



Northumberland College

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

[Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[How well is the college led and managed?](#)

[To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?](#)

[How well are students and trainees guided and supported?](#)

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

[Part B: The college as a whole](#)

[Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors](#)

[Achievement and standards](#)

[Quality of education and training](#)

[Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas](#)

[Land-based provision](#)

[Construction](#)

[Engineering](#)

[Business](#)

[Information and communications technology](#)

[Hospitality, catering, leisure and travel](#)

[Hairdressing and beauty therapy](#)

[Health and social care](#)

[Visual, performing arts and media](#)

[Basic skills](#)

[Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

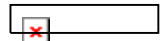
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age](#)

[Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age](#)

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

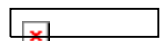
[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Basic information about the college

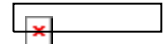


Name of college:	Northumberland College
Type of college:	General Further Education College
Principal:	Dr Tim Capron
Address of college:	College Road Ashington Northumberland NE63 9RG
Telephone number:	01670 841 200
Fax number:	01670 841 201
Chair of governors:	Peter Elliott OBE
Unique reference number:	130773
Name of reporting inspector:	David Eden HMI
Dates of inspection:	20-24 May 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

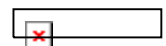


Northumberland has a population of approximately 310,000 and the lowest population density of any county in England. The transport infrastructure is poor. While coal mining and its associated industries have declined in Northumberland, there has been significant growth in the service industries and public administration. The county's unemployment rate is lower than the average for the north east, but higher than the national average. However, there are pockets of high unemployment. The Index of Deprivation for 2000, published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) shows that Wansbeck, where the college's main site is located, is one of the most deprived districts in England. The proportion of the population with very low literacy and very low numeracy is above the national average. The proportion of school leavers in the county who obtain grade C or above in five or more subjects in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is 48.8%, compared with 47.5% in England as a whole.

Northumberland College is the only general further education (FE) college in the county. It is the most northerly FE college in England with a catchment area extending over 60 miles north from the edge of Tyneside to the Scottish border, and from the east coast over 70 miles west to within 15 miles of Carlisle. The college offers courses in all 14 areas of learning recognised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for funding purposes. Its main site is at Ashington where the majority of students study, but there are also sites at Kirkley Hall, Amble, Blyth and Berwick-upon-Tweed. Students at Kirkley Hall specialise in land-based provision. Provision at Berwick, Blyth and Amble includes courses in business, care, art and design, information technology (IT), construction, and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Courses are also provided in over 50 venues in the local community. Work-based learning is offered in seven vocational areas. The college has ten franchise partners and expects that their provision will account for approximately 6% of all the units of funding required if the college is to meet its unit target. Competition in the area to recruit students aged 16 to 18 is intense. All the community high schools have sixth forms and are the local centres for the county's adult and community education provision. There were nearly 11,000 enrolments in 2000/01. Almost 80% of students were aged 19 or over, 59% were female and 85% of all students studied part time. The college's mission is 'to provide education, training and services that are of high quality, to meet the needs of the people and industry in Northumberland and beyond'.

In 2001, the Kirkley Hall site was closed for five months following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the area. The attendance of students at other college sites was adversely affected by the epidemic, following the imposition of travel restrictions by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

How effective is the college?



The college's provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. It is good in construction, engineering, business, information and communications technology (ICT), and visual, performing arts and media. Land-based provision and provision in hospitality, catering, leisure and travel, hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care and basic skills are satisfactory. The college's main strengths and areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

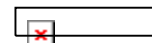
- high proportion of good or better teaching for adults
- high retention rates for adults
- extensive range of vocational courses for students of all ages
- outstanding provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- good learning resources
- productive links with employers
- effective implementation of strategies to widen participation
- good community-based provision.

What should be improved

- achievements of students aged 16 to 18 and those on modern apprenticeships
- teaching for students aged 16 to 18
- inconsistent implementation of quality assurance arrangements
- reliability of data available for management and quality assurance
- literacy and numeracy learning support.

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

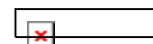


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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
Land-based provision	Satisfactory. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. Retention and pass rates were high in 2000/01 but they fell in 2001/02 when students were adversely affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the area. With the exception of those for animal care, specialist resources are good. Staff have useful links with employers and through these, students are able to obtain good work experience placements and relevant employment.
Construction	Good. Most teaching is good. Retention rates are good and pass rates are satisfactory on most courses. Few modern apprentices, however, meet all the requirements of their apprenticeship framework. Internal verification and assessment practices are good. Some workshops are poorly managed.
Engineering	Good. There is good teaching in all lessons. Pass and retention rates are high on most courses. Few modern apprentices, however, meet all the requirements of their apprenticeship framework. Specialist resources are excellent in most areas and teachers are well qualified. Staff do not take data on students' achievements into account sufficiently when reviewing students' progress.
Business	Good. Teaching in practical lessons is often very good. Pass and retention rates are high on secretarial courses, but pass rates are low on some business courses. Community-based venues are well managed and suitably equipped. Course reviews lack rigour.
Information and communications technology	Good. Much teaching is lively and imaginative, but in a few lessons, teachers made insufficient demands of the students. Pass rates on most courses are high. Resources at both the college and in community-based venues are excellent. There is a wide range of courses at Ashington and in the community.
Hospitality, catering, leisure and travel	Satisfactory. Most teaching is at least satisfactory and some is good. Most retention and pass rates are satisfactory or high on catering and hospitality courses but low on leisure and travel courses. Many students obtain relevant employment. Assessment practices are unsatisfactory on part-time catering courses.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Teaching in the majority of lessons is good. Retention and pass rates are low on many courses and few modern apprentices fulfil all the requirements of their apprenticeship framework. However, many full-time students obtain appropriate employment. Resources,

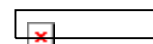
	including teaching materials, are good. In some practical lessons, there are not enough clients for all students to work on for training and assessment purposes.
Health and social care	Satisfactory. Teaching in the majority of lessons is good and none is unsatisfactory. Pass rates are satisfactory on most courses, but retention rates are low and declining on many courses. Students benefit from well-organised work placements. The college-based National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) courses are poorly managed.
Visual, performing arts and media	Good. Teaching is good on visual arts courses. Pass and retention rates are high on advanced level courses. Students produce work of a high standard and many progress to higher education (HE). Resources and accommodation for performing arts are inadequate.
Basic skills	Satisfactory. Teaching is good in community and work-based lessons. Teachers are well trained and confident in using the new basic skills core curriculum. Literacy and numeracy support is not provided for all the students who need it. The progress of individual students is carefully monitored, but not enough use is made of data to review the quality of programmes.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Outstanding. The majority of teaching is very good or outstanding. There is excellent learning and tutorial support for individual students. Students produce work of a high standard. There is good collaboration with social services and work experience providers.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has rectified some of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Much teaching is good. Overall, however, adults are taught better than students aged 16 to 18. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 have risen but many are still below the national average. Pass rates are above the national average for adults. Retention rates remain above national averages for adults, but those for students aged 16 to 18 have fallen and some are now below national averages. Central data on pass and retention rates are often unreliable. Curriculum management is at least satisfactory in all areas, although some curriculum teams do not monitor students' achievements sufficiently. Governors are well informed about the college's strengths and weaknesses. Communications across the college and with external partners are effective. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Financial management is good. The college provides satisfactory value for money.

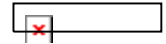
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. All staff have a strong commitment to widening participation. The college offers a wide range of courses in various locations across the county. Some part-time courses can be studied at times to suit individual students. Links between the college and local high schools are improving through the provision of courses at key stage 4 for school pupils and joint programmes for students aged 16 to 18. The college has developed a wide range of courses in different curriculum areas in locations across the county, including some which are comparatively disadvantaged. Most parts of the college are easily

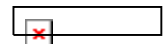
action plan for improving the promotion of equality of opportunity across the college. This highlights the need for the implementation of the college's policy on equal opportunities to be monitored.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Support for students is satisfactory. The college provides impartial advice and guidance to prospective students. Students with specific learning needs are well supported in their transition to the college. Induction arrangements are effective. With the aim of widening participation, the college provides good support for adults and students returning to education. For example, the college provides financial assistance to those students who need it, helps students who are parents to pay childcare costs and it has its own residential accommodation. Counselling and welfare arrangements are well co-ordinated and carefully managed. Students' attendance and progress are monitored closely. Students receive good personal support from their tutors. Tutorial arrangements are effective for full-time students but not part-time students. Students are given good careers advice and guidance. The careers centre at Ashington is poorly located away from the central part of the buildings. Learning support for a significant number of students is unsatisfactory. Many students who are identified through initial assessment as requiring literacy and numeracy support do not receive timely and adequate help during their courses.

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

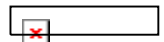
- good support from teachers and tutors
- being treated as an adult
- flexibility of course arrangements and opportunities for visits
- prompt marking and return of work with constructive feedback
- help for childcare and travel costs

- good range of facilities and resources
- good learning resource centres and IT facilities.

What they feel could be improved

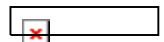
- access to social, sport and recreational facilities
- hot and stuffy computer rooms
- access to computers in the learning resource centre at Ashington
- shabbiness of the building and reception area at Ashington
- car parking facilities.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the inspection. Once published, the college has two months in which to prepare its post inspection action plan and submit it to the local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the LLSC. The LLSC is responsible for ensuring that the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) receives the college's post inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

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	60	30	10
19+ and WBL*	84	11	5
Learning 16-18	58	31	11
19+ and WBL*	81	13	6

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. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from individualised student record (ISR) returns to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) for the period 1997 to 2000. They also used college data on pass and retention rates for 2000/01 which had been subject to a sample validation. In some curriculum areas, the college's data on students' achievements required considerable updating during the week of the inspection. Inspectors used additional data held by the college to help them form their judgements.

2. The college offers a wide range of courses, which may be followed through full-time or part-time study, at various levels in all 14 areas of learning as defined by the LSC. Extensive provision is offered at venues in the local community and on a franchised basis across Northumberland. The inspection sampled provision in eleven curriculum areas. Work-based training is currently provided in seven areas with the largest numbers of trainees in construction and engineering. Retention and pass rates have been compared with those at similar colleges. Overall, adults do better than 16-18 year olds. Most adults study part time. In 2000/01, pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 were below the national average for the sector at every level, whereas pass rates for adults were above the national average, except at level 2. Few foundation or modern apprentices achieve a full qualification within the expected time.

16-18 year olds

3. Pass rates for students aged 16 to 18 at levels 2 and 3 are unsatisfactory. Level 2 pass rates are well below national average for the last four years. In 2000/01, the overall pass rate on level 2 courses for students aged 16 to 18 was only 50%. The overall pass rate on level 3 courses rose from 58% in 1998/99 to 62% in 2000/01, but is still well below the national average. All students on art and design courses, including some with previously low levels of attainment, make good progress. Over the last four years, 88% of students on level 3 courses have gained places on degree courses in HE. Many students on hospitality, catering, leisure and travel courses gain employment in related fields or progress to HE. Students' practical work in construction and art and design, particularly fine art, is of a high standard.

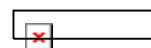
4. Retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 are low and have been below the national average for

the last two years. Retention rates for full-time students on level 3 courses have been particularly low. Learners' achievements on work-based programmes are poor. No modern apprentice in construction or hairdressing and beauty therapy has yet met all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Many of the modern apprentices in engineering who fail to fulfil all the requirements of their framework are successful in gaining a NVQ.

Adult students

5. Retention and pass rates for adults are high. Retention and pass rates on courses at levels 1 and 3 have been above the national average for the past four years. Between 1997 and 2000, retention and pass rates on level 2 courses were above the national average but they fell to slightly below it in 2000/01. Retention and pass rates for adults on part-time secretarial courses are particularly high. In the lessons observed, the attainment of adult learners in ICT was particularly high. Adults studying photography and embroidery part time achieve high standards in their practical work. Beauty therapy students demonstrate good IT skills in their portfolios of evidence.

Quality of education and training



6. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 198 sessions. Teaching was good or better in 70% of these, satisfactory in 22% and less than satisfactory in 8%. In a high proportion, 33%, it was excellent or very good. The highest proportion of good or very good teaching was on construction, business, and ICT courses, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The quality of teaching varies considerably across the curriculum areas. In three areas, teaching was less than satisfactory in over 10% of the lessons observed. Learning was good or better in 68% of lessons, satisfactory in 23% and unsatisfactory in 9%. The highest proportion of good or very good learning was on engineering, business, ICT, visual, performing arts and media courses and in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

7. Adults are better taught than students aged 16 to 18 and they learn more effectively. The teaching in 83% of lessons for adults was good or better, compared with 60% in lessons for students aged 16 to 18. Compared with 16-18 year olds, adult students were much better taught on business, ICT and basic skills courses. In most curriculum areas, however, classes contained a mix of 16-18 year olds and adults. The best teaching and learning were on entry and mixed level courses, and the highest proportions of unsatisfactory teaching and ineffective learning were on level 3 courses.

8. Good lessons were well planned. The teacher clearly explained the aims and objectives at the start and checked subsequently with the students that these had been achieved. The individual learning needs of students were carefully identified and the teacher set students tasks that matched their particular abilities. Students were then able to make progress by working at their own pace and at a level which suited them. In many areas, theory is linked effectively to practical activities and students clearly understand the relationship between the two. Vocationally relevant and often imaginative practical and project work holds the students' interest. Some teachers performed appropriate tasks themselves to show the students how they should be done and the standards they were expected to achieve. Most students gained confidence using specialist equipment and developed good practical skills. Some achieved high standards in their practical work. Many adults had enrolled on their course after a long absence from formal education. Teachers carefully built up their confidence by giving them effective individual advice and guidance as they undertook tasks. In the better theory lessons, teachers used a range of appropriate teaching methods, learning materials and equipment, including ICT and well-designed written materials. Examples to explain particular points were often drawn from the teachers' or the students' own experiences. Teachers also checked students' understanding regularly by careful questioning of the whole group. Most students' work is marked regularly and teachers give students written comments on how they can

improve their work.

9. In some lessons, including those that were less than satisfactory, teachers did not make enough use of ICT and other learning resources. They sometimes allowed the students too much time to complete tasks and after finishing them some students were given nothing else to do, became bored and distracted other members of the group. In some theory lessons, teachers directed their questioning to the more able students instead of checking that all students understood the topic. In poorly planned lessons, teachers did not allow themselves enough time at the end of lessons to review and go over what they had taught. In some lessons where the teaching was unsatisfactory, students spent a disproportionate amount of time on written learning materials and were not required to discuss and explore ideas for themselves. In other lessons, they were not urged to participate fully in learning activities, or were not given practical tasks that were demanding enough or reflected commercial practice.

10. There is wide variation in the quality of the teaching of key skills. Few lesson plans showed how students would develop their key skills through their vocational activities. Since September 2001, students in some curriculum areas have been working mainly on their own to develop key skills using commercially produced software packages or worksheets on key skills designed for their particular target level, and they receive support from basic skills tutors when necessary. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new approach. In other curriculum areas, staff intend to make work in key skills an integral part of vocational assignments. Few students currently see the relevance of key skills to their studies.

11. Teachers are well qualified. Those who teach vocational subjects have good industrial experience. Some 82% of full-time teachers and 71% of part-time teachers have a teaching qualification. Nearly 70% of full-time teachers have assessor qualifications. Technical and administrative support is effective. There is a good staff development programme. Staff complete individual training plans as part of the staff appraisal scheme.

12. Much of the college's accommodation is very good. The college owns sites at Ashington, Kirkley Hall and Berwick, and leases good accommodation at Blyth, Amble and Berwick. At Ashington, the student refectory has been refurbished, some temporary buildings have been removed and toilet blocks upgraded. However, some areas are still shabby and, for example, designated smoking areas contain graffiti. Improvements have also been made to teaching accommodation at Kirkley Hall and most is now good.

13. Teaching rooms in most curriculum areas are well equipped and suitably furnished. Many have interactive whiteboards. Most practical workshops are clean, safe and provide a good working environment. They are suitably equipped with specialist tools and equipment. Specialist resources are good in most vocational areas, but are poor in performing arts and in animal care. Community-based venues are well equipped and provide good learning environments. They are situated in town centres on the ground floor of buildings near to other agencies, such as job centres.

14. Receptions and student services on most sites are welcoming and conveniently situated. However, at Ashington, the career guidance base has been recently moved to the rear of the site which makes it more difficult for students to use the resources on a drop-in basis. Most parts of the college are accessible to students with restricted mobility. There has been considerable investment in the provision of toilet facilities for the physically disabled.

15. Learning resource centres are well managed, well used and open all day and also in the evening. They are pleasant places in which to learn and have sufficient study spaces and separate areas for quiet private study and group work. Resources are centrally catalogued and easily accessible. The range of books, journals, CD-ROMs and multimedia materials is adequate in most subjects. Many books, however, are outdated and little used.

16. IT facilities are very good. The college has 500 computer workstations for students, giving a good ratio of 1 computer to 5 students. Access to the Internet is good. All computers, including those in the local community, are linked to the college's intranet. However, it is in the early stages of

development and direct links to business-related websites are not yet available. Students have open access to computers in the learning resource centres and to a large IT suite at Ashington. The workstations in teaching areas are also available to students when these are not being used in lessons. Some rooms used for computing are hot and stuffy. The college's computer bus is equipped with ten laptop computers and an automatic mobile satellite Internet access. It is used effectively to provide IT courses in rural areas throughout Northumberland.

17. The clear policies and procedures for assessment, internal verification and moderation procedures are implemented effectively on the majority of courses. Assessment is fair and carried out regularly. The college monitors the quality of assessment through the internal verification group, the validation of courses and a forum, which meets to disseminate good practice in work-based learning. Monitoring systems work well but staff across the college do not sufficiently share good practice in assessment.

18. Most students receive constructive feedback on how they may improve their work. They are also encouraged to exercise initiative in their learning and organise and plan their studies carefully. On most courses, students' progress is monitored carefully. Students receive weekly reviews of their progress during which their individual learning plans are updated. The monitoring of the progress of work-based learners on construction programmes is carried out well. Learners on work-based programmes receive progress reviews in college and in the workplace. A member of staff from the college, a workplace supervisor and the learners themselves are all involved in these reviews. On several land-based courses, however, learners do not receive enough clear feedback on their progress. During their progress reviews, these learners are seldom set clear targets and they do not engage in thorough action planning to improve their performance.

19. The college offers an extensive range of full-time and part-time vocational courses to meet the needs of individuals, employers and the community. It also offers a wide range of general education courses. All schools of study provide courses at foundation level and these help students with learning difficulties who have followed a pre-vocational programme to make vocational choices. There are good progression routes within the college and to HE and employment. The college is improving its links with the majority of local schools and it is collaborating with one school to implement a course leading to the new vocational GCSE in engineering. Pre-16 students are referred to the college through the Education Welfare Service. The college's HE provision is expanding. Links with local community organisations are good, and through these, work placements are found for students. For example, some students on hairdressing and care courses are offered full-time employment by their work placement providers. However, links between the Adult Education Service in Northumberland and the college are not well established.

20. The college meets its strong commitment to increasing and widening participation. Many courses, and particularly those in venues in the local community, are arranged flexibly to attract adult students and suit their domestic and work circumstances. In most curriculum areas there is a wide range of full-time, part-time, day and evening courses to meet the needs of adults. Course timetables are often planned around local bus timetables. Programmes to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well planned through the good links with social services departments. The college makes effective use of community link workers to widen participation. Funding from the Construction Industry Training Board has helped the college increase the number of female students on construction courses. Through the use of its IT bus, the college is able to offer IT training anywhere in the county.

21. All full-time students and part-time students with substantial timetables can follow courses in key skills. These are not always integrated with their main courses of study. In some areas, students do not carry out work to develop their key skills until the end of their course, and few achieve key skills certification. The college has been slow to implement effective teaching and assessment of key skills for all students.

22. Potential students receive good initial advice and guidance through the central student advisory service at the college's main sites and through student services staff at community-based venues. The college's publicity information is clear and well designed. The range of support services available to students includes counselling, health care, welfare and financial help, careers advice

and access to learning support. Through the college's survey of their opinions, students expressed a high level of satisfaction in the induction to the college and to their chosen course. However, some said that they were unaware of the range of other facilities that the college provides.

23. The residential facilities, help with childcare and the financial support the college offers students, have been key factors in helping it widen participation. Almost 600 students are receiving educational maintenance allowances in 2001/02, and 800 full-time and part-time students have received other financial assistance in the same period. However, the college does not monitor or evaluate the achievements of students who receive help. Support for students with specific needs is good. Through its strong links with special schools and external agencies the college aims to ensure that the transition to college for pupils is well co-ordinated. Approximately 300 such students receive specific additional learning support.

24. The initial assessment process is effective in identifying those students who need additional learning support. Arrangements for ensuring these students receive this support promptly, however, are unsatisfactory. At the beginning of 2001/02, there were staff shortages and many students experienced delays in receiving the additional learning support they needed. Priority has been given to meeting the needs of the 36% of full-time students on courses below level 1. To date in 2001/02, only 60% of those students identified as requiring additional learning support have received it.

25. Tutorial provision is good for full-time students. Most part-time students, however, only receive informal support from their teachers, even though they may be in the college for up to four days a week. Tutors adapt the tutors' handbook and well-designed tutorial materials to suit the specific needs of their students. Two senior tutors act as mentors to new tutors and review the quality of tutorial materials available. Students' progress is carefully monitored through the use of action plans. Those students identified as 'at risk' receive frequent help. In tutorials, students are encouraged to review their own progress and record it in a progress file. In this way, they identify what they need to do to organise their learning better. Students at the Berwick centre and those on engineering and basic skills courses make particularly good use of their progress files. Students on land-based courses leading to NVQs do not always carry out effective action planning to improve their performance. The college's lesson observation scheme extends to tutorials. Staff have not, however, produced a report on the quality of tutorials, or identified and shared good tutorial practices.

26. Teachers monitor students' attendance closely, but encounter difficulties in obtaining data on students' attendance through the management information system. Students' absence is followed up promptly, usually on the first day of absence. Parents of students aged 16 to 18 are kept well informed of their son or daughter's progress and receive two reports each year. There are invitations to parents to visit the college, see work or meet staff. However, the employers of work-based learners are not always kept informed about the attendance of their employees.

27. There are good links between tutors and the careers adviser who ensures that good careers information is included within tutorials effectively. A private careers company is contracted to provide advice and guidance to students. The company also oversees students' applications to HE and gathers information on students' destinations. The careers centre at Ashington is well equipped but not all the computers can run the software available. It is poorly located to the rear of the college.

Leadership and management

28. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has a clear sense of purpose. Among its stated priorities are the raising of retention and pass rates and ensuring that the diverse range of needs of young people and adults are met throughout the large and sparsely populated county. Good progress has been made in rectifying many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Governors and senior managers managed the merger with Kirkley Hall College well and successfully met the challenges presented by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the county.

29. Communication within the college is good. Teaching and support staff are kept well informed of policy changes, events and day-to-day matters. The weekly staff bulletin is distributed widely, and the college intranet provides easy access to policy statements and staff directories. Teachers meet regularly through course meetings. The annual planning week in July provides a good opportunity for full-time and part-time staff to meet and review their work. An annual conference for part-time staff is well attended.

30. The regular cycle of planning and review meetings involves senior managers, middle managers and teaching staff. The December review meeting concentrates on the previous year's performance in terms of enrolment, students' retention and achievements and a progress report on action taken over courses on which students' performance is poor. The March meeting considers school priorities and proposals for the coming year.

31. Insufficient attention is given to the management of provision for students aged 16 to 18. The majority of 16-18 year old students follow vocational courses. Over 35% of students in this age group have weaknesses in basic skills. Targets for the recruitment of students aged 16 to 18 have not been met. There are significant differences in the quality of teaching for students aged 16 to 18, compared with that for adults. For example, the teaching in over 83% of lessons for adults was judged to be good or better, compared with only 60% for students aged 16 to 18. Retention and pass rates for 16-18 year olds are poor. Until recently there have been few links with schools, but the college is now increasing its provision for key stage 4 pupils and, in conjunction with local schools, it is providing courses for students aged 16 to 18 across a number of areas of learning.

32. Full-time and part-time staff complete an annual individual development plan which reflects their staff development needs, training priorities identified by senior managers and issues highlighted by course teams during the annual planning week. Staff development activities, supported by a budget of 1% of payroll, are valued by most staff. The staff appraisal system is satisfactory. It takes into account the findings from lesson observations. Full-time staff are only appraised every two years. Part-time staff can ask for an appraisal interview but very few do so.

33. Governors are well informed about the college's strengths and weaknesses. They play an important role in the planning process. The board meets five times each year, but since February 2001, attendance at its meetings has been low, averaging 58%. Board members review the college's strategic objectives annually, before meeting college managers to consider the operational plan for the following year. The board has seven committees. The standards committee provides advice on targets for retention and pass rates, but it has few members with a background in FE. The chair of the corporation and other members regularly attend college events to celebrate students' success.

34. The college has, over recent years, experienced problems with data management. Staff have little confidence in the accuracy of centrally held data and this has adversely affected the quality of their planning and decision making. Many of the students' achievement data produced by inspectors prior to the inspection were amended during the inspection following discussions with heads of schools. New staff have been appointed during the last year to improve data and ensure they are accurate and produced on time. Data are now becoming more reliable.

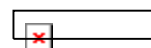
35. The college's promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. The college demonstrates its commitment to equal opportunities in many ways and principally by ensuring its courses are fully inclusive. Strong emphasis is placed on widening participation through the expansion of provision across the county. An equal opportunities action plan for the year 2001/02 identifies priorities for attention. All newly appointed staff receive training to make them aware of the importance of equal opportunities. Lesson plans have to identify how the needs of individual students are to be met. Staff and student handbooks include references related to equal opportunities. Awareness raising sessions on equal opportunities are part of the induction for full-time students. The tutorial programme includes an equal opportunities week, during which students discuss and debate specific issues related to equality of opportunity. There is, however, not enough monitoring of the effectiveness of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy, particularly in work-based learning programmes. Some curriculum areas do not have a strategy to ensure the promotion of equal opportunities. There are clear procedures for dealing with complaints and cases of

harassment. Reported cases are dealt with efficiently. The principal reports on a regular basis to the board on the number and types of complaint and provides an explanation of the action taken in each case.

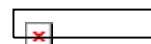
36. Quality assurance arrangements are extensive but they are not always complied with. There is strong emphasis on quality assurance at school and course team level, and all heads of school are responsible for the quality of courses and programmes in their area of study. At the planning and review week, work is reviewed and targets agreed and set for the coming year. However, in some curriculum areas the reviews are not carried out fully and targets are not always realistic or met. The college's annual self-assessment report is detailed and thorough. Inspectors agreed with most of the grades awarded by the college and many of the judgements. In 2000, the college introduced a process for observing and evaluating lessons. Lessons are observed by the college's own staff and staff from other colleges.

37. All governors and senior managers receive detailed financial information on a monthly basis. Some governors, however, who do not have a background or experience in finance, do not always find this information easy to understand. The college provides satisfactory value for money. The financial health of the college is good. In general, resources are good. However, in some curriculum areas, attendance rates are extremely low. Class sizes are low on some courses but the college justifies these as a demonstration of its commitment to the promotion of social inclusion. The college has no system for calculating the degree of value added to students' achievements by comparing the examination grades students held on entry to their courses with their final examination results. Some individual curriculum areas, however, undertake their own value added analysis to identify the extent of students' achievements. For example, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are set specific targets which are specified in their learning plans, and these are determined on the basis of their level of attainment when they started their course. The extent to which they meet these targets represents the value added to their overall achievement.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Land-based provision



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

Strengths

- constructive feedback from teachers on students' written work
- good IT and library resources at Kirkley Hall
- good specialist resources in most areas

- good work placements.

Weaknesses

- little use of ICT in teaching
- poor action planning
- poor specialist resources in animal care
- failure of modern apprentices to meet the requirements of their apprenticeship framework.

Scope of provision

38. The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses from foundation to advanced levels in agriculture, animal care, arboriculture, countryside management, equine studies, horticulture and service engineering. At the time of the inspection, there were 480 students, of whom 240 studied part time. Some 92 students enrolled on courses leading to NVQs. There were 36 modern apprentices.

Achievement and standards

39. It was not possible for inspectors to prepare a comprehensive table of examination results for the period prior to the merger of Kirkley Hall College with Northumberland College in 2000, as data on students' achievements for Kirkley Hall College were inaccurate. In 2001, the college was badly affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the county. Many students were unable to attend classes. In 2000/01, the retention and pass rates on the national diploma in animal care course were high and above the national average. On many other courses, however, retention and pass rates fell below the national average.

40. On most courses, students' attainment is at least satisfactory or better. However, the attainment of students on the first diploma in animal care course is low, and few students produce work of a requisite standard to obtain their qualifications. Few trainees complete their modern apprenticeships. Over the last four years, 20 trainees started advanced modern apprenticeships and 20 trainees started foundation modern apprenticeships, but none met all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. The attendance rate of 68% is low and well below the national average.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
First diploma in animal	2	No. of starts	**	**	12

care		% retention	**	**	83
		% pass rate	**	**	50
NVQ amenity horticulture	2	No. of starts	30	19	18
		% retention	73	*	21
		% pass rate	92	*	21
National diploma in agriculture	3	No. of starts	*	*	*
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	40
National diploma in horse studies	3	No. of starts	18	29	9
		% retention	78	93	100
		% pass rate	69	62	78
National diploma animal care	3	No. of starts	**	**	11
		% retention	**	**	91
		% pass rate	**	**	100
Advanced national certificate in animal care	3	No. of starts	11	9	12
		% retention	55	56	67
		% pass rate	100	100	38

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001) * data unreliable ** course not running

Quality of education and training

41. Most teaching and learning is good or satisfactory. In the best planned lessons, the individual learning needs of students are carefully identified, but this good practice is not common. Teaching is better in lessons where the majority of students are adults. In a lesson on gardening for beginners, the teacher gave a practical skills demonstration and linked this effectively to theory covered in previous lessons. The majority of handouts are well produced and convey information clearly. In some lessons, however, teachers allow the students to spend a disproportionate amount of time looking at handouts. The students then become bored, lose interest in the lesson and learn little. A few lessons are poorly planned. In these, teachers do not allow sufficient time to draw the lesson together and discuss its outcomes fully with students. There is little use of ICT in the teaching of subjects such as business management and applied science.

42. Students on agriculture, animal care and equine courses extend their learning by carrying out work unit duties. In equine studies programmes, these duties are managed effectively. Equestrian students take part in yard duties on a monthly rota basis, supervised by second-year national diploma students, under the direction of yard staff. Their work is carefully assessed and they take part in an inter-group competition to encourage them to give of their best. However, the management of duties on animal care courses is poor. Duties take place at the same time as timetabled lessons and students can miss key lessons for up to two consecutive weeks. Teaching is not planned to take account of the needs of students who have to miss lessons.

43. Teachers mark their students' work regularly and thoroughly. Their comments are constructive and provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their work. The assessment of key skills is poor. Opportunities for students to develop key skills are identified in some lesson plans and in some schemes of work, but students are not assessed in key skills in theory lessons, or when they carry out duties and practical tasks.

44. The advice and guidance students receive before they join their courses are good. The quality of the action planning to help students improve their performance varies widely. For example,

students on service engineering courses are set clear targets and their progress towards reaching these is monitored carefully. This good practice, however, is not found on all courses. For example, the tutorial records for full-time students on many courses seldom include any evidence of progress towards the achievement of targets.

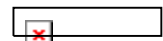
45. Since the merger, the college has made considerable changes to the range of courses with the aim of ensuring it meets the needs of students and employers better. Effective links with employers give students good opportunities to gain relevant work experience and, in many instances, this leads to an offer of employment. The college responds well to the needs of employers. Advisory panels in agriculture and equine are well supported by employer representatives and meet regularly. Promotional literature used to advertise the range of courses is well designed and conveys information clearly. However, the apprenticeship frameworks for modern apprentices are not widely understood by students or employers.

46. Many teachers are members of professional associations and keep themselves up to date with changes in industry. The learning resource centre at Kirkley Hall, which includes library and ICT facilities, is well equipped. Students can also use the IT resources outside the centre's normal opening hours. Most subject areas have good specialist resources. In horticulture, these include well-maintained grounds and a small nursery unit where there is good technician support. Machinery workshops have industry standard facilities. A national machinery manufacturer uses the college regularly as a regional venue for training staff employed in the industry, as well as the college's staff and students. In addition to the college's own facilities, students on countryside management and agriculture courses use those of local farms. Animal care resources are less satisfactory and many are not up to industry standard.

Leadership and management

47. Since the merger, managers have developed a clear plan for the future of the college's land-based provision. The curriculum offer and the specialist resources have been reviewed and rationalised with the aim of improving the quality and cost effectiveness of provision. The new policies and practices are welcomed by staff. Arrangements for the review and evaluation of courses are good. Resources to help teachers promote equal opportunities have been introduced. Communications with the Ashington site and within Kirkley Hall are good. College-based courses are well organised. Staff work well together.

Construction



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

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

Strengths

- much good teaching
- high retention rates
- good resources at Ashington

- strong links with industry
- effective internal verification and thorough assessment practices
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- failure of modern apprentices to meet requirements of their apprenticeship framework
- poorly managed workshops
- failure of many students to gain certificates in key skills
- inadequate use of data on students achievements.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time construction courses from foundation to advanced levels. These include specialist craft courses in gas, street works and highways, and technician courses such as those leading to the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in the built environment at foundation and intermediate levels, and the national certificate in building studies. Students can study at Ashington and at Berwick. At the time of the inspection, there were 384 students, of whom nearly half were aged 16 to 18. Almost 40% of students were on a work-based training programme.

Achievement and standards

49. Retention rates on most courses are above the national average and some are excellent. For example, in 2001, all students who started the GNVQ foundation construction and the built environment and level 3 carpentry and joinery courses completed them. Most pass rates have risen over the last three years and are at or above the national average. They are high on level 2 craft courses and the Institute of Clerk of Works part 2 course. Pass rates are low and below the national averages for the Institute of Clerk of Works intermediate course, level 3 carpentry and joinery and two-year GNVQ foundation courses. There is no evidence that any learner has obtained key skills certification, or that any modern apprentice has met all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework.

50. The standard of work produced by craft students particularly in practical lessons is high. Their practical work on level 2 highways, level 2 brickwork, and levels 2 and 3 wall and floor tiling courses is of a particularly high standard. Students on construction technician courses produce good coursework and carry out assignments well. Several students won regional and national awards in the FE sector's Skillbuild competitions in 2001. The attendance rate at lessons inspected was high at 84%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation built environment (1 year)	1	No. of starts	67	43	60
		% retention	82	79	95
		% pass rate	28	40	53
GNVQ intermediate built environment	2	No. of starts	15	15	16
		% retention	93	79	88
		% pass rate	14	40	75
NVQ carpentry and joinery	2	No. of starts	56	24	34
		% retention	91	46	91
		% pass rate	60	29	79
NVQ all building crafts	2	No. of starts	118	48	70
		% retention	88	52	84
		% pass rate	100	54	78
NVQ carpentry and joinery	3	No. of starts	15	21	19
		% retention	93	86	100
		% pass rate	100	80	74
NVQ all building crafts	3	No. of starts	65	75	55
		% retention	77	81	80
		% pass rate	26	52	64
Institute of Clerk of Works part 2	H	No. of starts	15	17	14
		% retention	100	94	100
		% pass rate	60	75	79

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

Quality of education and training

51. The majority of teaching is good or better. In the best lessons, teachers try hard to choose tasks and activities which interest students and help them progress. Realistic practical projects are used effectively to strengthen students' learning and to enable them to work to industrial standards. At the start of practical lessons, teachers take care to explain what each student has to do. In one well-planned lesson, each group of students was allocated a clearly identified work area on which to lay block pavers. The teacher frequently checked their work for line and level, while explaining to those who had laid some pavers before, how to pave around a manhole. The students received excellent feedback on the standard of their work which helped them to strengthen their understanding of the technical aspects of the task. An effective theory lesson was excellently planned. The teacher used ICT to go over the main points of the previous lesson and explain the use of mortar mixes. A

demonstration in the workshop on how to test mortars was followed by the students testing a range of commonly used mixes themselves.

52. In a few practical lessons, the size of the class was large and the teacher was not able to offer individual students the individual help they needed. During some theory lessons, the teachers did not phrase their questions skilfully and carefully to check whether all students understood the topic. In the weaker theory lessons, the pace was slow and the students were not urged on to give of their best and participate fully in the learning tasks.

53. The co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job learning is monitored effectively. Students receive regular and detailed feedback on their progress and standard of work. The well-documented internal verification system is applied rigorously and detailed records of internal verification are kept. In September 2001, the way students learnt key skills was changed. Students now mainly work on their own to develop key skills, using commercially produced packages designed for their particular level. They can also receive help from basic skills tutors when they need it. It is too early to know whether this new approach to key skills is proving helpful to the students or not.

54. Induction, careers guidance and support are well organised. Full-time students and work-based learners receive formal reviews of their progress at least three times a year. A copy of the record of the review is sent to employers when appropriate. Arrangements for the progress reviews of students on part-time courses vary between courses, but all students are able to get extra support if necessary. Overall, construction students receive good support.

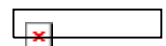
55. Facilities at Ashington are particularly good and meet the needs of students well. Workshop areas are spacious and well equipped. Teaching rooms for technician courses have interactive whiteboards, video conferencing facilities and computers. At Berwick, the facilities are not extensive but are adequate for the small number of students there. Most teaching and support staff are well qualified and suitably experienced in their occupational areas.

56. The college has substantially increased the number of students studying construction. School pupils are given opportunities to learn in the construction curriculum centre and provision is available for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Links with employers are excellent. A good range of short courses is provided to meet the needs of both individual students and employers. The college is a designated centre of excellence for a major industrial company.

Leadership and management

57. Management of construction provision is satisfactory. Teachers and support staff work well together. Policies covering the teaching and assessment of key skills in the workplace have been recently introduced. There is insufficient use of statistical data in the monitoring of students' performance. Risk analysis has not been recently carried out in some workshops and staff are not sufficiently aware of good health and safety practices. Inspectors mainly agreed with the self-assessment findings relating to construction provision. The self-assessment report, however, lacked detailed analysis of students' achievements.

Engineering



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

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

Strengths

- good teaching
- good retention and pass rates
- high standard of students' practical work
- good resources
- effective monitoring of training and assessment in college
- wide range of flexibly arranged provision.

Weaknesses

- failure to make key skills an integral component part of all programmes
- insufficient use of data on students' achievements when monitoring students' performance
- failure of many modern apprentices to complete their apprenticeships successfully.

Scope of provision

58. The college offers a broad range of engineering courses from level 1 to level 5 in general engineering, computer-aided design and control, marine, light vehicle repair and servicing, fabrication and welding, and electronics. At the time of the inspection, there were 350 students, of whom a quarter attended full time. Some 18% were modern apprentices and 2% were young people on work-based learning NVQ programmes. Eleven agricultural engineering modern apprentices were based at Kirkley Hall. There were 20 New Deal clients. Some 65% of students were adults.

Achievement and standards

59. Retention rates on most courses are particularly high and some are consistently above the national averages. Pass rates are high on most courses. In 1999, however, the pass rate on the GNVQ engineering course at foundation level was only 30%. It rose to 92% in 2000, but fell back to 44% in 2001. Pass and retention rates are high on computer-aided design and computer numerical

control courses at level 3. Few students achieve key skills qualifications. Modern apprentices make slow progress towards meeting all the requirements of their apprenticeship frameworks. All engineering apprentices, irrespective of their aptitude and ability, have to spend four years on their apprenticeship. Of those who started an advanced modern apprenticeship in 1997, only 50% fulfilled all the objectives in their learning plans. Of those who started foundation modern apprenticeships between 1999 and 2000, only 26% met all the requirements of their apprenticeship framework. Apprentices' overall pass rate for NVQ level 2 is high and has ranged from 83% to 100% over the last four years. The standard of work in the portfolios of modern apprentices currently on programmes is high.

60. Most students produce work of a high standard in practical lessons and particularly in welding lessons. Portfolios are well presented and contain a wide range of evidence.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation engineering	1	No. of starts	24	16	12
		% retention	91	81	75
		% pass rate	30	92	44
NVQ welding	2	No. of starts	**	28	24
		% retention	**	*	92
		% pass rate	**	*	83
NVQ engineering manufacture (foundation)	2	No. of starts	18	12	8
		% retention	*	*	86
		% pass rate	*	*	86
City and Guilds 2301-01 computer-aided design	2	No. of starts	19	9	9
		% retention	100	78	89
		% pass rate	83	86	100
City and Guilds 2290-02 fabrication and welding	2	No. of starts	9	7	13
		% retention	*	*	93
		% pass rate	*	*	85

Source: ISR (1999 and 2000), college (2001) * data unreliable ** course not running

Quality of education and training

61. Teaching in all lessons is good or better. Lessons are well planned and workshop activities are well organised. In the better theory lessons, teachers motivate the students and help them to learn more effectively by relating theory to the tasks undertaken in practical lessons. In most lessons, teachers check students' understanding by posing probing questions and then calling upon individual members of the group to answer them. Teachers encourage adult students to work at their own pace, while providing helpful and specific support for individual students.

62. With the exception of staff on motor vehicle programmes, teachers have not ensured that students learn key skills as an integral part of programmes. Assessment of key skills for modern apprentices is not integrated with assessment of their vocational skills. Work-based supervisors and apprentices are poorly informed about key skills and do not regard them as important.

63. Internal verification of the work of students is adequate. There is good monitoring of the

progress of college-based students. These students are well aware of the extent of their progress, and this is displayed on regularly updated wall charts. Progress reviews for learners on agricultural engineering programmes are carried out well and involve workplace supervisors. The reviews focus clearly on students' achievements, and during them, the students are set clear targets. Monitoring of the progress of some work-based learners on engineering and motor vehicle programmes, however, is not carried out well. These learners are not set demanding medium-term or long-term targets. Assessment is thorough. Assessors use a variety of assessment methods and they carry out a high proportion of assessment by direct observation in workshops. Good use is made of photographic evidence of learners' work and competences. Some engineering apprentices wait up to 18 months before receiving any formal assessment of their competence. During this time, they gather little evidence of their acquisition of competence and receive little feedback on the extent of their progress.

64. There is effective tutorial support for full-time students. During tutorials, students carry out self-assessment to increase their motivation, agree targets for themselves, and carry out action planning to improve their performance. Students with learning difficulties are well supported on many courses.

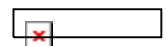
65. Courses lead to a wide range of qualifications and students may follow these through various modes of attendance. Most part-time courses and work-based learning programmes can be started at any time during the year. Engineering workshops are available to students for 48 weeks of the year. New Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and motor vehicle courses have been introduced during the last year.

66. The college has made a significant investment in its engineering resources. It has improved the quality of accommodation and equipment, rationalised the provision into one area of the college, and provided staff development activities for engineering teachers. Engineering workshops, particularly those for welding and motor vehicle engineering are well equipped. Staff have good industrial experience and all hold appropriate vocational and teaching qualifications. Practical resources in the machine shop are poor. Lathes and milling machines are adequate for work at level 2, but are not suitable for advanced machining operations carried out to good industrial standards.

Leadership and management

67. Management of engineering is satisfactory. Full-time and part-time teachers have individual development plans and are set targets for achievement through the staff appraisal system. Internal communications are effective. There is not enough use of students' achievement data in the monitoring of students' performance. There is insufficient promotion of equal opportunities in the work place. There is little co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Many of the assignments apprentices are set at college are not sufficiently relevant to their activities in the work place.

Business



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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates on secretarial courses
- high retention rates on part-time courses for adults

- well-planned and effective teaching
- well-managed and suitably equipped community-based venues
- good individual support for all students.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on AVCE business and level 2 NVQ accounting courses
- insufficient use of students' achievement data in course reviews.

Scope of provision

68. The college provides courses from foundation to advanced levels in business, administration, secretarial, accounting and management. There are specialist part-time courses in accounting, legal and medical secretarial skills, and for trade union representatives. At the time of the inspection, nearly 90% of students were aged 19 and over and most were studying part time. There were 64 full-time and 519 part-time students. Some 44% of full-time students were aged 16 to 18. Most were on AVCE business, NVQ in business administration and business technology courses. The 36 full-time adults were studying business technology.

Achievement and standards

69. Retention and pass rates for secretarial courses are above the national averages and sometimes significantly so. For example, since 1999, the overall retention rate on the shorthand course at level 1 has been 99%, compared with the national average of 75%. The overall pass rate on this course has been 77%, well above the national average of 67%. In 2001, the retention rate on 10 secretarial courses was 100%, and on 9 of these the pass rate was above the national average. These courses account for the highest number of enrolments in this curriculum area. The overall retention rate for part-time adult courses is 90%. However, the pass rate on AVCE business in 2001 was significantly below the national average. Pass rates on NVQ level 2 administration and accounting are low. Some students continue with their course beyond the anticipated end date and subsequently pass, but no record is kept of their achievement by the college.

70. On most courses, the quality of students' work is good. NVQ portfolios are well organised. Students work confidently. In a lesson on a Trades Union Congress (TUC) course for health and safety representatives, all the students contributed well to discussion in a mock meeting designed to review the work they had done on their own. Students make little use of the Internet to complete their assignment work.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Word processing stage 1	1	No. of starts	97	108	124
		% retention	100	90	89
		% pass rate	89	90	86
NVQ accounting	2	No. of starts	50	34	22
		% retention	84	62	91
		% pass rate	40	62	43
Accounting with computers basic	2	No. of starts	13	26	55
		% retention	100	85	75
		% pass rate	0	82	90
Integrated business technology stage 2 (IBT II)	2	No. of starts	44	163	110
		% retention	93	99	95
		% pass rate	90	73	65
NVQ administration	3	No. of starts	73	33	39
		% retention	85	94	85
		% pass rate	27	65	70
AVCE business	3	No. of starts	18	7	6
		% retention	78	57	83
		% pass rate	64	75	20

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

Quality of education and training

71. Teaching is good in many lessons. Teachers plan their lessons carefully. Lesson plans, work schemes and assignments are well structured with clear learning objectives and a description of assessment methods. In practical lessons, teachers ensure students can learn in a way that suits their needs. For example, in a word processing lesson, students who were working to achieve qualifications at different levels had clear objectives for the lesson linked to their individual learning plans. In a level 1 business administration communication lesson, students valued the checklist the teacher had drawn up and used it effectively to improve their letter writing technique. Teachers give individual adult students valuable advice and guidance and skilfully help them to build up their confidence. There are good links with employers and all full-time students benefit from well-planned work experience.

72. In the less effective lessons, teachers play too prominent a role and do not give the students enough scope to use their own initiative. They talk too much, do not engage the students in discussion, and fail to hold their interest. For example, in a lesson on an AVCE course, the teacher went over an activity but did not invite comments from the students or ask them questions to check their understanding of what they had to do. Full-time students attend lessons specifically for key skills, the level of study having been determined by their performance in initial assessment. Few full-time students aged 16 to 18 value key skills or want to spend time on them. Training in key skills is not an integral part of training leading to the NVQ on work-based learning programmes.

73. Assessment practice is effective. Teachers give good feedback to students on their written work and monitor students' progress closely. During a lesson in which students completed their portfolios, the teacher had detailed records of each student's progress and provided specific guidance for the students' next steps. Teachers monitor students' attendance closely and chase up absences.

74. Induction arrangements are effective. The well-planned tutorial programme is for full-time students only. Students value the individual support teachers give them. Group tutorials meet the needs of students of different ages effectively. New students are given an initial assessment to find out whether they need additional learning support. Those who are identified as needing support, however, are not always given it. For example, three full-time students who underwent an initial assessment in office technology were identified as being in need of additional learning support. None attended support sessions in the first semester and only one is attending them in the second.

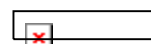
75. A whole range of courses in business is offered at Ashington and the three main outreach centres. Most part-time courses can be studied at times to suit the needs of individual students and many can be started at any time during the year. Students can work towards additional qualifications to extend their learning. For example, some AVCE students work towards accounting qualifications. To meet local demand, the office technology course at Berwick includes an accounting for computers option.

76. Teachers are well qualified, display extensive knowledge of the subject and have vocational experience. Each teacher has an individual development programme and progress in implementing this is monitored closely by the head of school. Students have easy access to computers and up-to-date software in all centres, but there are no direct links to business-related web-based resources. Training offices linked across centres and to central college administration provide students with realistic work experience in office practice. There are insufficient business-related materials in the learning resource centres.

Leadership and management

77. Most courses are well managed. Communications within the school and between centres are good. Staff make effective use of on-line facilities. Staff meetings are held regularly and are minuted. Students' achievements are carefully monitored. Course reviews are not carried out rigorously and staff who carry them out do not make use of centrally held data. Targets for students' performance are set for each course. Many of the targets are not realistic, however, and in some instances, their achievement does not necessarily represent any improvement. For example, in 2001/02, the target pass rate on the accounting for computers course was set at 75%, significantly lower than the actual pass rate of 90% achieved in the previous year.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- lively and imaginative teaching
- excellent specialist resources

- wide range of courses both at Ashington and in the community.

Weaknesses

- poor use of resources for teaching
- insufficient involvement of students in some lessons.

Scope of provision

78. There is a wide range of full-time and part-time ICT courses. Full-time provision includes: GNVQ, AVCE and IT systems for technicians courses. Part-time courses include those leading to National Open College Network (NOCN) awards, the Northern Counties Further Education (NCFE) qualification, the European computer driving licence (ECDL), also offered on-line, a college-designed NOCN level 3 course, and the CISCO Certified Network Associate (CCNA) qualification. Part-time courses are run at Ashington, at community-based centres throughout Northumberland and through a mobile IT unit. Of the 111 full-time students on courses at the time of the inspection, three quarters were aged 16 to 18. Nearly 90% of the 3,230 part-time students were aged 19 or over.

Achievement and standards

79. Pass rates are significantly above the national average on most courses. Over the last three years they have continued to rise. For example, the pass rate on the GNVQ foundation course rose from below the national average in 1999 to significantly above it in 2001. Retention rates on the majority of courses are above the national averages. The retention rate on the level 3 NOCN IT course in each of the last two years, has been 20 percentage points higher than the national average. Overall, however, retention rates on ICT courses have fallen slightly over the last three years.

80. In the majority of lessons, students demonstrate good practical skills and use the college computer system with confidence. Most students reach a high level of attainment. Many students develop good problem solving skills. For example, in one lesson, students were able to suggest to the teacher different methods of analysing a spreadsheet. After the teacher demonstrated each method in turn the students were able to analyse them and decide the best methods for different situations.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NOCN introduction to computing	1	No. of starts	162	792	884
		% retention	85	98	95
		% pass rate	71	64	87
GNVQ foundation IT	1	No. of starts	11	12	13

		% retention	91	100	85
		% pass rate	60	73	100
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	15	29	31
		% retention	87	62	77
		% pass rate	46	78	74
European computer driving licence (1 year)	2	No. of starts	254	288	372
		% retention	91	82	78
		% pass rate	72	73	70
AVCE ICT	3	No. of starts	*	*	30
		% retention	*	*	72
		% pass rate	*	*	71
GNVQ advanced IT	3	No. of starts	32	24	19
		% retention	59	42	100
		% pass rate	72	83	100
NOCN IT	3	No. of starts	*	53	114
		% retention	*	98	95
		% pass rate	*	83	96

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

81. Most teaching is good or better. Teachers plan their lessons well. They give their students appropriate classroom activities and learning materials. They clearly explain the aims and objectives of the lesson. A feature of the better lessons is the use of skilful questioning to check students' understanding and knowledge. In these lessons the teaching is lively and imaginative and it holds the students' interest. For example, in one lesson the teacher designed an 'Amble University challenge'. Students worked in groups to produce questions. The students of one group then put their questions to members of another group. After each answer the class debated other possible responses. This exercise helped the students to develop their skills of critical analysis. In another effective lesson on the routing of networks and the difference between static and dynamic routing, the teacher used the analogy of road junctions and signs effectively to help students appreciate the concepts. Teachers take students carefully through each stage of complex tasks. In a lesson for adults who had not used a computer before, the teacher showed each student how to scan photographs they had taken at home, insert them into stories they had written, and then send them by e-mail.

82. In some less effective lessons, teachers do not make enough use of the available teaching resources. In one lesson, the teacher did not use the interactive whiteboard to record the outcomes of discussions. In another, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to present a topic, but did not explain clearly what the students had to do next. Instead, the teacher devoted time to helping individual students and left other members of the class uncertain of how they should proceed. In other lessons where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the teacher allowed a few enthusiastic students to dominate discussions and did not encourage other students to come forward with questions and ideas. In some lessons, students were given activities that were too easy for them, or they were given too much time for their tasks and were left with nothing to do when they had finished them. Assignment work on advanced vocational courses is seldom given an industrial context.

83. Assessment is carried out well and students' progress is monitored closely. Clear written feedback is given to students on their marked work to help them improve their performance. Internal verification procedures are carried out well.

84. Students are well supported by their teachers who are careful to ensure they enrol on a course which is appropriate for them. Many teachers spend time after lessons providing extra help to those who need it.

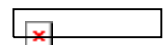
85. Resources for ICT are very good. All teaching rooms have interactive boards. The venues in the local community provide pleasant learning environments for adults. The college intranet offers students an excellent range of learning materials to use in general research or course work. Students have easy access to workstations where they can use industrial standard software and Internet facilities. However, some computer rooms are stuffy. In some open areas students have difficulty hearing the teacher when other students are working alongside them. Teachers are well qualified. Technician support on all sites is good.

86. The college's range of courses meets the needs of both adults and students aged 16 to 18 effectively. Adults unfamiliar with computers can gain confidence in using them by taking a course at a computing centre in the local community. Students are able to study for the ECDL on-line. The IT bus brings learning to those in rural areas who cannot travel to a college site. Recruitment on most courses is growing steadily. Enrolments to NOCN introduction to computing courses at level 1 have increased from about 160 in 1999 to nearly 900 in 2001.

Leadership and management

87. Courses are well managed. Communication between staff is good and teachers are keen to share ideas and resources. The minutes of regular team meetings are detailed and action points are followed up at the next meeting. Progress towards reaching target retention and pass rates is monitored rigorously. Procedures for monitoring students' absence are effective, and attendance during the inspection was very good. Value added data are not used enough in the monitoring of students' performance. Through the lesson observation scheme, staff have identified as a weakness, the failure to provide students with sufficiently demanding work in some lessons.

Hospitality, catering, leisure and travel



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

Strengths

- high retention rates on NVQ catering and hospitality courses
- broadening of curriculum through enrichment activities and work towards additional qualifications
- success of many students in progressing to employment

- good links between theory and practice.

Weaknesses

- low retention and pass rates on leisure and tourism courses
- unsatisfactory assessment practices on part-time catering courses
- low attendance rates on part-time courses
- little use of ICT in lessons.

Scope of provision

88. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses in hospitality, catering, leisure and travel. Courses in catering include those leading to NVQ levels 1 to 3, AVCE, and qualifications in bakery, sugar craft, cake decoration, hygiene, and the licensed trade. Courses in leisure and tourism include those leading to GNVQ at intermediate level, AVCE, retail travel operations at intermediate and advanced levels, NVQs in travel services at levels 2 and 3, tour representatives certificate and air ticketing qualifications. At the time of the inspection, there were 67 full-time students and 186 students on part-time and mainly short courses in catering and hospitality, as well as 63 full-time and 28 part-time students on leisure and travel courses. The proportion of full-time students aged 16 to 18 was 80%. The proportion of all students aged 19 or over was 60%. There were a few learners on modern apprenticeships and work-based programmes, and also some New Deal clients.

Achievement and standards

89. Retention rates are high on NVQ level 2 catering and hospitality and AVCE catering and hospitality courses. Most pass rates are satisfactory on catering and hospitality courses. Retention and pass rates are low on most leisure and travel courses. For example, pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate course have been below the national average in each of the last three years. Retention rates on the GNVQ advanced have fallen from above the national average in 1999 to significantly below it in 2001. The majority of full-time students gain additional qualifications.

90. In their portfolios, full-time students present detailed evidence of their acquisition of knowledge and skills. The evidence, however, in the portfolios of part-time students on level 3 catering courses is not varied enough. In most lessons, students demonstrate a satisfactory level of attainment. Students on advanced level courses analyse and evaluate information well. Most full-time students develop good practical skills, but the part-time students' standard of practical work is sometimes poor. A high proportion of students progress to HE or appropriate employment. In 2000/01, over 95% of students went into industry-related employment or progressed into HE. Students' attendance rates on part-time courses are low.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism	2	No. of starts	25	18	13
		% retention	18	89	69
		% pass rate	30	44	0
NVQ catering and hospitality	2	No. of starts	53	32	53
		% retention	83	84	92
		% pass rate	84	83	82
Intermediate certificate in retail travel operations	2	No. of starts	36	30	35
		% retention	94	9	63
		% pass rate	73	32	20
GNVQ advanced leisure and tourism	3	No. of starts	41	40	27
		% retention	88	65	39
		% pass rate	53	42	48
NVQ supervisory management	3	No. of starts	18	12	14
		% retention	78	58	64
		% pass rate	100	60	44

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

Quality of education and training

91. The majority of teaching in catering and hospitality is good. Most lessons are well structured. In theory lessons, teachers carefully link topics to the practical work in lessons that follow them. Teachers draw on their industrial experience effectively and help students to develop the skills they need for future employment. In practical catering lessons, activities are organised to take into account students' different levels and abilities and extent of progress on the course. In a lesson on food preparation, the teacher allocated each student a task before demonstrating how to make a chicken dish. The teacher kept reminding the students of the key points throughout the lesson and checked on the progress of each student regularly. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not ensure that good hygiene practices are maintained, and set students work which is not sufficiently demanding.

92. Most teaching on leisure and travel courses is good. It is well planned and teachers excite and hold the students' interest. Students are given vocationally relevant and complex case studies to help them understand the leisure and travel industries and develop their key skills. Learning for travel students is broadened by overseas educational visits to attractions such as 'Disneyland', the European Parliament, Tuscany and Rome. Teachers do not make enough use of ICT in their teaching, nor do they encourage its use by students.

93. The assessment of full-time students on catering and hospitality courses is carried out well. Students collect and record evidence of their acquisition of knowledge and skills effectively. Part-time students, however, receive insufficient assessment in the workplace, or under simulated work-based conditions. Teachers provide leisure and travel students with useful verbal and written feedback to help them improve their work. They monitor their students' progress carefully.

94. Students express their appreciation of the support they receive from their tutors. Tutorial support for full-time students is good. Full-time students take an initial assessment to identify their learning

support needs, but few take up the support provided. Guidance and support for part-time students are not well managed.

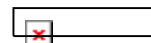
95. The provision in catering, hospitality, leisure and travel is broad and meets the needs of students effectively. Most part-time courses can be studied at times to suit individual students. Many students progress to higher level courses, work towards additional qualifications such as the food hygiene certificate, and take part in enrichment activities such as travel abroad. A school link course in catering with a local high school is well established.

96. Teachers are appropriately qualified and several have recent industrial experience. Most teaching rooms are suitably equipped. By working in the travel shop, training restaurant and pastry shop, students can gain experience of a commercial environment, and also gather evidence of their acquisition of a diversity of skills, for the purposes of NVQ assessment. Students on leisure and travel courses have inadequate access to ICT. Some equipment is not to industry standards. In catering, some accommodation is too small for the size of the group or type of lesson.

Leadership and management

97. Management of the programme area is satisfactory. Staff have a clear understanding of their own roles and those of their colleagues. Course teams meet regularly to discuss students' progress, but have only recently started to set targets for retention and pass rates and monitor progress towards achieving them. There is insufficient sharing of good practice, particularly in relation to teaching and assessment. The self-assessment report did not identify some of the important weaknesses found by inspectors.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

Strengths

- good teaching materials and resources
- good accommodation for beauty therapy
- high standards of work in portfolios of beauty therapy students
- success of many students in progressing to employment.

Weaknesses

- many low retention and pass rates

- poor assessment practices in hairdressing
- lack of clients for hairdressing students to work on for assessment purposes
- poorly co-ordinated on-the-job and off-the-job training for work-based learners.

Scope of provision

98. The college offers a broad range of provision in hairdressing and beauty therapy for both students aged 16 to 18 and adults. Full-time and part-time courses include those leading to NVQs in hairdressing at levels 1, 2 and 3 and beauty therapy at levels 2 and 3. Full-time and part-time courses are also available in holistic therapies. At the time of the inspection there were 110 students on hairdressing courses and 370 students on beauty therapy courses. The majority were studying part time. There were 25 modern apprentices in hairdressing. On beauty therapy courses most students were aged 19 or over, but on hairdressing courses the numbers of students aged 16 to 18 and over 19 were similar.

Achievement and standards

99. Retention and pass rates are low on many hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. The pass rate on NVQ level 2 in hairdressing in 2001 was significantly below the national average. In 2000, only 1 student out of the 14 who started the NVQ level 3 hairdressing course completed it. No modern apprentice has yet met all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. The retention rate on modern apprenticeship programmes has been very low, but it has risen in the current year. Pass rates are at or above national averages on some courses. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 beauty therapy course has been in line with the national average but it was high in 2000. Pass rates on courses leading to diplomas in holistic therapies and reflexology are high.

100. Students participate enthusiastically in group and practical work. They develop their practical skills well and work professionally with clients. Standards of students' work in portfolios are high, especially in beauty therapy. Students have made effective use of IT in the presentation of their work in portfolios. In theory lessons, students are keen to answer questions posed by teachers. Many students progress to employment. At the time of the inspection, 80% of the full-time hairdressing and beauty therapy students due to complete their studies at the end of the summer term had obtained jobs in the industry.

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	85	35	22
		% retention	*	*	77
		% pass rate	*	*	35
NVQ beauty therapy	2	No. of starts	*	*	31
		% retention	*	*	61

		% pass rate	*	*	78
NVQ hairdressing	3	No. of starts	16	14	9
		% retention	56	7	78
		% pass rate	67	100	86
NVQ beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	23	24	16
		% retention	100	92	75
		% pass rate	100	93	67
Diploma in holistic therapies	3	No. of starts	18	14	17
		% retention	89	79	64
		% pass rate	69	100	86
Diploma in reflexology	3	No. of starts	19	17	19
		% retention	95	71	82
		% pass rate	83	83	100

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

*data unreliable

Quality of education and training

101. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. Lessons have clear aims and objectives that are discussed and shared with students at the start. Teachers succeed in motivating students and maintaining their interest. Many teach their lessons enthusiastically and regularly check students' learning by either effective questioning during the lesson or through an appropriate test or task at the end. In a lesson for first-year hairdressing students, the teacher used a computer to give a presentation on the skills needed of a good receptionist. At various stages of the presentation, the students were asked to discuss what each task involved, how well it was done and what else the receptionist might have done. Good teaching materials include well-designed learning materials on theory which students can use on their own, and clear handouts and overhead transparencies. Teachers try hard to improve their students' communication skills, for example, by getting students to make presentations and take part in discussions.

102. In some practical lessons, there are not enough clients for students to work on for assessment purposes, and students are limited to working on practice blocks or each other, or spend the lesson completing their portfolios. Teachers do not always check that all students are working productively. In some lessons, the teachers' expectations of the students are not high enough.

103. There are poor assessment practices in hairdressing. The assessment documentation is insufficient and students are not given written feedback to help them improve their work. New assessment procedures have been recently introduced for learners on work-based programmes. Learners on these programmes are visited monthly in the workplace to be assessed or receive a review of their progress. There is, however, no co-ordination of training in the workplace and in the college. Employers are unaware of the extent of their employees' progress at college.

104. Most students are satisfied with the support they receive from their tutors. Careers guidance is good. Few of the students who are identified through initial assessment as needing additional learning support receive it.

105. In addition to those at Ashington, the college offers courses throughout Northumberland in reflexology, personal presentation and homeopathy. There is franchised provision with the National Therapies Institute for aromatherapy. Increasing numbers of adults are enrolling on hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. Many have individually designed timetables to suit their particular

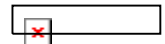
circumstances. The work experience programme for full-time students is well organised and enables them to gain a good understanding of the world of work.

106. The beauty therapy salons are of industrial standard. They are well equipped with appropriate décor and enable students to gain experience of working in a commercial environment. Part-time teachers who work in the industry keep students and full-time teachers up to date with the latest techniques and styles. Commercial hairdressing products are readily available to students. Hairdressing salons are poorly decorated and are not large enough to accommodate two classes easily.

Leadership and management

107. Management of the area is satisfactory. Roles and responsibilities within the school are clear and understood by all staff. Regular school and course team meetings are minuted but action is not always taken to address issues that arise. Some targets for retention and pass rates are not sufficiently demanding and progress towards reaching them is not monitored rigorously. Some course reviews are not carried out well.

Health and social care



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

Strengths

- effective teaching
- productive use of students' personal experiences in lessons
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- good work placements.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- low attendance rates

- failure to provide all students with sufficiently demanding activities
- poor management of college-based NVQ provision.

Scope of provision

108. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time provision in health and social care, early childhood studies and counselling. Courses are available from entry level to advanced level, as well as some at HE level. All full-time and most part-time provision is offered at Ashington. Some part-time courses are run at community-based venues in Blyth and Amble. At the time of the inspection, there were 195 full-time and 694 part-time students. Nearly 80% were aged 19 or over.

Achievement and standards

109. Retention rates on many courses are low and declining. In the last three years, the retention rates on the full-time Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in nursery nursing and the GNVQ foundation health and social care courses have each fallen from the national average to over 20 percentage points below it. During that same period, however, retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced health and social care courses have risen from well below the national average, to above it. Pass rates on many courses are in line with the national average. On some courses, the pass rates fluctuate considerably from year to year. For example, the pass rate on the basic counselling skills course was well below the national average in 2000, but rose above it significantly in 2001. All students who have completed the NVQ level 3 early years education course in the last three years have obtained their qualification. Pass rates on the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing course have risen over the last three years, but remain significantly below the national average. Both pass rates and retention rates are low for some college-based NVQ courses.

110. Most students' written work is well presented and of an appropriate level for their course. The majority of full-time students also gain additional qualifications. Most students, for example, achieve first aid and manual handling certificates. Students develop good practical caring skills both in lessons and when on work placements. Adults on basic counselling skills courses are able to relate theory to counselling practices well. Students' levels of attainment were satisfactory or better in all lessons. Students' achievements in key skills are low. During the inspection, the students' attendance rate for lessons was low, at 71%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	No. of starts	7	9	14
		% retention	71	67	50
		% pass rate	100	67	100
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	30	17	15
		% retention	60	65	87
		% pass rate	71	77	*
Basic counselling skills	2	No. of starts	132	131	132

		% retention	90	94	76
		% pass rate	82	63	95
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	No. of starts	40	52	44
		% retention	53	40	75
		% pass rate	90	84	72
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing (full time)	3	No. of starts	26	34	21
		% retention	77	68	52
		% pass rate	50	65	77
NVQ early years education	3	No. of starts	14	19	15
		% retention	64	37	53
		% pass rate	100	100	100

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

* data not available from awarding body

Quality of education and training

111. All teaching is satisfactory or better. Most lessons are well planned, with the individual learning needs of students sensitively considered. The aims and objectives of the lesson are shared with students. In the better lessons, teachers encourage students to draw on their personal and work experiences to help them understand theoretical concepts and to share ideas. In one lesson for childcare workers, students were asked to consider epilepsy and the different types of seizure in children. The teacher skilfully facilitated a good discussion and the students then produced a treatment and management plan, based on their experiences in a childcare setting. Students' practical skills are developed effectively. In lessons on counselling courses for adults, students receive good skills training as an integral part of triad work. Students aged 16 to 18 strengthen their practical skills through well-designed assignments in care practice.

112. In the less effective lessons, teachers provide students with learning activities that are narrow in scope. Some activities, whilst relevant, are insufficiently demanding for all students, who then become easily bored and distracted. Some teachers only involve a few students in discussions. Students are required to complete worksheets on key skills. These vary in difficulty and students are given worksheets that match their individual ability. The key skills, however, are not given a vocational context and students do not see their relevance to work in health and social care.

113. Assignments are carefully linked to schemes of work. They are well written and strengthen the students' learning. Feedback from teachers provides clear guidance to students on how they can improve their performance. Students' progress is recorded and monitored through a well-established and effective tutorial system.

114. Students are well supported. The tutorial system is effective. To ensure that prospective students receive comprehensive and objective pre-course guidance, two staff members from different subject-specific areas interview full-time students. All full-time students take an initial assessment to identify their additional learning support needs. Students on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses receive help with basic skills as part of their course. Additional learning support is provided for 11 students who have been identified as making little progress and at risk of leaving their course. This support is provided through a mentor system which is intended to raise retention and pass rates.

115. Students benefit from good work placements. The college's wide range of courses provides good progression opportunities for students. Through its membership of the Northumberland early years partnership, the college plans to offer a course leading to the CACHE playwork certificate,

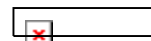
from September 2002. With the aim of widening participation, courses are provided in response to demand in community venues across the county.

116. Teachers have appropriate academic and professional qualifications. Several new appointments have been made recently. Specialist resources such as hospital beds, moving and handling equipment, first aid mannequins and childcare resources are readily available. Examples of students' work are displayed in classrooms. Students have good access to computing equipment.

Leadership and management

117. Management of the programme area is satisfactory. Entry requirements to the diploma in nursery nursing course have been revised, following consistently poor retention. The responsibilities of all members of the school are clearly expressed and well understood. Course teams meet regularly and communicate well with each other. Management of the college-based NVQ provision is poor and teachers do not apply the agreed procedures consistently. Data on courses are unreliable. Some data held centrally by the college differ from those held by course teams.

Visual, performing arts and media



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

Strengths

- high pass and retention rates on most level 3 courses
- excellent skills of level 3 and part-time art and design students
- good teaching on visual arts courses
- good teaching in lessons for students from different courses
- success of many art and design students in progressing to HE.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on GNVQ art and design courses

- inadequate accommodation and resources for performing arts courses
- some unsatisfactory teaching in performing arts and media technology.

Scope of provision

118. Courses are offered leading to diplomas in fine art, graphic design, photography, multimedia, fashion, textiles, media and drama respectively. There are also full-time art and design courses at levels 1 and 2, and a foundation studies art course at level 3. Part-time visual arts courses are offered in several centres around the county. Students can progress to higher level courses in multimedia and photography. At the time of the inspection, there were 120 full-time and 605 part-time students on visual, performing arts or media courses. Most part-time students were aged 19 or over.

Achievement and standards

119. Pass rates on most national diploma courses in art and design are well above national averages. Retention rates on the national diploma in design (graphic) and the diploma in foundation studies art and design are consistently high at 100%. Retention and pass rates on most General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and GCE Advanced level (GCE A-level) courses are high. However, retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design have fallen below the national average. Many students only have the minimum qualifications necessary for entry to their courses. Many students, however, progress to HE. In the last four years, 88% of all students on courses at level 3 have progressed to Higher National Diploma (HND) or degree courses.

120. The practical skills of students on full-time level 3 art and design courses are consistently good. Students on GCE AS art courses produce sketchbooks containing impressive developmental sketches. Their written notes are comprehensive and insightful. They use a wide range of media. On fine art courses, students use colour well and explore concepts thoroughly. Part-time students on photography and embroidery courses produce carefully developed work of a high standard. Students' achievements are celebrated through exhibitions of some excellent work. There are also displays of students' work in public areas of the college.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
City and Guilds photography	1	No. of starts	15	**	27
		% retention	87	**	78
		% pass rate	54	**	86
City and Guilds creative studies	2	No. of starts	14	*	22
		% retention	57	*	77
		% pass rate	*	*	75
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	No. of starts	10	11	9
		% retention	*	*	67
		% pass rate	*	*	17

GNVQ advanced art and design	3	No. of starts	*	*	13
		% retention	*	*	85
		% pass rate	*	*	82
National diploma performing arts	3	No. of starts	**	11	7
		% retention	**	82	86
		% pass rate	**	88	100
Diploma in foundation studies art and design	3	No. of starts	11	8	9
		% retention	100	100	100
		% pass rate	*	100	89
National diploma design	3	No. of starts	**	12	10
		% retention	**	100	100
		% pass rate	**	100	90

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

* data unreliable

**course not running

Quality of education and training

121. Most teaching in the visual arts is good. Teachers set students demanding and complex tasks, and encourage them to enjoy their learning. A critical studies lesson was brought to life by the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and the ability to elaborate on well-prepared lecture notes. By skilfully including references to pieces of artwork that the students knew, the students gained confidence in undertaking critical evaluation. Projects set by teachers are imaginative and capture the students' enthusiasm for their subject. Students on a three-dimensional course were set the task of designing a café for a disused church and building a scale model. The results of the project were imaginative and detailed. In many visual arts lessons, students working towards different qualifications are taught together. By good planning and effective collaboration, teachers ensure that the individual needs of the students are well met.

122. Some teaching on performing arts and technology-based media courses is unsatisfactory. In some lessons, equipment fails to work, teachers do not use the equipment competently, or resources are not available. Teachers have done little to rectify these weaknesses and ensure that they do not have an adverse effect on students' progress.

123. Well-designed and written assignments integrate theory with practical work effectively. The assessment criteria are clear. In their detailed verbal and written feedback to students, teachers take care to acknowledge good work while also including helpful suggestions on how it can be improved further.

124. Teachers give individual students excellent help with both course-related and personal problems. Attendance is carefully monitored and students must give reasons for absence. Staff in course teams give priority to helping students progress to HE. They give individual students good advice on which HE courses are most suitable for them. All new students are given an initial assessment, but this is not always effective as a means of identifying their needs for additional learning support.

125. Part-time courses leading to qualifications awarded by NCFE, City and Guilds and OCN are provided in centres across the county for those who cannot easily travel to Ashington. Students who complete these courses successfully continue their studies in the following year at a higher level.

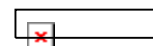
Students can take part in a comprehensive enrichment programme of visits to galleries and art shows. Some course teams, particularly those for media production and design (graphics), include part-time teachers who are practitioners in the industry. These part-time teachers help to strengthen links with employers. There are, however, few links between staff who teach on national diploma courses and the creative industries.

126. Teachers are suitably qualified and suitably experienced. There have, however, been some staff changes on performing arts courses and students have had the continuity of their learning disrupted. Students are able to use the excellent specialist art and design resources outside lessons. Few resources are available for performing arts students at Ashington. Most lessons are taught either in a classroom or a television studio, neither of which have been adapted to meet the needs of students on performing arts courses. Equipment for sound production does not work effectively or is unavailable and there is a lack of technical support for the maintenance of digital equipment.

Leadership and management

127. Management of the curriculum area is good. Teachers work closely together to ensure that courses are managed well and they aim to ensure that their teaching is consistently good. For example, the quality of support for students, assessment and feedback is good across all courses and there is much good team teaching. Course teams meet regularly to share ideas and review the work of their area. Although they have been unable to rely on data from the central management information system, data held at course level are generally reliable.

Basic skills



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

Strengths

- very good teaching
- good training for staff on the new core curriculum
- good individual learning plans for students.

Weaknesses

- failure to meet students' needs for help with literacy and numeracy
- narrow range of provision in the community and the workplace

- insufficient monitoring of students' achievements.

Scope of provision

128. The college offers basic skills courses. In addition, students on any course are given help with literacy and numeracy if they need it. Most courses are only offered during the day. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 60 students studying on literacy and numeracy courses at Ashington or Blyth. Nearly 300 students on vocational courses at Ashington and Kirkley Hall were receiving learning support during lessons from basic skills teachers to help them achieve their vocational qualification or a key skills qualification.

Achievement and standards

129. The college does not have a wide range of accredited courses in basic skills. College data show that the retention rate on additional learning support programmes has risen from 68% in 1999/2000, to 74% in 2000/01. In 2000/01, the pass rate on accredited courses in basic skills was 88%. Some data on retention and pass rates in this curriculum area, however, are unreliable.

130. Teachers take the results of initial diagnostic assessment into account when drawing up an appropriate individual learning plan for each basic skills student. Students are involved in the development of their plan, are clear about the purpose of their learning and what they must do in order to progress. Students are set targets and their progress towards reaching these is reviewed regularly.

Quality of education and training

131. In many lessons teaching is good or better. Schemes of work are well structured and lesson plans specify activities designed to engage students' interest and cater for their different learning needs. Lesson plans and individual learning plans take account of the new basic skills core curriculum. In the best lessons, teachers make learning relevant by relating the work to the students' vocational area or interests. In an effective lesson on horticulture at a community venue, the basic skills teacher worked with the vocational tutor to help the students improve their skills of literacy and numeracy through work on soil testing. The students were highly motivated and worked hard to develop the new skills of number required. Local authority employees on a work-based learning programme had developed good skills of communication, which they needed in their jobs. In one lesson, they used these newly acquired skills to produce presentations, leaflets and minutes of meetings to a high professional standard. The majority of teachers question students skilfully to check their understanding and encourage them to work out answers for themselves. On a course to attract young mothers back into education, the learning of new parenting skills included the development of literacy and numeracy skills. The course helped the students to gain self-confidence. Many now intend to enrol on a vocational course at the college.

132. In some of the poorer lessons, teachers fail to generate a sense of enthusiasm in the class, make learning exciting, and show students the relevance of the work they are doing. In some instances, the teachers go on to new topics which the students clearly do not grasp, without making sure they have fully understood the work they have done previously. Lesson activities are not always appropriate. For example, in a few lessons, the teacher was preoccupied in making sure the students completed an assignment correctly, at the expense of helping them identify the skills they had used and gain insight into why such skills are important.

133. Some 17 basic skills 'advocates' based in the college's schools have been trained to raise awareness of the importance of basic skills across the college, support other teachers and provide some of the learning support students receive as part of their course. All the teachers on basic skills

courses and the advocates either have an initial basic skills qualification, or are working towards one. Three members of the basic skills team provide City and Guilds courses and core curriculum training throughout Northumberland. The team does not include staff with specialist qualifications for helping students who are dyslexic.

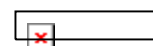
134. College-based basic skills provision is centrally located and easily accessible in the learning resource centres at both Ashington and Kirkley Hall. Students have good access to paper-based resources and IT facilities. Up-to-date software includes an integrated learning system for literacy and numeracy, which highlights students' weaknesses and provides remedial activities and exercises to help students rectify these.

135. Community-based provision includes a personal development programme for young women run in conjunction with the health service and a pilot course provided in the workplace for local authority workers. The college has been slow to respond to national strategies such as 'Skills for life', the Government's initiative for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of adults, launched in December 2000. There are few courses in basic skills at the community venues. Provision to help employees in the workplace improve their basic skills is at an early stage of development. The college has been unable to provide literacy and/or numeracy support for all the students who have been diagnosed as needing it. Some support was not available to students until halfway through their programme of study.

Leadership and management

136. A new basic skills co-ordinator was appointed in September 2001. Since then, the college has begun to implement an action plan to improve its basic skills provision. Management of basic skills provision is now good. Through a well-managed training programme, teachers have become confident in using the new core curriculum. Regular meetings are held between the basic skills team and the advocates. However, data to assist the monitoring of students' performance and the take-up of literacy and numeracy support, are not available.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- some excellent teaching
- skilful behaviour management
- excellent learning and tutorial support for individual students
- high retention and pass rates in 2001

- high standards of students' work
- good collaboration with social services and work experience providers.

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses.

Scope of provision

137. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time programmes at entry level and pre-entry level for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Three full-time courses are offered to school leavers. Those students with severe learning difficulties can follow a core curriculum, are provided with pre-vocational options and teachers help them to develop independent living skills. Students may spend up to three years on this programme. A one-year bridging course is provided for students with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties on which they develop academic, core and social skills and benefit from work experience. They can then progress to the one-year City and Guilds Skillpower course and this also recruits students from secondary schools. It includes a core curriculum, academic subjects, vocational options and work experience, and students can progress to a range of foundation level programmes. Part-time and full-time courses are provided for adults with greater learning difficulties at Ashington, Amble, Berwick and Hexham. Some provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is franchised to Learning First, a private provider. The company offers part-time courses in the community for adults with severe learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection there were 65 full-time and 531 part-time students enrolled on courses. Over 80% were aged 19 or over.

Achievement and standards

138. Many students achieve demanding targets. Retention and pass rates on externally accredited courses are well above the national average. Retention and pass rates on franchised courses are also high. Data on students' achievements on other courses are not summarised clearly. Data on individual students show, however, that many learners meet their performance targets. Most students from the bridging and Skillpower courses progress to an appropriate course at the next level in the college.

139. Students often produce work of a high standard. One student with severe learning difficulties was able, using Makaton communication equipment, to produce beautifully presented and detailed pencil drawings to record his learning. All students show that they have made good progress since their initial assessment. Many have improved their personal skills considerably. In one lesson, students with behavioural difficulties used role play to prepare for job interviews. They offered each other polite, constructive and helpful feedback. Students take pride in keeping their files up to date, with help from learning support assistants when necessary. Students are enthusiastic when describing their achievements.

A sample of retention and pass rates in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
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City and Guilds skillpower 2 years (16-18)	Entry	No. of starts	34	42	28
		% retention	76	64	96
		% pass rate	50	56	85
ASDAN workright (19+)	Entry	No. of starts	*	6	21
		% retention	*	100	100
		% pass rate	*	100	86

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

* course not running

Quality of education and training

140. Most teaching is good and some is excellent. In the best lessons, teachers provide individual students with learning materials matched to their particular abilities. They lead activities with enthusiasm and deal with behavioural issues calmly so that students can settle down quietly and learn without disrupting others. In an effective tutorial lesson, the teacher helped students to prepare for a residential course by developing their skills in working with others and making decisions. An elective mute was encouraged to use some yes and no communication. When she spoke the other students clapped her discreetly. The following day she said goodbye to the inspector with a huge smile. In one lesson, students enjoyed participating in a competitive spelling game in which they could choose a different coloured card relating to the level of difficulty. A score was kept by one student on the whiteboard and bonus points were available to encourage students to answer more and more difficult questions.

141. Students' work is carefully assessed and logbooks are kept to record students' progress in meeting the assessment criteria. Individual learning plans are produced for all students. Those for students with severe learning difficulties are produced after careful consideration of their immediate needs and their longer-term life plan. Some learning plans do not show how the targets will be achieved.

142. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. The assessment of their individual learning and support needs is thorough and includes consultation with care workers for those with communication difficulties. Behavioural difficulties are addressed sensitively. Targets for improved behaviour are identified and agreed with students. There are effective arrangements to support students who move from courses for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to other courses in the college.

143. Year 11 pupils from local special schools can sample the college's provision on a link course. Staff assess their needs and plan a suitable programme for them to follow when they join the college. Adult students with severe learning difficulties benefit from a supported employment initiative developed in conjunction with social services. All courses include enrichment activities and opportunities for students to use the independent living skills they have developed during their course.

144. Well-equipped classrooms at Ashington and Berwick are attractively decorated with displays of students' work. Access to IT is good and some classes are held in specialist IT rooms with excellent facilities including interactive whiteboards. Staff are well qualified and have good experience of working with students who have moderate to severe learning difficulties. Some students benefit from living in the college's residential accommodation.

Leadership and management

145. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very well managed. Self-assessment is used effectively to identify weaknesses, and staff work well together to address

identified areas for improvement. Part-time teachers take part in staff development activities and are active members of course teams. The use of value added analysis to measure the effectiveness of the provision is being introduced. Targets are specified for students in their individual learning plans, but there are not yet sufficient data to measure their progress in meeting these year on year.

Part D: College data

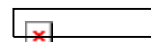
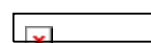


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

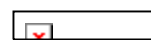


Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	27	27
2	40	31
3	25	16
4/5	0	0
Other	8	25
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

ote: The percentages in column 19+ have been rounded up and hence do not add up to 100

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	394	2,484	26
Agriculture	112	153	2
Construction	159	207	3
Engineering	233	195	4
Business	272	1,308	14
Hotel and catering	386	846	11
Health and community care	289	982	12
Art and design	142	342	4
Humanities	301	850	10
Basic education	61	1,251	12

Total	2,349	8,618	100
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Source: Provided by the college in spring 2002

Note: The percentages in Total Enrolments column have been rounded up and hence do not add up to 100

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
		1	Starters excluding transfers	399	517	571	808
	Retention rate (%)	83	85	84	88	89	88
	National average (%)	82	80	80	80	78	79
	Pass rate (%)	67	52	73	76	62	66
	National average (%)	59	62	66	61	63	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,066	1,082	1,010	1,414	1,711	1,775
	Retention rate (%)	84	84	75	86	88	84
	National average (%)	77	76	77	80	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	46	52	65	80	79	79
	National average (%)	63	67	68	66	65	68
3	Starters excluding transfers	722	625	613	992	1,157	1,337
	Retention rate (%)	77	82	72	83	84	84
	National average (%)	78	77	77	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	53	58	63	67	66	74
	National average (%)	70	72	73	63	65	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	3	12	0	116	68	174
	Retention rate (%)	*	92	*	93	93	88
	National average (%)	84	83	81	85	84	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	100	*	82	87	68
	National average (%)	64	65	69	58	61	60

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

* numbers too low to provide a valid calculation

Sources of information:

1. National averages: *Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England*, The Learning and Skills Council, September 2000.

2. College rates for 1998/99 - 1999/2000: *Benchmarking data 1997/98 - 1999/2000. Retention and achievement rates*, provided by the Learning and Skills council, September 2001.

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	72	17	11	74
Level 2 (intermediate)	65	25	10	72
Level 1 (foundation)	60	35	5	20
Other sessions	84	16	0	32
Totals	70	22	8	198

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