



Aylesbury College

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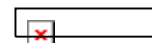
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Basic information about the college

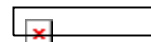


Name of college:	Aylesbury College
Type of college:	General Further Education College
Principal:	Pauline Odulinski
Address of college:	Oxford Road Aylesbury Buckinghamshire HP21 8PD
Telephone number:	01296 588 588
Fax number:	01296 588 589
Chair of governors:	Stuart Farrant
Unique reference number:	130607
Name of reporting inspector:	David Dana HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 April-3 May 2002

Part A: Summary



Information about the college



Aylesbury College, founded in 1962, is a medium-sized further education (FE) college. It draws most of its students from the central part of Buckinghamshire. The college operates on a main site close to the town centre, and a second site about three miles away. Within reasonable travelling distance, there are FE colleges at Amersham, Dunstable, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Hemel Hempstead and Thame. In addition, within the college's catchment area, all the local education authority (LEA) maintained schools have sixth forms. Buckinghamshire LEA operates a selective system of secondary education with transfer at the age of 12. There are also four schools providing education for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in the area. The LEA operates an adult education service in the town of Aylesbury and in other centres in the surrounding rural area.

The population of Aylesbury Vale in 1991 was 146,000. Minority ethnic groups form about 4% of the population. There are some 5,900 students (1,750 full-time equivalent) on roll representing some 10,000 enrolments, of which some 6,500 are funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There are 1,200 full-time and 4,700 part-time students. The majority of enrolments are to programmes at levels 2 and 3. Approximately 55% of the students are female, 25% are aged 16 to 18 and 8% have declared themselves as from minority ethnic heritage, with 18% of the students on roll in the 'not known' category. The college offers provision in all 14 areas of learning, although numbers are small in some of these areas. There are significant numbers of students enrolled on foundation modern apprenticeships, and advanced modern apprenticeships in six of the areas of learning. The fastest growth in employment in the area in the 1990s has been in the retail and distribution sectors.

The college operates with a senior management team of three comprising of the principal, vice principal and business director who provide strategic and operational leadership and management. The curriculum is taught in three faculties of business, services to people, and technology and the environment. Each faculty has a curriculum development manager and three or four course team leaders. A learning services manager has responsibility for the learning centres, additional learning support, careers and student support.

The college mission is supported by 10 strategic aims. The college mission is to:

- be an integral part of the community
- offer learners the opportunity to realise their maximum potential through education and training
- be first choice for post-16 inclusive learning.

How effective is the college?



Inspectors judged the overall quality of provision to be inadequate. A complete re-organisation of the college took place 18 months prior to the inspection and revised policies and systems have been introduced. Overall, achievements remain well below the national average for general FE colleges. Three of the curriculum areas and the work-based learning provision inspected were judged unsatisfactory. The retention rates improved in 2000/01 to near the national average for general FE colleges, but the pass rates remained well below the national average. The quality of teaching and learning is poor in too many lessons. Many of the policies, procedures and operational systems are new and have not yet had time to be applied consistently across the college. Inspectors judged the quality of education to be good for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Provision was satisfactory in construction, engineering, hospitality, hair and beauty, caring and humanities. Provision was unsatisfactory in the three areas of science and mathematics, business and professional studies and information and communications technology (ICT). Leadership and management were also unsatisfactory. The work-based learning provision in construction, hair and beauty and care were unsatisfactory with few apprentices successfully completing the full apprenticeship. The main strengths and areas that should be improvement are set out below.

Key strengths

- good range of vocational programmes and progression routes
- realistic self-assessment and improvements in quality assurance arrangements
- clear strategic direction
- good opportunities for appropriate staff development.

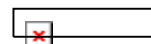
What should be improved

- low pass rates on many courses and low completion of modern apprentice frameworks
- consistent application of many of the recently introduced policies, procedures and operational systems across the college including students' attendance and punctuality
- quality of teaching and learning in some curriculum areas
- implementation of key skills across all provision

- target setting.

Further aspects of provision requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual subjects and courses in the full report.

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

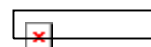


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum areas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the range: Outstanding (grade 1), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5).

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Unsatisfactory. The provision of science and mathematics at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate of Education Advanced level (A level) is unsatisfactory. GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) mathematics pass rates are low and the standard of work in most lessons is unsatisfactory. Much teaching on these courses is poor and the course management is ineffective in bringing about improvements. In contrast, the teaching and management of the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma in science is good.
Construction	Satisfactory. There are high retention rates and low pass rates on many courses. Changes in management are leading to improvements, including better monitoring of students' progress and provision of appropriate support. Some poor resources are adversely affecting some of these new initiatives. The work-based learning is unsatisfactory with few students completing the key skills element of the apprentice framework.
Engineering	Satisfactory. Pass rates are high in mechanical engineering and, overall, are satisfactory. Retention rates are low on some courses, but effective measures have been taken to improve them in 2002. Some resources and accommodation need updating. Management of the section is improving the quality of learning.
Business, administration and professional studies	Unsatisfactory. In business studies there is much ineffective teaching. Though rising in 2000/01, most pass rates are low, and management of the business and management section is poor. There are poor assessment practices and poor attendance and lack of punctuality on full-time courses. Pass rates on personnel and teacher education courses are high. Monitoring of students' progress is good on administration courses.
Information and communications technology	Unsatisfactory. Students who attend have a positive attitude to work. There is some good teaching, but most is too undemanding. Retention rates on the national diploma courses are unsatisfactory and pass rates on the major ICT courses are low. Assessment and

	feedback are good. Resources are generally good, but there is insufficient readily available reference material to support students' independent research. The management of some courses is unsatisfactory.
Hospitality and catering	Satisfactory. Good teaching in practical lessons leads to good development of skills. The students benefit from good learning resources and enrichment opportunities. Some retention and pass rates were low in 2001. The verification and the planning of the assessment of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) is not consistently effective.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Teaching is good. Resources and most of the accommodation are good. Pass and retention rates on courses are high. There are some poor assessment and internal verification practices. Work-based learning is unsatisfactory, with few students completing the full apprentice framework.
Health, care and public services	Satisfactory. Learners on NVQ programmes are appropriately challenged and portfolios are of a good standard. Work-based assessment and work experience for full-time students are good. Key skills are not integrated with full-time vocational programmes and work-based learning provision. Few students complete the key skills element of the modern apprenticeship.
Humanities	Satisfactory. There is much well-planned and effective teaching and some good achievements on the access programme. There are low pass rates on some courses. Assessment is at least satisfactory with some very good practice. Courses meet the needs of a wide range of students. In a few lessons, teaching is insufficiently demanding and information learning technology (ILT) is not used effectively.
Foundation programmes and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	Good. There is much good teaching and individual support. Students' individual learning programmes are well planned and monitored. Courses are well structured and students generally make good progress towards their learning goals. There are some poor resources and some college policies and documents, shared with students, are difficult for them to understand.

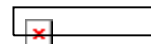
How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Governors have taken effective action to address previous failings and are committed to the success of the college. Many new systems and strategies have been put in place over the last 18 months. The college's strategic and operational plans give clear direction. Senior managers are providing effective leadership and have set priorities based on a realistic self-assessment of the current position. However, arrangements for monitoring the implementation of policies and priorities are not yet effective and there remain wide variations in the consistency with which they are applied. Teaching and learning in some areas remain weak. The implementation of the arrangements for key skills has been poorly managed. Retention rates have improved to about the national average, but pass rates remain well below the national average for general FE colleges. Low pass rates mean that there are many courses not providing value for money. The quality assurance arrangements are not applied sufficiently rigorously across all aspects of college operations. Improvements in the accuracy of management information are allowing better monitoring, but targets are still set at a whole college level and do not yet have the commitment of all managers. The funding targets have not been met for a number of years.

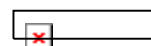
college, is well planned and is valued by staff. The college has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity and there are considerable efforts to implement and monitor its policies for equality of opportunity in all aspects of college life.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



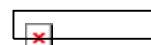
The college's approach to inclusion is good. It is strongly committed to equal opportunities and this is reflected in its strategic priorities. The college recruits students from a wide range of backgrounds. Enthusiastic efforts have been made to attract students from groups traditionally under-represented in education through the promotion of community-based provision. Links with schools and other organisations provide opportunities for students to have a wider choice of subjects available for study. A committee of the academic board promotes and monitors the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. Equality of opportunity is a regular agenda item on most college committees, although not always minuted. Equality of opportunity is a prompt for lesson observers and many reports indicate that considerable thought has gone into ways of promoting it in lessons. Staff development includes the promotion of strategies to ensure that students of differing ability within the same class are all treated equitably. This has resulted in changes in lesson planning and schemes of work. The well-managed support funds enable students to stay in education who for financial reasons might have to leave. However, the information available on the additional learning support needs of students is not used effectively to monitor all students who are at risk of leaving courses early. Students' knowledge of the college complaints' procedure is uneven.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



The college has a good range of support for students. The information and the initial advice available to prospective students are good, although the target that all full-time students receive a guidance interview is not always met. There is a clearly stated entitlement for all students to have tutorial support. Much of the tutorial support for full-time students is good, but there are some weaknesses that are not yet being addressed. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students are uneven across the college. Levels of attendance and punctuality of students vary across departments and there is inconsistency in the application of college policies to address these issues. Learning support assessment covers literacy, numeracy and other disabilities as appropriate and is effective, but take-up by students, although improved, remains low for the size of the college and the range of its work. The college provides an inclusive and effective response to students with disabilities. Welfare and careers guidance services are well planned.

Students' views of the college



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

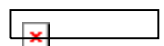
What students like about the college

- friendly and supportive staff
- good teacher and specialist support
- access to computers
- mix of students in the college
- being treated as adults.

What they feel could be improved

- management of aspects of some programmes
- lack of preparation for key skills assessment
- some aspects of accommodation
- some poor specialist resources
- quality and cost of refreshments in the refectory.

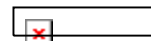
Other information



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.

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



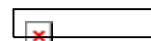
Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

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	55	31	14
19+ and WBL*	60	29	11
Learning 16-18	52	32	16
19+ and WBL*	61	30	9

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

* work-based learning

Achievement and standards



1. The college offers courses at all levels from entry level up to higher education (HE) courses. There is a good range of full-time and part-time vocational courses including work-based training programmes. The work-based training provision covers foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQs. A large proportion of the students aged 16 to 18 study vocational courses such as General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and BTEC diplomas and NVQs. The range of general education subjects at GCE A level and GCSE is more limited in line with college strategic planning. Most adults are enrolled on vocationally oriented courses, NVQs and short courses such as information technology (IT), to update skills. The distance learning short courses offered form an increasing role in the college provision. The college recruits students of all ages. At the time of the inspection, there were 325 students on modern apprenticeships and other work-based training provision.

2. As a part of the inspection, college data on students' achievements were analysed. Only the data for the last two years 1999/2000 and 2000/01 were considered sufficiently reliable to be used. The in-year retention rate for the college places the college in the lowest quartile for all colleges in 1999/2000. The college has improved its retention rate of students in 2000/01 to the national average at many levels of study. The most significant improvement has been in level 1 programmes for both students aged 16 to 18 and adults. The pass rates at all levels are below national averages by between 10% and 30%. The very low pass rates and the large number of students enrolled for

key skills at levels 1 and 2 has had a significant impact on the overall trends in pass and retention rates.

3. The average retention rates on advanced modern apprenticeships and foundation modern apprenticeship programmes using data provided by the college are low. The retention rates for NVQ training programmes are better than advanced modern apprenticeships and foundation modern apprenticeship programmes, but are still low. The percentage of learners going into employment from advanced modern apprenticeship, foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes varies considerably between subjects from satisfactory to poor.

4. Seventeen learners have recently completed the key skill elements associated with their apprenticeship programmes. They are in the occupational areas of brickwork, wood occupations, care, hospitality, hairdressing and painting and decorating. They have also subsequently achieved their modern apprenticeship frameworks.

5. Attendance and punctuality at lessons varied significantly. While the average attendance in lessons seen was about the national average this hid some wide variations. In some areas, such as construction, average attendance was poor. In engineering, attendance was good, but there was a lack of punctuality and, in business, students were not punctual and their attendance was poor. In computing, students were usually punctual, but selective absence by students affected their learning of particular topics. Attendance at key skills lessons was very poor with few students attending over the weeks leading up to the inspection.

16-18 year olds

6. The number of enrolments of students aged 16 to 18 studying GCE A level have fallen sharply between 1998/99 and 2000/01 from 250 in 1998 to 105 in 2000 and this age-group now forms only about half the total number enrolled on these courses. Most students studying at level 3 are taking advanced full-time vocational programmes, such as AVCEs and BTEC national diplomas or equivalents with a few studying NVQs. There has been some improvement in the pass rates of GCE A levels and GCE AS equivalents to 52% in 2000 against a national average of 73%, but they have fallen again in 2001 to 44%. The average points score for students entered for two or more GCE A levels or GCE AS equivalents was 7.6 in 1999/2000 compared to a national average of 18.5. This reflects the low numbers of students taking these qualifications and the number of sixth forms in the local schools who retain most students taking these qualifications. The retention rate for GCE A level was 75% in 2000/01. There has been an improvement in pass rates for GNVQs in 2001, but lower retention rates resulting in little overall change in the percentage of students who were ultimately successful. The NVQ level 3 pass rates have improved slightly, but remain very low at 23% in 2001.

7. The largest number of enrolments in 2001 were to level 2 programmes with some 1,600 enrolments. Of these, 170 were enrolled on GCSE courses and 390 on NVQs and about 900 on other long courses. Overall, the retention rate has been stable and is just below the national average, but pass rates have declined and, for 2000/01, are low, at 38% overall. The pass rates for GCSE A* to C are close to the national average at 52%. The NVQ level 2 pass rates have been consistent at 58% for the last two years. A significant factor in the low overall pass rates at level 2 was the poor college pass rates for other level 2 long courses where pass rates dropped to 20% in 2001. These courses include the key skills programmes where the pass rates were very low, but retention rates were very high.

8. There were significant numbers of students enrolled to level 1 programmes in 2000/01 with over 1,000 enrolments. The majority of these, some 900, were enrolments on to key skills programmes. A small number of students were enrolled on GNVQ and NVQ programmes. While, overall, the retention rate improved to the national average, partly because of the good retention rate on key skills, the pass rates were very low, at 29%, compared to the national average of 66%. In 2001, the GNVQ foundation programmes had a high pass rate of 85%, but the NVQ level 1 pass rate remained low, at 47%.

9. There is little assessment of students' prior learning except for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and here it is well used to promote their progress. Insufficient use is made of students' prior attainment at entry to predict or set targets for achievement or to measure learners progress in relation to what they might achieve. Standards of work achieved in lessons are satisfactory on most courses except GCSE and GCE science and mathematics. Students' communication and analytical skills are well developed on many courses, including hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care and humanities. On most vocational courses students' practical skills are being well developed with the exception of plumbing. The development of their key skills is poor, except in hairdressing and beauty therapy and some humanities subjects. Students are encouraged to develop their personal and learning skills through the wider key skills programmes of 'working with others' and 'improving own learning and performance'. Many students are entered at level 1 or level 2. Many students are developing their personal skills and self-confidence through these programmes and the developing enrichment activities provided by the college. Some students are also learning how to study on their own and use the library well for this purpose. There remain many courses where students' attendance, punctuality and failure to complete homework are contributing to poor performance.

Adult students

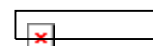
10. There were over 800 enrolments to level 3 courses. Some 600 of the enrolments were to vocational courses across the range of college provision, such as management and business courses, hair and beauty, engineering, construction and other professional development such as teacher training. Retention rates, overall, have been maintained at just above the national average for the last two years to 2001. Pass rates have improved slightly, but, in 2001, remained 10% below the national average. There has been a decline in retention and pass rates for NVQ level 3 courses to 60% and 27%, respectively, but there has been an improvement in pass rates in other level 3 vocational programmes. The remaining enrolments were mainly to GCE A levels and access to HE courses and retention and pass rates have remained consistently at the national average.

11. The largest number of adult enrolments were to level 2 programmes lasting for more than 24 weeks. Retention rates overall have been maintained at the national average for the last two years to 2001, but pass rates were poor and 15% below the national average at 52%. Both the retention and pass rates for NVQ level 2 programmes have declined between 2000 and 2001.

12. The level 1 enrolments were mainly to one-year courses that provide links into a range of employment. A few students are studying NVQ level 1 programmes. The retention rate improved to the national average in 2001. The pass rates have improved, but remain 20% below the national average. On vocational courses, adult students develop their practical skills well and gain in personal and self-confidence. Their key skills are poorly developed. The college does not take into account the prior learning of students or, except for students with special learning difficulties and/or disabilities, assess and record their attainment at entry so there are no data which it can use to measure how well students make progress while at the college.

13. There are variations to these general trends in achievements and more detail can be found in the individual curriculum sections in Part C of the report.

Quality of education and training



14. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 173 lessons covering 10 curriculum areas and the work-based learning provision in 3 areas. Teaching was good or better in 57% of these lessons, satisfactory in 30% and less than satisfactory in 13%. Learning was good or better in 56% of lessons, satisfactory in 31% and unsatisfactory in 13%. Teaching and learning were better for adults than for students aged 16 to 18. The highest proportion of good teaching and also unsatisfactory teaching was observed on level 2 programmes.

15. Consistently good teaching was observed in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in construction where over 70% of lessons were graded good or better. There was also a high proportion of good teaching in hairdressing and beauty therapy. The weakest teaching was in science and mathematics, business and professional studies and public services.

16. In the lessons that were good or better, careful planning and clear objectives ensured that the teaching took into account the range of individual needs and that the activities interested and motivated the students. In lessons with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, there was appropriate emphasis on reinforcing the work covered in the previous lesson before moving on to new material. In these lessons, there was good planning to ensure that the needs of individual students were met, good support from learning assistants and the learning materials were well designed with good use of graphics to interest and motivate the students. Role-play and formal and informal discussions were used well in several curriculum areas such as hairdressing and beauty therapy, health and social care and humanities to involve students in interesting learning activities and develop their communication and analytical skills. Students gained most from these lessons when they had been asked to prepare for the activity and were well informed about the topic to be covered.

17. In the best lessons on vocational courses, teachers planned well to ensure that effective use was made of their own industrial expertise and students' experiences in industry and the workplace to illustrate the theory being covered. Students were interested and motivated. This was particularly evident in engineering and hospitality. The best examples of practical work in vocational courses was when tasks and timings were clearly defined and there was effective team working between teachers and support staff.

18. In the unsatisfactory lessons, teachers failed to take sufficient account of the individual needs of students. In some lessons the activities, tasks and time limits set were not demanding enough for the students, and the pace of work was too slow to maintain students' interest. In other lessons, tasks did not take account of the concentration span of students and again their interest was lost. A common feature of a number of unsatisfactory lessons was the failure of teachers to make regular checks on students learning and their determination to continue with the planned work even when the students clearly did not understand it. In some lessons, there was poor use of teaching aids. For example, the screens used for overhead projectors were inappropriate and the projected image was too small for all students to see. Some handouts were used in a way that distracted the students from the key learning points being made in the lessons.

19. There were few good examples of the teaching of key skills and the college is reviewing its strategy for this. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, key skills were carefully integrated with assignments and group activities. In these assignments and group work, communication skills were developed and assessed and students were encouraged to use IT in projects. Opportunities to gather evidence for key skills are identified in some lessons in business and administration courses, but students fail to take advantage of this and teachers do not emphasise the need for gathering evidence. Not enough effort was made to identify and gather evidence for key skills through assignments and activities in lessons. In several lessons to support students studying for key skills, no students attended.

20. The college operates from two sites: the main site is close to the centre of Aylesbury; the Hampden Hall site is three miles to the south-east of the town centre. The college plans to build a new campus on the main site within five years. Most of the main site buildings are old and maintenance costs are high. Much of this accommodation is adequately maintained. Areas successfully improved include an independent learning centre with 85 computers, a refurbished multipurpose teaching room for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, improved access, and refurbished refectories. The new customer service reception area provides a welcoming and supportive environment for students. Most accommodation is accessible to students in wheelchairs. Accommodation occupancy rates are low. Teaching accommodation at Hampden Hall is good. A new combined library and learning centre has been built at Hampden Hall.

21. Much of the specialist accommodation and resources are good, although resources for some curriculum areas are spread across the main site and their use is not well co-ordinated. The

construction department has developed effective links with industry, which help to provide some up-to-date resources and equipment for students' use. Catering facilities are equipped to current industrial standards and provide students with good opportunities to develop practical skills. Good indoor sports facilities, a gymnasium and well-managed day nurseries are available for students' use and the refectories provide an adequate service. However, laboratory facilities for GCE AS and GCSE science are unsatisfactory, the engineering workshops are uninspiring and beauty salons are not up to commercial standard. Most classrooms are suitable, but heating control is difficult in a few areas, particularly in the tower block.

22. The libraries and computer suites are effective resources for research and individual work and are well used by students. The libraries provide a good range of books, videos and periodicals for loan and reference. They also have computer workstations and quiet study areas. Many teachers liaise with library staff to ensure that learning resources are up to date, sufficient and available for students' assignments. The college has invested heavily in computers for teachers and students. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers is now approximately 8:1 and is below the target the FE sector has set itself. In addition to the computer suites dedicated to teaching, two further suites provide good access to modern computers on a drop-in basis. There is no access to IT in some key classrooms such as those used for the teaching of mathematics or humanities. Four staff are designated as 'ILT champions' to help colleagues to make more effective use of IT in their teaching. Few teachers currently have the skills and experience of ILT to use it consistently well to improve learning.

23. Most teachers are academically well qualified and have appropriate vocational experience for the courses on which they teach. Many have first degrees or equivalent professional qualifications. A high proportion, 85%, hold or are working towards, a formal teaching qualification. Teachers have made good progress in gaining awards as assessors and verifiers. Professional development is planned in the context of individual appraisal, curriculum review and the strategic priorities of the college. For example, there has been staff training to develop a consistent approach to student tutorials. Most teachers have taken the extensive opportunities provided to improve their specialist skills and qualifications, but few hold key skills assessor awards.

24. Teachers in some curriculum areas lack recent industrial experience. Many part-time teachers use their valuable current industrial and professional experience well in lessons, but some have little teaching experience. Most new teachers receive an effective induction and are allocated a mentor. However, some do not receive support sufficiently early to help them with their teaching. Technical and administrative support staff provide good support for teachers. Staff awareness of health and safety issues is mostly good and this is reflected in their teaching. Routine monitoring of health and safety is carried out and risk assessments are completed, but sometimes these are not used effectively in planning lessons.

25. The college has a well-written and comprehensive internal verification policy. Internal verification procedures and assessment are thorough, but good practice is not always shared across the college. In some areas, such as business, procedures are not applied consistently and in other areas such as hairdressing the internal verification is not always well co-ordinated. Joint marking for moderation and consistency of standards takes place in some areas, particularly for new teachers. However, some weaknesses of internal verification, such as the lack of diverse evidence in students' portfolios, have not been identified.

26. Continuous assessment is used well to provide students' progress on most courses. Course handbooks in some subjects provide clear assessment information and guidance to students. However, assessment schedules are not always provided to full-time students at the beginning of their course and some assessment workloads are uneven. Assessment guidance and grading criteria is often clear and detailed and students fully understand what is expected of them. In several curriculum areas, a good range of appropriate assignments and other activities and feedback helps students to develop their understanding and improve standards. In these areas, marking of assignments is mostly systematic and accurate. Written and verbal feedback provided by teachers helps students to improve their work, but this is not always the case on some care courses. In some areas, such as beauty therapy, marked work is not returned to students quickly enough. In some other areas, the infrequent submission of homework by students makes assessment of progress

and the setting of individual targets difficult. Most assessment is set at an appropriate level, but some assignments are insufficiently challenging and do not develop students' research skills. Some assessments give students on advanced courses little opportunity to develop analysis, evaluation and planning skills. There is insufficient use of assessments on some courses to adequately monitor standards and progress.

27. Regular and timely review meetings with students take place on most courses. Feedback to students and the recording of their progress is generally effective. However, some tutorial records and learning plans used by full-time students, for example on hairdressing and ICT courses, contain insufficient detail to help students improve their standards of work. No formal arrangements exist to monitor students at risk of leaving courses. The assessment of key skills is not uniformly good. Some teachers and students do not fully understand the role of key skills within the curriculum.

28. Assessment practice in work-based training is uneven. The monitoring of students' progress in construction is effective, but is inadequate in hairdressing. Some students lack clear guidance on the apprenticeship framework and the standard and quantity of workplace assessment is poor. Many trainees do not have sufficient understanding of the assessment process and assessment is too infrequent. The quality of the evidence portfolios for some work-based trainees is poor. This has now been recognised by the college, however, and more recently compiled portfolios show improvements.

29. A good range of vocational courses are offered in all areas of learning, particularly at levels 1 and 2, along with a significant modern apprenticeship provision. However, the range of foundation level programmes is small. Account is taken of local employers' needs and of national strategies in determining the curriculum portfolio. Curriculum 2000 has broadened the range of options available and further collaboration with neighbouring high schools allows a broader choice of subjects such as GCE AS psychology to be offered. Collaboration is also providing Year 11 and 12 school students greater choice of part-time courses for qualifications that contribute to the achievement of their overall learning goals.

30. There is regular review of the curriculum portfolio. An annual planning event enables staff to review provision in the light of recruitment trends, employer needs and national demand. A sub-group of the academic board approves new provision and sanctions the removal of courses from the college portfolio. The monitoring and reviewing of courses varies in quality. Access to HE, provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and health and social care teams review courses well. Poor pass rates on GCE AS mathematics and science courses indicate that entry requirements to some qualifications may not be sufficiently realistic. The involvement of employers in work-based learning has been poor in the past, but employers report improvements over the last 18 months.

31. The implementation and management of key skills is weak. Taught sessions are poorly attended and badly managed. Initial assessment is not used to identify key skills levels for individual students. Students who have attended key skills classes regularly have not always been entered for the appropriate examination. Key skills evidence gathering is not emphasised sufficiently and portfolio completion is low. The majority of modern apprentices are failing to compile the necessary evidence to ensure they complete the full apprenticeship framework. There are some examples where appropriate action has been taken. Modern apprentices on the NVQ in administration knew which elements of their work could be cross-referenced and which required further evidence. Innovative key skills work was also seen in hair and beauty.

32. Enthusiastic efforts have been made to widen the participation of groups traditionally under-represented in education through the promotion of community-based provision. Although at an early stage, the strategy is proving to be effective in attracting students to access courses, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and basic skills provision. Curricular management and quality assurance responsibilities for this range of provision are unclear.

33. The enrichment programme is satisfactory. Some action has been taken to address the conclusion of a recent internal review that the programme was failing to meet the needs of all students. Individual activities, including photography, sports and modern languages are now spread

over the week in order to improve uptake. The activities are used by some departments, for example hospitality, to provide alternative certification. The creation of a garden as a Chelsea Flower Show entry provided BTEC students with a unique and challenging learning opportunity. The entry was judged the best courtyard and gained the show's gold award. Whilst keen to introduce further activities into the enrichment programme, the college does not possess readily available data upon which to measure the effectiveness of the programme or to create future targets.

34. Purposeful links with an appropriate range of agencies are recruiting in new curriculum developments. Increased opportunities to enter HE are being developed in conjunction with the Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College. Much of the widening participation work takes place as part of Buckinghamshire's Lifelong Learning Partnership. There are positive signs that these are providing students with a richer mix of options. A young people's university activity is being extended, and at a faculty level, the Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment project is improving the quality of learning for students with learning disabilities.

35. College prospectuses for full-time and part-time students are well presented. They provide prospective students with an up-to-date description of qualification routes and a comprehensive guide to courses. Development of on-line enrolments is well underway. There are links with local schools and the college contributes to local curricular and promotional events.

36. Learning services and customer service have undergone considerable organisational and staffing changes. Progress has been rapid. Both teams are responsive and provide students with an appropriate range of information, and initial advice. Communication is good and quality assurance procedures are being adhered to. Customer services staff, located in the college reception, are well informed and helpful. Revised enrolment and initial guidance procedures are in place, but the policy that all full-time students receive an initial interview through their faculty is not fully operational.

37. The college counselling service complements other student services well. It is open to all learners and also provides a work placement opportunity for students undertaking a counselling diploma. Some students' knowledge about the range of support services and the college complaints procedure is low. Other welfare services include childcare, accommodation advice and assistance in completing Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications. The learner support fund is used effectively. Uptake has increased over the last two years and the available budget is fully utilised. An analysis of the impact of the fund on student retention rates is currently being undertaken and is providing the team with data against which it can begin to measure success.

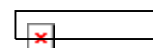
38. Systems are in place to enable students to have additional learning support needs identified at enrolment. All full-time students are screened for literacy and numeracy. In some instances, further screening is instigated for specific purposes, such as dyslexia. Additional learning uptake has improved considerably this year, but remains low for the curriculum provision offered by the college. There is, however, a lack of feedback to all students following initial assessment. The results of initial assessment are not used sufficiently to monitor students' progress and evaluate the effectiveness of additional support. Learning support assistants are well used. There is a particularly good example of effective and co-ordinated practice in courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; learning support assistants are trained, possess a job description and account is taken of their contributions in lesson plans. Full-time students in early years receive good support. Conversely, uptake in construction is poor. Some students have to miss lessons to receive additional support thereby falling behind in their coursework. Dyslexic students are very well served, but the quality of support for students with literacy, numeracy or ESOL needs is not always good.

39. The college places appropriate emphasis on tutorial support. All full-time students are allocated a personal tutor and attend a weekly group meeting that combines a tutorial programme with enrichment activities. A termly individual 'right choices' interview is also scheduled. The group meetings operate flexibly and cover areas such as careers guidance and the preparation of curriculum vitae, as well as providing an opportunity for tutors to help students with their portfolio development. Overall, students value the support they receive from their tutors. Tutorial practices are generally good. Where target setting is effective, students understand the tasks they need to undertake. However, the completion of tutorial review records by teachers is not always thorough. In

the poorer cases, records lack sufficiently detailed targets. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students are not so effective. The college holds regular parents' evenings and distributes reports on students' progress to parents and to the employers of work-based trainees.

40. Students' levels of attendance are at the national average, but there are variations across departments. There is often a lack of punctuality at lessons and teachers do not always question latecomers. Induction is the responsibility of individual faculties. Procedures involve a general introduction to the college and to the respective course. Overall, induction works well. Some faculties, ICT for instance, provide team-building activities or visits that encourage students to settle in quickly. Careers education and guidance is provided through a contract with the Connexions Partnership and is given primarily through tutor groups. A personal adviser supports tutors well and is on hand to carry out individual career interviews and advise the college on resources. The capacity of key staff to provide adult guidance has been improved as a result of Guidance Accreditation Board certification. The careers library is well stocked and has access to web sites and other software.

Leadership and management



41. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. After the last inspection, the college's financial position deteriorated and an external investigation revealed serious management failures. Governors took action to address the failures identified. A recovery plan was agreed with the funding agency. A complete re-organisation followed the appointment of a new principal in 2000. The principal and senior managers have set priorities for the college and improved the management structures to provide clear lines of accountability. They have introduced arrangements for monitoring the implementation of policies. However, some curriculum management is not yet effective and there are wide variations in the consistency with which policies and procedures are implemented. Weaknesses in teaching and learning in some areas have not been addressed with sufficient determination to bring about rapid improvements in quality. The college had little in the way of effective systems for quality assurance. These have now been introduced and are beginning to have an effect. Staff understand the importance of the strategies introduced to increase retention and pass rates. Retention rates have improved to about the national average for colleges of FE when the key skills retention rate, which is very high, is included. Pass rates declined in 2001. However, the pass rates for courses, excluding the results obtained for key skills, which were very low, show some improvement, but remain well below national averages. The college has not achieved its unit-funding target for a number of years. The current monitoring arrangements are more thorough and there is a clearer understanding of the exact position this year.

42. The college's mission has been carefully debated and has the full agreement and support of the governors and staff. They feel that the college has a particular aim to be inclusive and to support all students. In Aylesbury, they are working in an educational environment with grammar schools, other 11 to 18 schools and strong competition from neighbouring FE colleges. The college's strategic and operational plans give clear direction. The operational plans are clearly linked to the strategic objectives. However, there is insufficient rigour in their implementation leading to improvements in quality. More support and careful monitoring is required for some middle managers. For example, curriculum management in a number of areas, such as, mathematics and science, business, work-based learning and ICT is unsatisfactory. The management and implementation of the arrangements for developing students' key skills have been very poor. This has adversely affected the overall pass rates of the college and the ability of students on work-based training to achieve the full modern apprenticeship framework.

43. A course-costing model has been implemented very recently. This allows the college to be more realistic in its prediction of the level of funding being achieved. It is an important tool in setting targets at course level. The college is at an early stage in its development of target setting. Senior managers and governors set retention and pass rate targets at a whole college level. Some middle

managers have little commitment to target setting. The targets are not used effectively as a management tool to ensure improvement. Targets within action plans are often insufficiently precise.

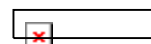
44. Lines of communication are generally effective. Senior managers are open and consultative. Staff feel well informed through team meetings, newsletters and informal contacts with senior and middle managers. Part-time staff are paid to attend course team meetings, college briefings and staff development events. Many of them value this, but there remain those who are not aware of course team meetings and feel somewhat isolated. There is a college intranet and many staff use e-mail effectively. There are a number of valuable links with local schools. The college is much involved with them and the local authority in considering collaboration in the teaching of the curriculum to students aged 14 to 19. The college also communicates well with a number of partners in order to widen participation locally. For example, they have effective links with the social services department to help adults with moderate learning difficulties and with the health authority to provide courses for staff to improve their IT skills. Effective links with Buckinghamshire Chiltern University College promote progression to higher level programmes.

45. A quality assurance system was implemented in September 2000. There is considerable support from staff for these new arrangements. The new framework has a logical cycle for reviews, self-assessment, audit and action planning. However, its implementation is not applied sufficiently rigorously across all aspects of the college's work. Students' views are identified through questionnaires, focus groups and through student representation on course teams. These views are taken seriously and actions to address issues implemented. A recent staff survey highlighted a large number of concerns. All of them have action plans to rectify the difficulties identified. There is a well-understood lesson observation scheme in place. College data indicate that only 38% of observations were considered good or better and 11% unsatisfactory. This compares with 56% good or better and 13% unsatisfactory lessons observed during the inspection. The self-assessment report is an honest reflection of the college's current position. Staff throughout the college have been much involved in its preparation.

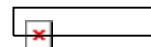
46. One of the ten strategic aims of the college is to promote equality of opportunity. There is a strong commitment to equal opportunities and to implementing the equal opportunities policy thoroughly. There has been much debate and consideration of the implications of the policy for the teaching of the curriculum. The equal opportunities committee of the academic board promotes and monitors the implementation of the policy. Equality of opportunity is a regular agenda item on most college committees. However, there are many examples where minutes do not record any discussion or outcome of this agenda item. The lesson observation documentation has equality of opportunity as a prompt for lesson observers and many reports indicate that considerable thought has gone into ways of promoting it in lessons. Staff development on ways of ensuring that students of differing abilities within the same group are all treated equitably has led to improvements to lesson plans and schemes of work.

47. Governors are well informed and committed to the success of the college. They attend board meetings regularly, attendance averaging 80%. Other committees are less well attended. There is a governor development programme that includes at least one formal development day a year. This is used effectively to review charters and strategic aims as well as to help governors carry out their duties more effectively. There is a new arrangement where governors are linked to curriculum areas or sectors of the college. This is giving them a greater insight into the life of the college. The learning services and quality assurance committee scrutinises students' achievements and where appropriate calls managers to account. This has been difficult in the past because of untrustworthy data. The accuracy of pass rate data produced since September 2000 is much improved. Nevertheless, low pass rates means that many courses are not providing value for money.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- effective management of BTEC national applied science (sport)
- good teaching on BTEC applied science (sport).

Weaknesses

- low pass rate on GCE AS mathematics course
- poor standards of work in most GCE AS and GCSE lessons
- unsatisfactory teaching on GCE AS and GCSE courses
- inadequate management of mathematics and science provision
- unsuitable laboratory facilities and equipment for GCE AS and GCSE science.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers a narrow range of science and mathematics courses. GCSE mathematics and science are available during the day and evening and GCE AS human biology and mathematics are offered during the day. A one-year evening class for GCE A-level mathematics started in September, but has few students still attending. The BTEC national diploma in applied science (sport) has not recruited enough students to run this year, although a small group of students are currently in their second year. GCSE mathematics is by far the most popular of the above courses and contains many students whose main programme of study is in other curriculum areas. The college offers application of number key skills at levels 1 to 3 which all students are entitled to attend.

Achievement and standards

49. The pass rate for GCE AS mathematics is low. In the last two years, only one student achieved a pass grade. The percentage of students obtaining at least a grade C in GCSE mathematics has been consistently at the very low national average for similar colleges. In science, GCSE pass rates have been inconsistent and dropped to a low of 10% in June 2001. Retention and pass rates for the BTEC national diploma in applied science (sport) have generally been at or above the national average, but fell slightly in 2001.

50. The standard of the work of many full-time students studying GCSE and GCE AS science and mathematics students is below that expected after almost a year of study. Students' files show little evidence of an appropriate amount of independent study and written work. In most GCE AS and GCSE lessons, the students are not demonstrating the skills and understanding required. For example, in GCSE mathematics, students have significant difficulties adding and subtracting simple fractions, dealing with negative numbers and manipulating standard form. In one GCE AS science lesson, students worked in a disorganised fashion without sufficient regard for safe laboratory practice. Measurements were taken with little care and results were recorded on untidy data tables or loose pieces of paper. BTEC science students carry out practical laboratory work in a methodical, safe and thoughtful manner.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	*	100	113
		% retention	*	76	72
		% pass rate	*	49	46
GCSE science	2	No. of starts	*	35	27
		% retention	*	60	78
		% pass rate	*	67	10
National diploma applied science (sports science)	3	No. of starts	*	16	22
		% retention	*	75	59
		% pass rate	*	83	69

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

* unreliable data

Quality of education and training

51. There is some very good carefully planned teaching, particularly on the BTEC national applied science course. The lessons are stimulating and teachers use a variety of appropriate methods. Schemes of work are up to date and contain a variety of interesting learning and assessment activities. Students respond enthusiastically and apply scientific principles well. The progress of these students is monitored carefully and weekly action plans are agreed.

52. Lesson plans are developed and used for all lessons. Course files contain comprehensive sets of plans. Schemes of work are effective in ensuring proper and timely coverage of the course content. In many cases, this documentation follows the college format and includes reference to learning styles and student activities. However, in a few instances, the schemes of work are a list of topics with little indication of the variety of methods or resources that could be used to help students learn.

53. In some mathematics lessons, there are good summaries to remind students of previous work, clearly stated lesson objectives and illustrations that link mathematics to real problems. However, the teaching of GCSE and GCE AS courses is frequently less than satisfactory. In many lessons, teachers fail to stimulate and motivate the students. While the students remain attentive, too often they are not challenged to think about mathematical and scientific concepts or to take an active part in the learning process. There is too much reliance on demonstrating methods for solving problems rather than discussing and examining the underlying principles. Students are not developing the appropriate level of understanding and confidence to apply their knowledge to new material. There is insufficient checking of students' progress and understanding in lessons. Teachers rarely direct questions to particular students to ascertain what they have learned. Homework is set weekly and teachers monitor the progress made by students through the work completed. However, few full-time GCE AS and GCSE students return the homework.

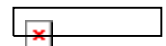
54. All GCE AS and GCSE students are allocated to a personal tutor who is available to provide support and guidance. The attendance at tutorials is very poor and hence few students benefit from the support on offer.

55. The science laboratory for the national diploma students is modern, suitably equipped and well managed. This contrasts with the poor state of the science laboratory used by GCSE and GCE AS science students. This laboratory is not effectively organised to promote appropriate safe working practices with students. A technician has recently been appointed, but has yet to receive appropriate health and safety training.

Leadership and management

56. Science and mathematics are poorly organised. Teachers on the academic programmes do not meet as a team to discuss teaching and learning and few formal procedures are in place to monitor students' attendance, punctuality, progress and achievement. Those systems that do exist are ineffective in bringing about improvements. Inexperienced and unqualified staff, while enthusiastic and committed to their students, are working with little support to help them improve their teaching. The college has recognised some of these issues and, as part of an on-going action plan, has recently appointed a co-ordinator for mathematics and science. By contrast, there is effective management of the BTEC national applied science (sport) course. The team meetings are regular and minutes identify specific actions. Quality assurance procedures are in place on the course and are effective in ensuring that the quality of provision is maintained. The self-assessment for the science and mathematics area was accurate in its overall judgement of the quality of provision, but it did not focus sufficiently on the learning experience of students in the classroom.

Construction



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

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

Strengths

- high retention rates on many courses

- good teaching on many courses

- very good system for monitoring students' progress
- effective school and industry links
- effective improvements by new management team.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many courses
- low framework completions on work-based learning
- little work-based assessment
- some out-of-date books and inadequate tools and equipment
- weak induction and mentoring for new staff.

Scope of provision

57. Construction courses include a foundation GNVQ in construction and the built environment, and craft courses in brickwork, wood occupations, painting and decorating, mechanical engineering services and electrical installation up to NVQ level 3. Short courses are provided in electrical testing and gas safety. Construction is based at the main Oxford Road campus. An increasing number of students are studying on modern apprenticeship schemes.

Achievement and standards

58. Retention rates on most courses are significantly above national averages, particularly in 2000/01. For example, brickwork and electrical installation are approximately 10% above the national average. An exception is painting and decorating which has had low retention rates. Pass rates on most courses are well below the national average. No students, from 111 starters, have gained an electrical installation NVQ level 3 over the last two years; some students have not completed their portfolios and staffing difficulties have prevented student work from being fully assessed. Many students, particularly those on modern apprenticeships, are taking a long time to

achieve their qualifications. Few students achieve key skills qualifications. This has meant that only 12 apprentices have completed their full apprenticeship framework.

59. Students display a high level of practical competence in the college workshops and in their work-based training locations. Students participate in regional skill competitions and two students have won 'silver trowel' awards presented by the National Federation of Builders. The average attendance was poor during the inspection, at 69%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	*	14	12
		% retention	*	50	75
		% pass rate	*	43	100
NVQ bricklaying	2	No. of starts	*	17	32
		% retention	*	71	66
		% pass rate	*	56	79
NVQ painting and decorating	2	No. of starts	*	15	10
		% retention	*	53	50
		% pass rate	*	33	40
City and Guilds 2391 inspection and testing	2	No. of starts	*	38	19
		% retention	*	91	95
		% pass rate	*	63	22
NVQ carpentry and joinery	2	No. of starts	*	39	48
		% retention	*	79	71
		% pass rate	*	50	48
NVQ electrical installation	3	No. of starts	*	43	77
		% retention	*	77	87
		% pass rate	*	0	0

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

60. The quality of teaching is good on many courses. Some 75% of lessons observed were graded as good or better. In the best lessons, students achieve a high standard of work. There is effective team teaching that provides close support to enable individual students to learn productively. However, there is some poor practice and undemanding teaching. In some lessons, teachers did not plan or effectively manage learning and some could not use equipment correctly to make new presentations. A few timetabled key skills lessons did not take place due to the non-appearance of designated teachers.

61. Students have good access to ICT facilities and to video resources within construction. Further relevant CD-ROMs are also available through the college computer network. The library contains many dated textbooks. Some new capital equipment has been ordered recently, for example, a

replacement mortar pan and some woodworking machinery. Other resources require updating include hand tools and a roofing rig. There is insufficient space for the storage of decorative materials. There are some health and safety issues concerned with portable electrical appliance testing and the application of Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) and risk assessments in the workshops. There has been a large staff turn over during the last 18 months. This has led to staff shortages at times. A number of new teachers have yet to undertake teacher, assessor and verifier training. A shortage of workshop technician staff means that teachers often have to undertake material preparation work during lessons.

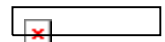
62. There is an excellent and well-developed monitoring system for the assessment of students' skills. Students' progress is regularly monitored and their assessment needs identified. Internal verification is effective and well managed. It is strengthened by the collaborative involvement of verifiers from another local college. It is not so effective in plumbing. On work-based training, there has been insufficient assessment of practical skills in the work place. A team of assessors is now being trained to carry out this assessment.

63. Tutorials are effective. All full-time and part-time students have an individual tutorial every six weeks which results in an individual action plan being agreed with them. The number of students receiving additional support is low. Only seven students are receiving support. Full-time students are able to take courses outside their main course to develop, for example, their football and catering skills. Progression to further construction-related courses is possible through collaborative links with other local education institutions. A range of introductory link programmes are run for local schools in conjunction with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) curriculum centre.

Leadership and management

64. A new management structure has been implemented. Critical improvements have been made to the management of the provision. However, staff turnover and the need for new staff have hindered the process of change. The induction and mentoring of new staff who lack teaching qualifications is unsatisfactory. At the time of the inspection, some changes were too recent for their impact to be evaluated. The regular course team meetings have improved communications. Student retention rates are a standard agenda item. The appointment of vocationally specific work place advisers has led to improvements in communications between the college and the work place.

Engineering



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on mechanical engineering technician course in 2000/01
- good teaching
- excellent computer-aided drawing resources

- effective management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rate on level 1 and level 2 courses in 2000/01
- failure of teachers to check students' progress in lessons
- lack of punctuality of students in some lessons
- drab and uninspiring workshops
- outdated car stock.

Scope of provision

65. Engineering courses are offered in motor vehicle servicing and body repair, mechanical engineering, welding and fabrication, electronics and computer-aided drawing. Full-time courses are available at levels 2 and 3, and a variety of craft and technician part-time courses are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3. There is a foundation course in motor vehicle engineering, but not in mechanical engineering. There are no engineering NVQs.

Achievement and standards

66. Retention rates on many of the level 1 and 2 courses were low in 2000/01. A number of measures have been put in place to redress poor retention rates. Data for the current year suggest that retention rates have risen or remained the same on the majority of the courses. However, retention rates have fallen significantly on the full-time diploma course and the final year of the motor vehicle body repair course. Pass rates are generally satisfactory with some high pass rates on the full-time and part-time mechanical engineering technician courses, in 2000/01. The national diploma results are particularly high.

67. The levels of learning and student attainment are satisfactory. The work produced by the students is generally of a satisfactory standard and there are some examples of higher standard work. Attendance in classes observed during the inspection was 84%. Students are not punctual at some lessons.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
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City and Guilds 3992 motor vehicle repair and maintenance	1	No. of starts	*	39	12
		% retention	*	81	42
		% pass rate	*	87	40
First certificate engineering	2	No. of starts	*	47	53
		% retention	*	93	58
		% pass rate	*	22	87
City and Guilds 2280 production engineering	2	No. of starts	*	*	17
		% retention	*	*	72
		% pass rate	*	*	50
City and Guilds 4351 autocad	2	No. of starts	*	*	14
		% retention	*	*	86
		% pass rate	*	*	92
National diploma in engineering	3	No. of starts	*	10	12
		% retention	*	80	83
		% pass rate	*	86	100
National certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	*	48	25
		% retention	*	80	88
		% pass rate	*	17	79

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

* unreliable data

Quality of education and training

68. Teachers use a wide range of appropriate teaching methods during many theory and practical lessons and closely relate the subject matter to the experience of students. This motivates students and improves their understanding of the subject. Teachers make good use of their own industrial experience to initiate discussions in lessons. Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm for their subject. Notes and handouts are of at least a satisfactory standard. Good use is made of the whiteboard to develop difficult theory and to explain complicated diagrams such as those relating to alternating current theory and the working of alternators. Visual aids are used well to supplement written material. For example, in a motor vehicle foundation class, good use was made of the main parts of a cooling system to explain their function and to extract responses from the students. Appropriate emphasis was placed on health and safety in lessons. Teachers do not always check that learning is taking place. In some lessons they do not use appropriate question and answer techniques to check students' learning or to ensure that the objectives of the lesson have been achieved. Insufficient use is made of practical work to support the theory teaching.

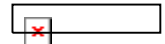
69. There are excellent resources for computer-aided drawing and some new software packages have been introduced for computer-aided machining. The equipment used for practical training is dated, but fit for purpose. It meets current legislative requirements regarding health and safety. The workshops are drab and uninspiring, and some accommodation is inappropriate. The motor vehicle car stock is dated and students do not value working on the cars. There is a high proportion of new teachers. Teachers are suitably qualified and very experienced in their occupational areas. Some are not teacher trained. Teachers are offered staff development opportunities and most full-time staff are undertaking some form of training including being trained to teach key skills. Term-time only teachers are offered in-house training opportunities.

70. The college is contracted to provide key skills training for one of the managing agents. Fifty-one students are involved. All the students have been screened for key skills and their exemptions have been formally accredited. Assessment systems are satisfactory and fair with work usually being handed back within an appropriate period of time. Internal verification systems are suitably rigorous.

Leadership and management

71. Much progress has been made in improving the quality of the engineering provision. A new management structure has been introduced and there is good support from the head of faculty. The management is suitably focused on improving quality and stability within engineering. Change has been rapid. Frequent team meetings have kept teachers informed about the reasons for change and the teachers have positively accepted the need for change. Term-time only staff are paid if they attend team meetings, but their attendance varies. Three external verifiers have commented very positively on the improved quality and development of the section and their gradings have improved from less than satisfactory to satisfactory or better.

Business, administration and professional studies



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on Certificate in Personnel Practice
- good teaching and learning on teacher education courses
- good monitoring of students' progress on the NVQ in administration.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many courses
- poor attendance and lack of punctuality of full-time students on business studies courses
- much unsatisfactory teaching
- very poor assessment practices on GCE AS, GCE A-level and AVCE business studies

- poor management of business and management courses.

Scope of provision

72. There are full-time courses in GCE AS and A levels in business studies, intermediate GNVQ and AVCE in business, and business administration at level 2. These courses recruit mainly students aged 16 to 18. The college offers courses for progression to Higher National Diploma (HND) business, but does not provide any level 1 provision for full-time students. There is a wide range of part-time courses, mainly in accounting, teacher training and marketing. Much of this provision is at Hampden Hall. There is also modern apprenticeship training in administration and accounting and an expanding distance learning provision.

Achievement and standards

73. Pass rates are high on the Certificate in Personnel Practice and the Further and Adult Education Teaching Certificate. However, they are poor on most other courses. Both pass and retention rates improved on most major courses in 2000/01. However, pass rates are still below national averages on the majority of these courses. Retention rates are generally satisfactory. Achievement of full modern apprenticeship frameworks in accounting and administration are very poor. From 1996, no trainee has achieved the whole qualification nor passed key skills.

74. The progress of current administration students is good and they are developing their skills to a suitable level for employment. Accounting students are developing skills at an appropriate level and were accurately coding entries for invoices and producing spreadsheets for sales revenue forecasts. Students on GCE AS and GCE A-level courses had been set very little assessed work during the year and their lack of practice in developing analytical and evaluative skills was evident in their recent written and oral work.

75. There was a low attendance rate of 69% in classes observed during the inspection. Attendance on full-time courses in business studies is particularly poor. Students' lateness is also a problem on these courses. Classes were disrupted by the late arrival of students. There was no consistent strategy amongst teachers to deal with these problems.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ accounting (1 year)	2	No. of starts	*	60	31
		% retention	*	75	97
		% pass rate	*	33	33
GNVQ advanced (2 year)	3	No. of starts	*	47	37
		% retention	*	68	65
		% pass rate	*	42	54
GCE A-level business studies (1 year)	3	No. of starts	*	13	14
		% retention	*	54	93
		% pass rate	*	0	38
NVQ administration	3	No. of starts	*	8	13

		% retention	*	75	92
		% pass rate	*	17	30
Further and Adult Education Teachers Certificate	3	No. of starts	*	*	44
		% retention	*	*	93
		% pass rate	*	*	79
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	*	21	19
		% retention	*	81	100
		% pass rate	*	94	100

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

76. Some teaching is very good, but a high proportion is satisfactory or unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers involve students in discussion, analysis and evaluation, set demanding work and draw upon students' experience of work effectively. In an intermediate GNVQ lesson, students clearly understood the legal basis of after sales service and the teacher exploited the interest in ethical issues surrounding the use of data acquired by retailers to encourage students to develop their ideas and oral skills. In a Certificate in Personnel Practice lesson, the teacher cleverly checked and reinforced learning by questioning students about the lesson objectives. However, in a significant number of lessons, teachers rely too much on their own explanation of a topic. Students are only infrequently involved and their learning is checked only cursorily. Some teachers do not use the overhead projector effectively. In discussions in GCE AS and A-level lessons, teachers do not make students think deeply. There is little use of learning materials that take account of the different abilities of students in lessons.

77. Teaching accommodation is generally good, although there is a lack of curriculum identity in many of the rooms. Classrooms, training suites and the learning centre at the Hampden Hall are suitably furnished and resourced for management and professional courses. Rooms at the main campus are spacious. The well-equipped office provides realistic work experience for administration students. There is good access to computers for students on the main site, although there are problems with printers and the slowness of the network. Most full-time teachers have teaching qualifications or are undergoing training. There are good opportunities for staff development.

78. The assessment of students' work and monitoring of their progress is not carried out consistently by all staff. Students' progress on NVQ administration is very thoroughly assessed and involves frequent and comprehensive reviews with individual students. Students are clear about their progress and the work they need to do. Opportunities to gather evidence for key skills portfolios are identified for some modern apprentices to support their completion of the full qualification, but this is not followed up. Assessment practice is very poor on GCE AS/A-level and AVCE business studies, with students given few assignments. AVCE students are not sure about how their qualification is graded or of what they need to achieve for acceptance for university entrance. Feedback on students' work on full-time business studies courses does not give students enough guidance on how to improve their work. However, feedback on part-time students' work is generally good.

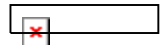
79. Initial assessment is not used consistently as a basis for planning teaching and learning or to support students on full-time business courses. In 2000/01, there was no initial assessment for AVCE business students and it was not used constructively in 2001/02. Opportunities for students to develop key skills on business studies courses are poorly organised. Some AVCE students were entered for key skills tests with insufficient prior tuition and preparation. Modern apprentices studying accounting are unclear about the work they need to do for key skills.

80. Most full-time students do not value their group tutorial sessions. They find individual tutorials more beneficial. Tutorial record keeping and target setting is still being developed.

Leadership and management

81. Leadership and management in the business and management section are poor. Although a faculty strategy has been set up to develop consistent approaches to self-assessment, review, action planning and improvement, it has yet to have an impact. Self-assessment reviews at course and section level lack rigour. There is generally little analysis or detailed review of retention and pass rates involving the use of performance indicators. Clear targets for improvement are not set. Action plans are vague. They are generally not followed through. Internal verification in the business and management section is poor. It does not take place at all on some courses. In administration, quality assurance procedures are applied with growing effectiveness and internal verification is thorough.

Information and communications technology



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

Strengths

- good range of courses with opportunities for progression
- good induction procedures
- good computing facilities.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on some courses
- unsatisfactory retention rates on the national diploma course
- insufficiently demanding teaching
- unsatisfactory management of some courses

- poor use of assessment.

Scope of provision

82. The college offers a good range of full-time computing courses with progression routes from the GNVQ foundation in ICT through the GNVQ intermediate to the AVCE and BTEC national diploma in computer studies. There is also a range of part-time courses in programming, IT and Internet skills to meet local community needs.

Achievement and standards

83. The retention rates on ICT courses are uneven. The new GNVQ foundation course has good retention rates, but retention rates on the BTEC national diploma course are unsatisfactory and, in 2002, the retention rate on the GCE AS course is also low. For those students completing courses, pass rates are below the national average on the BTEC national diploma, AVCE courses and the GNVQ intermediate course and close to the national average on other courses.

84. The standard of students' work observed in lessons and in students' files is mostly sound. Some good work was seen in the GNVQ foundation course and there was some good attainment on the fast-track advanced diploma course. There were also, however, cases of unsatisfactory attainment. Some students in the second year of the AVCE ICT course had an inadequate knowledge of the Visual Basic programming language for the task set.

85. Some students develop good personal and learning skills. On the GNVQ foundation course students working in small groups were required to discuss and make notes on topics. They were quiet and attentive when required to listen to the comments made by others. However, students are not encouraged enough to research their work thoroughly. For example, a national diploma student who had produced a high quality library administration program had not compared it with the system in the college library.

86. In general, students seen in lessons have a good attitude to work and most arrive punctually. However, a significant number of students did not attend all the lessons on a given day. This internal truancy is having a detrimental effect on attainment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ ICT intermediate	2	No. of starts	*	25	24
		% retention	*	71	75
		% pass rate	*	53	53
National diploma computing	3	No. of starts	*	20	24
		% retention	*	63	42
		% pass rate	*	50	50
AVCE ICT	3	No. of starts	*	22	25
		% retention	*	71	77
		% pass rate	*	33	33

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

* ***data unreliable***

Quality of education and training

87. Teaching and learning in computing were mainly satisfactory. The best teaching was seen on the GNVQ foundation and the fast-track advanced diploma courses. The teaching seen on adult IT courses was good. Teachers established good relationships with students, set appropriate tasks, assessed work well and monitored students' progress accurately. This ensured a high standard of work. The best lessons were planned and structured well and teachers used a variety of methods to maintain students' interest and ensure that all students understood the topics introduced. For example, in one GNVQ foundation lesson on the use of macros, the teacher set unambiguous objectives for the group, dealt with late arrivals effectively, revised previous work and introduced the new topic clearly. Students were required to discuss the work in small groups and responded well.

88. However, teaching is often pedestrian and is undemanding. In a computer studies lesson on database files, for example, the students' attitude to learning was good; they were interested and attentive. However, their rate of working and response to questions were slow and the teacher did not make them think for themselves. Sometimes the teacher had given insufficient thought about the learning to be achieved and the teaching proved ineffective. In a GCE AS computing theory session on recursion, the teacher continued with the lesson plan even though it was obvious that the students had failed to grasp the concept.

89. Overall, the computing facilities are good and there is a good environment for students' practical work. However, computer projection facilities are not readily available for computing students and demonstrations to groups of students are difficult to manage. In a GNVQ intermediate ICT lesson, the teacher attempted to introduce a new computer package for designing Internet web pages in a room intended for students' individual work. The teacher had to explain the same material many times and some students sat idle for much of the lesson.

90. While there is reference material in the college library, there is little resource material in the computing area and students engaged in project work have no ready access to appropriate reference manuals and materials. A student seeking to format two word-processed lists into columns could not look up the procedure and had to wait for the help of a teacher.

91. Assessment is generally sound. Teachers assess students' project work well and seek to build on students' prior attainment. However, assessment is mainly concerned with making summative judgements rather than identifying weaknesses and planning future work. At present, there are no formal systems in place to ensure that students have understood a topic before moving on to the next area of learning.

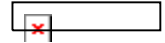
92. There is a good induction programme for new students that includes both social and subject-related visits. Teachers have a good relationship with students and provide effective support to students both formally and informally in lessons. If a student initiates the process and states that they are having problems, they receive appropriate help quickly. However, there are insufficient mechanisms in place to identify students who are at risk of leaving the course. Teachers are usually aware of students' individual needs, but in lessons where there is a serious imbalance between the sexes, the needs of female students are not always addressed, as the male student majority tends to dominate.

Leadership and management

93. The team leader has been in post for only a relatively short period of time and inherited a number of significant weaknesses. Since her appointment, a number of improvements have been made. For example, teachers are observed teaching on a regular basis and the observations are used to inform improvements. Although areas of weakness are usually identified well, a number of

issues remain. For example, there is ineffective management of some courses. Insufficient attention has been given to low pass and retention rates, internal truancy and the inadequate use of assessment to help students plan their future work.

Hospitality and catering



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

Strengths

- much good teaching
- effective development of students' practical skills
- valuable enrichment opportunities for full-time students
- good practical resources to support learning.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many courses in 2001
- low retention rates on some courses in 2001
- inappropriate planning for NVQ assessments in college
- poor resourcing of evidence in some NVQ portfolios.

Scope of provision

94. There are full-time and part-time courses in hospitality and catering courses. NVQ courses are available in food preparation and cooking at levels 1, 2 and 3, serving food and drink at level 2, restaurant supervision at level 3 and housekeeping at level 1. National diploma, AVCE, food safety,

national licensees' certificate and basic and advanced pastry courses are also available. Induction and tutorial programmes include introductions to health and safety, food hygiene, applying for jobs and other relevant employment topics. School-link programmes help pupils to progress successfully to hospitality and catering courses.

Achievement and standards

95. Retention rates are satisfactory or better on the food preparation and cooking NVQ courses. Retention rates on serving food and drink level 2 and the advanced GNVQ courses were low in 2001. The pass rates for the food preparation and cooking NVQ at level 2 are above the national average. The pass rates for the food preparation and cooking NVQ at level 3, national licensees' certificate and the advanced GNVQ were low in 2001. The retention rates on most courses in the current academic year have improved. The retention and pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 are similar to those of adult students. The standards of attainment observed in lessons are satisfactory and much of the students' work is good. The majority of students gain awards in addition to their main qualification. All students achieve a basic hygiene certificate. Most students go on to gain relevant employment in industry or continue to higher level courses in hospitality and catering.

96. Students demonstrate a high standard of technical skills in the kitchens and restaurant. They achieve high standards in food preparation, cooking and food service. Students work well together as a team and display good social skills when dealing with customers. Some students' portfolios, however, are poorly completed, with some evidence being inaccurately recorded. Student attendance is very good.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Food preparation and cooking NVQ (2 year)	2	No. of starts	*	60	26
		% retention	*	70	88
		% pass rate	*	74	87
Food and drink service NVQ (1 year)	2	No. of starts	*	44	26
		% retention	*	89	54
		% pass rate	*	63	78
Food preparation and cooking NVQ (2 year)	3	No. of starts	*	6	7
		% retention	*	83	67
		% pass rate	*	100	50
National licensees certificate (short)	3	No. of starts	*	*	221
		% retention	*	*	100
		% pass rate	*	*	69
GNVQ advanced (2 year)	3	No. of starts	*	*	7
		% retention	*	*	57
		% pass rate	*	*	25

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

* unreliable data

Quality of education and training

97. There is much good teaching in practical and theory lessons. Lessons are generally well structured. Students have well defined roles in production kitchens and in the restaurant which is open to the public. Teachers use some good learning materials for theory and practical subjects. In most cases, these materials are well prepared and presented. In some lessons, handouts are not always used effectively to involve students fully in learning. Some handouts are imaginative and colourful and these are popular with students. Teachers link theory to practical examples from industry and the work which takes place in the college. During practical lessons, in the production kitchen and restaurant, the teachers and support staff all work closely together to ensure that students get help and the work is co-ordinated. In most lessons, teachers use questions effectively to check students' understanding and ensure that learning is taking place. During some lessons, in the production kitchen and restaurant, students work under appropriate commercial pressure, but this is not always the case.

98. Some practical assessment of NVQs is unrealistic as students are assessed in inappropriate situations. Most assessments are by observation and questioning, but alternative methods of assessment such as witness statements are also used. The assessment of NVQs in the workplace is good. Many of the work-place supervisors are qualified assessors. Individual learning plans are updated during the regular reviews that take place.

99. Assignments for national diploma and AVCE courses are well planned and vocationally relevant and students are made aware of the criteria for success. Students have an assignment schedule that indicates when work is to be set, submitted and returned. The internal verification system does not ensure that all aspects of the provision are adequately checked. Internal verification sampling plans are available, but they do not include all aspects of assessment. Assessor observations are not planned or recorded. Internal verifiers sample units of each students' portfolio.

100. The students' learning is enhanced by working on functions and outside events, such as the open golf championship. Work-based trainees are employed in a variety of different establishments within the catering and hospitality industry. Students are complimentary about the support they receive from their tutors. The tutorial system is thorough, but some tutorials lack structure. Students' progress is effectively monitored and issues raised are documented. Students at risk of failure are set clear targets for improvement and are provided with additional support, as required. Excellent support and guidance are offered to students with specific learning difficulties. Students' basic skills levels are assessed during induction. However, the results and subsequent actions are not always accurately recorded. There is little assessment of the student's initial vocational skills and experience and few are given credit for their prior experiences.

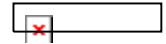
101. All staff are well qualified. Several teachers have recent industrial experience and the college is helping others to gain teaching qualifications. The catering facilities include two training kitchens, a production kitchen and a restaurant. The kitchens have a variety of specialist equipment and provide good environments that prepare students well for employment. Some major items of equipment in the kitchens, whilst appropriate, do not fully reflect standards within the industry. Most of the equipment is in good working order and breakdowns are promptly handled. General teaching rooms are of a good standard. The library book stock is good. Students have access to computers and the Internet to aid research. Students' experiences are improved by the well-established industrial links and a variety of visits including those to exhibitions, hotels and overseas trips. The links developed with employers often lead to employment opportunities for students. A variety of enrichment opportunities are available to full-time students including additional qualifications such as GCSEs. A recent team-building event, held at a nearby Royal Air Force base, included students completing an assault course.

Leadership and management

102. Management sets a clear direction. Course teams, which include student representatives, meet regularly and actions agreed at meetings are followed through. Staff meetings are held regularly and appropriate action is taken to remedy issues that arise. All staff work together well as a team and support each other during practical lessons. Staff appraisals are effective and ensure that continuous professional development takes place. Lesson observations take place regularly and are used in staff appraisal. Course reviews are effective and are a basis for the self-

assessment report for the curriculum area. Retention and pass rate targets are not set at course level.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

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

Strengths

- good lesson plans and comprehensive schemes of work
- high quality teaching
- good accommodation and resources for theory lessons
- good pass and retention rates on some college courses
- good development of key skills.

Weaknesses

- inadequate beauty salons
- poor communications in work-based learning
- insufficient monitoring of students' progress in hairdressing
- no framework achievements in work-based learning

- unsatisfactory internal verification in hairdressing
- some poor assessment practices.

Scope of provision

103. The college offers a good range of provision in both hairdressing and beauty therapy for both students aged 16 to 18 and adult students. Full-time courses include hairdressing and beauty therapy NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 and a beauty therapy national diploma. There is a full-time diploma in sports therapy and other courses in theatrical and media makeup. There has been an increase in beauty courses in both full-time and part-time modes to meet the demand from adult students. The college also offers hairdressing modern apprenticeships.

Achievement and standards

104. Retention rates are good on many courses. In 2001, the retention rates on the majority of courses were around the national average or above. Most of the pass rates on college-based courses have been close to national averages with high pass rates on some courses. The pass rate on the beauty therapy national diploma has been 100% for the last two years. Pass rates on some of the part-time beauty courses, such as the aromatherapy diploma and reflexology diploma, are also high and have been 10% or more above the national average for the last two years. The hairdressing NVQ level 3 course had a 100% pass rate in 2001. The pass rate for beauty therapy NVQ level 3 has varied being 13% below the national average in 2001 and 3% above in 2000. To date, only a few apprentices have achieved the key skills elements of their modern apprenticeship frameworks.

105. Students develop practical skills to good standards in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Teamwork is encouraged. Projects are completed to a high standard and make extensive use of IT. The majority of the hairdressing students are able to gain a qualification in health and hygiene, but the work-based students are not offered this opportunity. Some of these students also gain additional qualifications in manicure and makeup.

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	*	*	79
		% retention	*	*	72
		% pass rate	*	*	74
NVQ beauty therapy	2	No. of starts	*	59	33
		% retention	*	79	79
		% pass rate	*	89	67
Anatomy, physiology and body massage diploma	2	No. of starts	*	64	25
		% retention	*	68	71
		% pass rate	*	88	82
NVQ hairdressing	3	No. of starts	*	12	9

		% retention	*	75	78
		% pass rate	*	67	100
NVQ beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	*	24	19
		% retention	*	75	79
		% pass rate	*	83	67
National diploma in beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	*	14	10
		% retention	*	93	90
		% pass rate	*	100	100

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

106. The standard of teaching and learning is good, particularly in beauty therapy. Some 69% of the lessons observed during the inspection were considered to be good or better. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with students. Lesson plans allow for the requirements of individual students. Teachers are enthusiastic and effectively use a wide range of appropriate teaching methods that motivate and maintain the interest of students. In a beauty therapy tutorial, students were actively involved in effective role-play to demonstrate interview techniques with clients. In one hairdressing lesson on colour theory, students mixed paint to make their own colour charts. Teachers check students' learning regularly through effective questioning during the lesson or by an appropriate test or task at the end. Teachers have worked imaginatively to integrate the teaching and assessment of key skills with the relevant NVQ. Key skill assignments are a central part of lessons. Examples of students' key skills work are displayed in the salons and in the classrooms. The examples reflect the extensive use of IT in projects and assignments. Group work is used effectively and the development of communication skills is encouraged through presentations.

107. Teachers make good use of appropriate teaching resources and good internally produced learning packs. The handouts and overhead transparencies used in theory lessons are particularly good. There is a good use of appropriate videos in both theory and practical lessons. Learning is also assisted by the good standard of accommodation for theory lessons. Rooms are spacious, well furnished and well equipped with an appropriate range of teaching resources. The high quality science room has a large range of appropriate resources for hair and beauty science. The hairdressing salons are adequate, but the beauty salons are not of a commercial standard. The curtains in one salon are dirty and falling off the rails. Walls are in poor decorative order. In some practical lessons, the lack of clients restricts assessment opportunities and students are limited to working on other members of the group.

108. There is poor communication between college staff and trainers in the workplace. Work-based assessors have intermittent contact with college-based assessors. Results of student action plans developed by college teachers are not shared with the work-based assessors. Information relating to progress on training programmes is not shared. Employers do not routinely receive schemes of work.

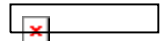
109. There is insufficient monitoring of students' progress. Neither students nor teachers have a clear picture of progress achieved. Internal verification in hairdressing is unsatisfactory. Planning of internal verification is poor, unsystematic and occurs infrequently in the workplace. Internal verifiers failed to pick up marked written assessments that had incorrect answers. There are some poor assessment practices. College students do not have access to their logbooks. This prevents them from identifying the performance criteria that they are required to meet to show that they are competent. Apprentices are not allowed to have their logbooks in the workplace, and this reduces

the opportunities for assessment.

Leadership and management

110. The hair and beauty team has experienced many management changes in the past three years. Many new systems and procedures have been introduced recently. There are regular, minuted meetings both for the whole team and for the specific hair and beauty teams. The hair and beauty teachers work well as a team and good practice is generally shared. There is a programme of observation of teaching and learning and the recently appointed 'senior tutor' supports teachers. The course review system is effective and understood by teachers.

Health, care and public services



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

Strengths

- good teaching on some courses
- good management of NVQ courses
- effective support for students
- good retention and pass rates on some level 2 courses in 2000/01.

Weaknesses

- failure of students to achieve full framework
- ineffective development of students' key skills
- poor management on some courses.

Scope of provision

111. There is a range of full-time health and social care courses, which includes the AVCE and intermediate GNVQ in health and social care, the foundation caring for young children at level 1, the certificate and diploma in childcare and education at levels 2 and 3 and the national diploma in public services. The NVQ provision includes oral health at level 2 and care and early years courses at levels 2 and 3. There are foundation and modern apprenticeship programmes in care and early years. Other part-time courses include a range of counselling courses offered in flexible modes of attendance. Enrichment activities and other provision such as GCSE and GCE AS are available, but options such as first aid are oversubscribed and not available to all students.

Achievement and standards

112. Pass rates on most courses are high. Pass rates on the NVQ in care and education courses have been consistently at, or above, the national average for the last three years. There have been high retention and pass rates in the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care and the NVQ 2 in early years care and education in 2000/01. Pass rates on level 3 and 4 courses are good and above the national average. For those students who complete a full-time level 1 or 2 course, there are good opportunities for progression to level 3 courses.

113. Students produce coursework of a high standard. NVQ students maintain well-structured portfolios that include evidence of good assessment and feedback from teachers. Most level 3 students demonstrate an appropriate level of analysis and evaluation. They make relevant contributions during class discussion and willingly participate in practical tasks.

114. Only a few students have fully completed their foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship framework. Overall, attendance during the inspection was 80%. On many occasions students were not punctual at lessons.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	No. of starts	*	13	12
		% retention	*	63	91
		% pass rate	*	100	100
NVQ early years care and education	2	No. of starts	*	15	20
		% retention	*	92	90
		% pass rate	*	83	81
NVQ advanced early years care and education	3	No. of starts	*	14	21
		% retention	*	92	83
		% pass rate	*	83	86
NVQ care	3	No. of starts	*	*	11
		% retention	*	*	90
		% pass rate	*	*	100
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	No. of starts	*	21	17
		% retention	*	85	76
		% pass rate	*	76	77

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

115. Overall the teaching is satisfactory, but was good on some courses for adults. Some 80% of the lessons were graded at least satisfactory. The teaching on the public services course was poor. Teachers ensure that the work is vocationally relevant and make appropriate applications and links to the students' work placements. In the best lessons, teachers use the students' work experience well to develop and extend the application of their knowledge. Most lessons are planned effectively to cover topics being taught and teachers set a variety of learning activities to maintain the students' interest. For example, there was very effective use of role-play in a session covering sensitive relationships. In a minority of lessons, teachers fail to teach the appropriate level of detail for the course and fail to incorporate key skills and identify teaching points related to equal opportunities. In some lessons, the pace of teaching was too slow, students' interest waned and teachers did not make sufficient checks on students' understanding. Some teachers did not plan their lessons to accommodate the needs of students who could only concentrate for short periods. Lessons that involve adult students are frequently lively and the teachers manage the students' experiences to good effect. Most schemes of work and lesson plans ensure adequate coverage of course requirements. However, they do not always contain enough detail about learning outcomes or assessment. Students' work is assessed promptly. Most of the marked work contained good written feedback to enable students to maintain or improve their grades.

116. The NVQ courses are highly organised and well supervised with students attending college to gain their basic knowledge. The majority of assessors are college based. This ensures that they work to the same standards. There are very good relationships with the providers. Regular and effective review and performance monitoring is undertaken, and this results in learners making good progress. There is good progression through the levels. The good employer links have increased the range of work placement providers, resulting in increased practical experience and employment progression routes.

117. The modern apprenticeship programme has a very well-structured NVQ provision and the students are well supported both in college and the workplace. Few have achieved the full framework as they have not completed the key skills element. In some of the lessons, teachers failed to link practical tasks to key skills. The key skills teaching input is provided centrally and has little vocational relevance. Attendance at such lessons is poor. Teachers assist in building portfolio evidence, but sometimes fail to use opportunities in lessons to incorporate key skills.

118. The majority of teachers are appropriately qualified and hold vocationally relevant qualifications. Some part-time teachers are current practitioners. For example, some counselling teachers have their own practices and run the college student counselling service. Other newly appointed teachers have joined directly from practising care posts. There are opportunities for regular professional development, but some teachers lack recent industrial experience. The learning centre holds appropriate resources for health social care and early years. Students can also access up-to-date computing equipment in the resources area. Classrooms have good displays of relevant teaching materials. However, two key teaching areas are less than satisfactory because there is access through them to a staff room that is frequently used.

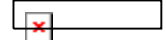
119. Teachers have a good knowledge of the students and their individual needs and provide extra support when necessary. Tutorial support is good. The support is matched to the needs of individual students and their progress is carefully monitored. Students described the support as friendly and approachable. Provision of learning support for students on foundation level courses has improved their individual learning. New applicants receive good support and guidance from care and early year's teachers.

Leadership and management

120. Regular team meetings are held in the care and early years department. Effective internal verification meetings ensure that standards and students' progress are maintained. These meetings are beginning to have a positive impact upon student achievement. Teachers work well together in teams. There is effective communication in the areas of health and social care, childcare and early years and counselling. Some teachers lack specialist qualifications and knowledge to effectively

teach the level of knowledge and understanding required on level 3 courses. Leadership and management of the national diploma in public services are unsatisfactory.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- much well-planned and effective teaching
- high pass rates on the access to HE one-year course
- appropriate courses for the needs of a wide range of students
- good assessment and monitoring of students' progress on access to HE courses.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on GCE A-level and GCSE law
- lack of integration of IT with the curriculum
- low retention rates on access to HE two-year course.

Scope of provision

121. A range of humanities subjects is offered at GCE AS/A level, including minority subjects such as philosophy. Psychology and sociology recruit the greatest number of students with smaller classes in government and politics and law and only a very few students studying philosophy. Successful links have been established with a local school in order to provide GCE AS psychology for their pupils. An access to HE course is available to students on a part-time and full-time basis, and can also be studied by attending during the day or evening.

Achievement and standards

122. Some areas have satisfactory retention and pass rates; others are low. Psychology is the most popular option for students and it has increased its pass rates at GCE A level to above the national average in 2001, having had particularly poor results in 2000. However, the retention rate has declined from 69% to 56%. Pass rates in GCE A level sociology are at the national average and retention rates are high. GCE A-level and GCSE law have low pass rates, with GCE A-level law having a particularly low pass rate in 2001. Students on the access to HE one-year course had good pass and retention rates in 2001, whilst the retention rate on the access to HE two-year course was very low. GCSE psychology pass rates are at the national average and retention rates are satisfactory.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE psychology 1 year	2	No. of starts	*	*	23
		% retention	*	*	70
		% pass rate	*	*	50
GCE A-level law 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	14	13
		% retention	*	64	85
		% pass rate	*	44	9
GCE A-level sociology 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	14	19
		% retention	*	79	79
		% pass rate	*	64	53
Access to HE 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	27	12
		% retention	*	74	75
		% pass rate	*	70	89
Access to HE 2 years	3	No. of starts	*	48	33
		% retention	*	67	18
		% pass rate	*	100	67
GCE A-level psychology 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	29	25
		% retention	*	69	56
		% pass rate	*	15	71

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

123. Much of the teaching in humanities is well planned and effective. Detailed lesson plans are linked to clear schemes of work and learning objectives are made clear at the start of lessons. A few lesson plans are of poorer quality and many do not clearly plan to provide learning activities for the range of students. Most lessons begin promptly and levels of attendance are good. Students come to lessons well prepared with the necessary materials and texts and having completed preparatory work. Teachers and students have a pleasant and productive relationship in lessons. Students value the individual help that is available from teachers during lessons and at other times.

124. The best teaching is both demanding and interesting. In one government and politics lesson, students role-played members of the cabinet debating new initiatives to curb the growing crime rate

while sustaining the viewpoint of the department they represented. Students demonstrated a mature understanding of political perspectives and were fluent and well informed on the topic. In another well-planned and managed psychology lesson, students showed a good standard of knowledge on the nature/nurture debate and were able to defend and illustrate individual perspectives within the disciplines of the subject. Teachers are well qualified and display expert subject knowledge. They are frequently good at developing the students' analytical skills and encouraging writing and comments in a sound conceptual framework. In an access to HE lesson, the teacher used well-chosen extracts to examine tone and narrative voice in prose. Students were interested and stimulated by the teaching and showed a good level of knowledge and understanding in questioning and discussion. Teachers seek to involve students in discussion and debate and are often successful in motivating students who show good progress in their subject knowledge.

125. In a few lessons, the teaching is insufficiently demanding and students spend long stretches of time taking notes. In lessons where teachers rely on exposition as the sole teaching method, students are less interested and motivated. Teaching does not always meet the needs of all students in a lesson and there are instances of more able students waiting for others to finish tasks rather than being given additional work. Teaching takes place in adequate accommodation, although there are some rooms that suffer from distracting external noise.

126. IT is not well integrated with the curriculum. Students and staff have good access to IT and web sites are referred to in most subject areas. However, there is very little use of IT in teaching. None of the teaching rooms used for humanities have IT facilities.

127. In GCE AS/A level, students' work is set at an appropriate standard and carefully marked. Dates for the submission and return of work are recorded and most written work has helpful comments from teachers on how students can improve their performance. There are a few instances where work has little comment or advice. There is no monitoring of the quality of assessment and marking on GCE AS/A-level courses. The college has no system in place that considers students' attainment at entry and uses it to predict or set targets for the grades which GCE AS/A-level students might achieve. Target minimum grades are not used as part of the assessment process. The progress of students on access to HE courses is carefully tracked using clear documentation. Assessment criteria are made explicit and informative front sheets are used on all work. Access students are well informed about their performance and ways to improve.

128. GCE AS/A-level students receive one hour a week of key skills teaching. Students report that they value the additional help that level 3 application of number provides for their subjects. There is no systematic identification of the achievement of key skills criteria in all subjects, but there are good examples of key skills criteria being met through work in government and politics, for communications, and in psychology, for application of number. Full-time GCE AS/A-level students have weekly tutorials which they find useful for general information purposes. Access to HE students have a weekly lesson on 'wider key skills' which is also used for tutorial purposes. Students find this lesson useful and relevant.

Leadership and management

129. Humanities management has recently been re-organised with the appointment of a senior tutor and a curriculum manager. Communications are good and there is a regular cycle of meetings to discuss curriculum and management issues. The subject self-assessment reports are detailed and contain action plans to address weaknesses in teaching and learning and achievement. At present, there are inadequate systems for covering teacher absence and sickness and students can be without an appropriate teacher as a result. Computer-based management information is readily available, but data relating to achievement are sometimes unreliable.

Foundation programmes and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities



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

Strengths

- well-structured programmes
- very good teaching and learning
- effective learning support
- good recording and monitoring of students' progress
- good achievements.

Weaknesses

- complex language on college documents for students
- some poor use of accommodation
- inadequate IT resources for learning.

Scope of provision

130. There is full-time and part-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are full-time students on the two-year 'New Direction' programme and the one-year 'Work Preparation' programme. Both of these programmes are for students aged 16 to 23 with mild to moderate learning difficulties. These courses are designed to help students gain the skills required for employment. There are 90 part-time students on the 'Moving On', 'Progressions' and Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment project. Moving On is designed for adults with severe learning difficulties and aims to increase independence. Progressions is for adults with mild to moderate learning difficulties. Students are given opportunities to improve their basic skills and have a choice of vocational subjects. Students on the Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment project come from day centres and may be taught in separate specialist classes or take part in the other programmes, as appropriate. All students are working towards externally

accredited units or modules at an appropriate level. There are also students on a confidence building course and in the summer holidays students from day centres enrolled for taster courses to introduce them to the college. Some of the Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment courses take place in day centres, but all other courses are based at the college.

Achievement and standards

131. All students are set individual, learning goals and targets. These targets include externally accredited modules or units at an appropriate level and take account of individuals' previous learning and other experience and interests. An action plan containing relevant information and targets is reviewed at least termly. Full-time students have regular tutorials to monitor progress and ensure that the targets are still appropriate. Some long-term targets have not been broken down into measurable, shorter-term targets.

132. Retention rates on full-time courses in 2000/01 are above 93%. Average retention rates for students on part-time courses for the same year are 87% or above. Students are working on individual programmes with learning goals that include accredited units or modules and measurable personal targets. Information on students' progress shows that a large number of students on both the full-time and part-time courses achieve their targets for accredited units or modules and also their personal targets. The college works with Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment to support students into work placements, employment or supported employment. Where appropriate, the third-year, full-time students are being encouraged to apply for foundation courses in the college. There are no reliable data on destinations such as employment from year to year or applications for other courses so the extent to which courses achieve their aims cannot be reliably measured. Third-year, full-time students have had half-day work placements in college every week. The students experience a range of placements by moving between them. They are due to move on to external work placements with the support of Buckinghamshire Agency for Supported Employment.

133.

Quality of education and training

134. Teaching is good on all courses with 82% of the lessons observed graded good or better. There are well-structured schemes of work and detailed lesson plans which include information on the specific needs of individuals and how these will be covered. All lessons start with a review of the previous lesson and the key learning points. A work record is completed at the end of every lesson listing tasks undertaken and, where appropriate, the learning of individual students. Students record this with tutor support. Learning materials on all courses are well designed and have good graphical layouts. Many of the materials use symbols as well as words and students use the specialist computer programmes to produce their own materials. Literacy and numeracy are a central part of all lessons and oral communication is well managed to meet students' learning needs. Tutors and learning support assistants ensure that students are achieving at an appropriate level.

135. Students are well integrated with the college community, use all the college facilities and mix socially with other students. They take part in learning in the main vocational areas and full-time students take vocational courses every afternoon. Many of these are based in other college departments.

136. There is very effective learning support that ensures students are able to work at their own pace and receive the individual attention they need. There are learning support assistants for every lesson in addition to those allocated to individual students where the support need has been identified. All learning assistants either have, or are working towards, the certificate for special needs assistants. Some of them are also working towards teaching certificates. They have a comprehensive job description and are able to go on to additional training courses. The learning assistants are managed by a full-time co-ordinator who is responsible for ensuring that there is appropriate cover at all times. Learning support assistants also provide help with personal care and accompany students to and from the bus and railway station.

137. There are good links with external agencies and taster courses are run in the summer holiday for prospective students from day centres. Students from special schools attend taster courses at the college to encourage them and their parents to consider FE. Optional taster courses have also been run for full-time students during the summer holidays to encourage them to continue learning and keep them motivated.

138. Handouts used during lessons are specifically designed to take into account the layout and the level of language most appropriate for the students. Students also use some college documentation such as the learning agreement, the student charter, and an induction checklist, as well as evaluation forms. These use very complex language and although the tutors talk them through with the students, they are not always fully aware of the content of the forms they have completed.

139. The department has its own classrooms that are large and have posters, photographs and examples of work on the walls. The classrooms are spread around the college and, although this encourages the students to find their way around, it can be confusing for some students. Some of the rooms do not have sufficient work surfaces for creative work. The main base room is open plan and has a large working area together with separate bed and sitting areas. There is also a small kitchen with a washing machine which students can use to practice their independent living skills. Students are distracted from their tasks when there are two groups of students in this room. There is no specialist furniture for students with specific physical needs. There is a separate IT room with computers and printers in it. Many of the computers are unreliable and there are problems in running the new software on them. The chairs are not correctly adjusted and the backs are all fixed at a height that gives little support. Some computer screens are at the wrong height. There is a lack of awareness of the health and safety requirements for working at computers amongst staff and learners. There is a large keyboard and mouse for students who are visually impaired or who have poor co-ordination.

Leadership and management

140. There is good leadership and support for staff. There are a small number of full-time staff and a much larger number of part-time tutors and learning assistants. There are regular meetings between all staff and they work well as a team. All staff are encouraged to continue their own professional development. Staff are regularly observed during lessons.

Part D: College data

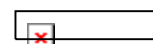
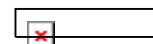


Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age



Level	16-18 %	19+ %
1	22	17
2	49	32
3	20	25
4/5	1	7
Other	8	19
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science	413	1,086	15
Agriculture	62	214	3
Construction	273	342	3
Engineering	287	411	5
Business	280	939	13
Hotel and catering	468	584	23
Health and community care	480	1,164	20
Art and design	128	538	4
Humanities	636	1,374	21
Basic education	97	177	4
Total	3,124	6,829	100

Source: Provided by the college in spring 2001.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000
1	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	515	*	*	472
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	56	*	*	71
	National average (%)	82	80	80	80	78	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	34	*	*	30
	National average (%)	59	62	66	61	63	68
2	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	1,037	*	*	1,058
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	74	*	*	77
	National average (%)	77	76	77	80	79	79

	Pass rate (%)	*	*	48	*	*	50
	National average (%)	63	67	68	66	65	68
3	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	561	*	*	946
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	67	*	*	81
	National average (%)	78	77	77	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	47	*	*	51
	National average (%)	70	72	73	63	65	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	*	*	14	*	*	248
	Retention rate (%)	*	*	86	*	*	85
	National average (%)	84	83	81	85	84	81
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	50	*	*	36
	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).

Sources of information:

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

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

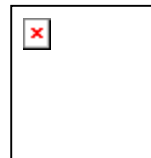
3. College rates for (1999/2000): provided by the college in spring 2001.

* data unreliable

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)	55	33	12	73
Level 2 (intermediate)	59	27	14	59
Level 1 (foundation)	40	47	13	15
Other sessions	68	19	13	26
Totals	57	30	13	173

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