



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE



## Halesowen College

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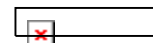
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#### **Basic information about the college**



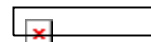
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Name of college:	Halesowen College
Type of college:	GFE/Tertiary
Principal:	Keith Bate
Address of college:	Whittingham Road Halesowen West Midlands B63 3NA
Telephone number:	0121 602 7777
Fax number:	0121 585 0369
Chair of governors:	Pam Thomas
Unique reference number:	130476
Name of reporting inspector:	Ian Seath HMI
Dates of inspection:	21-25 February 2005

#### **Part A: Summary**



## Information about the college



Halesowen College is a tertiary college located in the borough of Dudley. Most of its students are from Halesowen, Dudley and Sandwell, as well as significant numbers from Birmingham and wider Worcestershire. Dudley is a predominantly urban area, with about a quarter of its wards amongst the most deprived nationally. The area has seen a decline in manufacturing, and a growth in the service sector which now employs the highest proportion of local residents. Unemployment in the area is above regional and national averages. Achievement of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades A\* to C by students aged 16 is significantly below the national average in much of the college's catchment area.

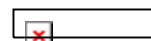
Overall, the number of young people entering post-16 education in further education (FE) is increasing in the area, and this is reflected in the college's enrolments over recent years. The number of full-time students aged 16 to 18 has increased steadily and for 2003/04 was around 2,600. The college has a relatively small number of full-time students aged 19 or over, about 180 in 2002/03. Most students in this age group are enrolled on to part-time provision, about 4,400 in 2003/04. Overall, the number of students aged 19 or over has remained broadly constant in recent years. In 2004, approximately two thirds of the college's full-time students were on advanced courses.

Since the last inspection in April 2000, the college has carried out extensive redevelopment and refurbishment of the main Whittingham Road campus. In addition to the main college site in Halesowen, a second centre at Coombswood about one mile away is used for e-business, short-course training, and education. The college offers a range of provision in eight centres in the community and five UK-Online centres in areas of deprivation.

The college has extensive operational and strategic links with local schools, and provides places for about 1,300 young people aged 14 to 16 on a variety of programmes. It is the lead partner in the Halesowen Education Consortium which includes local secondary schools. These links support the college's mission 'to strive for excellence in delivering opportunities for education and training in Halesowen and the surrounding area'.

The proportion of people from black, Asian, and other minority ethnic backgrounds varies considerably in the college's catchment area. For example, in Dudley the figure is around 4.6%, whereas in Sandwell it is over 20%. With some variations, the overall proportion of black and Asian ethnic students attending the college has risen significantly in recent years, and in 2003/04 was around 27%. About two thirds of the college's students are female.

## How effective is the college?



The quality of provision is adequate in all 10 of the areas of learning inspected. Leadership and management are good. The quality of provision is satisfactory in information and communications technology (ICT), beauty and complementary therapies, health, social care and public services, English, languages and communication, and literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The quality of provision is good in science and mathematics, hospitality, sports

business, administration, management and professional, and health, social care and public services. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

***Key strengths***

- good academic support for students
  
- resources for learning
  
- leadership and governance
  
- operational management of the curriculum
  
- provision in business and expressive arts
  
- inclusive ethos - all students are valued
  
- good range of provision
  
- collaborative arrangements with schools
  
- improvements to accommodation.

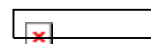
***What should be improved***

- the proportion of unsatisfactory and satisfactory teaching
  
- take-up of diagnosed additional support
  
- retention rate of students

- links with employers
  
- slow progress in improving some curriculum areas
  
- the consolidation and further development of recent changes to improve the curriculum.

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

### Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

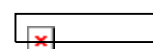


*The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Retention rates are high. Pass rates are high on most general certificate of education (GCE) A2 courses, but low on advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) physics and statistics. There is much good teaching in practical lessons, but some teaching of theory is unimaginative. Specialist accommodation for science is very good, but there are insufficient facilities for information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons. Support for individual students is very good. Curriculum management is good.
Business, administration, management and professional	<b>Outstanding.</b> The contributory grade for work-based learning is <b>satisfactory</b> . Pass rates are very high and the standard of students' work is good. A high proportion of teaching and learning is good, and students receive very effective support from staff. Management and teamwork are very good and quality assurance procedures are self-critical and effective. The achievement of frameworks in work-based learning is low.
Information and communications technology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Retention rates are high on most courses. Much teaching is good, but classroom management is not always effective. ICT and ILT resources are good. The proportion of high grades is unsatisfactory on some courses, and the achievement of key skills is low.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	<b>Good.</b> Pass rates are high and improving on most courses, but are below the national average on AS-level sport and physical education in 2003/04. A minority of courses have poor retention rates. There is a

	high proportion of good or better teaching, enhanced by a wide range of additional activities. Curriculum management is good and partnerships with the community are effective.
Beauty and complementary therapies	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Pass rates are high on most courses. The teaching of practical skills is good, but teaching is dull and uninspired in theory lessons. Assessment practice is poor on level 1 courses. Accommodation is satisfactory, but the salons are commercially unrealistic. Support for students is good and there is a wide range of courses both within the college and the community.
Health, social care and public services	<b>Satisfactory.</b> The contributory grade for work-based learning is <b>satisfactory.</b> High retention rates on level 3 full-time courses have been maintained for the past three years, but the diploma in childcare and education has had low pass rates since 2002/03. Candidates on national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and apprenticeship frameworks have made slow progress. The links between theory and vocational practice are well developed in lessons, but there is limited access to ILT to enhance the students' learning. Students receive good support. The management of key skills is ineffective.
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Outstanding.</b> Pass and retention rates are consistently high on most courses, although punctuality and attendance are poor on a minority of courses. Teaching is good and students recognise their responsibilities to their own learning and that of other students. Accommodation and resources are excellent, as are the opportunities for stimulating extra curricula activities. The management of the curriculum is good.
Humanities	<b>Good.</b> Teaching is purposeful and effective across the full range of courses. Students are well supported, achieve very good results and retention rates are very high. Very good resource materials support good learning. However, the most able students are insufficiently challenged and some feedback on assignments lacks developmental detail. Curriculum management is good.
English, languages and communications	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Pass rates are very high on AS-level and GCE A2 English courses, but the proportion of high grades is below the national average. Pass rates are low in GCSE English and Spanish. Courses are well managed, and there is good provision for part-time language students. Students are well supported, but teaching in many lessons is insufficiently challenging. Languages provision for full-time students is unsatisfactory.
Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Students develop good language and literacy skills. Teaching is good on literacy and numeracy courses. Monitoring of students' progress and achievement is very good. Course management is effective, however, student attendance is unsatisfactory. Learning is ineffective in many lessons. In-class literacy support is ineffective and the provision is insufficiently flexible.

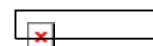
### How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are good. The principal and senior managers provide clear and effective leadership. Most students complete their courses successfully. The operational management of the college is highly effective. Rigorous systems ensure that the quality of provision

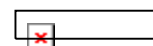
aspirations of both students and staff have been only partially successful. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, but there are pockets of weaker practice. Management information is accurate and comprehensive, and is used effectively to monitor students' progress. Staff work well together in teams. Curriculum management is good in most areas and is improving in others. The self-assessment report provides a realistic picture of the quality of provision, although the importance of some weaknesses is underestimated. Governors are influential in shaping the college's strategy and effective in monitoring its performance. Financial management is good and the college provides good value for money.

### **To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?**



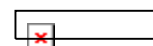
Educational and social inclusion is good. The college successfully promotes an inclusive environment in which individuals are valued. The range of courses has expanded to meet local needs and to attract more students from nearby areas of social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than in the college's immediate catchment area. Access to facilities and resources for those with restricted mobility is good. The college has made good progress in meeting the requirements of both the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000. Performance of different groups of students is analysed carefully, and managers act upon any issues identified. The promotion of equality and diversity is evident around the college campus, although it is not yet a central part of the curriculum. Provision for students who need extra support with literacy, numeracy or ESOL needs is satisfactory.

### **How well are students and trainees guided and supported?**



Guidance and support for students are good. College prospectuses and information on the college website provide detailed course information. Guidance and advice on choosing a course is effective. Well-organised induction programmes enable students to settle quickly into the college. The student's choice of course is reviewed with them early in their course. Students requiring help with literacy and numeracy skills are identified quickly and a relevant individual support programme identified. However, many students requiring support decline the help offered and there is insufficient in-class support in a few areas. Satisfactory specialist support is provided for students with disabilities and for those who need counselling help. Tutors provide very good support for their students. The tutorial programme is a well-planned mix of activities, but in teaching it some tutors do not ensure that it is matched to the needs of all their students. Tutors monitor student progress systematically throughout the year. Student attendance is checked closely. The overall attendance is close to the national average, with some low attendance and lack of punctuality in a few areas. Students receive good advice about preparation for, and progression to, further study and employment. Arrangements for child protection 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***

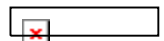
- being treated like adults
- range of courses
- personal and group tutorials
- learning resource centres and information technology (IT)
- near to town centre
- access to classrooms for those with restricted mobility
- good induction
- career development for mature students
- helpful/approachable staff
- no bullying and feeling safe
- free textbooks
- free transport
- support.



***What they feel could be improved***

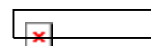
- canteens too busy at peak times
- payment for car parks
- not enough common room space
- more opportunities for work placements
- safety and security, especially late evenings in reception areas
- changing facilities and lockers
- frequent teacher changes
- opportunities to learn English outside lessons
- lack of Halal food
- small gym
- toilets.

**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



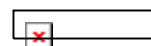
### Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	66	26	8
19+ and WBL*	78	22	0
Learning 16-18	60	31	9
19+ and WBL*	75	25	0

*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. The college offers a broad range of education and training in 12 of the LSC's 14 areas of learning, and at all levels including foundation. The inspection covered 10 of these areas. Of the full-time students who enrolled in 2004/05, 92% were aged 16 to 18. The majority of part-time students, 96%, were aged 19 and over. Of the total of 6,190 students enrolled in this period, 49% were on full-time courses. Of the total enrolments, 27% were on foundation-level programmes, with 24% on intermediate and 46% on advanced programmes. Of the full-time students enrolled, about 75% were on advanced courses. During inspection week, overall attendance was very close to the national average at 79%. The average number of students in each class was slightly above the national average at 11.8.

2. The development of students' practical work and skills is of a high standard. For example, advanced mathematics students demonstrate good graphical skills and in science, students manipulate laboratory equipment competently. Business students develop effective study skills and

successfully use business concepts. In ICT, many students are able to design and build their own websites and in sport, the women's football academy has performed well. In beauty, the quality of students' practical work is very good and students apply their skills confidently. In expressive arts, students produce practical work of a high quality. In humanities, students demonstrate effective use of concepts and information to formulate arguments, and in English they develop good research and analysis skills. Literacy and numeracy students improve their everyday living skills and many achieve their personal goals and individual targets.

3. The college has developed its own system for evaluating the extent to which students achieve grades higher than those predicted by GCSE results. The college's own data indicate that overall added value across the college is variable. For example, in humanities most students achieve higher grades than predicted. However, in other areas it is uneven. The overall proportion of high grades achieved by students at advanced level is significantly below the national average. Low rates of high-grade achievement are identified in mathematics and science, ICT, humanities and English. However, in visual and performing arts and media, a high proportion of students achieve high grades. The college has recently introduced additional support and enrichment measures to address this. In 2003/04, 58% of those students achieving GCE A-level passes progressed to higher education (HE). A further 24% entered full-time or part-time employment.

4. When compared to similar colleges, the overall proportion of students who succeed has been consistently high. For the years 2000 to 2003, the college has been amongst the top 10% nationally at all levels and for all students. In 2002/03, success rates for students aged 19 and over dropped for foundation and intermediate courses, but remained within the top 25%. Overall, a high proportion of students who enrol on AS-level or GCE A-level courses succeed. The performance of male and female students is similar, and is above national averages. However, at level 2, males aged 16 to 18 achieve less than the national average, and 7% less than females of the same age at this college.

#### **16 to 18 year olds**

5. In 2003/04, 89% of the college's full-time students were aged 16 to 18. Within this group, 54% were enrolled on advanced level provision, mostly AS-level and GCE A-level courses. A further 33% of this group were enrolled on to intermediate courses, mostly GCSEs.

6. Overall, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 are consistently high. However, the college's own data indicate that retention rates declined at all levels in 2003/04. For the years 2002/03, the college was within the top 10% of similar colleges at all levels. For example at advanced and intermediate levels, the college was 10% and 11%, respectively, above national averages. Overall the retention rate at foundation level was 18% above the national average. Retention rates for GCSE courses have been consistently high in recent years. Overall retention rates on NVQ level 2 courses improved significantly in 2002/03 to 19% above the national average for these courses. At advanced level, the retention rate on AS-level and GCE A-level courses was 6% and 7% higher than the national average for these courses in the years 2002/03. For NVQ advanced courses, the retention rate improved significantly to 32% above the national average for 2002/03. The total number of students on these courses, however, was relatively small.

7. For students aged 16 to 18, overall pass rates on courses at foundation and advanced level have been consistently in the top 10% of those for similar colleges for the years 2000/03, although there has been a decline over the same period for advanced courses. The pass rate for short courses was significantly below the national average for 2002/03. Overall pass rates for intermediate courses declined significantly in 2002/03 to 74%, just above the national average for similar colleges. However, the college's own data indicate that this rate improved markedly in 2003/04. For GCSE courses, overall pass rates declined significantly from 6% above the national average in 2001/02 to 10% below national average in 2002/03. Although pass rates for GCSE mathematics and English have shown significant recent improvements, they are still below the low national averages.

8. The overall pass rate for GCE A-level courses has declined from 10% above the national average in 2000/01 to 3% above in 2002/03. The overall pass rate for AS-level courses has remained consistently high, and in 2002/03 was 9% above the national average. There is wide variation between the overall AS-level and GCE A-level pass rates of individual curriculum areas. For

example, in science and mathematics, and business and humanities, the overall pass rates for GCE A levels fell by about 12% between 2000 and 2003. This trend was not apparent in visual and performing arts and media or in English, languages and communications where overall pass rates improved over the same period. Overall pass rates for AS-level courses also show variation. For example, in English, languages and communications, they fell by 7%, and in ICT by 8% over the same period. In contrast, the pass rate for AS levels in visual and performing arts improved by 4%. Overall pass rates have remained high for the relatively small number of advanced NVQ students.

### **Adult learners**

9. In 2003/04, just over 4,200 students aged 19 or over attended the college. Of these, the majority (96%) were on part-time courses. Overall, retention rates for adults were good between 2001/02 and 2002/03, though variable across courses. For example, in between 2001/02 and 2002/03, the retention rate of adults on foundation and advanced provision improved to about 15% above national averages. The retention rate on intermediate courses improved slightly to 7% above the national figure in the same period. Retention of the many adults on short courses was at the national average for 2002/03. At intermediate level, the retention of adults on NVQ and GCSE courses was significantly higher than the national average at 19% and 9%, respectively. However the college's own data indicate that retention rates fell significantly in 2003/04 at intermediate and advanced level.

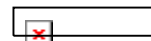
10. The retention of adult students on advanced level courses has been inconsistent. Though relatively small in number, the retention rate of adults on AS-level courses in 2002/03 was 7% higher than for those students aged 16 to 18, and improved significantly over the previous year. This figure is 14% higher than the national average. However, overall the retention rate on GCE A-level courses fell significantly in the second year, being 9% below the national average in 2002/03. For NVQ courses, the retention rate was 19% above national average in 2002/03.

11. The overall pass rates for the large number of adult students on foundation and intermediate level courses fell significantly between 2001/02 and 2002/03, though they remained above the national average. The college's own data indicate that this improved significantly in 2003/04. Adult students on GCSE courses in 2002/03 achieved a high pass rate, 16% above the national average. This was significantly above the pass rate for those students aged 16 to 18 on the same courses. In contrast, the overall pass rate for adult students on intermediate NVQ programmes was 18% below the national average in 2002/03. This was significantly lower than the overall pass rate for students aged 16 to 18 on the same courses.

12. Pass rates are good for adults on advanced level courses. For both AS-level and GCE A-level courses, they were significantly above the national average in 2002/03, and improved over the previous year for GCE A level. The overall pass rate for adults on advanced NVQ programmes was 3% above the national average in 2002/03.

13. Work-based learning provision is relatively small, with 76 learners. Most of these receive training in administration and early years care. Prior to starting an apprentice programme, learners attend a modern apprentice pre-recruitment scheme (MAPS) which is a four-week, full-time programme to help learners adjust to working life. Learners undertake the intermediate certificate in employment skills and a first-aid certificate. Pass rates for the first-aid certificate are good, with 97 % of learners successful in 2004. Portfolio success rates for the certificate in employment skills are also good, 98% in 2004. Overall success rates which include portfolio and examination are slightly lower at 75%. The college provides off-the-job training, covering technical certificates, basic knowledge and key skills. Changes in the management of work-based learning in early years care have recently been made. Progress is now satisfactory or better. Processes for progress review and internal verification are satisfactory. Achievement of both foundation and advanced apprenticeships is low across most areas, though good in accounts.

### **Quality of education and training**



14. The inspection graded a total of 177 lessons. Of these, teaching was judged to be good or better in 68%, satisfactory in 25%, and unsatisfactory in 6%. The proportion of very good or outstanding lessons has improved since the last inspection, however, the proportion of good lessons has fallen. There has been a corresponding rise in the proportion of satisfactory or unsatisfactory sessions. Overall, the proportion of teaching which is good or better is 4% above the national average for similar colleges.

15. There is some unsatisfactory teaching in 9 of the 10 areas of learning inspected. The best teaching is in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, visual and performing arts and media, and humanities. In these areas, the proportion of good or better teaching is significantly above the national average.

16. Where courses mainly consist of adults, teaching is more effective. Teaching was good or better in 78% of these sessions, with no unsatisfactory grades. Overall, the best teaching is at advanced level which has a low proportion of unsatisfactory sessions. The lowest proportion of good or better teaching is at foundation level, where the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons is high. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in lessons on intermediate courses is significantly higher than at advanced level. Overall, the teaching of practical work is better than the teaching of theory. A significant number of tutorials are unsatisfactory. The percentages of lessons graded good or better, satisfactory and less than satisfactory for learning were 63%, 29% and 7%, respectively.

17. The best lessons are well planned and students benefit from a variety of appropriate teaching methods. Schemes of work are detailed, and lesson plans take account of varying learning styles and abilities. Lessons are structured so that all students are productively occupied and learn effectively. Teachers use a range of activities. For example, in an advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) business lesson, groups of students considered various analytical tools and then applied them to a case study. In literacy lessons, teachers successfully broke down tasks into small sections to ensure that students effectively developed reading skills. Stimulating discussions often aid learning. For example, in travel and tourism, students learned by discussing their own travel experiences. In the most successful lessons, teachers often generate a sense of fun and maintain students' interest. For example, in one lively evening class, students debated aspects of anti-social behaviour in Spanish. The teaching of practical activities is good. In chemistry, for example, a practical demonstration of the determination of iron concentration helped students to carry out the work for themselves. In beauty, ILT is successfully used in practical make-up sessions. In expressive arts, practical demonstrations effectively enable students to understand complicated techniques.

18. In the least successful lessons, teachers fail to vary their teaching methods and students lose interest. Planning is often insufficiently detailed and does not take account of students' various learning styles or abilities. Aims and objectives are not clear, and are not shared with the students. Activities often take too long and the more able students may be left unoccupied while others in the class struggle with the task in hand. Sometimes, there is an over-reliance on students taking notes, and the pace of work in the lesson is too fast or too slow. Students are not given sufficient opportunity to contribute to the lesson and there is little use of group work or use of ILT to stimulate learning. Overall, the use of ILT is not well established in languages, humanities, health and social care, and science and mathematics.

19. The college has recently revised its teaching of key skills, allocating the responsibility for teaching and assessment to a nominated member of staff. In science and mathematics, key skills teaching is good. In work-based learning key skills are taught as part of learners' off-the-job training. Key skills are taught by staff from the curriculum area using projects based around health and safety in the workplace, though there is no direct link to vocational qualifications. Staff in some areas receive additional training to encourage the integration of key skills within the vocational qualification and technical certificate. The college has recently started to use online assessment of key skills. Achievement of both foundation and advanced apprenticeships is low across most areas. There has also been low achievement of key skills in ICT. However, progress is now satisfactory and the revised method of teaching is already beginning to have an impact on pass rates.

20. The college has refurbished much accommodation over the last two years. This includes two new teaching blocks and a sports hall with a fitness facility opened in 2003. Buildings are well appointed and accessible to all students. The condition of the teaching kitchen, however, is poor. The college undertook an audit of its buildings in May 2003 in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and SENDA. Recommendations have been implemented, and include the installation of induction loops, automatic doors and access lifts. Some classrooms are overcrowded. Temporary screens allow concurrent use of some of the larger rooms, though teaching is disturbed by noise from adjoining classes. Free bus services operate to a selection of local destinations. The college nursery has space for 29 children aged between 2 and 5.

21. The college has nine learning resources centres and a central library. They are all equipped with up-to-date computers, data projectors and interactive whiteboards. In addition, resource centres contain textbooks, journals and videos. Data projectors and interactive whiteboards are not accessible for classroom use in all curriculum areas. Good use is made of the college intranet site by staff and students. The college has a good range of specialist learning resources. The college has an adequate number of computers, though some students have difficulty gaining access to them. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced. All either have a teaching qualification or are working towards one.

22. Internal verification and moderation meet the requirements of awarding bodies. External verification reports are reviewed by a senior manager and recommendations monitored closely. Full-time students are provided with a course handbook that explains assessment criteria. Assignments in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, have clear briefs. In some cases, there is bunching of assignments which creates undue pressure on students. The evidence for work-based assessments in business uses a narrow range of methods.

23. The monitoring of student progress is good. Students are set targets based on GCSE achievements. Progress is reviewed regularly. This process is particularly effective in beauty, business and health and social care and public services. Two parents' evenings are held. The first, early in the academic year, helps parents to understand course structures and requirements, especially for assignments and assessments. The second, held just after Christmas, provides parents with progress reports.

24. Teachers usually provide comprehensive feedback on the quality of students' work and give clear indications on how to improve it. In humanities, the assessment of student work is inconsistent and the quality of marking varies. In other areas, such as health and social care and public services, some written feedback is very general and does not aid improvement of the students' work. Spelling and punctuation errors are not always corrected. Work is generally returned promptly to students, although in science and mathematics, some work is not returned within the agreed timescale.

25. The college provides a range of courses that meet the needs and interests of students, and the local community. Good use is made of information from local labour market analyses. Progression opportunities are available, though the progression rate is low in some cases. The college offers many advanced courses. Over recent years, the number of level 1 and level 2 programmes has increased. Senior managers recognise a gender imbalance across the college and have introduced a range of new courses to attract more males. Programmes are marketed effectively through a range of publications.

26. The college has very good collaborative links with local schools and is the lead institution of the Halesowen Increased Flexibility programme. Within this, over 1,500 Year 10 and 11 pupils from 18 local schools are able to undertake vocational courses both in college and at the schools themselves. Choices available include foundation level care, hospitality and health and beauty, together with a wide range of vocational GCSEs. Progression options to mainstream college provision are good. Staff from schools and college collaborate effectively to teach many of these courses, and joint staff development events take place to exchange good practice. Communications between schools and college are effective.

27. The college offers courses at a range of centres in the community. Additionally, there are five United Kingdom online centres offering adults the opportunity of improving their literacy, numeracy

and IT skills. Recent work with local businesses, particularly those in a nearby large shopping complex, has helped to develop a programme of employability skills for students aged 16 to 18. Good links have been established with local hospitals and doctors' surgeries to set up work placements for students following a medical secretary's course. Employers of work-based learners have a good level of contact with college staff and are kept up to date with learners' progress. Careers staff have a good understanding of local needs. However, some links with employers remain minimal, for example, in hospitality, sport and leisure and beauty therapy.

28. The college offers a wide range of enrichment activities. These include extension studies, sport, music, and languages. Curriculum areas arrange vocational and research trips, especially in catering and media. Sign language courses are available for students in child care, whilst catering students work towards certificates in food hygiene and first aid. A room is available in college for private reflection, prayer and meditation for students and staff of any faith.

29. The college prospectus provides detailed and helpful course information which is also available through the college's website. Further relevant guidance is provided on aspects such as fee remission and nursery/childcare. College staff regularly visit local schools and attend careers fairs. Many prospective students receive individual advice and guidance interviews. Well-organised induction programmes allow students to settle quickly into the college. The careers centre provides access to a range of appropriate careers information. Students have good access to advice on HE, for example, through a HE fair. Careers education and advice are good.

30. Students are screened during the induction week to determine if they need literacy or numeracy support. The results of this screening are quickly made available to tutors. Interviews with specialist staff are arranged and, where necessary, individual support programmes are designed which may be based on one-to-one or in-class support. Approximately 300 students are offered and receive support. Many students decline the support they are offered. In some cases, such as hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, and health and social care and public services, there is insufficient in-class learning support. Student progress on support programmes is reviewed regularly, and detailed reports are sent to their personal tutor. When required, students have good access to specialist help, such as for dyslexia or for the provision of adaptive aids. Professional counselling is also available if required.

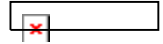
31. Tutors provide very good support for their students. The tutorial programme for full-time students is a well-planned mix of individual progress reviews and other relevant group themes. Detailed guidelines and teaching materials are provided for tutors. Some tutors use the material well and their students are motivated by the work, for example, in producing personal Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) statements. Other tutors use the material poorly in tutorial lessons and do not always match the work to the needs of all students. Student progress is reviewed closely through a series of formal reviews. An 'early warning indicators scheme' identifies students who may be at risk of leaving their course and helps tutors to prioritise students who need closer attention. Part-time students are assigned to a personal tutor, who is usually one of their subject teachers. Part-time students who need help with their literacy and numeracy skills can request it. Support for students on work-based apprenticeships is satisfactory.

32. Guidelines for staff and students on the requirement for regular attendance and punctuality are clear, however, their use is inconsistent. For example, some tutors challenge students who are late, others take little action. Students are aware that their attendance is being checked closely. A central attendance and pastoral support team monitors student attendance and maintains regular contact with students and their parents. Overall attendance is close to the national average, with low attendance in ESOL and beauty lessons and lack of punctuality in some performing arts and media and science and mathematics lessons.

33. Child protection arrangements are satisfactory. The college has one named person with responsibility for child protection. All senior managers have been appropriately trained, as have all those staff involved with the teaching of the 14 to 16 curriculum. Training for all other staff is planned, but at the time of the inspection it had not taken place. Governors have not yet been trained on child protection issues. The college has good links with associated schools, and has appropriate procedures for child protection. The college is represented on the local Area Child

Protection Committee, and has links with child protection agencies and social services. Staff have clear guidance in the college's child protection policy. All recently or newly joined staff undergo enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. In addition, staff directly involved in the 14 to 16 curriculum have been checked. However, these checks have not been extended to other staff.

## Leadership and management



34. Leadership and management are good. The principal, senior managers and governors provide clear and thoughtful leadership. They have developed a coherent strategy for the college. Staff at all levels work well together to implement college priorities, which have students at their heart. The operational management of the college is very effective. Over the last three years enrolments at the college have grown significantly, a broader curriculum has been developed, and accommodation and resources have been improved. At the same time, the proportion of students who successfully complete their courses has increased. Pass rates for most courses are high. Retention rates are also above national averages, although they have declined over the last year. The quality of teaching and learning is good in many curriculum areas, and effective action is being taken to further improve classroom practice. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection in 2000 have been remedied.

35. Communications within the college are very good. Information is disseminated effectively, and teams work well together to discuss ideas and implement procedures. Good practice in most areas of the college's work is shared effectively. Staff are well-informed and regularly consulted, both formally and informally. Senior managers are involved in the day-to-day running of the college as well as its strategic direction. The cycle of meetings established to ensure the smooth running of the college is effective. The college intranet is effective as a source of useful information.

36. The college is well managed at all levels. The college executive team consists of the principal, a deputy principal who oversees quality and resources, and managers responsible for teaching and learning, student support, and external liaison and curriculum development. Each curriculum area has a manager who works closely with a senior tutor and a senior teacher. The functional responsibilities of each of these roles are clear, and teamwork is good. Line management arrangements are both clear and effective, with short reporting lines between the college executive and the curriculum teams, and clear accountabilities for improving teaching and learning and students' achievements. As a consequence, senior managers are directly responsible for the quality of educational provision. Curriculum management is good in most areas; it is particularly good in expressive arts, business administration, humanities, and science and mathematics. Recent changes in the management and staffing of some areas, for example, ICT and health and social care, and beauty are leading to improvements.

37. Quality assurance arrangements are clear and comprehensive, and are coherently linked to strategic and operational planning. All staff are involved in self-assessment, and curriculum teams provide concise reviews of their performance. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, although they considered that insufficient recognition is given to some weaknesses. Feedback from students and other partners is collected and acted upon, although it is not always used to inform curriculum area self-assessment reports. The internal lesson observation system is rigorous and provides an accurate account of the quality of teaching and learning in the college. The scheme is beginning to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching, particularly where classroom practice is unsatisfactory. However, the college recognises that too much teaching does not yet provide enough challenge for many students.

38. There is a strong focus on staff development. All staff are appraised annually, and teachers' appraisals are informed by their performance in lessons. Staff development is closely linked to appraisal, and is increasingly tailored to help individuals to improve their teaching. Arrangements for induction, mentoring and appraisal of staff are good. A comprehensive programme of staff



development is in place, including classroom management, bullying and harassment and customer care. Vocational updating is also included as part of staff development needs.

39. The college information system provides accurate and reliable data to help teachers and managers to do their jobs effectively. A wide range of reports on students and courses are readily available. Useful data on the progress of students by ethnicity and gender are used by managers to assess the progress of different groups within the college, and to take remedial action where necessary. Increasingly, the information system is being developed as a powerful tool to raise standards by providing data that can be used to assess progress against targets, for example, on attendance, retention and pass rates and value added.

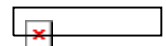
40. The college has very good links with local schools and the community. Its links with employers are less well established. The increasing number of courses taught in centres in the community has raised the profile of the college and, along with the broadening of the college curriculum, has begun to increase the participation of under-represented groups in FE. An extensive programme for students aged 14 to 16 from local schools is very well managed.

41. The college has a comprehensive range of policies and action plans on aspects of equal opportunities. These plans are regularly monitored and updated by managers and governors. Staff and governors have had appropriate training on equality and diversity. The college complies with, and takes seriously, its obligations under recent legislation on race relations and disability. College-wide events are held to promote equal opportunities, and to encourage students to think about issues such as ethnic diversity, religious differences, and disability. Recently, equality and diversity have been added to schemes of work and lesson planning. However, in most curriculum areas, this has not yet led to the active promotion of equality and diversity in teaching and learning.

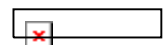
42. Strategic planning is good. Governors and senior managers use an annual residential weekend to establish objectives and review progress. Strategic priorities focus on raising standards, broadening the range of provision and the resources available to support the curriculum, and positioning the college in anticipation of future policy developments. Good use is made of an appropriate range of external and internal information for planning. Staff are well informed about the strategic priorities of the college, and there is a strong consensus on its future direction. Plans are securely costed and accompanied by a comprehensive and realistic risk analysis. Challenging but achievable targets are set for most areas of activity, and these are rigorously monitored. Financial management is very good, and the college provides good value for money.

43. Governance is good. Shortcomings identified at the last inspection have been rectified. Corporation members have a broad range of relevant expertise, and much enthusiasm. Procedures for monitoring both the financial and academic performance of the college are very effective. Reports submitted by managers to the corporation and its committees are regular and comprehensive. Governors provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge to college managers. They are influential in shaping the strategy of the college, and hold managers to account for operational matters whilst maintaining the distinction between governance and management.

## Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



### Science and mathematics



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

### **Strengths**

- high retention rates on most courses
- high pass rates on GCE A-level courses
- enthusiastic and effective teaching of practical work
- wide range of courses
- good academic support for individual students
- very effective curriculum leadership.

### **Weaknesses**

- low pass rates on AS-level courses
- unimaginative teaching in a few theory lessons
- insufficient facilities for ILT in teaching rooms.

### **Scope of provision**

44. The college offers a wide range of courses. Full-time students can enrol on AS-level and GCE A-level courses in mathematics, biology, chemistry, environmental science, geology, human biology physics and statistics. Mathematics, human physiology, astronomy and science are available as GCSEs. Students with an interest in vocational study can enrol on applied science at Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) first and national diploma levels. A free-standing mathematics qualification at level 1 is also available. GCSE evening classes are offered in mathematics and human biology. Students aged 14 to 16 from local schools study vocational GCSE in science and BTEC first certificate in animal care. There are 1,172 students on mathematics and science courses, of whom 68 are part time and aged 19 or over.

### **Achievement and standards**

45. Overall, the standard of student achievement is satisfactory. Retention rates are close to or above the national average for most advanced and intermediate courses. Pass rates for AS-level biology and GCE A-level physics are significantly above the national average. Retention rates on the national diploma in applied science and GCSE mathematics are above the national average for these courses. The pass rate for GCSE mathematics has improved in recent years. However, it remained below the low national average in 2003/04. Pass rates for most GCE A2 courses are above the national averages. However, pass rates for AS-level physics and statistics were significantly below the national average for these courses in 2003/04. The number of students gaining grades A and B on level 3 courses is below the national average for most courses.

46. Students are attentive in lessons and make good progress understanding theory and in laboratory skills. In chemistry, students can handle laboratory glassware and apparatus competently during experiments. In physics, they can assemble apparatus confidently for investigations and evaluate sources of error. In applied science, students can make up solutions accurately and relate their practical work to atomic theory. Students in advanced mathematics lessons have good graphical skills and can use graphs to solve trigonometrical equations. Students on level 1 mathematics courses can effectively use computer spreadsheets to tabulate and analyse data. In GCSE mathematics, students find difficulty with algebra and are sometimes slow to recall basic number concepts. Students use ICT with confidence and enthusiasm. Most communicate effectively in writing and discussions. Students aged 19 and over show particularly good understanding in human physiology.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2002 to 2004***

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
GCSE mathematics grades A to C	2	No. of starts	191	344	223
		% retention	79	77	78
		% pass rate	22	25	41
AS-level biology	3	No. of starts	42	35	39
		% retention	79	91	95
		% pass rate	45	73	68
AS-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	77	46	41
		% retention	83	89	80
		% pass rate	75	76	82
AS-level physics	3	No. of starts	35	17	32
		% retention	94	94	91
		% pass rate	61	50	52
AS-level statistics	3	No. of starts	37	48	19
		% retention	86	94	89
		% pass rate	91	67	41
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	33	21	21
		% retention	94	95	100
		% pass rate	94	95	90
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	43	37	16
		% retention	95	97	88
		% pass rate	88	94	93

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

### ***Quality of education and training***

47. Much teaching is good. Schemes of work are detailed and lessons are thoroughly planned. Teachers are aware of different learning styles and abilities and give very good attention to the needs of individual students. They use varied resources to engage students' interest. Practical demonstrations and activities help students to understand detailed theory and improve practical skills. For example, in one chemistry lesson, the teacher gave a lively demonstration of how iron tablets could be analysed. The students then carried out titrations and calculated the actual iron content. Geology students used graduated sieves to analyse sand samples for particle size, developing their data handling skills and understanding of sedimentation. Where facilities are available, staff make good use of ILT for simulations which help students to understand complex concepts. For example, in a statistics lesson, students effectively used a computer program on hypothesis testing. The program enabled them to see immediately the effects of different sample sizes on the significance of results obtained.

48. In a few lessons, theory teaching is unimaginative and lacking in variety of learning activities. Students are not given enough opportunity to work in groups and pairs so that they can exchange ideas and clarify understanding. In mathematics, there is too much dependence on teacher explanations at the board followed by students practising similar examples independently. In a few science lessons, teachers rely too much on note taking, the more able are not challenged, and some students lose enthusiasm.

49. Student progress is monitored through tests and regular homework. Work is marked thoroughly and returned promptly. Teachers write full, developmental comments on students' work so that they know what they need to do to improve. Progress targets are set for all students according to prior attainment and ability. Performance is monitored against challenging, realistic target grades through regular one-to-one reviews. Student action plans address underachievement and maintain good progress. Parents receive regular reports and students are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

50. Support for individual students is good. All students are assessed at the start of courses to identify learning styles. Additional needs are supported through tutorials or by support staff assisting students in lessons. Academic support is very good. Workshops are timetabled for mathematics support. Science subjects have drop-in tutorials. Attendance at these sessions is compulsory for students whose progress gives cause for concern. Students are able to access extensive revision work on the college intranet, and are given CDs for home study. To extend their experience, students have many opportunities to attend trips and visits. For example, biology students have attended lectures at the University of Birmingham and geology students have attended a field course in the Lake District. Good industrial links benefit vocational students.

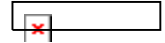
51. Resources for learning are good. All staff have suitable qualifications and remain committed to updating their skills through staff development. Laboratories are spacious and very well equipped for students' practical work. Well-organised specialist technical support and storage rooms are conveniently located. Relevant, stimulating displays in curriculum areas attract attention and capture students' interest. The learning resources centre is well stocked with relevant texts and periodicals. Students have good access to IT in the mathematics and science centre. However, facilities for staff to use ILT in teaching are not sufficient. Many rooms do not have fitted data projectors, computers or interactive whiteboards so that teachers cannot make full use of computer animations, simulations and sequenced diagrams. Overhead projector and video provision is dated.

### ***Leadership and management***

52. Leadership and management are good. Managers set clear targets for pass and retention rates, and student attendance on all courses. The self-assessment report and course review process is self-critical and acknowledges weaknesses. Subject team leaders produce rigorous action plans and are effective in implementing initiatives aimed at raising students' performance. In GCSE mathematics, new specifications, schemes of work and resources have been introduced with greater opportunities for coursework. In physics, a new tutorial system provides mathematics support for students who need it. Staff are aware of diversity issues and make efforts to encourage minority

ethnic students and females to take courses where they are currently underrepresented. There is a strong team spirit at subject and course level, with all staff committed to common goals of raising achievement. Teaching teams meet regularly to discuss teaching and learning. The lesson observation system is effective in identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Staff development to improve teaching is given a high priority and staff share good practice. Links with local schools are good and pupils aged 14 to 16 attend open days and take courses in applied science and animal care at the college.

## **Business, administration, management and professional**



Overall provision in this area is **outstanding (grade 1)**  
Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### ***Strengths***

- outstanding pass rates
  
- much good teaching and learning
  
- good resources to promote learning
  
- very good responsiveness to the needs of students and the local community
  
- high-quality support for individual students
  
- good management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- low framework achievement for business administration work-based learners.

### ***Scope of provision***

53. The college provides a wide range of business courses from foundation to advanced and higher levels. Full-time courses are provided in accounting, business administration, business studies and economics. Both academic and vocational programmes are available. Accounting and business

administration are offered at different NVQ levels. The college also offers courses for medical receptionists and the diploma in consumer affairs requested by local authority trading standards units is taught through distance learning. The college has an employability project with the Ethnic Minority Students' Achievement Grant initiative which helps students to use their work experience for accreditation. The area also has links with a local school and provides GCSE business courses to Year 10 and 11 students who attend college. At the time of the inspection 530 students were enrolled on full-time courses, with a further 270 attending part time. Most full-time students were aged 16 to 18, and most part time were aged 19 or over.

### ***Achievement and standards***

54. Pass rates are outstanding. They are well above the national average on most courses across all levels, and on both academic and vocational programmes. For example, general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate business courses have consistently had pass rates 20% above the national average. Pass rates are also high on AS-level business studies, GCE A-level accounting and economics. The NVQ level 4 accounting pass rate for 2003 was 80% compared to a national average of 32%. Achievement of work-based learning full frameworks in business administration has been low. New initiatives have been introduced to improve this. Progression rates between courses are good.

55. The standard of students' work is high. Students understand business concepts well and are able to use these with confidence in their work. For example, in a GNVQ foundation lesson students were able to relate the key stages of product development and apply these to the research and launch of a new product. Students work well in tutorials and effectively develop study skills. Part-time adults make very good use of their work situations, sharing ideas and experiences with the other students and extending knowledge and understanding. For example, in an accounting lesson, students outlined the different ways in which their companies organised stocktaking arrangements. Work-based learning students make good progress at work. Most learners are employed at the end of their apprenticeships.

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

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ foundation business	1	No. of starts	51	56	46
		% retention	75	89	72
		% pass rate	89	90	100
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	44	23	24
		% retention	82	78	83
		% pass rate	83	89	90
AVCE double award	3	No. of starts	60	59	49
		% retention	43	58	63
		% pass rate	88	82	97
AS-level business	3	No. of starts	158	100	90
		% retention	80	89	91
		% pass rate	81	84	91
Advanced diploma for medical secretaries	3	No. of starts	29	41	42
		% retention	90	90	86
		% pass rate	81	78	64
NVQ accounting	4	No. of starts	26	22	23

		% retention	77	68	91
		% pass rate	80	80	81

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

### **Quality of education and training**

56. Much of the teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. Lessons are planned well and have clear aims and objectives. Courses have detailed and thorough schemes of work. Teachers put their students' learning at the centre of the planning and teaching of lessons. In the best lessons, teachers recognise that students are individuals and that they prefer to learn in different ways. They introduce a range of different interesting and worthwhile activities which the students enjoy. In an AVCE business lesson, for example, students considered the concept of analysis together and then broke into small groups which then had to apply a different analytical element to the products of a local fast food chain. Other students had to consider the impact of recent government health warnings on the organisation's future developments. Every student was able to enjoy a different task and make a worthwhile contribution. The use of ILT is uneven, and teachers sometimes do not use simple resources such as whiteboards and flipcharts to reinforce key learning points.

57. Teachers have a good rapport with their students. Lessons are usually informative and interesting. Students are encouraged to become involved in their own learning. For example, in a vocational business lesson, students were responsible for investing and tracking their own share portfolio in class. They then had to explain and justify their decisions to the class. Most teachers relate theory to commercial practice, and encourage their students to think about their experiences as employees, customers or consumers. Teachers use their links with outside companies and organisations to add extra interest. In a few lessons, teachers do not recognise that students' learning needs differ and they teach their lessons in an unimaginative way.

58. Arrangements for assessment are good. However, in a few instances, teachers use a small range of assessment methods. Students are set clear learning targets which they understand. Progress towards meeting these targets is closely monitored. Formal progress reviews take place several times a year. Written work is returned promptly and students value the detailed and constructive feedback they receive. Internal verification procedures are in place for college and work-based learning. Course teams moderate their own marking. A small range of assessment methods is used in work-based learning.

59. Support for individual students is very good. Students are clear about the actions they should take to improve their performance. Full-time students benefit from a well-structured tutorial programme which encourages the development of wider study and learning skills. Work-based learning students receive good support from their assessors. They also benefit from the Modern Apprenticeship Induction Programme. Students acknowledge the constructive and sensitive support which teachers and specialist staff give them on a wide range of issues.

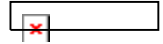
60. Teaching and learning resources are good. Teachers have appropriate business experience and teaching qualifications and good access to further professional development. Accommodation and equipment are good. The Atrium Learning Centre provides a very good business learning resource which is well used by teachers and students. The Coombswood e-business centre is a stimulating and welcoming environment for part-time business students.

### **Leadership and management**

61. Leadership and management are good. There is a strong sense of commitment to improvement which is understood by staff. Teams work well together and share good practice in curriculum design, resource development, and teaching. Communication is good and curriculum managers and teachers work well together. Teams use and monitor data and student views in their meetings to effectively inform their decisions and plan future developments. Systems to monitor absence and

attendance are effective in maintaining high standards. The self-assessment process is seen as a tool for improvement and is self-critical. Equality and diversity are promoted through the curriculum and through the staffing profile which reflects the local community and provides positive role models for students.

## Information and communications technology



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

### **Strengths**

- high retention rates on most courses
  
- much good teaching
  
- good resources for learning
  
- good support for full-time students.

### **Weaknesses**

- low proportion of high grades in ICT
  
- low pass rates for key skills
  
- poor classroom management in a minority of lessons.

### **Scope of provision**

62. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses both at the main campus and at centres in the community. Full-time courses include AS-level and GCE A-level ICT, computing, AVCE ICT, BTEC national diploma, BTEC first diploma, BTEC introductory diploma, GNVQ intermediate and GCSE IT. A range of part-time provision, ranging from entry to advanced level is available at community venues, the largest being Coombswood e-business centre. The total number of students on roll in the curriculum area at the time of inspection was about 1,300, the majority of whom were on part-time courses. Of these, about 900 were enrolled on computer literacy and



information technology (CLAIT) courses.

### ***Achievement and standards***

63. The retention rate of students on most full-time and short courses is high. For example, in CLAIT and AS-level computing, it is significantly above national average. However, retention rates for the BTEC first diploma for IT practitioners and AVCE IT course fell significantly between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Pass rates overall are average, and in some courses have improved in recent years. For example, pass rates improved to above the national average in 2003/04 for AS-level IT, AVCE IT, and GCE A-level computing courses. The pass rate on CLAIT short courses has been consistently above the national average for 2002/03 and 2003/04. However, the pass rate for IT key skills at intermediate level is low. The pass rate on GNVQ intermediate IT has been consistently below the national average. The proportion of students achieving higher grades on AS-level ICT and GCE A2 IT is significantly below the national average. In 2004, no students on the AVCE course achieved high grades.

64. Students are enthusiastic about their courses and have productive working relationships with tutors. They often work well independently and develop good practical skills. For example, national diploma students demonstrated the ability to design, build, and maintain their own websites. Others are able to effectively design posters, surveys and spreadsheets. The standard of students' written and assignment work is satisfactory overall. During inspection week, overall attendance was 78%, slightly below the national average.

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

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ IT	2	No. of starts	91	38	33
		% retention	87	87	85
		% pass rate	62	58	64
First diploma IT support	2	No. of starts	*	17	16
		% retention	*	100	94
		% pass rate	*	94	87
AS-level computing	3	No. of starts	*	44	25
		% retention	*	93	88
		% pass rate	*	56	64
AS-level IT	3	No. of starts	132	98	92
		% retention	86	84	85
		% pass rate	63	66	73
AVCE IT	3	No. of starts	52	80	88
		% retention	67	68	55
		% pass rate	74	65	90
GCE A2 computing	3	No. of starts	136	41	21
		% retention	89	98	86
		% pass rate	78	83	89
GCE A2 IT	3	No. of starts	51	42	31
		% retention	92	98	100

		% pass rate	89	80	84
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Source: ISR (2002 and 2003), college (2004)

\*course not offered

### **Quality of education and training**

65. Much of the teaching on ICT courses is good. Teachers have good technical knowledge and are well qualified. Many have relevant industrial experience. Lessons are usually well planned. Teachers often use a variety of appropriate teaching methods. In the best lessons, teachers ensure that extension activities are available for the more able students. In other lessons, however, this is not the case. Assignments often use intranet-based resources which are produced by college staff. Teachers usually check the learning of students effectively. Good use is made of data projectors that are linked to class computers. Students are encouraged to use the college's intranet to store notes and other course-related materials. Students and teachers use Internet resources effectively.

66. In a minority of lessons, the use of computer rooms for theory work is inappropriate and students have insufficient desk space to undertake written work. In other lessons, classroom management is ineffective. Some students are inattentive and fail to apply themselves to the work in hand. Teachers occasionally spend too much time helping individuals rather than setting them tasks so the whole class can be monitored. Noise levels from different classes timetabled into the same room, or adjacent to it, distract students and teachers. In a few lessons, the more able students finish tasks or assignments in good time, but are not given further work.

67. Assignment briefs are usually clear with indications of what students should do to obtain a high grade. Comments on written work and assignments are usually helpful and detailed. Although the weaker students are usually given comprehensive feedback on their work, this is not always the case for the more able and comments on their work often lack detail. The administration and record-keeping of assessment and verification has been unsatisfactory, but recent changes have been implemented to address this. The assessment of progress within lessons is often incomplete and does not adequately inform the target-setting process.

68. Support for students is good. Academic support is provided through additional lessons for those who need it. Teachers give freely of their time outside timetabled lessons. All full-time students have individual learning plans which usually give an accurate indication of their progress together with the steps necessary to improve. In a minority of examples, however, these are insufficiently detailed. The learning support needs of full-time students are assessed on entry. Many students, however, choose not to accept the support offered. Students value the support they receive. Late arrival and lack of punctuality occasionally disrupts lessons. A number of enrichment activities are undertaken to enhance students' learning. These have included trips to a theme park in the United States of America, work placements in Germany and visits to local industry.

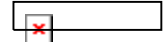
69. Resources are good. Staff are well qualified and many have recent relevant commercial experience. Online resources are good and effectively aid learning. Teaching and learning are supported by up-to-date software. Computers are of good specification and are readily accessible to students. Computer rooms are adequate and have good ILT facilities. However, space for associated paper-based working is limited. Course textbooks are available for all courses.

### **Leadership and management**

70. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has introduced recent significant changes to the management of ICT. The manager sets a clear direction, and a new team structure has been implemented. Course leaders meet each term and several new initiatives are being piloted. Staff share resources and teaching materials. Communication is good, and staff share good practice. Staff development is good, and visits have taken place to other institutions to compare standards. Staff participate in the production of the self-assessment report. Actions to address weaknesses in internal verification, punctuality and unsatisfactory course leadership are beginning to have an effect. Internal lesson observations of teaching and learning have contributed to improved

performance. Good use is made of management information.

## Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel



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

### **Strengths**

- high and improving pass rates on most courses
  
- much good teaching
  
- extensive range of additional activities that enrich learning
  
- effective community partnerships
  
- good curriculum management.

### **Weaknesses**

- low retention rates on a minority of courses
  
- low pass rates on the AS-level sport and physical education in 2003/04
  
- some poor accommodation.

### **Scope of provision**

71. The college offers a wide range of courses for full-time students. These include first and national diplomas in sport and exercise science, AS levels and GCE A levels in sport and physical education, AVCE in travel and tourism and leisure and recreation, and NVQ levels 2 and 3 in hospitality and catering. Provision at level 1 and at entry level is limited. Courses at this level are mostly taught in community centres. The wide range of part-time courses includes the community sports leader's

award, airfares and ticketing certificate, and basic food hygiene. The number of enrolments on these courses is generally high and they are used to broaden the learning opportunities for full-time students. Vocational GCSEs in travel and catering are offered through the Increased Flexibility programme for students at Key Stage 4. Numbers on this collaborative provision are increasing. The number of students at the time of the inspection was 427, the majority of whom are aged 16 to 18.

### ***Achievement and standards***

72. Pass rates are high and improving. For example, in 2003/04, the first diploma in sports and exercise science and the AVCE travel and tourism had a pass rate of 100%. Pass rates on the GCE A2 sport and physical education improved to 95% in 2003/04, 7% above the national average. However, pass rates on the AS-level sport and physical education courses have fallen to 61%, 16% below national average. Retention rates are low on a minority of courses. For example, in 2003/04 the AVCE in travel and tourism (single award) was 36%, 12% below the national average. In 2003/04, the NVQ level 2 in catering and hospitality had a retention rate equal to the national average. However, this rate fell from 100% in 2001/02 to 80% in 2003/04. Retention rates on the GCE A2 sports games and recreation have risen year by year to 100% in 2003/04.

73. Students' progress in relation to their prior attainment is variable across the different curriculum areas. Students' written work is generally well marked with comprehensive feedback on how students could improve their work. Spelling and grammatical errors are systematically corrected. A comprehensive assignment on fitness testing in sport was presented to a high standard with the students using advanced IT skills. Students are able to contrast fitness requirements for different sports very well. A well-constructed assignment on customer service in travel enabled students to visit different organisations in order to produce good comparative evaluations of customer service standards across the industry.

74. The women's football academy team has performed well in regional five-a-side events and some of its members play for Aston Villa and West Bromwich Albion ladies teams. A large number of students have competed in a range of events including swimming and trampolining at the college's sport national finals.

### ***A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, sports, leisure and travel, 2002 to 2004***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
First diploma in sport and exercise science	2	No. of starts	21	19	23
		% retention	67	89	57
		% pass rate	79	41	100
NVQ catering and hospitality (food preparation and cooking)	2	No. of starts	15	49	20
		% retention	100	90	80
		% pass rate	93	68	88
GCE A2 sport and physical education	3	No. of starts	116	36	20
		% retention	86	94	100
		% pass rate	78	85	95
AVCE (double award in travel and tourism)	3	No. of starts	*	22	19
		% retention	*	59	58
		% pass rate	*	92	100
AVCE (double award) in travel and tourism	3	No. of starts	22	31	*
		% retention	86	39	*
		% pass rate	74	83	*

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

*\*fewer than 15 students enrolled*

### **Quality of education and training**

75. Teaching is mostly good or better. Many of the lessons have a wide variety of well-planned activities which interest students. Many lessons have comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans which include detailed cross-referencing to the subject specification and to the relevant key skills units. In one travel and tourism lesson, the teacher used questioning techniques effectively to contextualise and reinforce key concepts of package holiday pricing and promotion. The students asked searching questions arising from their own experiences which generated effective discussion. In catering, students develop a high level of practical catering skills in a realistic working environment. The needs of the individual students are met effectively and they are well prepared for a period of planned work experience and for further study. The teachers support this process sensitively and students make good progress.

76. Some teaching lacks sufficient challenge for the more able students. In the less successful lessons, planned activities take too much time and students become distracted for short periods. Teachers use some IT and ILT in lessons, but most of this is powerpoint presentations.

77. Assessment is regular and systematic. Record keeping is good. Assignments have clear briefs and marked work contains a good level of feedback. Students are clear on the steps which are necessary to improve. Occasionally, assignment deadlines are bunched together producing undue pressure on students. Marked work is usually returned promptly, but this is not always the case.

78. Support for students is good. Student progress is monitored effectively through regular well-planned tutorials. Attendance, punctuality and progress against expected grades are reviewed systematically. A minority of individual learning plans have insufficiently specific targets. Some lessons at level 2 and below have no in-class support despite a number of students having identified learning needs. Students value the support which they receive. Tutorial activities are well organised. A few groups, however, have had a number of changes of personal tutor which has disrupted their studies.

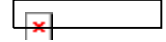
79. Staff are well qualified and most have appropriate experience. New staff are expected to take appropriate teaching qualifications at the earliest opportunity and are supported well throughout this process. Staff have good access to a wide range of ongoing development opportunities and have had recent training on issues such as dealing with challenging behaviour and equality and diversity. Accommodation is mostly good. However, facilities for practical kitchen work are dated. The fitness suite is small for the number of students on sports courses. Outdoor practical sports facilities are limited. Many of the rooms have good resources to support teaching and learning. The travel and tourism base rooms contain a good stock of up-to-date guides and brochures. The curriculum area's learning centre contains a good level of resources to support students' work, including appropriate textbooks and travel guides. The range of periodicals is small.

### **Leadership and management**

80. Leadership and management are good. Communications are effective and there is a good team ethos. Quality assurance procedures are effective. Development planning and self-assessment are rigorous. Course reviews are effective and lead to improvements. Good practice is shared across the curriculum teams. A comprehensive curriculum quality handbook acts as an effective point of reference for staff. Each subject area has a comprehensive year calendar which includes dates of team meetings, work experience periods and dates for internal verification and staff development events. Although ethnicity is monitored at course level, there is no formal strategy to recruit under-represented groups on to courses in the area of learning. The lesson observation process is effective and has resulted in improvements in teaching and learning. Students' challenging behaviour and any instances of lateness are dealt with effectively. Management information is used

well to monitor the performance of courses and students.

### **Beauty and complementary therapies**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates on most courses
  
- good teaching in practical lessons
  
- good support for students
  
- effective initiatives to improve the curriculum.

#### ***Weaknesses***

- lack of variety in theory lessons
  
- unrealistic work environment
  
- unsatisfactory assessment practice on NVQ level 1 courses
  
- little work experience for students.

#### ***Scope of provision***

81. The college offers a range of courses from foundation to advanced level. These include full-time and part-time courses in beauty and holistic therapies. At the time of the inspection, there were 487 full-time and 310 part-time students. Of the full-time students, 171 were aged 16 to 18 and 316 were aged 19 or over. Of all students, 5% are male and 19% are from minority ethnic groups. A range of part-time provision is taught at several community centres. In addition to this, many local schools

participate in 14 to 16 programmes within the curriculum area.

### **Achievement and standards**

82. Pass rates are high and retention rates are above national average on many courses. For example, at both intermediate and advanced level, pass rates for beauty therapy are 6% and 13%, respectively, above the national figure. The standard of the students' practical work is very good, often displaying standards that are above awarding body requirements. Students demonstrate a sound knowledge of their subject and are confident in applying their skills. The standard of written work is good particularly on holistic therapy courses. Students develop a good understanding of their subject. Key skills portfolios are vocationally relevant, however, achievement is low. During inspection, the average attendance rate was 73%, which is 4% below the national average. Lessons are occasionally disrupted by students arriving late.

83. Progression from many community-based courses on to college mainstream courses is good. Progression between levels on the college site is good: 72% of NVQ level 2 students progressed to NVQ level 3 in 2004/05. Work experience opportunities are limited to level 3 students who attend placements and experience a realistic work environment. The college has little involvement with local employers.

### **A sample of retention and pass rates in beauty and complementary therapies, 2002 to 2004**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
Beauty therapy One year	2	No. of starts	36	51	60
		% retention	86	82	78
		% pass rate	87	95	91
Beauty therapy One year	3	No. of starts	17	24	32
		% retention	82	100	94
		% pass rate	100	100	100
Diploma in Indian head massage	2	No. of starts	33	60	46
		% retention	97	85	85
		% pass rate	56	86	95
Diploma in reflexology	3	No. of starts	15	22	*
		% retention	53	86	*
		% pass rate	100	100	*

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

\*fewer than 15 students enrolled

### **Quality of education and training**

84. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. The teaching of practical skills is good. Students display high standards of work. ILT is widely used in practical lessons where the students make use of digital photography to provide evidence of their work. In a photographic make-up session, students applied the make-up to a theme and were immediately able to make amendments and adaptations after reviewing their work. The students thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and very good learning took place.

85. However, in some theory lessons, there is a lack of variety and teachers fail ensure that teaching methods take account of students' individual learning styles and abilities. Less able students are not always supported, and the more able students are not always challenged. For example, students

were asked to copy information from an over-head projector, and quickly became bored and frustrated when they could not write down the information quickly enough. Both holistic and beauty therapy student portfolios of evidence are well organised and provide a good range of evidence for skills development.

86. Assessment practice on the NVQ level 1 courses is unsatisfactory. It does not meet course or regulatory body requirements. For example, students are not always assessed on paying clients. There is a lack of clients in some lessons which limits assessment opportunities. Internal verification is satisfactory. Target setting is used effectively to monitor student progress. Students are aware of their progress and the steps necessary to achieve their qualification. Homework is marked and returned promptly. The quality of feedback is effective and evaluative. Parents are kept fully informed through written reports and parents' evenings.

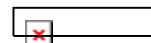
87. Support for students is good. Students have well-documented termly reviews and weekly tutorials where relevant topics are discussed such as time management, curriculum vitae writing, and job applications. All full-time students undergo an initial assessment where additional learning support requirements are identified. Effective arrangements are made quickly for one-to-one and classroom-based support. Students requiring physical support arrangements are well catered for. For example, amendments and adaptations to the curriculum and organisational arrangements have been made for a student who uses a wheel chair on the full-time holistic therapy course.

88. Overall, resources for learning are satisfactory. The learning resource centre is well stocked with books, journals, videos, CD-ROMs and computers. It is regularly used by students either on their own or as part of a lesson. The salons do not provide a realistic work environment. Space for display is inadequate. Salons are equipped to industrial standards and are well stocked with products and equipment. Staff are well qualified and benefit from regular and relevant training and professional updating.

### ***Leadership and management***

89. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The curriculum manager has been appointed recently. The self-assessment process has identified a number of weaknesses. As a result, effective initiatives to improve the curriculum have recently been introduced. Regular well-attended meetings involve both full-time and part-time staff. Standard agenda items include sharing good practice where staff regularly share training they have attended and teaching and learning initiatives. Staff feel valued and work well together as a team. Responsibilities are delegated at an appropriate level. Course reviews are detailed and focus upon improvements for the students. Challenging targets on retention and pass rates are set at course level and progress toward their achievement is monitored effectively. Staff comment favourably on the support they receive.

### **Health, social care and public services**



Overall provision in this area is **satisfactory (grade 3)**  
Contributory grade for work-based learning is **satisfactory (grade 3)**

### ***Strengths***

- high retention rates on level 3 full-time courses
  
  
- effective partnerships with local schools and good progression links



- good support for students
  
- good links made between theory and vocational practice.

### ***Weaknesses***

- low pass rates on diploma in childcare and education
  
- slow progress on NVQs and frameworks
  
- limited access to ILT to support learning
  
- ineffective management of key skills.

### ***Scope of provision***

90. There are 538 students aged 16 to 18, the majority of whom study on full-time programmes in early years, health and social care or public services. The 447 part-time enrolments are mostly adult students on courses in counselling, first-aid or early years. In addition, 10 students aged 14 to 16 attend college courses in childcare and health and social care. There are 28 work-based learners on apprenticeship programmes. Courses are available from level 2 to level 4 in childcare, levels 2 and 3 in health and social care and public services, and level 2 to level 4 in counselling. Most of the provision takes place on the main college site during the daytime, although there are some courses at off-site venues. Students have opportunities to take additional vocational qualifications including first-aid and deaf awareness, and can participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. A wide range of work experience opportunities support college studies, including placements in local schools, private day nurseries, playgroups, and social care settings.

### ***Achievement and standards***

91. The high retention rates on level 3 full-time courses have been significantly above national averages for the last three years. This includes the BTEC national diploma in early years, the AVCE health and social care (double award) and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in childcare and education. Pass rates, however, on the diploma in childcare and education, have been low for the past two years and significantly below the national average. Pass rates on counselling courses are good. The progress of learners following NVQs and frameworks for apprenticeships has been slow until the recent appointment of a new team of assessors and internal verifiers.

92. Students work well in lessons, and make effective contributions to group work and discussions. In a childcare lesson, students heard a story read poorly and then effectively, and were able to give

a detailed analysis of what made the well-read story more appropriate for children. Assessment is through a variety of challenging assignments, and the standard of work is satisfactory for the qualifications being undertaken. Vocational practice portfolios are well presented and clearly mapped to unit criteria. Students are well motivated and the level of attendance is above the national average for the area of learning, but slightly below the college target. The management of key skills is ineffective. Some students have not received key skills teaching because of the unavailability of staff. Apprentices have only recently been offered a coherent key skills provision. Many students are not offered any key skills option. Where key skills are identified as being taught through vocational units, this is not always made explicit.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
BTEC first diploma in care (early years (and precursors))	2	No. of starts	25	34	43
		% retention	68	82	79
		% pass rate	88	64	76
BTEC first diploma in public services	2	No. of starts	*	32	32
		% retention	*	88	69
		% pass rate	*	43	86
NVQ early years care and education	2	No. of starts	30	38	17
		% retention	73	79	47
		% pass rate	86	57	100
BTEC national diploma in early years	3	No. of starts	26	48	45
		% retention	81	85	67
		% pass rate	100	83	80
AVCE health and social care (double award)	3	No. of starts	55	64	47
		% retention	75	70	70
		% pass rate	71	91	73
CACHE diploma in childcare and education (and precursors)	3	No. of starts	50	50	65
		% retention	66	72	60
		% pass rate	91	61	64

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

\*fewer than 15 students enrolled

***Quality of education and training***

93. The majority of teaching is good. The best lessons are well planned and purposeful with clear aims and objectives which are shared with students. Teachers make good use of the real-life experiences of students, for example, drawing upon their own childhood experiences when considering a storytelling activity. There are many good links made between classroom theory and vocational practice, using examples derived from work settings. Students in one lesson were asked to consider developmental stages of children through the design of a leaflet which was aimed at parents. There are good strategies in place to ensure all students make a contribution to the lesson, and the presentation is lively and enthusiastic. Preferred learning styles are recognised and teaching methods adapted to suit specific learning needs. Detailed class profiles provide useful background information on students. These include results of basic skills initial assessments and identifying specific learning needs. Equal opportunities issues are effectively promoted.

94. In less successful lessons, there is a lack of focus and the purpose of activities is not made explicit. Apart from lessons in dedicated classrooms, there is limited access to ILT to support learning. There are no computers in most classrooms, but students do make use of the vocationally specific learning resource centre.

95. Initial assessment identifies additional support needs effectively, and there is good in-class support for level 2 groups. About 50 further students receive individual support outside their normal lessons. Assessed work is carefully and regularly marked, and returned promptly. However, some public services students have had work outstanding for some time. Assessor feedback generally provides clear guidance for improvement. The monitoring of student progress is satisfactory with regular reports, progress reviews, and parents' evenings.

96. Work-based learners have benefited from the introduction of new procedures and documentation for the assessment and internal verification of NVQs. Individual learning plans are good, with detailed targets identified, particularly at subject level. There are good strategies to monitor and follow-up attendance.

97. Support for students is good. They value the advice and guidance available on personal issues, coursework and progress monitoring. Individual reviews support progress and good records are maintained. Expectations are clear and students have a 'Right Choice' interview after three weeks to check they are on a suitable programme. A group profile identifies individual learning needs and lessons are planned so that the work takes account of the different needs and abilities of students. Work-based assessors carry out reviews in the workplace and learners express satisfaction with the opportunity to discuss issues or concerns of a personal nature. General college support services are well used and appreciated. The free college bus service is popular with students who have to travel long distances from home. Financial assistance has helped many students to continue with their studies.

98. Dedicated classrooms are bright and well resourced, with stimulating displays of students' work and other materials. Class sizes are often large, and some classrooms become crowded when furniture is pushed to the walls for group activities and role playing. The dedicated learning centre is well resourced and popular with students. Staff are well qualified, and most have appropriate teaching qualifications. Their vocational background is not always used to support learning during lessons.

### ***Leadership and management***

99. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been several recent changes in staffing and a new manager is now in post and making positive steps towards improvement where issues had been identified. A new lead internal verifier is addressing substantial concerns in work-based learning. Good progress is being made towards establishing clear and uniform procedures and documentation. There have been many recent appointments in this area of learning, and new staff comment positively on the support they have received. Course teams work well together and communication is good. Quality assurance measures are satisfactory, with mechanisms in place for internal verification of assessments and the review of courses throughout the year. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. A development plan is monitored regularly. Lesson observations contribute to staff appraisals. Opportunities for continuous professional development are good, and are linked to the development planning process. Equality of opportunity is an integral part of the ethos of the curriculum area, and is promoted in lessons. About 19% of the student population is drawn from minority ethnic backgrounds. Effective partnerships with local schools provide good progression links for their students. The area is an active contributor to the local IF programme, and provides very good opportunities for over 100 young people aged 14 to 16 in childcare and health and social care.

### **Visual and performing arts and media**



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

### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates on most courses
  
- high retention rates on most courses
  
- much good teaching and collaborative learning
  
- excellent accommodation and resources
  
- a broad range of stimulating enrichment opportunities
  
- good curriculum management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- lack of punctuality and poor attendance on a minority of courses.

### ***Scope of provision***

100. The college offers a wide range of full-time, part-time, non-vocational and community courses in expressive arts. Provision includes AS levels and GCE A levels in art and design, music, media, film, drama, dance and design and technology. Vocational courses include intermediate GNVQ art and design and media, first diplomas in music and performing arts, national diplomas in art and design, media, music practice, music technology, dance, drama, graphic design and fine art. Music and dance advanced levels are taught in partnership with a local school. A range of arts and crafts-based courses are offered to adult students at the main college and at a number of centres in the community. At the time of inspection, there are 823 students aged between 16 to 18, the majority of whom are on full-time courses, and 515 adult students who are mainly studying on part-time courses. Links with industry are strong. For example, media diploma groups benefit from a practising director's feedback on their work in progress.

### ***Achievement and standards***

101. Student achievements are outstanding in most level 2 and 3 media, performing arts and art and design courses. Pass rates are very high, with good retention rates on the majority of full-time

programmes though the retention rate on the AVCE media and national diploma in drama was below the national average for 2003/04. The proportion of students that achieve high grades is significantly above the national average in all advanced subjects. The majority of students make good progress. The standard of students' practical work is consistently high, particularly in dance, music, art and design and media. Students are often articulate, confident and perceptive. In a minority of lessons punctuality and attendance are less than satisfactory.

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

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GNVQ intermediate/first diploma performing arts	2	No. of starts	15	16	20
		% retention	93	67	85
		% pass rate	79	92	100
AS-level fine arts	3	No. of starts	67	89	136
		% retention	87	88	90
		% pass rate	88	86	75
AS-level media studies	3	No. of starts	91	62	81
		% retention	86	84	84
		% pass rate	96	100	99
AVCE art and design	3	No. of starts	31	25	27
		% retention	55	84	70
		% pass rate	71	100	100
National diploma in drama	3	No. of starts	*	23	16
		% retention	*	74	44
		% pass rate	*	76	86
National diploma in popular music	3	No. of starts	21	12	25
		% retention	38	92	68
		% pass rate	100	100	94
GCE A2 media studies	3	No. of starts	41	67	37
		% retention	98	94	97
		% pass rate	95	100	100

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

\*fewer than 15 students enrolled

***Quality of education and training***

102. Teaching and learning are good in most lessons. Teachers expect students to be responsible for their own learning and that of other students through an emphasis on collaborative learning. Technical demonstrations in practical lessons are effective, and students can clearly follow sometimes complicated techniques. Lessons are effectively planned and in most cases teachers take account of the different learning styles of students. Students in all subjects have an increased perception and awareness of their own specialisms. In one AS-level drama lesson, students demonstrated significant insight in interpreting the characters of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* into their own words, although in the same lesson there was some indistinct understanding concerning the role of the theatre director. In a music lesson, individual guitarists demonstrated much control

and sensitivity in interpreting the work of Led Zeppelin. Visual arts students often paint with a bold and dynamic flourish. Media students make imaginative and inventive animation films. In a minority of lessons, teachers use a narrow range of teaching methods to meet students' needs and in some lessons teachers talk too much at the expense of active student learning.

103. Assessment methods and standards are good. In academic tutorials, students' progress against target grades is monitored using an effective review and guidance process. Much work exceeds expected national standards. Awarding body requirements are met. Submitted work is marked and returned swiftly and feedback from staff is always helpful and fair. In a minority of cases, students' written assignments contain poor English which is not always corrected.

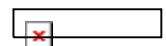
104. Support for students is good. Students value the efforts made on their behalf by their tutors. Individual learning needs are identified at induction and appropriate support offered. Most teachers recognise individual learning styles and integrate these into lesson plans. Reviews are regular and both students and parents are kept informed of progress. Advice and guidance about progression to HE are very good. Absence is immediately noted and students are contacted at home for explanation. However, when students are late some staff fail to challenge them sufficiently.

105. Accommodation and resources are excellent. There are several specialist areas including a purpose-designed theatre. A well-equipped dance studio has an extensive mirrored wall to aid teaching and learning. Music provision is well resourced with industrial standard equipment. Students benefit from the extensive professional experience of many of the staff. Art and design has separate specialist two-dimensional and three-dimensional areas that are stimulating and well maintained. All teachers demonstrate a very good command of their subject and demonstrate often expert specialist knowledge. Students have access to a wide range of equipment and technical facilities. Technician support is very good and the learning resource centre is well stocked with relevant publications, personal computers and MACs for drop-in use. Enrichment opportunities are excellent. Residential trips are arranged to visit the Edinburgh Festival to see current mainstream and fringe theatre work. Foundation students work with students from another college at a site in Cornwall on collaborative art projects and all art students have the opportunity each year to visit European and American cities as part of their courses.

### ***Leadership and management***

106. Leadership and management are good. There is an evident commitment and application to maintaining continuous improvement. The monitoring of the standard of teaching is effective. Internal judgements about the quality of teaching and learning were very similar to those of inspectors. New teachers are given much support and have experienced staff as mentors. Regular team meetings as well as observation of each other teaching ensure that good practice is shared across all staff. Course leaders recently visited a nearby Beacon college to note and, where appropriate, implement areas of good practice. There is an effective and beneficial partnership with a local school. Staff are encouraged and expected to develop their knowledge and experience through attending internal and external professional development initiatives. Teachers feel valued and supported and feel they make a contribution to the rigorous self-assessment.

### **Humanities**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- very high AS-level and GCE A-level pass rates

- very high retention rates on all courses
- much good teaching and learning
- good supportive resource materials
- effective student support
- good curriculum management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- lack of challenge for the most able students
- insufficiently detailed assessment feedback on a minority of courses.

### ***Scope of provision***

107. The college offers AS-level and GCE A-level courses in archaeology, geography, history, law, philosophy, psychology, religious studies and sociology as well access to HE and an AS-level critical thinking. There are currently 1,162 enrolments with 89 students aged 19 and over and 64 students are part time. Numbers are high in psychology, sociology and law with 342, 254 and 194, respectively. Recruitment to history is good, but numbers in geography are declining. AS-level and GCE A-level groups in archaeology are small. Progression opportunities are good.

### ***Achievement and standards***

108. Pass rates are very high. GCE A-level sociology, history and archaeology all achieved 100% pass rate in 2004. Pass rates are high at AS level, with most subjects exceeding the national average in 2004 including law and psychology. Retention rates are very good in all subject areas. Psychology and sociology at AS level retain very high numbers of students. For example, the retention rate in AS-level sociology was 10% above the national average in 2004. GCE A-level geography has retained all its students for the past two years. Student progress is very good. Compared to pass rates predicted on the basis of GCSE results alone, GCE A-level students generally achieved better than expected. This was not the case for sociology, however, where results are close to those predicted. High-grade performance at GCE A level is poor and at AS level is uneven. Attendance was good during the inspection at 84%. Students were usually punctual.

109. The standard of students' work is very good. Students' written work demonstrates a thorough understanding of concepts and the ability to use information effectively. Students readily make valuable contributions in lessons. Staff encourage students effectively. In a sociology lesson, students discussed social class and put forward well-considered and perceptive analyses of different aspects of the topic. In a philosophy lesson, students' understanding and ability to discuss the views of Kierkegaard and Pascal on faith was incisive. Students are attentive and keen to learn in most lessons. They are prepared to put forward personal views and ideas that help to consolidate their learning. A law lesson on misrepresentation involved students looking at different cases related to statements of fact. This led to successful individual assessments of whether misrepresentation had taken place and included consideration of a key case concerning the Spice Girls.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2002	2003	2004
AS-level law	3	No. of starts	139	112	126
		% retention	84	88	87
		% pass rate	74	80	79
AS-level history	3	No. of starts	55	70	80
		% retention	89	90	88
		% pass rate	88	86	84
AS-level psychology	3	No. of starts	251	205	247
		% retention	88	84	84
		% pass rate	72	82	71
AS-level sociology	3	No. of starts	134	150	167
		% retention	81	83	89
		% pass rate	95	93	92
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	35	34	34
		% retention	91	100	100
		% pass rate	97	100	100
GCE A-level psychology	3	No. of starts	92	110	99
		% retention	98	93	92
		% pass rate	81	89	87
GCE A-level religious studies	3	No. of starts	23	17	21
		% retention	91	88	100
		% pass rate	100	93	95

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

***Quality of education and training***

110. Most teaching is good or better. Lessons have a clear structure and are well planned. Students produce good oral and written work. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods which engage students and stimulate their interest. Students are encouraged to enquire and reflect on their own learning. For example, in one psychology lesson, students were provided with different learning opportunities to investigate the factors that affect short-term and long-term memory. In another lesson, students worked together to understand models of memory using empirical evidence and then tested each other to evaluate the validity of the theory learned. In a geography lesson, students



were presented with a task that necessitated working collaboratively to judge and assess the potential effects of global warming. Students demonstrate a good ability to apply relevant evidence and compare and contrast effectively. In the best lessons, teachers generate a sense of fun and enjoyment of learning in which students remain focused. For example, in religious studies, a novel game was used to check and consolidate learning following work on the differences and similarities between Christianity and Buddhism.

111. In the weaker and less stimulating lessons, students are not given sufficient opportunities to test their understanding of the material. Students do not have discussions as the teacher provides all the information and some are bored. The more able students are often not challenged. The proportion of high grades achieved in many lessons is below the national average.

112. Monitoring of students' academic progress is good. Target setting is linked effectively with the reporting process and the review cycle. Student work is marked carefully and thoroughly, but feedback on marked work is insufficiently detailed in a minority of subjects. Students are not always provided with clear enough advice about how they might improve their work or clear targets for any subsequent assignments.

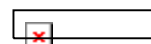
113. Student support is very good and is valued by students. Tutors are approachable and readily give of their time outside of timetabled hours. All students receive initial diagnostic testing for learning support needs, though not all accept the support which is offered. Advice for HE is good, and tutorials are well structured. All full-time students have individual learning plans in which targets are outlined and set. Access to support on personal issues is good. Attendance monitoring and checking is good and is accepted by students who recognise its value and effectiveness. Attendance during the inspection week was slightly higher than the national average.

114. Staff in humanities are experienced and well qualified. Subject support materials are very good with plentiful texts, thorough work materials, a developing intranet, a well-stocked learning resource centre and good access to computer facilities around the college. Classrooms are not fitted with interactive whiteboards and this inhibits the use of many technological aids for teaching and learning. References to appropriate websites are made in lessons and the use of the intranet by students looking at resource materials is good. Students make good use of the college intranet.

### ***Leadership and management***

115. Leadership and management are good. The operational management of the area is effective and staff work well as a team. They share good practice and learn from each other in a collaborative manner. Co-ordination of curriculum development, the organisation and management of meetings and the process of review and self-assessment are rigorous. Staff feel valued and involved in the decision-making process and feel that their opinions and views matter. Communications are effective and ensure that staff do not feel isolated. Equality and diversity are a focus for the area and any issues are challenged effectively in the classroom and within the wider college community. Staff regularly undertake professional development activities.

### **English, languages and communications**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- high pass rates in AS-level and GCE A-level English and GCE A-level communications studies courses

- effective development of personal and study skills in English and communications lessons
  
- good community provision for part-time language students
  
- good support for learning
  
- effective course management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- low pass rates on GCSE courses
  
- low proportion of high grades on AS-level and GCE A2 courses
  
- insufficiently challenging teaching in many lessons
  
- unsatisfactory languages provision for full-time students.

### ***Scope of provision***

116. The college provides a wide choice of full-time and part-time courses in English language and literature, English literature, communication studies and modern foreign languages. At the time of inspection, 351 students were studying AS level and GCE A level, 226 GCSE English and 26 GCSE or business Spanish. Numbers for full-time students taking AS-level and GCE A-level French, German and Spanish are low and declining. About 300 part-time students are learning French, German, Spanish, Greek, Italian and Japanese at various centres within the community.

### ***Achievement and standards***

117. Pass rates are very high in AS-level and GCE A-level English and GCE A-level communications studies. Overall retention rates are good. However, students achieve fewer high grades than average, particularly in AS-level communications studies. Recruitment to modern foreign languages courses is weak, with very small numbers, and pass rates are low. GCSE English results have improved, but are below the low national average. In 2004, out of 125 starters, 37 were successful. In GCSE Spanish, the retention rate was very low in 2003/04, and although the pass rate

improved in 2004, it was still below the national average. Achievement of advanced key skills communications is high.

118. Students develop good study skills in AS-level and GCE A2 English and communications studies. In many English lessons, responsibility is handed over to the students for preparing work collaboratively, then presenting findings to the rest of the class for discussion. They are encouraged to become independent students and develop their skills in research and analysis as well as communication. The majority of GCE A-level students progress to HE. Opportunities for gaining a level 3 key skills communications qualification are built into the programme.

***A sample of retention and pass rates in English, languages and communications, 2002 to 2004***

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Completion year:</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
GCSE English (A* to C)	2	No. of starts	118	206	125
		% retention	70	73	67
		% pass rate	25	21	44
GCSE Spanish (A* to C)	2	No. of starts	37	40	15
		% retention	78	90	47
		% pass rate	10	17	57
AS-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	143	103	153
		% retention	90	81	82
		% pass rate	82	92	100
GCE A2 English literature	3	No. of starts	71	44	37
		% retention	94	100	95
		% pass rate	100	100	97
AS-level communications studies	3	No. of starts	54	46	66
		% retention	76	72	86
		% pass rate	93	85	75
AS-level Spanish	3	No. of starts	14	26	6
		% retention	93	100	50
		% pass rate	85	62	67

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

***Quality of education and training***

119. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. The proportion of teaching which is good or better is significantly below the national average for this area of learning. Teaching in AS-level English is good. In the best lessons, enthusiastic teachers help students to become independent learners. Discussions are well managed and contributions are encouraged and valued. In one language and literature lesson on the poetry of Simon Armitage, students used a helpful checklist to prepare a detailed presentation on aspects of language, and ideas were effectively developed. In part-time languages lessons, students develop good communication skills. For example, in one lively evening class, students debated aspects of anti-social behaviour in Spanish.

120. In less effective lessons, students learn from one another, but with insufficient contribution from the teacher. In GCSE English and AS-level languages lessons good teaching materials are not always used effectively. Students are not sufficiently interested, and teachers fail to make

opportunities to develop students' communication skills are missed. Students often work in silence or in whispers. In communications studies, teachers do not set work which is sufficiently demanding for the students.

121. Work is marked helpfully and thoroughly and in most cases is returned promptly. Students are aware of what they need to do to succeed and improve. Systems for standardising marking and examination assessments are effective. Previous GCSE results determine target grades for GCE A-level students, and these are discussed in useful progress reviews with subject teachers and tutors. In retake GCSE English, however, staff are not sufficiently aware of students' previous grades and expectations are often unrealistic. Course handbooks contain assessment details, and grade criteria are generally clear.

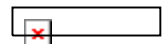
122. Support for students is good. They are helped to settle into new courses, and AS-level language students have extra timetabled help to bridge the gap from GCSE. Students have very effective individual support from tutors and good access to learning support and careers advice. Staff are approachable and give freely of their time. Students value tutorials, subject skills lessons, and informal one-to-one support. Both personal tutors and subject teachers set realistic targets for improvement and meet students regularly to discuss progress. Students understand what they should do to improve and receive good advice.

123. Teachers are well qualified and keep up to date. They have developed excellent teaching and learning materials for use in all areas. In English, writing frames help students structure their work. Some rooms are too small for the size of classes, but have attractive displays of students' work which create a pleasant working environment. The area has its own well-used computer room and an analogue language laboratory. However ILT, including video and satellite television, is not used enough to stimulate students. Students are able to broaden their learning through theatre and conference visits and trips abroad.

### ***Leadership and management***

124. The operational management of the curriculum is good. Team meetings are regular and minuted, though actions are rarely ascribed to individuals. Ideas and teaching materials are often shared. Communications are good between all staff. Staff feel well supported by their managers who observe lessons regularly and provide administrative support. The lesson observation system has not successfully addressed all teaching weaknesses. A number of new systems have been introduced to improve the curriculum. The self-assessment process is self-critical. Equal opportunities issues have a high prominence, and are built into schemes of work.

### **Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages**



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

#### ***Strengths***

- good development of students' language and literacy skills
  
- good teaching and learning on courses

- very good monitoring of students' progress and achievement
- effective course management.

### ***Weaknesses***

- unsatisfactory student attendance
- ineffective learning in too many lessons
- ineffective in-class literacy support
- insufficiently flexible provision.

### ***Scope of provision***

125. The college provides foundation learning in literacy and numeracy, ESOL, literacy and numeracy support. Some 61 students attend literacy and 11 students attend numeracy lessons on a part-time basis in the day and evening at the college. A total of 75 ESOL full-time students study at the college and 78 part time at 4 community centres. All ESOL courses are at entry level except one at level 1. Two of these courses are for women only and most are offered in the day except for one evening course in the evening at a community centre. About 250 students receive literacy and numeracy support; 45 students receive in-class literacy support.

### ***Achievement and standards***

126. Students develop their language and literacy skills well. Achievement of personal goals and individual targets is good. ESOL students make good progress and develop their language skills. They are able to function better in society and use acquired language in their lives. They gain self-confidence and self-esteem. Students' files and individual learning plans show good attainment. Literacy and numeracy students are better able or improve their skills for use in everyday life. Many acknowledge for the first time in their life the need to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. They are more effective in their jobs. For example, a student is now able to read health and safety notices at work. Another is now able to fill in forms independently and is proud that he no longer has to rely on his wife. Another employed student, having gained promotion, is now able to produce a first draft of a technical report for his employers. Numeracy students are now able to write cheques as well as understand their bills and bank statements.

127. Students receiving individual literacy and numeracy support make satisfactory progress. Some students who receive support from the specialist tutors in literacy and the main subject of study make very good progress. For example, a student who has multiple learning disabilities is now able to express himself very effectively with the support of a tutor who is well versed in performing arts

and literacy support. He is also now able to plan his assignments and wordprocess them correctly as well as use software to check his spelling and grammar. As a result, he has achieved distinctions and merits on his course, which was beyond his expectations. Students who receive in-class literacy support do not make sufficient progress. The standard of their work does not always improve and they continue to make the same mistakes. Student attendance is unsatisfactory. Overall, attendance rates at inspection were 66% but particularly poor in ESOL at 57%.

### ***Quality of education and training***

128. Teaching is good on language and literacy courses. Literacy teachers use a variety of short activities to break down the tasks into small sections to ensure that all students learn the essentials of reading. They make good use of learning materials. The students see the immediate relevance of tasks to their daily lives. For example, the students learn to read specific information about National Health Service (NHS) appointments and bus timetables. Teaching in one-to-one support sessions taught by the tutors with expertise in vocational areas is very good. The students develop an appropriate level of skills to complete their assignments

129. The planning of ESOL lessons is effective and thorough. Equality and diversity are very well promoted in lessons. The teachers plan a variety of activities, and use a range of stimulating materials. Teachers skilfully encourage students to participate. However, students are not given sufficient guidance on how they could continue to learn beyond their lessons and at home.

130. The teaching of numeracy and for those who receive one-to-one support sessions is satisfactory. However, learning is ineffective in too many lessons. Too many of the satisfactory lessons do not challenge the more able students. In these lessons, the focus is on completing tasks and worksheets, not developing skills. In addition, record keeping is poor.

131. Monitoring of students' progress and achievement overall is very good. Screening for numeracy and literacy is prompt and helps to identify student needs accurately to place them on appropriate courses. Individual learning plans and student diaries are good, and are well maintained by students and teachers. They are detailed and set targets that are specific and reviewed regularly. Teachers make good use of learning style questionnaires to develop lesson plans, activities and learning materials. They effectively encourage all students to evaluate their own learning. Progress reviews are regular and involve students who are fully aware of their achievements. Students who receive one-to-one study support receive detailed feedback on their progress.

132. The range of courses in foundation is insufficiently flexible. Demand for ESOL has grown substantially. Part-time courses are available in the day, but not in the evening. Many ESOL students are not prepared or are unable to attend year-long courses. Registers show large numbers recruited, but only few students attend all lessons regularly. The college does not offer sufficient short courses, or opportunities for those who wish to progress on to higher level study. The college does not provide specific language support for bilingual students.

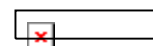
133. In-class literacy support is ineffective. The planning of support is not linked always to the study area. The identification of needs is not specific. The role of the learning assistants is unclear. Support tends to be of a general nature, for example, to help the students complete their portfolios and set tasks. Students do not develop their skills. Many continue to make the same mistakes in spelling, poor sentence structure and grammar. Many students have to wait too long before receiving support. One-to-one literacy and numeracy support and help in the drop-in workshop is satisfactory.

### ***Leadership and management***

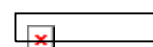
134. Leadership and management of the courses and support is satisfactory. The approach to equality and diversity in lessons is good. Communications are good. Team meetings are regular and staff are well informed. Teaching observations are well planned and staff get detailed and helpful feedback. Staff development is good, and is linked to appraisal. Staff work well in teams and are fully involved in course design. Managers receive regular reports on students' attendance. A thorough

infrastructure of support and monitoring mechanisms is now in place. Staff are adequately qualified and are deployed effectively. There is good sharing of practice. Experienced staff act as mentors to new recruits. The skills for life strategy and development plan has recently been developed. It recognises the need to develop a college wide approach to skills for life and to build community partnerships.

#### Part D: College data



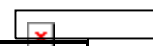
**Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2003/04**



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	12	56
2	33	13
3	55	14
4/5	0	2
Other	0	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: provided by the college in spring 2005*

**Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2003/04**



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments (%)
Science and mathematics	904	102	6
Land-based provision	54	32	1
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	17	36	0
Business administration, management and professional	623	503	7
Information and communication technology	506	1,726	15
Retailing, customer service and transportation	1	29	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	422	196	4

Hairdressing and beauty therapy	151	391	3
Health, social care and public services	725	573	8
Visual and performing arts and media	823	515	8
Humanities	1,430	887	14
English, languages and communication	3,336	579	25
Foundation programmes	498	649	7
Unknown AOL	4	284	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,494</b>	<b>6,502</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: provided by the college in spring 2005

**Table 3: Retention and achievement**

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		2001	2002	2003	2001	2002	2003
<b>1</b>	Starters excluding transfers	187	158	386	558	1,380	1,682
	Retention rate %	84	88	93	78	78	88
	National average %	75	74	75	73	74	71
	Pass rate %	89	81	83	87	91	77
	National average %	64	65	73	68	68	76
<b>2</b>	Starters excluding transfers	769	895	1,233	505	386	409
	Retention rate %	82	76	81	80	74	75
	National average %	70	70	70	70	69	68
	Pass rate %	70	75	74	75	84	77
	National average %	67	68	73	65	69	73
<b>3</b>	Starters excluding transfers	4,191	3,839	3,457	698	658	589
	Retention rate %	80	85	86	76	74	82
	National average %	67	75	75	67	69	67
	Pass rate %	80	82	84	83	79	84
	National average %	70	73	76	65	69	73
<b>4/5</b>	Starters excluding transfers	0	1	0	60	78	88



	Retention rate %		0		73	71	65
	National average %				65	67	70
	Pass rate %				91	64	77
	National average %				50	48	56

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data 2000 to 2002: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, Learning and Skills Council, September 2003.

2. College rates for 2000/01 to 2002/03: *College ISR*.

\* numbers too low to provide a valid calculation

\*\* data unavailable

**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)	73	24	3	107
Level 2 (intermediate)	64	23	13	39
Level 1 (foundation)	59	23	18	17
Other sessions	57	43	0	14
<b>Totals</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>177</b>

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