



Solihull College

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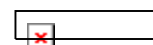
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Basic information about the college

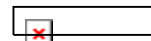


Name of college:	Solihull College
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Colin Flint
Address of college:	Blossomfield Road Solihull B91 1SB
Telephone number:	0121 678 7000
Fax number:	0121 678 7200
Chair of governors:	Philip Hanson
Unique reference number:	130482
Name of reporting inspector:	Michael Fisher

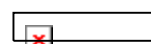
Dates of inspection:

26-30 November 2001

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

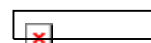


Solihull College opened in 1954 as a general further education (FE) college. It is located in the metropolitan borough of Solihull in the West Midlands, close to the city of Birmingham. Many students travel out from the city to study at the college. Programmes are available from entry level to degree level. The college generates an annual turnover of approximately £25 million. The main college site is at Blossomfield Road, close to the town centre. It offers an extensive range of courses in all 14 areas of learning. The Chelmsley Wood site is a former secondary school located in the north of the borough. It serves the needs of the local community. A third of the population of Solihull lives in the north of the borough and a quarter of all college students are recruited from this area of economic and social disadvantage. Many programmes are provided in local community centres within the borough and on employers' premises. At the time of the inspection there were few work-based students and little take-up by New Deal clients. Only FE and work-based learning was inspected.

In 2000/01, the college enrolled approximately 54,500 students of whom 79% were aged 19 or over. Some 79% of students aged 16 to 18 were undertaking full-time programmes. Most adults are enrolled on part-time or short courses. The gender profile of students is 56.3% female and 43.7% male. Only a quarter of the full-time students are resident in the borough. Some 73% of the full-time students travel from central Birmingham. Half of these students come from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in FE. In the borough of Solihull, 23% of the population are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some 30% of students aged 16 to 18 are from minority ethnic backgrounds, of whom 35% are full-time students.

The purpose of the college, set out in its mission statement, is to remain the principal provider of educational opportunity in its locality, and to be a key contributor to the regional economy. The college seeks to provide high-quality education and training to all of its customers, through direct provision and strategic partnerships, and to be a beacon of excellence in post-compulsory education.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the overall quality of provision to be satisfactory. Education and training are satisfactory in 6 of the 14 curriculum areas inspected, good in land-based provision, information and communication technology (ICT), teacher training, and retailing and customer care and outstanding in foundation for work programmes. Although college-based provision was unsatisfactory in the three curriculum areas of science and mathematics, business administration with management and professional studies, and hospitality, leisure, sport and travel, the work-based provision in the latter two areas was good. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- clear strategic direction from the governors and managers
- good and open management
- outstanding provision for students on foundation for work courses
- effective provision for community and individual need
- effective partnerships for widening participation
- respect shown by staff to students
- good work-based learning and in-company provision.

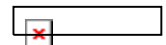
What should be improved

- students' achievements in a minority of areas
- poor attendance and punctuality
- inconsistent tutorial provision
- poor teaching in the unsatisfactory curriculum areas
- sharing of best practice among staff across the college

- quality assurance arrangements
- appropriateness of some room allocations.

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

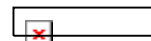


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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	Unsatisfactory. Retention and pass rates on most courses are poor. Some teaching is unsatisfactory and there are low rates of attendance at most lessons. There are good resources to support science teaching and effective workshop facilities for science and mathematics students. There is some inappropriate recruitment to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) mathematics courses.
Land-based provision	Good. Stimulating teaching maintains student interest. Most students are highly motivated and achieve good results. Resources in animal care are insufficient for expanding student numbers. Opportunities for commercial activity in floristry create real work environments, which enrich students' experience.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Satisfactory. Lessons are well structured. Achievement is satisfactory and the teaching by enthusiastic staff is purposeful. There is good student progression onto higher-level courses. Some resources in classrooms and workshops are poor. Retention rates on work-based training programmes are low.
Business administration, management and professional	Unsatisfactory. There is good support for college-based students on the wide range of courses, but pass rates are poor. Retention rates are low amongst two-year full-time students. In a quarter of lessons observed, teaching was poor. Most work-based students achieve their learning goals and develop good attitudes and skills.
Teacher training	Good. Good teaching is appropriate to learners' needs. Enrolment numbers, retention rates and pass rates have increased following the introduction of the innovative modular scheme. The course team works well together. The standard of action planning in tutorials is uneven.
Information and	Good. An extensive range of courses provides good opportunities for

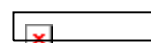
communication technology	students. There are ample resources of an industrial standard. Students are highly motivated and make good progress. Achievement is very good. Pass rates are good on most one-year courses, but are poor on many short and two-year courses. Monitoring of students' progress is unsystematic.
Retailing, customer service and transportation	Good. Management and assessment of National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses undertaken in the workplace are thorough. Good customised learning resources aid learning. Courses for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) are well taught and students produce coursework to a good standard. On the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course, punctuality and attendance rates are poor.
Hospitality, leisure, sport and travel	Unsatisfactory. On courses in travel and hospitality the standard of teaching and the quality of students' work are satisfactory. Work-based provision is good. Pass rates on travel, sport and leisure programmes are poor. Retention rates on some courses are unsatisfactory. Managers have been ineffective in raising standards of achievement.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Students develop good practical skills, both in college and at the workplace. Committed staff provide effective support to full-time students. Pass rates on some programmes are low. There is insufficient checking that students are understanding the work during lessons. Work-based students benefit from good experience in the hair salon.
Health, social care and public services	Satisfactory. Retention and pass rates on full-time courses are good. In-company trainees often fail to complete their individual learning plans. Most teaching is satisfactory. Opportunities are missed to share good practice within the teaching team and to take full advantage of available resources.
Visual and performing arts and media	Satisfactory. Much teaching is good. Unsatisfactory records of attendance and punctuality correlate with poor retention and pass rates on a minority of courses. Curriculum management lacks rigour in media and performing arts. Student progression to higher education (HE) and employment is good.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Staff teach well and with enthusiasm. Students develop good analytical and oral skills. Most pass and retention rates on GCE A-level and GCSE courses are poor, but the results in GCE Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) were at least satisfactory in 2001. Management practices are mostly underdeveloped except in access to HE where they are effective.
English, languages and communications	Satisfactory. Most teaching is well planned. Students benefit from good individual support and they contribute well in classes. Most staff provide extensive feedback and commentary on students' written work. Attendance and punctuality are often poor. Strategies to improve low pass rates in some subjects are not sufficiently developed.
Foundation programmes	Outstanding. Retention and pass rates are very good. Teaching is very effective. Learning materials are imaginative. Students' motivation is good and they achieve an extensive range of qualifications. Effective management and good teamwork contribute to the good provision.

How well is the college led and managed?



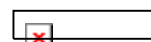
Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has addressed most of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection reports. Governors are well informed. The college has moved from considerable financial insecurity to far greater stability. The main focus of managers has been on the improvement of college finances. Weaknesses in students' achievement have not been fully addressed. Much has been achieved since the previous inspections in improving planning, quality assurance activities, appraisal of staff and the use of resources. The leadership provided by managers is open and responsive. Communications across the college and with external partners are effective. Overall curriculum management is satisfactory, but some curriculum teams have not monitored the quality of education, training and students' achievements with sufficient rigour.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



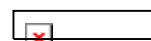
The college's approach to inclusion is good. There is a strong commitment at all levels to widening participation and promoting learning for all who wish to benefit from it. This commitment is fully reflected in the college's work. Flexible arrangements for study at community venues seven days a week allow learners from very diverse, and often disadvantaged backgrounds to take part in education and training. Effective partnerships with employers and members of the local community help the college to widen participation. The college collects good data which it uses effectively to make policy decisions.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



There is good guidance and support for students. The college provides impartial advice and information to prospective students. Most students value the advice and guidance they are given and find the staff helpful. A comprehensive range of attractive and informative leaflets and brochures for different groups of students are always available. These documents provide appropriate initial and on-course information. An on-line electronic enrolment process has been installed and students are able to enrol throughout the year. All full-time students undertake an assessment of their needs at the beginning of their course. There are appropriate systems to monitor the progress of most students and trainees as they work towards their learning goals. The group tutorial programme is not always well attended by full-time students, although individual support provided by staff is appreciated and valued by students. The tutorial procedures have failed to address poor records of attendance and punctuality successfully.

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

- respect shown to them by staff
- willing individual support from staff
- the extensive choice and availability of courses
- good learning resources at Blossomfield campus.

What they feel could be improved

- arrangements for information and admissions during initial enrolment
- organisation of the college day to reduce `gaps' on individual timetables
- some dull teaching.

Other information

The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

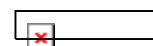
Aspect & learner	Graded good or	Graded	Graded less than
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type	better (Grades 1 to 3) %	satisfactory (Grade 4) %	satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	58	30	12
19+ and WBL*	72	23	5
Learning 16-18	56	31	13
19+ and WBL*	72	26	2

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. Data on students' achievements drawn from individualised student records (ISR) for the period 1998 to 2001 were provided by the LSC. In some curriculum areas, the college's data on students' achievements required updating during the week of the inspection. Inspectors used additional data held by the college to help them form their judgements. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more details about achievement and standards on particular courses. The college's data for students aged 16 to 18 during the 3 years to 2001 indicate that, for level 2 qualifications, the student pass rate of 67% is at the national average. Pass rates at level 1 have shown an improving trend over the same period, resulting in the rate in 2001 almost reaching the national average of 65% in 2001. However, there has been a declining pass rate for level 3 achievements to 13% below the national average. At all levels, retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 are at, or near, national averages. The performance of adult students from 1998 to 2001 on courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 are significantly below national averages by approximately 9% for each year. However, their pass rates at level 2 and level 3 are improving. Retention rates for adults for courses at all levels are above the national average of 79%.

16-18 year olds

2. The college achieves good results on national diploma and certificate courses. Some 83% of the students who complete their course pass and achieve the award. The rate exceeds national averages. In 2000/01, the pass rate for GCE A-level courses was 62%, well below the national average of 73%. For students completing their GCE A-level courses, 27% achieve higher grades. Pass rates for GCE AS courses in 2001 were also low; the pass rate was 54% and the point score 9.1, against a local area average of 16.8. In GNVQ intermediate and first diploma courses, students' pass rates are generally in line with national averages. Some 71% of students completing their course are successful. Pass rates on GCSE courses are low at 72%. NVQ level 2 pass rates are less than 50%, well below national averages. Most pass rates on level 1 programmes are at national averages. On GNVQ foundation courses, the total pass rate for all courses is 84%, which is above national averages.

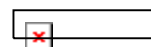
Adult learners

3. Pass and retention rates for short courses taken by adult students are good. In 2001, pass rates were 84%, while retention rates were at 88%. Pass rates for level 3 certificate courses are good at 77%. However, on level 3 NVQ courses, the college pass rate is 59%, and achievements are unsatisfactory. Approximately 40% of students on the college GCE A-level programme are adults. Most achieve results well below the national averages. In 2001, only 51% of adult learners achieved a pass grade. Over a three-year period, on average, 21% of work-based learners leave their

modern apprenticeship programme early. Only 18% of learners achieved their modern apprenticeship frameworks in 1999, and 25% did so in 2000. However, this rate improved significantly in 2001 to 59%.

4. During the week of the inspection, the average rate of student attendance was 75%, which is close to the sector average of 76%. However, this overall figure masks unacceptable variations in attendance. In both visual and performing arts and modern foreign languages, attendance was poor at approximately 65%. Attendance was particularly good in land-based provision and ICT. Standards of students' work observed in the teaching sessions during the inspection were mostly satisfactory or good. The standard of students' specialist subject work is commented on in detail in Part C of this report.

Quality of education and training



5. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 278 sessions. They judged that teaching was good or better in 63.7% of lessons, satisfactory in 27.3% and less than satisfactory in 9%. Learning was good or better in 62.4% of lessons, satisfactory in 29% and unsatisfactory in 8.6%. The best teaching was on teacher training, land-based and foundation courses. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and learning was on business administration and science and maths courses.

6. In the lessons judged to be good or better, thorough planning ensured that students engaged in stimulating activities which matched their individual needs, abilities and interests. Teachers made high, but realistic demands of students. The most effective lessons were brisk and purposeful. Learning activities had a logical sequence and held students' interest, enabling them to make steady progress. On foundation programmes, teachers are particularly skilful at motivating students. In some vocational areas of learning, the theory lessons were effectively linked to the practical lessons so that they complemented each other. This approach was particularly evident in courses in hair and beauty. Assignment briefs on teacher training courses and portfolios in travel and tourism are particularly well designed to challenge students and encourage them to learn. The quality of teaching and learning on foundation studies, teacher training and land-based provision is high.

7. In those lessons judged to be unsatisfactory, teachers did not ensure that all students understood the lesson. They did not take sufficient account of the different needs arising very often from the different abilities of students. Although teachers often used questions to check students' understanding, they often failed to allow sufficient time for students to respond. Sometimes teachers answered their own questions. In too many lessons, the teaching was boring and the students were not attentive. Overall, theory lessons were less effective than practical lessons. Sometimes teachers did not check students, for example, over lateness or use of resources. In a practical engineering lesson, the teacher failed to correct students over the inappropriate use of personal protective equipment.

8. Effective ways of teaching key skills and enabling students to achieve certification are being developed. The college has amended its strategy in response to national changes over requirements. The emphasis remains on the integration of key skills into the vocational areas. In engineering, there is good integration of key skills in most programmes. For students on GCE AS/A-level courses, there are separate key skills workshops, where students use their own work to develop the skills. Key skills development for trainees is good. However, there are missed opportunities to gather evidence in the workplace.

9. Most teachers have appropriate academic or vocational qualifications. Of 178 full-time staff, 85% hold a recognised teaching qualification and 93% have a relevant degree. Approximately 50% of part-time staff hold a teaching qualification. The college has a policy that requires all teaching staff to gain a teaching qualification. Through appraisals and staff development activities, teachers are

updated on curriculum issues. For example, in tourism and leisure, 58 training and development events were held for staff in 2000/01. Training opportunities range from information learning technology (ILT) to winter mountain leader training. The college has concentrated much of its staff development resources on updating teachers in the use of ILT. All curriculum areas have ILT 'champions' and in English and humanities, these 'champions' are proving effective. They have developed good on-line teaching and learning materials. Where the development of competence in the use of ILT is particularly slow, such as in hair and beauty, the area is given specific attention and help.

10. Blossomfield and Chelmsley are the college's main campuses. Blossomfield is spacious. It is well maintained and has some excellent teaching resources. The campus includes a new light and airy, purpose-built sixth form centre. The centre contains a range of attractive teaching areas including well-equipped IT rooms and science laboratories. Students benefit from the provision of a lounge and modern refreshment areas. Blossomfield has an extensive library with over 30,000 books and subscriptions to well over 200 magazines. Good audio-visual facilities and access to CD-ROMs and the Internet are available to all students. The sports hall provides extensive opportunities for students to participate in and enjoy a wide range of activities, including football, squash, basketball, drama and music. Refurbishment work on the older buildings has been carried out to a high standard. The students' entrance is attractive and provides an up-to-date information centre where students can easily obtain initial guidance about courses, as well as advice on personal, welfare and financial concerns. However, there are a few shortcomings. Some classrooms are cramped and noisy, and the use of temporary screening in some teaching areas is unhelpful. The Blossomfield site is fully accessible to students with restricted mobility.

11. Chelmsley campus has some good teaching and training facilities including a well resourced industry standard hairdressing salon, a motor vehicle workshop with specialist diagnostic equipment and a spacious learning centre where students can go to get additional help. However, the campus also has some poor accommodation. There is a comprehensive accommodation strategy to relocate the college buildings on a new site in the Chelmsley town centre.

12. Students benefit from the college's extensive IT facilities. At the time of the inspection, 730 computers provided a ratio of 1:5.5 full-time equivalent students, compared to the national target of 1:5. All terminals for the use of students have both industry-standard software and Internet access. Four 'IT shops' have been established in local shopping centres. These shops are widening participation by attracting students who would not have attended the college's main campuses. They are conveniently located, well resourced, and open 12 hours a day for at least six days each week. The needs of the local community are being met very effectively.

13. There is a welcoming and accessible student information centre on each campus, which stocks an extensive range of attractive and informative brochures to provide appropriate initial information. A telephone help-line is available. Most students find the admissions process effective. An on-line enrolment procedure is popular. However, a few students report difficulties in obtaining the information that they want. Students find information and admissions staff helpful and value their advice. There are open days for potential students which provide opportunities for them to find out more about the college. At the Chelmsley campus there is a carnival day which provides a family fun day during which courses are promoted. A liaison team visits local schools regularly to talk about opportunities for progression. During the summer, the college rents accommodation in the shopping centre from which it promotes college courses and offers advice and guidance. Student services staff provide helpful guidance and support in community venues. Their service includes initial advice and guidance, welfare, careers guidance, help with applications to HE or employment, and counselling. Students speak highly of the support they receive. The career guidance service is supplemented by a weekly service from the local careers company.

14. The college offers a wide range of courses at a variety of levels from entry level to HE. In all subjects, there are good progression routes for students. Many modular programmes, for example in office technology, increase the study opportunities that the college can offer students. The college has been active in widening participation and is successful in attracting adult students back to learning. Many courses are provided in community venues and are available on seven days of the week, in the evenings and through summer schools. Saturday and summer courses are provided for

both adults and their children which enables parents to study whilst their children join in interesting educational activities. Sunday courses, particularly in computing studies, enable those who cannot attend during the week to benefit. The college is a member of several successful community partnerships which make learning more available for adult students. The local employment services consider the college to be a successful contributor to local regeneration.

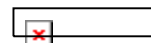
15. All full-time students undertake an initial assessment when they join the college to identify whether they need additional help with literacy or numeracy skills. The support may be in the form of extra individual lessons, in-class help, special help from their subject tutor, or attendance at one of the college's learning centres. Students are also provided with telephone tutorials where appropriate. During 2000/01, 1,167 students received additional support. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective help appropriate to their needs and there is much good or outstanding practice. Students speak highly of the support they receive and believe that they would not be able to complete their courses without it.

16. Most assessment is well planned and benefits both students and trainees. Most work is assessed thoroughly. There are appropriate internal verification procedures. Teachers' evaluative comments help students to improve their work. Practical assessments are generally appropriate and internal quality assurance moderators provide good support to course teams.

17. All full-time students have regular tutorials included in their programme. Effective group tutorials cover topics that include cultural awareness, healthy living, independent living and team building. Clear and useful teacher resource packs help tutors organise these activities. Some group tutorials are unsatisfactory and are not valued by students. Students also have individual reviews with their personal tutor, usually twice each term, when performance targets are agreed. However, in teacher training, ICT, access to FE and business, students are not always clear what they need to do to improve. There is ineffective monitoring of the progress of individual students on business courses. On the GCE AS/A-level programme, the quality of subject tutors' reports to personal tutors is uneven, and in some cases, the actual report forms are not completed or contain insufficient comment to be useful. Most students find the individual reviews helpful. Personal tutors are responsible for following up student absences. Tutorial procedures have failed to address poor records of attendance and punctuality successfully. Part-time students have a named tutor who is usually their course tutor. Parents and employers are sent regular reports on the progress of students. Employer surveys show a good level of satisfaction with the reporting arrangements. Parents' evenings are held twice a year and provide further opportunities to review progress.

18. There is an active student liaison team. Its members, who have experience in youth and community work, organise the well-attended central enrichment programme and support the student representatives and their executive. The college organises programmes such as sporting activities, drama and music. Some offer opportunities for students to gain additional qualifications for example, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Students are also able to gain qualifications in certain key skills through their tutorial activities. On some courses, students have the opportunity to extend their experiences through trips and expeditions. They are offered a good range of additional qualifications to enhance their technical skills and personal development, and to meet local employers' needs.

Leadership and management



19. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has addressed most of the weaknesses identified in the last inspections. The main focus of management has been on improving the college's financial position. The college has moved from a situation of considerable financial insecurity to one of far greater stability. However, weaknesses in rates of students' achievement have not been fully addressed. Many strategies to raise pass rates have not had time

since the FEFC inspection in 1999 in improving planning, quality assurance, appraisal and use of resources. A comprehensive range of strategies has refocused the college at all levels on raising achievement. For example, there is a regular review of entry requirements and the suitability of programmes, improved initial assessment, increased use of additional support, greater accountability of managers and teachers, and increased assistance for improvements in teaching and learning.

20. The college's strategic and business plans give clear direction. Governors are closely involved in setting strategic targets and monitoring the college's progress towards them. All staff are consulted in the review of the college's mission. Managers and teachers share a common sense of purpose. Business planning in divisions, teams and college units is generally thorough, although, in a few teams, development and operational planning is not sufficiently rigorous. In 2000/01, the college did not write an operating statement. In 2001/02, the college business plan was written after divisional business plans had been agreed. The alignment is not clear between the key objectives in operational plans and the college's strategic objectives. Targets for pass and retention rates are insufficiently challenging in a significant minority of areas. Financial indicators are used in all areas, but the use of other performance indicators is underdeveloped. For example, even in areas where problems over attendance rates are pronounced, there is no target for improvement.

21. Most resources are managed effectively. There is regular and thorough monitoring of progress towards achievement of unit targets. A helpful resourcing model aims to ensure efficient deployment of staff to support educational priorities. The allocation of budgets to budget holders within each year is dependent on income targets being met. The college does not yet cost its courses, however, nor does it analyse how much it costs for an individual student to achieve a desired qualification. Poor academic achievement in some areas means that there are courses not providing good value for money. Communications within the college and with external partners are good. There is an effective management briefing letter, which staff value and course teams use. Most staff in curriculum areas work effectively in teams. Clear policies are easily accessible on the college's intranet. Staff and students are kept up to date with developments in the college through regular newsletters. Communication with governors is also good and the college is building an intranet site specifically for the governing body. Links with external partners are particularly strong and, in some areas, outstanding. Recent work with local retailers has been very effective. The college also works well with employers, employment services, the careers service, the borough council and the local education authority. It conducts organisational health surveys of support and teaching staff; 29% of support staff and 9% of teaching staff responded to the most recent questionnaire.

22. There have been significant improvements in arrangements for quality assurance since the last inspection. There is a clear framework and logical cycle for team reviews, self-assessment activities and curriculum audit. The framework is clearly referenced against a number of appropriate external standards, the common inspection framework, and advice and guidance standards. Performance in all areas of the college's work is scrutinised by achievement and quality assurance boards. There are regular formal and informal reviews of the progress towards targets for courses and for qualifications in most curriculum areas. They are led by internal quality moderators. Students' views are clearly integrated into team reviews and, where appropriate, lead to prompt action. There is a thorough focus on students' achievement at all levels. In a few curriculum areas, the implementation of the quality assurance framework lacks sufficient rigour; team reviews in the areas are superficial. In 2000/01, arrangements for lesson observations were inadequate in scope and effectiveness. Since September 2001, the system has been more thorough, consistent and clearly linked to appraisal. It does not, however, encompass all areas of college activity. Analysis of results against recognised averages is used in most course reviews. However, the data produced in some areas are unreliable. The college's view of its students' performance in examinations does not benefit from analysis of appropriate value added data.

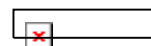
23. In 2000/01, only 45% of full-time and 28% of part-time staff were appraised. The college has reviewed procedures for appraisal and plans to appraise substantially more staff in 2001/02. There are now clear, formal links between lesson observation, appraisal and staff development. The current system is centrally controlled, more rigorous and well monitored. The focus on individual development and performance improvement is clear. However, staff development plans are not clearly aligned to corporate objectives. The college helps staff to achieve an appropriate teaching

qualification and part-time staff are supported through the part-time mentor pilot project. Mentoring of new staff is not effective in all areas. The college has made a significant commitment to the improvement of teaching and learning. The teaching and learning support initiative is designed to build on the strengths of the teacher training courses at the college.

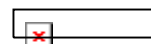
24. Governors are well informed and committed to the success of the college. They have attended and contributed to Saturday development days and are closely involved with college life. Governors recognise the college's strengths and weaknesses, and contribute to the assessment of its performance. A curriculum and quality assurance committee scrutinises students' achievements and, where appropriate, calls managers to account. The finance and policy committee closely monitors the college's finances. Governors have evaluated their own performance and made a number of appropriate recommendations.

25. The college's commitment to equal opportunities is reflected in its work. A clear equal opportunities policy statement encompasses enrolment activities, the curriculum, and the employment, promotion and development of staff. The college ensures that students, staff and governors are aware of its policies and values. Equal opportunities issues are included in staff and student induction, and managers have been trained in managing equality of opportunity. There are clear management and advisory responsibilities, including a 'diversity council', and policy is effectively monitored and updated. There are explicit links between key policies and the college's inclusive learning strategy.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

Strengths

- high retention rates on GNVQ intermediate science
- thorough assessment practices
- good resources for the teaching of science
- effective workshops in mathematics and science.

Weaknesses

- much unsatisfactory teaching
- poor retention rates on two-year advanced-level courses
- low pass rates on two-year advanced-level courses and GCSE mathematics
- a poor record of student attendance and punctuality
- inappropriate recruitment to GCSE mathematics courses.

Scope of provision

26. The college offers a broad range of courses for both students aged 16 to 18 and those aged 19 and over. GCE AS/A-level and GCSE courses are available in biology, chemistry, environmental science, human biology, mathematics and physics. There are vocational courses in GNVQ science at both intermediate and advanced level. The teaching programme allows both full-time and part-time courses to run even where demand for subjects is small. All courses are modular. The number of students enrolling onto advanced-level programmes in mathematics and science has increased from 180 in 1999 to 240 in 2001. Each year, the college enrolls about 400 students onto the GCSE mathematics course. Only a minority of these students are predicted to achieve grade A* to C in the examination. The college does not offer courses at foundation level in maths or science.

Achievement and standards

27. Retention rates on two-year advanced-level courses are low. In 1999, only 44% of students enrolling onto the chemistry programme completed the course. On the GNVQ advanced level science course, only 37% of the students completed. The one-year part-time GCE A-level courses show satisfactory retention rates. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate science, which enrolls small numbers of students, are good. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate science, and the one-year GCE A-level human biology, are above national averages. The pass rates of students on two-year advanced-level 2 courses are poor. In mathematics, only 44% of students gained the qualification in 2001. The pass rate on the GCSE mathematics course is very poor. It improved from 21% in 2000 to 26% in 2001, but still remains significantly below the national average. The introduction of GCE AS courses has improved retention and pass rates. The average attendance rate during the inspection was low at 69%. Punctuality was also poor. The standard of students' coursework and work in lessons is very uneven. In some lessons, students take good notes and keep their files well organised. Other students have poor literacy and organisational skills. Few teachers recognise or address the poor quality of the students' work during lessons. Some GCE A-level statistics and GCSE science coursework is of a low standard. Teachers do not always correct grammatical errors or challenge poor presentation. Most GCE A-level mechanics and biology coursework reaches a good standard. Progression from level 3 mathematics and science courses to HE is low, at 21%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ intermediate science	2	No. of starts	18	14	7
		% retention	94	100	100
		% pass rate	88	57	83
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	395	446	399
		% retention	48	69	72
		% pass rate	30	21	26
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	36	19	25
		% retention	85	37	44
		% pass rate	78	57	62
GCE A-level mathematics	3	No. of starts	52	30	31
		% retention	86	43	42
		% pass rate	50	80	44
GCE A-level biology	3	No. of starts	31	20	23
		% retention	79	60	68
		% pass rate	91	67	69
GCE A-level human biology (one year)	3	No. of starts	39	22	41
		% retention	77	80	61
		% pass rate	52	44	52

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

28. The most effective lessons are well structured and organised. Activities are appropriately varied, and the lessons progress purposefully. Students focus on the tasks they are set and work well and hard. They make good progress and achieve high standards. In one lesson, the teacher used thorough knowledge of the subject and good teaching skills to guide a GCE AS pure mathematics class through the development of formulae for integration from basic principles. The range of prepared activities held the students' interest. Clear guidance from the teacher ensured that the students understood the relevant concepts. The standard of their note taking and the work they produced during the lesson was very good. Most practical work in science is well organised. There are good opportunities for students to develop their practical skills. One biology lesson, taught by two teachers together, started with an effective review of the principles of scientific investigation and was followed by a well-managed transition into a practical investigation of the effect of pH on amylase. However, in too many lessons teaching is unsatisfactory. Planning and preparation is inadequate. In a GCSE science lesson, where the objective was to design a test to investigate the effect of temperature on yeast activity, the teacher outlined the objectives and explained the theory, but did not check that students understood the task they were being set or the accompanying handout. As a result, most of the students were not confident in their ability to design the experiment and only the most able made any progress. In a number of GCSE mathematics lessons, the teachers use exercise booklets as the main teaching resource and students work through them on their own for extended periods of time. These lessons lacked purpose and attainment was poor. Teachers do not use good model answers effectively to develop the students' understanding of a topic. Many students express dissatisfaction with teaching methods on mathematics courses. Many science students find the two-hour theory lessons too long; in these lessons, many students

become inattentive and too little learning takes place.

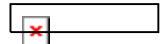
29. Assessment is generally thorough. Many staff are experienced external examiners and moderators. Homework is set regularly. The quality of most feedback from teachers on students' marked work is very good. In mathematics, most teachers provide thorough model answers for students when correcting mistakes on homework and assignments. They keep appropriately detailed records of students' work and progress and ensure that students are kept well informed of their progress at their individual subject review meetings. Students who need additional help or who have missed lessons are encouraged to attend the useful science or mathematics workshops.

30. The organisation and management of key skills provision for application of number are effective. Mathematics staff help staff from other vocational areas in the development of assignments and the teaching of these skills during regular staff development sessions. The standard of accommodation for mathematics and science is good. The resources for the teaching of science courses are very good. The science and maths workshops organise useful additional subject support. Students are offered the opportunity to attend at times to suit them.

Leadership and management

31. There have been a number of changes to the management of science and mathematics programmes since the last inspection. Most courses are satisfactorily managed, but the college has failed to address weaknesses in teaching and standards. The standard of analysis of course performance is not thorough or consistent. The college's internal lesson observation system is too generous when compared both to the views of learners and to the judgements of this inspection.

Land-based provision



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

Strengths

- good pass and retention rates
- stimulating and effective teaching
- well-planned courses
- good support for individual students
- high standard of students' portfolios and written work

- effective curriculum planning and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient practical training in animal care
- inadequate accommodation and resources for animal care.

Scope of provision

32. Courses are provided in floristry, animal care and horticulture. Animal care courses include full-time courses at entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3. Part-time courses at NVQ level 2 are attended in the evenings by students employed in the animal care industry or by people wanting a career change. Floristry courses are offered by full-time and part-time attendance at levels 1, 2 and 3. Recreational courses are provided in flower arranging and creative skills. Entry to part-time floristry courses is available throughout the year, so access for learners working in the industry is straightforward. Courses are offered by full-time and part-time attendance for amenity horticulture at foundation level, levels 1 and 2 and for Royal Horticulture Society (RHS) certificates.

33. At the time of the inspection there were 157 students following animal care courses, 131 students on horticulture courses and 116 students registered on floristry and creative skill courses. The college offers an environmental conservation course (landscapes and eco-systems) at levels 2 and 3, which students can study by distance learning but, at the time of the inspection, there were no enrolments. All full-time students undertake work experience in industry, and are monitored closely by tutors. A contract for modern apprenticeship has seven trainees, of whom six are foundation modern apprentices and one is an advanced modern apprentice.

Achievement and standards

34. Retention rates are good; over 90% of students are retained across all programmes. When retention rates on the diploma in animal care dropped from 100% in 1999/2000 to 61% in 2000/01, immediate remedial action was taken to improve the course and at the end of November 2001 all students enrolled were still on the course and very enthusiastic about their work. The NVQ level 1 in animal care and the national certificate in floristry which enrolls small numbers of students have 100% retention rates. Attendance is excellent and any absences are promptly followed up. If students leave their programme, the reasons for their departure are established and in many cases alternative courses are provided. Students are punctual for lessons. In some cases, special arrangements enable students with domestic responsibilities, such as childcare, to negotiate flexible hours. Examination pass rates are very good; 100% of students on NVQ animal care, intermediate floristry and national certificate in floristry achieve their awards. Many students on RHS courses have often not chosen to undertake the examinations. Action has been taken by the college to encourage entry and as a result, pass rates have improved from 0% in 1998/99 to 80% in 2000/01. Students' work on all courses is of a good standard.

A sample of retention and pass rates in land-based provision, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001

NVQ animal care	1	No. of starts	25	59	25
		% retention	100	90	100
		% pass rate	83	80	100
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	No. of starts	*	6	7
		% retention	*	100	71
		% pass rate	*	83	86
NVQ caring for animals	2	No. of starts	14	39	33
		% retention	100	90	79
		% pass rate	86	79	100
Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) intermediate floristry	2	No. of starts	30	53	28
		% retention	90	85	75
		% pass rate	89	89	100
National certificate floristry	3	No. of starts	7	9	6
		% retention	86	78	100
		% pass rate	100	100	100
BTEC national diploma animal in applied science (animal management)	3	No. of starts	*	24	18
		% retention	*	100	61
		% pass rate	*	89	91

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

35. Lessons are well planned and taught. Teaching is imaginative and appropriately varied; it holds students interest and attention. Students are enthusiastic about their work and enjoy attending lessons. They join in group work and practical sessions with gusto. Students help each other well in class work and practical lessons, and mature students relish working in groups with enthusiastic young people. Initial assessment is thorough and includes self-assessment, key skills assessment and vocational assessment. Individual training plans are reviewed every six weeks and progress is monitored and measured against specific targets.

36. Accommodation and resources for animal care are inadequate. Some classrooms are housed in temporary huts of poor quality. They are noisy, cold and without blinds. In some cases, rooms are too small for the number of students attending. Animal and bird housing is also of poor quality. The animal unit is poorly drained and insecure. Student access to some buildings is impeded by clutter and steps to the chinchilla house are steep. Horticultural resources are good. Effective use is made of a large walled garden area, extensive borders, sports fields, lawns, and a glasshouse and polytunnel for practical work and plant identification. A floristry shop open to the public is operated on a commercial basis and is effectively used by students to improve their industrial and presentational skills.

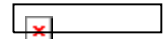
37. Well-presented portfolios are produced by all students. They contain ample evidence based on a wide variety of assessment strategies. Assignments are marked promptly. They are returned to students with helpful detailed comments and clear advice on any improvements needed. Students on BTEC courses know what they have to do to achieve good grades. Key skill assignments are integrated within vocational work and assessed thoroughly.

38. Effective use is made of educational trips. For example, floristry students visit establishments in Holland, and other students visit animal sanctuaries and zoos, and take part in programmes on television such as Gardeners' World and Lost Gardens. All students on BTEC and NVQ programmes benefit from effective work experience with local employers and produce good assignments and diaries. Briefing for employers does not always come sufficiently early in the programme. Individual students receive good learning support. Additional learning needs are accurately assessed. Effective arrangements are made to provide additional support in literacy and numeracy from which students benefit. Support tutors accompany students into vocational lessons and in an unobtrusive manner help them in their work, leaving the student to do the actual task. Many students who are identified as requiring special help take great pride in completing excellent portfolios. Staff help students out of college hours. They give them learning support and advice on personal difficulties. Students who have financial problems receive help from the college to subsidise: the cost of books' travel to work; educational trips; and the purchase of floristry tool kits.

Leadership and management

39. The section is well managed and directed by enthusiastic managers committed to their work and their students. Internal verification is frequent and thorough. Courses are well planned and managed by tutors who form an enthusiastic team. Many staff are new in their roles and are well supported by experienced colleagues. Team leaders set a clear direction and encourage staff to be innovative and try new ideas under their close supervision. Staff meet frequently in well-structured and documented meetings.

Engineering, technology and manufacturing



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

Strengths

- effective links between theory and practical lessons through careful lesson planning
- good induction programme
- achievement of a wide range of additional qualifications
- access to training for motor vehicle students throughout the year
- good in-company training.

Weaknesses

- disturbance to some lessons from noise in adjacent areas
- poor resources in the mechanical engineering workshop
- insufficient work placements for motor vehicle trainees
- poor achievement at NVQ level 2.

Scope of provision

40. The engineering section operates on two sites. The Blossomfield centre offers a broad range of courses in mechanical and manufacturing engineering for full-time, part-time and work-based learners. At the Chelmsley centre there are dedicated facilities for motor vehicle courses. At the time of inspection, there were 919 students and work-based trainees enrolled on courses; 4.3 % were modern apprentices. Courses offered range from level 1 to higher national certificate. Links with employers offering work-based training have been reviewed and have resulted in improved trainee achievement.

Achievement and standards

41. The pass rates on intermediate GNVQ programmes since 1999 have been consistently above the national average, although retention rates in the same period have declined to below the national average. The pass rates on advanced GNVQ have improved in the period 1999 to 2001 from 47% to 83%, which was 11% higher than the national average in 2001. National diploma pass rates are consistently above national averages. Modern apprentices in mechanical engineering make slow progress towards achievement. In 2000/01, retention rates were unsatisfactory in mechanical engineering at level 2. At level 3, in 1998/1999 and 1999/2000, there was no achievement. Some students achieve a wide range of additional qualifications that includes GCE A levels, GCSEs and computer-aided design. In 2000/01, most mechanical production students achieved additional qualifications. There are good opportunities for students to progress to HE.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, technology and manufacturing 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ	2	No. of starts	40	48	42
		% retention	90	42	52
		% pass rate	45	57	**
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	19	29	20
		% retention	84	83	75
		% pass rate	100	92	75
City and Guilds	2	No. of starts	27	24	49
		% retention	96	100	69

		% pass rate	46	58	**
NVQ (in-company)	2	No. of starts	*	*	88
		% retention	*	*	90
		% pass rate	*	*	90
GNVQ advanced	3	No. of starts	29	30	32
		% retention	83	67	78
		% pass rate	47	56	83
National diploma	3	No. of starts	10	15	15
		% retention	70	73	67
		% pass rate	80	70	71

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

42. More than half of the teaching observed was good or better; most of the remainder was satisfactory. Teachers plan carefully to ensure that effective links are established between theory and practical lessons. They produce comprehensive lesson plans that specify objectives, resources and methods of teaching. Teaching materials are of a good standard and are used effectively. A support tutor is provided for those students with learning needs. Practical training is well planned and learners working on practical tasks benefit from the effective support and individual tuition provided by teachers.

43. Full-time GNVQ and AVCE students receive work placements that last for two weeks as part of the programme to enhance their learning experience and introduce them to a fully operational work place. Modern apprentices have placements that range from small independent to large international companies, producing engineering components for the motor vehicle and aerospace industries. Students receive good training from experienced workplace supervisors. There are 62 in-company, manufacturing trainees who also receive good training. An assessor from the college visits trainees two days each week, to carry out training and assessment activities and to help students to build up their portfolios. This support helps trainees to make good progress towards their qualification. College staff also provide a good level of support to the company.

44. Motor vehicle trainees have access to their training programme throughout the year. Workshops operate on an open access system, where students log their arrival and departure times on computer. Staff are available to guide and support learning throughout the day. This attendance method allows greater access to FE and increases the participation of those who could not normally attend on a fixed time basis. There are good resources in the motor vehicle workshop. Only one of the motor vehicle NVQ trainees had a work placement. Such an inadequate level of provision prevents trainees from gaining the work-based evidence that is required for achievement of an NVQ. The college recognises this deficiency and is considering alternative, more appropriate qualifications.

45. Students receive a good induction. They are given good handbooks and clear guidance about training programmes, assessment activities and facilities. Tutors also outline the attitudes and approaches to their work that are expected of students. Students complete assignments on 'how we learn', health and safety, and the dangers inherent in working in an engineering environment.

46. Teachers are technically well qualified and hold qualifications as teachers and assessors. There

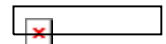
is a good staff development programme. Assessment for all programmes is carried out effectively to maintain standards. There is insufficient planning of assessment and verification for the NVQ programmes. Monitoring of students' achievements is good. Tutorials are held regularly to discuss students' progress and agree action plans that address weaknesses. Most tutorials do not include a sufficiently thorough review of students' work and progress. Tutors do not set targets against which students can measure their improvement.

47. Much of the machinery in the mechanical engineering workshop is old and in most cases, does not represent current industrial standards of technology. There are insufficient machines to allow all students to work on their tasks at the same time. Students waiting to use a particular machine waited around in the workshop, leaning on machines that were being used by other students until they became available. This practice is dangerous. There are not enough prominently displayed safety notices. In one lesson, students were not wearing suitable safety footwear. The teacher failed to identify this poor practice. Many teaching spaces are subject to noise from adjacent areas. Students find it difficult to concentrate on their work, and are quickly distracted.

Leadership and management

48. Engineering is effectively managed. Quality assurance systems are well established and internal verification procedures are fit for purpose. Observations of teaching are carried out regularly. Effective support for teachers includes appropriate staff development where necessary. The monitoring of progress and achievement in work-based learning has improved significantly in 2000/01. Section leaders systematically analyse student performance data and share findings at staff meetings.

Business administration, management and professional



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

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

Strengths

- wide range of courses and good internal progression routes
- high pass rates on Chartered Institute of Marketing courses
- some good pass rates on GNVQ courses
- good portfolios of evidence on work-based learning
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on management and professional and GCE AS/A-level courses
- low retention rates on two-year full-time business courses
- much poor and unsatisfactory teaching
- lack of assessment of key skills in the workplace
- poor co-ordination and recording of students' progress on management and professional courses
- ineffective strategies to improve pass rates.

Scope of provision

49. The wide range of courses enables students to progress to higher levels of study in the business and professional area. The college offers full-time and part-time provision in business, administration, management and professional programmes. Courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced level for business students. In the administration area, NVQs are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3, and there is specialist secretarial provision for the Certificate of the Institute of Legal Executives and the Certificate and Diploma of the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practitioners And Receptionists. GCE AS/A levels are offered for both full-time and part-time students. Professional provision covers personnel, accounting, marketing, legal executives, and supervision and management, including some company-based work. At the time of the inspection there was one work-based trainee following NVQ level 1 in business administration, as well as five foundation modern apprentices and seven advanced modern apprentices. There were 514 students aged 16 to 18 and 1,241 students aged over 19, of whom 316 were on distance learning supervisory programmes.

Achievement and standards

50. Pass rates are very high on Chartered Institute of Marketing courses. In 2000/01 they were more than twice the national average. However, pass rates on other management and professional courses are consistently poor and below national averages. Pass rates on Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development programmes have declined since 1998/99. Students undertaking supervisory courses by distance learning for a local company have made excellent progress. Pass rates for full-time students aged 16 to 18 on GNVQ programmes have improved over the three years 1999 to 2001 and are now close to national averages. Pass rates for the first year of the GCE AS programmes are poor, and pass rates for GCE A-level students are below national averages.

Retention rates for full-time students on two-year business programmes are poor and consistently below national averages. Work-based trainees have good NVQ pass rates, but key skills assessment in the workplace is underdeveloped. Portfolios contain good evidence gathered in the workplace, but trainees nearing the completion of their NVQ have not yet achieved key skills units.

51. Much students' work on personnel courses is well presented. There is good use of research references. Co-operative work on projects is also of a good standard. However, the analytical skills of some students are inadequate. Marketing students worked effectively on past examination questions. Accounting technician students had not developed sufficient skills to compile effective portfolios of evidence. For many students, the amount of work submitted for assessment is below expected levels. The portfolios of students on GNVQ programmes are well presented; IT is well used. An appropriate variety of skills is demanded of students in carrying out assignments. Intermediate-level students are able to demonstrate good research and presentation skills and the ability to work well in groups. Written work often displayed inadequate levels of literacy. Advanced-level students are required to analyse and interpret source material, and the best students produce work that goes well beyond repetition of factual data. Effective use is made of graphs to illustrate more complex numerical data. The involvement of local companies in assisting with assignments and assessing the outcomes is valued by students and brings realism to the learning.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business administration, management and professional, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ intermediate business	2	No. of starts	33	28	20
		% retention	88	79	95
		% pass rate	34	73	79
GNVQ advanced two years	3	No. of starts	71	51	32
		% retention	94	61	53
		% pass rate	79	48	86
GCE A-level business studies two years	3	No. of starts	76	34	37
		% retention	87	56	52
		% pass rate	83	83	64
GCE A-level law two years	3	No. of starts	60	26	47
		% retention	92	69	60
		% pass rate	76	57	54
Chartered Institute of Marketing certificate two years	3	No. of starts	28	35	19
		% retention	96	60	75
		% pass rate	13	56	62
CIPD graduateship 2 years	H	No. of starts	72	86	64
		% retention	90	62	92
		% pass rate	60	49	24

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

52. There is poor teaching in many lessons. Teachers often fail to check whether all students are understanding the work. Some teachers do not consolidate key learning points. Very poor teaching

is most evident in some of the lessons conducted by part-time teachers. In the more effective business lessons, teachers made short, logical statements to introduce new concepts. They used students' existing knowledge as a base on which to develop ideas and explore the wider business context. In one lesson, good use was made of local knowledge to identify and analyse trends in consumer demand. Key skills are routinely emphasised in many business lessons. In the weaker lessons, question and answer techniques are ineffective in engaging the attention of all students, and participation is limited to a vociferous few. Teachers make no allowance for the variation in ability of students working in the same group. In one lesson, more able students were left unoccupied for 30 minutes because they had finished a task, which they found easy and there was no other work prepared for them. Students on management and professional courses are well motivated. Working relationships between teachers and students are good and encourage learning. In most management lessons, students make appropriate progress; their lessons are generally well planned. Administration students benefit from well-organised workshop sessions. Tuition and individual guidance given during these sessions is good. Students' practical training is extended through the opportunities in the business centre for real work.

53. Teachers are well qualified. A high proportion of full-time staff have a teaching qualification, and most part-time teachers have specialist vocational qualifications. The library contains a good range of books and journals. Students have increasing access to on-line learning materials. However, insufficient use was made of IT to assist learning on management and professional courses. Classrooms are mainly suitable. There are a few occasions where large class sizes mean that students do not have individual access to computers. The business centre provides a realistic working environment for students on NVQ administration programmes.

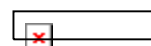
54. Marking of the work of students on administration and business courses is thorough. Teachers' comments are helpful and enable students to improve. Some students fail to meet deadlines and produce work that lacks depth and does not cover all the requirements of the task. Teachers' different methods of marking GCE A-level topics make it difficult for students to compare their progress across subject areas. On work-based training, records of the planning of the assessment and the actual assessment are extremely detailed and clearly show how they are cross-referenced to the NVQ standards. Teachers have no single agreed approach to the monitoring and recording of students' progress on management and professional courses. As a result, there is no overview of the progress of individual students.

55. Levels of academic and personal support for students are high. Teachers help and encourage students during lessons. Students also value being able to meet informally with teachers for extra help and guidance. Staff are responsive and available to the students. Part-time students appreciate prompt e-mail responses from staff. Group tutorials are less valued by students. Foundation-level students receive extra classroom support for basic skills. On work-based training, individual learning plans are not working documents and are not reviewed and updated to reflect progress in key skills.

Leadership and management

56. Some aspects of curriculum management are ineffective. There is insufficient awareness among staff of the low pass rates. Action plans lack strategies for improving teaching and learning. In the college's internal observations there has been some over-estimation of the quality of teaching. Part-time staff are not routinely observed. Issues raised from student surveys have been tackled effectively, but recent actions by course teams had not had an impact by the time of the inspection. There is no co-ordination of systems for recording students' progress, and insufficient focus at team level on strategies to improve pass rates.

Teacher training



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

Strengths

- well-designed courses
- good, positive approach by students in lessons
- good teaching and learning
- consistent and thorough assessment procedures
- effective management of the curriculum.

Weaknesses

- insufficient action-planning following tutorials
- some unsatisfactory pre-course information.

Scope of provision

57. There is a good range of part-time provision which meets the needs and aspirations of adult students. The college offers a wide range of qualifications for teachers and trainers. These include: national Open College Network (OCN) Introduction to Teacher Training; City and Guilds 7306/7 Further and Adult Education Training Certificate (FAETC) to Cert.Ed/PCGE Further and Adult Higher Education certificate (FAHE) in conjunction with Wolverhampton University; and NVQs in training and development at levels 3, 4 and 5. The number of students following these programmes has increased over the years 1999 to 2000. This increase in part results from the introduction of a programme of study that enables students to negotiate their pattern of attendance and selection of study modules. Students receive good help from their tutors both individually and in their study groups. Teacher training in basic skills and for learning support assistants is also provided.

Achievement and standards

58. Retention rates are in line with, or above, the national average for all courses. Pass rates are generally around or above the national average. Teachers encourage students to evaluate their own performance and they are effectively challenged to reflect on their teaching methods. All students are attentive and work well during lessons. They have the confidence to contribute freely during discussions and they put forward carefully considered views on a range of FE topics. Students on the introduction to teacher training course demonstrated sound knowledge on the planning of lessons. Students on stage 2 were able to use and evaluate a range of possible

responses to situations where their students might make personal disclosures. Students' assignments are suitably demanding at all levels. Portfolios are of a high standard. They contain appropriate observation evaluations. The students' learning notes are exemplary and give ample opportunity for reflection on what they have done and learnt. There is consistency in both the assessment and verification processes used by teachers. Teachers give useful feedback on students' written work that helps them to improve. Attainment ranges from good to outstanding. Many students show ability beyond the level of their current course. Attendance was 88% during the week of inspection.

A sample of retention and pass rates in teacher training 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
7307-03 stage 1 FAETC	3	No. of starts	105	50	139
		% retention	90	94	90
		% pass rate	82	100	85
7303-02 stage 2 FAETC	3	No. of starts	108	48	132
		% retention	90	94	89
		% pass rate	76	78	82
National Open College Network for England (NOCNE) introduction to teaching	3	No. of starts	130	92	171
		% retention	98	95	90
		% pass rate	93	85	96

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

59. Teaching and learning is of a high standard. Teaching on all courses is skilful and effective. Teachers use approaches that draw on students' own experiences. They plan their lessons so that the students remain alert and responsive and learn effectively. In one lesson, students individually presented details of where they were in terms of completing their own research. The rest of the group then made suggestions and offered guidance about how each might proceed. The students enjoyed a dialogue about the relative merits of different research methods and the interpretation of current educational issues. Case studies are used to good effect to interest and motivate students. Teachers are successful in encouraging students to draw on their own experiences. In one lesson, the students posed various 'what if?' scenarios from their own teaching practices. The teacher then gave helpful and constructive comment, and the whole group worked well together. In a few lessons, the teaching lacked momentum and some of the instructions given to students were unclear.

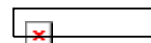
60. Tutorials are an integral part of the courses and an entitlement for all students. Tutors act as 'critical friend' and oversee the production of students' assignments. Tutors also conduct lesson observations and give critical and constructive feedback to help students to improve their teaching. However, during tutorial reviews, there is no consistent recording of action points, intended outcomes and the deadlines by which those actions should be achieved. Working relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Most students, especially those on the introduction to teacher training courses, speak highly of the support and guidance they receive from both their subject teachers and their personal tutor.

61. Some of the pre-course information provided to students is confusing and misleading. Students are not clear about the transition from phase 1 to phase 2 of the courses. They also find the timetable confusing. Most found their induction helpful in providing clarification about the course. Many would also have liked the induction to have been available on the Internet.

Leadership and management

62. There is effective management of the curriculum. The team works together well. The style of the managers motivates team members who feel valued and able to contribute. All staff are involved in developing the business plan and self-assessment report. There are regular team meetings and briefings which are well recorded to ensure that all team members have opportunities to be involved in initiatives and wider college issues. Staff engage constructively in self-evaluation, appraisal, peer review and support. Realistic targets are set and monitored regularly. Students and staff are invited to give feedback on lessons, modules and whole programmes as a contribution to curriculum review. Teachers are well qualified and regularly undertake professional development.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- wide range of courses
- good pass rates on most one-year courses
- effective workshops for development of independent learning skills
- good resources
- effective arrangements for distance learning
- well-managed curriculum.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on many short and two-year courses
- lack of systematic monitoring of students' progress

- inappropriate use of workshops for lessons and assessment.

Scope of provision

63. There is a wide range of courses. Most are taught in learning workshops where students use good learning materials and benefit from tutor support. The workshops remain open for extensive periods throughout the week, including Saturday and Sunday. A large workshop with 160 modern computers is located at the Blossomfield site, and a smaller unit is at the Chelmsley site. College-owned IT 'shops' are located in shopping centres at Solihull, Chelmsley and elsewhere. The college works closely with a large national company at three manufacturing sites in the area. A distance learning option is available to students. Community centres in the north and south of Solihull borough are mainly attended by adults studying part time. Courses provided include: Computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT); European computer driving licence (ECDL); Integrated Business Technology (IBT) levels 2 and 3; City and Guilds 726; and Internet technologies. Many OCN courses on a variety of topics and at several levels are available.

Achievement and standards

64. Pass rates on courses vary according to the length of course. Rates for most one-year courses are good. On short and two-year courses most pass rates are poor. At the time of the inspection courses were predominantly one-year. They gave students a time-scale about which they felt confident in terms of attendance and capacity to concentrate and achieve. The pass rates of students following CLAIT courses have risen for one-year courses and retention rates have remained high. Retention and pass rates are above national averages. However, pass rates for short courses in 2000/01 were at 44%, and for two-year courses at 66%, which are both below national averages.

65. Between 1999 and 2001 pass rates for IBT level 2 one-year courses have risen to above national averages but retention rates have fallen. Pass rates on short courses have been consistently below national averages for the last three years. NVQ courses in the use of IT at levels 1 and 2 have very poor pass rates. The pass rate for ECDL one-year courses improved to 83% in 2000/01.

66. Word processing courses have satisfactory retention rates and good pass rates at levels 1 and 2. The City and Guilds 4248 Start IT course and IT one-year course certificate have good retention rates. Pass rates are 82% and 72% respectively which are well above the national average. The pass rate of 53% for the short IT certificate course is below the national average. Retention and pass rates on the OCN level 1 course are below the national average.

67. Students observed in the workshops worked confidently and made good progress. Beginners quickly develop practical computing skills. Students' work is of a good standard. Students who had been apprehensive about starting courses were excited about the progress made. Many students return for further courses and develop a good range of skills and qualifications.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communication technology, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
CLAIT short	1	No. of starts	549	466	139
		% retention	96	82	85

		% pass rate	32	34	44
CLAIT one year	1	No. of starts	904	1056	698
		% retention	88	83	83
		% pass rate	59	43	90
ECDL short and one/two year	1	No. of starts	**	79	168
		% retention	**	94	80
		% pass rate	**	12	66
NVQ using IT	1	No. of starts	62	63	28
		% retention	95	78	82
		% pass rate	42	6	0
OCN	1/2	No. of starts	860	970	1,055
		% retention	86	85	67
		% pass rate	48	35	47
IBT stage 2 short and one year	2	No. of starts	193	287	191
		% retention	89	91	68
		% pass rate	41	45	80*
WP level 3 short	3	No. of starts	32	13	10
		% retention	94	77	90
		% pass rate	67	70	57

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* achieved of those completed, 60 students continuing

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

68. Students are well supported in efficiently organised workshops. They follow clear instructions in user-friendly booklets. Materials are clear and easy to follow, but some students had to switch booklets to build up the range of skills required to obtain the qualification, which they found confusing. In other courses, one set of materials constituted the complete course. Free three-hour taster courses help students to choose the qualification appropriate for them. Staff are well practised in supporting students and are knowledgeable about and sympathetic to their needs. Most teachers were very active, moving quickly between students, correcting errors, answering questions and posing their own questions to make students think carefully and improve their understanding. In less effective sessions, teachers waited for students to seek help. The teaching of some groups was not always successful.

69. There is insufficient planning of individual student's learning. Careful records are kept of the exercises students have completed and a variety of forms are used tailored to specific courses. Some students are unclear about what they are expected to do next. There are no targets for students to work to and little account is taken of students' previous experience. Many students were unaware of their progress and what was needed to complete work. No specific tutors take responsibility for a student's support and progress. Changes of tutor undermine the continuity in the students' experience. There is inconsistent use of students' records and insufficient communication between tutors. The return of marked work is often delayed, and contributes to students' uncertainty about their progress.

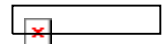
70. There are ample and appropriate resources which match good commercial standards. Students rarely experience difficulty in booking sessions. Learning materials cover enough topics, and provide clear instructions and practice exercises. The workshops are pleasant environments, but not appropriate for group sessions or assessments. In the college IT centre, the volume of noise at busy times from partially screened bays is distracting. Some working conditions are cramped.

71. Arrangements for the distance learning courses are effective and well supported by excellent course materials. Students attend the college for a carefully planned induction. A well-designed database is used to maintain student records and to alert staff of the need to contact students. Such contact is regular and the capable staff are helpful to students.

Leadership and management

72. The curriculum is well managed. There is a clear organisation structure and responsibilities are carefully defined. All staff take part in regular scheduled group team meetings. There are frequent well-documented whole staff meetings. Communications are good and include newsletters, copies of the minutes of meetings and e-mails. Course review and evaluation is thorough, and action plans are well targeted. Progress reviews take place regularly. Staff contribute well to the development of the business plan and self-assessment report. No clear links are established between the staff development plan, the business plan and the college strategic plan.

Retailing, customer service and transportation



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

Strengths

- good learning resources for NVQ students
- effective management of training in the workplace
- flexible and thorough assessment of NVQ
- good standard of GNVQ coursework.

Weaknesses

- some poor accommodation
- insufficiently demanding teaching for students on vocational GCE A-level course.

Scope of provision

73. The college offers two full-time courses in retail/distribution, a GNVQ intermediate diploma and a vocational GCE A level. Over 90% of the provision is work-based for students aged over 19 and includes NVQ qualifications in distributive operations, retail operations, warehousing and customer service. These courses are taught and assessed in the student's workplace by college staff. Evening classes in yacht mastership are run in the education centres in the local community. The college belongs to a nationwide consortium of colleges that provides training and assessment for the employees of major retailers. Students are located across a wide area of the West Midlands. The college has accredited foundation-level programmes in retailing and customer service that are assessed in the students' workplace.

Achievement and standards

74. There has been a substantial increase in pass rates for NVQ programmes in retail operations and customer service over the three years 1999 to 2001. In previous years, low pass rates resulted from poorly managed projects in which students failed to make enough progress. These projects suffered from poor employer involvement and support. New projects have been introduced which offer the students better support. Pass rates have greatly improved. The withdrawal of students from under-performing projects has reduced overall retention rates of students on NVQ programmes.

75. On recently established projects, both retention and pass rates are high. On one NVQ level 2 customer service programme with 35 students, 31 have fully achieved and the remaining four have made substantial progress towards gaining their qualification.

76. There are high pass rates on foundation level programmes run and assessed in the student's workplace. The portfolios of NVQ students show a high standard of work. Good use is made of diverse evidence obtained from normal activities at work. Assessment and internal verification is thorough and effective. Students on the GNVQ intermediate course produce a good standard of work. Assignments are appropriately detailed and well presented, and demonstrate a good level of knowledge of retail distribution. Visits and practical activities form the basis of effective assignments which develop the student's knowledge and provide a sound base for assessment.

A sample of retention and pass rates in retailing, customer service and transportation, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Focus on retail*	foundation	No. of starts	**	**	210
		% retention	**	**	84
		% pass rate	**	**	95
Entry customer service	foundation	No. of starts	**	44	71
		% retention	**	91	85
		% pass rate	**	77	93
NVQ customer service	2	No. of starts	568	328	607
		% retention	100	91	78
		% pass rate	25	29	60
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	6	**	8
		% retention	67	**	58

		% pass rate	100	**	88
NVQ retail operations	2	No. of starts	69	111	191
		% retention	96	94	65
		% pass rate	27	43	64
NVQ retail operations	3	No. of starts	**	**	7
		% retention	**	**	29
		% pass rate	**	**	40
NVQ customer service	3	No. of starts	2,088	646	144
		% retention	96	94	65
		% pass rate	13	13	51

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

**These courses are foundation level and accredited by ASET. They are LSC funded and assessed by written logbook and practical assessment in the workplace. They provide students with a progression route onto NVQs.*

*** course did not run*

Quality of education and training

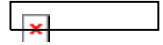
77. Students on NVQ programmes benefit from regular visits by college assessors. Assessment practice is thorough and enables students to make good progress. Assessors are willing to visit students early in the morning or at night to accommodate differing shift patterns. In some cases, the employers' training staff participate in joint sessions with college staff which helps to integrate employer and college training effectively. Retail NVQ students are supplied with good workbooks that set their employer's operations in the context of NVQ standards, and provide a valuable learning resource. The college equips retail supervisors with training and assessment materials to enable them to take greater responsibility for assessment and to acquire formal assessment qualifications.

78. Reviews of some students in the workplace lack sufficient detail on targets, and do not specify precise action points with agreed time-scales. They are often carried out in busy and cramped offices, and frequent distractions reduce the effectiveness of the process. Teaching on the AVCE course is insufficiently demanding for students, and their record of attendance and punctuality is unsatisfactory. Some lessons are dull. The programme provides insufficient practical work and visits to stimulate interest and improve learning. Cramped accommodation and noisy background distractions reduce the quality of teaching on some full-time and evening courses. Fourteen GNVQ students were observed in a classroom that had a capacity for ten. During evening classes in yacht mastership, many students were unable to do sufficient practical navigation work due to a shortage of desk space.

Leadership and management

79. Curriculum management is good. The college has effective systems for managing learning in students' workplaces. There are close links with local employers, the employment service and other community groups. College staff regularly contribute to local forums and take every opportunity to establish good community links. The college has obtained new work and repeat business from many local employers, and has helped develop a customised training package for staff working at a large new shopping centre in Solihull. To help address a shortfall in local provision, the college has recently started to work with a small specialist training company that trains front door supervisors working in the entertainment industry. Close relationships with local retailers have resulted in additional training being undertaken in topics such as the food hygiene and assessor awards.

Hospitality, leisure, sport and travel



Overall provision in this area is **unsatisfactory (grade 4)**

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

Strengths

- good written work by students
- good standard of teaching for travel and hospitality
- range of courses responsive to the needs of industry.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on travel, sports and leisure programmes
- unsatisfactory retention rates on a number of programmes
- unsatisfactory attendance at sports lessons
- some poor accommodation
- ineffective attempts of some managers to raise standards of achievement.

Scope of provision

80. The college offers a wide range of courses in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel for full-time and part-time students, and for a small number of learners in the work place. Courses are available from level 1 to level 4. They include full-time programmes which lead to NVQ, GCSE, GCE A-level and national diploma qualifications. Part-time provision includes NVQ and specialist travel programmes. Short courses include the national licensees certificate, welcome host and hygiene

certificates. The college also offers a range of HE programmes in sports, leisure and tourism. At the time of the inspection, there were 37 students on hospitality programmes. In addition, there were 13 hospitality foundation modern apprentices. On the sport courses, there were 177 students aged 16 to 18 and 32 aged 19 and over. On leisure and travel programmes, there were 92 students aged 16 to 18 and 14 students aged 19 and over.

Achievement and standards

81. The pass and retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 and for adult students are similar. Most pass rates on sports and leisure and the GCSE travel courses are poor. The pass rate on NVQ sport and recreation programmes has declined from 41% in 1999/2000 to 22% in 2000/01. In 1999/2000, the pass rate for the national diploma in leisure studies was only 38% and in 2000/01 it declined to 31%. GCSE travel and tourism, which has had low pass rates since 1998/99, had very poor results in 1999/2000 when only 6% passed. NVQ pass rates in food preparation improved significantly from 38% in 1998/99 to 81% in 1999/2000. The NVQ pass rates for the small number of work-based NVQ trainees and foundation modern apprentices are considerably better than those for college-based students. However, achievement of the modern apprenticeship framework is poor. There were no completions in 1999/2000. The situation improved significantly in 2000/01 when 56% of learners completed the framework.

82. Some retention rates are unsatisfactory. On courses leading to the national diploma in leisure and tourism in 1999/2000 the rate was 50%, and in 2000/01 it was 63%, still 18% below the national average. On the course for the national diploma in travel and tourism, the retention rate in 2000/01 was 64%, which was a drop of 7% from the previous year, and compared unfavourably with the national average of 72%. The rate for GCE A-level sport declined from 86% in 1998/99, to 60% in 2000/01. There have been some good retention rates on the national diploma in sciences sport studies, but the pass rates were low. Although not part of the hospitality, sports, leisure and travel area of learning, pass and retention rates on the sports therapy courses are good.

83. Students' attendance at sport studies lessons is unsatisfactory. During the inspection 40% of students did not attend classes. A few students arrived late for classes. The standard of students' written work in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, including work-based provision, are good. Assignments and portfolios of evidence are well presented and neat. The content is of a high standard and appropriately detailed. In a number of assignments for travel, there is good use of colour photography and ICT. Sport students are quick to understand the link between theory and its practical application in industry. They are confident and well motivated. In a debate about the efficacy of use of the drugs in sport, students demonstrated good skills in research, presentation and group work. The cookery of day-release adult students from the local school meal service is of a very high standard, significantly above the requirements for the level of course that they are taking. Students on the air cabin crew programme take pride in their appearance, demonstrate good social skills and are neatly dressed in college uniforms. Learners on work-based off-the-job provision show good vocational skills and enthusiasm for their subject. Some level 1 and 2 leisure and tourism and sport students have difficulty in maintaining interest in lessons.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hospitality, leisure, sport and travel 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ catering and hospitality food preparation and cooking one year/two year	2	No. of starts	48	61	*
		% retention	60	87	*
		% pass rate	38	81	*
GCSE travel and tourism	2	No. of starts	12	63	19
		% retention	67	73	100
		% pass rate	25	6	22

NVQ sport and recreation	2	No. of starts	*	68	180
		% retention	*	57	72
		% pass rate	*	41	22
National diploma travel and tourism two year	3	No. of starts	*	17	28
		% retention	*	71	64
		% pass rate	*	53	100
National diploma leisure studies two year	3	No. of starts	*	16	25
		% retention	*	50	63
		% pass rate	*	38	31
National diploma sciences sport studies two year	3	No. of starts	12	26	14
		% retention	83	69	88
		% pass rate	50	72	50
GCE A-level sport	3	No. of starts	21	12	16
		% retention	86	58	60
		% pass rate	39	100	78

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

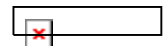
84. In hospitality and travel lessons, most teaching is of a high standard. Teachers are attentive to the learning requirements of students. In most instances, they stimulate and hold students' interest. Teaching is linked carefully to industry practice, and provides students with learning that is clearly relevant to their future employment. In one lesson, the teacher used an effective combination of ICT including videos and a slide presentation, airline safety equipment and whiteboard to explain the importance of the safety demonstration by air cabin crew at the start of a flight. Teaching and learning for sport ranges from unsatisfactory to effective. In the more successful lessons, good teaching methods are used. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable in the area of sport studies. Their methods included practical and group work, role-play and formal debates. Assignments for sport provision are well written and vocationally relevant. In some instances, teachers in this area are not well organised and failed to engage students' interest in lessons. Overall, the quality of learning is affected by accommodation arrangements. The open learning area for sport, leisure and travel, tuition is disturbed by noise from the rest of the section and the arrival and departure of students, teachers and technicians using adjacent classrooms. Some class groups are larger than the rooms can reasonably accommodate. At one off-site venue, 12 students had to use a very small room with no natural light, no overhead projection facilities and a small white board.

85. The library offers a good range of services including adequate provision of books and periodicals, lists of relevant web pages for sport, leisure and travel, CD-ROMs and videos. There is good access to appropriate sport facilities and a flourishing travel agency provides students with good opportunities to achieve their vocational competencies. An imaginative six-week induction programme which aimed at improving course selection for sport foundation studies, involved a residential event, the opportunity to gain a qualification, a diagnostic assessment and briefings on the different courses available. Students considered that this programme helped them settle into their studies very well.

Leadership and management

86. The response of managers to the need to raise pass and retention rates on sports, leisure and travel programmes has been ineffective. A new manager was appointed for the area, supported by a new team structure, in September 2001 and since then some developments have started to address the weaknesses. It was too early at the time of the inspection to assess whether these measures were being effective. Minutes of meetings and quality assurance reviews indicate that there had previously been no discussion or action planning to address the identified weaknesses. Management of the small work-based provision has been successful in improving the achievement of the modern apprenticeship framework. The self-assessment report for hospitality, sport, leisure and travel correctly identified most of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The report did not fully acknowledge the managers' lack of success in raising pass and retention rates.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates on hairdressing NVQ level 3
- high standard of practical work
- well-planned work-based training
- wide range of resources to support learning
- effective individual reviews for full-time students.

Weaknesses

- insufficient checking in lessons on students' understanding of the work
- insufficient systematic planning for assessments

- poor pass rates on beauty therapy NVQ level 2 programmes
- inadequate provision of training in key skills.

Scope of provision

87. Courses for hairdressing and beauty therapy are available at the Blossomfield and Chelmsley campuses. Hairdressing at NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3, foundation and advanced modern apprentices, barbering and programmes in introduction to hairdressing are offered at the Blossomfield campus. At the Chelmsley campus only hairdressing at NVQ level 2 is offered. Part-time or full-time students attend during the day; in the evening, courses are only for part-time students. Courses in beauty therapy at NVQ levels 2 and 3 are offered at the Blossomfield campus, and at NVQ level 2 at the Chelmsley campus. In the evening, courses include a beauty specialist diploma, manicure and pedicure, aromatherapy, reflexology, Indian head massage, fashion and photographic make-up, and wax depilation. Some students can study on individually designed timetables to accommodate their particular needs. Staff are trying to devise flexible arrangements that will benefit all their students in terms of attendance modes and study patterns.

Achievement and standards

88. Retention and pass rates on hairdressing NVQ level 3 are good. For the three years since 1999 they have been above the national average. Part-time provision in aromatherapy has also exceeded the national average for both retention and pass rates for the same period. There is an upward trend on the foundation modern apprentices programme; retention rates have risen from 37% to 57% and pass rates of the full framework from 37% to 50%. However, retention rates on beauty therapy NVQ level 2 in 2000/01 were exceptionally poor at 7%. The college recognised the need to redesign the beauty therapy curriculum. The new design was implemented in September 2001. Students now study on a modular basis with earlier scheduled assessments on the NVQ criteria. There is inadequate provision for key skills. Lessons on key skills are not taught until the students' second term. Unsatisfactory attention is given to key skills during other lessons. Teachers missed opportunities to assess key skills as they occurred naturally during students' practical work.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ hairdressing (two years)	2	No. of starts	99	54	17
		% retention	81	65	67
		% pass rate	63	79	60
Foundation modern apprenticeship (one year)	2	No. of starts	27	46	28
		% retention	37	37	57
		% pass rate	37	37	50
Beauty therapy (one year)	2	No. of starts	*	42	60
		% retention	*	100	57
		% pass rate	*	100	77
Beauty therapy (two years)	2	No. of starts	79	51	14

years)		% retention	73	73	7
		% pass rate	7	0	100
Hairdressing	3	No. of starts	28	18	13
		% retention	86	83	77
		% pass rate	82	85	92
Aromatherapy part time	3	No. of starts	50	71	84
		% retention	78	86	82
		% pass rate	93	85	98

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

89. A new and effective scheme of work was introduced in September 2001 for all full-time students. Reviews and target setting take place every six weeks, when a full teaching week is dedicated to review activity. Enrichment opportunities involving both staff and students are also scheduled during this week. For example, representatives from product and cosmetic houses give talks and demonstrations to extend students' learning. Reviews and target setting are not, however, provided for part-time students. Academic support and guidance occurs informally; there is a policy for students to receive appropriate support. There is insufficient systematic planning of assessments. In beauty therapy, one group of mature students had not undertaken any assessed work. A full-time second-year hairdressing group had insufficient assessments for their length of time on programme and received no accreditation for previous learning.

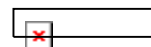
90. Staff are enthusiastic, well motivated and receptive to new ideas and initiatives. Teachers have good theoretical knowledge. Of the teaching lessons observed, 92% were graded satisfactory or above. Teachers, however, give insufficient attention to checking that students are understanding the work. Some lessons finished without a summary of the key points. The level of practical work undertaken by students is of a good commercial standard. Students work professionally and competently on clients, and have well-developed communication skills. Their written work and assignments are of a satisfactory standard. Some advanced holistic therapy students produce work of a very good standard. Marking and feedback from teachers often lacks a commentary that will help students to improve. Good work from students is not appropriately acknowledged.

91. Resources and accommodation are good. Both at Blossomfield and Chelmsley resources are good. Competent technical support staff ensure the commercial activity of each centre is properly operated. Qualified technical staff closely supervise students in the reception procedures that form part of their NVQ assessment. Students have access to a wide range of commercial products in both hairdressing and beauty therapy. Equipment in both areas is good and the teaching salons reflect current commercial practice. However, there is no heat therapy area for students on the beauty therapy NVQ level 3 course. Students have to rely on gaining knowledge and experience during work placement sessions.

Leadership and management

92. The programmes are well managed. Teaching staff manage their own courses well. There is a regular cycle of meetings where staff discuss issues that impact on students' learning and decide on appropriate action. There is, however, insufficient awareness and involvement of staff in the setting and monitoring of retention and pass rate targets. Progress is being made to produce action plans to address weaknesses. Staff have regular access to and support from the team leader. Students are encouraged to feedback their views on programmes regularly. Wherever possible, staff ensure improvements are then made.

Health, social care and public services



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

Strengths

- effective guidance for full-time students
- good retention and pass rates on all national diploma courses
- good enrichment programme for the national diploma in social care
- good retention and pass rates on the national diploma in early years.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates for work-based learners
- insufficient NVQ work-based assessors for childcare and education
- inadequate use of play equipment in the classroom by Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) students
- insufficient professional support for new teaching staff on social care programmes.

Scope of provision

93. The college offers a good range of full and part-time programmes in social care and in early years. Courses in these areas are at NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4. The NVQ level 1 course did not recruit in 2001. Students are able to start NVQs at any time during the academic year. Vocational programmes for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults are provided at the Blossomfield and Chelmsley sites. In part-time provision a good range of first aid programmes is offered at both college sites and in community locations. The college offers part-time courses in British sign

language, access to health, and the diploma in welfare studies. All full-time students have the opportunity to participate in a programme of enrichment activities which includes basic food hygiene, lifting and handling and augmentative communication.

Achievement and standards

94. Pass rates for those students who complete courses are good and retention rates are satisfactory. Students show high retention and pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in early years. They produce a high standard of course work that has relevant links to the workplace. The pass rate on NVQ levels 3 and 4 is good and above national averages. Pass rates on the CACHE certificate in childcare and education programmes are consistently above national averages, achieving 100% in 2000 and 82% in 2001. Pass rates on short courses in first aid and first aid at work are high at 98% for the same two years. Retention and pass rates on all NVQ work-based courses in care and early years are low. Students' attendance during the week of inspection was low at 69% and students' were frequently late. NVQ workshops for background knowledge in care are poorly attended. Many NVQ students in childcare, and education and care do not complete the whole qualification within the two years normally allowed. There are insufficient assessors in the work place to support childcare and education students.

95. Examples of good practical work are displayed in teaching areas at Blossomfield. Most students' written work meets course requirements and is of a good standard. Most diploma students demonstrate an appropriate level of analysis and evaluation. They make relevant contributions during class discussion and willingly participate in practical tasks. All students studying at level 3 are attentive in lessons. Employment opportunities have improved for BTEC national diploma social care students since the introduction of a linked NVQ level 2 in care. The standard of work in their portfolios is good. All students on full-time programmes are monitored effectively in the work place.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, social care and public services, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
First aid at work	1	No. of starts	711	300	302
		% retention	100	99	97
		% pass rate	90	90	89
NVQ care	2	No. of starts	137	14	64
		% retention	88	57	98
		% pass rate	60	80	20
Cache childcare and education	2	No. of starts	32	26	24
		% retention	75	72	75
		% pass rate	82	100	82
NVQ childcare and education	3	No. of starts	56	43	55
		% retention	96	86	71
		% pass rate	16	45	15
Access to health	3	No. of starts	10	9	22
		% retention	80	43	76
		% pass rate	75	67	100
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	No. of starts	34	21	41
		% retention	91	90	80
		% pass rate	100	100	100

GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	No. of starts	36	22	*
		% retention	78	73	*
		% pass rate	63	92	*

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

96. Most teaching is satisfactory. Teachers plan effectively, and in most lessons, challenge students appropriately. The most effective lessons are well structured and make good links between theory, practice and students' work placement experience. There are good opportunities for all students to contribute in lessons and most demonstrate clear understanding when responding to questions. The better schemes of work and lesson plans are well used to ensure adequate coverage of course requirements. On some care programmes, plans do not always contain enough detail about learning or assessment. Where teaching was less than satisfactory, tasks were presented badly and students did not understand what was required of them. In the less effective lessons, the teaching lacked momentum. Teachers failed to hold students' interest and did not check that they were understanding the work. Some teachers are inexperienced and do not have sufficient understanding of classroom management. They do not receive enough guidance on how to plan lessons for students with a short span of concentration. Assignments are well written and students are generally well prepared to undertake the work. Teachers assess students' work appropriately. Most written feedback on the quality of the work is generally good. Internal verification of students' work conforms with awarding body requirements and the college procedures are followed.

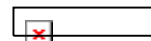
97. Accommodation at Blossomfield is good and teaching rooms are well equipped. There are adequate practical resources in both areas. However, students on courses for the full-time childcare certificate are given insufficient practical guidance on how to use and experiment with equipment and resources that they may use in the workplace. A good range of learning resources is available for students, including up-to-date computing equipment. Students make good use of the wide range of journals and publications. There is sufficient equipment for childcare and early years students to use in practical sessions at the Blossomfield site.

98. Students receive good personal support and guidance from staff. All full-time students have an effective induction and tutorial programme. There are procedures to monitor students' progression and achievement closely. Communication between teachers and parents of younger students is effective. Open evenings provide good opportunities for teachers to communicate with the parents and carers of younger students. Most students express satisfaction with the good support and guidance they receive.

Leadership and management

99. The areas of both care and early years are managed effectively. Staff work well together in teams and communicate regularly. There is effective co-operation between the curriculum managers for care and early years. The self-assessment report identifies effective strategies to improve retention and pass rates for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in childcare and early years, and the need to appoint additional assessors in the workplace. Newly appointed staff receive insufficient guidance on how to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. Team meetings are held regularly and they are well documented. Staff appraisal procedures are now in place. Course files are comprehensive and well maintained by course leaders. Managers use the information about recruitment, retention and pass rates in course reviews for planning purposes.

Visual and performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- good progression to HE and employment
- well-planned and effective teaching
- extensive range of courses from access to first degree
- good integration of computing skills for NVQ levels 2 and 3 students.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- unsatisfactory attendance and lack of punctuality
- inadequate accommodation for performing arts and media
- ineffective curriculum management in media and performing arts.

Scope of provision

100. There is an extensive range of full-time and part-time courses which provides progression within this college from foundation or access level to Higher National Diplomas (HND) or a first degree. Most full-time courses are at intermediate and advanced levels. The range of part-time opportunities and community provision is good. Saturday art classes are available for children and adults. Modular courses are popular with adult students who can gain progressive accreditation at appropriate levels. Within the overall programme, learners have a good choice of general art and design or specialist design, media and performing arts courses. New provision includes access to visual communications and GCE AS courses in dance, drama and film studies. There are some gaps in provision at foundation level in media and performing arts. Students aged over 19 make up 70% of all enrolments in art and design.

Achievement and standards

101. Pass rates are very uneven. There are some good results. In two out of the three years from 1999 to 2001, pass rates above the national average were achieved in the national diploma in design and in the national diploma in performing arts. The most recent pass rate for the latter course fell to just below the national average, from 100% in 2000. Pass rates at or around national averages have been achieved for two successive years in the diploma in foundation studies in art and in GCE A-level media. Pass rates in GCSE fine arts rose above the national average in 2001. In other intermediate and advanced courses, pass rates have fallen below national averages. There are many poor results including a significant decline in the intermediate GNVQ in art and design.

102. Retention rates in the advanced GNVQ in art and design have been consistently above national averages for students aged over 19. Retention rates on the intermediate GNVQ art and design have improved in 2000 and 2001. Poor retention rates and significant falls in retention have occurred in other courses, notably in GCE A levels in art and media, in intermediate GNVQ media and in the national diplomas in design and performing arts. Attendance at many classes is poor and is linked to retention patterns. Students arriving late at lessons often disrupt other students' learning.

103. Students attain satisfactory standards in their studies. Progression is good. Most students on advanced-level courses progress to a wide range of HE courses or to employment. Many students choose to continue their studies in Solihull on the college's own HE provision that includes degrees validated by the University of Central England and higher national diploma courses.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts and media, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE fine arts	2	No. of starts	39	23	11
		% retention	54	78	100
		% pass rate	90	56	82
GNVQ intermediate media	2	No. of starts	17	30	15
		% retention	94	62	53
		% pass rate	75	29	67
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	37	25	24
		% retention	54	68	71
		% pass rate	65	29	44
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	No. of starts	27	20	17
		% retention	74	70	76
		% pass rate	87	86	77
Diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	No. of starts	57	31	12
		% retention	91	81	83
		% pass rate	79	92	89
National diploma in design	3	No. of starts	42	45	51
		% retention	86	69	57
		% pass rate	78	93	92
GNVQ advanced media	3	No. of starts	25	26	20
		% retention	72	46	67

		% pass rate	89	64	67
BTEC national diploma performing arts	3	No. of starts	12	18	15
		% retention	83	56	57
		% pass rate	90	100	88
GCE A-level fine arts	3	No. of starts	31	21	12
		% retention	94	43	42
		% pass rate	98	89	80
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	14	24	31
		% retention	79	42	38
		% pass rate	67	100	89

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

104. Teaching in art, design, media and performing arts is good. None of the lessons observed were less than satisfactory. Students find their teachers friendly and approachable. They comment positively on the enthusiasm that teachers have for their subject. Effective action planning has secured improvements in teaching and learning. Teachers provide students with a rich seam of information on how to research current art, design, media and theatre activities. Many teachers bring in their own books to illustrate points relevant to their lessons. Teaching in all areas includes a good and appropriate range of teaching and learning methods. A teacher in performing arts used a well-structured lesson plan to keep first diploma performing arts students engaged on the task of devising characters and creating dialogue. The students performed confidently, developing a rapport with the teacher that stimulated their learning. Students in the second year of advanced-level courses demonstrate strong self-confidence and motivation. A group of fashion students worked independently on a garment construction with expert and individual support from their teacher. This same group was introduced to industry standard garment specification and costing sheets as an extension of their assignment. Fashion students regularly undertake periods of work experience at the 'Clothes Show Live', but links with industry and work experience for other students are underdeveloped.

105. Overseas students, adult students with children and students with learning difficulties all speak highly of the support they receive for their studies. Students' participation in lessons is satisfactory. They develop additional personal and learning skills through their practical work. Work on key skills is integrated well within practical studio work. Students from the intermediate art course were effectively led through an exercise in discussing topics of social interest. IT key skills are developed expertly through lessons relevant to arts practice. Study visits to local and national venues are well organised. On the intermediate GNVQ in art and design, an appropriate variety of teaching and learning methods is used to motivate students to develop their creativity through imaginative studio work. These students were effectively engaged in making three-dimensional body ornaments, inspired by a study visit to the Pitt Rivers museum in Oxford.

106. Assignments are well structured, have clear learning objectives and cover syllabus specifications. Supplementary notes and good supporting materials are used effectively and extensively to strengthen learning. Teachers regularly monitor learners' progress and devise individual action plans through the use of 'learning conversation' records. Assessment is fair and the systems are understood by the students. Teachers mark work accurately and make helpful comments. Students comment favourably on the benefit they receive from tutorials. Feedback to students is thorough. Part-time adult students in drawing and photography classes at foundation level were sufficiently enthused by their progress to want to continue to the course at the next level.

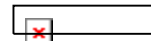
107. Teachers are well qualified in their respective subject disciplines and many continue to practice professionally. There is sufficient good technician support. Art and design studio accommodation is

extensive and satisfactory. Photography and fashion accommodation and resources are particularly good. There is good IT provision, including dedicated computers with graphics and image manipulation software. Library book stock benefits from the HE provision. Teachers and learners speak highly of the library service. There are some unsatisfactory room schedules in art. Accommodation for contextual studies is poor and there is a general lack of secure storage for students' work. Accommodation for media and performing arts is unsatisfactory. The performing arts room is cramped, poorly ventilated and unsuitable for performance activities. Performances staged at outside venues provide a positive experience, but there is a lack of specialist rehearsal and technical space in the college. Dance lessons take place in an inappropriate sports hall which is without suitable heating provision and is also used as a through route to gain access to other areas. Media rooms have a high level of noise intrusion making classroom discussion difficult.

Leadership and management

108. Management initiatives have resulted in improved self-assessment and action planning procedures and good communications in the department. Course programme management at departmental level is effective and programme leaders maintain good course quality manuals. There is ineffective curriculum management in media and performing arts subjects. For example, there are no targets for students' attendance. There are procedures for absence and lateness, but students are unaware that any action is taken to implement them. Timetable and staff changes have affected continuity of learning in media and performing arts. Although efforts have been made to address this situation, some students have not had their work marked or returned and some performances and lessons have had to be cancelled or postponed. Staff have raised matters of health and safety and have not been made aware of any subsequent consideration of the issues.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- good pass rates in GCE AS courses in history and sociology
- much good teaching
- good development of analytical and oral skills
- effective management of access to HE courses.

Weaknesses

- GCE A-level pass rates well below averages

- some poor retention rates on GCSE and GCE A-level courses
- insufficient use of available resources
- inadequate development of writing skills
- insufficient sharing of best practice.

Scope of provision

109. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses on both main sites including some evening provision. At the time of the inspection 434 students were enrolled on GCE AS and A-level programmes, of whom 103 were part time. Approximately half of the 56 day students on GCSE courses were part time. The largest subject cohort was in psychology, with 290 students, one third of whom were part time and studying mainly in the evenings. Of the 71 access to HE students, 35 were following a history programme, 26 psychology and 21 sociology, over a one or two year period.

Achievement and standards

110. Advanced-level pass rates are well below national averages. Pass rates in history have declined since 1999 to 18 % in 2001. Pass rates are also low on one-year GCE A-level courses in psychology and sociology. There are improving trends at GCE AS in history and sociology, where pass rates are above the national average. The one-year history course, with a small number in the class, has achieved significant improvement and reached a pass rate in 2001 of 88%. Achievement on the access to HE course has improved since 2000, and the pass rate is above the local consortium average. There are some poor retention rates on two-year GCE A-level courses in history and psychology, and also at GCSE. There is a high retention rate for students aged over 19 in GCE AS psychology and on the one-year GCE A-level sociology course.

111. Standards of attainment are satisfactory or better. GCE AS and A-level students handle source information confidently. Analytical skills are well developed. Using textual and statistical evidence, most students are able to develop logical arguments to support judgements that they then put forward in class discussions. Students acquire good oral skills. However, this ability to develop and put forward an argument is not often demonstrated in students' written work. Essay writing is often weak and poorly structured.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE psychology one year	2	No. of starts	49	43	43
		% retention	43	63	56

		% pass rate	48	48	36
GCE A-level psychology one year	3	No. of starts	48	27	56
		% retention	77	52	73
		% pass rate	46	43	41
GCE A-level sociology one year	3	No. of starts	35	31	35
		% retention	63	58	80
		% pass rate	38	67	36
GCE A-level history two years	3	No. of starts	31	22	21
		% retention	81	50	52
		% pass rate	44	36	18
GCE A-level psychology two years	3	No. of starts	66	42	63
		% retention	70	60	35
		% pass rate	71	71	50
GCE A-level sociology two years	3	No. of starts	64	33	49
		% retention	73	70	57
		% pass rate	45	71	36

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

112. Much of the teaching is good. Lessons generally have coherent objectives. There was an enthusiastic approach to learning in a GCSE history lesson that examined Stalin's purges. Access students in sociology demonstrated good skills in interpreting quite complex statistical data on income differentials between men and women. In a second-year GCE A-level psychology lesson on theories of aggression, skills of evaluation and judgement were well developed. Teachers create learning opportunities that challenge students to think for themselves. This approach is most effective when all the students in a class are engaged on the same activity. For example, in an access history lesson, students discussed the causes of the First World War in groups and then fed back and collated their responses. GCE AS students in psychology effectively used role-play to understand dream scenarios. In a few lessons, the teacher talked for too long and failed to hold the students' interest. In other lessons, the teacher's lengthy dictation of notes provided little stimulus to learning. Insufficient time is given to developing students' writing skills. Question and answer sessions do not always involve all students. In some groups, erratic patterns of attendance and late arrival affect the continuity of learning. There are good working relationships between teachers and students, who enjoy most of their learning opportunities. Students speak well of the support they receive from their teachers.

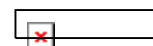
113. Well-qualified, experienced staff generally teach with enthusiasm. New and part-time staff are paired with experienced mentors. Accommodation at the Blossomfield site offers good learning opportunities. There is good access to adequate IT and good library facilities. Insufficient use is made of these facilities during lessons. In history, an IT programme of study on aspects of modern German history has been developed, but generally IT is not sufficiently integrated into teaching and learning, particularly in sociology and in access courses. In terms of aids for teaching and learning, much reliance is placed on the use of good photocopied material. Sources used are appropriate and varied, but there is little encouragement for students to undertake any research themselves. One exception was a history lesson, in which relevant new library stock from the library was shown to the students. Some history students have made visits to Ypres, and a survivor of the Holocaust has talked to students about his experiences but generally, few external resources are used to enrich and enliven learning.

114. Demanding assignments are set regularly. Marking and feedback are not of a consistently high standard. Attention given to the work of access students is good; marking is thorough and their assignments are returned with detailed cover sheets and constructive comments on scripts. Monitoring of adult students' progress is well documented. Generally, however, younger students are not given target grades against which they can measure their performance and there is little use of other performance indicators.

Leadership and management

115. There is effective leadership and management of access to HE courses. There are appropriately detailed schemes of work which specify teaching methods and learning objectives. There are also clear written procedures for monitoring students, for giving guidance and support and for collecting sound evidence for self-assessment. Within the sixth form centre, classroom management and deployment of specialist staff are good. However, there is insufficient identification and sharing of good practice. The development of staff skills to meet the needs of all students is inadequate. Schemes of work are insufficiently developed with the exception of schemes for the access programmes. Other schemes do not define learning objectives or appropriate teaching methods. Lesson plans and marking and feedback procedures and practice are uneven in quality. The management and use of targets and performance indicators and central data to evaluate the quality of provision are not always satisfactory.

English, languages and communications



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

Strengths

- good support for individual students
- good student participation in many lessons
- wide range of GCE AS/A-level courses in English and community languages
- good resources.

Weaknesses

- English GCSE course inappropriate for many students
- poor retention rates on many courses

- disruption of lessons by arrival of students
- insufficiently thorough planning and development
- poor attendance rates.

Scope of provision

116. There is a wide range of courses providing students with many options. Six modern languages are offered across a range of GCE AS and A levels, GCSE, New Concept for Education (NCFE) and OCN courses. At the time of the inspection there were 785 students taking modern languages at the main college site and at community venues, and 245 students on a company-based training programme at a local car manufacturing plant. In English, 350 students were following part-time or full-time courses at GCSE, and 240 were studying GCE AS and A-level courses in English literature, English language, and English language and literature.

Achievement and standards

117. Most students achieve satisfactorily in lessons. In languages in classes for adults, students communicate effectively in the target language and progress well. Students in an Italian lesson were able to tell each other about a day trip using a range of tenses and vocabulary. In a GCE AS Spanish lesson, students gave confident presentations on the difficulties of living with anorexia. In GCE A-level English lessons, students are often able to explore texts in great depth and detail. In a GCE AS English lesson, students made impressive contributions to a sustained discussion of the presentation of characters, relationships and themes in 'Snow Falling on Cedars'. In lessons in both English and other languages, some students lack self-discipline and teachers are not able to motivate them to make good progress. Pass rates in language courses for GCSE, and one-year GCE A-level courses in English literature, have been consistently good. Pass rates on GCE AS French were above national averages in 2001. There were good pass rates in Spanish national OCN courses at level 2 in 2001. The pass rates in English GCSE courses have declined over the three years to 2001 to well below national averages. Pass rates were low in 2001 for students on GCE AS courses in English and on GCE A-level French and Spanish one and two-year programmes. Retention rates are poor on GCSE English courses, and GCE A-level courses for full-time students in English, and on some modern foreign language GCE A-level courses. In lessons observed during the inspection, attendance was low at 65%. In some lessons, attendance was below 50%. In a significant number of English classes, many latecomers disrupted the flow of the lesson and the concentration of the other students.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, languages and communications, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE Spanish one year	2	No. of starts	14	18	25
		% retention	85	72	76
		% pass rate	73	85	88

GCSE English language	2	No. of starts	357	369	277
		% retention	59	65	68
		% pass rate	53	41	39
GCE A-level English language	3	No. of starts	6	16	20
		% retention	83	60	68
		% pass rate	60	44	62
GCE A-level English language and literature	3	No. of starts	51	40	65
		% retention	82	75	80
		% pass rate	78	84	44
GCE A-level French two year	3	No. of starts	17	21	13
		% retention	88	43	92
		% pass rate	57	58	82
GCE A-level English literature	3	No. of starts	99	85	63
		% retention	75	46	56
		% pass rate	39	72	66

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

118. Teachers are confident and well prepared. There is a sense of purpose in many English and modern foreign language lessons and students have varied opportunities to contribute through group work and discussion. Members of one GCSE English group conducted a lively debate about whether Eveline in 'Dubliners' had been right to stay with her family, rather than take an opportunity to begin a new life. Students are often challenged to analyse texts carefully and probe deeply into authors' intentions. Part-time students on GCE AS English literature courses were very responsive to the nuances and ambiguities of Larkin's poetry in 'An Arundel Tomb'. In English, some teachers continued a successful activity for too long, and diminished its impact. Tasks for written work are demanding and appropriate. Students in a GCE AS English language class produced pamphlets to demonstrate the principles of parts of speech for young children. Many pamphlets were colourful and effective. Most teachers in English provide very detailed written comments on students' work. The most effective examples highlight good features of the work, specify shortcomings, and give clear advice for improvement. In modern foreign languages, comments are not as full. Most modern language lessons are conducted entirely in the target language, and students develop good accents. In a German class for adult beginners, students enjoyed a lively role-play session in which they practised how to complain about standards in a hotel. On adult level 2 and GCE AS courses in French, students receive weekly assessment sheets with action points for improvement. In most lessons, teachers establish friendly working relationships with students. They also set out clearly what they expect of the students. However, in a few classes teachers failed to motivate students. In English lessons, lateness is challenged insufficiently.

119. Most teachers support students well. In lessons, they are aware of the needs of individual students who are experiencing problems, and give appropriate advice and encouragement. In English, carefully prepared additional learning support sessions are provided for those students who need more sustained help. Foreign language assistants give extra lessons to support students on full-time GCE AS and A-level courses in languages. These lessons improve students' oral skills. On other courses, there are regular one-to-one reviews of individuals' progress, but no consistent setting of precise targets to help students to improve.

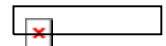
120. Students benefit from good access to resources, including computers and the Internet. The languages resource centre is extensively equipped and well managed. There is a large and

appropriate book stock at the main site library, students at Chelmsley Wood have a much narrower selection of books available to them. Modern language teaching is in dedicated rooms with attractive displays. English teaching is mainly based in general purpose rooms, which lack any sense of subject identity or access to subject resources.

Leadership and management

121. Courses are well planned, but schemes of work generally give insufficient emphasis to teaching methods. Some schemes are merely lists of topics to be covered and the resources to be used. Staff work well together, but English staff rely too much on informal discussions for developing policy and practice. Their decisions are often not documented effectively. Meetings of modern languages staff are consistently recorded well. Teachers have benefited from effective staff development in the key skills of IT and communications. Staff teams have not devised effective strategies to combat poor attendance and retention rates. The English team has not found suitable alternatives to GCSE English courses for the many students who take them with little prospect of making significant progress, let alone gaining the qualification.

Foundation programmes



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

Strengths

- good retention and pass rates
- good progression opportunities
- much effective teaching and learning
- innovative ways of teaching basic skills
- extensive use of external qualifications
- excellent training materials
- effective management and support of staff.

Weaknesses

- inappropriate use of learning centres for group training
- poor target setting for a minority of students.

Scope of provision

122. At the time of the inspection the foundation area of learning had enrolled 817 students. The total included: 95 on part-time basic skills courses in the community and industry; 336 adults with learning difficulties on part-time courses; 22 on part-time courses for English for speakers of other languages; and 57 following access to FE courses. There were 26 trainees on the life skills option of Learning Gateway. Students and trainees are recruited throughout the year and in 2000/01, over 2,000 students chose training in this area. Training takes place on the 2 main college campuses, and also at Keepers Lodge, 35 outreach centres and 3 centres in workplaces. There are, 5 managers, 15 full-time staff, 46 part-time staff, 5.5 learning support staff, and a group of 15 part-time learning support staff. Many volunteers help the staff.

Achievement and standards

123. There are good retention and pass rates especially in the provision for adults with learning difficulties and on life skills. Retention rates on the adults' programme have averaged 93% over the three years to 2001, and the pass rate has improved from 64% to 96%. There was a retention rate of 74% on the life skills programme in 2000/01, and a 74% pass rate for individual learning plans. The student booklet, which is used in most of the courses, combines an individual development plan with short-term targets and records of reviews. Students complete work records at the end of each lesson. They regularly discuss their records with the tutor and progress is noted. Progression at the end of the course is good. On average some 64% of students on life skills either move into FE or employment with training. Last year, 82% of students on access to FE progressed into FE colleges, other training or employment. Students on the community courses are encouraged to continue with their training and many of them move through access courses onto further and HE studies. The standard of students' work is high. Good use is made of displays in the learning and outreach centres to encourage students and promote the courses. Family literacy and numeracy programmes offer accredited provision to parents of children at school. The good teaching on these programmes has contributed to the growth in the number of courses. By the time of the inspection, over 1,000 students had enrolled and achieved some form of accreditation. Former students have progressed onto other courses such as basic skills, childcare and classroom assistants. Others are employed as teaching assistants in schools. There is poor target setting for a minority of students. For example, students on the access to FE course do not have measurable short-term targets set, and are not always aware of how long they should be taking to complete the separate parts of their course. Other students and trainees do have short-term targets, but it is not always possible to measure achievement against this and get a clear result.

A sample of retention and pass rates in foundation programmes, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Chelmsley Wood learning centre	foundation	No. of starts	130	215	274
		% retention	80	75	67

		% pass rate	39	52	65
Adults with learning difficulties	foundation	No. of starts	479	419	489
		% retention	94	94	92
		% pass rate	64	70	96
Blossomfield learning centre	foundation	No. of starts	175	235	402
		% retention	90	85	77
		% pass rate	34	54	75
Access to FE	1	No. of starts	45	54	59
		% retention	95	100	80
		% pass rate	27	39	33

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001).

Quality of education and training

124. Most teaching and almost all learning and attainment were good or better. All of the teaching is in small groups. Many of the lessons have additional support from either learning assistants or volunteers. This arrangement ensures that all students receive good individual attention. Work on basic skills is integrated into much of the training and an appropriate variety of creative activities and learning materials are used. Training materials in most courses have good graphical layouts and are specially developed to meet the needs of individual students. All of the materials for adults with learning difficulties use symbols as well as words. Training in the craft workshops includes opportunities to develop and accredit many numeracy skills. Effective joint partnership projects in the community and with industry encourage a greater participation in basic skills provision by local residents and people in employment in the locality. Learning centres set up in three local companies enable staff members to improve basic skills and take IT training in their workplace. A wide range of external qualifications is offered. Good use is made of units offered by the OCN. Students' individual development plans show that units are chosen to meet their individual needs. The open-plan learning centres are widely used for small group training sessions, although they are very busy and noisy, and students are easily distracted from their work.

125. The life skills programme is well designed. A wide range of activities meets students' needs and keeps them highly motivated. Students can start the programme at any time of the year and care is taken by both staff and existing trainees to ensure that newcomers are made welcome and integrated into the group. There are flexible arrangements for running the well-structured programme so that all students can benefit from the opportunities. For example, students benefit from the chance to take part in challenging, personal development and team-building programmes. Life skills staff work closely with the college's work placement team to ensure that the 'work tasters' are appropriate, and that employers are aware of the particular requirements of each student. Weekly student reviews are effective. The recording of progress and personal development and setting of realistic targets are good.

126. All courses have detailed schemes of work with clear objectives and individual lesson plans. Some lesson plans list the individual learning objectives for each student, and comments on whether these have been achieved. All students and staff contribute thorough feedback on the programmes which is used to improve the provision. There are effective half-yearly student meetings for adults with learning difficulties, run by staff from an external advocacy agency. Feedback is given to the programme manager and the college managers are informed about issues of particular concern. Assessment, internal verification and moderation are satisfactory. Good records of meetings are maintained. There is a good awareness of equal opportunities among both staff and students. All students receive an introduction to equal opportunities issues during their induction. There is an equal opportunities course on the life skills programme that runs for 3 hours each week for 11 weeks, and reviews detail issues involving harassment and discrimination. Training materials and resources are good. Students are made well aware of how their words and

actions can be interpreted, and are encouraged to identify changes in their behaviour.

Leadership and management

127. The excellent work in the area is in part the result of outstanding management and very good support for staff. There are few full-time staff, and a much larger number of part-time staff and learning assistants. There is a well-structured recruitment process for staff. Volunteers are used effectively. They have to either be qualified or working towards a recognised qualification in the area of basic skills. Each team has a cycle of meetings which helps teamwork and communication. Managers regularly observe staff in their training sessions.

Part D: College data

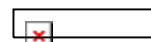
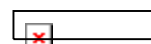


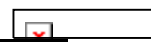
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	23.8	35.4
2	33.3	27.9
3	23.8	21.5
4/5	4.8	3.8
Other	14.3	11.4
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	2,797	8,872	14.9
Agriculture	87	245	1.2
Construction	3	46	0.5
Engineering	251	1,064	5.8
Business	1,067	7,479	22.8
Hotel and catering	580	2,373	4.1
Health and community care	915	9,055	9.1

Art and design	466	2,038	7.4
Humanities	7,657	7,091	27.6
Basic education	300	2,134	6.6
Total	14,123	40,397	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000
1	Starters excluding transfers	543	651	1,419	2,909	2,687	6,138
	Retention rate (%)	85	87	73	88	79	77
	National average (%)	81	80	80	80	78	79
	Pass rate (%)	62	52	53	52	56	62
	National average (%)	59	62	66	62	63	69
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,622	1,737	2,480	2,217	4,956	5,634
	Retention rate (%)	87	70	75	91	91	84
	National average (%)	76	76	77	79	78	78
	Pass rate (%)	60	70	62	61	34	58
	National average (%)	63	67	68	66	65	68
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,339	1,363	1,510	3,278	5,329	6,138
	Retention rate (%)	74	81	71	89	93	88
	National average (%)	77	77	77	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	66	67	61	43	29	53
	National average (%)	71	72	73	64	65	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	28	28	31	1,414	884	930
	Retention rate (%)	86	100	74	74	90	78
	National average (%)	83	84	80	84	84	81
	Pass rate (%)	27	72	83	33	47	43
	National average (%)	64	65	70	58	61	60

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 (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1997/98 - 1998/99: Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

3. College rates for (1999/2000): provided by the college in spring 2001.

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)	62.6	29.8	7.6	131
Level 2 (intermediate)	56.0	30.7	13.3	75
Level 1 (foundation)	73.0	24.3	2.7	37
Other sessions	74.3	14.3	11.4	35
Totals	63.7	27.3	9.0	278

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