



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



Royal National College for the Blind

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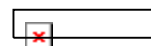
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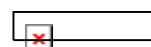
Basic information about the college



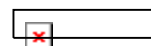
Name of college:	Royal National College for the Blind
Type of college:	Independent specialist college
Principal:	Roisin Burge
Address of college:	College Road Hereford HR1 1EB
Telephone number:	01432 265725
Fax number:	01432 376628
Chair of governors:	Mr David Adams
Reference number*:	2367627
Name of reporting inspector:	Diane Stacey
Dates of inspection:	1-5 November 2004

**charity or registered business number of the company running the college*

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

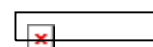


The Royal National College for the Blind is an independent specialist residential college with charitable status, and is a company limited by guarantee. The college provides education and training for people who are primarily blind and visually impaired. A small number of fully sighted learners are accepted where their needs cannot be met by local general further education (FE) college provision. Founded in the 1870s in London, the college moved to its present site in Hereford in 1978. The college is situated in 25 acres of grounds within easy walking distance of the city and has good road and rail links. The college principal reports to the governing body. The college's management team includes two senior managers who oversee the curriculum and learner

responsible for learners aged 16 to 19, trainees funded by the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) residential training unit (RTU) (adult learners) and residential curriculum and support. Of the 192 students currently enrolled, 83 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), 67 by the RTU and 6 are funded by Education and Learning Wales (ELWa). Other students are privately funded or receive funding from their local education authority (LEA). Of the student population, 119 are male, 73 female and 17 are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The college does not provide facilities for students with severe learning difficulties.

Programmes offered in-house include administration, customer service, business studies, information and communications technology (ICT), creative and performing arts, media, music technology and piano tuning, sport and recreation, massage and complementary therapy and a range of general certificate in secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate in education (GCE) advanced subjects. The college also offers a distance learning 'tele-tutoring' programme funded by the RTU. There are links with local FE colleges and a regional university. Royal National College for the Blind, in partnership with Hereford College of Technology, has developed a Music Technology/Sound Engineering programme, which is offered jointly by the two colleges. All students have an individualised programme, which can include independent living skills, mobility, knowledge and skills for transition, pre-vocational and vocational education and careers and employment guidance. College facilities include a health centre and a student services centre. There are four halls of residence and houses both on and off the campus to give learners the opportunity of staged progression to independence and a wide choice of accommodation. There is a broad range of sporting and recreational facilities. The college's mission is 'to enable those who are blind or partially sighted to achieve their full potential'.

How effective is the college?



The quality of teaching and the standards of students' achievements are very good overall and are outstanding in sport and leisure; remedial therapies; and independent living status and mobility. Provision is good in business and ICT; creative and performing arts and music studies; pre-vocational studies and literacy, numeracy and communication. There is very good development of students' communication and personal skills. Support and guidance for students are outstanding.

The college's key strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below.

Key strengths

- very good teaching and learning

- very good achievement by most students

- very effective assessment procedures

- excellent arrangements for the coordination of individual programmes

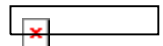
- excellent range of specialist resources
- outstanding support for students' individual needs
- outstanding leadership and strategic management
- very good promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity
- very effective quality assurance procedures.

What should be improved

- teaching accommodation for some curriculum areas
- the use of additional resources in some teaching sessions
- access to external work experience placements for some students

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

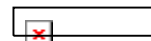


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Business and information	Good: Contributory grade for work-based learning: good . Students

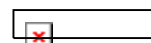
and communication technology	achieve high standards of work. Much of the teaching is effective and the support for personal development is very good. There are opportunities for on-site and supported work experience but external placements with local employers for some students are limited. Leadership and management are very good.
Sport and leisure	Outstanding: Students' achievements are outstanding and teaching and learning are very good with attention to each student's needs. Targets are set effectively in individual learning plans. Support for students is exceptionally good. Students achieve excellent standards within the extended curriculum across a wide range of sporting activities. Some opportunities for assessments when working with people from the local community are missed. Leadership and management are very good.
Remedial therapies	Outstanding: Pass rates are consistently well above the national average: practical work is of a very high standard. Very good teaching, by staff with excellent knowledge and experience, motivates and inspires students. Very good use is made of the extended curriculum to increase students' skills and excellent support is provided to students through a very effective tutorial system. Leadership and management are very good.
Creative and performing arts and music studies	Good: Contributory grade for work-based learning: good. Achievement pass rates are good. A wide range of courses is offered as well as a very rich extended curriculum. Teaching and learning are good with challenging targets set for many students. Teaching staff are very experienced with good industry links. Resources are varied with some excellent resources for some areas and inadequate accommodation for two of the main courses. Support for students is very good. Leadership and management are good.
Pre-vocational studies	Good: Students' achievements are good across most areas: many students are developing greater independence in their study skills and their own self-awareness. Teaching is good and students learn well. Good use is made of initial assessments to design courses that meet individual student's needs. Some lessons are very teacher-led and there is insufficient use of a variety of resources to maintain students' interests. Leadership and management are very effective.
Literacy, numeracy and communication	Good: Achievements in literacy, numeracy and Braille reading and writing are good. New courses leading to national awards are used to ensure students gain qualifications for these achievements. Teaching and learning are very good, particularly in literacy and e-skills: there is however, insufficient co-ordination of literacy and numeracy across the day and extended curriculum. Individual support is sensitive: teaching and support for new users of Braille and Braille technology are outstanding.
Independent living skills and mobility	Outstanding: Mobility achievements are outstanding and excellent skills are gained through independent living skills training: students gain high levels of confidence and make excellent progress from supported to independent living accommodation. Teaching is excellent and well planned with challenging targets set for students. There are excellent resources and new accredited arrangements ensure mobility achievements are formally recognised. Support for students is outstanding and leadership and management are exceptionally good.

How well is the college led and managed?



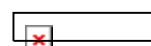
Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal's outstanding leadership ensures that the college aim of meeting each student's needs to the highest possible standard directs all areas of its work. College management is very good. Very effective quality assurance and planning is centred on well-established and thorough self-assessment. Detailed knowledge of this provision and good understanding of students' views and needs inform further improvements through this self-assessment. The staff development programme is very successful. There is a very high regard for promoting and ensuring equality of opportunity and diversity. The governing body are very effective at providing support and challenge for the broad range of work of the college. Financial planning and management are very effective in ensuring that the college uses its resources well to meet the priorities for development.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



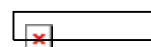
The college's response to educational and social inclusion is outstanding. The college takes students from all areas of the United Kingdom, most of who are primarily blind or have a visual impairment, but may have additional difficulties. The college accepts a small number of fully sighted students whose needs cannot be met in general FE colleges. Accommodation and residential arrangements take full account of the different needs of students. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity underpins all college activities. There is a very clear and successful focus on enabling all students to achieve their maximum potential. Students participate fully in social and leisure activities as well as in their main programme. Students have opportunities to play an active role in running the college through various committees. Through the development of relevant policies and related staff training, the college has responded very well to its responsibilities under the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA). Provision for literacy, numeracy and key skills is good.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support and guidance are outstanding. Personal support through the work of tutors, key workers and counsellors is outstanding and is greatly valued by students. There are very good arrangements for students to access a wide range of specialist assessment and support services to meet their individual needs. Induction of new students is thorough and comprehensive and prepares them very well for getting the best from their course. Rigorous and effective procedures are in place to monitor attendance and punctuality, and bring about improvements when necessary. Careers advice and guidance are very good: the links with Connexions services are very effective; and support for students applying to university is highly successful.

Students' view 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

- broad range of opportunities and activities
- greater independence
- friendly staff who are excellent role models
- opportunities to express opinions in lessons and make decisions and choices
- outside speakers
- excellent teaching
- good accommodation
- good resources for music technology
- the sense of a friendly community
- being treated like an adult
- being able to travel more independently
- the food
- the peer support and help from more experienced learners.

What they feel could be improved

- better facilities for common rooms/quiet rooms

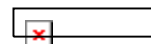
- better resources for the performing arts course

- refurbishment of the hall of residence

- opportunities to use computer technology at weekends

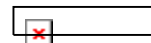
- the occasional late night disturbances in the residences.

Other information

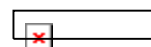


The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once it is published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post-inspection action plan and submit it to the local LSC. The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to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

Part B: The college as a whole



Achievement and standards



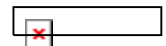
1. The majority of adult students, funded through the RTU, are enrolled on remedial therapies, piano tuning, national vocational qualification (NVQ) administration and advice and guidance programmes including those on the tele-tutoring distance learning programmes. Students under 25 and funded by

and pre-vocational programmes. Where there are differences between the two groups (those funded by the RTU and those funded by the LSC), these are indicated in the text.

2. The range of academic and vocational courses spans foundation level to levels 2 and 3. Students' achievements on national awards are good overall, with outstanding achievements in sports and recreation and remedial therapies. Sports and recreation achievements of NVQs were 92% and 100% for the previous two years. Currently, 88% are achieving success and potentially 94% will achieve success this year. Achievement rates for students on the remedial therapy programme were 87% in 2002 and 100% in 2003. Additional accredited achievements within the remedial therapy programme include 100% pass rate for reflexology for 2003. There is a wide range of GCE A-level and advanced subsidiary-level (AS-level) courses. Students gain access to these courses through an individual planned programme or they are additional to their main vocational programmes. The development of personal and learning skills is outstanding. For example, all students have varying degrees of visual impairments and develop exceptionally good e-skills and/or skills in Braille reading and writing and Braille technology to aid communication. Students' achievements in both literacy and numeracy skills are good. Achievements in mobility and orientation skills and independent living skills are outstanding. Overall, students demonstrate increasing self-confidence and self-esteem in all aspects of their programme including trying new activities offered within the extended curriculum. There are good examples of students' sporting achievements both at national and international levels.

3. Students demonstrate outstanding motivation to achieve their potential. Over the past three years, 30 LSC-funded students and 23 RTU-funded students have progressed into general FE colleges or higher education (HE). During the same period, 41 adult students have progressed into employment or self-employment. Retention rates for all students over the last three years are good and comparable with other specialist colleges.

Quality of teaching, training and learning



4. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Teaching in over three quarters of the 70 lessons observed was good or better. All lessons observed within independent living and mobility were good or better. Teaching of literacy and e-skills was very good. The teaching of Braille skills was outstanding. There was little variation between other areas of the curriculum. Teaching and support staff know their students well. The majority of lessons are well planned and inspire students to achieve their full potential. The best teaching is challenging and fully includes the student in a range of practical and well-planned activities. For example, in remedial therapies, students have open clinics for staff and people from the local community so they can practise skills in a realistic setting. They extend their organisation skills by taking their own appointment bookings. There is a good mixture of activities during the majority of lessons and theory and practical activities are well planned. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for selecting their own art projects through links with local employers and role play is used effectively in literacy lessons. Evening and weekend activities are used well to reinforce skills gained during the daytime lessons. For example students studying performing arts and music studies regularly perform at the cabaret evenings. Students are encouraged to develop their critical thinking, and this was demonstrated effectively in many of the lessons.

5. A common feature that permeates the curriculum is that students' overall programmes are tailored individually to meet their specific needs. This is a significant strength across all curriculum areas and is particularly evident in the pre-vocational and individual programme areas. The basic core skills are centred on e-skills, Braille reading and writing and Braille technology, enabling them to access the most appropriate medium of communication. This aspect is particularly well taught and students who have recent sight deterioration find this part of their course extremely valuable. Excellent use is made of the wide range of ICT and Braille resources for teaching in all areas of the curriculum. Residential accommodation is very well used to teach independent living skills within a realistic

context. Mobility teaching is co-ordinated effectively around students' individual needs and they take an active role in planning their programme of activities. Where the very small amount of teaching is unsatisfactory, teaching is often over reliant on teacher dominated activities and sessions are over lengthy.

6. Levels of staff expertise across all curriculum areas are very good. Staff are also well qualified. There are currently 76 teaching staff and 52 residential staff. Residential and medical staff are suitably qualified. Teaching staff hold appropriate teaching qualifications or are working towards them as well as specialist qualifications in teaching students who are blind or visually impaired. The college is currently negotiating accreditation of a new visual impaired teaching course at level 4, which it has designed. It will be used for staff training in the future. There is a well-established staff development and training programme. Additional training has included diversity in the curriculum; Asperger syndrome; literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessment; core curriculum training; and risk assessments.

7. The specialist resources are excellent. The flexible learning centre is very well resourced. It is open during the evenings and at weekends, and is well used by students. Adult students on the distance-learning course are provided with all the necessary equipment and software that they require to complete their studies. There is an excellent variety of adaptive hardware and software to meet individual student's needs. The college is active in developing new and innovative resources. Links with international organisations have resulted in the development of a 'talking tactile tablet' with a variety of raised diagram overlays. This is currently being trialled with students. One member of staff has created very effective short software programmes for literacy and numeracy, which include integrated speech output.

8. A successful accommodation strategy has had a big impact on residential housing for students. Recently, the majority of halls and independent living homes have been refurbished. One hall has not yet been refurbished. The college has taken the view that it would be difficult to provide satisfactory en-suite facilities in this particular building because of the design and layout of the property. There are plans to develop this site for a general assessment centre and house adult students elsewhere. Strategies and plans are in place for a new build to accommodate parts of creative and performing arts as well as other curriculum areas. In general, residential accommodation is well furnished with a very good range of adapted equipment for daily living skills. There is a good strategy to ensure students' progression from supported residences to fully independent housing in the local community. Access for wheelchair users is available for all the ground floor accommodation. Across the college site, particular attention is paid to wheelchair access with appropriate ramps and access to the upper ground floor via lifts. The whole site has good security with closed circuit television coverage to ensure the safety of students.

9. Pre-entry assessment is thorough and holistic. Students benefit from a two-day or three-day pre-entry assessment period at the college. They are actively involved in self-evaluation. A multi-disciplinary team ensures all aspects of students' achievements, abilities and needs are taken into account. External information is used appropriately to inform decisions and planning. Personal risk assessments are undertaken at this stage and updated at induction. All assessments are discussed at an assessment board to ensure appropriate decisions are taken. The outcomes of assessment lead to the development of a detailed individual learning plan. Planning is further informed by assessments that continue through an extended induction period. Students benefit from a phased entry whereby small groups are brought in at intervals of a few days. This arrangement enables them to settle in more quickly and provides opportunities for specialist staff to continue with further assessment and start intensive individual training in orientation and mobility.

10. The systems for monitoring and reviewing students' progress on courses are good. Targets are set jointly between staff and students. Students have a good understanding of their own targets and are clear about how they can achieve them. Reviews have an appropriate focus on the main programme, residential activities and extended curriculum activities. Students have useful meetings with their personal tutors each week to review progress, agree new targets where appropriate and discuss any difficulties. They also have regular joint meetings with their tutors and key workers to monitor progress. The college has recently introduced a new electronic system to enhance the monitoring of progress and improve the levels of communication between all staff. This is

increasingly being used to pass on useful information quickly so that all those involved are up-to-date with individual issues and achievements. Effective handover meetings are held to ensure residential staff are well informed about students' progress and are aware of any current issues. Managers running these meetings show a clear understanding of, and knowledge about, all aspects of individual students' courses, needs and interests.

11. Students are encouraged to use electronic mail to communicate on a regular basis with staff. This strategy is an active and successful attempt to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, achievements and adult life. Students' partial achievements are accredited and they are able to gain college certification for activities within the extended curriculum. Progress is well tracked in literacy and numeracy. Aspects of residential life and the extended curriculum are monitored effectively against targets. These are referenced to the wider key skills, such as working with others and problem solving. Arrangements for assessment and internal verification are good and meet or exceed awarding body requirements. Types of assessment are designed and adapted to meet individual students' needs. Assessment in visual and performing arts is particularly rigorous. Marking is thorough and feedback to students is constructive.

12. The college offers a very broad range of programmes, both academic and vocational. It has developed a more unitised approach to accommodate the differing needs and interests of students. This has led to the implementation of a successfully individualised pre-vocational and flexible foundation programme. Effective partnership work with local general FE colleges has extended the curriculum options available. For example, the college provides an integrated music technology course in collaboration with the local FE college. This is based at the Royal National College for the Blind site and includes students from both colleges. Students can enrol at a local sixth form college to undertake specific GCE A-level or AS-level subjects that are not offered at the college. Effective work with awarding bodies and the RTU has assisted in the development of an appropriate curriculum. Adaptations to qualifications have been made and agreed with awarding bodies to make them more accessible for students who are blind or have a visual impairment. Agreements have been made with the RTU for the provision of alternatives to NVQs where these are more appropriate for learners. Good international networking in remedial therapy has led to the development of specialist courses for people who are blind or have visual impairments.

13. The college offers a very good range of sporting and leisure activities within the extended curriculum. The programme makes provision for football, line dancing, recreational art, keep fit, goalball, yoga, drama, acoustic shooting, horse riding and shopping. It includes walks, visits, a games night, a cabaret night, a choir, an art club, a dining club and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. College certification is available for some of these activities. Sport and recreation students are instructors for some activities, enabling them to extend their work experience. Both adult and younger learners participate effectively together in these activities in which participation rates are very good. Currently 131 students are participating, with the vast majority involved in more than one activity.

14. A good range of work experience is available. For example, there are placements in football clubs, hospitals, the Royal Albert Hall, the Visitors' Centre at Heathrow Airport, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Hereford and Worcester, health clubs and the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Of those students on placements since January 2004, 80% have worked in external organisations in the local or their home area. However, there are insufficient work placements for those students in the NVQ in administration at levels 2 and 3. This shortage mainly affects RTU-funded students. There are effective transition arrangements both into and out of the college. Students are encouraged to maintain links with their home areas in preparation for returning there after completing their courses. Effective use is made of the extended curriculum to increase confidence and develop transfer skills. The rationale for the extended curriculum includes the aim to encourage lifelong learning and participation in local activities. The arrangements for those wishing to progress to HE institutions are highly successful. Students have very good opportunities to become involved in decision making within the college through membership of committees. This enables them to develop skills that will help them in their lives after leaving college. Specialist staff continue to provide advice to students after leaving college where this is required.

15. The college provides very good access to a wide range of specialist support services and

therapies to identify and meet students' individual needs. In addition to diagnostic assessment services relating to their visual impairment, screening and support required by additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as hearing impairment and dyslexia, are also readily available. These assessments may then be followed up by appointments with external specialists if required. The college also has arrangements to provide physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. In addition to campus nursing care there are arrangements with local general practitioners (GPs) for referral for meeting students' medical needs. Students find the college's counselling service very helpful. This service also provides referral to psychiatry and psychology support from community mental health services.

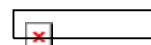
16. Induction of new students is managed very well. Before they start their course, students and their families are invited for a weekend, so that they can meet their tutor and key worker to become familiar with their new college campus. This is followed as they start their courses by a week for students aged 16 to 19 or three days for adult students. This period contains an introduction to all of the important aspects of their programme and of college facilities. The content of this induction period is very well considered and students report that it helps them settle quickly into college life.

17. Personal support arrangements are outstanding and are valued extremely highly by students. In addition to a weekly timetabled tutorial personal tutors are available when necessary. Students comment that their tutors are most helpful and freely give their time to support them with any difficulties that might arise. The weekly tutorial session also provides an opportunity for reviewing students' individual learning plan targets as well as negotiating and planning new ones. In addition to these very supportive arrangements with their tutor, students also receive excellent personal support from their residential key worker who again is available to discuss any matters that arise. Careful notes are kept of all contact with personal tutors and key workers. They track successfully both the help that has been provided and the personal development progress that has been achieved.

18. The college management information system includes a close monitoring of students' attendance and punctuality. This process is rigorous and any difficulties that might arise are quickly noticed. Tutors and key workers work very effectively with students to ensure that these difficulties are effectively resolved. For example, one student who had poor punctuality at the start of the college day negotiated support arrangements that included seeing his tutor at nine o'clock each morning.

19. There is very good careers advice and guidance for all students. The college's well-qualified and very experienced careers advisor interviews all students and helps them to consider and plan for their next step after leaving the college. This input may also involve sensitively helping them to reflect on whether the career aspirations they have are realistic and, if not, to reconsider them so that they can be successfully realised. This adviser works closely with students and Connexions services local to the college as well as those from students' home areas to consider and plan for these next steps. The adviser also assists students with applications to universities and has helped students to be very successful in this process.

Leadership and management



20. Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the principal is outstanding. Her belief in achieving high quality through encouraging and enabling both students and staff to be innovative and not to simply accept barriers to learning drives the college to continually higher standards. She is supported well by a dedicated and talented group of managers. As a result, the vision and aims of the college to meet students' individual needs are successfully shared and focused on by all staff. They generate an exceptional culture of placing the needs of students at the centre of planning and of all the college's activities and developments.

21. Strategic planning is comprehensive and coherent. It successfully considers the role of the Royal

National College for the Blind in the changing world of education and training for students who are blind or who have a visual impairment. This longer-term view of the college effectively informs the self-assessment process and helps plan detailed annual improvement. These plans form the main targets for continuous improvement across all areas of the college. The quality of this target setting has improved as a result of staff development and the increasing maturity and rigour of self-assessment.

22. Quality assurance procedures are very effective and like all other aspects of the college's work are reviewed as part of its self-assessment procedure. Internal verification procedures for one curriculum area are currently being modified and strengthened. Observation of teaching takes place regularly and the results of the observations are moderated rigorously by an external consultant. The outcomes provide clear advice for staff about areas for further improvement, as necessary. The results of these observations are in accord with the judgements made by inspectors about the quality of teaching and learning.

23. Self-assessment is very well established and all staff understand and value the important part that it plays in improving the quality of provision and raising the standards of students' achievements. The self-assessment process involves everyone and is based on a very careful analysis of the performance of each area of the college against the expectations of the common inspection framework and the direction set by the college's strategic plan. The awareness and understanding of curriculum managers and senior managers of how well their students are learning is used very effectively as part of the self-assessment, as is the detailed feedback obtained from students about their courses and other college activities and facilities. In most areas of the curriculum, self-assessments of the strengths and weaknesses matched those identified by inspectors. However, students were often more critical of the adverse effect of the weaknesses, resulting in the quality of provision being graded lower than it was judged by inspectors.

24. The college does not compromise quality when it seeks to make improvements. For example, rather than purchase a commercially produced management information system it has developed one that is specifically designed for their circumstances, allowing both students and staff who are blind or visually impaired to have access to this important system. As a result, students can read and contribute to the notes made about how well they are learning, while staff have access to a broad range of information about students' programmes and their achievements, as well as other aspects of college management.

25. Induction of new staff is effective. All staff follow a menu of activities that covers a broad range of important areas, including the nature and implications of the most common visual impairments; health and safety and planning; recording procedures; and important college policies. Annual appraisal takes place for all staff and, for teachers, includes the outcomes from lesson observation. Through this appraisal and as a result of self-assessment the college is very successful at identifying staff development needs. These are met through a wide range of training from expertise within the staff group and by external specialists. New staff are mentored by experienced colleagues for as long as they feel it is helpful. This openness about sharing good practice continues even for experienced staff who feel confident to ask other members of staff for specific advice as needs arise.

26. The ability of the college to meet the needs of each of its students' effectively is a demonstration of its success in both promoting and monitoring equality of opportunity and diversity. It meets very well its responsibilities under the recent legislation of the Race Relations (amendment) Act (2000) and the SENDA. The college has reviewed its policies in light of these requirements and carefully monitors its work in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. There are good arrangements to meet the religious needs of its students, for example, in making suitable timetable and prayer arrangements for Muslim students at the time of Ramadan. At the time of the inspection, child protection procedures were not fully in place. Although induction training includes the college's policy about the protection of children and vulnerable adults, a few staff were not fully aware of the procedures to follow.

27. The college's response to complaints and concerns is very thorough and comprehensive. Students know they can raise such issues with their teachers, key workers or other members of staff, including to the principal whom they can contact directly by e-mail. Students feel very confident

that harassment and bullying are not tolerated by staff, or by other students, and feel sure that if any issues arise they will be dealt with very promptly.

28. The governing body is very effective and shares fully the values promoted by the principal and all the staff. A measure of their commitment is found in the very substantial distances that many members have to travel to attend meetings at the college. The group has a very broad range of experience in educational, financial and other fields that contributes successfully to their role as governors. They scrutinise rigorously the quality and standards of the college and its financial planning and management. Governors are very well informed about students' achievements, receiving details of awards and updates on curriculum developments. They have first hand experience gained from visiting classes, and talk with students and staff. In line with the college's culture of continuous improvement the governing body undertakes its own self-assessment of its effectiveness and routinely reviews improvements it makes where these are necessary. Such a self-review by governors is not commonplace in other similar establishments.

29. Financial planning and management are very effective. Very careful consideration is given to obtaining the best value for money. As a result, the college routinely considers and reviews services such as banking, and the provision of telephone and power companies. It also considers if it should use external providers for some services, such as for catering and cleaning. Decisions are made in accordance with the principles of 'best value'. Careful financial benchmarking is undertaken with other independent specialist colleges as part of the ongoing monitoring of the college's effectiveness and efficiency.

30. This is an outstanding college providing very high quality education and training and where students' individual needs are very well met. Students consistently achieve very well and the quality of teaching is significantly above the average found within the FE sector. Equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted very successfully. Contractual requirements with funding agencies are fulfilled and often exceeded. Exceptional leadership and very good management ensure that the college provides excellent value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Business and information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- good achievement

- good teaching

- very effective development of personal skills

- good opportunities for gaining additional qualifications

- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- limited opportunities for external work placements for NVQ students.

Scope of provision

31. At the time of the inspection, 41 students are on courses taught within the areas business, ICT, customer service, and advice and guidance. Of these, 14 are funded by the LSC and 27 receive funding from the RTU. Residential students on business courses account for 23 of the total and these students are studying towards NVQs, general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) or advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE)/ Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications. Seven students are studying towards ICT qualifications at level 2/3. Six students on courses in customer service and five students on courses in advice and guidance are studying for NVQ qualifications. Eight of the students on the NVQ programmes are distance-learning students; three are enrolled on a level 2 advice and guidance NVQ, with the remaining five students studying for the business administration qualification. Additional courses offered include the European computer driving licence (ECDL), computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and open college network (OCN) IT-related subjects. Students on distant-learning programmes attend the college for eight sessions during the year, spending the rest of their time at workplaces near their homes. Additional support is provided by the internet. Across all programmes there are 12 full-time and 11 part-time subject teachers, core skills staff, and students' own personal tutors and key workers.

Achievement and standards

32. Achievement overall is good on all courses and for all types of students. For example, 72% of the distance-learning students and 75% of the residential students achieved their level 2 NVQ in administration in 2002. Achievement rates for LSC-funded students is marginally better than that for RTU-funded students. In 2003, 80% of students achieved the ECDL and all three students, 100%, achieved the AVCE/BTEC business qualification. Work produced by students is of a good standard and of an extremely high standard on the AVCE/BTEC course. Transition from the college is good. Over the past three years, 64 RTU-funded students have entered employment or progressed to FE or HE. The retention rates across all courses are very good.

33. Close attention is paid to basic computer skills from the start of training and all students achieve a good level of competence to assist their coursework. This covers keyboarding, use of specialist aids and adaptations such as screen readers and magnification programmes as well as a range of Braille technology. Students also achieve good levels of knowledge on how to adjust these programmes to meet their specific needs.

34. Each student is challenged sufficiently to bring about improvements. For example, those who find speaking in front of others difficult are encouraged to do so in class. The resultant increase in confidence, communication and team working is clearly seen in all lessons and during general leisure activities.

Quality of education and training

35. Teaching and learning are good. In all classes teachers knew their students well and were able to provide for each individual student's needs. More than three quarters of sessions were good or better and in some of the better sessions challenging targets were set for students with a good mixture of activities. In a small number of classes, whilst teaching was satisfactory, teachers did not sufficiently stretch a small number of students and there was an over reliance on discussion and insufficient practical activity. Those students on distance-learning programmes are very well supported. As well as receiving face-to-face teaching in the college eight times a year, they have regular times allocated with their tele-tutors who also give prompt and informative responses and support by e-mail when required.

36. There is a good variety of resources. All classroom accommodation is of a good standard and easily accessible. Common layouts help students find equipment and ease navigation and access. A wide variety of specialised equipment including talking calculators is available and used. Learning material is produced in an appropriate communications format for the specific needs of each student, for example, Braille, large text, computer or CD-based as well as in different colours and contrasts. Distance-learning students are very well supported with resources. All the equipment, both hardware and software, is supplied by the college. The college arranges for technicians to install it and maintain it when necessary.

37. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. All students receive a detailed initial assessment before they are accepted on their programme. There are regular reviews of progress, which are formally recorded. Progress checked during lessons is noted in the student log after each lesson, with targets set for the next lesson. A new computerised individual learning plan is very useful as a tracking mechanism and completed targets recorded when they are achieved.

38. As well as a good range of main courses, students are also offered the opportunity of gaining additional nationally recognised computer qualifications at level 1 or level 2. These are the ECDL, CLAIT and the OCN word-processing. Many acquire the full qualification, but those that do not achieve some units.

39. Opportunities for external work placements for students on the NVQ administration programme are limited. Students are able to use the college office and reception area for initial experience to gain confidence. The college has set up an external office as a next step for students' work experience. However, this is not yet providing a sufficient range of work. Whilst this is extremely useful for the next stage of students' work experience, no students were in fact on external work placements with local employers at the time of the inspection. Students on the distance learning programmes are all placed with employers within their local home areas.

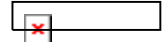
40. Very good personal, academic and pastoral support is provided for all students. This includes practical help with mobility and orientation around the campus, advice about sources of financial help and ways of dealing with personal and social difficulties. Teachers offer additional help with course work either in face-to-face meetings or through the internet. Some students find the move from living at home to moving to residential accommodation taxing and value the personal support given by all the staff. All students receive a thorough and effective induction on arrival at the college.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum area is well managed with good collaboration across all areas of learning. There is an established appraisal system where training needs are discussed and linked to the needs of the programme area. Quality assurance arrangements for all curriculum areas are rigorous. Staff are consulted about the self-assessment report and are involved in the content for their curriculum areas. Management acted swiftly to address the identified weaknesses in the latest self-assessment report. Staff have been recruited to fill the place of a member of staff who retired and was responsible for overseeing the text and word processing certificated courses. A new workplace supervisor has been appointed to oversee the external office. There is ongoing effective communication with awarding bodies, universities, national

companies and commercial software firms to develop new material for students with restricted vision. Equality of opportunity is strongly promoted. RTU-funded students who are unable to attend the college full-time because of additional difficulties are fully supported in their homes and workplaces through distance learning.

Sport and leisure



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

Strengths

- excellent retention rates

- outstanding achievement

- excellent teaching on the extended curriculum

- excellent support for students

- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses.

Scope of provision

42. Currently 16 students are studying for the NVQ level 2 in exercise and fitness within the sport and recreation department. There are 10 students funded by the LSC and six funded by the RTU. The programme is delivered over the course of a year with timetabled theory and practical sessions together with scheduled work experience. Two full-time members of staff within the department are supported by three additional staff from other departments on specialist aspects of delivery and the extended curriculum. A dedicated theory classroom and a fitness suite are also open to use by the wider community as well as by students and staff within the college.

Achievement and standards

43. Retention and pass rates are excellent. Retention rates have remained over 90% for the last

three years. Achievement in the NVQ is excellent with consistently high success rates. Achievement rates over the last three years have been 92%, 100% and 88%. Some students are still following programmes from the previous year. They are very near to completion providing a potential success rate of 94% for 2004. Students' portfolios demonstrate a high level of underpinning knowledge often exceeding that required at level 2. In applied situations they were able to analyse their previous learning and suggest solutions to problems. Students' discussion on physical fitness demonstrated they were able to analyse critically the requirement of different sports as well as differentiating the requirements of various team sports.

44. Students achieve very high standards within the extended curriculum. They are taught in mixed ability groups and develop appropriate sensory and physical skills. Many students demonstrate exceptional levels of skill and have represented their country in a range of sports including football, athletics, cricket, swimming, goalball and acoustic shooting.

Quality of education and training

45. The good teaching within sport and recreation is very good. Teaching within the extended curriculum is excellent and develops high levels of skill and improves fitness among students. A football training session for students with no vision demonstrated excellent development of highly complex skills across a mixed ability group with support being varied to meet individual needs. Teaching sessions provide individualised support to meet very specific visual and wider learning needs. Questioning is used effectively to check students' progress whilst remaining sensitive to their levels of confidence and ability. In a small number of lessons there was an over-reliance on teacher-dominated class activity with limited opportunities for students to investigate and apply new concepts individually or in small groups.

46. Teaching staff are well qualified and experienced in the field of fitness instruction. All members of staff participate in the teaching of the college's extended curriculum which involves a diverse range of students and members of the wider community. Staff provide excellent role models for students and actively encourage students to evaluate their own performance to enhance their understanding of the key characteristics of good fitness instruction. Staff remain up to date with industry development through participating in work-placements with external leisure providers. Limited resources are used in some theory sessions. This is currently being addressed through the development of an e-learning platform to re-enforce key points.

47. A new and effective internal verification strategy has been put in place to monitor and support all aspects of assessment. This procedure is well planned and recorded to ensure all units and elements are reviewed across all assessors. Some standardisation of assessment practice has ensured consistency across practical sessions. A clear procedure is now in place to ensure standardisation of the full range of evidence required prior to signing off completed NVQ units. Assessment is carried out during the students' planned six-week work experience period. However, some opportunities for assessment are missed when members of the wider community participate in exercise sessions within the college.

48. The college has made good links with a local college to enable students to progress to higher level programmes. The college is currently investigating options for delivering level 3 courses but this is still in the early stages. Students do not have the opportunity to gain a certificate in fitness instruction at level 2 which would enable them to gain work-experience in local leisure centres.

49. The college provides excellent support for students. A comprehensive initial assessment is undertaken prior to a student being offered a place within the college. This reviews all aspects of their social, emotional and physical development as well as their academic ability. Individual learning plans identify individual needs with SMART targets set in many areas. Action is taken to address immediately those students who are not meeting targets and additional support is provided over and above the agreed training plan where necessary.

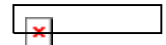
50. Students are very positive about the support they receive and the environment that has been developed for them. Many students have a combination of learning difficulties and disabilities and

some are finding their reducing sight very difficult to deal with. In these situations, college staff, whilst ensuring all difficulties are addressed, offer very sensitive support. Tutorials are effective in providing additional subject support for some students to ensure they progress towards achieving in line with their individual targets.

Leadership and management

51. Leadership and management are very good. Regular team meetings are well documented and show involvement of the whole team in decision making and development planning. Student representatives attend meetings. They provide the student voice to inform future directions effectively for the department, as well as raising any concerns or difficulties. There is a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Religious festivals are identified within the scheme of work and practical activity is planned to ensure intensity is kept to a minimum during this time. There is a very good system for inducting new members of staff with scheduled time for shadowing experienced teachers. This ensures consistency in teaching and learning and provides additional support for new members of staff who initially may have limited experience of working with students with visual impairments. Staff development is good. Training is identified through the self-assessment process and staff appraisals and based upon individual aspirations and the future needs of the college. Quality assurance of curriculum areas is well planned and rigorous. The self-assessment process identified the majority of the points raised by inspectors.

Remedial therapies



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

Strengths

- excellent retention rates

- excellent achievement

- very good teaching which inspires learners

- highly qualified and experienced staff

- excellent range of enrichment activities

- excellent support

- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient rigorous internal moderation.

Scope of provision

52. The college offers a very good range of courses within the remedial therapies programme. The main programme is holistic massage and is accredited by the International Therapy Examination Council (ITEC). Additional accredited elements include reflexology, Indian head massage, sports massage, onsite chair massage and aromatherapy. There are two start dates per year in February and September. Currently 16 students are on the programme: seven are male. All students are funded by the RTU. There is one full-time and six part-time members of staff. All students have opportunities to study a combination of other courses once they have completed the main holistic massage course.

Achievement and standards

53. Retention and pass rates are excellent. They are well above the national average and have been consistently so over the last three years. Pass rates were 100% in 2003 and 93% in 2004. Of the current students, four have already completed the main programme. Students' practical work is of a very high standard. They display good techniques of massage in practical classes. Students demonstrate high levels of knowledge and understanding and an exceptional grasp of terminology. In one practical lesson students were able to recognise the actions of muscles through massage and movement techniques. During practical classes most students are able to carry out advanced massage techniques with ease and were able to name the muscles. Staff continually have high expectations of students' work and achievements. Students are highly motivated and spend additional time studying on their own. Students' communication skills are of a very high standard. They display high levels of confidence when carrying out consultations with clients and working in practical settings.

Quality of education and training

54. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very well planned and inspiring. Teaching takes into account students' individual needs. The passion and enthusiasm of teachers are exceptional, creating a very exciting learning environment. Teachers challenge students to help them achieve their maximum potential. This is done in a very supportive manner whilst stretching the students' skills and knowledge. In one lesson, very effective question and answer techniques were used. Different levels of questions were directed at all students with the teacher showing a clear understanding of the students' individual abilities. In another lesson a combination of theory and practical activities had been very well planned and students were able to support each other in naming the arteries and veins of the head.

55. Staff are highly qualified and their knowledge, experience and practical skills are excellent. They use a wide variety of outstanding and unique teaching resources. Staff have developed these themselves to enhance their teaching and the students' learning. One example of this is a suit of the skeleton and muscles of the body which can be worn by students, creating a three-dimensional effect to illustrate the composition of the body's anatomy. A pioneering invention for aromatherapy has enabled the college to be the only centre accredited to run the course for people who are blind or have a visual impairment. Oils are measured with pipettes designed to dispense only one drop of oil at a time. The oils are arranged in a tray in alphabetical order; labels are in Braille using their

Latin names. This enables students to select the correct oil and dispense it very accurately. A box divided into compartments enables students to mix the blends for both the face and the body.

56. Students practise their skills with a range of clients. Many clinic appointments are with people from the local community. However, whilst understanding that teachers need to monitor and assess students' abilities during these practical sessions, there are no screened cubicles to allow the professional ethics of privacy and modesty of clients.

57. Initial assessment is very good. Planning and individual learning needs and goals are used very effectively. Students play an active part in the assessment of their own progress. Internal moderation however, is insufficiently rigorous. Standardisation is mainly through effective communication amongst the team. However, they recognise that there have been few formal procedures in the past and are currently addressing this. Feedback is designed to motivate students: it is constructive and gives clear direction for further improvement.

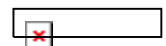
58. The curriculum for this programme is growing, giving students excellent opportunities to study a wider variety of programmes. There is a very effective enrichment programme comprising well-planned extended curriculum activities to aid students physical and emotional well being. These include T'ai Chi, yoga and pottery. The strong links with the community enable students to gain valuable experience and prepare them for transition from college. The college has very good European and International links with other training providers who offer similar programmes. These links enable the sharing of good practise across a wide range of institutions and countries.

59. Support for students is excellent ensuring all individual needs are met, both academic and personal. A very good tutorial system ensures that action is taken immediately to deal with any problems. Tutorials support the learning and personal needs of the students. Effective communication takes place between tutors and students' key workers. Students value the excellent support they receive in reaching their personal and learning goals.

Leadership and management

60. Leadership and management of the programmes are very good. Internal communication is good. Regular team meetings are held which are well minuted and show involvement of all teaching staff and students in decision-making. Proactive management enables good development of resources, courses and staff. Equality of opportunity is promoted well, with barriers to learning removed. In practical classes students wear belts to hold their massage oils in accordance with health and safety requirements. The newly built reception area is well planned with facilities for wheel chair access and guide dogs. Formal quality assurance systems are now in place. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report accurately recognises the strengths identified during the inspection. The weakness the college identified in its self-assessment report has been acted upon and improvements have been made.

Creative and performing arts and music studies



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

Strengths

- very good achievement

- very good teaching

- very good resources for music technology

- effective support for students

- very good leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- inadequate accommodation for creative and performing arts.

Scope of provision

61. A wide range of courses is available for students. On offer are courses at level 3 in music theatre and music technology, a diploma in piano tuning, GCE A-level and AS-level courses in media and art and a single award in acting. Level 2 courses include a first diploma in dance pathway; a ceramics foundation course; developed in conjunction with Wolverhampton university; and a GNVQ in art and design.

62. A wide range of enrichment activities includes musicals, ceramics, an art club, music technology recording sessions, drama and drumming sessions. Recreational dance is also available and involves a company made up of specialist dancers and six non-specialists. They rehearse together and put on public performances. All these combine to make a stunning weekly cabaret evening.

63. In the department 45 students are funded by the LSC and the RTU. Of the 29 students on the music technology and piano technology courses, 15 are LSC-funded and studying towards level 2/3 qualifications and 14 funded by the RTU. Of these 5 are specifically on the piano technology course. All the 16 students on the performing arts, ceramics and art courses are funded by the LSC. The provision for piano tuning, media, performing arts and music technology is based on the main campus, whereas art and ceramics are on the Norwood site opposite the main campus.

Achievement and standards

64. Students achieve very good standards: practical achievements are at a very high level. For example, dance students rehearsed a sensitive performance of the life of baby turtles and throughout the college there are excellent displays of paintings and bold ceramics. Media students' films are highly skilled and music technology students perform and record their own work, operating highly complex recording desks to a high standard. Recently, adult students recorded for a well-established pop music artist. College certificates are often awarded for successful involvement in the extended curriculum. For example, some non-specialist students involved in the recreational dance company have transferred to a performing arts course. End-of-course productions have included the exciting dance show 'Ex-static' at the Courtyard Theatre, whilst music technology students reached a high standard in 'The Main Event', successfully staged in their own performance space, a converted chapel. The material was performed live and recorded and filmed in front of a live audience.

65. In 2003, students achieved 100% pass rate on the level 2 performing arts and the art and design

courses. Two students who completed their programmes in 2001 passed with merits and distinctions, one is training to teach art and design and the other is self-employed selling her art work through tourist outlets. One student is now studying towards a degree in media. Students regularly achieve pass marks in subjects both at GCE A2 and AS level; the majority of these are younger students. There has been 100% pass rates for AS-level art and design for 2002 and 2003.

66. Some students go directly into the profession. Two ex-students now perform with the Cando Co dance company. There is good progression to HE establishments, such as at King Alfred's College, Chichester and Northbrook colleges or the Universities of Central England or Wolverhampton.

Quality of education and training

67. The overall quality of teaching is good or better and clearly reflects the requirements of the validating bodies. Good verbal feedback is given to students in the majority of lessons, and written feedback is detailed with indications of how to improve. Students are very highly motivated and are given challenging projects they often select for themselves. Art students on the GNVQ course each had individual 'commissions' from companies they had themselves identified, for example, advertising a new motor bike, making hangings for a flower shop and creating a stain glass window. Three clear briefs were agreed, with indications from the tutor of possible research sources.

68. Detailed individual learning plans are developed with the students and these are carefully recorded in learning logs. Targets are agreed with students and revisited weekly. Both students and staff record and regularly review progress against these targets.

69. Resources for the programme area are of varied quality. An excellent range of professional audio facilities, computers and studios is available for music technology. However there is a lack of storage space for performing arts costumes and props. The dance studio is spacious with a well sprung floor and full sized mirrors, but, like the visual arts area is in need of refurbishment. The popularity of the GCE A-level media courses has resulted in the current room being too small, though there are plans to move to a new venue. A generous number of practice rooms and instruments are available for the piano tuning course. Staff are very well qualified and experienced in their subject specialisms, and many have industrial links and experience. For example, one has been a sound engineer for a popular music band, whilst another was a jazz singer and now shares her skills with students on the musical theatre course. The work of the art department is enhanced by an artist in residence. The majority of teaching staff are appropriately qualified. Those that are not are working towards them.

70. Assessment and monitoring are good. There is a thorough pre-entry assessment which accurately identifies students' needs. After the general initial assessment students have a specialist assessment, attend the college with their parents for a residential weekend, attend a specialised course induction and a more general college induction of six weeks. Students are involved effectively in their own assessment. All students have copies of assignments, together with appropriate criteria. Internal verification paperwork is detailed and rigorous. A wide range of appropriate assessment methods are used.

71. The good range of courses at level 2 and 3 is further enriched by visiting companies which resulted in a whole day samba workshop, or visits from a former student who now tours the world with his own band, playing Turkish and Moroccan music and a visually impaired theatre company from Zagreb. There is a good variety of work experience, for example at the local theatre or by music technology students recording visiting bands if they are unable to obtain a placement at a suitable studio. Recent placements have included BBC Hereford and Worcester Radio, The Music Studio and the J10 Recording Studios. RTU funded students are particularly well supported by the Information, Careers and Employment team of the college.

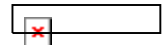
72. Students are very well supported. Tutors are always available for advice but learners are encouraged to attempt work themselves, before asking for help. There is effective personal and tutorial support with weekly meetings to check targets. Additionally, extensive informal support is provided by a dedicated teaching team. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are

effective and close support is forthcoming from the college's careers advice and guidance team and Connexions partnership.

Leadership and management

73. Leadership and management of the programme area are very good and the relationships within the whole staff team are very positive. A good quality assurance system is being developed and has resulted in an accurate self-assessment report. All staff within the department contribute to self-assessment. Staff are well supported through teaching observations and appraisals from which training needs are identified. A successful induction and mentoring system for new staff ensures that they too feel well supported and valued. Communication is good; through regular minuted meetings as well as through regular informal discussions or email. Equality of opportunity is strongly promoted by all staff. Very good use is made of local community resources and ex-students who have achieved professional work status act as excellent role models for current students.

Pre-vocational studies



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

Strengths

- good achievement

- good teaching and effective learning

- very good staff experience and qualifications

- very high quality support

- very effective leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of a range of resources.

Scope of provision

74. There are 25 students on pre-vocational courses and 26 students with individualised

programmes, all funded by LSC. The area includes a wide range of GCE A-level and GCSE courses, vocational qualifications up to advanced level, and foundation courses. Many students study a combination of subjects, which may involve academic, vocational and basic skills programmes. The nature of subject combinations and the level of learning are decided after discussions with the students and on the basis of the results of initial assessment. Some students begin by studying a 'flexible foundation' course before moving on to other programmes. Students have opportunities to change courses if their initial choices prove unsuitable or if they change their ideas about their eventual career path.

75. Most teaching takes place at the main college site, but some students also learn at other centres such as Hereford College of Technology, Hereford Sixth Form College and Holme Lacy Agricultural College

Achievement and standards

76. Students achieve well. The vast majority of students complete their chosen courses. When they do not, many transfer to other courses at the college and achieve success in those. A high proportion of students studying for AS-level and GCE A2 courses gain qualifications which enable them to enter HE. Other learners acquire qualifications which provide a good preparation for vocations. For 2003/04 100% of students achieved GCE A2 English, 78% AS-level English and the aggregated grades for various AS-level courses including history, art and psychology was 75%.

77. Many students begin their studies at relatively low levels, but proceed to higher levels of learning relatively rapidly, indicating the success they have achieved.

78. GCE A-level students are developing their skills well. Their use of subject-specific terminology is good. They are developing a logical process in their thinking and in their contributions to discussions. Some of their writing does not yet demonstrate the sophistication evident in their oral work. Students' levels of concentration are good, particularly in sessions which are quite long and require substantial listening skills. Most students are developing greater independence in their study skills and recognise the importance of reading and research.

79. Students on other courses are making good progress in developing their awareness and general knowledge. They are acquiring a better understanding of the key elements of vocations and the type of skills required to succeed in such careers. This is helping them to develop greater self-awareness and to make realistic career choices. Students make good progress in tackling weaknesses in their basic skills and achieve well in overcoming barriers to their learning, which results in increased opportunities to study at a higher level.

Quality of education and training

80. Teaching is good and students learn well. Teachers of GCE A levels have strong subject knowledge. They are able to explain important ideas well. They place good emphasis on supporting ideas with evidence. Teachers use subject terminology well and provide accurate explanations of the meanings of key terms. They are effective in explaining how students can develop logical arguments followed by valid conclusions. Teachers have a good knowledge of the demands of examinations. They structure work clearly, enabling students to gain a clear idea of the stage of learning they have reached. Many class discussions are well led and feature carefully-constructed questions which draw out the level of students' understanding. Some discussions last too long and it is difficult for students to sustain their concentration. A minority of lessons are too teacher dominated. Teachers provide a good range of print and Braille materials, but too little use is made of additional resources, such as video and audio, to reinforce learning and provide variety.

81. Teachers have a good, general knowledge of students' areas for improvement including the difficulties they have to overcome relating to their visual impairment. Teachers are particularly aware that some students have only a limited range of skills and general knowledge. They are effective in helping students to overcome this disadvantage, providing regular reminders and guidance on the approach that students need to take. Teachers are effective in building up students' confidence; in

helping them to develop better self-awareness; and in satisfactorily assessing their progress towards examination success. Some objectives in individual 'learning logs' are rather general and, as a result, can be difficult to measure accurately.

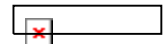
82. Good use is made of the thorough initial assessment to design courses to meet students' needs. The college provides an impressive range and combination of courses and is able to attract a very good number of well-qualified and experienced staff to teach them. Many of the teachers have substantial experience of working with students with visual impairments.

83. Very good guidance is provided by teachers who provide one-to-one subject support for students. Very good emphasis is placed on developing study skills relevant to the course and opportunities are available to discuss any problems which may have been encountered. The induction course, the preparation for transition and personal tutors provide very good support for students' personal development, especially when they are new to the college and have to adjust to a different environment and new ways of working.

Leadership and management

84. Leadership and management are very effective. A very strong commitment is made to equal opportunities for students by providing the best possible combination of courses, despite the practical difficulties this can cause. Very effective liaison between managers, teachers and personal tutors helps to ensure courses are run well. Good arrangements are made to monitor the quality of provision, through frequent meetings and informal discussions. Self-assessment accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses, and the resulting action plans are well implemented. The recent appointment of a co-ordinator for the 'flexible foundation' course demonstrates a good awareness of the need to ensure efficient administration of all programmes. There has been a very good exchange of information between the new Manager for Younger Learners and his predecessor, ensuring a continuity of good practice. Future aims for the department are realistic and well considered.

Literacy, numeracy and communication



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

Strengths

- very good teaching and learning

- very good achievement

- outstanding Braille provision

- excellent resources

- very good support for students' individual needs.

Weaknesses

- insufficiently co-ordinated planning of opportunities for learning.

Scope of provision

85. The development of literacy, numeracy and communication skills is available to all students. The communication component includes English as a foreign language, Braille reading and writing skills, basic e-skills and the use of Braille technology. Currently seven adult students, funded by the RTU, are engaged in programmes to support their literacy and numeracy skills, which are assessed at below the level 2 required by their programme of study. There are 45 younger students, funded by the LSC, 26 of whom are new starters this academic year. They include 14 who are working towards GCE A levels and AS levels and three students who are working towards qualifications in English as a second language. The rest are following a foundation programme to support their basic and key skills while allowing them to identify their abilities and aspirations before deciding on a further academic or vocational programme.

Achievement and standards

86. Students' achievements are good. The college has a clear mission to enable students to increase their ability in communication and numeracy and thereby access vocational or academic courses. For 2004 the OCN Braille reading and writing achievement includes six units at entry level, 35 at level 1 and one at level 2. Numeracy prepares and supports students for appropriate levels of accreditation. Many students progress through the levels. In 2004, three students gained OCN entry level units for introduction to maths, three acquired entry level units in money management and number and six achieved units at level 1 in number and algebra. Students gain significantly in literacy skills and progress to higher level courses. Literacy programmes effectively prepare students to deal with communication needed for everyday living. Students in one group were organising a group meal at a restaurant. In Braille lessons, many students progress through several levels; all students are able to work independently, transforming their future capacity for learning and raising their aspirations. Rapid progression to higher levels is common; one student attained grade 2 Braille in five months, while another entering at basic skills entry level 2 has now progressed to a customer service course and is undertaking training as a student support worker.

Quality of education and training

87. Teaching and learning are very good, particularly in all aspects of specific support for literacy and e-skills. The provision for Braille teaching and learning is outstanding. Most sessions were carefully structured to address the individual needs of the students. Staff provide material in the appropriate medium for each student. Braille sessions were extremely effective in providing sensitive but challenging activities with students encouraged to organise their own learning. Dyslexia support is very good at providing individually tailored coping and learning strategies. In one lesson students created humorous cartoon drawings of muscles highlighting personal references, colour and metaphor to memorise names and locations. Most lessons provide variety though planning is not always adequately documented. A minority of lessons are too teacher dominated. Literacy lessons provide useful strategies in the key skills needed for participation in everyday life through role play and reading 'live' menus. Numeracy lessons tended to focus more on mechanical number work than on application. In better lessons specific learning targets were shared with the students though sometimes there was insufficient encouragement of self-evaluation. All students are highly motivated, focused on tasks and confident in requesting help.

88. The majority of staff have specialist training in dealing with visual impairment. All literacy and numeracy staff have attended core curriculum training and some have relevant qualifications. Staff teaching Braille skills have significant experience and qualifications. Basic skills staff have a working knowledge of Braille. Students access a wide range of appropriate media for communication. Learning and teaching materials are of high quality and in a variety of formats. Good use is made of residential settings to teach literacy and numeracy as they apply in everyday situations, though this work is not planned consistently to link with college programmes or with individual learning frameworks.

89. Pre-entry assessment of literacy, numeracy and communications provides an adequate guide to attainment levels. The tracking of achievement within accredited frameworks and specific support sessions is good. Many learning logs provide effective continuous review and evaluation, which in the best lessons informs subsequent planning. In Braille, targets are precise; they are shared with students and lead to effective recording and monitoring of progress.

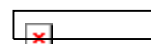
90. The range of courses caters effectively for students' needs. Grouping by attainment with variations in group size facilitates high levels of support. The college has reviewed the teaching of basic skills and is moving towards a more integrated and common approach. At present the emphasis on accreditation is strong in numeracy: little emphasis is placed on everyday functional tasks.

91. High levels of sensitive support are provided. This includes an awareness of the medical conditions and the emotional states of students. Support for new Braille students and students requiring skills in Braille technology is outstanding. Students report that they receive very effective support as they develop their skills and are strongly encouraged to make rapid progress. Many adult students spoke of their delight at being able to communicate effectively and to access information for the first time after sight loss or deterioration. There is very good provision for those with specific learning difficulties and short term memory problems. Several students with brain injury as well as visual impairment discuss and learn different strategies for using their memory more successfully. The particular literacy difficulties encountered by those with visual impairments and those who have used Braille for many years are clearly understood.

Leadership and management

92. There is clear leadership which is having an impact upon the focus and direction of the college's provision of basic skills. The quality of provision is regularly monitored and management have reviewed and made changes in its approach to teaching basic skills. Staff development is good and ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge and skills in the basic skills core curriculum and Braille. Equality of opportunity is promoted well with barriers to learning removed for all students requiring basic skills and Braille. The strong team approach based on close co-operation and transfer of information among the members of the team, leads to a unified approach in developing and teaching these aspects of the curriculum. There is less evidence of collaborative working between the day staff and those of the extended curriculum in the structured development of literacy and numeracy in everyday settings. The process by which the final self-assessment report was developed is sound and involves all staff.

Independent living skills and mobility



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

Strengths

- outstanding achievement

- excellent teaching

- excellent resources

- very effective assessment and recording of progress

- outstanding personal support

- excellent leadership and management.

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses.

Scope of provision

93. The college offers provision in independent living skills and mobility to all students: many students identify independence as their primary learning goal. Each new student has an individual programme to suit their personal needs and returning students are encouraged and supported in practising, consolidating and transferring their developed skills. Mobility is a priority and is focused on enabling the student to develop skills to travel wherever they wish. The programme progresses from pre-cane techniques to advanced travel. The independent living skills programme is an essential element towards ensuring successful progression into HE, employment and personal growth. For students with acquired sight loss the programme has an emphasis on rehabilitation and adaptation of existing skills.

Achievement and standards

94. Students' progress is outstanding. They demonstrate a clear understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and actively set challenging learning goals to develop their skills. They are confident in travelling on and off campus and progress in their mobility training to become independent travellers enabling them to maintain links with their home areas. Students' attendance is excellent and they negotiate with staff to ensure lessons are relevant and meet individual needs appropriately. Students demonstrate excellent progression in independent living through the attainment of skills and the development of confidence to manage their own daily living skills. They move from supported halls into independent houses both on and off campus. These houses enable students to live independently and to request support if and when it is needed thus preparing many of them for life at university or in the community when they leave the college. Students demonstrate a clear understanding of the risks involved and they have the strategies to ensure they are independent and safe.

95. An opportunity is available for OCN accreditation for mobility skills with a variety of units and levels. This qualification has been developed by the college to provide national recognition for the complex skills acquired by students. Optional units have been included to meet the diverse needs of the students, mobility for guide dogs within the environment and workplace; for the blind and hearing impaired; for the blind wheelchair user and for non-cane users. Students can choose to follow this award and a number have acquired the full certificate or achieved unit accreditation since 2002.

96. The majority of students fully participate in the extended curriculum activities. Students play in the national blind football league, regularly travelling to matches regionally and nationally whilst some have represented their country.

Quality of education and training

97. Teaching is excellent with very well planned lessons based on comprehensive individual learning plans. Teachers set the students challenging and demanding tasks which develop self-assessing and analytical skills. Excellent use is made of prompt questions to check students' understanding and improve and extend the skills needed in the programme area. When one student on a mobility lesson said that she was lost, the tutor asked her where she thought she was and how she could check. The student reflected on her previously acquired skills and using them appropriately was able to continue successfully to her destination.

98. Teachers have excellent knowledge of all students and are aware of the specific requirements of students with additional disabilities and/or learning difficulties. Teachers and students develop very good relationships based on this knowledge and this enables them to support the development of self-confidence and the improvement of communication skills. Students use these skills in their positive movement around the campus and demonstrate their confidence to request extra support in those independent living skills which they have identified for themselves. Teaching is carried out in realistic environments highly relevant to the individual's needs and reflects the daily activities of the students. Staff are very well qualified and have wide range of experience directly related to the diverse needs within the student cohort.

99. A wide variety of excellent resources is available enabling students to make choices appropriate for the task; supporting personal preferences or relevant to prior experience. In mobility, students have the opportunity to experiment with an extensive range of canes. There is an excellent close circuit television security system installed on the campus, around the residential halls and houses and at the pelican crossing between the main campus and residential areas. The resources for independent living are excellent both in the classroom and in the residential sites. They cover the broadest range from simple marked equipment to electronic specialist items enabling students to make informed choices based on experimentation and preference.

100. Initial assessment is very effective and comprehensive with a strong student input. Individual learning plans are developed from this assessment and are used very effectively to contribute to recording progression and informing reviews. The new IMS recording system enables all staff to input and share students' successes in informal or incidental learning alongside achievement in timetabled lessons. This provides an excellent record of the students' progress and informs forward planning and reviews.

101. The extended curriculum, in which most students take part, is exceptionally good and offers students a wide variety of optional activities and visits. It enables students to try innovative, new and challenging activities and to broaden their skills. Progress and achievements are clearly recorded. Students were very enthusiastic about the available options and one was very animated when describing the acoustic shooting activity. A former student was introduced to acoustic shooting at the college and became a world champion. This enabled her to experience world travel. She has now set up and runs an acoustic shooting club to share her positive experience and enjoyment with others.

102. Personal support is outstanding based on a very strong team approach. All students have exceptionally good access to specialist advice and support. They are able to discuss issues with

their independence workers, key workers, personal teachers or the specialist team which is available on campus. Students have confidence in the team and requests to meet with one of the specialist staff are handled sensitively and quickly. External specialists are available. Students have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities towards their own learning and staff monitor attendance. Any potential difficulties are addressed early to ensure the student has the most appropriate level of support but staff encourage students to take control of this support. Students do not expect the residential workers to wake them in the morning and they take responsibility for their own timetable and punctuality.

Leadership and management

103. Leadership and management are excellent at strategic and operational levels. Staff teams are involved in the self-assessment report which is a realistic and self-critical working document implementing change and development. The very effective management of the self-assessment report is reflected in the introduction of the independent living skills scheme of work, the management information profiling system and the recruitment of additional staff. Set targets were achieved on time and had a positive impact across the whole college. The leader of the independent living skills and mobility team took a leading role in the development of the profiling system which measures and identifies student attainment including the very important soft targets. This system provides a reliable source of information to measure student achievement and progression. A teaching observation programme accurately reflects the grade profile of the curriculum area and realistically reflects the quality of the learning experience for the individual student. All staff are supported with continuous professional development linked to the appraisal system and the changing student cohort. New staff, with a wider experience of working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, have joined the team and provide support and advice.

104. The college's vision clearly promotes a culture of respect and trust for students and staff. Adaptations to the timetable were sensitively made during the inspection to recognise the specific needs of Muslim students fasting for Ramadan. Promotion of equal opportunities and diversity underpins the whole of the independent living and mobility programmes.