



Huntingdonshire Regional College

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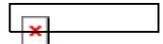
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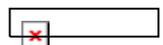
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Basic information about the college

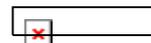


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|------------------------------|---|
| Name of college: | Huntingdonshire Regional College |
| Type of college: | General Further Education College |
| Principal: | Richard Summers |
| Address of college: | California Road Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 1BL |
| Telephone number: | 01480 379100 |
| Fax number: | 01480 379127 |
| Chair of governors: | Dr Glyn Rowlands |
| Unique reference number: | 130612 |
| Name of reporting inspector: | Michael Davis |
| Dates of inspection: | 11-15 March 2002 |

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

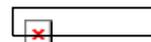


Huntingdonshire Regional College, a rural community college, meets the needs of a widely dispersed population. The main college site is located on the outskirts of the town of Huntingdon, near Cambridge. Most students live in Huntingdon, in the Great Ouse valley towns of St Neots and St Ives or in villages and rural settlements. Huntingdonshire, which has a population of approximately 150,000, is a relatively prosperous area. Levels of unemployment are low and the projected growth rate is above the national average. Huntingdonshire Regional College is funded by Cambridgeshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), but also has contracts and agreements with Cambridgeshire County Council, Anglia Polytechnic University and some other organisations. Some income is generated by direct fee payments made to the college by individuals and organisations. Most students who enrolled on college courses in 2000/01 were adults. In total, there were 791 full-time students and 6,183 part-time students. Students aged 16 to 18 accounted for 28% of all enrolments. Some 70% of full-time students are adults. Most students aged 16 to 18 enrol onto courses at level 2. Smaller numbers take courses at level 1 and level 3. At the time of the inspection, there were 102 work-based learning trainees. Twenty were advanced modern apprentices, 27 foundation modern apprentices and 55 were on a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programme, mostly at level 3. In 2000/01, the ratio of female to male students was 7:3. In the same period, 2.7% of students at the college identified themselves as from a minority ethnic background, which is slightly higher than the proportion of minority ethnic people in the local population.

The college is one of several providers of post-16 education and training within the area. In the locality, there are four colleges of further education (FE), two sixth form colleges and a former college of agriculture and horticulture. There are seven secondary schools with sixth forms in the immediate catchment area, one independent school with a sixth form and two schools for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most schools offer a range of vocational education programmes, and neighbouring FE colleges offer programmes similar to Huntingdonshire Regional College. In addition, there is a number of training organisations. The mission states that the college aims 'to be recognised as the most successful provider of high quality, locally accessible further education and training'.

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and TSC (Training Standards Council) inspectorates jointly inspected the college in November 2000. A number of grades 4 and 5 (unsatisfactory and very weak provision) were awarded at the time. Following that inspection, the college drew up and began to act upon detailed action plans. The Cambridgeshire LSC has been monitoring progress. In part, the current inspection has been a re-inspection for areas of provision previously found to be unsatisfactory or very weak.

How effective is the college?



In too many of the main aspects of its life, the college is not effective. Teaching and students' achievements are good in two of the areas inspected, satisfactory in three other areas and unsatisfactory in the remaining four. In summary, more than one third of the curriculum areas inspected are unsatisfactory. The work-based learning provision in business and hairdressing is unsatisfactory and in engineering very weak. The college has made slow progress in addressing many of the weaknesses identified at the FEFC and TSC inspections in November 2000. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The quality of the provision is inadequate to meet the reasonable needs of students. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- commitment to meeting the needs of the local area
- significantly improved financial position
- some effective course leadership
- sound work with charitable firms
- good retention and pass rates for 19+ students on level 2 and level 3 courses
- good information and communication technology (ICT) resources
- good provision in areas of health and social care and humanities.

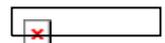
What should be improved

- weak leadership
- poor management
- strategic involvement of the governing body
- slow progress of many students
- much unsatisfactory teaching

- inhibiting effect small class sizes have on learning
- insufficient sharing of good practice
- inadequate additional learning support
- low retention and pass rates for students aged 16 to 18
- poor retention and pass rates for foundation students
- unsatisfactory provision in the following areas: hair and beauty; engineering; programmes for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; basic skills; work-based learning.

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



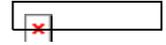
The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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 |
|-------------------|--|
| Animal management | Satisfactory. There are good pass rates on courses in animal technology, pre-veterinary nursing and for the national certificate in animal care. Most other courses are at, or near, the national average. Learning in the work place is good and has strong, well-planned links to college courses. Theory teaching on the veterinary nursing course is often unimaginative. Management of quality assurance activities is unsatisfactory. Teachers do not share good practice. Student support is often inadequate. |
| Engineering | Unsatisfactory. Pass rates are satisfactory in motor vehicle courses, but poor in engineering and work-based training. Most students make slow progress. Teaching is unsatisfactory and does not stimulate or |

| | |
|---|--|
| | hold the attention of students. Learning plans do not accurately reflect students' different abilities and experiences. Students are not given appropriately demanding learning targets. Communication between staff is not effective. There is little sharing of good practice. The quality of work-based learning is very weak. |
| Business and office technology | Satisfactory. Pass rates are high on most accounting and office technology courses. There is good provision for adult students. Tutorial support for students is good. The numbers on business courses are declining significantly. Students on these courses are often not interested in learning. There is little sharing among teachers of effective classroom practice. |
| Information and communication technology | Satisfactory. There are good pass rates on most ICT courses. The range of ICT courses below level 2 is good. The standard of practical teaching is good, but the management of large classes is often poor. Specialist computer resources are good. Support for individual students is effective. Teachers make insufficient reference in lessons to current working practices. There is little sharing of good practice between teachers. |
| Hairdressing and beauty therapy | Unsatisfactory. Pass rates on hairdressing courses are poor. Teaching on beauty therapy courses is good, but on hairdressing courses it is poor. Assessment of students' work in hairdressing is poor, particularly in work-based training. Specialist resources are inadequate. Work-based provision is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient structured training in the workplace. Work-based evidence is rarely used for the NVQ. |
| Health and social care | Good. Pass rates on most courses are good. Retention rates remain a weakness in full-time courses, but have improved since the last inspection. There is a wide range of relevant occupational courses. Many are designed to meet the needs of adult students. Teaching is well organised. Practical teaching sessions are often lively and challenging. Some groups are too small. There is strong support for both full-time and part-time students. |
| Humanities | Good. Pass and retention rates for adult courses are good. There are good retention rates on courses at General Certificate of Education Advanced level (GCE A level). Students develop good learning skills. Most teaching is very effective. Teachers provide good individual support for students. Pass rates at GCE A level are below national standards. The range of humanities courses offered is reducing. There is insufficient review and sharing of best practice. |
| Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | Unsatisfactory. Students on vocational preparation programmes make good progress and develop appropriate skills for work. Good partnerships with social firms create effective learning opportunities in the community. The quality of teaching for students with the most severe and complex difficulties is poor. Lesson planning is inadequate. The monitoring and recording of progress of individual student plans is weak. Resources available throughout the college are poor. Management is ineffective. |
| Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages | Unsatisfactory. There is a wide range of provision designed to widen participation on courses in FE. The results of initial assessment are used effectively to devise individual basic skills learning programmes. Some teaching is well planned and takes account of individual needs. The monitoring and assessment of students' progress towards their goals is inadequate. The number of students receiving additional learning support is very low. Poor accommodation affects learning adversely. Arrangements for co-ordinating the teaching of literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), |

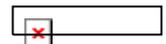
| | |
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| | across the college, are very weak. |
|--|------------------------------------|

How well is the college led and managed?



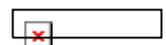
Leadership and management of the college are unsatisfactory. The college has not made adequate progress in addressing the many weaknesses identified during the FEFC and TSC inspections in November 2000. There is no clear strategy to improve the quality of provision. Governors are insufficiently involved in strategic planning. The management of a number of curriculum areas is weak. Since August 2001, the reorganisation of the senior management team has contributed to ensuring that effective procedures are implemented for improving aspects of the college's work. The college's financial position and the monitoring of its budget have improved. The impact, however, of improved systems on the quality of students' learning has been insufficient. Overall, there is too much unsatisfactory teaching and poor professional practice. Monitoring and evaluation of much of the work of the college is weak.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's mission reflects its wish to respond to community needs and to help address educational and social disadvantage. The college has taken steps to widen participation in FE by extending the range of courses within the curriculum. The mission statement is clear and is well supported by the governors. The needs of students with difficulties and disabilities in the local community are being met through partnerships with a variety of companies that provide opportunities for groups under-represented in the workplace and charities, as well as within the college. On the main college site, other facilities for the community, such as a fitness centre and a doctors' surgery and primary care centre, further encourage local involvement. There is a strong commitment to a single regeneration fund project within the locality, and to the expansion of the on-site nursery provision to help adults returning to full-time or part-time education who have childcare responsibilities. However, these assets and aims are undermined by weaknesses in management, by a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching and learning, by low standards in many areas and inadequate provision overall. Work on the main site with students who have inadequate skills in literacy and numeracy or severe learning difficulties and disabilities is unsatisfactory. Access for students with disabilities to college buildings and facilities are good. However, equality of opportunity is not an effective feature of college life and too many students are poorly served. The monitoring of equality of opportunity is weak.

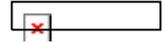
How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Guidance and support for most full-time students are satisfactory, although impartial advice and information are not readily available for all prospective students. Full-time students have weekly tutorials, but the quality and effectiveness of these vary considerably. Students aged 16 to 18 are mostly well supported by their teachers. Counselling and welfare arrangements are effective and well managed by the student support services team. There is poor take up of additional learning support, which is not an integrated part of classroom activities. Effective use is made of the

specific workshops run on job-related topics. Students with disabilities studying on mainstream courses are well supported. Part-time students have poor access to the guidance and support services especially those who do not attend the main college site. Most part-time students do not have adequate arrangements for tutorial support. The student guidance and support services have not had an impact on the full-time student retention rates, which continue to show a downward trend.

Students' views of the college



Students' views about the college were taken into account and a summary of their main comments is presented below:

What students like about the college

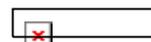
- friendly and supportive tutors
- range of support services
- good wheelchair access at the college site
- availability of computers
- good nursery provision
- benefit to adult students of flexible arrangements for course hours
- good opportunities for work experience.

What they feel could be improved

- more private study space
- inadequate recreational facilities

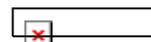
- poor accommodation on most college sites
- insufficient lockers for personal belongings
- unreliability of transport to the college
- inadequate car parking on main college site.

Other information



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

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

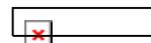


| Aspect & learner type | Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) % | Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) % | Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) % |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Teaching 16-18 | 46 | 49 | 5 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 51 | 36 | 13 |
| Learning 16-18 | 51 | 34 | 15 |
| 19+ and WBL* | 50 | 36 | 14 |

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

* work-based learning

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers a wide range of vocational qualifications, mainly for adults. It also offers academic qualifications for the GCE A level, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), access to higher education (HE) and higher national courses. In four of the areas of learning that were inspected, there is a significant amount of work-based learning. Approximately half of these work-based learners are following advanced or foundation modern apprenticeships, which incorporate NVQs. The remainder is following NVQs. Most college students on both full-time and part-time programmes are aged 19 or over.

2. The college has developed a number of partnerships with community organisations. The provision includes a programme for students with specific and moderate difficulties and disabilities who work in social firms. Another partnership in St Neots has considerably increased the college's information technology (IT) community provision. As part of the offers at the main site, two new innovative programmes have been developed for adult students who are not ready to start an access to HE course, these are 'Jumpstart' at entry and foundation level and 'Pathway' at GCSE.

3. Students in humanities develop good communication skills and work well together. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those on health and social care courses gain confidence and develop effective skills through group work. Many adult students make satisfactory progress and reach acceptable standards. However, full-time students in particular, are not sufficiently challenged. There is insufficient use of targets against which students can measure their progress. Students on some courses have poor records of attendance and punctuality; the impact is greatest on small teaching groups and affects the rate of progress of all other students in the groups. The teaching of key skills has not been implemented effectively, particularly for work-based learners.

4. Young people with moderate learning difficulties make good progress. They achieve a range of relevant qualifications that include literacy, numeracy and entry level vocational certificates. Students who work in social firms learn appropriate work skills in real work environments. Their general progress and achievements are good and many students progress from entry level to NVQ 1 programmes. The achievements of students with severe learning difficulties are inadequate. Their achievements are poorly monitored and recorded. Their progression to other courses in the college is poor.

5. The number of students aged 16 to 18 who successfully complete their key skills is low. In 2000/01, the best result was 47% in level 3 application of number, and the lowest was at level 1 IT, at 8%. Attendance for all levels has remained poor at 56%; and the college has a target of 60% for 2001/02.

6. Overall, there has been a gradual decline in the retention and pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 in the three years from 1999. At all qualification levels, rates are now well below the national average. At levels 2 and 3, adult retention and pass rates over the same period have been good and improving, but at level 1 they are below national averages and falling. For students who complete their courses, there is satisfactory progression to more advanced courses within the college or at other colleges. The separate reports on areas of learning in Part C give more detail about achievement and standards on particular courses.

16-18 year olds

7. The number of students starting GCE A-level subjects has steadily declined from 86 in 1997/98, to 37 in 1999/2000. Over this three-year period, there has been a slight improvement in the pass rates for most GCE A-level subjects. The number of students enrolling onto individual GCE A-level subjects is very low. The largest group in 1999/2000 was the seven students who enrolled on the law course. In 2000/01, 76% of GCE A-level students who completed their course passed the

examination, compared with 66% in 1999/2000. The average points score in 1999/2000, for students taking two or more GCE A levels, was 5.7, which was significantly below the borough average of 19.9, and the national average of 18.5. The college's average points score was 6.9 in 2000/01. Retention rates on GCE A-level courses are well below national averages. The number of students who achieved high grades when compared with national averages is low. There is insufficient analysis of students' actual achievements at GCE A level, compared with predictions based on their GCSE grades.

8. Retention rates on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced programmes in 2000/01 for students aged 16 to 18 were well below national averages. The retention rates have steadily fallen from 96% to 64% in the three years from 1998. The number of students enrolling onto GNVQ advanced programmes is low and declining. Pass rates in 2000/01 are also below national averages, but have improved slightly when compared with the results in 1999/2000. Pass rates on courses for Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) qualifications for students aged 16 to 18 are mostly above national averages. However, retention rates are generally poor, with the exception of computer studies where both retention and pass rates are above the national average. NVQ level 3 retention and pass rates are at the national average. However, the number of students aged 16 to 18 who enrol onto NVQ level 3 programmes is very small. The largest group in the three years from 1998, was 12.

9. Retention rates at level 2 have declined steadily to below the national average in 2000/01. Pass rates have improved and are now at the national average. Retention and pass rate for GCSE retakes, in 2000/01, were below the national averages. Only 66% of the students who started their studies completed the course. Of those who completed, pass rates at grade A* to C declined from 42% in 1999/2000, to 37% in 2000/01. Both are below the national average of 43% for general FE colleges. GNVQ intermediate pass rates, at 92%, were well above the national average in 2000/01. The pass rate for GNVQ intermediate art and design was 100%. The pass rates at NVQ level 2, in 2000/01, were well below the national average, at 54%.

10. In 1999/2000, retention rates on level 1 courses declined to below national averages. Pass rates have also declined to around the national average. Retention and pass rates on GNVQ foundation courses are above the national average. On NVQ level 1 business administration, only 40% of students who started their programmes completed them.

Work-based learning

11. At the time of the inspection, there were 102 young people undertaking work-based learning, largely on courses in motor vehicle, business accounting and hairdressing. No advanced modern apprentices, who started in 1998/99 or later, had successfully completed all aspects of their programme at the time of the inspection. In the two years from 1999, only one foundation modern apprentice has fully completed. Retention rates are generally poor. Most learners who start a NVQ training programme are retained, but the pass rates are still poor. In November 2000, TSC inspectors found that key skills were introduced towards the end of some programmes. During the 18 months since the inspection, there has been insignificant progress in improving work on key skills.

Adult learners

12. Adult learners account for 72% of students. There were improvements in level 3 pass rates, in 2000/01, to well above the national averages. Retention rates have remained at the national averages for the two years from 1999. In 2000/01, pass and retention rates were at 82% and 80%, respectively. GCE A-level retention rates improved in 2000/01, and were 17% above the national average. Pass rates have remained at the national average. The retention and pass rates for GCE A-level English literature consistently exceed national averages by 20%. Access to HE courses have maintained good pass rates, at 97%, which is 20% above the national average. Many students on the access to HE programme remain on their course and succeed in gaining a place at university. Higher-level courses have had consistently good retention rates. Pass rates, at 86%, in 2000/01, have remained above national averages for NVQ level 4 programmes. Retention rates on BTEC courses are good. There are good retention and pass rates on most NVQ level 3 courses. In

2000/01, the pass rate on the NVQ 3 course in accounting was 94%, which was 39% above the national average.

13. Pass rates on level 2 courses have steadily improved over the last three years from 1998, and, in 2001, were 24% above the national average. Retention rates have remained around the national average. GCSE pass rates improved in 2000/01 to 75% for grades A* to C, well above the national average. In 2000/01, pass rates on NVQ level 2 programmes, at 79%, were good. Students on other long courses, over 24 weeks in length, are also performing well above national averages. For example, in 2001/02, the Integrated Business Technology (IBT) stage 2 course achieved a retention rate of 79% and a pass rate of 85%, both significantly above national averages.

14. Level 1 pass rates have declined over the four years from 1997, and were below national averages in 2000/01. The retention rates have risen to the national average and are considerably better than for students aged 16 to 18. NVQ level 1 pass and retention rates are good. Most adults who attend classes to improve their literacy and numeracy make adequate progress. However, very few of these students take courses that lead to an external qualification. Much achievement remains unrecorded and unrecognised.

Quality of education and training



15. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 127 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 50%, satisfactory in 40% and unsatisfactory in 10%. In only a relatively small proportion of lessons, 16%, it was excellent or very good. The highest proportion of good or very good teaching was in business, health and social care and humanities. There is an unsatisfactory degree of variation in the quality of teaching across the curriculum areas. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory lessons was observed in engineering, hairdressing, literacy, numeracy, and ESOL, and among students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Lessons where most students were adults received the widest range of grades. For example, there was a higher proportion of lessons graded good or better and a higher proportion of lessons graded unsatisfactory, compared with lessons in which most students were aged 16 to 18. Classes, however, often contained a mix of students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. The only areas with no unsatisfactory teaching were business, ICT and humanities.

16. Teaching on entry level courses is generally of a lower standard than at other levels. Some 25% of lessons were less than satisfactory. Teaching was good or better in 50% of level 1 lessons. There were no unsatisfactory lessons at level 1. Level 3 courses had the highest proportion of good or very good high grades for teaching, at 65%, and only a small proportion of lessons were unsatisfactory. Curriculum areas with high proportions of lessons at level 3 in which teaching was good or better included business, humanities and health and social care. More information on inspectors' judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and attainment can be found in Part C of this report.

17. Most teachers have an appropriate command of their subject or occupational area. Some teach enthusiastically. Working relationships between teachers and students are good in all curriculum areas. Students speak positively of the support they receive from their teachers. Most adults are well motivated and keen to learn. Teachers recognise that many adults lack confidence at the start of their course and take account of this in their teaching. In most lessons, adults and young people work successfully alongside one another.

18. Good lessons were carefully planned. Teachers used well-designed teaching materials. In these lessons, teachers carefully explained the aims of the lesson to students at the start and subsequently checked that these aims had been achieved. They ensured that their lessons were pitched at an appropriate level and set students challenging tasks, which took account of their particular abilities. Many lessons in health and social care were lively and demanding. In these

lessons, teachers made good use of the students' own vocational experiences. In a number of humanities classes, students were developing good analytical and evaluative skills. Group work was often used effectively to improve learning. In business, initial assessment was used effectively to plan individualised learning programmes. Students' work was marked regularly and, in most cases, teachers gave students helpful written or oral comments on the quality of their work. In ICT practical lessons, assignments were well planned and, on animal management courses, IT was used effectively in the classroom. Many adult students on business office technology programmes made rapid progress.

19. Teaching was unsatisfactory in 10% of the lessons observed. In many of the lessons, the teaching was dull and students were poorly motivated. Many classes were small. Teachers had not developed strategies to compensate, for example, for the lack of group work. There was little sharing of good teaching practice among staff and insufficient evaluation of what constitutes effective teaching. Students aged 16 to 18 lack self-confidence and many teachers have low expectations of them. The tasks students were set in engineering were often undemanding. Students who did not produce their work on time regularly had their deadlines extended. Characteristics of the less effective teaching included poor planning, a failure to take into account the prior experience and knowledge of students, and inappropriate teaching methods. Students were working too slowly and had sometimes been set unclear tasks. Some teachers failed to direct their questions skilfully or check effectively that students understood the work. Some marking was not sufficiently thorough. Sometimes teachers failed to provide the feedback that could give students a clear idea of their progress. Other weaknesses in teaching included: the tendency of some teachers to spend too much of the lesson talking at the students; ineffective attention to the needs of individuals and the failure of some teachers to acknowledge and make constructive use of students' previous experiences. In literacy, numeracy and ESOL, learning was not always regularly checked. Students spent too much time completing a series of activities or worksheets without the chance to reflect and ask questions. Practical lessons were generally well planned and satisfactorily managed. Most students gain confidence in the use of specialist equipment and developed their practical skills effectively. The training received by students with learning difficulties and disabilities on their placement at a social firm was very effective. Teachers of ICT, however, did not effectively relate the topics taught to current commercial practices.

20. There has been little improvement in the quality of work-based learning since the previous inspection. Action plans from this inspection of November 2000 were not fully implemented until formally accepted by the LSC in August 2001. Work-based off-the-job training at the college was observed in three curriculum areas. Teaching was good or better in 60% of lessons taught at the college. The more effective lessons were courses in motor vehicle, accountancy and animal care. In some areas, trainees were well supported in the workplace, but in hairdressing knowledge gained by learners was not tested or checked, and the links to workplace activities were wholly inadequate. Many learners make slow progress. Little use is made of work-based evidence and there is little co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training.

21. The teaching of key skills is uneven. A key skills policy was written in 2001. Students aged 16 to 18 are timetabled to attend three single hour workshops every week. Attendance is very poor. Some good training materials have been developed. A key skills project with the probationary service is effective. Due to teaching commitments, the planned visits of key skill co-ordinators to groups did not take place regularly. Links between key skills co-ordinators and teachers running vocational courses are strong, but in other curriculum areas they are weak. Managers of work-based learning have introduced an initial diagnostic test. Overall, the development of key skills work is poor, as is the sharing of good practice among teachers of key skills.

22. The standard of assessment on most college-based courses, including those in community centres, is mainly good. Students generally know what they need to achieve to gain their qualification. Most teachers provide students with a clear timetable for assessments and negotiate dates for assignments to be returned. Some students, however, still find that the spacing of assignments over the duration of their course is poor. Assessment grading criteria are usually clearly stated. Most assessed work is fairly and accurately marked, and most students receive appropriate written and oral feedback. In some curriculum areas, such as humanities, the quality of feedback is uneven; some teachers give insufficient written explanation. There is insufficient

monitoring and recording of foundation students' achievements. In some curriculum areas, initial assessment is not used effectively to plan an appropriate programme of work and, for most students, target setting is underdeveloped. For students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, initial assessment fails to take into account prior achievements and pays insufficient attention to school records and reports. Some students in their first year at college repeat a high proportion of the work that they have already covered competently at school. Most students do not have specific short-term or medium-term targets and many do not have individual learning plans. Students on veterinary nursing courses, for example, lack clear medium term targets against which they can monitor their progress.

23. In work-based learning, individual learning plans are poor. Many plans are incomplete or have not been updated following changes to the planned programme. The only target dates noted in the plans are the expected end date for the whole programme. In some areas, such as hair and beauty, students are not given a copy of their learning plans. There is insufficient assessment in the workplace. Little assessment is by direct observation. The number of qualified assessors in the workplace is inadequate. The portfolios of many work-based learners contain too narrow a range of evidence. On work-based motor vehicle courses, for example, there is an over-reliance on job cards as evidence of learners' competence. In other areas, portfolios mainly contain testimonies from expert witnesses who are not qualified assessors. The portfolios for work-based learners are kept at the college and learners have no ownership of them. Many learners are uninvolved in maintaining and developing their portfolios, and see this task as being the responsibility of their assessor. Most work-based learners make slow progress in completing their NVQ and key skills portfolios.

24. The effectiveness of internal verification varies considerably. The college has a comprehensive handbook for internal verification, which includes a policy and procedures. The procedures are not, however, implemented consistently. On college-based courses in engineering, internal verification is well planned and in line with college procedures. In business and office technology and in health, care and early years, internal verification has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. In several other curriculum areas, however, internal verification is not sufficiently systematic or thorough. In one animal technology course, for example, college procedures were ignored. Internal verification for work-based learning is poor. In some areas, there has been no internal verification of work-based learning. When verification does take place, internal verifiers fail to identify poor assessment practices. Often internal verification only occurred at the end of a learner's programme. The amount of time internal verifiers spend in direct observation of assessors is inadequate. They concentrate instead on verifying learners' portfolios.

25. The general resources provided by the college are satisfactory. The buildings are maintained regularly, but there have been few major improvements since the college was originally built in 1965. The college entrance foyer is drab and gives a poor first impression of the college to visitors. General teaching rooms and specialist areas are mainly satisfactory. The workshop used for motor vehicle courses is good and the supply of vehicle stock is adequate. Some specialist areas of the college are unsatisfactory, for example, the small number of beds available in the beauty salon. The college has reduced its dependency on mobile classrooms. Since the last inspection, four units have been demolished. Some classes, however, are still badly affected by poor accommodation. The base room for basic skills teaching is small and can only accommodate five students at a time. Some literacy teaching takes place in inappropriate accommodation, for example in the motor vehicle workshop and in the library.

26. There is a good library on the main college sites. Staff are welcoming and encourage students to make the best use of the resources. There is a good range of current periodicals and an appropriate stock of books. Students make good use of the open access arrangements in the library for using computers linked to the Internet. Childcare arrangements at the nursery unit help many students who are also parents of young children. Work is due to start on a new and larger unit later in 2002. There are excellent fitness facilities at the main site. The gym is open for use by the local community; there are approximately 800 members, including staff and students. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities greatly benefit from the gym's facilities. There are very few general facilities and areas for students to use. At the main site, there is a cafeteria and a shop, but students do not have their own common room. The college has recently made modifications to the main buildings to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities. On the main college site,

doors in the main corridor have been modified, chair lifts have been installed and an automatic double door and ramps allow entry from outside. As a consequence, wheelchair users can successfully negotiate all areas of the college site except the photographic facility, which is on the first floor. The reception counter has been lowered to wheelchair height.

27. The college's community centres vary in the standard of resources which they provide for students. At the St Neots centre, the accommodation can become very cramped, but access for students with physical disabilities is good. The Wood Green animal shelter has restaurant facilities, but full-time students do not have their own social area. Sign language resources are in short supply and teachers regularly move equipment between centres. The hairdressing salon currently, located in the centre of Huntingdon, is to close and a new combined hair and beauty salon is to open on the main site.

28. Since the last inspection, the college has extended its computer network and increased the number of computers and locations. Community centres have benefited from this improvement. Some 100 workstations have been purchased and there are now 350 computers available for students to use. The overall ratio of computers to students is good. The college intends to replace all of its computers every three years. The software has been updated to industry standards. The college has developed an intranet service to provide general information and learner resources. However, most curriculum areas have yet to develop the intranet's potential. Students attending community centres cannot access the college intranet. The availability of specialist IT equipment for visually impaired students is good. All staff and students have e-mail facilities, which are well used.

29. Most staff are experienced and either well qualified or working towards an appropriate award. Of the 59 full-time teachers, 81% have a teaching qualification. Only 28% of the 146 part-time staff are teacher qualified. The college is, however, systematically addressing the issue and 35 teachers are currently working towards accreditation. Teachers' vocational competence is mostly good, but standards vary between curriculum areas. In beauty therapy, business administration and animal care, most teachers have current industrial experience, but, in IT, the level of industrial experience is low. Professional updating for teachers in engineering and business administration is inadequate. Most teachers who work with students with severe learning difficulties have had little formal training. There is some effective staff development, for example, training for British sign language teachers, one of whom is profoundly deaf. In September 2001, a mentoring scheme for new lecturers was introduced. The system is effective. At the time of the inspection, 34 staff had mentors. All college staff have an annual appraisal by their line manager. Training needs are identified, agreed and linked to the college's annual staff development plan. The college was re-accredited with an Investor In People award in 2001.

30. The college has a good range of initiatives to widen participation in FE. An increasing numbers of adults, particularly women, are attracted to the college's range of courses. Many courses are flexibly organised so that the arrangements can accommodate the domestic and other commitments of adult students working, for example, towards access to HE and nursing qualifications. Parents with young children identify the opportunity to use the college nursery as a key factor enabling them to return to learning. In the business and office technology area, courses have been designed to meet the needs of students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds or have been low achievers. Courses for adults are available in over 20 community centres and are attracting approximately 6,000 students each year. Despite efforts by the college to enrol people from groups traditionally under-represented in FE, enrolment in most curriculum areas reflects long-established patterns of recruitment. There are, for example, very few men taking hairdressing, health, care and early years courses. The college has a thriving music school. There are over 450 part-time students of all ages. The college only offers a small range of GCSE and GCE subjects and enrolments onto these courses, particularly for students aged 16 to 18, are low and falling. Most humanities courses that are designed for adult students recruit well. They include, for example, teacher training and learning support courses. A high proportion of students on the access and teacher training courses progress to HE institutions, particularly to Anglia Polytechnic University.

31. The college has good links with charitable organisations and the probation service. It provides good community-based vocational training for students with identified learning difficulties and disabilities through its work with ten social firms. These social firms help students to improve their

skills significantly and, in many cases, to gain employment. The college has developed an effective partnership with the Cambridgeshire Probation Service. The programme, which enables offenders on community service orders to gain key skills qualifications, works well. Some 20 staff working in the probation service have also gained key skill qualifications at level 3. At the time of the inspection, nearly 250 offenders were taking key skills at level 2. Links with other FE colleges and secondary schools are generally weak. Work with other colleges is restricted to the joint delivery of one course and the development of a submission for a Higher National Certificate (HNC) course. The only links with secondary schools are related to broad community initiatives. Young people who live locally are offered taster sessions during the Easter and summer holiday periods. There are some effective links with infant, nursery and primary schools; a number of college recreational classes take place on their premises. The college also has effective links with HE institutions. In particular, it works with Anglia Polytechnic University in its regional partnership. In addition to access courses, the college offers a number of degree modules under a franchise agreement with the university.

32. The college has 11 curriculum consultative panels that support review and development effectively. They meet at least twice a year. Their membership includes governors, as well as commercial and industrial representatives. Good practice, when identified, is shared between panels. Minutes of panel meetings do not contain action points and the panels do not have action plans. There are plans for a senior manager to present consultative panels' action plans to the academic board.

33. Arrangements for work experience for full-time students are good. Most full-time students benefit from well-organised placements, which provide appropriate vocational experience. The college has a comprehensive work experience policy and procedures, and good documentation for use during monitoring visits. Great care is taken to ensure that each stage of the process meets stated requirements. In 2000/01, over 70% of full-time students completed a period of work experience. Most students on access to HE courses, except for those taking the nursing option, choose not to do work experience. In some areas, for example in art and design and hair and beauty, the lack of work experience remains a weakness. Many students benefit from suitable enrichment activities and take appropriate additional qualifications. In the areas of hair and beauty, and health, care and early years there are good opportunities for enrichment activities. On health and care courses, students participate in a wide range of activities including educational trips and visits, presentations by external speakers and fund-raising event for various charities. A visit to a morgue, by the access to nursing course, resulted in one student completing a work placement there. In business and office technology, there are insufficient enrichment activities for full-time students.

34. Most support that the college provides for students is satisfactory. A student services team is responsible for providing careers advice, student counselling, welfare and medical support. A separate unit provides additional learning support for students with learning difficulties. The availability of support for part-time students is inadequate. Induction to the college is usually brief; the services available for students are not always explained to them. The student services support team does not go out to community sites, even to full-time students. Student support services are only available during the college day and, hence, are not offered to part-time evening students. Students on work-based provision rarely use the college's support services.

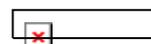
35. The initial advice and guidance that applicants receive is not always sufficiently impartial. Subject tutors usually carry out most interviews, although many of them have received no formal training in interviewing techniques. Only applicants who are completely unsure of the course they want to follow are encouraged to attend a more general interview or meet with a careers officer. Some students who consider that they have enrolled onto the wrong course are interviewed by a careers officer, but many leave. The retention rates for full-time students have worsened over the three years from 1999 and in-year retention rates were showing no sign of improvement at the time of the inspection. The take-up of learning support by full-time students is low in several areas. In hair and beauty, for example, no students have taken advantage of the additional support they have been offered. When starting their course, most full-time students complete an initial assessment to determine whether they have any additional learning needs. In some curriculum areas, for example, business and office technology, initial assessment is not thorough. Only about 10% of those with

identified additional needs take up the offer of support. The funding the college uses to provide learning support, at 2.2% of gross income, is significantly below the average for the sector. Most support is provided through workshops or individual tutorials in the basic skills base room. Additional support for students in the classroom is minimal. Most part-time students in the college are not assessed for their learning support needs.

36. Effective use is made of the funds made available to support students with financial problems. The financial support available to students to help pay for college nursery fees is good. The college nursery on the main college site effectively meets the needs of students who use its services. Application forms for help from the funds are easy to complete; each applicant's case is carefully considered. Decisions are made quickly by the college, which helps students to make informed decisions. Full-time students are allocated a personal tutor at the start of their course. They feel well supported by their tutors and most find the weekly tutorial system useful. However, tutorial time is not always used effectively. Tutors, in curriculum areas, use tutorial sessions for individual reviews and group development work; others use it as additional teaching time. Most part-time students do not have formal tutorial sessions. Policies have been introduced to improve full-time students' levels of attendance at lessons and rates of retention on courses. Students' attendance is closely monitored and telephone calls are made to parents of students aged 16 to 18 if they do not attend. In addition, a member of staff from the student support team regularly patrols the main college site encouraging students who truant to return to their lessons. Attendance figures at lessons have improved during the academic year 2000/01.

37. Careers guidance and support for full-time students is good. A member of the student services team is responsible for providing general careers guidance. The team also runs support workshops on topics such as time management and study skills. The college has a close working relationship with the local careers service. A careers officer attends the college's main site two mornings a week. Students receive effective support from this arrangement. The careers officer works closely with the student support team, attends induction events and runs workshops on specific work-related topics. A high proportion of adults on full-time courses progress to HE, for example from courses on access, teacher training, office technology, accounting and veterinary nursing courses. The counselling service is effective. The service, which is totally confidential, is easily reached through a discreet appointment system. The counselling provided has been particularly effective in helping students to resolve personal problems and to continue with their studies.

Leadership and management



38. Leadership and management across the college are unsatisfactory. The college has been slow to address the weaknesses identified in the FEFC and TSC inspection reports of November 2000. Financial issues, however, have been acted on with some urgency since the summer of 2001. There has been an increase in activity, in the implementation of post-inspection action plans approved by the local LSC in August 2001. The curriculum and quality committee of the corporation has monitored actions carefully and, although there has been some slippage, most have been completed on time. College managers, although they gave insufficient consideration and evaluation to required improvements, have also monitored the agreed actions efficiently. There are too few precise targets to enable success to be measured. The management team, however, is committed to the improvement of college services. Although there is no college development plan at present, the post-inspection action plans are being used to address the college's most significant weaknesses.

39. The strategic plan, which contains a financial forecast for 2002 to 2004, is a very detailed document. It contains a clear statement of the college's mission, an analysis of recent performance and the key financial assumptions. It fails, however, to identify clearly many of the key actions the college is undertaking and the success criteria by which these actions may be measured. There is no clearly established link between the college's operational plan and the strategic plan. The

operational plan comprises a calendar of actions that can be monitored for completion rather than for its impact on the students. Governors are keen to respond to government and LSC initiatives. The college is considering, for example, developing a strategy that would enable it to be a potential provider of a distinctive curriculum for students aged 14 to 19. However, the number of students aged 16 to 18 enrolling at the college is declining and retention and pass rates are low. Moreover, the college has low expectations of its current students aged 16 to 18 and links with local schools are weak.

40. The financial position of the college has improved considerably during 2001. The college is now able to plan for development. In line with government directives, the college has reduced its franchised position by a half. This decision contributed to a 17% growth in income last year; a similar growth rate is planned for 2001/02. These projections have been the foundation of the college's financial recovery strategy. Finance is monitored closely and effectively, regular reviews have been introduced. Management team meetings are now used effectively to monitor finance on a monthly basis. The local LSC acknowledges the college's improved financial position, although its overall financial condition remains fragile. Last year, ending 31 July 2001, the college achieved an operating surplus for the first time in seven years.

41. The corporation has a clear understanding of the college's mission in relation to its local community. Governors are very supportive of the college and are committed to its development. Many governors have developed close links with curriculum areas and staff regard their visits as supportive and helpful. There is a lack of clarity, however, about the exact purpose of these links. Several governors sit on a number of college committees. The health and safety committee, for example, has two governors. The marketing group that had governor representation has been disbanded. Despite this, a marketing strategy is about to be submitted to the board. Although the college is currently, during 2001/02, experiencing a period of growth, there is no common understanding among governors, managers and staff of the college's future direction. In 2001, the principal and the senior team changed the arrangements for providing information for governors. They have improved the presentation of papers and provide useful summaries of key documents. However, there are many recent instances, despite requests from governors, where the new arrangements do not apply. Health and safety reports, for example, have not been consistently made available, and concise summaries of some papers have not been provided. Information required by the governors, for example, on class sizes, teaching ratios and staffing efficiencies, has not been tabled. The corporation has not been sufficiently involved in the strategic development of the college. Their involvement in the strategic planning process was inadequate, and mostly confined to commenting on the draft. The strategic plan itself is a large and cumbersome document. Governors have, until recently, received infrequent updates on the progress made in key areas, for example, on efforts to improve student retention and pass rates. Key strategies to achieve targets and measure progress set out in the plan have not been presented clearly to governors.

42. Since the last inspections in November 2000, the college has restructured its senior management team. The principalship now consists of a principal, two vice principals and an assistant principal. Roles are clear and there is a sharper focus on student support and quality assurance issues. Financial management, for example, has improved, and there is a clearer emphasis on improving the quality of the students' experience. Responsibilities among senior managers are unevenly distributed and the senior management team is having difficulties in achieving rapid improvements in the overall quality of the college that are required. Some additional administrative staff have been appointed to help with priorities. There is a strong commitment to staff development for both full-time and part-time staff. A carefully designed plan is linked to the cycle of annual appraisal and has been effectively implemented. However, there are no clear links between the staff development plan and the operational plan. Improved management information is providing better support for planning. The management information system is sound. However, managers do not routinely use management information when considering or analysing course costing. Many class sizes are very small and not viable in cost terms. The college has commissioned consultants to examine efficiency issues. A report comparing the college's performance to national averages is in preparation.

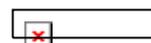
43. Quality assurance systems are not fully effective. Most curriculum team reviews are inadequate, although good end-of-year reviews take place in business administration. The self-assessment

process has been planned carefully and involved over 120 academic and support staff. The process was accelerated in order to make the self-assessment available for the inspection. Target setting at all levels is not sufficiently sharply focused or thorough. Curriculum managers have failed to eradicate shortcomings in procedures in the areas of basic skills, hair and beauty therapy, engineering, learning difficulties and/or disabilities and animal management, as well as in work-based learning. Overall, the quality of curriculum leadership is unsatisfactory; there are significant weaknesses. However, there is some good leadership, particularly in humanities. Quality assurance activities are effective at course level, but in business administration there are also significant management problems which lead to inadequate monitoring and evaluation. The management of work-based learning is inadequate overall, leading to much poor practice.

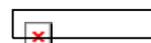
44. The college has developed clear policies for equal opportunities, for both students and staff. However, although some analysis of equal opportunities data is carried out, the impact of the policies is small. No analysis, for example, has considered outcomes related to gender or school of origin. Policies are not monitored thoroughly to ensure successful implementation. Surveys of students' views have not been carried out adequately; views of parents and employers have not been sought, although there are plans to do so in the summer term. The college has, in general, recognised the deficiencies of its practice and has taken steps to improve.

45. The leadership from the principal has been insufficiently forceful to bring about rapid improvement in many areas of the college, especially in relation to poor retention and pass rates for students aged 16 to 18, as well as for level 1 students. In-year retention rates in 2001/02 show no signs of improvement. There is too much unsatisfactory practice in curriculum areas. Although staff are aware of quality assurance issues, and procedures have been revised substantially, standards vary significantly between and within curriculum areas. Too much teaching and learning is barely satisfactory, and too often less than satisfactory. There is virtually no sharing of good practice amongst staff. The standard of student assessment is sometimes inadequate. The college's own evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is overgenerous and insufficiently rigorous. The college is not sufficiently competent to measure students' progress or know if or when it is adding value. Managers do not understand the principles that underlie best value. Activities that can lead to continuous improvement are missing from many aspects of their work.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Animal management



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

Strengths

- good pass rates

- good learning in the work place

- sound progression to higher-level qualifications.

Weaknesses

- inadequate support for students
- unsatisfactory arrangements for quality assurance
- unsatisfactory theory teaching on veterinary nursing courses.

Scope of provision

46. The college offers part-time courses for the certificate and membership diploma studies in animal technology and has a franchise arrangement with the College of Animal Welfare which has three other sites across the country. In addition, the provision includes part-time courses in veterinary nursing, pre-veterinary nursing and NVQs in animal care and a national certificate course run at the College of Animal Welfare. Numbers on many courses have increased. At the time of the inspection, there were 260 students; 50 students were based at the main site and the remainder managed by the College of Animal Welfare. Numbers on NVQ levels 1 and 2 in animal care have steadily declined and there were no students on these courses at the time of the inspection. The number of students taking courses at NVQ level 3 in animal welfare and management courses were small.

Achievement and standards

47. Students' written work is well organised and presented. Their practical skills are at appropriate levels. Students who are not employed attend good work placements and become very competent with many different animal species. The attention paid to animal husbandry and health and safety issues is very good. Pass rates on courses in pre-veterinary nursing, and animal technology and for the national certificate in animal care are above the national average. The retention rate on the course for the animal technology certificate declined during 2000/01, although pass rates have remained above the national average. Pass rates on the NVQ level 3 in animal management and welfare are poor. The few students who achieve the qualification take a long time to complete. To address this problem, the College of Animal Welfare has arranged for new students to attend additional periods of study at the college. There has been no key skills development on any course. The students taking the NVQ course at level 3 in animal management and welfare do not have to complete the requirements in the national framework. The pass rates on veterinary nursing courses are at or around the national average. Most students complete their portfolios to a good standard and make progress at a satisfactory rate. Some require more assistance in the early stages of their course than would normally be expected.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|--------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| Veterinary nursing | 2 | No. of starts | * | 79 | 87 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | % retention | * | 95 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 73 | 84 |
| Animal technology diploma | 2 | No. of starts | 15 | 12 | 17 |
| | | % retention | 60 | 67 | 71 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 63 | 83 |
| Animal technology certificate | 2 | No. of starts | 13 | 18 | 31 |
| | | % retention | 77 | 83 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 93 | 68 |
| Pre-veterinary nursing | 2 | No. of starts | 24 | 52 | 39 |
| | | % retention | 96 | 90 | 92 |
| | | % pass rate | 57 | 77 | 81 |
| National certificate in animal care | 2 | No. of starts | 16 | 6 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 0 | 67 | 89 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| Veterinary nursing | 3 | No. of starts | 138 | 52 | 73 |
| | | % retention | 91 | 98 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | 40 | 67 | 57 |

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

*data unavailable

Quality of education and training

48. The standard of teaching on courses in animal technology and for the national certificate in animal care is mostly good or better. Students are attentive and work effectively. A lesson on the anatomy of the heart was clearly explained and a pictorial representation was developed with the students. Students' knowledge was later tested when they were required to complete a comprehensive handout. The tutor helped individual students with their problems. Additional work was given to students who worked faster. Learning concepts were illustrated through the use of models and practical dissection. Working in small groups, the national certificate students used the knowledge gained from a visit to design a retail layout. Most practical teaching on the veterinary nursing courses is satisfactory. Teachers use mostly good resources to prepare students for their practical examinations. The students on the course for the national certificate complete a comprehensive practical book in their workplace. Their work is regularly monitored. The theory teaching on veterinary nursing courses does not challenge the students to think for themselves. Some teaching methods are unsuitable. Students use few of the college's library or computer resources. Lessons lack an appropriate range of activity. In general discussions, teachers often fail to involve all students. They do not explore theoretical concepts in any depth. Course notes are mostly provided through handouts or by students copying material from the teacher. Opportunities are missed to examine models, critically analyse work or consider contentious issues. Many students do not contribute in class and tutors accept this passive lack of response as the norm.

49. Written work is of a good standard. Many students use their own computers to present work to a high standard. The national certificate students write objectively about animal welfare issues and present sound arguments for and against the way animals are used in the human environment. Teachers mark fairly, make helpful comments and return work promptly. Students on the courses for the national certificate and animal technology have insufficient opportunity to practice mock examinations. Students' progress on the NVQ level 3 in animal management and welfare is slow. Some students had not completed their course after three and a half years. Deadlines for

coursework were not set until late in their programme.

50. Employers are knowledgeable about students' qualification aims. There are good links between college and employers and sufficiently detailed schemes of work. Working practice is organised so that it contributes to the students' learning experience. One employer arranges for college students employed by another employer to receive additional tuition from his own staff. Even small companies have qualified NVQ assessors. The college encourages the training and accreditation of work-based assessors. Tutors regularly visit NVQ students in the workplace to monitor progress.

51. No internal verification takes place in animal technology. The area's own course review identified this omission as a weakness, but subsequent actions were still not effectively monitored. The course team was not fully involved in the self-assessment process and the final report did not adequately identify key issues. There are too few course team meetings. The College of Animal Welfare has developed its own internal verification system and does not use the college's model. The activities that assessors are required to undertake are not sufficiently specific and they are not monitored. The quality of internal verification is unsatisfactory. There is no internal verification of practical assessment for animal care courses. The other quality assurance procedures at the College of Animal Welfare are effective. Teachers do not share materials or best practice.

52. Students are appreciative of the help and informal guidance they receive from staff. At the College of Animal Welfare, concerns raised by students at course reviews are usually addressed. Animal care and veterinary nursing students have termly tutorials. Tutorial records are generally well maintained. Students are not consistently set targets to enable their progress to be measured. There are no recorded tutorials in animal technology. Attendance is monitored thoroughly on all courses, but, on animal technology courses, reasons for absence are not always effectively followed up. All students have an induction to their courses. Induction checklists are used to ensure that late starters to the course are included. Initial assessments of the learning needs of part-time students are not always followed up effectively, even when they are in need of support. On the certificate course in animal technology, ineffective student support has been identified as a key factor for low retention rates. Little action is taken to inform appropriate staff of students' learning needs or of circumstances that require special examination arrangements for an individual student.

53. Significant numbers of veterinary nursing students progress to the advanced diploma or the degree in veterinary nursing. The College of Animal Welfare helps students at work and many former NVQ level 2 students have progressed to the NVQ 3. Significant numbers of students on the course in animal technology regularly progress to the membership diploma. Some students on the diploma course are able to temporarily put their college-based studies on hold in order to pass a mandatory specialist qualification at work. The College of Animal Welfare has good links with industry. Specialist courses are available, for example, micro-chipping, courses for the RSPCA, and dog warden training.

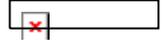
54. There are suitable library texts and journals, although part-time students are not always encouraged to make use of them. Laboratory facilities are adequate and there are good models and equipment for practical work. Full-time animal care students are sometimes asked to vacate their classrooms to make space for veterinary nursing students. There are insufficient reliable computer resources at the College of Animal Welfare. Although many students have their own computers, they find it difficult to integrate IT into their assignments.

Leadership and management

55. Leadership and management at the College of Animal Welfare are good. There is the will to improve quality assurance procedures and to develop training for staff. The franchise arrangement with Huntingdonshire Regional College is mostly well managed. Aspects of good practice, which are evident at the main college site are, however, not always implemented at the College of Animal Welfare. Some college resources are under used. The development plan identified the need to employ more staff and develop their educational expertise. The college underestimated the level of support required for new and inexperienced staff. This misjudgement has adversely affected the standard of teaching in the area. Recent changes in the management responsibilities for the animal technology courses have not improved the quality assurance procedures or the formal support for

students. The self-assessment did not reflect all issues identified in the course review and the action plan has not been monitored effectively.

Engineering



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

Contributory grade for work-based learning is **very weak (grade 5)**

Strengths

- good off-the-job motor vehicle training
- well-resourced motor vehicle workshops
- good progression from foundation courses into motor vehicle apprenticeships.

Weaknesses

- students' slow progress on courses
- ineffective teaching
- poor achievement in work-based learning
- inadequate support for individual students
- poor work-based assessment
- insufficient employer involvement in NVQ

- poor curriculum management.

Scope of provision

56. The engineering sections offer a range of full-time and part-time courses in engineering, mainly electrical and electronic, and aspects in motor vehicle servicing. Full-time courses predominantly attract students aged 16 to 18, whereas on the part-time programmes students are mostly adults. At the time of the inspection, there were 47 full-time motor vehicle students and 9 full-time engineering students. Most of the 125 part-time students were on the motor vehicle courses: 47 on work-based learning programmes; 48 following engineering courses; and 5 in work-based learning. The department was also training 41 part-time students in construction (electrical installation) and 13 ICT students in computer-aided design (CAD).

Achievement and standards

57. Between 1999 and 2001, the retention rates on motor vehicle courses improved and, in 2001, were at national averages. The pass rate for the City and Guilds progression award has stayed close to the national average, whereas the pass rate for the NVQ level 2 in vehicle servicing is poor. In engineering, over the three years from 1998/99, enrolments have steadily declined. On national certificate and diploma programmes, as well as the first award in engineering, retention and pass rates have been below the national average. The City and Guilds 2301 computer-aided engineering course has had improving retention rates and, in 2001, was above the national average, although the pass rate was below. The average attendance at the lessons observed was 78%. Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment that the retention and pass rates for engineering courses are a strength of the provision.

58. The standard of students' work is usually satisfactory or better. In motor vehicle practical sessions at the college, students perform practical tasks at a good standard and operate tools and equipment competently and safely. Students are given vocationally relevant tasks, follow well-structured schemes, and are given good guidance from the tutors. Much work, however, in both engineering and motor vehicle, does not make sufficient demands on students. Completion targets are rarely set and when they are, students are regularly given extra time to complete individual assignments. Work on key skills is not integral to programmes. For mainstream programmes, planning is underway to improve key skills work in communications, but not in application of number or ICT. In work-based learning, key skills have not developed. At the time of the inspection, many students had been on programme for three years and had not collected evidence or developed key skills during that whole period. There have been no completed modern apprenticeship frameworks since 1997.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|--|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| City and Guilds 6956 progression award motor vehicle servicing | 1 | No. of starts | 17 | 61 | 44 |
| | | % retention | 41 | 69 | 68 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 60 | 77 |
| First award in engineering | 2 | No. of starts | 17 | 14 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 59 | 64 | 63 |
| | | % pass rate | 40 | 89 | 50 |
| City and Guilds 2301 | 2 | No. of starts | 17 | 25 | 15 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Computer-aided competencies | | % retention | 71 | 76 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 75 | 95 | 67 |
| NVQ in vehicle mechanical and electrical systems | 2 | No. of starts | 26 | 36 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 58 | 64 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 0 | 11 |
| National diploma in engineering | 3 | No. of starts | 4 | 9 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 33 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 67 | 100 | 0 |
| National certificate in engineering | 3 | No. of starts | 14 | 18 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 93 | 61 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 69 | 73 | 0 |

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

Quality of education and training

59. Much teaching is dull and too much is unsatisfactory. Although some visual aids are used, students spend considerable amounts of time copying notes. The time students have for practical or investigative work is inadequate. Many students do not concentrate on the teaching. In many lessons, they only respond when directly questioned. All students undergo an initial assessment, but the outcomes are not recorded in their learning plans. Students who would benefit from additional learning support do not receive it. Work-based learners' reviews are infrequent and, when they do take place, teachers give little support and guidance. Individual learning plans do not contain information on additional learning needs or target dates for achievement nor acknowledge previous attainment.

60. The workshop accommodation for motor vehicle work is good. There is appropriate enclosed and undercover space for students to work in. The supply of vehicles is sufficient for the students' needs, although much of the vehicle stock is dated. Students often have to work on their own or staff vehicles to meet the assessment requirements of the NVQ.

61. Students on college programmes at the main site have regular, well-planned and vocationally relevant assessments. Feedback is generally constructive and appropriate. Most students' progress is monitored and recorded. However, work-based assessment is inadequate. There is an over-reliance on job cards as the major source of evidence. In engineering, no workplace assessment has taken place since the start of the programmes in September 2000. Work-based assessors, appointed during the last six months, are beginning to address these issues.

62. Motor vehicle programmes are offered at a variety of levels and modes of attendance. Students from many differing backgrounds, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and with negative attitudes to formal education are provided with opportunities to achieve skills and competencies. Students from foundation programmes regularly progress into employment and onto a modern apprenticeship programme. Particular attention is paid to the needs of users of wheelchairs.

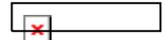
63. There is little involvement of employers in the NVQ programme for work-based learners. They do not receive a copy of the NVQ standards and are not involved in the assessment or review of students' progress. Many students are unclear about the requirements of the NVQ that they are following or the apprenticeship framework on which they are registered. In engineering, at the time of the inspection, work-based learners had not been registered onto an appropriate framework, although their programme had started at the college over 18 months earlier. The college, only a few months before the inspection, discovered that its centre accreditation with the awarding body lapsed some years ago and is now in the process of seeking re-approval.

Leadership and management

64. The curriculum area is poorly managed. Staff do not discuss individual course performance or plan for improvements. No formal meetings take place at programme area level. There are no meetings of sections to discuss common issues or to share good practice. However, despite this situation, some good individual initiatives are being developed within both the motor vehicle and engineering areas, for example, the building of racing sports cars and the development of music technology and robotic courses. There is little promotion of equal opportunities in the work place. Employers are not requested to confirm that they have an equal opportunities policy, and are not provided with the college's policy. Materials that might be offensive to some people were on display at some employers' premises.

1.

Business and office technology



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

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

Strengths

- good teaching and learning on courses for adults
- good support for individual students
- very good pass rates on NVQ accounting courses
- good student progression on accounting courses
- good pass rates on most office technology courses
- flexible arrangements and good opportunities on courses in office technology.

Weaknesses

- poor student concentration on full-time business courses

- insufficient evaluation of teaching and learning
- unsatisfactory quality assurance of work-based learning programmes
- little sharing of good practice
- underdeveloped use of individual learning plans and targets
- insufficient updating of teachers' business experience.

Scope of provision

65. The college provides courses in accounting, business studies, office technology and management. There are full-time courses in GNVQ intermediate and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) business, and there is a 'fast track' for NVQ levels 2 and 3 in accounting and office technology programmes at levels 1 to 3. Part-time courses include: the awards of Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) at levels 2 to 4; a wide range of office technology qualifications; management courses at levels 3 and 4; GCSE, GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A-level accounting; and GCE AS business studies. Most students are aged 19 or over. Students on full-time business courses and two full-time office technology courses are mainly aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

66. Retention rates had improved steadily on several courses, at the time of the last inspection. On many courses, the rate is above, or in line with, the national averages. Adult students with a variety of educational backgrounds make good progress in acquiring new knowledge, skills and confidence. Pass rates on NVQ accounting courses at all levels are significantly above the national average. There are good pass rates on most office technology courses. Retention and pass rates on modern apprenticeship programmes and on the GNVQ advanced business course have remained poor.

67. The standard of most assessed work produced by students is good. On full-time business courses, the quality of students' work contrasts sharply with the low levels of motivation shown in class. Key skills are an integral part of all full-time courses and some office technology students are able to gain accreditation in the wider key skills.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business and office technology, 1999 to 2001

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|-------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| Word processing I | 1 | No. of starts | 43 | 72 | 20 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|----|-----|-----|
| | | % retention | 72 | 81 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 87 | 80 | 81 |
| NVQ accounting (one-year part-time course) | 2 | No. of starts | 18 | 21 | 18 |
| | | % retention | 89 | 100 | 94 |
| | | % pass rate | 71 | 90 | 93 |
| GNVQ intermediate in business | 2 | No. of starts | 8 | 8 | 11 |
| | | % retention | 75 | 50 | 73 |
| | | % pass rate | 67 | 75 | 88 |
| NVQ 2 administration | 2 | No. of starts | 15 | 34 | 32 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 68 | 69 |
| | | % pass rate | 92 | 100 | 78 |
| NVQ accounting (one-year part-time course) | 3 | No. of starts | 39 | 40 | 35 |
| | | % retention | 87 | 87 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 80 | 87 | 95 |
| AVCE business (and precursors) | 3 | No. of starts | 16 | 15 | 13 |
| | | % retention | 56 | 60 | 62 |
| | | % pass rate | 78 | 29 | 67 |
| Word processing III | 3 | No. of starts | 43 | 20 | 26 |
| | | % retention | 72 | 100 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 87 | 80 | 87 |

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

Quality of education and training

68. Teaching is effective and well planned for adult students. Students demonstrate good levels of concentration and application in classes. In one notable lesson, the teacher maintained a good sense of purpose during a visual presentation, asked questions, provoked discussion, organised work in pairs and gave feedback. The teacher also drew on students' own experience at work and provided them with lively and enjoyable learning. Accounting students have opportunities to practise what they have just been taught and they do so with enthusiasm. Teaching is not as effective in engaging younger students who are not well motivated and often appear disinterested and reluctant to contribute. Poor attendance and lateness also impede learning. Teachers do not modify learning activities to meet the varying needs of students at differing levels who are in the same group. Some trainees on work-based programmes have received no off-the-job training and are insufficiently aware of the training opportunities provided in the workplace. All full-time students undertake a work experience placement lasting several weeks. Local employers make useful contributions to many of the programmes.

69. Teaching staff are appropriately qualified or experienced. There is much reliance on fractional and part-time staff, some of whom are course managers. There have been difficulties recruiting suitably qualified staff. Key staff lack recent experience of business. The significant number of courses with small student numbers results in some inefficient use of teaching staff. Library-based resources are sufficient and students have access to good quality IT facilities. The training office provides a real working environment in which some office technology students can develop their skills. Most classrooms contain adequate teaching resources. Some lessons take place in sub-standard mobile classrooms. Only a small amount of students' work is on display.

70. Most assessment practice is good. Students' work is assessed thoroughly and grading

standards are appropriately applied. Feedback is often suitably detailed and constructive. Internal verification is systematic and clearly recorded. On AAT courses and in the office technology workshops, work is sometimes assessed and returned quickly. Portfolios of work of the AAT students are well organised and presented. Students' progress in formal assessment is closely monitored and recorded. Insufficient use, however, is made of informal assessment on business courses. The monitoring and recording of the progress of work-based learners is inadequate. There is no consistent use of individual learning or training plans and target setting for individual students is weak.

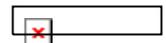
71. There are good progression routes for most students taking courses in accounting and office technology. Progression rates on AAT courses are high. In 2000/01, 70% of students completing level 2 moved on to level 3, and 60% completing level 3 moved onto level 4. In office technology, there is a morning only full-time course and courses run during school hours as well as good workshops. These opportunities, which are taken up by many students, widen participation in FE. The 'Launchpad' course provides the opportunity for students with few prior attainments to gain their first qualification.

72. There is strong pastoral and tutorial support on full-time and part-time courses, which is highly valued by students. Tutorials are used for group learning as well as individual reviews. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored and, on full-time business courses, any lapses by students are followed up on the day on which they occur. Personal tutors are a vital source of support for some full-time students. Access to college counsellors is good. Induction programmes are well planned. Diagnostic testing to identify additional support needs is systematic across full-time courses, but does not extend to part-time students. Additional literacy support is built into the GNVQ intermediate course.

Leadership and management

73. Courses are well managed. Most course control files are well organised and comprehensive, but some are incomplete. There are clear targets for recruitment, retention and pass rates. The review process is thorough, but there is insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Quality assurance of work-based learning is inadequate, but procedures to improve practice have been developed and are starting to be implemented. There has been no programme co-ordinator for the business area since the early autumn of 2000, which has increased the pressures on staff. There are no arrangements to ensure that good practice is shared amongst staff.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- good pass rates
- wide range of courses
- good specialist resources.

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of teaching in larger classes
- insufficient references during courses to current working practices
- little sharing of good practice among teachers.

Scope of provision

74. The college offers a wide range of courses in IT. Courses are available at levels 1, 2, and 3 during the day and evening. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,453 students on part-time courses and 176 on full-time courses. The full-time courses include GNVQ in ICT at intermediate level and a national diploma in computing, covering both networking and software development. There is no full-time provision at foundation level. The part-time provision includes short, one-year and two-year courses. The short courses range from 6 to 10 weeks and cater for beginners as well as those requiring specialist web design, programming, or network courses. One-year courses include the European computer driving licence (ECDL), computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), IBT 2 and 3, and City and Guilds 7261 in IT. There is a two-year HNC in IT; a Higher National Diploma (HND) is planned. For those in work, there are NVQ courses at level 2 and 3. On-line learning is provided with the BBC 'Becoming Wise' course.

Achievement and standards

75. Recruitment on part-time courses has grown steadily since the last inspection. A recent initiative at levels 1 and 2 has been particularly successful in recruiting 920 students since September 2001. Pass rates have been significantly above the national average for the three years from 1999 in level 1 programmes. Pass rates on CLAIT courses are consistently above the national average. The first year results for the ECDL course are also considerably better than the national average. The BTEC national programmes pass rates are below the national average. The poor pass rate in the CAD programmes has been below the national average for the three years from 1999. Retention rates are good on most courses.

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

| Qualification | level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| City and Guilds 7261 information processing | 1 | No. of starts | 62 | 77 | 34 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 86 | 91 |
| | | % pass rate | 54 | 75 | 90 |
| City and Guilds 7261 certificate in computer applications | 1 | No. of starts | 49 | 38 | 6 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 95 | 83 |
| | | % pass rate | 61 | 94 | 100 |
| CLAIT (16 to 18) | 1 | No. of starts | 105 | 71 | 31 |
| | | % retention | 30 | 80 | 71 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | | % pass rate | 71 | 55 | 57 |
| CLAIT (19+) | 1 | No. of starts | 266 | 147 | 173 |
| | | % retention | 60 | 84 | 86 |
| | | % pass rate | 74 | 71 | 72 |
| ECDL | 1 | No. of starts | ** | ** | 13 |
| | | % retention | ** | ** | 92 |
| | | % pass rate | ** | ** | 82 |
| GNVQ intermediate IT | 2 | No. of starts | 18 | 19 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 82 | 82 | 81 |
| | | % pass rate | 21 | 57 | * |
| BTEC national diploma | 3 | No. of starts | 8 | 14 | 16 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 75 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 66 | 73 |

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

*unreliable data

** course did not run

Quality of education and training

76. During assignment workshops, students use workbooks that contain clear specifications written to a good standard. In these workshops, students receive good one-to-one support and teachers take account of students' individual needs. Handouts, study notes and additional exercises are provided. Most practical sessions are well planned and valued by students. Tutors use questions effectively in lessons to check that students understand the work. Technical terms are explained clearly and students are encouraged to use them during class discussions. Students are taught effectively in practical sessions and their progress is carefully monitored. Teachers do not make enough use of presentation aids that are available within the college, for example, laptop projectors and interactive whiteboards.

77. Assignments are usually well designed and the most effective challenge students' skills and understanding. They mostly cover the range of skills required in employment, but often lack relevant references to the up-to-date practice. During group practical work, teachers intervene helpfully and use good examples to consolidate learning. Most assignments are designed to enable students to work at their chosen pace. The more able students have the opportunity to extend the remit of the assignment and make faster progress. Support for students is generally good. All full-time students take an initial assessment at the start of their course. Not all students, however, take advantage of the opportunities offered. Very few adult students receive any additional learning support.

78. Most learning is self-supported study that takes place in a computer workshop. Specialist resources are good. There is a well-resourced library which has open access computer facilities linked to the college network. Many standard classrooms have suites of up-to-date computers that are connected to the network and available for students' to use. Staff have a good range of technical skills and a good knowledge of their subject. Few, however, have relevant recent industrial experience. There are sufficient dedicated workstations for students, and technician support is good. Dedicated computer rooms are equipped with high specification computers with industrial standard software and Internet facilities. Foot rests and wrist rests are generally not available. Students develop good Internet skills and are able to use the Internet as a resource to help them with their studies. Some teachers use the Internet for investigative learning. Students learning about CAD techniques can use the latest commercially available software.

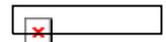
79. When classes are large, teachers pay insufficient attention to the different needs of students. Most students on level 1 and level 2 courses have varying knowledge and experience of computers. Teachers, however, often require the whole group to start a new topic as a group and finish together. This rather rapid approach results in some students not being effectively challenged by the work and others falling behind. Teachers are good at explaining the steps to be followed when using software packages, but do not always extend the students' understanding to how their skills may be applied in a work situation. Students aged 16 to 18 have insufficient exposure to industrial practice in the field of computer system development, particularly in their first year. Second-year BTEC national diploma students undertake a six-week programme of work experience with local companies.

Leadership and management

80. The management of the curriculum area is generally good. Full-time teachers regularly attend staff meetings. Action points are agreed at these meetings and plans reviewed. Staff are well aware of their responsibilities. There is insufficient sharing of good practice between staff. For example, teachers teaching on the same or similar courses in the community, produce and use different materials. Although part-time teachers do not attend some meetings, the programme area co-ordinator meets all part-time staff informally on a weekly basis. Most issues raised are dealt with promptly and effectively. Action planning is generally effective, but managers have not been successful in improving those retention and pass rates that have been identified as persistently poor. The staff appraisal programme usually results in relevant staff training, although staff shortages sometimes interrupt the process. Issues involving equality of opportunity are rarely included in staff training programmes or addressed by teachers in the course of lessons.

81. A number of short courses are not managed by the IT department. For example, the art and design department runs the photograph manipulation and the web-design courses. The engineering department runs the CAD courses. The business department runs the e-commerce courses. This fragmented approach leads to a lack of consistency in software evaluation, purchasing standards and operational use of these systems.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

Strengths

- good teaching in beauty therapy
- effective support for students
- good pass rates on beauty therapy diploma courses
- good enrichment activities.

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in hairdressing
- poor assessment practices in hairdressing
- inadequate specialist resources
- poor pass rates in hairdressing
- weak industry links
- inadequate on-the-job training for work-based learners
- lack of work-based evidence for the NVQ
- missed opportunities among teachers to share good practice.

Scope of provision

82. At the time of the inspection, there were currently 25 beauty therapy and 77 hairdressing students at the college. Of the hairdressing students, 18 were on work-based training programmes. Some 71% of students were aged 19 and over. Full-time NVQ level 2 and level 3 courses are offered in hairdressing and beauty therapy. There is also a diploma in stress management. There is no level 1 provision except for those work-based learners who have been identified as having additional support needs. The range of complementary therapy and part-time courses includes holistic therapy, aromatherapy, reflexology, anatomy and physiology, and artificial nails. The certificate in manicure was offered, but, due to lack of enrolments, is not running. Full-time courses are delivered over two days a week and the part-time hairdressing courses are over two evenings. Full-time hairdressing students have to attend for an additional half day to develop key skills. The beauty therapy students do not undertake key skills training. Due to student demand, the college now offers enrolment for the part-time hair course twice a year. The level 3 programmes are offered on a part-time basis one evening a week. Work-based learners attend college one day a week for practical and theory training and assessment and spend four days in the salons.

Achievement and standards

83. Pass rates on NVQ hairdressing programmes are poor. In 2001, the pass rate for the NVQ course at level 2 in beauty declined to well below the national average. Students' progress is slow. They often have to re-enrol for an additional year of learning to complete their course. Pass rates on beauty therapy diploma courses are good. In hairdressing a lack of suitable clients and the setting of unrealistically demanding targets have adversely affected students' progress. Poor attendance on the beauty therapy level 2 courses has slowed the progress of the students. To compensate, staff encourage students who miss lessons to watch other students demonstrating their newly acquired skills. This approach avoids tutors having to spend additional time with the poor attendees and helps those students who give the demonstrations to consolidate their skills.

84. Students who work in industry do not use evidence of their competence which is obtainable in their workplace. The work-based learners rely on assessments at college. There has been little progress, since the last inspection, to address the lack of work-based assessment. There is little use of witness testimonies. These circumstances impede learners' progress. Students on NVQ programmes are not encouraged to target and complete individual units systematically and take an excessive time to complete their programmes.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|-----------------------------------|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| NVQ hairdressing | 2 | No. of starts | 25 | 25 | 36 |
| | | % retention | 72 | 84 | 67 |
| | | % pass rate | 25 | 77 | 38 |
| NVQ beauty therapy | 2 | No. of starts | 8 | 18 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 50 | 83 | 66 |
| | | % pass rate | 0 | 83 | 50 |
| City and Guilds manicure | 2 | No. of starts | * | 6 | 14 |
| | | % retention | * | 100 | 85 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 75 |
| Diploma in holistic therapy | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 12 |
| | | % retention | * | * | 92 |
| | | % pass rate | * | * | 83 |
| Diploma in anatomy and physiology | 3 | No. of starts | * | 19 | 29 |
| | | % retention | * | 84 | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 92 |
| Diploma in reflexology | 3 | No. of starts | 6 | 20 | 8 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 75 | 88 |
| | | % pass rate | 60 | 100 | 100 |
| NVQ hairdressing | 3 | No. of starts | 10 | 7 | 6 |
| | | % retention | 80 | 71 | 66 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 50 | 25 |
| Diploma in aromatherapy | 3 | No. of starts | * | 13 | 2 |
| | | % retention | * | 85 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 70 | 100 |
| Diploma in advance nail | 3 | No. of starts | * | * | 8 |

| | | | | |
|------------|-------------|---|---|-----|
| techniques | % retention | * | * | 88 |
| | % pass rate | * | * | 100 |

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

* data unavailable

Quality of education and training

85. Much of the teaching in beauty therapy is good. Lessons are well planned and hold students' interest and attention. There is clear progression from one lesson to the next and good consolidation of previous learning. The tutors work well with inadequate resources. For the larger groups, beds have to be used on a rota basis, as there are insufficient for the size of the group. The staff work well together and there is good team teaching, which boosts the attainment of the students.

86. The teaching in hairdressing is unsatisfactory. Sessions lack structure; teaching is dull and fails to motivate students. There is much unprofessional practice among students that goes unchecked. There is no contingency planning for the non-attendance of clients. Students are not set individual targets and there is a lack of consolidation of learning. New staff are given insufficient guidance. There are poor assessment practices in hairdressing. The internal verification process is not thorough and has failed to highlight weaknesses. There is poor marking of written work and assignments. Written assessments are often assessed as correct when they have not met the criteria. Students are ill prepared for assessment. Assessment plans are often not completed properly; sometimes students complete them after the assessment.

87. Staff are suitably qualified and most have or are working towards teaching qualifications. Hairdressing staff undertake some continuing professional development activities every year. Beauty therapy teachers continue to practice in the industry to keep their skills up to date. There are inadequate specialist resources. The shortage of hairdressing clients has a significant affect on the progress of the students. The college has advertised in the hope of building a better client base, but students still spend an excessive amount of time working on one another or on dummies. Work-based learners could be assessed in the workplace, but are not. Plans for assessors to visit work-based learners every eight weeks to carry out assessments have not been implemented. Full-time students who work in industry and could use evidence from the workplace fail to do so and their progress is impeded.

88. The hairdressing accommodation, which was cited as a significant weakness in the last inspection, has been much improved. There is now a salon on the first floor, equipped with up-to-date fixtures and fittings. Health and safety issues are now fully addressed. However, the accommodation is still inadequate and, as it is reached up steep steps, access is restricted. Students work in cramped conditions. The reception facility does not reflect a realistic working environment. It is within the beauty therapy room, which is used for both theory and practical work. Here, lessons are interrupted due to the telephone ringing and, although a screen is used to protect clients' privacy, it is inadequate. The college is in the process of relocating the hairdressing salon onto the main college site.

89. Students have good pastoral support. Tutorials are effective and regular for full-time students. They have the opportunity to discuss any welfare or other issues effecting their progress and programmes. The college is well resourced to offer additional support where a need has been identified. However, no students identified as needing additional support have come forward. Some students, who need childcare provision, use the nursery at the main site.

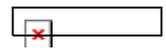
90. Links with industry are weak. The review of progress for work-based learners has been infrequent and poor. Opportunities to liaise with employers have been missed. As their salons are rarely visited by staff, health and safety checks in some salons have not been carried out. There is no monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. There are no work-experience

arrangements for full-time learners in both hair and beauty, which restricts their awareness of commercial practice. The previous inspection raised as a weakness the issue of work-based learners having no dedicated on-the-job training; the weakness remains. The college has failed to address this issue. Some learners do not have sufficient opportunity at work to develop their technical skills.

Leadership and management

91. The hair and beauty departments run in isolation on separate sites. Although there are co-ordinators for each area, they rarely meet. The overall leadership and management of the courses are unsatisfactory. There is no coherent management structure across the hair and beauty provision. Staff rarely meet and opportunities to develop and share good practice are missed. There is good practice in the teaching of beauty therapy and new staff are well supported. The beauty therapy staff have yet to achieve the internal verifier award and a peripatetic internal verifier is used. Staff were involved in a self-assessment process that lacked depth and rigour and failed to identify some of the weaknesses. There is little evidence to show that many matters of concern identified in the last inspection have been addressed.

Health and social care



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

Strengths

- good pass rates
- good range of additional qualifications and enrichment activities
- good teaching of skills in vocational practice
- good range of occupational competence amongst staff
- appropriateness of a wide range of courses to community needs
- strong support for individual students.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on full-time courses
- limiting effect of small groups on learning opportunities on some courses
- some insufficiently demanding lessons.

Scope of provision

92. The college offers full-time courses at levels 2 and 3. At the time of the inspection, 36 full-time students, most of whom were aged 16 to 18, were studying courses at first or national diploma level, and 32 full-time and part-time students were following the national certificate in early years education or were on an access to nursing course. There were 183 students taking different options in first aid, 130 working towards NVQ 2 or 3 in care, or early years, or play work and 61 taking counselling courses, either at introductory or certificate level. In addition, 21 students were studying sign language at level 1, and 12 at level 2. In pre-school practice, which is offered at introductory, certificate and diploma level, there were 53 students. The college also offers a range of short courses, for example, introduction to childminding.

Achievement and standards

93. Pass rates are good and are above the national averages for all courses. At the last inspection, students taking NVQ courses were making slow progress. The progress of current students is satisfactory. Pass rates in the diploma in counselling and the diploma in pre-school practice are particularly good. Retention rates are unsatisfactory on full-time courses. There has been a considerable improvement in part-time course retention rates, an area of concern cited at the last inspection. Attendance at lessons is good at 84%.

94. Standards achieved in students' portfolios and assignments are satisfactory. NVQ portfolios are well organised and students are competent in cross-referencing their work. Students on many of the part-time courses are confident in their ability to relate theory and practice. One student produced a thoroughly researched and clear induction guide to her care home, as part of the investigation into health and safety. Students have a clear understanding of the values and ethics which underlie this programme area. Part-time students carry out independent research and on some courses they develop good presentation skills. Students on the diploma in pre-school practice made presentations to demonstrate areas where they felt that they had improved in skills or confidence. One student led the group in a lively and energetic singing session, and others joined in with no trace of self-consciousness. They were confident in questioning the presenter on the ways in which the songs could be used, and suggested modifications for children with disabilities. The use of IT is increasing.

95. Full-time students gain useful additional qualifications, for example, in first aid at work, Makaton, hygiene and paediatric first aid. Part-time students have the opportunity of gaining qualifications in first aid at work if they wish. There is good progression from the access course to nurse training, supported by a strong link with a local school of health studies. A few students progression immediately from the national diploma to HE, but several move on to HE after two or three years in employment.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|---------------|-------|------------|------|------|------|
|---------------|-------|------------|------|------|------|

| | | year: | | | |
|---|---|---------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Health and Safety Executive first aid at work | 1 | No. of starts | 84 | 177 | 205 |
| | | % retention | 96 | 99 | 98 |
| | | % pass rate | 89 | 98 | 95 |
| First aid - paediatric | 1 | No. of starts | 24 | 113 | 97 |
| | | % retention | 100 | 99 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 99 |
| CACHE diploma in pre-school practice | 3 | No. of starts | 16 | 16 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 94 | 63 | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| CSCT/Assessment and Qualifications Alliance diploma in counselling | 3 | No. of starts | 5 | * | 9 |
| | | % retention | 100 | * | 100 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | * | 100 |
| Edexcel national diploma in early years | 3 | No. of starts | 28 | 12 | 12 |
| | | % retention | 64 | 67 | 75 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 71 | 100 |
| CSET/Assessment and Qualifications Alliance introduction to counselling | 3 | No. of starts | * | 15 | 27 |
| | | % retention | * | 93 | 96 |
| | | % pass rate | * | 100 | 85 |
| Access to nursing and health care | 3 | No. of starts | 7 | 13 | 11 |
| | | % retention | 43 | 77 | 64 |
| | | % pass rate | 100 | 100 | 100 |

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

*data unavailable

Quality of education and training

96. Teaching is satisfactory or good. It is well planned and most classes include an appropriate variety of activities. In a counselling lesson, students were encouraged to select from a wide range of resources to explore a personal metaphor when looking at the use of storytelling in therapy. The resources included models, puppets, natural artefacts and art materials. Previously they had listened to an extract from an audiotape on the therapeutic use of stories. Most teachers share the lesson aims with the students and make regular checks to ensure that students understand the work. Teachers emphasise the importance of ethics, equal opportunities and confidentiality. Teaching is particularly good in lessons which promote the acquisition of skills for vocational practice, such as sign language, counselling, first aid and pre-school practice. These lessons are rigorous and imaginative. There are good opportunities for acquiring new skills and applying existing ones. Sign language students carried out an extensive role-play which was set in a restaurant, having previously rehearsed new vocabulary and directional verbs. This lively lesson was conducted in sign language throughout and students had reached a level where they were able to sign jokes.

97. In some lessons insufficient demands are made on students. When participating in group work, teachers do not take sufficient opportunities to extend students' conceptual understanding or help them to acquire specialist vocabulary. The use of undirected questioning means that the more vocal

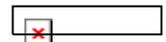
students dominate some sessions, and less confident students do not benefit as much. In some classes, there are low numbers of students which in counselling, limits the opportunities to develop group skills, and on other courses makes it difficult to draw upon an adequate range of students' practical experience in a vocational setting. Homework is set regularly. It is marked and returned quickly, accompanied by feedback sheets. These sheets vary in the guidance they give to students to help them to improve their performance. Some assignments are strongly linked to placements. The NVQ internal verification system has improved since the last inspection. Students benefit from a varied programme of enrichment activities, including visits, projects in local schools, fund-raising for charities and for promotion events and health education. Key skills in application of number and IT are taught as separate lessons, but with materials that link to the curriculum area. Communication key skills are integral to main courses. There is strong support for students. Staff have a good understanding of individual student's support needs. Formal reviews lead to action planning and identification of areas for improvement. There are reviews, tutorials and assignment monitoring for full-time and part-time students. Tutorials are also used to provide informal support for students in response to their immediate needs.

98. The college provides a wide range of courses in this curriculum area. Some are established through links with health trusts or charities, for example, an NVQ co-ordinator is based at a Leonard Cheshire Home. Other courses are responding to requests from the local community, for example, for the provision of training for baby sitters. Timetables and programmes are adjusted to meet the needs of mature students with domestic responsibilities. Staff are appropriately qualified and they have good relevant and recent occupational experience. Many are also working as practitioners across a wide range of occupational settings. Rooms are fit for purpose.

Leadership and management

99. There is effective and energetic management of the area. The cohesive team of staff are supportive of each other as well as of their students. Strong mentoring systems support the large proportion of part-time staff.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- consistently high pass rates on one-year adult courses
- good retention rates on most courses
- very good teaching and learning
- very good resources to support learning

- strong departmental learning support
- well-organised and efficient course management.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates at GCE A level
- narrowing range of academic courses
- insufficient review and dissemination of best practices.

Scope of provision

100. For full-time and part-time students there is a relatively narrow range of one-year humanities courses at GCE AS and A level and GCSE is provided for full-time and part-time students. In the three years from 1999, 72% of students on these courses have been adults. Numbers in both 16 to 18 and adult age-groups fell in 2000, but there was some recovery in adult numbers in 2001. The number of courses since 1999 has declined and only four GCE A-level, four GCE AS and two GCSE options were offered. Since 2001, GCE AS courses have been re-introduced as evening classes, for example, law at St Neots. Significant humanities provision in several adult programmes includes courses leading to: the access to HE certificate in integrated studies; stages 1 and 2 of the further and adult education teacher certificate; the certificate in education; and the certificate in learning support. Access courses are part of daytime provision; other courses are offered in the evenings. Numbers on all these courses are buoyant.

Achievement and standards

101. Pass and retention rates on access, teacher training and learning support courses are high. On most programmes, pass rates have reached, or been very close to, 100%. Since the last inspection, retention rates have improved on the one-year access course. Retention rates of stage 1 students on teacher training and on the learning support courses have remained very high. There is good progression to levels of higher study. Some 75% of access students progress to HE of whom 50% choose the college's franchised humanities degree course or other courses at Anglia Polytechnic University. Pass rates on one-year GCE A-level courses in 2001 were below national averages. Few candidates achieve high grades. In 2001, 27 students took the examination in history, law and sociology, and only 5 sociology students achieved a high grade. Retention rates at GCE A level are above national standards, but are well below in GCSE geography and psychology.

102. Standards of work achieved by most students are good or better. Students make good progress on adult courses and generally fulfil their potential. They develop suitably detailed knowledge and acquire a good understanding of their subjects. Significant emphasis is placed on the development of investigative skills. Students are required to research, analyse and make independent judgements. In an access to HE lesson, group members explored complex issues

surrounding research into intelligence. Presentational skills are developed to a high standard. Adults on teacher training courses confidently demonstrate these skills using newly acquired knowledge and teaching aids to support oral presentations. Peers assess the presentations. In GCE AS and GCE A-level history, and government and politics, students learn to write well-argued and balanced essays. Students are able to work in a diligent fashion both independently and with others.

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

| Qualification | Level | Completion year: | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 |
|--|-------|------------------|------|------|------|
| GCSE geography, one-year course | 2 | No. of starts | 13 | 20 | 9 |
| | | % retention | 85 | 60 | 44 |
| | | % pass rate | 18 | 42 | 50 |
| GCE A-level history, one-year course | 3 | No. of starts | 19 | 15 | 10 |
| | | % retention | 63 | 73 | 90 |
| | | % pass rate | 50 | 64 | 44 |
| GCE A-level sociology, one-year course | 3 | No. of starts | 15 | 17 | 13 |
| | | % retention | 73 | 71 | 77 |
| | | % pass rate | 73 | 42 | 50 |
| Access to HE (integrated studies), one-year course | 3 | No. of starts | 25 | 32 | 30 |
| | | % retention | 56 | 72 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 91 | 100 |
| Further and adult education teachers certificate stage 1 | 3 | No. of starts | 25 | 32 | 30 |
| | | % retention | 56 | 72 | 80 |
| | | % pass rate | 86 | 91 | 100 |
| Certificate in learning support, one-year course | 3 | No. of starts | 40 | 39 | 34 |
| | | % retention | 83 | 87 | 97 |
| | | % pass rate | 77 | 100 | 97 |

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

Quality of education and training

103. Much teaching and learning is very good. Most lessons have coherent aims and include learning opportunities which made significant demands on students intellectually. Complex issues, for example, the 1848 Revolutions, are examined in GCE A-level history in considerable detail. GCE AS students in psychology attain good understanding of one-tailed and two-tailed hypotheses. Adult students are highly motivated on access, teacher training and learning support courses. In one access lesson, a student presentation on the topic of night shelter in Cambridge was well researched, informative and skilfully delivered. Mature students on an evening learning support course were eager to have their week's assignment assessed on a one-to-one basis and enthusiastically shared their practical experiences with others. Much of their project work is of a high standard. In GCE A-level social policy, students use competent oral skills to analyse and discuss issues for coursework such as institutional racism and teenage pregnancy. In the more effective lessons, teachers made good use of questioning techniques. In a few lessons, teachers gave insufficient attention to checking that students understood the work.

104. A good range of resources supports learning effectively. The standard of library books and periodicals is good, especially for students on the teacher-training course. Staff have a rich diversity

of experience and qualifications which they draw on effectively in their teaching. Many have more than one area of responsibility. Teaching accommodation, though well equipped, is not furnished as a set of specialist rooms. There is no display material related to the curriculum in rooms. Flexible allocation policies enable students with mobility difficulties to study in ground floor rooms. The use of IT in the classroom has improved since the last inspection. Students are encouraged to use the Internet and word process their work, but the college intranet has yet to be developed by subject teams.

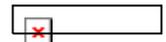
105. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress is well recorded. Initial testing is used to confirm the suitability of students for courses and is followed by periodic monitoring and the setting of target grades. Students on adult courses have continuous monitoring as part of course assessment. Written assignments are set regularly. These are marked fairly and accurately, but the quality of written feedback is uneven. Assignments in GCE AS and A-level sociology are returned with appropriately detailed analysis to support grades.

106. There is a strong commitment to the provision of good additional support. Initial assessments are effective in identifying learning needs at an early stage and support from specialists is arranged and monitored. The actual take up of learning support is good among adult students, but less so among students aged 16 to 18. Students receive good guidance. Students value the willingness of teachers to respond to requests for additional help with studying or personal issues.

Leadership and management

107. Curriculum management is efficient and responsive to local circumstances. Courses are well managed, reviews are held regularly and students' opinions are taken into account in decision making. Course co-ordinators are alert to shortcomings, but progress is sometimes slow in implementing remedial action, for example, in improving teaching methods with small groups. There is too little dissemination of best practice in, for example, lesson planning, or marking procedures or in teaching key skills as an integral part of GCE AS and GCE A-level course programmes. There is a good team spirit among full-time and part-time staff.

Foundation Studies



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

Strengths

- effective partnerships with social firms
- good preparation for employment
- good learning support
- excellent resources for learning off site.

Weaknesses

- poor teaching for students with severe learning difficulties
- inadequate lesson planning to meet the needs of individual students
- inadequate monitoring and recording of students progress
- poor resources in the college
- ineffective management.

Scope of provision

108. The college has a range of discrete programmes designed for students with learning difficulties and disabilities including those with moderate and severe learning difficulties, people experiencing mental health difficulties, and people on the autistic spectrum. At the time of the inspection, there were 171 full-time and 88 part-time students attending programmes in the college or in locations across the county. Some 230 students were adults and 60% of all students were learning in social firms. The links with other external agencies, for example, local charities, social services and social firms, enable the college to extend its provision to benefit a wide range of students in the community. Courses range from entry level 1 to level 3. Students with moderate learning difficulties follow an entry level vocational preparation programme designed to prepare students gradually for employment. A range of accreditation is offered including the vocational access certificate, achievement tests in literacy and numeracy, and NVQs at level 1 and 2. Learning areas include business administration, small animal care, retail, horticulture and manufacturing processes. Students with severe learning difficulties follow programmes for personal development. Courses are designed to increase the development of independence, and of competence in daily living and in work-related skills; they include a variety of enrichment activities.

Achievement and standards

109. Students with moderate learning difficulties make good progress. They achieve qualifications at a number of levels in areas that include literacy, numeracy and entry level vocational certificates. Many students progress through entry level provision to further training, to employment, sheltered employment or social firms. Most students in the three years from 1999 have been retained on their courses. In social firms, students learn appropriate work skills in realistic environments. The achievements of students in the social firms are good; students progress through entry level to NVQ qualifications at level 1. The achievements of students with severe learning difficulties are less satisfactory. The achievements of these students are insufficiently monitored and recorded. In gymnastics students achieve a good level of gymnastic skill and develop confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of education and training

110. For students with moderate learning difficulties, work projects and appropriate work placements ensure that students are well prepared for progression into employment or further training. Students' placements are chosen with care to match their skill and maturity levels. Teaching in the college supports the skills needed for employment. Students develop their confidence, literacy, numeracy and IT skills, and transferable work skills, such as teamwork. In one lesson, students were put into groups to solve a problem and write a joint letter. This task enabled them to put into practice what they had learned about the qualities and the benefits of teamwork.

111. In the social firms, students' learning takes place in a context that enables them to develop their skills and knowledge and build on their strengths. Individual students undertake a variety of appropriate tasks and develop a good range of transferable work and specific vocational skills. In one firm, some students on the NVQ level 1 business administration course have employed status and take part in the profit share of the workers' co-operative. The students are involved in print finishing processes and develop skills that include collation and binding. Some students have positions of responsibility and undertake a supervisory role. The social firms have developed an employment service for people with disabilities and increased their employment opportunities. Students' progress is recorded in their portfolios, which are of a good standard. In the social firms, the regular reviews and action planning are good.

112. Teaching sessions for those with severe learning difficulties is poor. Teachers lack appropriate expertise. Their teaching is inappropriate to the needs of the students. Many of those who teach students with learning difficulties have undertaken no specialist training or staff development. In lessons, explanations and instructions are sometimes unclear and classroom activities are not managed effectively. In some lessons, the activities set and learning materials provided fail to match learning needs identified in individual learning plans. Teachers do not plan for individual learning in lessons. In one drama lesson, 18 students supported by 7 staff members played a game of musical islands. The students were over-stimulated and became overexcited. There was little purpose to the session and no planning for the achievement of individual learning targets. One student who uses a wheelchair was disadvantaged and could not join in properly or have any chance of winning the game. In poorer lessons, planned activities and concepts are sometimes too difficult for the students to understand and they become bored and inattentive. Learning resources are not well prepared. Some teachers do not understand the difficulty students might face in completing a conceptual task without practical applications. Insufficient use is made of IT software and video to enhance learning opportunities. In the lessons where teaching and learning was good, students had clear individual short-term targets and teachers developed well-planned and carefully structured steps of learning.

113. Initial assessments, which were introduced in 2001, are unsatisfactory. Individual learning plans produced for students are not used effectively to provide short learning steps. The process of assessment takes too long to complete and little account is taken of students' prior learning. Insufficient attention is given to school records and reports when planning the students' programme and some students repeat work previously covered in school. There is an inadequate overview of the students' progress. For example, there are no regular monthly or termly reviews. The annual review is insufficiently detailed and fails adequately to record the achievements students have made. Courses for students with severe learning difficulties lack coherence. They consist of a string of activities which are not adequately linked together or monitored.

114. There is a high level of support for students in the classroom. Support assistants actively take part in the lessons and help students, where appropriate. Working relationships between teachers and students are friendly and informal. Students speak highly of the help and support they receive from their learning support assistants. There are good links with external agencies that support student development. The specialist careers adviser provides support and guidance. Some students with severe learning difficulties are given too much support and treated like small children. Their hands are held, for example, and they are lead around the college instead of being taught gradually to find their own way.

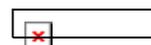
115. Teaching accommodation for students with learning disabilities at the college is poor. There is insufficient suitable accommodation. One of the base rooms has an adjoining staff office and

constant interruptions distract students and interfere with their learning. Some lessons take place in rooms that are inappropriate or finish early as the room is required for another group. There are some excellent resources for learning off site. Accommodation and resources in working environments in social firms enhance learning. Good use is made of the local Olympic style gymnasium, which is a valuable resource for learning. Good IT resources are provided by the college in social firms.

Leadership and management

116. Managers are committed to developing new learning opportunities for students. They have created innovative vocational learning opportunities through effective partnerships with social firms. However, the overall management of this area is ineffective. Managers fail to set appropriate standards or monitor performance adequately. There are insufficient systems to monitor individual students' learning and progress. Managers do not adequately collate or analyse data to improve their planning. Issues related to the inequality of opportunity are not adequately tackled. Managers across the college take insufficient account of the needs of students with learning difficulties when planning the curriculum and allocating resources.

Literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages



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

Strengths

- effective initial assessment
- good range of provision
- well-planned teaching, taking account of individual needs.

Weaknesses

- inadequate assessment of students' progress and achievement in basic skills
- poor accommodation
- very poor provision of additional support

- poor management of basic skills across the college.

Scope of provision

117. The college offers discrete courses in basic skills and ESOL, and additional support in basic skills for students on other courses. Provision is based at the two main college sites, and in a variety of venues in the community. Short basic skills courses are also provided on employers' premises. At the time of the inspection, there were 115 part-time basic skills students, 110 part-time ESOL students, and 44 other students receiving additional support for basic skills. A small number of students were working towards new national tests in numeracy. Most were working on individually tailored programmes that used components of the core curricula for literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

Achievement and standards

118. Very few students take courses leading to an externally awarded qualification. The standard of students' work is generally satisfactory. Many students make good progress in developing new skills. For others, the expectations of their teachers are too low and their attainment is unsatisfactory. In basic skills, students' portfolios are poorly organised. Many consist of large numbers of completed worksheets arranged in chronological order. It is difficult for students to review their progress, or refer back to earlier relevant work. Much achievement remains unrecorded and unrecognised.

Quality of education and training

119. Most of the teaching is satisfactory. Lessons are well planned. They generally include opportunities for the teacher to present new work to the whole class as well as to spend time with individual students on their own work. Teachers effectively relate learning activities to their students' background and experience. Good use is made of volunteer assistants. The good practice in some lessons is not sufficiently shared amongst staff. Some 14% of lessons were less than satisfactory. In the most effective lessons, learning is reviewed regularly and thoroughly. Classroom management is good and students support each other well. In some basic skills classes, however, teachers allow students to move from one activity to another without proper discussion of what has been learned. In these lessons, too much emphasis is placed on the completion of worksheets and insufficient reference is made to learning goals. Some use is made of IT within basic skills teaching, but is largely limited to a computer-based initial assessment test.

120. There is effective initial assessment to identify suitable individual programmes of learning. All new students for basic skills and ESOL courses are offered an informal interview with the appropriate co-ordinator. Their learning needs are carefully assessed. Individual learning plans are drawn up which generally contain long-term and short-term targets and make clear reference to appropriate elements on the core curriculum. These plans establish the direction of subsequent work. In ESOL classes, the progress of students towards their goals is regularly checked. Thorough records are compiled weekly and a full review is carried out each term. In basic skills classes, many students are not told of the progress they have made towards their goals. The records of tasks completed make no reference to progress in developing skills identified as priorities in the initial assessment. In basic skills, most reviews which are planned do not take place.

121. There is very poor additional support in basic skills for students on other college courses. Full-time students' needs are assessed when they join the college. However, most students identified by the college as requiring support do not receive any. Of 248 students identified in 2001, only 50 received any support. The academic sessions specifically provided to give support are poorly attended. At the time of the inspection, only 27 students were attending regularly. The college has recognised this weakness, but has been slow to respond. A new co-ordinator had been appointed and a system of partnership teaching introduced shortly before the inspection. Support for those students who attend is good. In one individual tutorial, effective literacy support was provided in

partnership with an interpreter for a student who has impaired hearing.

122. There is poor accommodation for courses offered at the main college site. The college has given too little priority to addressing this issue which was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. The base room for basic skills is too cramped for all but the smallest class. There are many disruptions to learning. Some classes are moved from one room to another several times during the year. Others are frequently moved in the middle of a lesson. Learning takes place in inappropriate locations, such as an art room and at the entrance to the college library. Poor quality temporary accommodation is used for ESOL classes. It is no surprise that students feel that they are not treated as equal members of the college.

123. Staff have extensive experience of specialist teaching in these areas. A number have specialist qualifications. They are well informed about recent developments in the core curriculum. The basic skills and ESOL co-ordinators regularly observe members of the team teaching and provide valuable feedback on their performance. However, this approach has not led to an overall improvement. The college has made good use of extensive links with other organisations to widen participation in learning in FE. It has developed family literacy and 'Keeping Up With the Kids' classes in the community, and basic skills courses in the workplace. Short ESOL courses on 'How to Talk to Your Doctor' are held in a doctors' surgery.

Leadership and management

124. The co-ordination and management of basic skills is inadequate. This weakness was identified at the last inspection and has not been properly addressed. A co-ordinator has been appointed for literacy, numeracy and additional support across the college. However, the role and relationship with curriculum areas have not been properly defined. The management, oversight and linkage of all basic skills work undertaken by the college are ineffective. Courses containing substantial amounts of work on literacy and numeracy skills are run within departments without adequate co-ordination. A college strategy for basic skills has only very recently been produced and has not yet been implemented. The marketing of courses aimed primarily at developing basic skills is not effectively planned or is not a part of the college's marketing strategy. As a result, the main college publication relating to community-based provision contains no details of basic skills or ESOL courses. Some standard documentation and procedures are used well as part of quality assurance arrangements. However, the performance of these courses is not thoroughly evaluated by managers.

Part D: College data

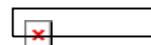
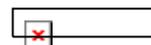


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



| Level | 16-18 % | 19+ % |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1 | 22 | 15 |
| 2 | 42 | 20 |
| 3 | 15 | 16 |
| 4/5 | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 21 | 48 |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Total | 100 | 100 |
|--------------|------------|------------|

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

| Curriculum area | 16-18 | 19+ | Total |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | No. | No. | Enrolments % |
| Science | 407 | 749 | 15 |
| Agriculture | 28 | 249 | 3 |
| Construction | 1 | 41 | 1 |
| Engineering | 113 | 119 | 3 |
| Business | 245 | 917 | 15 |
| Hotel and catering | 86 | 159 | 3 |
| Health and community care | 165 | 1,124 | 17 |
| Art and design | 311 | 413 | 10 |
| Humanities | 717 | 1,184 | 25 |
| Basic education | 78 | 508 | 8 |
| Total | 2,151 | 5,463 | 100 |

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

| Level (Long Courses) | Retention and pass rate | Completion year | | | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | | 16-18 | | | 19+ | | |
| | | 1997/ 98 | 1998/ 99 | 1999/ 2000 | 1997/ 98 | 1998/ 99 | 1999/ 2000 |
| | | 1 | Starters excluding transfers | 364 | 396 | 347 | 1,188 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 81 | 81 | 73 | 77 | 73 | 79 |
| | National average (%) | 81 | 80 | 80 | 80 | 78 | 79 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 80 | 73 | 70 | 78 | 73 | 68 |
| | National average (%) | 59 | 62 | 66 | 62 | 63 | 69 |
| 2 | Starters excluding transfers | 669 | 643 | 567 | 1,062 | 1,255 | 1,034 |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | Retention rate (%) | 73 | 74 | 72 | 78 | 78 | 80 |
| | National average (%) | 76 | 76 | 77 | 79 | 78 | 78 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 58 | 63 | 70 | 68 | 74 | 82 |
| | National average (%) | 63 | 67 | 68 | 66 | 65 | 68 |
| 3 | Starters excluding transfers | 310 | 388 | 211 | 997 | 837 | 690 |
| | Retention rate (%) | 72 | 72 | 73 | 87 | 80 | 80 |
| | National average (%) | 77 | 77 | 77 | 79 | 79 | 79 |
| | Pass rate (%) | 63 | 58 | 63 | 61 | 70 | 82 |
| | National average (%) | 71 | 72 | 73 | 64 | 65 | 69 |
| 4/5 | Starters excluding transfers | 0 | 0 | 0 | 107 | 94 | 80 |
| | Retention rate (%) | * | * | * | 90 | 90 | 85 |
| | National average (%) | 83 | 84 | 80 | 84 | 84 | 84 |
| | Pass rate (%) | * | * | * | 65 | 72 | 84 |
| | National average (%) | 64 | 65 | 70 | 58 | 61 | 60 |

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

Sources of information:

1. National averages: Benchmarking Data (1998/99) to (1999/2000): Retention and Pass rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1998/1999 - 1999/2000: Benchmarking Data (1996/97) to (1999/2000): Retention and Pass rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.

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

** too few students to provide valid data*

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

| Courses | Teaching judged to be: | | | No of sessions observed |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Good or better % | Satisfactory % | Less than satisfactory % | |
| Level 3 (advanced) | 66 | 29 | 5 | 35 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 41 | 48 | 11 | 46 |
| Level 1 (foundation) | 50 | 50 | 0 | 16 |

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Other sessions | 43 | 37 | 20 | 30 |
| Totals | 50 | 40 | 10 | 127 |

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