprentices currently on the construction framework, 18 (22%) have already exceeded their planned duration on the programme.

6. In 2003/04, 49% of the full-time students and 53% of the part-time students were female. About 19% of the students, compared with about 10% in the college's catchment area, were from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college had over 17,000 enrolments, of which, 30% were by students aged 16 to 18. Nearly half the enrolments were on level 1 provision and about a fifth on level 3 provision. Approximately three quarters of the 13,700 students were aged over 19 and about 16% of students attended full time.

7. In most areas, the standard of students' work is good, especially for students aged over 19. Most students are well motivated, committed and punctual. Their attendance levels are high. Students in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and in hospitality and catering, achieve considerable successes in local and national competitions. In most lessons, the majority of students produce good work. However, in many key skills lessons, the standard of work produced is lower than that expected. Most work-based learning apprentices achieve at least a satisfactory standard of work. The development of their employability and other work-related personal skills are good. However, apprentices are not challenged sufficiently to make appropriate progress. Students' practical skills in construction, engineering, hairdressing, beauty therapy, art and design, hospitality and catering and sports are highly developed. Students' portfolios in electrical installation and plumbing are of a high standard. Engineering students respond to questions at levels above that expected for their course and the time of year. Business students make significant progress at college. The standard of students' work on the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), management and executive secretarial courses is particularly good. In ICT, students have a positive attitude to their work and produce high standards of work in lessons and in their files. Performing arts students present public performances of high quality. Students studying humanities subjects achieve high standards of work and possess good skills of analysis and evaluation. Students on ESOL programmes have well-developed self-confidence and are able to negotiate effectively. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities complete work in lessons and in files which is of a high standard.

16 to 18 year olds

8. About 30% of the enrolments in 2003/04 were by students aged 16 to 18. Of these, about a quarter were on level 1 courses and a half on level 2 courses. Nearly a quarter of the students in the college were aged 16 to 18. Half of these students attended on a full-time basis. Retention rates for these students increased on courses at levels 2 and 3, stayed the same on level 1 and declined on short courses, compared with the previous year. Retention rates are still below national averages on courses at levels 1 and 3, but are above on level 2 courses. All pass rates for this age range are above national averages. In 2003/04, pass rates at level 1 continue the upward trend of the previous three years. Achievements of work-based learning apprentices are low.

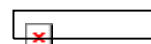
9. The standard of students' work is good or very good in most areas of learning. Students progress well relative to their prior attainment and potential. The great majority of students develop high levels of personal and learning skills. Students achieve challenging targets during lessons and in assignments. Most work-based learning apprentices achieve satisfactory standards of work and improve their employability and personal skills.

Adult learners

10. Adult students constitute over two thirds of the enrolments. Of these, 50% were on level 1 courses and over a quarter were on level 2 provision. About three quarters of the students in the college were aged over 19. Only 6% of these attended full time. Retention rates for these students were below the national averages on courses at levels 1 and 3, but were above on courses at levels 2 and 4 and on short courses. Similarly, retention rates have improved over the last three years on levels 2 and 4 and on short courses, but have declined on levels 1 and 3. Again, all pass rates for this age group are above the national averages. Pass rates have improved over the last three years on short courses and have been consistently high for provision at levels 2 and 4.

11. Adult students' work is good or very good in most areas of the college. In particular the standard of students' work in relation to their learning goals is very high. Students develop high levels of personal and learning skills. They progress well in relation to their prior attainment and potential.

Quality of education and training



12. Teaching, learning and attainment are satisfactory or better in most areas of the college. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded in 205 sessions. Teaching is good or better in 61% of lessons, satisfactory in 33% and less than satisfactory in 6%. The proportion of less than satisfactory lessons is below the national average, but so is the proportion of good or better lessons. The proportion of less than satisfactory lessons is about a half of that in the last inspection. However, the proportion of satisfactory teaching is now much higher than in the last inspection. Teaching is most effective in business administration, management and professional, performing arts and media, and hairdressing and beauty therapy where three quarters or more of the lessons observed by inspectors were judged to be good or better. Teaching is least effective in foundation programmes and hospitality, and catering, sports and leisure where less than half the lessons were good or better. Teaching is better overall in lessons for adults than in those for students aged 16 to 18. Teaching is good or better for 63% of students aged over 19 and 59% of students aged 16 to 18. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons is only 2% for those aged over 19 compared with 11% for those involving students aged 16 to 18. Nearly 66% of teaching at levels 2 and 3 is good or better compared with 55% on level 1 courses. Of the lessons observed to be less than satisfactory, 33% are at level 2, 33% at level 3, and 16% each at entry level and level 1.

13. The most effective lessons are characterized by activities which challenge and motivate students. They are well planned with clear outcomes. They have a clear focus on tasks and develop good vocational skills. Feedback to students in these lessons indicates clearly how improvements can be made. Relationships between teachers and students are often good; mutual respect and appropriate humour support a constructive working ethos. Interactive whiteboards are used appropriately to illustrate and reinforce concepts. Much good teaching of practical skills takes place across the college. In one lesson, students learned valuable practical skills in how to stack and transport bricks. All the students were motivated, engaged and challenged. Learning was by individual coaching, group presentation and practical demonstration. The students demonstrated high-level manual handling skills with an emphasis on health and safety. In some cases, key skills are developed through vocational settings and activities. Work-based learning takes place in appropriate environments.

14. The least successful lessons have insufficient variety of activity and do not provide individualised opportunities for all students to make progress. Learning is checked poorly and target setting is weak. Lesson plans lack detail and appropriate differentiation to meet varying students' needs. Students are not challenged. IT is used rarely to aid learning, even when the resources are available. Teaching is dull and uninspiring, and has an over-reliance on note taking. The least successful key skills lessons are not planned well to develop students' skills. In one key skills lesson, nearly half the students arrived late and most of the students lacked motivation. The lesson plan had insufficient emphasis on differentiation. Many students were bored because the tasks were too easy; others struggled with the same tasks and did not complete them.

15. Whole group teaching accounts for four times as many lessons as individual learning. In both cases, two thirds of the lessons are good or better. A mixture of whole class, group and individual teaching results in just over half of these being good or better. All learning which takes place in the workplace is good or better.

16. Learning is good or better in 58% of lessons, satisfactory in 35% of lessons, and unsatisfactory in 7% of lessons. The percentage of good or better learning is below the national average of 63% and the percentage of less than satisfactory learning is above the national average of 6%. Learning experiences for the students aged 16 to 18 are better than for those aged over 19. Attendance is above the national average. The college attendance is 84% and the national average for general FE colleges inspected in 2002/03 is 79%.

17. The effect of resources on achievement and learning is good. The main site of the college is in Bedford town centre and is easily accessible. The college has adopted a low-profile security strategy which focuses on the safety of students while providing a welcoming environment. Most buildings on the main site are over 40 years old and require a substantial programme of maintenance. The college has recently completed the first phase of an extensive property strategy by opening a new building on the main site for sport and dance programmes and a plumbing CoVE in Kempston.

These buildings are well equipped and provide a good learning environment. Ground floor accommodation on the main site used for construction and some rooms used for art and design courses are unsatisfactory. In the hairdressing, humanities and literacy areas, lesson sizes are often too large for the rooms allocated. The college is working well towards fulfilling the requirements of the SENDA with regard to reasonable adjustments to buildings by September 2005. The college has good facilities and equipment. Significant investment has been made in new technologies in classrooms, especially in the new accommodation. The college has an intranet and is developing a virtual learning environment. Although the college has increased its access to drop-in IT facilities by creating two suites of 73 and 30 computers, these facilities do not always meet demand. The art and design area has an insufficient number of computers in classrooms. Specialist equipment and resources are good generally, but not always sufficient for the large group sizes in hairdressing. Work-based learning placements are resourced well and employers are supportive.

18. The college has effective staffing policies and procedures, including an employee assistance scheme and payments for achieving relevant qualifications. The number of staff employed by the college has increased significantly in the last four years. The college is committed to increasing the proportion of staff employed full time and decreasing its reliance on staff employed through a teaching agency. The number employed through an agency last year was 88, so far this year, it is 12. If staff are appointed who do not have teaching qualifications they are expected to gain appropriate accreditation within two years. Currently, 56% of the teaching staff have fully qualified teacher status, 30% of full-time staff and 18% of part-time staff are working towards stage 3 qualifications and 7% of full-time staff and 14% of part-time staff are working towards stage 2 qualifications. The college offers an extensive programme of staff development which includes four cross-college development days a year. Mentoring and support are provided through a team of advanced practitioners. Significant training and support are given in the use of new technologies.

19. Assessments are well planned and fair. Assignment briefs are comprehensive and clear. The requirements of awarding bodies are met. Many curriculum areas offer support workshops which are used by students to work on assignments. Assessment and good practice guidance are available to all teachers on the college intranet. Assessments are used successfully to aid learning in many areas. For example, in care, assessments are organised well and used effectively to monitor students' progress. Homework and assignments are set regularly and are marked and returned to students promptly. Overall, assessment feedback from tutors is inconsistent; in art and design, students receive comprehensive guidance on how work could be improved; in engineering and ICT, comments often do not give students useful indications and are cursory. Assessment deadlines are made clear to students, and tutors usually schedule deadlines to avoid undue workloads. However, this is not always effective. For example, in hospitality, scheduling is poor and results in a large number of assessments towards the end of the course. Work-place assessment does not take place in building crafts.

20. Verification systems and procedures are clear and available to staff on the college intranet. Most internal verification is carried out according to awarding body requirements. Assignments are frequently double marked. Assignment briefs are moderated internally. Outcomes from external verifier visits are logged centrally and actions are monitored using the college intranet. Issues are dealt with effectively by course teams. Assessment records are comprehensive, though mostly paper based. The results of assessments effectively inform the tutorial and action-planning process to the benefit of students. Most staff teaching on vocational courses have appropriate assessor qualifications. Work-based learning assessment practices are unsatisfactory; monitoring and target setting are insufficient.

21. Overall, the college offers a wide range of full-time courses from levels 1 to 4 with good progression opportunities in most curriculum areas. The college has grown significantly over the past four years. The main focus of growth has been in full-time courses at levels 1 and 2 for students aged 16 to 18. However, insufficient provision below level 3 still exists for these students in art and design, engineering, health, care and early years.

22. The provision for students aged 14 to 16 is extensive and expanding, and involves partner schools in Bedford and mid-Bedfordshire. The college has worked closely and well with local schools to provide successful provision for students aged 14 to 16, especially in construction, motor vehicle,

catering, childcare, hairdressing and beauty therapy. Specialist accommodation and resources are now available in local schools and students achieve well. The relationships with feeder schools are good. In particular, effective support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

23. Full-time courses for students aged 16 to 18 are predominantly vocational, but the college also has a well established and successful sixth form centre. The college offers a wide enrichment programme for full-time students aged 16 to 18 through a programme of 10-week options in the autumn and spring terms. The options are predominantly sport and music based. Participation rates have increased over the past three years; however, some students are excluded because lessons are timetabled during enrichment or the options are over subscribed. Art and design and performing arts, and hairdressing and beauty therapy also offer additional enrichment opportunities. Performing arts, and art and design, have good links with their industries which benefit students. However, full-time construction students have insufficient work preparation.

24. The college has a clear policy that all full-time students aged 16 to 18 take basic or key skills qualifications. The quality of key skills provision is poor in several curriculum areas and attendance, retention and success rates are often low. The outcomes are better in areas where key skills have been integrated effectively into the vocational programmes and students can appreciate their relevance. Key skills provision is not effectively planned, coordinated or taught across all areas of the curriculum.

25. Provision for part-time and adult students is less well developed in construction, health, care and early years courses. One of the college's strategic objectives is to develop a comprehensive range of learning and training programmes which meets the needs of the local community and improves prospects of success in the labour market. Good provision is arranged in the workplace through employers, particularly for NVQs and ESOL. The college has developed a centre for employer engagement to improve its responsiveness to employers' needs. Currently, work-based learning provision is satisfactory in care, but unsatisfactory in hairdressing. Work-based learning provision responds well to local needs, especially in the construction industry. The college is committed to expanding its work-based learning provision and is improving recruitment, organisation and management processes. The college has good links with community groups and has participated in collaborative projects to attract under-represented groups. However, such provision is inconsistent and often short lived. The college has yet to establish coherent provision with clear progression routes for students from disadvantaged groups within the community.

26. Support, guidance and pre-entry advice for students are good. The college has gained the Matrix standard for the effectiveness of its information, advice and guidance processes. The college has regular information evenings where specialist staff are available to give advice on college courses. The reception area is welcoming and leaflets on many courses are readily available. Detailed guidance and advice are available on a range of issues including financial support, benefits, transport and housing. Initial enrolment documentation makes clear the responsibilities of students, as well as their rights.

27. The college offers a wide range of specialist student support services and advice. These include literacy and numeracy support, and specialist support for dyslexia and sensory impairment. The college employs a full-time trained counsellor. Guidance and support staff have a regular programme of visits to outreach centres, and students are able to book appointments. The college has an assistive technology room with IT equipment for students who are visually impaired, specialist software, and a wide range of other learning resources. Most support and guidance staff are qualified appropriately, and all have relevant experience in their role. Professional development is extensive and many staff have attended specialist training events which benefit students. Personal advisers monitor attendance effectively and act as a liaison between support services, students, and teaching staff. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 receive termly progress reports. The college offers a wide range of enrichment activities for all students. The college has childcare facilities for up to 36 children aged 2 to 5.

28. The provision of additional learning support is good. All full-time and most part-time students are assessed early in their course for literacy, numeracy, and other support needs. The support centre

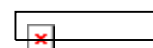
aims to provide initial support within 10 working days of a request and this is usually achieved. Support is provided both in lessons and on an individual basis. Communication between support staff and course tutors is good. Absences are reported promptly and appropriate action taken. Record keeping is good. All students receiving support agree an individual learning plan. In the best examples, these are detailed, comprehensive and useful. However, many are insufficiently detailed and it is not clear what steps the student should take to improve. Course tutors are updated regularly on their students' support progress. Over 400 students took advantage of learning support in 2003/04 and this number has increased significantly. College data indicate that students receiving support have a higher likelihood of succeeding than those who refuse it. However, a significant proportion of students aged 16 to 18 fail to maintain attendance at support sessions.

29. Tutors are accessible to their students, who speak highly of their support. The quality of course handbooks is inconsistent. The best examples are detailed and clear with comprehensive guidance and details of course content. However, in a few, there is insufficient mention of assessment requirements and only a brief outline of course structure. Careers advice is good. The college has extensive careers library facilities as well as on-line access to specialist careers support. College staff work closely with Connexions advisers based within the student support centre. Careers advisers participate regularly in group tutorial sessions.

30. All full-time and significant part-time students receive tutorials. Guidance documentation for tutors is clear and comprehensive, both for tutorials and target setting. Standardised tutorial programmes specify the content of both personal and group tutorials. Procedures for action planning are detailed and used throughout the college as a component of the individual learning plan and tutorial system. The use of value added data to set targets and monitor progress is well developed in a few curriculum areas. In the best examples, targets are clear, detailed, well understood and monitored effectively. Targets are reviewed regularly and good use is made of the documentation. For example, in ICT delivered in learning shops, effective progress monitoring takes place. In humanities, value added data are used well to set targets and monitor progress. In construction, tracking of achievement against targets is very good and students understand the steps necessary to improve. However, in many curriculum areas, the use of tutorials is unsatisfactory. Targets are often vague and imprecise, and systems are used ineffectively. Tracking of progress is often incomplete and students are not clear about their own progress towards goals. Targets are often not reviewed as students progress.

31. Students are informed well about the colleges' procedures to cover discipline, academic appeals, bullying, harassment, academic neglect, equal opportunities and racism issues. The academic neglect procedure is effective in re-engaging students who may otherwise not achieve. Most support and guidance staff are trained to help students. The college has an experienced child protection officer. Links with child protection agencies are developing quickly. Regular updating and training in child protection issues are planned, and all staff have guidance available. The college undertakes appropriate checks for those staff working with young people. Student support is managed effectively. Monitoring of support and analysis of support data are good. Development plans are comprehensive and developing trends are well considered. However, team meetings often do not ascribe actions to individuals or report on progress.

Leadership and management



32. Leadership and management of the college are good. The principal, governors and senior managers set clear strategic directions for the college. The processes for strategic and operational planning are very effective. Self-assessment procedures are well established, but weaknesses are not always identified clearly or acted upon. The governors are well informed about the college and monitor its academic and financial performance closely. The college has benefited from effective leadership to maintain high levels of performance over a period of rapid growth. Pass rates are very

rates are improving, but are still below the national averages in most curriculum areas. Teaching and learning are satisfactory; the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons is small, but so is the proportion of good or better lessons. Communication is good. Staff and managers have a clear understanding of the strategic objectives. Regular briefings, newsletters and presentations help members of the college to be informed of curriculum developments and encourage their participation in strategic and operational planning.

33. Since the last inspection, the college has focused on curriculum management. Inspectors identified key strengths in curriculum management leading to improvements in learning in 6 of the 11 curriculum areas inspected. Curriculum development and innovation in engineering are directed clearly and course meeting plans and files are exemplary. Staff meetings in business are well organized, result in actions to improve teaching and learning, and course files are well managed. In health, care and early years management of the curriculum is effective and course reviews lead to improvements in provision. The effective management structure in humanities results in clear and realistic action planning focusing on teaching and learning. Curriculum management is effective in visual and performing arts and media. The overall quality of curriculum management is, however, variable. Some weaknesses, linked largely to insufficient monitoring by managers, were identified in hospitality, sport travel and leisure, ICT and foundation programmes. The management of work-based learning is unsatisfactory; too many apprentices do not achieve their learning goals and progress is often slow.

34. The college executive team takes action regularly on issues directly affecting students' experiences. Advanced practitioners focus on teaching and learning. A programme of lesson observations is managed by the quality department. This supports and trains more than 40 line managers and senior teachers who undertake over 300 observations a year. The college's own teaching grade profile matches national averages. However, the inspection profile is several percentage points below the national average for good or better teaching and learning. It is above the national average for satisfactory teaching and learning. The observation system is effective in most curriculum areas in identifying poor teaching and leads to actions for improvement. Teachers with unsatisfactory grades are supported and re-observed. Directors take measures relating to competency. Nevertheless, inspectors found that the college grades awarded in art and design, visual and performing arts, and in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, were overgenerous. Inspectors in ICT found that the five observers did not moderate the grades awarded for their observations. The lesson observation system relies greatly on internal expertise and lacks rigorous and independent judgements. Most teachers are observed at least once each year and often more; probationers are observed and mentored closely.

35. The quality team targeted courses that were performing poorly through over 30 course audits in the last year. These resulted in action plans for improvement and seven course closures. Quality assurance procedures, including course reviews, are well documented and clearly established. They are linked to a well-conceived cycle of self-assessment which has in-year reports and action plans. Students' views are taken into account using focus groups and on-line completion of questionnaires. However, procedures to monitor effective compliance in all curriculum areas are insufficient. In particular, the completion of individual student targets, action planning and monitoring of students' progress are not always rigorous. In most areas, self-assessment procedures are applied thoroughly. They result in realistic judgments and appropriate action plans. The quality team monitors and revises many course reviews. Nevertheless, in some cases, weaknesses such as persistently low retention rates on some full-time courses are not noted. In ICT, quality assurance processes are not utilized fully to plan and inform development of the curriculum and there are few measurable targets in course reviews. In provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, self-assessment is insufficiently rigorous and action planning is weak. Action plans do not always contain clear targets against which improvements can be monitored.

36. The college sets retention and pass rate targets for each level of work and all are achieved. Targets are also set for individual courses. Course teams monitor progress towards these targets and they are reviewed by senior managers. All pass rates are above the national averages. However, action plans at course team level do not always clearly identify weaknesses in retention rates, nor the measures required to achieve improvements. Retention rates on courses at levels 1 and 3 courses are below national averages. Most areas of unsatisfactory performance have been

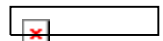
identified and actions implemented. Separate action plans identify the improvements that need to be made and the support required to achieve them. These measures have been successful in raising standards on most courses, but have not been entirely successful in improving retention rates. The management information system has been substantially developed and managers have been provided with on-line access to a much wider range of information on students' enrolments, attendance and performance. Course managers have much improved access to this data and its analysis, and monitor actual data against targets.

37. The college promotes equality of opportunity and monitors equal opportunities issues effectively. The college has made satisfactory progress in the implementation of the SENDA and is aiming to achieve the access requirements by September 2005. Representatives from minority ethnic groups advise the college on issues of diversity. The equal opportunities policy is reviewed annually. The college monitors and analyses enrolments, and retention and pass rates for students from different backgrounds. Detailed information is produced on students' performance by age, gender and ethnicity. Reports are produced regularly for the governors and the academic board. However, the college does not use this data systematically to implement change or to spread good practice. Pass rates of students from minority ethnic backgrounds are high; however, retention rates are low. Equal opportunities issues are promoted effectively in the college prospectus, in displays and newsletters. In health, care and early years, equal opportunities issues are promoted well in teaching and through display. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, students from minority ethnic backgrounds have high levels of achievement. However, equal opportunities policies and checks are not promoted effectively to employers in much of the work-based learning provision. The college is involved in community learning projects which are engaging new learners, including women from minority ethnic groups.

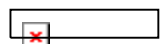
38. The staff appraisal system is robust. It applies to all staff including part-time teachers. It is conducted by line managers and results in agreed action plans for staff development and improvement. Line managers also set six clear objectives for staff, the achievement of which, results in performance related pay. One objective for teachers is the achievement of a satisfactory or better teaching observation. Staff development opportunities are extensive and formulated well. They include attention to teaching and learning styles, and support for enhancing vocational skills.

39. Financial management is very good. The college has achieved all of its income targets or exceeded them over a period of regular growth since the last inspection. It produces regular surpluses through prudent budgeting. Successful growth has allowed it to accumulate reserves which have been deployed carefully to achieve appropriate capital refurbishment and development. Major new building projects have been completed successfully. Budgets are controlled tightly and managed carefully. Staffing costs are efficient and effective. A computerized system monitors the deployment of teachers and has helped to secure the efficient and effective use of teachers' time. Pass rates are high and so are success rates. The average lesson size is large. The college provides good value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Construction



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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- much good teaching in electrical installation, brickwork, plumbing, and painting and decorating

- effective action planning and tracking of students' progress

- good development of courses in response to local and national needs.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory coordination of learning in wood occupations workshops

- unsatisfactory reviews for work-based learners

- insufficient assessment in the workplace for NVQ students in wood occupations, painting and decorating and bricklaying.

Scope of provision

40. The college provides courses in plumbing, electrical installation, bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, and painting and decorating from levels 1 to 3. There are 859 students, of whom, 376 are on full-time courses and 483 are on part-time courses. Additionally, 104 students aged 14 to 16 from local schools are taught by college staff. There are 82 modern apprentices on work-based learning provision, of whom, 14 are taking advanced frameworks. Short updating courses in electrical installation and domestic gas safety are also provided. The college has two CoVEs. The first was awarded in March 2002 in plumbing and mechanical services. The other is in house building for the future and was awarded in September 2003 in conjunction with another leading college.

Achievement and standards

41. Pass rates are high on most courses. For example, in 2004, pass rates on three NVQ courses are 100%. Most pass rates are above the national averages. Retention rates are satisfactory or better for most courses and have improved considerably on the main NVQ level 2 and 3 courses over the last 3 years. However, retention rates are consistently below the national average in electrical installation at level 2. Progress for work-based learners is slow. Of the 82 apprentices currently on programmes, 18 (22%) have already exceeded their planned duration on the programme and 16 (20%) have achieved their NVQ, but are still working towards their key skills qualifications.

42. Student portfolios in electrical installation and plumbing are of a high standard. They are presented well and include a diverse range of evidence including witness testimonies, assessor observations and photographs. These are cross-referenced accurately to the performance criteria. Students are well motivated and develop good practical skills. In particular, bricklaying students attain high levels of manual handling skills. Attendance and punctuality are very good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in construction, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
City and Guilds 2360-05/07 electrical installation part 1 (2 year)	1	No. of starts	18	29	28
		% retention	67	59	86
		% pass rate	100	82	*
Foundation construction award plumbing	1	No. of starts	**	28	42
		% retention	**	82	81
		% pass rate	**	96	91
City and Guilds 2360-08 electrical installation part 2	2	No. of starts	***	20	18
		% retention	***	70	81
		% pass rate	***	64	*
NVQ wood occupations (2 year)	2	No. of starts	74	27	38
		% retention	53	56	100
		% pass rate	77	100	100
NVQ mechanical engineering services plumbing	2	No. of starts	47	44	59
		% retention	43	73	83
		% pass rate	90	94	100
NVQ carpentry and joinery	3	No. of starts	18	21	18
		% retention	83	100	100
		% pass rate	87	86	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* unreliable data

** NVQ level 1 programmes changed to foundation construction award in 2003

***fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

43. Much good teaching takes place in brickwork, electrical installation, painting and decorating, and plumbing. In the best theory lessons, teachers use a good range of teaching and learning techniques, and theoretical aspects are related closely to their practical applications. For example, in one session, students undertook research using case studies for designing heating systems. They used catalogues, text books and wireless Internet-linked laptops effectively. In the best practical sessions, tutors give clear demonstrations and effectively check students' understanding. Students are motivated and are challenged well by teachers. In the worst lessons, teachers talk for too long without involving the students; students lose interest and are distracted. Lesson plans indicate minimal objectives and low expectations. Lesson time is not spent productively and topics covered are for induction rather than for explanation in a lesson.

44. Action planning and the tracking of students' achievements are effective. The systems are computer based and are used well to set clear targets which are updated at regular action planning meetings. Individual students and appropriate staff access the records as required. Specific reports are produced for parents and employers. Internal verification is generally satisfactory, but in carpentry and joinery, it is underdeveloped. However, reviews for work-based learners are unsatisfactory. They do not always take place every 12 weeks. Few measurable targets are set for students against which progress can be reviewed. Students do not receive a copy of their review. Individual learning plans are not updated as a result of reviews. Assessment in the workplace does not take place for the NVQ programmes in carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating, and bricklaying. There is an over-reliance of use of witness testimonies and students' own reports. Students have difficulty recognising and gathering evidence and this slows their progress.

45. The range of courses is satisfactory. The college has responded well to provide courses to meet local needs. A new centre has been opened to provide courses for the local community and to cater for students aged 14 to 16. The college is leading the development of courses in renewable technologies through its CoVE partnership. However, few evening courses and no weekend courses exist for technician and supervisory programmes. The college policy is not to provide work placements for full-time students. Where placements have been organised by teachers, students speak highly of their experience. They gain a greater understanding of their trade and are able to relate the theoretical and practical aspects of their training to the work environment.

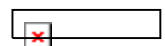
46. Students receive good initial advice and guidance about available courses. Full-time students and work-based learners have an initial assessment to identify any additional support needs for literacy or numeracy. Where support needs are identified they are provided. Individual support in lessons is effective. Attendance is monitored closely and effective action is taken where needed. Colour perception testing for electrical installation students does not take place. Vocational aptitude testing is not in place. All full-time students and work-based learners receive a satisfactory induction programme.

47. Resources are good. Using CoVE funding, a building on another site has been converted to provide spacious and well-designed new teaching facilities for plumbing to meet increased local demand. Most other workshops provide satisfactory or better learning resources and additional teaching rooms have been created to meet increased demand. Significant investment has been made in computers, software and interactive whiteboards. However, the wood workshops are cramped and untidy. Most classrooms and a few workshops have access to ILT, but this is not yet utilised fully by teaching staff. Most teachers have appropriate occupational experience and have, or are working towards, teaching and assessor qualifications. Through the CoVE activities and professional updating they are able to relate current industrial practice to their teaching.

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management of construction are satisfactory. Partnership working through the CoVEs is effective and has enhanced student resources and curriculum development. Management structures are clear and regular departmental and course team meetings take place. Staff are well informed. Roles and responsibilities of all staff are clear. Staff have good contacts across the college to provide advice and assistance, but the opportunities to share good practice between the construction trades are insufficient. The promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace is limited. The self-assessment report is detailed and reflective, but fails to identify several weaknesses. The unsatisfactory management of the wood occupations workshops hinders the effectiveness of learning and students are inadequately monitored and supervised when they move between workshop areas.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses

- much good teaching and learning

- good strategic management

- high-quality resources.

Weaknesses

- insufficient and unhelpful assessment feedback

- ineffective tracking of students' progress.

Scope of provision

49. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in engineering from level 1 to level 4. Most of the courses are delivered at the main site in Bedford, but motor vehicle provision is delivered in a purpose-built centre three miles away. The provision includes progression awards at levels 1, 2, and 3 in motor vehicle maintenance, body repair and motorcycle maintenance and national certificate and diploma courses in mechanical, aeronautical and electrical engineering. A few part-time evening courses are available mainly in computer-aided design related subjects. The college offers performing engineering operations courses at level 1 to students aged 14 to 16. Progression to higher national certificate and diploma courses in electrical, mechanical and aeronautical engineering is also available. The area has 384 students, of whom, 156 are full time and 228 are part time. There are 227 students aged 16 to 18 and 157 aged over 19. In addition, the college company 'Catalyst' delivers NVQs in food and drink operations to 30 students in the workplace.

Achievement and standards

50. Many courses have high pass rates. Pass rates on the national certificate in engineering, for example, have been above 90% for the past three years and have improved each year. The City and Guilds progression award in repair and servicing of road vehicles has a 100% pass rate in 2004. Three other courses at levels 1 and 3 also have pass rates of 100%. Most courses have improving pass rates over the last three years. However, the pass rates for the City and Guilds aeronautical engineering competences (part 2) have declined over the last three years and are well below the national average. Retention rates are at, or above, national averages in the aeronautical engineering

competences (part 2), national certificate in engineering and NVQ in food and drink manufacturing operations courses. However, retention rates are declining in the NVQ in performing engineering operations, the progression award in automobile vehicle service and repair, the City and Guilds repair and servicing of road vehicles and the NVQ in food and drink manufacturing operations. Some groups of students have high key skills pass rates whilst others have low pass rates.

51. Students are generally well motivated and achieve high levels of work, both during lessons and in their assignment work. Most students in a national certificate lesson worked at an appropriate level, but a minority of the students showed high levels of attainment. In most lessons, students respond well to questioning and are able to answer at levels above that expected for the course. Students worked particularly well in a computer-aided design lesson and in a motor vehicle lesson, and showed high levels of motivation.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, technology and manufacturing, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
City and Guilds progression award automobile vehicle servicing and repair	1	No. of starts	*	135	75
		% retention	*	86	63
		% pass rate	*	74	100
NVQ food and drink manufacturing operations	2	No. of starts	**	26	40
		% retention	**	100	65
		% pass rate	**	100	92
City and Guilds 3830-02 repair and servicing of road vehicles	2	No. of starts	24	45	19
		% retention	4	100	47
		% pass rate	0	71	100
Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	68	78	42
		% retention	74	76	76
		% pass rate	92	98	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course not offered

** fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

52. Teaching, learning and attainment are good or very good in the majority of lessons. Most lessons are prepared well. Teachers set clear learning objectives. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge and question students well to check learning has taken place. Teachers set work which enables students of differing abilities to progress at their own rates. Positive reinforcement of learning encourages students. Interactive whiteboards are used well to illustrate new concepts. Staff and students have access to a comprehensive IT and virtual learning environment suite and use it to good effect. In one case, a clear description of aeronautical jacking was given. The various components were illustrated through an animated package and this was given to the students as a CD-ROM. However, in the less effective sessions planning is poor and schemes of work lack detail. In a minority of sessions, students are not challenged sufficiently and insufficient checking of learning occurs.

53. Assessment feedback is often poor. In a minority of cases, feedback is good and provides the student with clear guidelines for improvement. However, in many cases, feedback is not given adequately and in others, it is unhelpful. Students studying on full-time courses are not generally given an assessment calendar, although some course teams have produced plans to ensure that assessments are spread out well. Internal verification is good. Appropriate records are maintained and sampling ensures good coverage.

54. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses from level 1 to level 4. The curriculum area offers its own vocationally relevant enrichment activities. For example, students studying on a national diploma engineering course are also taught performing engineering operations in order to extend their practical skills. All full-time students are offered a range of Learndirect courses. Good links exist with schools and the college has recently opened a motor vehicle centre for students aged 14 to 16. The college responds well to the needs of employers; an assessor, based at a company's premises, works flexible hours so that shift patterns are accommodated. The company's staff retention rate has increased from 42% prior to training to 75%.

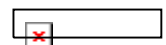
55. Support for students is satisfactory. An effective initial assessment and induction programme is in place for full-time and part-time students, and initial target setting is carried out, based on GCSE results. Many students needing additional learning support agree to receive it. Students are supported well for their literacy needs. A comprehensive cross-college tutorial pack is in place, but this is not implemented well by the tutors. In some cases, students complete and sign the appropriate tracking sheet, but tutorial staff do not. In other cases, target setting is poor or non-existent. Part-time students are not all given individual learning plans. Where key skills pass rates are low they are replaced by basic skills.

56. College workshops are generally very well resourced. A good range of resources is available across the disciplines of mechanical, electrical and motor vehicle engineering. A new motor vehicle workshop, situated approximately three miles from the main site, is extremely well resourced with good facilities for the delivery of vehicle maintenance, body repair and refinishing, and motorcycle maintenance. Staff shortages in some areas have posed challenges for faculty management. For example, the need for an aero-engines specialist has been identified, but the college has been unsuccessful in recruitment.

Leadership and management

57. The leadership and management of the area are good. The management team has a clear strategic vision and aims to achieve demanding targets. New curriculum developments have occurred in renewable-energy technologies. The management structure is new. The management team has acted quickly to develop better lines of communication. The self-assessment plan has identified key areas for improvement and has started to address these. Staff appraisal is linked strongly to the college's and the engineering area's targets, and is effective in achieving these targets. A meetings calendar is comprehensive and details centre, course team, programme area and innovations team meetings. Staff shortages in some areas are yet to be resolved.

Business, administration, management and professional



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on accounting and management courses

- much good and very good teaching and learning

- high standards of students' work in professional studies

- effective curriculum area management.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on AS-level business

- insufficient access to and use of IT.

Scope of provision

58. The college provides a comprehensive range of full-time and part-time courses, from foundation level to advanced and higher levels. The curriculum area has full-time courses in business, administration and accounting. Courses include NVQ, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ), advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) and GCE. Specialist part-time courses include the certificate, diploma and executive diploma in management. Courses are run in the tower block, St. Mary's and the workshop block. The college has a CoVE in supervisory and management skills. There are 485 students on full-time courses and 1,038 students on part-time courses. Over 300 students are aged 16 to 18 and about 1,200 students are aged over 19.

Achievement and standards

59. Over the past three years, retention and pass rates have been high on accounting and management courses. Pass rates are also high on the full-time courses at levels 2 and 3. Four courses at levels 3 and 4 achieved pass rates of 100% in 2004. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate business course has been above the national average for the last three years. Retention and pass rates for AS-level business have been consistently below the national average for the past three years. The retention rates on the AVCE (double award) in business have been very low for the last two years.

60. Students arrive promptly for lessons, but the average attendance at lessons observed during the inspection week was only 78%. Students enjoy their courses and many make significant progress whilst at college. The standard of work on the AAT, management and executive secretarial courses is particularly high. The part-time AAT students' portfolios contain a well-balanced mix of college and work-based evidence. The students on administration courses develop good skills in producing complex documents such as powerpoint presentations. They are well organised and show clear evidence of knowledge and understanding. Accounting students are well motivated, work effectively in lessons and apply themselves to achieving their goals.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business, administration, management and professional, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	**	17	15
		% retention	**	82	80
		% pass rate	**	93	83
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	86	69	90
		% retention	79	99	86
		% pass rate	78	79	83
AVCE business (double award)	3	No. of starts	34	44	20
		% retention	*	36	35
		% pass rate	*	36	100
AS-level business studies	3	No. of starts	20	19	25
		% retention	70	58	60
		% pass rate	79	91	33
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	58	52	103
		% retention	84	89	85
		% pass rate	63	79	75
NVQ accounting	4	No. of starts	62	67	66
		% retention	89	78	94
		% pass rate	70	94	80

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* no data available

**fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

61. Most practical and theory lessons are taught well. Teaching and learning in the great majority of lessons are good or better. In the most successful lessons, teaching, learning and assessment are carefully planned and structured, and the lesson objectives are shared with the students at the start. In these lessons, teachers successfully review the content at the end and check that learning has taken place. Most teachers work to detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Teachers check students' understanding regularly and use up-to-date examples from business to illustrate various business concepts. In one accounting lesson, the teacher praised the students for their involvement in a challenging question and answer session. The lesson's aims were clearly stated and related to previous work and the use of practical examples made the topic exciting.

62. The least successful lessons are too undemanding of students; teachers rely heavily on note taking and asking students to read out loud from case studies. The use of appropriate resources including ILT to aid learning is insufficient. Students do not always concentrate sufficiently on tasks set and some teachers are unaware of this. In one lesson, the students were not challenged or engaged and understanding was not checked. The lesson plan was incomplete and unclear. Teaching aids were not used effectively.

63. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are satisfactory. Assessments are designed imaginatively, and cover the requisite competences and subject material. Marking is fair and accurate, and many teachers supplement this with detailed and helpful feedback on how students may improve their work. This is particularly noticeable on the accounting courses. However,

the review of students' performance and the setting of individual student targets are underdeveloped.

64. The college offers a wide range of courses and progression opportunities through the various levels. Through imaginative planning and flexibility of the timetable, students are able to follow a course of study which is tailored to suit their individual needs and takes account of their commitments outside college. There are few appropriate work placements for full-time students in business and accounting. Key skills are integrated into the business assignments for full-time students and are used to deliver the key skills portfolio requirements. Students receive discrete key skills lessons to develop underpinning knowledge. This is not always done in an innovative way or contextualised to the programme of study. The college has recently been funded to develop a CoVE in supervisory and management skills in partnership with a neighbouring college. Employers are involved with the college through the local hospital, the area health offices and health centres in order to run the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists (AMSPAR) courses at levels 2, 3 and 4.

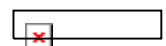
65. The group and individual support systems for full-time students are good. The working relationships between teachers and students are constructive and encourage learning. Teachers offer additional help to students outside lessons and this is valued by them. Initial advice and guidance are helpful. Students are prepared well for progression to higher level courses. Although students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated well, appropriate support and training are lacking for curriculum tutors. In a minority of lessons, students who need specialist support do not receive it.

66. Resources are good. Most teachers are well qualified and experienced in their subject, and have recognised teaching certificates, but they have little or no recent industrial updating. They engage in comprehensive staff development programmes. New computer software has been obtained for business students. Students have insufficient access to IT resources. Opportunities to use specialist resources including ILT are not taken. Teaching accommodation is not always used appropriately; some large lessons are held in rooms which are too small. In most rooms, relevant display materials are not used.

Leadership and management

67. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum area has responded positively to challenges and has been proactive in meeting the needs of its students. The CoVE is managed well and is involving employers in a range of initiatives. Communications between managers and staff are effective. Teachers meet frequently, both formally and informally, as members of course and programme teams. Students' progression and retention rates are monitored well. Course files are comprehensive and administration is thorough. Regular reviews of the provision and of students' needs are held and appropriate actions are taken. The self-assessment reporting at both curriculum and course level is critical and rigorous. Many of the issues identified in the development plan are already in place. Managers have clear ownership of the college's aims and objectives. Staff development is encouraged positively. Compulsory staff development days exist and training is made available to meet needs. A peer observation system has recently been introduced involving advanced practitioners and this is effective in identifying and sharing best practice.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- very good computing resources that improve students' learning
- effective student tracking and support in the learning shops.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory provision for key skills
- insufficient rigour and implementation of quality assurance procedures
- teaching strategies do not address the needs of all students.

Scope of provision

68. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses, including the BTEC first diploma for IT practitioners, national award, certificate and diploma for IT practitioners, AVCE ICT, Microsoft office specialist, European computer driving licence (ECDL), and City and Guilds programming courses. Opportunities for studying City and Guilds applications are available at the college's learning shops in Bedford, Biggleswade and Luton. There are 175 full-time and 1,191 part-time students enrolled. Of the full-time students, 132 are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

69. Pass rates are high and the majority of courses have retention rates close to the national average. Most pass rates are above the national averages especially at entry level and levels 1 and 3. The pass rate on the BTEC national diploma in computing has risen from 64% to 100% in the last 3 years. The key skills pass rate is low at 11%. Retention of students is good on the City and Guilds diploma for IT users course. However, on the BTEC diploma for IT practitioners course it is unsatisfactory.

70. With the exception of key skills, the standard of students' work in lessons and in students' files is good. The BTEC first diploma students show clear understanding of computer systems, while AVCE students are able to set up simple networks and transfer files between two computers. Students have a positive attitude to their work and enjoy it. Students arrive on time and attendance at lessons is good. Students with little recent educational experience gain good skills quickly in basic IT applications.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communications technology, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
City and Guilds 4248 Start IT	E	No. of starts	1,465	322	405
		% retention	72	62	85
		% pass rate	73	62	90
City and Guilds 7262 certificate for IT users	1	No. of starts	1,485	1,186	1,777
		% retention	57	65	44
		% pass rate	88	59	78
GNVQ foundation ICT/BTEC introductory IT @ work	1	No. of starts	17	*	23
		% retention	71	*	74
		% pass rate	50	*	88
City and Guilds diploma for IT users	2	No. of starts	32	58	38
		% retention	44	72	89
		% pass rate	71	100	81
GNVQ intermediate ICT/ BTEC first diploma IT	2	No. of starts	52	29	36
		% retention	77	83	81
		% pass rate	80	96	76
BTEC diploma in computing/BTEC diploma ITP	3	No. of starts	25	47	28
		% retention	100	47	46
		% pass rate	64	91	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

*fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

71. Much teaching is good, but too many of the sessions are unsatisfactory. Most teaching is planned well to meet the needs of the course, but planning is often less responsive to the needs of individual students. The best lessons are planned and structured well and use a variety of methods to maintain students' interest and ensure that all students understand new topics. In these lessons, students work with interest and perseverance; they make good progress. For example, in one group of 19 students, very good management ensured that all of them were motivated and that a challenging pace was maintained. After a good introduction from the teacher, students worked well individually and received effective individual help.

72. However, the worst lessons do not challenge students sufficiently and the rate of progress is too slow. Teaching does not always address the needs of all the students. Teachers often become engrossed in the work of an individual student or small group and pay too little attention to what is happening in the rest of the lesson. The teaching of key skills is insufficiently demanding. In one lesson, the same task was given to all students in a mixed ability group; the teacher spent so much time with the weaker students that the more able students finished and became restless.

73. Assessment practice is satisfactory. In the best examples, helpful feedback is provided on marked work, but on one course, comments do not focus sufficiently on improvement. Homework is set regularly and returned promptly. Assignment briefs are clear and include helpful explanation of the assessment criteria. Internal verification is not always organised well or carried out on time.

74. Programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of students. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time computing and IT courses from entry level to level 4. However,

enrolments of female students on full-time courses are low. Opportunities for work experience are limited; only one full-time course has work experience and few other opportunities exist for students to learn about employment. Many of the part-time courses are available at the college's learning shops. These community centres effectively meet the needs of adult students who are new to IT.

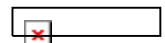
75. Students receive good support and guidance. Student tracking and support in the learning shops are rigorous. A database is used effectively to share information about students' progress. Students are supported well in lessons. Target setting is used effectively in tutorials. Students receive appropriate advice, guidance and support to select appropriate courses. Tutorial support for full-time students is very good. In individual interviews, tutors set and monitor targets effectively for students' progress.

76. Computing resources are very good and are used well to enhance students' learning. Students benefit from good accommodation and technical resources. Areas for teaching and learning are well appointed with a strong subject identity. Teachers make good use of interactive smartboards and data projectors for demonstrations and exposition of material. During lessons, students work with current commercial-standard software. Students have good access to a shared drive to store work and are encouraged to make copies on disks and USB memory sticks. Students do not have easy access to computers during their private study time. High-quality materials including handouts, powerpoint presentations and assignment briefs are used effectively to promote learning.

Leadership and management

77. The leadership and management of the area are satisfactory. The learning shops are run well and managers are supported effectively. Full-time courses are organised well. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory, but sometimes lack sufficient rigour. The monitoring of students' individual learning plans is thorough and frequent. However, course reviews rarely contain clear measurable targets for improving retention and pass rates. Staff development needs arising from lesson observations are recorded clearly. However, the teaching observation grades made by the five observers are not subjected to moderation. Management information is available, but is not always used effectively for the benefit of students. A simple value added analysis of students' progress over time has been introduced, but it has yet to impact on provision. Self-assessment has been effective in identifying key strengths and weaknesses, and an action plan is in place to address weaknesses.

Hospitality and catering, sport, leisure and travel



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on hospitality courses

- high level of students' skills

- good accommodation and resources for travel and sports programmes.

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of target setting for students
- insufficient differentiation to meet the needs of all students.

Scope of provision

78. The area offers courses in hospitality, catering, travel and sport. All programmes are delivered at the main site and full-time students are able to progress from level 1 to level 3 in hospitality, catering and travel. A wide range of part-time and short course provision is available. There are 76 full-time students and 92 part-time students in the hospitality and catering area, and 221 full-time students and 45 part-time students on travel and sports courses. Of the full-time students, 72% are aged 16 to 18 and 28% are aged over 19. Of the part-time students, 26% are aged 16 to 18 and 74% are aged over 19. Only catering provision is available for students aged 14 to 16.

Achievement and standards

79. Pass rates are very high on NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3 hospitality and catering courses (100% in 2004). Part-time catering students aged 14 to 16 have very high pass rates and progress to full-time programmes at 16. However, pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism, the BTEC national diploma in science (sport) and the City and Guilds progression award in sports and leisure courses are below national averages. Retention rates on the AVCE travel and tourism and the national diploma in science (sport) courses are low. Success rates are low on many additional short vocational courses offered to full-time students.

80. Students develop good practical and personal skills. Hospitality and catering students are involved in a range of industry competitions, outside events and the Bedford food festival. Catering students are representing the country in the Culinary Olympics in Germany. Opportunities for individual vocational and personal development in practical sessions are good. Sports students learn a wide range of sports and fitness-testing skills, and are able to apply them well.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality and catering, sport, leisure and travel, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
NVQ hospitality and catering, food preparation and cooking (2 years)	2	No. of starts	20	29	28
		% retention	60	38	50
		% pass rate	75	100	100
NVQ hospitality and catering, food and drink service (1 year)	2	No. of starts	26	22	22
		% retention	54	73	59
		% pass rate	93	100	100
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	19	18	18
		% retention	58	61	78
		% pass rate	64	73	71
City and Guilds	2	No. of starts	77	40	40

progression award in sports and leisure		% retention	62	78	78
		% pass rate	35	77	42
AVCE (double) travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	32	29	31
		% retention	47	28	48
		% pass rate	33	50	87

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

81. Teaching and learning are good in hospitality and catering practical lessons. Teachers plan lessons well with clear structure and purpose. ILT is used effectively to support learning. However, in theoretical lessons, the more able students are not challenged. Teaching methods are not varied and insufficient consideration is given to students with additional learning needs. Teaching is not differentiated sufficiently to meet the needs of all students. In the weakest lessons, learning is insufficiently checked and students are unmotivated. Sports students are coached well in basic sporting skills and tactics, and learn to adapt them to small game situations. In a very good sports lesson, students put theory into practice by learning how to measure body fat using skin callipers. Instructions from the teacher were clear and simple, and ensured that the tests were carried out accurately; valid results were obtained. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively. In one lesson, web pages from travel sites were displayed on screen to identify airports used by different airlines. The locations and codes of these airports were then researched using a range of learning materials.

82. Assessment plans in the travel and sports areas are good. Feedback on assignments is comprehensive and provides good opportunity for improvement. However, in all programmes, the use of target setting is ineffective. Individual learning plans and student action plans are, in most cases, not completed properly or updated. Many targets are general and not reviewed throughout the year. In hospitality and catering, many assessment plans are agreed with the student for completion over a four month period. However, most assessments fail to meet the target dates and are assessed at the end of the academic year. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets awarding body standards.

83. Students choose from a broad range of provision and several well-planned additional qualifications in order to specialise. Sports students have the opportunity to participate in sports teams at different levels. A programme of academic and sporting excellence is offered to students to develop high levels of performance. Part-time hospitality courses are now in place to meet the needs of students and employers. Full-time students do breakfast production and service throughout the year as a response to local employment needs.

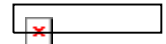
84. Support for most students is effective at improving their performance. Tutors offer good informal support and students have easy access to staff to resolve personal and subject issues. Diagnostic assessment and monitoring are effective for students needing additional learning support. A wide and useful range of specialist advice, guidance and support is offered by the student services section.

85. The accommodation and resources for travel and sports programmes are good. They include a large sports hall, fitness consulting room, air conditioned fitness gym, testing area and dance studio. These are designed and equipped to industry standard and are accessed easily by students with limited mobility. Classrooms and a staffroom for sport and travel are housed in the same complex, and are resourced fully to support teaching and learning. Full and effective use is made of the resources. Resources in hospitality and catering are satisfactory. The public restaurant is a good teaching environment. The two production kitchens are adequate. The classroom is too small and students move to see the screen. Teaching materials are satisfactory. Staff in hospitality, catering, travel and sports studies are qualified appropriately. They have relevant vocational experience and have developed close links with local organisations. Professional development for staff is effective. Industry guest speakers enhance students' experience.

Leadership and management

86. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have reduced the range of courses offered to reflect the needs of employers and the aspirations of students. The college rationalises the curriculum effectively to improve the quality of provision. Communication channels between staff and management are clear and regular team meetings are well attended. Course reviews inform course planning. Professional development for staff is good. However, the monitoring of some key aspects of training is insufficient. Observation of tutors is not sufficiently rigorous. The self-assessment report does not sufficiently acknowledge low retention rates. Managers are aware that some key data are incomplete.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

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

Strengths

- high pass rates on two year NVQ level 2 in hairdressing and beauty therapy course

- much good teaching and learning

- effective development of students' skills

- good resources meeting industry standards.

Weaknesses

- insufficient main site accommodation

- unsatisfactory provision for work-based learning.

Scope of provision

87. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time courses in hairdressing, beauty and holistic therapies. Hairdressing and beauty therapy qualifications are offered at levels 1 to 3 and holistic therapies at levels 2 and 3. The college has partnership links with 9 local schools from which 128

pupils take level 1 courses. There are 287 full-time students, of whom, 138 are in hairdressing, 110 in beauty therapy and 39 in holistic therapy. Of the 105 part-time students, half are on beauty therapy courses and half on hairdressing courses. Male students constitute 13% of the total students and 9% of the students are from minority ethnic groups. The hairdressing apprenticeship programme has 21 students. Currently, 128 students are aged 14 to 16, 193 are aged 16 to 18 and 235 are aged over 19. The area also provides courses in African-Caribbean hairdressing.

Achievement and standards

88. Pass rates for the two year NVQ level 2 programmes in hairdressing and beauty therapy are high and exceed national averages. Pass rates and overall retention rates on most other programmes are at, or just above, the national average. Retention rates are very good on the NVQ level 3 beauty therapy course. Pass rates are low for apprenticeship frameworks. Over the past three years, only 1 out of 36 starters has achieved the full framework. No full frameworks have been achieved by the five advanced apprentices who started in the past three years. NVQ achievement is 37%.

89. Students' skills are highly developed. Students achieve success in local and national hairdressing and beauty competitions. An NVQ level 2 hairdressing student won a national student of the year award. Other students produce high standards of make-up and hairstyles for fashion shows and exhibitions. The NVQ level 3 hairdressing students produce portfolios of a very high portfolios using excellent photographic evidence of their practical work. Students use good techniques when sectioning and applying rollers, and use their background knowledge effectively to solve practical tasks. One student, who had only been on the programme for four weeks, displayed a high level of skills in plaiting African-Caribbean hair. Another student demonstrated particularly good massage techniques in an aromatherapy lesson.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
NVQ beauty therapy (1 year)	2	No. of starts	19	40	42
		% retention	84	93	83
		% pass rate	100	100	86
NVQ beauty therapy (2 years)	2	No. of starts	*	30	52
		% retention	*	53	58
		% pass rate	*	88	97
NVQ hairdressing (2 years)	2	No. of starts	21	72	51
		% retention	29	60	73
		% pass rate	100	72	89
NVQ beauty therapy (2 years)	3	No. of starts	17	16	*
		% retention	100	94	*
		% pass rate	100	100	*
Body massage certificate	3	No. of starts	34	52	54
		% retention	79	87	74
		% pass rate	100	87	83

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

*fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

90. Most of the teaching and learning are good. Teaching is well planned and evaluated. In the best lessons, students are set challenging learning goals which effectively develop their vocational skills. Teachers have a good knowledge of theoretical and technical skills. Students and staff are motivated well and develop good relationships which promote learning. In an NVQ massage lesson, students were engaged fully in an initial quiz to consolidate previous learning. Theory was well linked to practical by the use of questions to elicit knowledge and to promote understanding. Teacher and students worked well as a team and clear progress was made.

91. In the worst lessons, poor planning and lack of students' involvement leads to confusion and uncertainty regarding the level of the lesson and the work to be completed. Students are not engaged in the tasks, have little understanding of what is required to progress and learning outcomes are not achieved.

92. Feedback on students' work is detailed and helpful to students. Internal verification and assessment systems for college-based students are satisfactory. They are unsatisfactory for work-based learners who have no long-term assessment targets within individual learning plans. These students and their employers are unable to measure progress or plan completion of units.

93. The curriculum area offers a broad vocational enrichment programme which gives students valuable opportunities to gain additional qualifications. Good external links have been made with employers and schools. For example, the college has helped two schools set up well-equipped training salons and works with them to offer NVQ level 1 courses for disaffected students. The college also provides useful complementary therapy training for local health service staff.

94. Students receive satisfactory pastoral and vocational support from approachable staff. Teachers create a supportive, friendly learning environment which enables students to develop their skills with confidence. One student, who required support for dyslexia, was given effective extra support to complete written assessments. The assessment of students' numeracy and literacy skills is satisfactory. Students' needs are identified during induction. Students who have additional learning needs are referred to specialist tutors and support is provided rapidly. Students' individual learning styles and requirements are identified in detailed learner profiles. These are based on initial and diagnostic assessments and identification of individual learning needs.

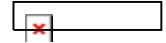
95. The area has good resources which meet industry standards. The hairdressing and beauty therapy provision is easily accessible in a high street location. The commercial salons are equipped professionally and maintained well. The reception area has a computerised appointment system, a good selection of retail products and reflects industry standards. A well-equipped dedicated theory room incorporates an interactive whiteboard and laptop for powerpoint presentations which staff use effectively. Well-qualified technicians and receptionists give good support. Staff are well qualified and maintain a high standard of vocational expertise with a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development. Work placements are taken with high-quality hairdressing salons in prime locations which give students the opportunity to work with a diverse range of clients. The accommodation at the main site is insufficient to support current lesson sizes. In some lessons, this inhibits effective learning. Owing to greatly increased recruitment, additional facilities are leased. These are inferior to the main accommodation.

Leadership and management

96. Leadership and management of the college provision are good. Trainers, assessors and internal verifiers have a high level of commitment to training. Staff are enthusiastic and work well together as a team, maintain industry standards and attend a comprehensive range of staff development activities. All staff are trained in the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000, child protection legislation and the SENDA. All staff are observed in lessons and effective mentoring and guidance are provided where needed. Appraisals are completed on time and appropriate targets are set. The self-assessment report overestimated the quality of provision particularly in work-based learning. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. However, it is not always promoted or reinforced to work-

based employers. Provision for the small work-based learning section is unsatisfactory. Internal verification of the quality of the work-based assessments is insufficient. Long-term target setting is poor. Students and employers are insufficiently involved in target setting. Students and employers do not have copies of individual learning plans. Coordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training is inadequate. Monitoring of the quality of training in the workplace is insufficient. Communication is poor between specialist key skills staff and vocational staff. Slow progress is made in key skills. Framework achievement is poor.

Health, social care and public services



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- much good teaching

- strong commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities

- effective curriculum management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on level 2 full-time courses

- insufficient provision of short courses for adults in the community.

Scope of provision

97. There are 363 full-time and 403 part-time students enrolled on courses in social care, early years, counselling and public services. Most students aged 16 to 18 attend full-time courses in care, early years and public services. The majority of the students on NVQ, counselling and access courses in health and social studies are aged over 19. A small number of apprenticeship students are on early years care courses. There are over 200 students aged 16 to 18 and over 1,400 students aged over 19. Currently, 27 students aged 14 to 16 are studying for foundation qualifications in caring for children. Courses are available from entry level to level 4 in early years, from level 1 to level 4 in care, and at levels 2 and 3 in public services and counselling. Most of the provision is

offered on the main college site during the daytime. NVQ and counselling lessons take place during the evening. Little outreach and community-based provision is offered.

Achievement and standards

98. Pass rates are high on most full-time courses. In 2004, all the students on level 3 courses in early years, care access and counselling passed. Most pass rates have been above national averages for the last three years. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care has, however, declined over this time and is now well below the national average. Retention rates on most courses are at, or above, the national averages. However, retention rates on level 2 full-time courses are below national averages. Progression is good to higher level courses and to related employment. In 2004, 52% of full-time students progressed to higher level study and a further 30% to related employment.

99. Students' work in lessons is at an appropriate standard for the qualifications and for the stage in their courses. In a national diploma public services lesson, students used powerpoint skilfully to present very well researched findings on the aims, roles and responsibilities of the emergency services. Their presentations were evaluated carefully by their peers and the tutor. Students showed good subject knowledge and maturity in their responses to questions. Students' assignment work is of high quality. Students are highly motivated, are punctual and attend well.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, social care and public services, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	34	28	17
		% retention	79	89	71
		% pass rate	85	76	58
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	15	26	35
		% retention	73	77	71
		% pass rate	100	95	88
Intermediate certificate in counselling skills	2	No. of starts	*	41	22
		% retention	*	68	77
		% pass rate	*	93	100
BTEC national diploma in early years (and precursors)	3	No. of starts	20	21	15
		% retention	100	81	60
		% pass rate	100	94	100
CACHE diploma in childcare and education	3	No. of starts	**	27	20
		% retention	**	59	60
		% pass rate	**	100	100
Access to health and social care (1 year)	3	No. of starts	29	42	34
		% retention	72	79	76
		% pass rate	71	91	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* course not offered

**fewer than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

100. Teaching and learning are good across all courses and meet the needs of individual students. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed and clearly meet the qualification requirements and the level of award. The individual learning needs of full-time and part-time students are met effectively in most lessons. One teacher provided good individual support in a key skills lesson in which students worked confidently at their own pace preparing statistical data for a vocational lesson. Students are prepared well for the next stage of their learning. In a public services lesson, students worked productively in groups creating a poster representing their ideal society. Key skills are very well integrated into the teaching and assessment of care courses. This good practice is now disseminated across the early years' provision. Application of number, IT and communications are given an interesting vocational context and are taught jointly by key skills and vocational staff. Students complete a useful assignment on career plans in their tutorial programme which provides evidence for key skills assessment.

101. Students' written work is assessed carefully. Assessment criteria are explained clearly and teachers interpret the qualification requirements fairly and accurately. Particularly clear formative assessment is given on level 3 programmes. Teachers provide focused guidance which explains clearly the strengths and weaknesses in students' work and how they can improve. Targets set are based on grades on entry and these are reviewed regularly. NVQ portfolios in early years are well ordered, assessed carefully and internally verified. Internal verifiers provide clear guidance to teachers. Students make good use of detailed course handbooks which provide clear information on programme and college requirements.

102. The response to the needs of students, employers and the local community is satisfactory. A comprehensive enrichment programme is offered, including sports and leisure activities, additional GCSEs and other relevant vocational courses. A wide range of work experience opportunities is available to support college studies. Although NVQ and counselling programmes in the daytime and evening meet the needs of adult students, the range of part-time provision is narrow and there is very little provision in the community for adults returning to learn. However, the college is participating successfully in a distance-learning pilot programme on paperless NVQs in care. The health and social care area has recently been awarded CoVE status, but this is yet to take effect. The links with health and care providers to support work placement experience are good.

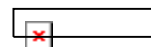
103. Academic and pastoral support for students are good. The induction programme is clear and effective. Initial assessment is supportive. Careers and HE guidance are comprehensive and helpful. The tutorial system is planned well and provides ongoing personal and academic support. In individual tutorials, clear personal and academic targets are set and monitored. Lessons start promptly and student lateness is challenged appropriately.

104. Resources in this area are adequate. The books and journals are well suited to qualification requirements and students' needs. Access to ICT outside classrooms is satisfactory. Most classrooms are well equipped and have relevant displays. However, most classrooms do not have computers and insufficient use is made of ILT. Staff are qualified appropriately and have a wide range of industrial experience. Staff in care and early years spend a minimum of two days each year in health and care settings to gain knowledge and understanding of current practice.

Leadership and management

105. Leadership and management are good. Curriculum management by course teams is good. Course teams work well together and staff support each other. Roles and responsibilities are clear and understood by staff and students. Formal and informal communications within teams are good. Team meetings are regular and minutes are clear. However, agreed action points are not recorded in sufficient detail. Partnership links with workplace providers and local agencies are successful. Course evaluation and self-assessment are rigorous. The teaching observation programme is effective in ensuring that good practice is shared and appropriate support identified. Staff development and professional updating are planned well. In care and early years, aspects of equal opportunities are promoted effectively. Positive images of minority ethnic groups and their families are used well as part of the high level of commitment given to equal opportunities.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- much good teaching

- high standard of students' work

- effective integration of industrial projects in art and design

- good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently rigorous vocational practice in performing arts

- insufficient new technology resources in art and design.

Scope of provision

106. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time level 3 courses in art and design, performing arts, music technology and media. The AS-level and GCE A-level media and film studies provision is managed by the sixth form centre. Insufficient accredited evening provision is available. All courses are held at the main site. There are 18 full-time and 13 part-time teachers with 3 technical staff. Currently, the provision has 396 full-time and 124 part-time students with 64% of full-time students on performing arts courses. Almost half the students are on art and design courses. Over 400 students are aged 16 to 18 and about 300 are aged over 19.

Achievement and standards

107. Students achieve high pass rates on most visual and performing arts courses. Pass rates on

the BTEC diploma in foundation studies art and design course, and the national diplomas in graphic design, media, music technology and performing arts courses have consistently exceeded the national average. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course are also high. Retention rates are high on the GNVQ intermediate art and design, and national diploma in media courses. However, the retention rate is consistently low in music technology.

108. The standard of students' work in art and design is very high. Students use sketchbooks well to analyse projects and develop ideas. Progression to HE is good, particularly on the BTEC diploma in foundation studies. Performing arts students are successful in gaining places at prestigious specialist colleges despite intense national competition. Public performances by performing arts students are of a high standard and attract large audiences from the surrounding area. In performing arts and media, punctuality and attendance are poor.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	19	18	18
		% retention	74	94	83
		% pass rate	93	100	87
BTEC national diploma in media	3	No. of starts	20	22	17
		% retention	70	82	94
		% pass rate	100	100	100
BTEC diploma in foundation studies	3	No. of starts	66	52	48
		% retention	94	94	94
		% pass rate	92	98	100
BTEC national diploma in graphic design	3	No. of starts	25	30	19
		% retention	60	80	100
		% pass rate	93	100	100
BTEC national diploma in music technology	3	No. of starts	19	25	19
		% retention	53	40	58
		% pass rate	100	100	100
BTEC national diploma in performing arts	3	No. of starts	39	35	37
		% retention	69	71	73
		% pass rate	85	100	100

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

109. Teaching and learning are good. In art and design, imaginative assignments promote the learning of basic creative skills. This is initiated through consistent and thorough drawing programmes and projects which successfully develop underpinning visual language. In one first diploma lesson, students visited the local Bedford museum to conduct visual research into beetles. This was used well as primary source material to create relief prints of beetle shapes in a variety of textures and colours. Delivery of contextual studies is satisfactory. However, this is not integrated fully into all courses. Staff set challenging assignments for performing arts students. Recent productions have included 'Road' and 'Six characters in search of an author' which make significant demands on student achievement. However, in one lesson, students were encouraged to select audition speeches from anthologies without having first read the play. Adherence to good vocational

practice is not promoted sufficiently. Staff do not challenge inappropriate behaviour and attitude in performing arts, music and media. High levels of industrial standards are not enforced.

110. Assessment practices are good. Students' assessment briefs across all courses are detailed. Constructive written feedback helps students to improve. Assessment records are rigorously kept and allow for peer evaluation and tutor feedback. Tracking documents are maintained well and individual students' progression on courses is discussed regularly. Initial assessment is completed for all students and leads to support where appropriate.

111. The college offers a wide range of courses, particularly at level 3. Most students enrol on courses appropriate to their ability. Students progress from foundation to advanced courses within the area of learning. Provision for level 1 art and design is not available. Key skills are delivered well in discrete groups and integrated effectively into areas such as technical theatre, and art and design contextual studies. Students have many opportunities to visit galleries, theatres and concert halls for live performances. The curriculum is inclusive and ensures equality of access. Vocational links in art and design are excellent particularly on the national diploma in graphics course. Industrial projects are integrated effectively in art and design. A student from the national diploma graphic design course won the United Kingdom heat of a global competition for students to design a press and poster campaign to promote an anti-fur organisation.

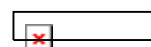
112. Guidance and support are good. Pre-entry guidance is good and specialist subject advice is available. Students are supported well by staff and support systems. Additional support is available, but the take-up of support is low. Individual learning plans are clear and aid the progress of students. Appropriate action plans inform progress.

113. Resources are satisfactory. In performing arts, media and music, accommodation is adequate, but many lessons are taught in rooms spread across the main site. Many rooms are too small for the number of students and inappropriate for some activities. Rehearsal space for performing arts students is insufficient. In visual arts, resources are adequate. However, some accommodation is poorly maintained, particularly in the garage building. Access to IT facilities for art and design students is satisfactory and students use a well-equipped computer suite. However, in other areas, students have insufficient access to new technologies, particularly in the garage and textile rooms. Most staff are well qualified and have, or are working towards, teaching qualifications. Many have relevant professional experience. The staff development programme supports the vocational expertise and curriculum delivery needs of the area.

Leadership and management

114. Leadership and management are good. Managers recognise the needs of staff and students, and plan accordingly. They have good knowledge of the range of qualifications available and what will benefit current students. The curriculum is planned well and reflects the needs of students. Staff are encouraged to undertake professional development. Course leaders value the autonomy given to them and the lack of artistic interference. Course reviews are rigorous. Staff are competent in target setting for student recruitment, retention and pass rates. Effective measures are in place to ensure equality of opportunity. Student groups come from increasingly diverse backgrounds. Senior managers and governors regularly attend performances and exhibitions. The lesson observation system covers all staff; however, the grades awarded are not realistic.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on many courses

- good tutorial support

- good individual target setting

- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GCSE courses

- poor management of group work in a minority of lessons.

Scope of provision

115. The college offers a GCSE programme for full-time students aged 16 to 18. This includes four humanities subjects on which 63 students are enrolled. Seven humanities subjects are offered to full-time students at AS level and GCE A level. There are 124 students on the AS-level subjects and 63 on the GCE A-level courses. The most popular subject is psychology with 83 AS-level and 24 GCE A-level students. About 100 adult students are enrolled on the 5 AS-level subjects, which are offered in the evening. The access to degree studies course has 14 full-time and 11 part-time adult students who are taking humanities subjects. This course is part of a flexible access to HE programme and students select from a wide range of units and different modes of attendance.

Achievement and standards

116. Pass rates in most subjects are high. Pass rates in AS-level government and politics and AS-level and GCE A-level sociology are 100% in 2004. The high grade pass rates in these subjects are also significantly above national averages. The pass rate for access to degree studies improved significantly in 2004. The pass rates in all GCSE subjects, except law, are above the national averages. The sociology and psychology pass rates are significantly above the national averages. However, the pass rates for AS-level philosophy and law declined to well below national averages in 2004. Retention rates are high for AS-level law and GCE A-level psychology. However, retention rates on most courses have declined and are below the national averages.

117. Students achieve high standards of work in most subjects and demonstrate good skills of analysis and evaluation. Students are encouraged to develop these skills in most lessons and they contribute well to discussion and debate. On the access to degree studies course, students participate fully in lessons and develop high levels of study and independent learning skills. Most students achieve the grades predicted by value added data, based on their GCSE scores. In sociology, however, students achieve significantly higher grades at both AS level and GCE A level than predicted by their GCSE results.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	23	29	24
		% retention	70	72	54
		% pass rate	56	71	77
GCSE psychology	2	No. of starts	25	19	23
		% retention	56	53	52
		% pass rate	64	50	100
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	60	70	77
		% retention	67	84	90
		% pass rate	50	61	55
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	62	60	54
		% retention	74	77	65
		% pass rate	83	83	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	30	22	33
		% retention	67	82	94
		% pass rate	90	100	87
Access to degree studies	3	No. of starts	15	17	15
		% retention	67	71	73
		% pass rate	100	67	91

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

Quality of education and training

118. Teaching and learning are good in most lessons. Lesson plans and schemes of work are detailed and have clear objectives. In most lessons, students are attentive and interested in their work. Teachers have high expectations of students and develop their analytical skills. For example, in an AS-level sociology lesson, students studying sociological methods worked in groups to produce questionnaires used in role plays. These were then used as a basis for the key issues relating to interviewing. In a GCSE psychology lesson, students carried out an experiment on conformity. This was managed carefully by the teacher and enjoyed by the students. It encouraged discussion and effective learning of the key issues in social psychology.

119. In a minority of weaker lessons, group work is not managed well by teachers. Group tasks lack a clear focus and students are unsure of what is expected. A few lessons lack variety. The same teaching strategy is used for prolonged periods and results in students losing attention. Occasionally, learning is adversely affected because the group size is too large for the size of the room.

120. Varied and appropriate assessment methods are used. Detailed assessment records are held by all course teams. In most subjects, teachers provide detailed feedback to students on their assessed work. In a small number of subjects, students are given insufficient feedback which does not indicate clearly how the mark was awarded or how to improve performance. Progress reviews are held frequently and result in written reports which coincide with parents' evenings. In the access to degree studies programme, internal verification procedures are thorough and are applied consistently.

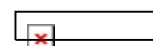
121. Tutorial support is good. All full-time students and part-time access students have personal tutors and a structured, timetabled tutorial programme. Students appreciate the support provided by personal tutors. Communication between personal tutors and teachers is very good. The value added system is effective in setting students' targets. On entry to the college, AS-level students are set a minimum target grade based on their GCSE points score. These grades are reviewed regularly and progress grades identified. Teachers and tutors agree individual action plans with students. Access students also agree targets with their personal tutors which are upgraded regularly. Students on all programmes know their current targets. All full-time and part-time access students have detailed induction programmes. These include an initial assessment to identify additional support needs. Where additional support is provided, this is valued by staff and students. A student adviser monitors the attendance of full-time students aged 16 to 18.

122. The humanities accommodation is well equipped and furnished. Most rooms have flexible furniture which is moved to meet the needs of the activity. Good curriculum-related displays are in most rooms. One room is equipped with a data projector, interactive whiteboard and wireless networked laptops. Another room is fitted with a set of desk top computers. Library staff are responsive to requests for learning materials, and the range and quantity of learning materials are good. Teachers make effective use of IT to support learning. Staff are well qualified and are involved in frequent professional development.

Leadership and management

123. Leadership and management are very good. A new management structure operates effectively. Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. Communication between staff is good and a strong team ethos prevails. Quality improvement focuses on planning and target setting as a priority. Staff participate effectively in course reviews. These result in realistic judgments and detailed action plans. Action points are monitored closely and standards are raised. The management of the curriculum area is focused strongly on teaching and learning. Employees undertake relevant staff development. Support for newly appointed staff with little teaching experience is strong. Most student groups include a significant proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Teaching strategies and materials are sensitive to diversity. All teaching staff have undertaken disability awareness training.

Foundation - literacy and numeracy and English for speakers of other languages



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- good ESOL teaching meeting the needs of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds

- effective development of students' confidence.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on ESOL and literacy and numeracy

- inconsistent target setting, monitoring and recording of progress

- ineffective use of resources to support learning.

Scope of provision

124. Basic skills, key skills, ESOL and additional learning support are managed by the foundation and community education section whereas GCSE English and mathematics, and English as a foreign language (EFL) are managed by the sixth form centre. Courses are based at the main college site, an outreach centre in a deprived area of Bedford, schools, nurseries, community venues, and workplaces. All courses are delivered within the national core curriculum framework. The part-time provision of ESOL and basic skills has expanded rapidly in the last three years. Half of these students are from groups with a diverse ethnic mix. The ESOL courses cover all levels and elements. There are 644 students on ESOL and EFL courses, 52 on basic skills courses, 150 studying GCSE English and mathematics, and 300 receiving additional support in literacy and numeracy. Additional support is offered in lessons and at the skills resource centre in the main site library.

Achievement and standards

125. Pass rates are high on literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses, with over 90% achievement in entry level and level 1 adult literacy and numeracy. Pass rates in GCSE English and mathematics are well above the national averages. The key skills pass rates for communication and application of number at level 1 are above national averages. However, at level 2, they are below national averages. Additional literacy and numeracy support assists students in achieving vocational qualifications. Students who receive additional learning support make good progress in addressing their identified needs. However, many students, especially those aged 16 to 18, do not take up support. The college does not investigate why students do not take up support. Retention rates are low in ESOL courses and on levels 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy courses.

126. Students' self-confidence and motivation are well developed. They are able to negotiate effectively their support needs. Students make good progress as a result of the support they receive. For example, they increase their understanding of homophones and are able to interpret velocity-time graphs and two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects. Attendance during the inspection was good and any lateness was followed up sensitively.

Quality of education and training

127. The teaching and learning of ESOL and EFL are good. In the best lessons, teachers effectively manage the learning of students from a wide range of nationalities. For example, in 1 ESOL lesson, all 13 students were from different countries. A wide range of teaching methods, activities and resources is used which enables students to develop their speaking and listening skills. One teacher, in a beginners ESOL evening class, used a bingo game and role play to add variety to the learning. Most teachers use very good visual clues and high-quality learning materials which reflect the diverse cultural mix. Appropriate audio resources aid listening activities. The recognition of individual needs during group activities is good. The ESOL core curriculum is mapped to all EFL

courses. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Students receive an initial assessment and interview to identify their needs. The link between assessment outcomes and priorities for learning is insufficiently developed. Nevertheless, the additional support for literacy and numeracy provided within lessons and in individual tutorials is good. The support is responsive to students' needs and sensitivities, and students negotiate the content of support sessions. Teachers use vocationally appropriate materials and focus primarily on supporting students with the difficulties identified in their main programmes. Communications between support tutors and vocational teachers are good; students' improvements are fed back and areas for future support identified.

128. Overall, an over-reliance on group work limits the development and monitoring of individual learning targets. The differentiation of learning is insufficient; teachers use the same work sheet or text book with a group rather than focusing on individual needs. Teachers form good relationships with students in lessons. This develops students' confidence and self-esteem, and enables effective negotiation of individual support needs.

129. Target setting in individual learning plans is poor. Many targets are too broad and do not provide sufficient focus for teaching and recording achievement. For example, the targeted actions for one student, with an identified need to write in complete sentences, were all about reading. Reviews of individual learning plans are incomplete, too general and do not reflect the progress made on individual targets. Most records do not make note of students' learning in lessons, even though it takes place.

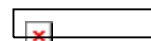
130. The ESOL provision is diverse and covers all levels and elements. An ESOL with IT course, in a community centre, encourages adult Asian women to return to learning, use computers for the first time and improve their English. The promotion of basic skills provision is insufficient, particularly in the workplace.

131. Very good computer equipment is available in the IT suites. However, access to IT on the main site is limited due to a lack of availability and the IT facilities at the outreach centre are underutilised. Frequently, large groups work in cramped accommodation which impacts adversely on individual learning. The assistive technology centre is well resourced and includes rise and fall desks and large screen computers. However, relevant resources are unavailable in classrooms to support differentiation and individual learning. The language skills workbook, used for independent learning in GCSE English, is of a high quality. The learning materials used with ESOL students represent their wide range of ethnic backgrounds and their diverse cultures. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant qualifications. They are competent in the subjects they teach and receive training on core curriculum materials.

Leadership and management

132. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Teachers are supported well by their line managers and senior management. Communication is satisfactory and the staff intranet is seen as a useful resource. The cooperative teamwork is beneficial to the teachers. The partnership between the ESOL and EFL provision is strong, despite them being managed in different parts of the college. Teachers' personal and professional developments are identified through annual appraisals. The college provides four staff development days annually. Teachers participate in a wide range of activities including the SENDA and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 requirements. Courses are reviewed regularly and action plans agreed and monitored. The analysis and impact of the quality assurance procedures are underdeveloped. Teachers are not fully aware of the quality assurance system and their contribution to its processes. Inconsistency in completing individual learning plans and setting appropriate targets has yet to be addressed. The college's teaching observation profile for this area represents that during inspection.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- high pass rates

- effective course structure which responds to students' interests and ability levels

- good support for students

- effective links with feeder schools.

Weaknesses

- inappropriate teaching and learning activities in a significant minority of lessons

- teaching of entry level students unduly influenced by external awarding body requirements

- poor initial assessment, target setting and reviews of individual learning

- insufficiently rigorous self-assessment and action planning.

Scope of provision

133. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased greatly over the past two years. The college provides two main programmes for students aged 16 to 18. The design for living course has 22 full-time students studying towards award scheme development and accreditation network (ASDAN) life skills and Workright qualifications. The foundation skills programme at level 1 enrolls 47 full-time students and uses a range of accreditation including the ASDAN FE award and the English Speaking Board certificate of achievement in basic oral skills. Part-time courses for adult students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities started at the college in September 2003 and have grown quickly. The developing pathways to learning programme has 47 part-time adult students, steps to independence has 14 students and the continued learning courses for students with acquired brain injury have 13 students. A small number of students with physical disabilities or sensory impairment receive support on other courses in the college. The link programme with local schools has 80 students who infill into a range of courses in this curriculum

area.

Achievement and standards

134. Pass rates are high. Retention and pass rates for the ASDAN certificate in life skills, Workright award and the FE award are all high. The pass rate on the English Speaking Board certificate of achievement in basic oral skills course has been high for three years and is well above the national average. Students make good progress between courses in the curriculum area and on to other courses in the college. The retention rate of students progressing on to higher level courses is high. More than 75% of students who complete the foundation skills course enrol on higher level courses.

135. The standard of work completed in lessons and the work in students' files are good. In one lesson, students used computers effectively and quickly to produce posters with text and images advertising their course. Students' attendance is high at 80% and tutors deal appropriately with the few students who are late for their lessons. Students' success is celebrated at prize-giving events.

A sample of retention and pass rates for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 2002 to 2004

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
ASDAN certificate in life skills	E	No. of starts	42	34	23
		% retention	90	94	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
ASDAN workright award	E	No. of starts	*	*	21
		% retention	*	*	90
		% pass rate	*	*	90
ASDAN FE award	E	No. of starts	**	11	10
		% retention	**	100	90
		% pass rate	**	82	89
English Speaking Board certificate of achievement in basic oral skills	1	No. of starts	*	*	53
		% retention	*	*	83
		% pass rate	*	*	93

Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

* fewer than 15 students

** course not offered

Quality of education and training

136. Most teaching is satisfactory. The best lessons are structured well with a variety of activities and opportunities for learning. However, a few lessons have inappropriate teaching and learning activities. For example, students spent a large part of a lesson completing cut and paste activities. In another lesson, students with very low literacy skills spent time typing the alphabet. Courses and lessons are planned clearly. However, too much attention is given to planning and completing activities, and insufficient emphasis is placed on clearly identifying relevant learning outcomes for students. Teaching is focused on ensuring students pass external assessments which sometimes results in students practising skills they already have or spending time on learning that is not useful to them. The working relationships between staff and students are good and they support learning.

137. Good assessment procedures and practices are in place to meet the needs of external accreditation. Students' work is marked well and appropriate feedback is given. However, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment of non-certificated learning is not detailed or frequent enough. The targets set in individual learning plans are not detailed and are not reviewed frequently enough to track students' progress. Learning plans do not clearly identify or evaluate learning or skills development that is relevant to students' current or future needs.

138. Tutors and support staff give good learning and personal support to their students. Partnerships with feeder schools are well developed and the Connexions service ensures smooth transition for students starting at the college. Effective careers guidance aids progression into employment. The link programme and taster courses for students aged 14 to 16 enable students to make informed choices about which course to select. All of the 41 students who completed link courses in the curriculum area in 2003 progressed to full-time courses at the college or gained employment. Information on the courses available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is limited. The full-time prospectus is clear about the courses available for students aged 16 to 18, but the part-time guide does not contain details of the provision for adults.

139. The provision in this area has increased considerably in the last two years to meet local demand. The range of courses for students aged 16 to 18 is wide. These courses are flexible in that they give students individual timetables built around their interests. Most students benefit from participating in the college's enrichment programme.

140. Access to IT facilities in classrooms is good. In one mathematics lesson, the tutor involved the students to good effect in calculations on an interactive whiteboard. However, in most lessons, the IT equipment available is underused. The new domestic cookery room is of a high standard and is used well. Teachers and support assistants are appropriately qualified and experienced. A strong sense of professionalism and teamwork prevails. Staff have good access to in-house training and they are supported by an effective mentoring scheme.

Leadership and management

141. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers employ successful strategies to expand and develop the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The structure of the courses and the progression opportunities for students are planned well. Both respond effectively to students' interests and ability levels. The self-assessment report for the curriculum area is not clear or accurate. Action plans lack detail and are not reviewed effectively. Course level self-assessment is satisfactory and team meetings are used to discuss improvements to courses and support for students. Course teams accept and work on the targets set for retention, pass and progression rates.

Part D: College data

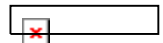
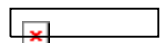


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	23	50
2	49	27
3	25	14

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
1	Starters excluding transfers	413	527	733	1,145	2,492	2,539
	Retention rate %	75	70	73	68	62	68
	National average %	75	76	76	70	71	71
	Pass rate %	72	77	82	70	82	75
	National average %	67	69	73	68	70	77
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,541	1,830	1,693	1,892	1,880	2,579
	Retention rate %	66	65	72	63	65	68
	National average %	70	71	71	68	68	67
	Pass rate %	78	86	89	76	88	88
	National average %	68	70	73	67	71	73
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,503	1,386	1,297	1,552	1,663	1,766
	Retention rate %	67	66	69	64	71	63
	National average %	70	77	77	68	70	69
	Pass rate %	59	76	87	73	86	89
	National average %	75	77	80	68	71	74
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	*	168	105	270
	Retention rate %	*	*	*	79	72	73
	National average %	73	71	74	67	68	69
	Pass rate %	*	*	*	44	84	85
	National average %	54	57	68	54	54	58

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).

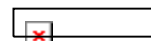
Sources of information:

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 2001 to 2003: College ISR

** numbers too low to provide a valid calculation.*

Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level



Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	65	30	5	81
Level 2 (intermediate)	66	27	7	55
Level 1 (foundation)	54	41	5	37
Other sessions	50	44	6	32
Totals	61	33	6	205

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2004. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.
 Inspection reports are available on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

