



South Birmingham College



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Inspection report

Audience Post-sixteen	Published December 2005	Provider reference 130461
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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	South Birmingham
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Alan Birks
Address of college:	Hall Green Campus, Cole Bank Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 8ES
Telephone number:	0121 694 5000
Fax number:	0121 694 5053
Chair of governors:	John James
Unique reference number:	130461
Name of lead inspector:	Charles Hooper ALI
Dates of inspection:	7 – 11 November 2005

Background of the organisation

1. South Birmingham College is a large general further education college. The college mission is to 'provide high quality vocational education and training opportunities in response to local need and which puts learners first'.
2. The college operates from five major sites and over one hundred smaller ones mainly in the south eastern area of Birmingham. Since the last inspection, the college has developed extensive new accommodation for many of its courses. The college has a particularly strong community focus and one third of its provision is delivered in community venues. The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status for childcare.
3. Some 90% of the learners aged 16 to 18 and 60% of the adult learners are from Birmingham. Many are from inner city wards which are ranked in the top one hundred in terms of indices of multiple deprivation. Nearly 50% of the students are white with Indian (18%) and Pakistani (13%) being the main non-white student groups. Representation of non-white groups in the local population is 29.6% compared with 9.1% for England. There are slightly more male learners overall with 63% of the learners aged 16 to 18 being male. The proportion of school leavers with five or more grades A* to C in Birmingham is 51.2% which is lower than the national average for England of 53.7%.
4. At the time of the inspection there were 6,342 learners aged 16 to 18 and 10,744 adults on courses leading to externally accredited qualifications. Additionally, 559 learners were enrolled on courses not leading to externally accredited qualifications. The college manages 161 work-based learners on apprenticeship programmes and over 1,100 learners on Train-2-Gain (Employer Training Pilots). Most of the curriculum is now vocationally-based. Since the last inspection, the college has withdrawn from offering GCE-A levels, other than community languages, and GCSEs, other than for mathematics, English and community languages. In 2003/04, approximately 50% of the total enrolments were on level 1 courses and 87% of learners were adults.

Scope of the inspection

5. In deciding the scope of this inspection, inspectors took account of: the college's previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk); the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans; comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC); and data on enrolments and learners' achievements over the period since the last inspection. This inspection focused on the following aspects:
 - overall effectiveness of the college and its capacity to improve further
 - achievements and standards
 - quality of provision
 - leadership and management

- specialist provision in: health and social care, construction, ICT, performing arts, foundation for life and work including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), business and Train-2-Gain employer training.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good : grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Good : grade 2
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Achievements and standards	Good : grade 2
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Quality of provision	Good : grade 2
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Leadership and management	Good : grade 2
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Note: Where contributory grades have been awarded, they are shown in the relevant sections of the report. Contributory grades represent the judgement of the team that the quality of the aspect of provision indicated by the grade differs from the grade overall.

Curriculum areas

Health and social care	Outstanding : grade 1
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Construction	Satisfactory : grade 3
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ICT	Good : grade 2
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Music and performing arts	Good : grade 2
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Preparation for life and work	Good : grade 2
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Business	Good : grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: grade 2

6. The college has continued to improve since the last inspection and is now good. Success rates continue to be above national averages for adults at levels 1 to 3 and for all learners on short courses. Success rates are also high on Train-2-Gain courses for employed adults. In 2004/05, the retention rates for learners aged 16 to 18 improved markedly and pass rates were high on many courses. Learners develop good practical, personal and social skills and adults on the Train-2-Gain courses develop good workplace skills.
7. Teaching and learning have improved substantially since the last inspection and are now good. Lessons are planned carefully with stimulating activities. Learners enjoy their studies and behaviour is good. In a few lessons, teaching does not fully meet the needs of individual learners. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Accommodation and learning resources are good. Employers and parents are kept fully informed of learners' progress.
8. The good range of courses meets the needs of a diverse local community and local businesses. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Students have access to a well organised enrichment programme. Good partnership working with schools provides a wide, flexible and highly valued 14 to 16 curriculum.
9. The provision of support, information, advice and guidance is good. Initial assessment effectively identifies additional learning needs and learning support is effective. Students are supported by a well structured tutorial programme and the effective use of individual learning plans in setting and reviewing progress. Effective monitoring arrangements have significantly improved attendance.
10. Leadership and management are good. The principal provides clear leadership and is well supported by managers and governors. Weaknesses at the last inspection have been addressed. There is a strong culture of identifying areas for improvement. The college is very responsive to national priorities and local need. Promotion of equal opportunities is exemplary. Significant investment has provided high quality accommodation and equipment. The college provides a safe environment for its learners. The management of the college finances is satisfactory. The college provides good value for money.

Capacity to improve

Good: grade 2

11. The college has developed robust systems to analyse its own performance. It is continually improving the quality of education and training. Lessons are observed regularly and staff development and rigorous monitoring address

weaknesses. The quality of teaching has improved and standards are continuing to rise.

12. The college's self-assessment was mainly accurate and identified correctly the main strengths and areas for improvement. In some cases, inspectors found further progress had been made since the report was written. Achievement rates for 16 to 18 year old learners have not risen fast enough since the last inspection but retention rates improved significantly in 2004-05. New provision in construction experienced initial difficulties but effective action has now been taken to bring about improvement. The college did not meet its income target in 2004-05 and there were problems with its management information system. Managers and governors are clear about why this situation arose and effective action has been taken to address the situation.

The effectiveness of the steps taken by the college to promote improvement since the last inspection

13. The college has made good efforts to address the issues raised in the inspection in 2001. The curriculum for learners aged 16 to 18 now focuses on vocational education and retention rates improved significantly in 2004-05. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. There is better monitoring of provision across sites. The college has made significant investment to improve accommodation for teaching and learning. Access for students with limited mobility is now good. Internal verification processes are satisfactory.

Key strengths of the college

Strengths

- good leadership and management
- strong culture of continuous improvement
- rigorous self-assessment
- substantial improvement in quality of teaching and learning
- continuing high success rates for adults
- effective curriculum management
- very effective partnership working
- extensive range of courses
- good learning environment
- outstanding promotion of inclusiveness and equality of opportunity

Areas for improvement

The college should address:

- success rates for learners aged 16 to 18
- apprenticeship achievement rates in construction
- under-developed teaching of key skills
- inconsistency of group and individual tutorials

Main findings

Achievements and standards

Good: grade 2

14. From 2001/02 to 2003/04 success rates for adults have been significantly above national averages on level 1, 2 and 3 courses. The success rates have also improved from year to year as identified in the self-assessment. For learners aged 16-18, the success rates were significantly below the national averages in 2003/04 on level 2 and 3 courses, despite the rates improving from 2001/02 to 2003/04. For all learners, the success rates on short courses in 2003/04 were significantly above the national averages and have improved markedly from 2001/02 to 2003/04. Success rates are high on Train-2-Gain security guard courses for employed adults. The achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is good in health and social care but in construction it is slow. Learner's practical, personal and social skills are developed well on, for example, construction, music and performing arts and ICT courses. This was not identified in the self-assessment. Adults on the Train-2-Gain courses are developing good workplace skills.
15. The retention and achievement rates for adult learners have been above national averages at all levels and have improved over the last three years. The good achievement rates for adults were a key strength at the last inspection. The achievement rates for learners aged 16-18 were below national averages at levels 2 and 3 up to 2003/04. College data for 2004/05 shows some good achievement rates in business, ICT, health and social care and literacy and numeracy and ESOL courses. There are some low achievement rates on construction courses. Retention rates for all learners have improved over the last four years at each level and college data for 2004/05 shows marked improvements in the retention rates of learners aged 16 to 18 with an improvement of eight percentage points at both levels 2 and 3 from 2003/04.
16. Female learners achieve better than male learners at all levels except for male learners aged 16 to 18 at level 1. The success rates of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds were broadly at or above national averages in 2003/04 with the exception of Black African learners at level 1 and most learners from minority ethnic backgrounds aged 16 to 18 at level 3 who are below national averages.
17. Attendance in the lessons observed during the inspection was 78% compared to 72% at the last inspection. In business, the punctuality of learners in a few lessons is poor.

Quality of provision

Good: grade 2

18. Teaching and learning are good. The college places significant emphasis on improving teaching and learning. The college's lesson observations show a marked improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection and this

was confirmed by inspectors. The self-assessment acknowledges that further work is required to ensure that all teaching is consistently good or better. There is extensive staff development to promote teaching that meets the needs of individual learners. The benefits of this training have yet to be seen.

19. A comprehensive and robust lesson observation programme is carried out by a team of trained observers. Sound arrangements are in place to moderate and validate the grades. Inspectors are in broad agreement with the college's assessment of teaching. A teaching and learning improvement team works with individuals and teaching teams to help them improve and a further dedicated team supports the large number of new construction staff. The outcomes from lesson observations are used effectively to inform performance management and staff development. The college makes insufficient use of observations to evaluate the quality of the tutorial provision. Learners' views are actively canvassed and they show high levels of satisfaction with teaching.
20. Most lessons are planned carefully with clear learning objectives. The management of lessons is good. A good range of activities is used effectively to stimulate and motivate learners. Learners are focused, work purposefully, enjoy their studies and their behaviour is good. In a few lessons, teaching is insufficiently challenging and more able students do not always have the opportunity to progress at a faster rate. In a few lessons, learning is not checked frequently enough. Teachers are enthusiastic and demonstrate good subject knowledge. Learning resources are good. The college's virtual learning environment is used effectively in some curriculum areas but is not exploited fully. For work-based learners there are good links between learning in college and in the workplace. The teaching of key skills has improved since the last inspection and it is now more vocationally related. Learners aged 14 to 16 develop good occupational skills whilst continuing with their general education.
21. Assessment is well planned, regular and fair. Most teachers mark learners' work promptly with useful and informative comments and clear guidance on what learners need to do to improve. Learner progress is monitored carefully. Internal verification procedures are sound. Employers are well informed on the performance and attendance of work-based learners. Parents of younger learners are invited to regular parents' evenings. A good range of enrichment activities effectively help to develop learners' personal and occupational skills.
22. The good range of courses meets the needs of a diverse local community and local businesses as noted in the self-assessment. The college works closely with the local Learning and Skills Council, colleges and other strategic partners to provide an effective and co-ordinated curriculum for Birmingham and Solihull. Many learners take full advantage of the good progression routes from entry level to level 4. The college's approach to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. Many learners have been successfully recruited through the highly effective and very responsive strategies to meet their need. These strategies were targeted at disadvantaged groups, non-traditional learners and black and

ethnic minority groups from business and the local community. This included a rapid response to develop an effective programme for redundant MG Rover workers.

23. A well planned, centrally devised programme effectively supports curriculum area arrangements to enrich the experiences of all learners. Many activities focus effectively on developing social and life skills and healthy lifestyles. The college works effectively with partner schools to provide a wide and flexible 14 to 16 curriculum which is valued highly by learners, schools and parents. Well managed comprehensive child protection arrangements are in place.
24. The college's provision for information, advice and guidance is good as noted in the self-assessment. A full range of support measures is provided and is well co-ordinated by central service teams. Learners value the support they receive. It is very sensitively provided and gives them confidence to progress and achieve their goals. Responsive and personalised support is also provided for learners at the community learning centres and for non-traditional learners such as those on the Train-2-Gain courses.
25. Robust arrangements for initial assessment have identified an increasing number of learners who need additional support with their learning. Good quality individual learning support is provided during lessons and in well resourced learning development centres. The self-assessment acknowledges that there is not enough support for all learners who need it. Learner induction is effective. The well-structured tutorial programme and individual learning plans are used well to set targets and review progress. The lack of consistency of tutorials is an issue noted in the self-assessment. Learners receive frequent individual tutorials, often exceeding the allocated time. Effective monitoring arrangements have significantly improved attendance.

Leadership and management

Good: grade 2

26. Leadership and management are good. The principal provides clear leadership and is well supported by senior and middle managers and by the college governors. Governors monitor carefully the performance of curriculum areas. Curriculum management is good. Success rates for adults are good and improving for learners aged 16 to 18. Weaknesses in teaching and quality assurance at the last inspection have been addressed. The college is good at identifying areas of weakness and taking action to put things right. Communication is good and there is improved consistency in the implementation of policies and procedures across different sites. The self-assessment report is accurate and actions relating to it have successfully led to improvements.
27. The response of the college to the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act has been very good. There is a strong focus throughout the college on the promotion of equal opportunities. Governors and managers are well informed

about the performance of different groups of learners. Action is taken to address under-performance and this has resulted in improvement for many minority ethnic learners. The college is aware of the need to further improve the performance of male learners. All areas of the college are now fully accessible by those with limited mobility. All staff and governors have received training on child protection procedures and the college provides a safe environment for its learners.

28. The college is responsive to national priorities and local need. It works well with schools to develop and deliver vocational provision for young people aged 14 to 16 and has responded well to the needs of employers. The college has built successfully on the strength identified at the last inspection of working with local communities to widen participation in education and training.
29. Accommodation has been significantly improved since the last inspection. New facilities and refurbishment of older buildings has provided a high standard of accommodation for teaching and learning. In a few cases, the layout or size of the room restricts the learning activity. Resources to support learning are good and the college has invested in modern specialist equipment for its vocational curriculum. Staff qualifications and expertise are good in most areas. The college experienced difficulty recruiting appropriately qualified teachers in construction and intensive staff development for new staff was provided. The college recruitment procedures ensure that staff are representative of the communities they serve.
30. Financial management is satisfactory. Capital projects have been well managed. The college failed to meet its income target in 2004-05. The reasons for this are well understood by managers and governors and appropriate action has been taken. The college provides good value for money.

Curriculum area inspections

Health and social care

Outstanding: grade 1

Context

31. Full-time courses in early years and care are offered at levels 1 to 3. The college has expanded its NVQ provision since the last inspection and has provision at levels 2 to 4. It also has registered manager awards, a certificate in youth work, counselling courses at levels 2 and 3 and 25 apprentices in early years. There is a range of short courses and access to higher education courses. There are 113 learners aged 16 to 18 and 115 adults on full-time courses and 463 learners on part-time courses.

STRENGTHS

- very high achievement rates on NVQ courses
- good framework achievement for apprentices
- good vocational skill development of adults
- lively and particularly effective teaching and learning
- highly effective and responsive partnerships
- excellent range of provision
- very good support for individual learners
- outstanding leadership and management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

No significant areas for improvement

Achievements and standards

32. Achievement rates are well above national rates except for counselling, which matches the national rate. Achievement rates are particularly high on NVQs at all levels. The achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is good. Adults develop a good range of skills which enable them to make improvements in their occupational practice. Learners' written work and portfolios are at least satisfactory and are often good. Learners work with self-discipline and demonstrate effective collaborative skills. They often take responsibility for managing their own learning and develop good independent research skills.

Quality of provision

33. Teaching is good and is often lively and imaginative. Well planned lessons incorporate an effective variety of activities whilst also meeting individual needs. Group work is well structured and the management of lessons is effective. Lessons have a sense of purpose and focus. Teachers and learners make good links to occupational practices. Assessment practices are thorough

and are suitably adapted, where necessary, to meet individual needs. Learning is well supported by the available resources and accommodation.

34. Highly effective, responsive partnerships and an excellent range of courses provide learners with many opportunities for success and progression. Successful initiatives include measures to widen participation, good provision for learners aged 14 to 16, successful partnership agreements and a Centre of Vocational Excellence for early years. Courses are appropriately adapted for particular groups such as registered managers for residential child care and General Practice surgery workers. Some innovative course are offered such as vocational courses with ESOL and personal safety awareness. Positive action is taken to develop supervisory and managerial skills in learners from black and minority ethnic groups. Many learners progress successfully through several course levels.
35. Learners benefit from a high level of individual support. Successful strategies to support academic progress include the effective curriculum resource centre, three-weekly NVQ workshops and placement surgeries. Great care is taken in monitoring the welfare and safe working practices of apprentices. Appropriate additional screening and/ or individual support is provided including a substantial amount of in-lesson support for full-time learners aged 16 to 18.

Leadership and management

36. Leadership and management are outstanding. Teams work together cohesively and have a strong sense of purpose. There is a culture of continuous improvement. The self-assessment matches closely with the findings of inspectors. Progress against the action plan is monitored monthly. Staff development and opportunities for occupational updating are good. There is a strong emphasis on the promotion of equal opportunities.

Construction

Satisfactory: grade 3

Context

37. Construction courses include carpentry and joinery, brickwork, wall and floor tiling, plastering, painting and decorating, plumbing, gas, heating and ventilation, air conditioning, refrigeration, construction and civil engineering. There are 1044 learners aged 16 to 18, 2163 adults, 86 apprentices and 67 learners aged 14 to 16.

STRENGTHS

- good practical skill development
- excellent practical workshop facilities
- exceptionally wide range of courses
- good management of the development of the new construction facility

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- low achievement rates on some courses
- slow achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- uninspiring teaching in some lessons

Achievement and standards

38. Many courses have improving retention and achievement rates and success rates are now satisfactory. However, achievement rates in the construction award and the NVQ2 in wood occupations are low. The achievement of apprenticeship frameworks remains low and often takes longer than identified. Retention rates are poor for apprentices. Learners' develop good levels of practical skills. Most learners hold a health and safety Construction Skills Certification Scheme card. Attendance is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

39. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A wide variety of teaching techniques are employed. In the better lessons, learners are challenged and constant checking confirms learners' knowledge and understanding. Learners are separated into different ability groups and the content is suitably adapted for the different groups. Some teaching is uninspiring. The less successful lessons focus too much on the dissemination of information and learners remain passive. All rooms are equipped with modern teaching aids but only a few teachers can use them effectively.
40. Assessment and monitoring of learner progress are satisfactory. Initial assessment is used appropriately to identify individual learner needs. There are sufficient assessors to ensure that college and work-based assessments occur at the appropriate time. Internal verification ensures that assessment is

rigorous and reliable. Teachers maintain comprehensive records which track learner progress effectively. Additional wall charts help learners to judge progress relative to their peers. Portfolio development is satisfactory and improving. Evidence is routinely gathered and appropriately confirmed by witness testimony and/or photographic evidence. Marking of assessments is thorough and up-to-date.

41. The excellent practical workshops have been developed as part of the newly built construction facility. They are spacious and equipped with modern industry standard equipment which helps learners to develop appropriate occupational skills in a realistic work environment. An exceptionally wide range of courses is offered and includes a wide breadth of construction trades. A range of construction trade courses was run at short notice for redundant MG Rover workers. Learner support is satisfactory. The admissions process ensures that all learners are screened to determine their individual support requirements. Additional support is provided both within lessons and at drop-in lessons in the twilight period and on Saturdays. The student services team, based within construction, offers a wide range of suitable services including confidential counselling.

Leadership and management

42. Leadership and management are good. The development of the new construction provision has been managed well. A modern construction facility has been developed and provision from another college has been integrated successfully. Retention and achievement rates are improving. Recruitment has increased by over 400% in three years. Good support is provided for the large number of new teachers. A robust programme of lesson observations is used well to aid the development of teachers. The self-assessment was accurate and self critical.

Information and communication technology

Good: grade 2

Context

43. Currently there are 1321 enrolments on ICT courses and over 70% are adults. Most adults are studying 'using information technology' part-time courses located in a range of community venues. Most learners aged 16 to 18 are studying vocational courses leading to 'IT practitioner' qualifications at foundation, first and national levels on a main college site.

STRENGTHS

- high retention and achievement rates on most courses
- much good teaching
- good progression
- good community provision
- outstanding curriculum management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- lack of challenge for level 3 learners

Achievement and standards

44. There are high retention and achievement rates on most courses. They have improved considerably over the last three years. Learners are confident users of computers. They develop practical IT skills well and often work with enthusiasm on tasks set. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good.

Quality of provision

45. Teaching and learning are good as identified in the college's own teaching and learning observation process. Lessons are managed effectively. Learners are well behaved and work very hard developing their IT skills. Teachers communicate steps clearly using the data projectors in most lessons. Directed questioning is used well to check learner understanding. However, there is a lack of challenge in some level 3 lessons with some learners completing mundane tasks that require little thought and all learners progressing at the same rate. Good use is made of electronic resources to support learners but the layout of most classrooms makes it difficult to organise group work. Learner's work is marked thoroughly. Teachers are well qualified and have good subject knowledge.
46. Progression routes are good and many learners progress from one level to the next. For example, 66% of learners on the national IT practitioner course progressed from the first diploma, and 64% of those on the first diploma have progressed from the foundation. There is good community provision that is responsive to local needs. The large number of community learning venues,

including a mobile classroom, are well managed and are successful in attracting traditionally difficult to reach learners and developing their skills in using computers. New courses are being piloted to better meet the needs of the community. These include an e-citizen course for adults and a new apprenticeship programme for IT support technicians.

47. Support and guidance is good. Initial assessment is effective in placing learners on appropriate courses and identifying the needs of learners. Individual learners are set appropriate short term goals and targets. The beneficial in-lesson support for learners includes the good use of additional support workers. A homework club makes effective use of previous level 4 learners to support current learners.

Leadership and management

48. Leadership and management of the curriculum area are outstanding. An enthusiastic management team have used self-assessment to successfully introduce many initiatives to improve performance. Staff have been reorganised into small focused teams with clear roles and responsibilities and a shared vision for improvement. Communication is very good and is enhanced by regular meetings focused on improving teaching and learning. Teachers and managers, many of whom are bilingual, are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. They appreciate the open management style and feel they are able to contribute towards target setting and decision making.

Music and Performing Arts

Good: grade 2

Context

49. The college offers mostly full-time courses in music and performing arts at levels 2 and 3. Courses include BTEC first diplomas in performing arts and music, national diplomas in music practice, performing arts and music technology and an NCFE certificate in music technology. At the time of inspection, 903 learners were enrolled with 312 on level 1, 204 on level 2 and 281 on level 3 courses. Some 64% of the learners are aged 16 to 18.

STRENGTHS

- good development of practical, personal and social skills
- good teaching
- excellent range of enrichment activities
- well designed curriculum with good progression routes
- excellent accommodation and specialist resources for music
- good curriculum management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- underdeveloped cohesion between music and performing arts
- inadequate accommodation and resources for performing arts

Achievement and standards

50. Overall, success rates are satisfactory. Success rates for learners aged 16 to 18 have improved over the last three years particularly at levels 2 and 3. Achievement rates at levels 1 and 2 have improved over the same period for all learners, but significantly for those aged 16 to 18. Learners develop good practical skills and are able to work effectively in groups in lessons, rehearsals and performance, and as independent learners. Learners enjoy their work, are fully involved and show respect for others. Attendance and retention, identified as weaknesses in the self-assessment, have improved this year.

Quality of provision

51. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned. Teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to test understanding and improve learning and to integrate theory into practical work successfully. Learners benefit from a wide range of appropriate activities in lessons. Teachers employ effective strategies for managing demanding groups. Thoughtful teaching helps learners to improve their listening and discussion skills. In the best lessons, teachers set appropriate and challenging tasks and give good, clear individual and group feedback that clearly guides learners to improve their work.

52. Assessment is good. Interesting and well designed assignments encourage learners to produce high standards of practical and written work. Peer evaluation is used effectively to improve learner skills. Appropriate initial selection, induction and assessment activities ensure that learners benefit from effective levels of personal support and guidance.
53. A wide range of specialist courses at levels 2 and 3 provide good and well used progression routes giving learners clear direction, focus and motivation. Many learners progress to employment in the creative industries and to higher education. The extensive range of excellent enrichment activities develop and extend practical skills and give learners opportunities to work in the creative industries. Learners also have excellent opportunities to gain appropriate and realistic work experiences.

Leadership and management

54. Curriculum management is good. Managers set a clear direction which is communicated effectively to staff who fully support the drive to improve standards. Specialist resources and technical support for music are excellent. Studios equipped to professional standards motivate learners and enable them to develop skills to a high standard. Learners greatly benefit from the current industry experience of teachers. Studio spaces for small scale drama and dance performances and lessons are inadequate. Working practices and relationships between music and performing arts to support learning are underdeveloped. Many of the issues identified as weaknesses in the self-assessment have been addressed successfully.

Preparation for life and work

Good: grade 2

Context

55. Courses are offered from pre-entry to level 2 and take place on the main college sites and in a variety of community venues. The college has significantly expanded this provision since the last inspection. ESOL learners can take a range of vocational options and all full-time ESOL learners have one lesson a week of ICT. There are 1096 learners on courses with 61% on ESOL courses. Most are adults.

STRENGTHS

- high achievement rates
- good development of learners' skills
- highly responsive range of ESOL provision
- good pastoral and learning support
- good curriculum management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- insufficient account taken of some learners' needs

Achievement and standards

56. Learners' achievements are good. Achievement rates are good on both externally accredited and college certificated courses. Achievement and retention rates on long and short ESOL courses are much improved. The achievement rates for literacy and numeracy are good. For many learners this is the first time they have achieved a qualification. Learners in receipt of learning support make good progress. There was a good progression rate onto higher level courses in 2004-05.

Quality of provision

57. Teaching and learning are at least satisfactory. There is good development of learners' skills. The use of group work in mixed nationality lessons enables learners to practise their English in a supportive environment. Literacy skills are developed effectively. Newly introduced classes for pre-entry ESOL learners successfully teach them how to use and understand written English. The good mix of activities engages and motivates learners. Learners state that they gain in confidence after a short time attending lessons. In some lessons, insufficient account is taken of learners' individual needs. Learners are given the same tasks to complete irrespective of their individual skills and abilities and in some lessons the more able learners are not sufficiently challenged. Assessment is satisfactory.

58. Standards of equipment and resources are satisfactory. A good range of learning materials is available on the college Skills for Life website. Rooms are pleasantly furnished and many have good displays of learners' work. Teaching staff are well-qualified and are able to relate well to the learners' needs. There is a highly responsive range of ESOL provision which takes place in a variety of community venues and main college sites and at times to suit learners. The response to requests for courses is good. For example, a course was provided for Polish bus drivers to improve their language skills.
59. Pastoral and learning support is good. Additional learning support in lessons and in the learning development centre is effective although it is not always available when requested. There is good use of multi-lingual support assistants and other translators. Many ESOL learners take part in a wide range of enrichment activities which helps them to settle into the wider community.

Leadership and management

60. The management of the area is good and has responded well to the need to expand the provision. The effective monitoring of attendance and punctuality has led to considerable improvements. There is a comprehensive programme of staff training and meetings for both full and part-time staff. The induction of the considerable numbers of new staff is good. Staff are fully involved in rigorous self-assessment which reflects many of the inspectors' findings. The quality assurance procedures are effective and the promotion of equality and diversity is good.

Business

Good: grade 2

Context

61. The college offers full-time courses in administration from entry through to level 3. First and national business qualifications are offered on a full-time basis, mainly to learners aged 16 to 18. Learners can also take access to higher education courses. Part-time courses include NVQs in administration, customer service, accountancy and management, some of which are assessed exclusively in the workplace. The college also provides management training for local employers and a wide range of part-time, short courses, for trade union representatives. There are approximately 850 full-time and 2,150 part-time enrolments of whom approximately 800 are learners aged 16 to 18 and 2,200 are adults.

STRENGTHS

- high retention and achievement rates
- good teaching and learning
- effective learning support
- good leadership and management

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- poor punctuality for some learners aged 16 to 18
- inconsistent implementation of key skills

Achievement and standards

62. There are high and improving retention and achievement rates. On the BTEC national business award, for example, achievement rates have risen from 34% in 2002/03 to 73% in 2004/05. Retention rates have improved from 76% to 89% over the same period. Similar improvements have occurred on the BTEC first diploma. Achievement rates on NVQ courses are high. There are very high retention and achievement rates on the short management and trades union courses. Attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality at the start of the day is poor for some learners aged 16 to 18.

Quality of provision

63. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide range of appropriate teaching methods. Teachers successfully engage their learners in the lesson activities and provide them with an interesting and challenging range of tasks. The standard of the learners' work is good and they receive detailed and constructive feedback from their assessors. The implementation of key skills has been inconsistent as noted in the self-assessment. Although steps have been taken to improve the teaching of communication skills, the teaching of numeracy skills is weak.

64. The accommodation and equipment are satisfactory. IT and library resources are appropriate and accessible and the new administration bureau provides learners with a realistic working environment. Staff are well qualified and sufficient in number. There is an appropriate range of courses with clear progression routes for learners.
65. Learners receive good support. Their needs are accurately identified through initial assessment and comprehensive ESOL and basic skills support are provided where necessary. Teaching assistants help in many lessons and provide valuable support for individual learners. All learners have frequent one-to-one tutorials and have access to a well-resourced homework club.

Leadership and management

66. Leadership and management are good as identified in the self-assessment. Managers and course teams agree annual targets for learner retention and achievement. Courses that fail to meet the targets are subject to a rigorous internal review. Some poorly performing courses have been replaced with new courses that better meet learner needs. Learner progress is closely monitored against their qualification targets and any 'at risk' learners identified. The self-assessment process is rigorous and reliable and the resulting report was accurate in its identification of strengths and areas for improvement.

Learners' achievements

Table 1

Success rates on mainstream level 1 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age. 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-1: College success rate for level 1 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
1 Long	01/02	878	50	49	1	4,672	67	50	17
	02/03	1,023	53	55	-2	6,233	68	54	14
	03/04	1,249	58	59	-1	5,250	74	58	16
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	115	46	50	-4	12	33	42	-8
	02/03	144	67	56	10	5	60	47	
	03/04	70	69	62	7	4	100	55	
NVQs	01/02	41	51	54	-3	688	78	60	18
	02/03	32	22	58	-36	681	76	66	10
	03/04	47	23	60	-36	549	73	69	4
Other	01/02	722	50	48	2	3,972	65	50	15
	02/03	847	52	55	-2	5,547	67	54	13
	03/04	1,132	59	59	0	4,697	74	58	16

Table 2

Success rates on mainstream Level 2 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age. 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-2: College success rate for level 2 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
2 Long	01/02	1,310	47	48	-1	2,329	58	48	10
	02/03	1,123	41	51	-10	2,866	63	50	13
	03/04	770	49	55	-6	2,354	64	54	10
GCSEs	01/02	618	53	54	-1	181	51	53	-2
	02/03	499	52	58	-6	193	45	54	-10
	03/04	207	64	64	0	107	83	58	25
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	204	38	50	-12	37	41	47	-6
	02/03	139	35	53	-18	12	42	50	-9
	03/04	49	33	57	-25	1	100	57	
NVQs	01/02	133	44	39	5	1,342	64	43	20
	02/03	149	44	41	3	1,790	75	53	22
	03/04	107	47	50	-3	1,250	68	55	13
Other	01/02	355	42	45	-3	769	50	48	2
	02/03	336	27	48	-20	871	43	48	-5
	03/04	407	45	51	-6	996	56	52	4

Table 3

Success rates on mainstream level 3 qualifications, by qualification type, expected end year and age. 2001/02 to 2003/04, compared to the national rates for colleges of a similar type.

Table S-3: College success rate for level 3 long qualifications by qualification type, expected end year and age

Notional Level	Exp End Year	16-18				19+			
		Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff	Starts - Transfers	College Rate	National Rate	Diff
3 Long	01/02	1,229	39	55	-16	1,961	51	47	4
	02/03	815	47	58	-11	1,668	53	49	3
	03/04	683	47	60	-13	1,558	55	52	4
A/A2 levels	01/02	347	48	75	-27	161	52	58	-6
	02/03	137	72	79	-7	103	80	65	15
	03/04	76	78	83	-5	38	84	68	16
AS levels	01/02	366	36	55	-19	166	37	45	-8
	02/03	259	49	57	-8	119	45	47	-1
	03/04	180	51	59	-9	35	66	49	17
GNVQs and precursors	01/02	345	27	43	-17	167	29	40	-11
	02/03	225	28	47	-20	87	36	45	-9
	03/04	137	40	50	-10	36	25	43	-18
NVQs	01/02	23	61	45	16	421	61	40	21
	02-03	30	23	47	-23	602	56	45	11
	03/04	28	43	47	-4	585	65	47	18
Other	01/02	148	52	47	5	1,046	53	50	2
	02/03	164	54	48	5	757	50	50	0
	03/04	262	40	49	-10	864	48	52	-4

Table 4

Success rates on work-based learning programmes managed by the college for 2003/04 year

a) Overall success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Construction, planning & the built environment apprenticeship	30	13%	30%	33%	51%
2003/04	Construction, planning & the built environment advanced	10	40%	31%	100%	60%

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

b) Timely success rate

End Year	Apprenticeship Programme	Number of Learners *	College Framework rate **	National rate **	College NVQ rate **	National rate **
2003/04	Construction, planning & the built environment apprenticeship	38	5%	10%	21%	24%
2003/04	Construction, planning & the built environment advanced	10	40%	19%	100%	43%

* The number of learners who planned to complete their learning programme in the given year

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Outcomes for Employer Training Pilots and National Employer Training Programmes managed by the college 2002/03 year to 2004/05 year.

Year	Number of starts in year	Planned learning completed *	Still in learning
2002/03	26	13	0
2003/04	772	649	3
2004/05	442	289	140

* These are key learning objectives identified for each learner following an ETP or NETP programme