

Stockport College of Further and Higher Education

CONTENTS

[Basic information about the college](#)

[Part A: Summary](#)

[Information about the college](#)

[How effective is the college?](#)

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

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

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

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

[Students' views of the college](#)

[Other information](#)

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

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

[Achievement and standards](#)

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

[Science and mathematics](#)

[Construction](#)

[Engineering](#)

[Business studies](#)

[Information and communication technology](#)

[Hairdressing and beauty therapy](#)

[Health, social care and public services](#)

[Visual and performing arts](#)

[Humanities](#)

[English, languages and communication](#)

[Foundation programmes](#)

[Literacy and numeracy](#)

[Part D: College data](#)

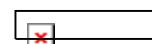
[Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age](#)

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

[Table 3: Retention and achievement](#)

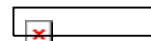
[Table 4: Quality of teaching observed during the inspection by level](#)

Basic information about the college

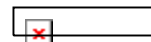


Name of college:	Stockport College of Further and Higher Education
Type of college:	General Further Education
Principal:	Peter Roberts
Address of college:	Wellington Road South Stockport SK1 3UQ
Telephone number:	0161 958 3100
Fax number:	0161 480 6636
Chair of governors:	Eric Stelfox
Unique reference number:	130512
Name of reporting inspector:	Keith Abbott HMI
Dates of inspection:	28 April-2 May 2003 and 6 May-8 May 2003

Part A: Summary



Information about the college

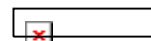


Stockport College is the largest of four colleges serving the metropolitan borough of Stockport. It is located on a single site close to the town centre. The college has over 7,500 further education (FE) students and about 1,000 higher education (HE) students. About 70% of the FE students are part time. The college offers academic and vocational programmes in most programme areas. About 1,000 distance learning students study from home with tutorial support provided through the college's flexible learning centre. The college has work-based learning provision for foundation programme students and in construction, engineering, business administration, hairdressing and social care. The college does not offer hospitality, catering, leisure, tourism or land-based courses. It provides very few courses in community venues since community adult education programmes are provided by Stockport Adult Education Service.

Stockport has a population of about 293,000. It is a relatively prosperous area, with unemployment below north-west and national averages, but some areas of the borough have relatively high levels of deprivation. About 4% of borough residents are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 11% of the college's students.

The college's mission is 'to be a leading provider of quality education and training'. Its vision is 'excellence through people, partnerships and technology'.

How effective is the college?



Stockport College has made significant progress since it was inspected by Ofsted in May 2001, when it was judged to be inadequate. In 2001, provision in six curriculum areas and in leadership and management was unsatisfactory. Provision is now good in five curriculum areas, satisfactory in six areas and unsatisfactory in one curriculum area. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college is no longer inadequate. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strength

- effective leadership by governors and the principal
- effective programme of lesson observations
- good personal and academic support for full-time students
- close monitoring of students' progress and helpful feedback on their assessed work

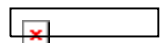
- good specialist facilities in most curriculum areas
- good course management
- effective promotion of equal opportunities.

What should be improved?

- retention rates on many courses
- the range of level 1 courses, evening classes and provision in community venues
- the quality assurance of distance learning courses
- the quality of health, social care and public services provision
- students' punctuality and attendance
- opportunities for work experience and enrichment activities
- the assessment of work-based learners.

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

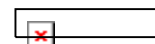


The table below shows overall judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were inspected. Judgements are based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall judgements on curriculum 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	Satisfactory. Pass rates improved significantly between 2001 and 2002 and are mainly satisfactory. Retention rates on most courses are unsatisfactory. Science teaching is good and students' progress is well monitored, but there are few enrichment opportunities. There is an over-reliance on part-time staff to teach mathematics.
Construction	Good. There are high pass rates on most courses, but retention rates are unsatisfactory on a few courses. Teaching is effective and students' work is of a high standard. There is a broad range of provision and productive links with employers. Work-based learning is satisfactory overall, but there is insufficient assessment in the workplace.
Engineering	Good. There are good pass rates on most courses, but low retention rates on a few courses. Teaching and support for students is good. Students' progress is well monitored. There are good links with schools, employers and other training providers.
Business studies	Satisfactory. Pass rates are good on professional courses, but they are unsatisfactory on most full-time courses. Teaching on professional and business administration courses is good. Punctuality and attendance of students aged 16 to 18 are poor. Accommodation and resources are good.
Information and communication technology	Satisfactory. Pass rates and standards of students' work are good on advanced level courses. Retention rates are unsatisfactory on a significant number of courses, but retention rates are improving. Teaching and learning is good on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course. Courses are well managed, but there is a lack of provision in community venues.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good. Pass rates are high on most courses. There is much good teaching that effectively links theory and practice. There is a wide range of full-time and part-time courses and good opportunities for students to take additional qualifications. There are insufficient resources in the college and the management of work-based learning is weak.
Health, social care and public services	Unsatisfactory. Pass rates are unsatisfactory on a significant minority of courses. Retention rates are unsatisfactory on most courses. The teaching of practical skills is mainly good; it is more effective than the teaching of theoretical topics. Many students have not made the progress expected for the stage of their course. Punctuality and attendance are unsatisfactory. Accommodation and resources are mostly good.
Visual and performing arts	Good. Pass rates on most courses are good, but retention rates on a few courses are unsatisfactory. The standard of students' work in art design and media studies is high. Teaching is good and students benefit from a varied enrichment programme. Course management and personal support for students are good. Some photography, media and performing arts accommodation is unsatisfactory.
Humanities	Satisfactory. Pass rates have improved and are good in sociology

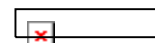
	and history, but many students who study by distance learning fail to achieve. Many students produce a high standard of work, but the written English of lower attaining students is often poor. Students' progress is well monitored and there is good academic and personal support for students.
English, languages and communication	Satisfactory. There are good pass rates on General Certificate of Education Advanced-level (GCE A-level) English, General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) languages, and practical language courses. Retention and pass rates of GCSE English students and distance learning students are unsatisfactory. Most teaching is good and students' progress is well monitored. The links between college courses and distance learning provision are underdeveloped.
Foundation programmes	Good. Students' achieve appropriate qualifications and effectively develop their personal and social skills. Most teaching is good or better. Many students on the work preparation course progress to employment, but there are insufficient opportunities for foundation students to progress within the college. There is a good range of college-based provision, but provision in the community is underdeveloped.
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory. Most teaching is effective and literacy and numeracy specialists provide good in-class support for vocational teachers. Initial assessment is not used effectively to set targets in individual learning plans. Arrangements to support students with dyslexia are effective. There is a narrow range of provision both in college and in the community.

How well is the college led and managed?



Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the last inspection in May 2001, the college has improved the quality of provision in 6 of the 12 curriculum areas inspected. Successful action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching and raise pass rates on many courses. However, retention rates remain unsatisfactory. The principal and governors provide a clear strategic direction for the college. The principal provides effective leadership, but the accountability of curriculum managers is unclear. Course management is good. The implementation of quality assurance procedures has improved, but has failed to address weaknesses in the college's distance learning programmes. Self-assessment is comprehensive. There are effective procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity. The accuracy and reliability of the college's management information has improved and is good. The college has good financial management and provides satisfactory value for money.

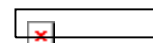
To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to education and social inclusion is satisfactory. The college attracts some 30% of its students from areas of deprivation and 11% from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 4% in the local community. However, the potential to provide courses in the community has not been adequately researched and the college has not yet developed a coherent approach with its

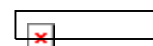
and a wide range of distance learning courses. There are relatively few evening classes. Basic skills provision is satisfactory. The college has good links with local schools and provides a wide range of opportunities for school students to take National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and other qualifications and sample college courses. The college actively promotes equality of opportunity for students and staff. A 'diversity manager' has recently been appointed to ensure that the college maintains its good level of response to equal opportunities issues.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Systems to provide initial advice and guidance for students have been improved. The new systems are not well established and unsatisfactory advice led to a few students choosing courses that were not suitable for them. In a few curriculum areas, initial assessment of students' need for additional literacy and numeracy support is not used effectively to construct individual learning plans. The provision of in-class support for students on level 1 and 2 courses is generally effective, but many level 3 students do not attend their individual support sessions. Personal and academic support for students are good. In most curriculum areas, there is an effective combination of group tutorials and one-to-one reviews where attendance and progress are discussed. A good range of support services includes counselling, welfare advice, careers guidance, mental health support, chaplaincy, disability services, and a well-equipped college nursery. The quality of these services is good and they are well used. Students with specific learning needs or disabilities are well supported by qualified staff and specialist resources.

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, helpful, capable teachers

- good individual academic and personal support

- readily available computers

- good library and learning resource centre

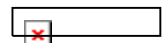
- opportunities for educational visits

- the sixth form common room
- opportunities for additional qualifications.

What they feel could be improved

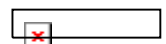
- key skills provision
- course timetables and assignment schedules
- a few hot and noisy class rooms
- the unreliable swipe card system for gaining access to parts of the college
- the number of car parking spaces.

Other information



The college inspection report will normally be published 12 working weeks after the formal feedback of the inspection findings to the college. 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 (LSC). The college's action plan must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors should agree it before it is submitted to the local LSC. The local LSC is responsible for ensuring that, where inspectors have judged there to be unsatisfactory or poor provision in a curriculum area or in leadership and management, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) receives the college's post-inspection action plan within the stipulated two months.

Part B: The college as a whole



Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16-18	60	33	7
19+ and WBL*	70	25	5
Learning 16-18	60	30	10
19+ and WBL*	68	28	4

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. Overall pass rates both for students aged 16 to 18 and adults have improved significantly since the last inspection. In 2002, overall pass rates (excluding key skills) at levels 1 to 3 for students aged 16 to 18 and for adults were above the national average for general FE colleges. Between 2000 and 2002, overall retention rates improved at level 1, declined at level 2 and remained stable at level 3. In 2002, with the exception of level 1 students aged 16 to 18, overall retention rates were below the national average for general FE colleges.

16 to 18 year olds

2. In 2001/02, 2,034 students aged 16 to 18 accounted for 70% of students on full-time courses. In the same year, 608 students aged 16 to 18 accounted for 11% of the part-time students. In the three years ending in 2002, overall pass rates on level 1, 2 and 3 long courses (excluding key skills qualifications) improved significantly. In 2002, the overall pass rates were 80%, 83% and 80%, respectively. This is well above the national averages of 68%, 69% and 76%, respectively, for students aged 16 to 18 in FE colleges. In 2001, the last year for which comparative figures are available, the college's overall pass rates placed it in the second quartile of general FE colleges at level 1 and in the third quartile at levels 2 and 3. If overall pass rates for 2002 are compared with national average figures for 2001, the college would be in the upper quartile at each of the three levels.

3. On average, about 600 students aged 16 to 18 took short course qualifications in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Overall pass rates were satisfactory in 2000 and 2002, at 77% and 88%, respectively. The 54% pass rate in 2001 was unsatisfactory.

4. Overall retention rates for students aged 16 to 18 were unsatisfactory in 2000 and 2001, particularly at level 3. In 2002, overall retention rates improved significantly at levels 1 and 3, to 83% and 74%, respectively, and are now satisfactory. At level 2, the overall rate declined slightly to 69% in 2002. This is 7% below the national average and is unsatisfactory. The 2002 overall retention rates for long courses at levels 1, 2 and 3 place the college in the second, fourth and third quartile, respectively, of general FE colleges, based on comparative figures for 2001.

5. The college achieves some of its highest pass rates on level 3 qualifications. In 2002, pass rates of 100% were achieved on the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) national diploma course in media production, the the NVQ level 3 beauty therapy course, GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) sociology and psychology programmes and on the two-year AVCE course in information technology (IT). However, the retention rate on this course was unsatisfactory, at 56%. Pass rates on a few courses continue to be unsatisfactory. These include the full-time business studies courses. In 2002, the pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business courses were 57% and 64%, respectively. The retention rate on the AVCE course was poor, at 33%. Retention and pass rates on public services courses have been generally poor for the past three years. In 2002, on the national diploma course, the retention rate was 37%, and the pass rate was 64%. Pass rates in GCE AS French were poor in 2001 and 2002, at 27% and 29%, respectively.

6. In 2002, pass rates were high on most construction, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes. The pass rate in GCSE mathematics improved significantly from 33% in 2001, to 60% in 2002, although the retention rate fell from 67% to 51%. The 60% pass rate is well above the national average. In contrast, the pass rate in GCSE English language fell from 53% to 42%, and is unsatisfactory. Pass rates in other GCSE subjects vary considerably. For example, in 2002, the pass rate in GCSE Spanish was good, at 94%. In GCSE IT it was poor, at 31%. In 2001, there were 3,670 starters on key skills qualifications. The overall retention rate was 80% and the pass rate was 10%. The retention rate is satisfactory, but the pass rate is poor. The college reviewed its policy on key skill entries in 2002 and 1,964 students started key skills qualifications. The retention rates fell to 74% and the pass rate improved to 33%. However, this is still unsatisfactory.

7. Standards of students' work observed in lessons during the inspection were generally satisfactory or better. Standards are particularly good in visual arts and humanities lessons. However, the proportion of lessons in which students aged 16 to 18 were judged to have made good progress, compared with the progress that would be expected at that point in their course, was low at 55%. Attainment was judged to be satisfactory in 27% of lessons and less than satisfactory in 18%. Levels of attainment are generally lower at levels 1 and 2, for example, on GCSE, NVQ level 1, GNVQ foundation and GNVQ intermediate courses. Attainment was particularly weak in health and social care, where it was judged to be good or better in only 26% of lessons. Students in several curriculum areas produce good practical work. Examples include construction, motor vehicle and motor cycle engineering, hairdressing, beauty therapy and visual arts. Students with learning difficulties generally make good progress, due to the good integration of vocational work and life skills programmes. There are good progression rates from the work preparation course into employment.

8. Young people aged 16 to 18 on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship programmes in construction and engineering account for the majority of the college's 500 work-based learners. Their overall retention and pass rates are satisfactory on construction and motor vehicle engineering programmes, but unsatisfactory in general engineering and hairdressing and beauty therapy. The failure to fully integrate and assess key skills means that many work-based learners do not complete their programmes.

Adult learners

9. Of the 7,500 students who enrolled in 2001/02, nearly 5,500 were aged 19 or over. Most were studying part-time and just over half of the enrolments were on level 1 and 2 courses. The overall achievements of adult students on long qualifications are similar to those of students aged 16 to 18. In the three years ending in 2002, the college improved the overall pass rates of its adult students by 20 percentage points or more at each of the three levels. In 2002, the overall rates of 77%, 83% and 83% at levels 1, 2 and 3, respectively, are well above the national average and place the college in the upper quartile of general FE colleges for long qualifications at levels 1 to 3.

10. Retention rates for adult students on long qualifications declined at levels 2 and 3 between 2000 and 2002. The greatest fall was at level 2, from 79% in 2000 to 66% in 2002. This compares with a national average of 78%. At level 1, over the same period, the college improved its overall retention rate by 10 percentage points to 73%. However, this is 5% below the national average. The overall retention rates for adult students in 2002 place the college in the lower quartile for general FE colleges. Low retention rates on the college's distance learning courses are a significant factor

contributing to the low overall rates.

11. Around 650 adults start level 4 qualifications each year. The pattern of achievement is similar to that at levels 1 to 3. Overall pass rates are above the national average, but retention rates are below. The number of part-time students taking short qualifications has fallen over the last three years. The overall retention rate of 96% in 2002 is above the median figure of 93% for all colleges. The overall pass rate of 81% is good and places the college in the second quartile for all colleges. Adults' achievements of key skills qualifications are unsatisfactory. For example, in 2002, just under 500 adults started a key skills course. The overall retention rate was 75% and the pass rate was 35%.

12. Adult students' work, observed in lessons during the inspection, was of a higher standard than work produced by students aged 16 to 18. Attainment was judged to be good or better in 60% of lessons, satisfactory in 34% and less than satisfactory in 6% of lessons. Adult students are well motivated and achieve good results in several programme areas. For example, adults on professional business studies courses in personal practice, accounting and general management achieve high retention and pass rates. Retention rates on English as a foreign Language (EFL) courses are good, but pass rates on EFL courses declined between 2001 and 2002 and are satisfactory. In 2002, retention and pass rates on the access to HE course were good at 88% and 91%, respectively.

Quality of education and training

13. Inspectors observed 236 lessons. They judged that teaching was good or better in 64% of lessons, satisfactory in 30% and less than satisfactory in 6%. This profile is slightly better than the average for general FE colleges inspected in 2001/02. The standard of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection, when 55% of lessons were good or better, 30% were satisfactory and 15% were unsatisfactory. Teaching is most effective in foundation programmes, visual and performing arts, humanities and construction. Teaching is least effective in health and social care, English and languages and business studies.

14. Teaching is significantly better in lessons primarily involving adult students. Over 68% of these lessons were good or better, compared with 60% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18. The proportion of unsatisfactory lessons was also lower at 5% compared with 7%. Teaching tends to be better on level 3 courses. The best teaching was observed in GCE A-level lessons and the weakest in GNVQ foundation and intermediate lessons. Of the 15 work-based learning sessions observed by inspectors, 12 were judged to be good or better. Overall attendance during the inspection was unsatisfactory at 75%, although the attendance of some adult students was adversely affected by childcare responsibilities, since the inspection took place when local schools were on holiday. In the previous inspection, the attendance rate was 71%.

15. The more effective lessons are well planned, have clear learning and assessment objectives and include an appropriate variety of activities. Teachers of construction, engineering, visual arts and foundation programme plan well for students with widely differing abilities. Motor vehicle engineering teachers and hairdressing and beauty therapy staff effectively integrate theoretical and practical topics. Business studies students on professional courses are skilfully involved in discussions, group work, case studies, role play and presentations. In most foreign language lessons, there is sustained use of the target language. Teachers generally cope well with the disruptive behaviour of a few of the younger students.

16. In many of the less effective lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of the needs of individuals. A few lessons proceed too slowly, sometimes because students take notes very slowly. Others are dull because teachers talk too much. Students are not involved in these lessons; they lose interest and achieve very little. In some curriculum areas, for example, business studies and information and communication technology (ICT), courses are not closely related to work. There are insufficient opportunities for work experience and too few external links. In other areas, for example, science, hairdressing and beauty therapy, English and humanities, there is too little use of information and learning technology (ILT) in lessons. Other teaching weaknesses include poor management of group work, unclear explanations, poor discipline, poor questioning techniques and

failure to check students' understanding of the topics covered.

17. In many curriculum areas, teaching in practical lessons is generally better than in theory lessons. Most students are suitably briefed about the tasks they need to perform, although this is often not the case in health and social care. They are closely supervised and well supported, although in a few science and construction lessons, insufficient attention is paid to health and safety. Most practical lessons in laboratories and workshops are well organised. Realistic projects for construction and engineering students ensure that most practical individual and group work is productive. In health and social care and in media studies, the better practical activities are linked to assignments or to the workplace. Key skills teaching is mainly satisfactory. In construction, engineering, and hairdressing and beauty therapy relevant key skills work is well integrated into assignments. In health and social care, attendance at key skills lessons is very poor.

18. Learning is generally satisfactory or better. The percentages of lessons graded good or better, satisfactory and less than satisfactory for learning were 64%, 29% and 7%, respectively. This profile is almost identical to the profile for all colleges inspected in 2001/02. Learning was also better in lessons involving adults, with good or better learning in 66% of these lessons, compared with good or better learning in 60% of lessons for students aged 16 to 18.

19. Assessment of students' practical and written work is generally well planned and effectively carried out. Clear college policies and procedures set the standard of assessment required from teachers and course teams. On most courses, assessment is regular, rigorous and fair. Most course teams have an assessment schedule that takes into account the timing of external tests. However, in a few curriculum areas, students are overloaded with work because too many assignments have to be completed within a short period. The assessment of work-based learning is often unsatisfactory. Too few judgements are based on direct observation of learners' work by qualified assessors. There is over reliance on witness testimonies to provide evidence of competence in the workplace and there is often slow progress in collecting evidence from the workplace. However, the reporting of work-based learners' performance and attendance to their employers is satisfactory.

20. Most course teams design and moderate students' assignments to ensure that they are relevant and that they contain clear guidance about what students should achieve by specific dates. Most students receive good feedback on the quality of their work. In a few curriculum areas, for example, business studies, feedback is often minimal and some part-time students receive insufficient information about their progress. The monitoring of students' progress is thorough in most courses. It is particularly good in humanities, where each student negotiates an individual action plan during personal tutorials. In several curriculum areas, for example, foundation studies, health and social care, and humanities, there is close monitoring of students who are at risk of not completing their courses.

21. Internal verification is well documented and rigorously applied on the majority of programmes. Most programmes have sufficient internal verifiers. The internal verification process has been improved to meet awarding body requirements in most programmes. However, internal verification is still weak on a few courses, for example the GNVQ intermediate business course. External verifiers' reports are evaluated by the quality assurance team and summary reports are produced. These are used to identify the actions required by course teams and to communicate any good practice identified by external verifiers across the college.

22. Systems to provide initial advice and guidance for students have improved. Admission procedures have been centralised to ensure that students have a single point of contact and that they receive impartial advice and guidance. All enquiries and applications are carefully monitored. Students who are unsure about which course to choose are referred for specialist guidance. The new systems are not well established and unsatisfactory advice given by inexperienced staff led to a few students choosing courses that were not suitable for them. This contributed to low retention rates on some GCE AS courses.

23. All full-time students undertake an initial assessment to determine their need for additional literacy and numeracy support. In some curriculum areas, for example, English and languages and humanities, the results of initial assessment and other records of prior achievement, such as GCSE

results, are used to plan lessons and monitor students' progress. However, initial assessment of students on foundation programmes is not used effectively to construct individual learning plans. The provision of in-class support for students on courses at levels 1 and 2 is generally effective, but many level 3 students do not attend their scheduled individual support sessions in the learning center.

24. Personal and academic support for students are good. Tutorials for full-time students have improved since the last inspection and are good in most curriculum areas. In several curriculum areas, good subject tutorials are used to provide extra revision lessons, help with assignments and portfolios, and help for students who are underperforming. The tutorial programme focuses on one-to-one reviews where students discuss their punctuality, attendance and progress compared with minimum target grades based on their prior achievements. Tutorials for work-based learners are less effective. Work-based learners' targets lack detail and their tutorial records do not indicate with sufficient clarity what evidence is appropriate and how it should be obtained. Full-time students also attend group tutorials. College guidance sets out the topics that should be covered. The quality of these tutorials varies considerably, but they are satisfactory overall. Tutorial support for part-time students also varies in quality. In business studies, and hairdressing and beauty therapy, tutorials for part-time students are normally only provided when requested by individual students.

25. A good range of support services includes counselling, welfare advice, careers guidance, mental health support, chaplaincy, disability services, and a well-equipped college nursery. The quality of these services is good and they are well used. There is comprehensive support for students applying to HE. Youth workers based in the students' common room provide informal support on personal and social issues. Students with specific learning needs and/or disabilities are well supported by qualified staff and specialist resources.

26. The college has improved its accommodation since the last inspection. One site has been closed and almost all teaching is now located in the main building. A new sixth form centre and common room have been established. A central admissions area has been established in a suitable location. Learning resource areas have been established in five curriculum areas. Teaching accommodation for students on foundation programmes has been expanded and improved. A swipe card system has been introduced to improve security.

27. The overall standard of teaching accommodation is satisfactory. Buildings are clean and well maintained. Most classrooms are adequately furnished and are fit for their purpose, although a minority of rooms are noisy or badly ventilated. A few computer rooms have broken chairs and some science laboratories have uncomfortable seating and a poor layout. In contrast, accommodation and equipment for engineering is of a high standard. Almost all of the college is accessible to students with mobility difficulties. The main exception is the students' union building. An audit has been carried to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and action is underway, for example, the fitting of doors that are easier to open.

28. The learning resources centre is spacious and well used. There are a suitable variety of spaces for individual and group work. The book stock is adequate and there is a good range of journals and online data. These online data are well used in some curriculum areas, for example, hairdressing, English and ICT. Audio-visual aids and reprographics facilities are good. There are sufficient up-to-date computers for students. All students have access to the Internet and adequate space to save their work on the college network. However, students' access to, and use of, the college e-mail system is inadequate. There are sufficient computers for full-time staff, although a few part-time staff have difficulty finding available computers at convenient times.

29. The college employs over 450 teaching staff. Most full-time and part-time staff have appropriate qualifications and experience. Around 85% of the permanent full-time staff and fractional staff are qualified teachers, but only just over 50% of the 255 hourly paid staff have a teaching qualification. In a few curriculum areas, for example, health and social care, the proportion of hourly paid staff is too high. Since the last inspection, most staff development activities have focused on teaching and learning. The college has also appointed 10 experienced teachers as advanced practitioners to work with teachers to observe lessons, improve teaching and assist curriculum developments.

30. The college offers a satisfactory range of academic and vocational courses in most curriculum areas. It does not offer hospitality and catering, leisure and tourism courses or land-based courses. In most programme areas, there are appropriate opportunities for students to progress from foundation to advanced level courses. The college offers evening classes in several curriculum areas, but the overall range of evening classes is narrow for a large college with a mixed urban and rural catchment area. The college offers work-based learning programmes in engineering, construction, hairdressing, business administration and health and social care. The college has successfully attracted students from under-represented groups. Some 30% of students are from areas of relative deprivation and 11% of students are from minority ethnic groups.

31. The college offers a range of courses that it describes as 'flexible learning courses'. Students who enrol on these courses study at home. They use learning materials provided by the college. They have a designated tutor who they may make an appointment to see at the college. At the time of the inspection, the college had about 1,000 of these distance learning students, mostly studying for GCSE and GCE A-level qualifications. In 2002, the number of distance learning enrolments fell and the college only achieved about 70% of its enrolment target for this mode of delivery.

32. The college has premises in Stockport town centre through which it offers 'Learndirect' IT courses. Its IT provision is restricted to courses at the main site and Learndirect programmes. The college provides basic skills courses at four community venues. Courses in the community are also provided by the borough's Adult Education Service. The college has analysed courses offered by local providers, but the analysis did not include the Adult Education Service. Consequently, the college does not have adequate information to assess whether it is meeting the need for courses in community venues.

33. The college has improved its approach to Curriculum 2000. Many students combine study of a GCE AS subject with their vocational course. A model for key skills teaching has been established with clear responsibilities for subject teachers and key skills specialists. In most curriculum areas, key skills are assessed in vocational assignments. However, in a few curriculum areas, key skills teaching is not well integrated into lessons. The college offers a satisfactory range of enrichment activities, but take-up is low. Some curriculum areas, for example, hairdressing and beauty therapy, offer appropriate additional qualifications.

34. Links with local schools are very good. The college provides NVQs in construction, engineering, hairdressing and beauty therapy for over 100 pupils from 14 local schools. Pupils attend the college one day a week accompanied by their teachers. The college also offers taster sessions, for example, in forensic science, and summer courses for disaffected school leavers. Good links with employers in some curriculum areas, for example, engineering and construction, have led to the provision of specialist courses for local companies. In business and science, links are inadequate and students do not get enough exposure to current industry practice through work experience, visiting speakers or visits.

Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since the inspection in May 2001, the college has made good progress in addressing its weaknesses. Governors and the principal provide a clear strategic direction. The quality of provision has improved in 6 of the 12 curriculum areas inspected. Pass rates are higher on many courses, the quality of teaching has improved and the monitoring of performance is more rigorous. However, despite several initiatives to increase attendance and retention rates, they remain persistently low on many courses.

36. The principal provides effective leadership. Since his appointment just under a year before the inspection, the college has revised its mission statement and corporate objectives. Managers are very focused on improving the standard of teaching and raising students' achievements. The principal and senior managers have responded positively to a staff survey. As a result, managers are now open and consultative, morale has improved and staff feel that their opinions are valued. The college's development plan for 2002/03 is a comprehensive and coherent document that identifies the actions required to secure improvements in key aspects of the college's business. Planning and review processes, for example, for self-assessment and programme review, are

integrated with the development planning process.

37. After his appointment, the principal sensibly decided to take time to review a new curriculum management structure that had been introduced shortly before his arrival. This structure is too complex. Accountability of managers in the different management tiers is unclear. Curriculum managers do not fully understand their responsibilities for aspects of the college's business, for example, staff deployment and quality assurance. The college has too many cross-college working groups and committees. The overall effectiveness of these groups is satisfactory. However, senior managers have recognised that the work of these groups is often duplicated and that line management and committee structures need to be simplified.

38. Course management is good in most curriculum areas. Careful attention is given to monitoring individual students' progress. Most course managers have implemented actions to improve retention and pass rates. In many cases, this has resulted in improved performance. However, poor performance persists on a minority of courses and the college has failed to meet its retention rate targets for courses at levels 1 and 2.

39. Quality assurance procedures have improved since the last inspection and they are consistently implemented. Course review and target setting are well established. The principal chairs termly performance review boards for each faculty. The boards monitor all aspects of performance, including retention rates, achievement, attendance, staffing and the results of lesson observations. They effectively help managers to identify courses where students' performance is unsatisfactory. Managers intervene promptly to ensure that appropriate remedial action is taken. However, managers have not effectively identified the significant weaknesses in the college's extensive distance learning provision. Course review of distance learning is inadequate. Self-assessment is firmly established in the college and involves all staff. The college's extensive programme of lesson observations has resulted in sound judgements about the quality of teaching and learning. This has improved teaching. The appointment of experienced staff as 'advanced practitioners' to carry out lesson observations and support teachers has also contributed to better teaching.

40. Teachers' appraisal is informed by lesson observation outcomes. Development needs identified through appraisal are generally met. However, in 2001/02, fewer than half of the teachers were appraised. There is a comprehensive programme of staff development. Staff have good opportunities to develop their teaching skills and acquire additional professional qualifications.

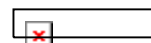
41. The college actively promotes equality of opportunity for students and staff and appreciates the importance of support for individuals in ensuring equality of opportunity. A 'diversity manager' has recently been appointed to ensure that the college maintains its good level of response to equal opportunities issues. The college is making good progress in implementing its race equality policy and action plan. Some 11% of students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 4% in the local community. The college has analysed the retention and pass rates of these students. The college recognises that the monitoring of equality of opportunity in premises used by modern apprentices for their vocational training is unsatisfactory. The college has made an effective response to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Disability Discrimination Act. Governors, all full-time staff, and many part-time staff have attended training sessions on disability awareness. The college has effective policies and procedures to deal with harassment and complaints.

42. Governance is good. Governors bring a wide range of valuable expertise to the college. They operate within a sound framework for governance. They are well informed about the national agenda for the 14 to 19 curriculum. Governors have played a major role in monitoring the implementation of the college's post-inspection action plan and have supported the principal and senior managers during a period of rapid change. As prominent members of the local community, they recognise the challenge faced by the college in raising skill levels in the local community. Governors scrutinise the academic performance carefully and are well served by accurate reports on retention and pass rates compared with targets.

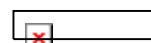
43. Financial management is effective. Governors and senior managers monitor college expenditure carefully. Operating costs have been reduced by £1.2 million since 2001. Surveys of students' views

demonstrate that the college has achieved savings while increasing students' levels of satisfaction. Satisfactory value for money is assured by the careful deployment of resources and through detailed monitoring of teachers' workloads to ensure that their time is used efficiently. The college has improved the accuracy and reliability of its management information. Regular reports enable managers to keep track of expenditure, enrolment, retention rates, attendance and students' examination performance compared with college and national averages.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas



Science and mathematics



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

Strengths

- good science teaching
- thorough monitoring of students' progress
- broad range of daytime and distance learning courses.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on many courses
- low levels of attainment
- unsatisfactory accommodation
- over-reliance on part-time and inexperienced staff.

Scope of provision

44. The college provides a wide range of mathematics and science courses for students aged 16 to 18 and adult students, including GCE A levels in biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and human biology and GCSE courses in science, mathematics, human physiology and health and geology. These courses are offered to full-time and part-time students during the day. The college offers first diplomas and national diplomas in applied science and sports science, and a national certificate in science. GCSEs and GCE A levels are also provided through distance learning. This enables students to study independently, but with access to individual academic tutorial support. There is a good range of enrichment activities for sports science students including additional qualifications, visiting speakers, work experience and residential visits, but insufficient enrichment activities for other vocational science students.

Achievement and standards

45. Pass rates have improved since the last inspection. For example, in 2002, pass rates of 60%, 59% and 54%, respectively, in GCSE mathematics, science and human physiology and health were well above national averages. In 2002, the pass rate was good in GCE AS biology, at 89%. The pass rate on the national diploma in sports science has also been consistently above the national average. The AVCE science course and the NVQ in laboratory and associated technical activities had poor pass rates and are no longer offered. Retention rates on many courses are unsatisfactory. For example, in 2002, GCSE mathematics, GCE AS human biology and the national diploma in sports science all had retention rates below 60%. Registers for 2002/03 show that there has been little improvement in retention rates on many courses. Most students are well motivated and enjoy their courses. However, at the time of the inspection, many students, particularly in mathematics, had not attained the standards expected for the stage of their course.

A sample of retention and pass rates in science and mathematics, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE mathematics	2	No. of starts	278	228	103
		% retention	75	67	51
		% pass rate	23	33	60
GCSE general science	2	No. of starts	49	68	77
		% retention	61	61	61
		% pass rate	40	43	59
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	*	50	17
		% retention	*	73	75
		% pass rate	*	51	92
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	*	26	27
		% retention	*	81	69
		% pass rate	*	52	89
GCE AS human biology	3	No. of starts	*	16	15
		% retention	*	33	33
		% pass rate	*	20	80
National diploma in applied science (sports science)	3	No. of starts	*	44	43
		% retention	*	55	58
		% pass rate	*	92	84

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

46. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Most science teaching is good. Mathematics teaching is mainly satisfactory, but a minority is unsatisfactory. The best lessons are well planned. They have a clear purpose and include a variety of activities that maintain students' interest. For example, in one lesson, students made models with coloured paper to show transcription and translation in protein synthesis. Teachers are beginning to make effective use of new interactive whiteboards, but the use of ICT in teaching and learning is underdeveloped. ICT is rarely referred to in schemes of work or lesson plans. In a few lessons, insufficient attention is paid to health and safety and risk assessments are not reviewed on a regular basis. The need to cater for students of different abilities is identified in lesson plans, but in practice little differentiated material is used. In several lessons, teachers talk too much and the students are not expected to think for themselves.

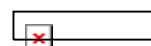
47. The assessment of coursework is good. Students' progress is assessed regularly. Feedback on assessed work clearly identifies how students can improve. There is effective tracking of students' progress on GCSE and GCE A-level courses. Students are set target grades, based on their qualifications on entry. Targets are regularly reviewed against assessed work and appropriate action is taken if students are not meeting their targets. There is very good academic support for both part-time and full-time students. Extra lessons are scheduled to help students who are underachieving. Revision sessions and practical workshops are held for distance learning students. Initial guidance is weak. Many students drop out in the first few weeks of their courses.

48. Teachers are suitably qualified, but they lack recent industrial experience. Consequently, they are not well equipped to give students an appreciation of the skills, knowledge and opportunities available in science-based employment. Work experience and visits are not used to compensate for this. There is a high proportion of part-time teachers, particularly in mathematics, where there are no full-time teachers. This adversely affects curriculum development, the availability of teachers to students outside lessons, and the ability to provide cover when staff are absent. Much of the accommodation is unsatisfactory. The science laboratories are dated. There is insufficient storage space. Fixed seating and work benches inhibit group work and students are not able to move safely around the laboratories. Practical sports facilities are poor. Changing facilities are inadequate, and there are no dedicated fitness testing laboratories. Fitness testing equipment is dated and it is incompatible with the newer college computers. The library has sufficient up-to-date text books and periodicals.

Leadership and management

49. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Good progress has been made in addressing weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Individuals' progress is well monitored, but managers are not sufficiently rigorous in identifying poorly performing courses and addressing their weaknesses. The use of value added data to analyse the results in each subject is underdeveloped. Teams responsible for subjects taught by both traditional and distance learning methods have too little contact with each other. They do not share good practice or discuss curriculum developments.

Construction



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

Strengths

- high pass rates on most courses
- effective teaching
- broad and expanding range of provision
- high standard of students' work
- productive links with employers.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on a minority of courses
- weak management of work-based learning
- insufficient work-based assessment.

Scope of provision

50. The college offers a broad range of courses in brickwork, carpentry and joinery, electrical installation, handcrafted furniture, painting and decorating and plumbing. Around half of the 1,300 students are aged 16 to 18. A further 187 learners take modern apprenticeship programmes. The college provides good opportunities for school pupils to gain vocational qualifications while attending school. Links with employers are productive. Computer-assisted design courses, gas safety provision and power appliance testing courses for industry recruit well. The college provides specialist assessment services for employees facing redundancy and training days to inform work-based learning employers of their obligations under modern apprenticeship programmes. The college has also provided special training for an urban regeneration partnership, but there are no other community-based courses.

Achievement and standards

51. Students' written work, practical work, and portfolios are of a high standard. Students

undertaking practical assignments work well together. They contribute good ideas to discussions and respond well to technical problems. For example, in an NVQ level 2 plumbing lesson on ventilation, students analysed an isometric drawing of a house showing a range of ventilators in correct and incorrect locations. They vigorously debated the merits of each location and agreed correct solutions. Evidence of students' achievements is carefully recorded. Students use digital photography to thoroughly record evidence of skills developed in workshops and workplaces. They make good use of ICT to record technical details of products and processes in their key skills portfolios. For example, NVQ level 3 bricklaying students produced an excellent graphical evaluation of the type and prevalence of fatal injuries in the construction industry.

52. Low progression rates from level 1 to level 3 on craft courses were a weakness at the last inspection. Progression rates are now good. Pass rates on most courses are high. In 2002, particularly high pass rates were achieved on NVQ level 2 painting and decorating, plumbing and wood occupation courses. Retention rates on a minority of courses are unsatisfactory. For example, in 2002, the retention rates on NVQ level 2 in brickwork, and NVQ 2 in installing electrical systems and equipment, were well below the national average at 50% and 63%, respectively. NVQ pass rates for work-based learners are good, but few learners complete the full framework, mainly because they fail to achieve the required key skills. However, current learners have better key skills pass rates.

A sample of retention and pass rates in construction, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Construction crafts	1	No. of starts	54	53	46
		% retention	67	58	78
		% pass rate	83	71	92
Construction crafts	2	No. of starts	276	331	333
		% retention	62	56	68
		% pass rate	75	71	84
City and Guilds electrical engineering	2	No. of starts	32	30	*
		% retention	94	90	*
		% pass rate	83	48	*
NVQ in producing handcrafted furniture	2	No. of starts	30	24	19
		% retention	40	57	63
		% pass rate	82	82	82
Construction crafts	3	No. of starts	27	56	100
		% retention	81	88	75
		% pass rate	95	90	85
AVCE construction and the built environment**	3	No. of starts	30	70	71
		% retention	67	90	92
		% pass rate	88	80	80

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* unreliable data

** GNVQ advanced in 2000

Quality of education and training

53. Teaching is effective. Students with widely differing abilities are well catered for. The more able students are helped to achieve at a faster rate, while less able students are given the extra attention that they need. Teachers cope well with large groups of students, especially in practical lessons. Most teachers demand and receive high standards of work from college students and work-based learners. Realistic projects ensure that most individual and group work is productive. Teachers occasionally fail to ensure that students participate fully in lessons or they fail to check their understanding of topics. In a few lessons, lengthy presentations by teachers or long periods watching videos inhibit students' participation. Students are encouraged to observe safe working practices, but occasional lapses occur. For example, in a brickwork lesson, students did not wear protective goggles while cutting bricks.

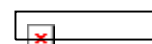
54. Assessment is well organised and well documented. Students' assignments have clear assessment criteria and are well marked. Key skills work is relevant to construction and it is well integrated into assignments. Internal verification is thorough. Students' progress is well monitored. Work-based learners have good portfolios of evidence, much of which is assessed, but there is over reliance on witness testimonies, insufficient direct assessment of learning in the workplace, and slow progress in collecting site evidence from the workplace. Most students identified as needing additional support take up the support and achieve their qualifications. The employers involved with work-based learning play an active part in training by providing opportunities for work-based learners to gain experience and evidence for their NVQ qualifications. Despite efforts by the college to improve employers' understanding of modern apprenticeship frameworks, levels of understanding remains low.

55. Staff are well qualified. There is good technician support in workshops. However, high staff turnover and absence through illness have adversely affected some courses. There are good computing facilities and software. Most classrooms are well equipped and suitably furnished. Informative posters in construction areas encourage students to study, achieve their key skills and work safely. Most workshops are spacious and well equipped, but electrical installation and painting and decorating areas are hot and stuffy and subject to excessive traffic noise. Carpentry and joinery project areas are some distance from the main workshops, which makes it difficult for teachers to supervise students. The bricklaying workshop has excessive levels of silica dust. The furniture workshop is too small and it lacks appropriate ventilation and spraying facilities.

Leadership and management

56. Leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection. The management of college courses is good. Communication between managers and staff is effective. Links with employers are good. There is regular reporting of students' absence to employers. Course teams have clear targets for recruitment, attendance, retention and pass rates. These targets are effectively monitored through course reviews. Significant weaknesses remain in the management of work-based learning. Unreliable and incomplete work-based data for learners starting in 1999 and 2000 precludes analysis of these students' overall achievements. Target setting for work-based learning is underdeveloped. For example, no targets are set for retention and pass rates or for equality of opportunity in the workplace.

Engineering



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

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on most college courses and motor vehicle modern apprenticeships

- very good resources for motorcycle engineering and computer-aided design
- good monitoring of individuals' progress on college courses
- effective partnerships with schools, employers and training providers
- good course management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on mechanical and electronic systems courses
- low pass rates on mechanical production and one electrical course
- unsatisfactory achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks in general engineering
- lack of rigour in progress reviews for work-based learning students.

Scope of provision

57. The college offers a broad range of courses in mechanical, fabrication, electrical, electronic, motor vehicle, motorcycle, computer-aided and manufacturing engineering for full-time and part-time students and work-based learners. Courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. There is a one-year pre-apprenticeship programme in motor vehicle engineering. Enrolments have fallen over the last three years. In 2002, 602 students enrolled on engineering courses, of whom 55% were adults. Work-based learning programmes include production, motor vehicle, motorcycle and engineering manufacture. At the time of inspection, there were 39 advanced modern apprentices and 12 foundation modern apprentices on these programmes.

Achievement and standards

58. Pass rates on most courses have improved since the last inspection and are generally above national averages. There are high pass rates on the national certificate in engineering and on NVQ courses in engineering maintenance, motorcycle and motor vehicle engineering. However, the pass rate on the level 2 mechanical production course was unsatisfactory in 2001 and 2002. Retention

rates on many courses have improved, although they remain below the national average on many courses. An exception is the NVQ level 2 course in vehicle, mechanical and electronic systems, where the retention rate has declined to below the national average. The retention rate was poor on the GNVQ foundation engineering course. However, this course was discontinued in 2002. General engineering students produce satisfactory work. Students on motor vehicle and motorcycle courses produce a good standard of work. Their training equips them well for work in the motor industry. They are well motivated and take pride in their work. Particularly good work is carried out on go-carts that are built and raced by college students.

59. Modern apprenticeship framework achievements in motor vehicle engineering are good. Of those who started in 2000, 63% achieved the full qualification. This is a significantly higher rate than typically achieved by training providers. Retention rates and pass rates on general engineering modern apprenticeship programmes are unsatisfactory. Retention rates for learners starting in 2000 and 2001 are around 60%. Pass rates are around 35%.

A sample of retention and pass rates in engineering, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Pre-apprenticeship motor vehicle	1	No. of starts	*	38	43
		% retention	*	71	79
		% pass rate	*	78	91
NVQ in vehicle mechanical and electronic systems	2	No. of starts	75	54	21
		% retention	57	56	43
		% pass rate	85	90	88
City and Guilds progression award in electrical and electronic engineering	2	No. of starts	16	22	***
		% retention	81	73	***
		% pass rate	15	31	***
City and Guilds computer-aided draughting and design	2	No. of starts	18	57	34
		% retention	100	89	88
		% pass rate	78	76	97
City and Guilds mechanical production competence	2	No. of starts	28	***	19
		% retention	68	***	68
		% pass rate	84	***	42
AVCE engineering**	3	No. of starts	33	43	26
		% retention	42	79	100
		% pass rate	64	82	62
National certificate in engineering	3	No. of starts	86	76	38
		% retention	64	67	84
		% pass rate	70	88	90

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** GNVQ advanced in 2000

*** less than 15 students were enrolled

Quality of education and training

60. Most teaching is good or better. Teachers have good schemes of work and informative lesson plans that make appropriate references to teaching students of differing abilities, students' additional support requirements, and the integrated teaching of key skills. Most handouts are good. Motor vehicle and motorcycle engineering teachers effectively integrate theoretical and practical topics and made good use of interactive whiteboards. Good use is made of project work and industrial visits. A minority of lessons are dull. In these lessons, teachers rely too heavily on closed questions. On a few courses, key skills training has been left until too near to the end of students' programmes.

61. Assessment of students on college courses is carefully planned and appropriately scheduled throughout the year. Students' progress is recorded on clear charts posted on workshop walls. These are updated each week. Individuals' progress is reviewed during tutorials when areas of concern are identified and corrective action is planned. Reviews of work-based learners' progress lack rigour. Feedback is often inadequate. Tutors do not indicate what evidence learners should obtain. In most cases, assessors only use a tick sheet to record competences. Target setting is poor. Individual learning plans are seldom updated and are not used as working documents.

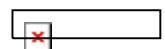
62. Staff have relevant qualifications for teaching and assessment. General engineering resources are satisfactory. The college has very good resources for motorcycle engineering, including a bay in the workshop with wheelchair access which is used by one of the students. The motor vehicle section also has up-to-date reference materials. Computer-aided design and manufacture resources are good.

63. There are good links with local schools, employers and external organisations. Short taster courses are provided for local school children and a few college staff teach on engineering courses in local schools. Good links with employers assist students' progression to employment. Frequent workplace visits by college training officers help to maintain good relations. On most courses, there are clear progression routes from introductory levels to HE.

Leadership and management

64. College courses are well managed. There are standard procedures for lesson planning, assessment and individual learning plans. The selection and initial assessment of students is well structured. Attendance monitoring and tutorial support are generally effective. Curriculum planning is rightly focusing on a more project-based approach. However, managers have not effectively addressed falling enrolments and unsatisfactory retention rates on many courses. The management of work-based learning is improving, but data are not well used in programme reviews. There is poor monitoring of employers' commitment to equal opportunities and work-based learners have little awareness of equal opportunities.

Business studies



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on personnel management and accounting courses

- good teaching on most professional and administration courses

- good accommodation and resources.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on several full-time courses
- undemanding teaching in a significant minority of lessons
- poor attendance and punctuality on full-time courses
- unsatisfactory key skills provision.

Scope of provision

65. The college offers a good range of business studies, business administration and professional courses from level 2 to HE. Full-time programmes include GNVQ intermediate, AVCE business, GCE A-level business studies and the certificate and diploma in administration. Part-time provision includes accounting, marketing, personnel, purchasing and supply, legal executive and management programmes. There are 14 modern apprentices on administration and accounting programmes and a further small provision of work-based NVQ training. Approximately 40 students follow distance learning business or accounting programmes. At the time of inspection, there were 88 students on full-time courses and 782 students on part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

66. Retention and pass rates on most professional and management courses are good. In the past three years, the certificate in personnel practice course has had high retention rates, and all students who completed the course gained the qualification. Pass rates on accounting courses have improved over the last three years to well above the national average. Retention and pass rates for full-time business students are unsatisfactory. In 2002, only 21% of the students who started the AVCE business course gained the qualification. In the same year, the retention rate on the GNVQ intermediate business course was satisfactory, but the 57% pass rate was below the national average. The retention rate on these courses remained unsatisfactory in 2002/03. The lack of effectively integrated key skills on full-time courses contributes to low achievement.

67. The standard of students' work on management, professional and administration programmes is good. In a management lesson, students worked effectively in groups, sharing their work experiences to enhance their understanding of performance management. Administration students develop good skills in producing complex documents and the standard of their assessment portfolios is good. Accounting students are well motivated and work effectively in lessons, applying themselves well to achieve their learning goals. The research and analytical skills of full-time students are generally not well developed. However, in one advanced level business studies lesson, effective use was made of the Internet to research the social responsibility of companies. This provided good material for the subsequent discussion. Attendance on full-time business courses is unsatisfactory.

Some students arrive late and poorly prepared for lessons. In these lessons, students are poorly motivated and their attainment is low for the stage of their course. The college lacks sound data on the past achievements of modern apprentices. However, current trainees' work indicates that they are making good progress.

A sample of retention and pass rates in business studies, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate business studies	2	No. of starts	28	20	18
		% retention	68	80	78
		% pass rate	68	6	57
NVQ level 2 accounting	2	No. of starts	57	64	58
		% retention	84	70	83
		% pass rate	48	71	83
AVCE business studies*	3	No. of starts	41	30	33
		% retention	37	27	33
		% pass rate	73	50	64
Certificate in personnel practice	3	No. of starts	36	57	45
		% retention	89	95	98
		% pass rate	100	100	100
NVQ level 4 accounting	4	No. of starts	56	50	27
		% retention	96	94	93
		% pass rate	26	66	83
Certificate in management	4	No. of starts	74	34	**
		% retention	92	97	**
		% pass rate	94	88	**

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* GNVQ advanced in 2000

** less than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

68. Teaching is good on professional and management courses. On these courses, effective use is made of role play, case studies, students' presentations and residential courses. Management students found residential beneficial in developing teamwork and problem solving skills. In a legal executives lesson, a role-play exercise was used effectively to develop students' understanding of conveyancing. Most lessons are well planned, but in a few lessons teaching is undemanding and does not maintain students' interest. In an AVCE lesson, students spent too long on a simple calculation. Some students completed the task quickly and then did nothing while they waited for the others to finish. In the better lessons, teachers plan for the range of abilities in the class and provide additional work for the more able students. There is insufficient work experience, or other links with business, to provide vocational relevance on the full-time business and administration courses.

69. Off-the-job training for work-based learners is well organised and provides good opportunities for the development of underpinning knowledge to support NVQ assessment and the achievement of key skills. Workplace assessment is also well organised and provides regular opportunities for evidence to be gathered. The standard of assessment on most college courses is good. However, a

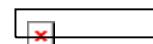
small minority of assignments are marked too leniently. Feedback on assessed work is generally good, but in a few cases the brief comments do not provide sufficient guidance to students on how to improve their work.

70. Most staff are well qualified and suitably experienced for the courses they teach. However, only half the part-time staff have teaching qualifications. Accommodation and resources are good. An excellent resource-based learning facility with computers and other learning resources is available throughout the day and evening to all students. Excellent support is provided for students with complex learning needs. Tutorials for full-time students improved in 2002/03 and are satisfactory, but support for part-time students is not always available at suitable times.

Leadership and management

71. New managers have introduced revised curriculum management and quality assurance procedures, including value added analysis and lesson observation procedures. Good progress has been made in addressing weaknesses identified during the last inspection. Action plans are carefully monitored. Course teams are now accountable for the overall quality of students' experiences. Course reviews are conducted regularly, but a few reviews lack detail and rigour of action planning. For example, the GNVQ intermediate course review did not address the external verifier's recommendations. The organisation and management of work-based learning has improved and is satisfactory. Trainees' progress is now monitored effectively.

Information and communication technology



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

Strengths

- very good teaching on the AVCE course
- good achievement on the AVCE course
- well-managed vocational courses.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on several courses
- poor advice and guidance for GCE AS and GCSE students

- insufficient opportunities for students to experience current industrial practice
- insufficient provision in the local community.

Scope of provision

72. Approximately 1,400 students take ICT courses ranging from level 1 to level 4. Full-time courses for students aged 16 to 18 include foundation and intermediate GNVQ, AVCE, GCE A-level, and GCSE courses. Part-time courses include AVCE, City and Guilds E-skills and IT evening classes for beginners. A range of IT qualifications including computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and European computer driving licence (ECDL) are offered through the department's drop-in IT workshop. The college has a learning shop in Stockport town centre. This provides Learndirect IT courses. This provision was not included in the inspection.

Achievement and standards

73. There is good achievement on the AVCE course. AVCE students' work is of a high standard. In 2002, pass rates on the two-year and one-year courses were 100% and 94%, respectively. Progression rates are good, with nearly 70% of AVCE students progressing to HE. Many students obtain high grades. In 2002, over 60% exceeded the targets set for them based on their prior achievement. Retention rates are unsatisfactory on GCSE, intermediate GNVQ and City and Guilds programming courses. In 2002, retention rates on these three courses were, respectively, 10, 26 and 9 percentage points below national averages. Registers for 2002/03 show that on most courses, with the exception of GCE AS, retention rates are improving. The retention rate of students aged over 19 who attend evening classes is significantly lower than that of younger full-time students.

74. Students on the GNVQ intermediate and foundation courses produce satisfactory work, but poor punctuality adversely affects learning on these courses. The quality of students' work on the City and Guilds programming course is good. In 2002, the ECDL course was taken as an additional IT key skills qualification by all full-time college students. The pass rate was very poor. This arrangement has been discontinued. The ECDL is now offered as a part-time course in the drop-in IT workshop. Part-time students taking courses based in the IT workshop produce work of a satisfactory standard.

A sample of retention and pass rates in information and communication technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ foundation IT	1	No. of starts	*	*	33
		% retention	*	*	73
		% pass rate	*	*	67
GCSE IT	2	No. of starts	16	19	23
		% retention	69	74	57
		% pass rate	0	57	31
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	38	37	35
		% retention	87	68	54
		% pass rate	48	56	84
City and Guilds diploma	2	No. of starts	38	37	56

in programming		% retention	87	62	64
		% pass rate	88	65	92
GCE AS IT	3	No. of starts	26	27	18
		% retention	65	54	78
		% pass rate	41	57	71
AVCE IT (2 year)**	3	No. of starts	57	52	46
		% retention	52	51	56
		% pass rate	62	65	100
AVCE IT (1 year)**	3	No. of starts	51	44	71
		% retention	55	60	70
		% pass rate	54	92	94

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** GNVQ advanced in 2000 and 2001

Quality of education and training

75. Teaching is very good on AVCE courses. Teachers make good use of group work and encourage students to support each other. Lessons are well planned and effectively linked to assessment. Teaching methods are varied and interesting. The effective use of ICT for teaching and assignment work enables teachers to cater for students of different abilities. In particular, it allows the more able students to proceed at a challenging pace. Students make good use of homework and private study time to work on assignments. They are given good feedback from teachers about the quality of their work. There are too few opportunities for students on vocational courses to experience current industrial practice. There are insufficient work placements. There are too few industrial visits and guest speakers. The monitoring of students' progress on full-time vocational courses has improved since the last inspection and is good. The recent introduction of an electronic register system and rigorous follow-up of absent students by a 'retention officer' have contributed to improved attendance and retention rates and helped with the identification of under-performing students.

76. ICT classrooms are satisfactory. New computers have been installed in one room and there are multimedia projectors in all ICT teaching rooms. Students have space on the college network for the storage of their files and recording their progress in learning logs. Students have appropriate access to the Internet. Two interactive whiteboards have recently been installed, but they are not yet used effectively by teachers to improve their lessons. Online learning is at an early stage of development. In a few lessons, students were undertaking multimedia assignments, but they were unable to play sounds or watch video clips. In one classroom, damaged chairs are a health and safety risk. Staff are well qualified, experienced and enthusiastic.

77. All ICT teaching takes place at the main college site. The college has taken part in development of the local Learndirect hub. A summer school is offered in partnership with the University of the Third-age. However, the college is not sufficiently active in developing courses in community venues. There are no partnerships with local community groups and insufficient research on local community and employer needs.

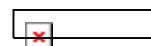
78. Support for ICT students is generally good. Students on vocational courses receive relevant and impartial advice and guidance. They are given an interview, a tour of the facilities and the chance to talk to current students and staff. GCSE and GCE AS students are not well informed about demands of the course. This contributed to unsatisfactory retention rates in 2002, particularly on the GCE AS

course. Students meet their personal tutors three times a year to discuss academic progress and support issues. The use of individual learning plans to record initial assessment results, targets, progress and support issues is satisfactory. On foundation and intermediate courses, there are good literacy and numeracy support lessons.

Leadership and management

79. Vocational courses are well managed. Retention and attendance rates are improving. Staff communicate effectively with the parents of students whose attendance or progress is unsatisfactory. New data management software are well used to inform course team meetings and set retention and pass rate targets for courses. Experienced teachers known as 'advanced practitioners' mentor new members of staff. The department's self-assessment report recognises unsatisfactory retention and pass rates and staff attend weekly course team meetings that focus on improving course performance.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy



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

Strengths

- good pass rates on most courses
- effective monitoring of college students' progress
- good links between theory and practice in teaching
- broad range of courses
- well-presented, good quality portfolios of students' work.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on a minority of courses
- unsatisfactory physical resources

- unsatisfactory management of work-based learning.

Scope of provision

80. The college provides full-time and part-time courses leading to NVQ qualifications at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and beauty therapy. In addition, there are full-time national diploma courses in beauty and holistic therapies. All full-time courses include a work experience placement. There are 203 full-time students, 163 part-time students and 27 modern apprentices who are employed in salons and attend the college for one day every two weeks. Part-time and short courses include nail techniques, ear piercing and photographic make-up. These courses are also offered to full-time students as additional qualifications. The complementary therapy short courses include sports massage, Indian head massage, reflexology and aromatherapy.

Achievement and standards

81. Retention rates on most courses are in line with national averages and are satisfactory. In 2002, retention rates in NVQ level 3 hairdressing improved to 60%. This satisfactory rate is 7 percentage points above the national average. The retention rate in reflexology is good, at 93%, which is 10 percentage points above the national average. Retention rates are unsatisfactory on the national diploma in beauty therapy and diploma in sports therapy courses. They are 9 and 6 percentage points, respectively, below national averages. Pass rates on most courses are good. Pass rates on NVQ levels 2 and 3 hairdressing, NVQ level 3 beauty therapy, diplomas in sports therapy, body massage, reflexology and Indian head massage courses are all above the national average. All students passed NVQ level 3 hairdressing and beauty therapy courses. The pass rates of modern apprentices are unsatisfactory. Of those who start foundation and advanced modern apprentice programmes, around 30% and 15%, respectively, achieve the full qualification.

82. Students' work is of a good standard. They have good opportunities to experience the standard of work expected in practice. Students visit trade fairs and carry out practical demonstrations and treatments. Media make-up students use well-developed skills to enter national competitions. Product manufacturers' training courses enhance student skills and knowledge. Visits to television companies and specialist lectures in dentistry and forensic anthropology have also broadened students' experience.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Indian head massage	2	No. of starts	46	63	60
		% retention	98	86	90
		% pass rate	96	87	93
NVQ beauty therapy	2	No. of starts	30	41	47
		% retention	84	73	77
		% pass rate	81	80	89
NVQ hairdressing	2/3	No. of starts	115	145	132
		% retention	61	54	72
		% pass rate	86	86	95
National diploma in beauty therapy	3	No. of starts	19	28	27
		% retention	84	71	63

		% pass rate	100	80	100
Diploma in body massage	3	No. of starts	*	22	31
		% retention	*	100	81
		% pass rate	*	100	92
Diploma in reflexology	3	No. of starts	18	27	15
		% retention	89	96	93
		% pass rate	88	81	100

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

83. Much teaching is good and better. Schemes of work and lesson plans are well organised. Questions and answers are used skilfully to determine how much learning is taking place. Groups containing students with differing abilities and language differences are well taught. Good teaching of theory is supported by well designed, challenging assignments and projects with clear objectives, assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. Theory teaching is also enhanced by practical demonstrations of up-to-date equipment and products.

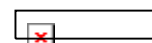
84. Key skills development is effectively integrated into vocational subject teaching. Key skills lessons are team taught by vocational teachers and key skills' tutors. Students' portfolios of work are well managed and of a high standard across all subjects. They contain a wealth of relevant evidence of students' competence, including much photographic evidence. Students' progress is effectively monitored using a variety of methods, including wall charts and assessment record books. A computerised records system enables monthly reports on each student's attendance and progress to be produced for discussion and action by managers and course teams.

85. Physical resources are unsatisfactory. Most salons are not large enough and contain insufficient workstations for students. There are too few clients for students to work on. The reception areas are cramped. There is insufficient IT equipment for both staff and students. There is no use of ILT in teaching. Full-time teachers have appropriate qualifications and experience, but two part-time teachers do not have assessor qualifications.

Leadership and management

86. College courses are well managed. There are good systems to monitor attendance. Managers have focused on action needed to improve retention and pass rates. On most programmes, improvements have resulted. However, there is no accreditation of the existing skills of students or work-based learners. Aspects of the management of work-based learning are weak. Targets set for individuals' achievement often lack dates for completion. Students' personal files are not always updated as achievement occurs. Many employers do not have work-based assessors. Consequently, opportunities for assessment in the workplace are restricted, since assessment can only take place when college assessors are visiting those employers. Work-based learners have a poor understanding of equal opportunities.

Health, social care and public services



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

Strengths

- good teaching in practical lessons
- good monitoring of students' progress
- good classroom accommodation for public services and health and social care.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on most courses
- low pass rates on a significant minority of courses
- ineffective group work in many lessons
- the slow progress of many current students
- too many unqualified or inexperienced teachers
- unsatisfactory attendance and punctuality.

Scope of provision

87. The college offers a broad range of courses. In childcare and health and social care, there are full-time and part-time courses at levels 1 to 4. Full-time courses in public services are offered at levels 2 and 3 and a level 3 national certificate course has been started this year. There are part-time counselling courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. Most courses recruit well. A total of 173 full-time students are enrolled on health and care courses, 104 on childcare courses and 39 on public services courses. Most full-time students are aged 16 to 18. Around 350 part-time adult students are following counselling, childcare and health and social care courses. There are also 19 learners following advanced modern apprenticeships in childcare.

Achievement and standards

88. In 2002, retention rates were unsatisfactory or poor on most courses. At the time of the inspection, retention rates had improved to at or above the national average on many one-year courses, but were significantly below average on other one-year courses and on the first year of two level 3 national certificate courses. Pass rates have improved to above the national average on the GNVQ intermediate course, the foundation award in caring for children, the childcare and education course, the NVQ level 3 in early years and the diploma in social work course. However, with the exception of the GNVQ course and the foundation award, retention rates were well below the average on all these courses. Pass rates declined to significantly below the national average on the first certificate in caring, the national certificates in caring and childhood studies, the national diploma in public services and the intermediate certificate in counselling skills.

89. In just over one fifth of all lessons, students were not producing work of the standard expected for the stage of their course. In public services lessons, too many students are inattentive. Staff have not succeeded in creating an appropriate professional culture among public services students.

A sample of retention and pass rates in health, social care and public services, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Caring for young children	1	No. of starts	17	*	16
		% retention	59	*	81
		% pass rate	90	*	85
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	33	19	25
		% retention	52	47	80
		% pass rate	76	67	100
First certificate in caring	2	No. of starts	16	17	24
		% retention	50	59	67
		% pass rate	100	100	75
Counselling skills intermediate	2	No. of starts	34	74	46
		% retention	91	86	76
		% pass rate	81	83	83
National diploma in childhood studies (nursery nursing)	3	No. of starts	22	34	33
		% retention	52	71	70
		% pass rate	91	71	91
National diploma in public services	3	No. of starts	29	21	30
		% retention	69	43	37
		% pass rate	44	78	64
National certificate in caring services	3	No. of starts	20	21	24
		% retention	50	57	54
		% pass rate	90	83	62

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* less than 15 students were enrolled

Quality of education and training

90. The proportion of good or better lessons is well below the average for lessons observed in colleges during 2001/02. The best teaching is in lessons where students carry out practical activities linked to assignments or the workplace. For example, in a foundation lesson, students were working effectively together to plan a practical assignment. The resources they needed were appropriate and easily accessible. The teacher stressed the relevance of the task to the workplace. The students enjoyed the task and produced good quality work. In an advanced level part-time lesson, students used a variety of resources to analyse the types of, and visible and behavioural indicators of, child abuse. They worked well in groups and produced a good quality analysis for use in the workplace. In the weaker lessons, there is poor management of group work. Tasks are often unclear, deadlines are not set and there is no systematic review of lesson outcomes. In many lessons, questions and answers are used ineffectively. Students have little involvement in class discussions. Many level 3 lessons are too focused on imparting knowledge. There is too little development of students' analytical and evaluative skills. Very few students attend key skills lessons and overall attendance at lessons observed by inspectors was unsatisfactory, at 69%. The late arrival of many students disrupts lessons.

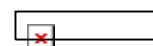
91. Generally, resources are good. Classrooms and base rooms are well equipped and have good quality displays of students' work. The classrooms for public services, health and care and counselling courses are particularly good. Appropriate materials are used in practical activities. Students generally have good access to books and modern computers, although some adult students cannot always gain access to computers when demand for computers is high. There are too many unqualified part-time teachers in health and care. At the time of the inspection, 9 of the 37 teachers employed in the curriculum area had no teaching qualification. Teachers on public services courses lack experience of work in public services, but good links with public service employers enable students to make useful visits and attend short residential courses.

92. Teachers' detailed verbal and written feedback on assignments explains how grades may be improved. However, assignments are poorly scheduled, with the result that hand-in dates are too close together. Generally, full-time students receive good personal support. Teachers use tutorials to set target grades and monitor progress against them. Some targets are too general to enable progress to be measured. There is close monitoring of students who are considered to be at risk of leaving early. These students receive good support.

Leadership and management

93. Curriculum leadership and management are satisfactory in health and care and good in public services. Communications are good and staff work well together in their respective teams. Course reviews have become more rigorous, particularly in public services, although public services students' achievements remain poor. Staff are aware of key weaknesses in the provision. Managers have improved the programme of work-based learning for modern apprentices through more effective arrangements for assessment, learner support, key skills teaching and internal verification.

Visual and performing arts



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

Strengths

- high pass rates in media studies and art and design
- good teaching in media studies and art and design

- consistent and effective lesson planning
- very good individual support for students
- effective course management.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention rates on a few courses
- some inadequate accommodation for photography and media studies.

Scope of provision

94. The college offers a wide range of level 3 full-time courses in media, art and design and performing arts. Level 2 provision includes GNVQ intermediate courses in performing arts, media and art and design. Full-time art, design and media students have good opportunities to take additional qualifications. There are relatively few level 1 and part-time courses, but evening classes are offered in photography and interior decoration.

Achievement and standards

95. Pass rates on many courses are above national averages. For example, in both 2001 and 2002, all students who completed the national diploma in media studies course gained the qualification. There are high pass rates on the national diploma in design, AVCE art and design, GNVQ intermediate in media and GNVQ intermediate art and design courses. Retention rates on several courses are below national averages. In 2001 and 2002, retention rates on the AVCE performing arts were unsatisfactory at 50% and 54%, respectively. Retention rates are also low on national diploma in design, AVCE art and design and GCE AS art and design courses. The retention rate of performing arts students enrolled in 2002 is only slightly better than previous rates. In general, fewer adults are retained than students aged 16 to 18.

96. The standard of students' work in media studies and art and design is very good. Students on the national diploma courses in design and media and the foundation programme in art and design make particularly good progress. Performing arts students produce satisfactory work. There are good progression rates to HE. In 2002, over 90% of the students who achieved level 3 qualifications progressed to HE and nearly 80% of those who passed at level 2 progressed to level 3.

A sample of retention and pass rates in visual and performing arts, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate in	2	No. of starts	32	40	32

art and design		% retention	78	65	84
		% pass rate	76	69	89
National diploma in foundation art and design	3	No. of starts	107	134	129
		% retention	85	84	94
		% pass rate	98	96	93
National diploma in design	3	No. of starts	76	86	99
		% retention	74	72	68
		% pass rate	100	85	97
National diploma in media production**	3	No. of starts	22	26	23
		% retention	68	65	74
		% pass rate	80	100	100
AVCE art and design**	3	No. of starts	86	85	92
		% retention	72	71	61
		% pass rate	96	98	89
AVCE in performing arts**	3	No. of starts	*	30	27
		% retention	*	50	54
		% pass rate	*	60	71

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** GNVQ advanced in 2000 and 2001

Quality of education and training

97. Teaching and learning are well structured and take account of students with differing abilities and learning styles. Appropriate activities are identified for both the more able and the less able students. The best teaching is on level 3 courses in art and design and media. A consistent approach by teachers has a positive impact on students' learning and progress. Most assignments and lesson activities encourage the students to think for themselves and focus on topics in which interest them. In one art and design lesson, students discussed their design ideas in a logical manner and successfully justified their decisions, using the formal language of design. In media studies, assignments and tasks are closely related to professional practice. For example, one production project involved second-year students in the production of a feature length film, using professional actors, and to be screened at a commercial cinema later in the year. A few lessons do not include enough stimulating activities and students remain passive and uninvolved.

98. Key skills provision is satisfactory. There is good collaboration between subject teachers and key skills tutors. Opportunities to provide evidence of the acquisition of key skills are indicated in assignments. Art and design students have good opportunities for overseas visits, for example to Barcelona, Paris and Madrid. In 2002, performing arts students participated in a European student drama festival in Italy. Both media and art and design students have opportunities to gain professional experience. For the past three years, art and design students have helped with scene construction and painting for productions at the Garrick Theatre in Stockport.

99. Accommodation and resources for art and design are good. The areas for three-dimensional design for wood, metal and ceramics are conducive to creative work. Media and photography facilities are inadequate for the large number of students on these courses. Workshops and photography facilities are overcrowded. It is difficult for students to take notes and learning is

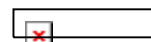
adversely affected. Performing arts students have dance lessons in the sports hall. Timetabling restrictions applicable to the sports hall adversely affect these students and there are inadequate facilities for small group rehearsal work. Full-time teachers have appropriate teaching and assessor qualifications, but there are too few staff with internal verifier qualifications.

100. Students' individual support needs are identified early in the year. Almost all students identified as requiring additional support receive it. Individuals are well supported through the tutorial system and their progress is closely monitored. Most pre-course guidance is satisfactory, but inadequate pre-course information and guidance for AVCE performing arts students have contributed to unsatisfactory retention rates on this course.

Leadership and management

101. The curriculum area is well managed. Staff understand their responsibilities. The style of management is open and supportive and communication is good. Targets for attendance, retention and pass rates are set. Progress towards these targets is monitored through monthly reports and at termly course review meetings. There are good staff development opportunities and effective support for teachers from the advanced practitioners.

Humanities



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

Strengths

- good pass and retention rates in sociology and history
- mostly good or better teaching and learning
- well-planned and helpful assessment of students' work
- very good arrangements for supporting students and monitoring progress
- effective management.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many distance learning courses

- low pass and retention rates on GCE AS and GCSE courses in psychology and law
- inadequate learning skills and poor standard of written English of a few students
- little use of ILT in teaching and learning.

Scope of provision

102. The college provides full-time courses at GCE AS and A level and GCSE in psychology, sociology, history and law. Over one third of the 275 enrolments are distance learning students who receive tutorial support through the college's flexible learning centre. There are no evening classes. In 2002/03, enrolments at GCE AS declined in psychology and law. In these subjects, only about a quarter of GCE AS students progress to GCE A level, whereas in sociology and history, some 50% do so. Psychology and European studies are included within an access to HE course taken by over 60 students.

Achievement and standards

103. GCE A-level pass rates have improved significantly since 2000, when they were low. In 2002, GCE A-level pass and retention rates were good, particularly in psychology, where almost half the students who completed the course obtained a grade A or B. Pass and retention rates in GCE AS and GCSE sociology and history have improved and are above the national average. GCSE psychology retention rates have remained low and over the past three years no GCSE law students have achieved an A to C pass grade. In 2002, pass rates in GCE AS psychology and law declined to below the national average.

104. In 2002, there were good pass and retention rates for distance learning students who completed their courses within a short duration, but low completion rates for those who did not complete within a year of enrolment. A high proportion of access to HE students obtain their qualification.

105. In general, students produce good work in lessons, but the written English of a few lower attaining students is poor. Standards of work are consistent with the above average pass rates achieved in 2002. Current GCE AS and A-level students are making good progress. These students make fluent references to concepts and theories. Access students work productively in groups, and show considerable interest in what they are learning. Students generally display a good command of their subjects and are able to express themselves with confidence.

A sample of retention and pass rates in humanities, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	49	24	27
		% retention	67	79	78
		% pass rate	73	74	76
GCE A-level psychology***	3	No. of starts	54	47	31
		% retention	*	36	97

		% pass rate	61	76	100
GCE A-level sociology***	3	No. of starts	32	28	15
		% retention	59	43	93
		% pass rate	39	75	100
GCE AS psychology	3	No. of starts	**	55	52
		% retention	**	78	71
		% pass rate	**	84	68
GCE AS sociology	3	No. of starts	**	34	33
		% retention	**	79	88
		% pass rate	**	74	83
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	**	34	50
		% retention	**	71	84
		% pass rate	**	71	62
Access to HE (1 year)	3	No. of starts	68	57	40
		% retention	76	75	88
		% pass rate	75	79	91

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* data unreliable

** course not running

*** pass rates for 2000 and 2001 are based on two-year GCE A-level courses. Pass rates for 2002 and the number of students enrolled in 2002 are based on one-year GCE A2 courses

Quality of education and training

106. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is now mostly good or better. Teachers develop students' understanding and skills using well-structured, and sometimes imaginative, activities. In a psychology lesson, students analysed the lyrics of a taped song to identify different models of abnormality. Most tasks require students to think for themselves and make balanced assessments. A few activities are pursued for too long because some students take notes very slowly. Sometimes students gain only superficial understanding because they copy from books. Students use the Internet for research, but teachers do not exploit the wider possibilities offered by ILT. Learning is effectively consolidated, both in lessons and through regular written work and tests. Good use is made of subject tutorials to meet the needs of students of differing abilities. In lessons, teachers plan to take account of differing needs, but the plans are only occasionally effective.

107. Staff are appropriately qualified. The quality of teaching has improved because of good staff development, lesson observations and support provided by experienced staff. Classrooms are bright and comfortably decorated, but teaching and learning are affected by noise from a busy main road. Resources for distance learning students are good. The book stock in the library is inadequate for access students. Computers are readily available, but the intranet site for humanities students is underdeveloped.

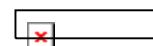
108. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are effective. Students receive assessment schedules that help them to plan their work. Assessment criteria are clearly defined. Teachers return work quickly, often reinforcing written comments with oral feedback. Several teachers do not correct students' grammar and spelling. At monthly intervals, staff monitor students'

progress against minimum target grades. Subject teachers and personal tutors hold regular discussions with individual students. Detailed records are maintained. These arrangements enable students to know how they are performing and how they might improve. Students' additional learning needs are identified, but relatively few students take up the offer of additional learning support, preferring instead to turn to their teachers and personal tutors.

Leadership and management

109. Management is good. Actions to address weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been generally effective. Managers and staff have gathered detailed information to help them monitor and evaluate the quality of full-time courses, although value added data is not used to analyse the performance of subject groups and reviews of distance learning students' achievements are superficial. Students' attendance is now good, but further action is required to improve a few unsatisfactory pass rates and a greater number of poor retention rates. Present arrangements are inadequate to address undeveloped study skills and the poor written communication of lower attaining GCE AS students.

English, languages and communication



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

Strengths

- good pass rates in classroom-based GCE A-level English, GCSE languages, practical languages and EFL courses
- good teaching in most modern languages and EFL lessons
- very good individual subject guidance and support for students
- rigorous monitoring of students' progress.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory retention and pass rates in GCSE English for students aged 16 to 18 and in advanced level languages
- poor retention and pass rates of students on distance learning programmes

- poor classroom management in a few lessons
- inadequate links between teachers of classroom-based English and languages and distance learning tutors.

Scope of provision

110. The college offers daytime, evening and distance learning courses in English, modern languages and EFL. These include GCE A-level and GCSE courses, practical languages courses and EFL courses ranging from elementary level to advanced level. At the time of inspection, there were a total of 180 students enrolled on English courses, 202 on modern languages courses and 184 on EFL courses. Of these students, approximately a third are following distance learning programmes with tutorial support. There are classroom-based courses in French, German, Italian and Spanish. Students are also studying Greek and Russian through distance learning.

Achievement and standards

111. There are good pass rates in classroom-based GCE A-level English, GCSE languages, practical languages and EFL courses. There are good retention rates on classroom-based GCE AS English language, GCSE English literature, practical languages and most EFL courses. Retention and pass rates in GCSE English for students aged 16 to 18 and for students on distance learning programmes are poor. There are low retention and pass rates on most advanced level languages courses. Overall retention rates between September 2002 and April 2003 are good on EFL courses, but below the college target of 77% for classroom-based English and modern languages courses. Attendance during inspection week was unsatisfactory at 71%.

112. Most students' class work is of an appropriate standard. Most students express their ideas clearly and effectively. Many students on modern languages and EFL courses have good comprehension skills and are confident in using their oral skills in the relevant language.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English, languages and communication, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
EFL preliminary test	1	No. of starts	***	26	28
		% retention	***	93	86
		% pass rate	***	75	54
EFL first certificate in English	2	No. of starts	41	28	41
		% retention	76	95	93
		% pass rate	63	56	53
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	254	183	192
		% retention	78	73	65
		% pass rate	41	53	42
GCSE Spanish	2	No. of starts	25	31	28
		% retention	76	55	61
		% pass rate	95	88	94

GCE AS English language	3	No. of starts	*	17	19
		% retention	*	82	84
		% pass rate	*	86	100
GCE AS English literature	3	No. of starts	*	23	39
		% retention	*	61	60
		% pass rate	*	64	95
GCE AS French	3	No. of starts	*	21	15
		% retention	*	52	47
		% pass rate	*	27	29
GCE A-level English**	3	No. of starts	104	109	21
		% retention	58	59	95
		% pass rate	42	47	95

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** pass rates for 2000 and 2001 are based on two-year GCE A-level courses. Pass rates for 2002 and the number of students enrolled in 2002 are based on one-year GCE A2 courses

*** less than 15 students enrolled

Quality of education and training

113. The standard of teaching and learning ranges from very good to unsatisfactory. Most lessons are well prepared and well structured. Students work purposefully in most lessons, demonstrating a keen desire to make good progress. They learn from each other in practical and group activities. Many teachers use humour to stimulate learning and explain tasks. The importance of good examination technique is emphasised. In the good lessons, skilful questioning is used to check understanding and build confidence. Modern language teachers use the relevant language extensively to promote the development of fluent oral and listening skills. Imaginative teaching materials provide an authentic cultural background in the better language lessons. In the best lessons, teachers skilfully arrange activities and competently handle the difficult behaviour of a few young students. In a minority of English lessons, the organisation of activities and the management of students are ineffective. In these lessons, teachers spend too long on lengthy introductions, tasks are not clearly explained and poor timing results in non-completion of tasks. Teachers do not involve the more reticent students and they fail to deal firmly with students who lose concentration and distract others. In modern languages and EFL lessons, poor pronunciation is not always corrected. There is little use of ICT to promote learning in lessons.

114. On modern languages and EFL courses, there is good initial assessment and induction. Teachers work carefully with individuals to ensure they are choosing courses at the right level. Detailed profiles of students' prior achievements and learning needs are used to inform lesson planning. On GCE A-level and GCSE courses, there are effective processes for monitoring students' progress against target grades. Students find this helpful and are clear about how they are performing. An extensive programme of subject tutorials provides good help for advanced level students. Assessment is carefully planned on all courses. Students are informed of the calendar of work and understand how their work will be marked. Work is thoroughly marked with helpful comments to support improvement. In distance learning tutorials, there is detailed discussion with students on assessed work.

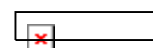
115. Staff are appropriately qualified and languages teachers are either native or fluent teachers of the language. The curriculum area's resource room houses a good range of paper and online

materials. Computers in the college learning centre have been designated for use with alphabets for other languages, but the language laboratory has not functioned for over 12 months. Good opportunities are available to study a wide range of English and languages through distance learning, but there are no classroom-based courses for students for whom re-sitting GCSE English is not appropriate.

Leadership and management

116. The management of English and languages courses has significantly improved and is good. Managers have a secure grasp of the quality of the provision. Staff are committed to the college's priorities of improving teaching and learning and of monitoring and supporting the progress of individual students. Managers and teachers rigorously monitor students' attendance and progress each month. There is good communication, with a planned cycle of regular meetings. Links between classroom-based English and languages provision and distance learning are inadequate. Different staff work in the two areas and there are no meetings for joint planning and monitoring. No arrangements are in place to oversee assessment and moderation of students' work across the two areas.

Foundation programmes



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

Strengths

- good teaching
- good range of provision
- wide range of external links
- good achievements
- good progression from the work preparation course to employment.

Weaknesses

- under-provision of courses in the community

- insufficient progression routes to mainstream provision
- insufficient use of initial assessment in developing individual learning plans.

Scope of provision

117. The college provides a wide range of full-time and part-time programmes for young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. At the time of inspection, there were 408 students on these courses. The provision meets the needs of students with complex disabilities, for example, people on the autistic spectrum, those with severe learning difficulties and physical disabilities, and people with mental health needs. The college effectively provides for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This was a key weakness in the last inspection. Most programmes include opportunities for literacy, numeracy, and IT skills development and opportunities for college or external certification covering both vocational and life skills. The main programmes include residential visits. On appropriate courses, students undertake work placements. The range of provision incorporates good pastoral support and specialist counselling. There are three specific community partnership projects, but community-based provision is generally underdeveloped.

Achievement and standards

118. Students make good progress and achieve a suitable range of college certificates and external qualifications. In 2002, 95% of students working towards a college certificate were successful and 83% of students successfully achieved their entry level vocational skills certificates. Retention rates are improving and are satisfactory. Portfolios of students' work are well organised and, in most cases, of a good standard. Practical project work is also good. For example, entry level students on the full-time pre-vocational course make food to serve in the department's café. Students with mental health difficulties, taking a creative activities module, produce well-made art and craft items. Students who have experienced problems with being with others learn to accept their presence and develop confidence. Students with emotional and social difficulties learn to work as team members in the café. They also develop their numeracy skills through use of the till.

119. There is good progression from the work-preparation programme. In 2001, 68% of students progressed into jobs and 20% continued in education. In 2002, 75% progressed into jobs. Progression rates to mainstream college provision are insufficiently developed. In 2002, only 9% of full-time students with learning difficulties progressed into mainstream college courses and only 19% of students from the full-time pre-vocational course progressed to the work preparation course.

A sample of retention and pass rates in foundation programmes, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
College certificates for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	pre-entry and entry	No. of starts	254	306	254
		% retention	82	87	88
		% pass rate	97	88	95
Vocational skills certificate	entry	No. of starts	*	20	59
		% retention	*	75	98
		% pass rate	*	40	83
Towards independence (ASDAN)	entry	No. of starts	*	29	29
		% retention	*	100	100

		% pass rate	*	100	83
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Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

Quality of education and training

120. Most teaching is good or better. Lessons are well planned with a good range of activities. In the better lessons, activities are sequenced and promote learning in small steps. Good additional in-class support enhances learning and promotes independence. In the better lessons, there is good differentiation of activities and resources to meet the needs and abilities of individuals. In addition, there is effective classroom management of students' behaviour. Good relations between teachers and students help to promote effective learning. Students' progress is well monitored in most lessons. In a few lessons, insufficient account is taken of students' different needs and abilities. The weaker lessons involved some uninspiring teaching and poorly photocopied learning materials.

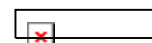
121. The initial assessment of students is not used consistently for the development of individual learning plans. In particular, it is not used to identify individual literacy and numeracy goals for students. Most targets in individual learning plans are satisfactory, but a few are not sufficiently challenging. Progress reviews are regular and, in most instances, are used to review goals and set new targets. Pastoral support for students is good, with adequate access to support and counselling on personal issues.

122. The college uses its good external links to support students and promote learning. For example, there are good links with employers who provide good work placements. Students have the opportunity to sample several placements. Links with external agencies are used effectively to support progression into college and to develop partnerships with specialist charities. Teaching staff are well qualified, with most classroom assistants having or working towards teaching qualifications. Since the last inspection, the accommodation has been improved significantly, but in a small minority of lessons the accommodation is inappropriate.

Leadership and management

123. Discrete courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well managed. Staff and managers have clear responsibilities and work well together. Good communication is assisted by a communications diary in the departmental office and a clear meetings structure. A development plan addresses most key issues, but it does not adequately set out a strategy for the implementation of basic skills in the curriculum area, and it does not deal with the need for clear progression routes into mainstream courses. Performance management is effective and individuals' plans have clear and relevant goals. Monitoring of attendance is rigorous, with a daily log, weekly reporting and monthly evaluation. Progress, retention and pass rates are monitored effectively at all levels.

Literacy and numeracy



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

Strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching

- good in-class literacy and numeracy support
- effective arrangements for providing support for students with dyslexia.

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory arrangements for the initial assessment of full-time students
- insufficiently clear targets in individual learning plans
- insufficient breadth of college and community-based provision.

Scope of provision

124. The college provides discrete basic skills courses for 115 students. Students also receive literacy and numeracy support, either on a one-to one basis, or through support in their vocational areas. Specialist support is provided for around 300 students with dyslexia. The college provides basic skill programmes in four community venues, however, the extent of provision in the community is insufficient to effectively promote recruitment of students who may be nervous about enrolling at the college. English language support is provided for around 50 students through an agreement with the Stockport English Language Service.

Achievement and standards

125. Both individual and in-class basic skills support for students on mainstream college courses has improved the overall performance of many students. In 2002, around three-quarters of students who received basic skills support were estimated by the college to have made better progress than would be expected on the basis of their initial assessment. Most students on the discrete basic skills courses are well motivated and produce satisfactory work in lessons. Retention rates for students on discrete basic skills courses are satisfactory, at around 75%. Pass rates in basic skills qualifications have generally improved since the last inspection. In 2002, pass rates in the Associated Examining Board (AEB) achievement test were good at 81% and 91%, respectively, for the short and one-year programmes. Pass rates in key skills application of number and key skills literacy improved to 29% and 33%, respectively. These results are in line with national averages, but they are nevertheless unsatisfactory.

A sample of retention and pass rates in literacy and numeracy, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
Basic test in communication skills	1	No. of starts	**	21	21
		% retention	**	71	76
		% pass rate	**	80	81

Key skills application of number	1	No. of starts	*	827	145
		% retention	*	80	92
		% pass rate	*	10	29
Key skills communications	1	No. of starts	*	693	133
		% retention	*	81	92
		% pass rate	*	10	33
AEB achievement tests literacy (short course)	1	No. of starts	81	22	21
		% retention	98	100	76
		% pass rate	34	5	81
AEB achievement tests literacy (one year course)	1	No. of starts	91	24	12
		% retention	61	96	92
		% pass rate	65	48	91

Source: ISR (2000 and 2001), college (2002)

* course not running

** less than 15 students were enrolled

Quality of education and training

126. Lessons are carefully planned and in most cases the needs of individual students are catered for through a suitable combination of group and individual learning activities. For example, in one lesson, pairs of students were required make shapes from different numbers of craft sticks and estimate the external and internal angle measurements. In another lesson, students collected data, entered it on a spreadsheet and produced charts showing their results. In-class basic skills support and the integrated teaching of basic skills and vocational topics are generally effective, but further development of materials and teaching techniques would improve students' learning.

127. Although basic skills teaching and support are generally effective, the link between initial assessment and subsequent teaching is weak. Students' portfolios do not contain initial assessment results and some teachers had not seen their students' assessment results. Consequently, teachers do not set clear measurable targets for individuals' development. Several initial assessment systems are used in the college. In general, the initial assessment processes are too slow and complex. Targets are too general and do not set clear times for progress reviews. Individual learning plans have a complex layout that is not well suited to target setting and consistent recording of progress. Nevertheless, most individual learning plans contain adequate records of the skills acquired by individuals.

128. Resources for basic skills are satisfactory. The college's support centre is available for timetabled individual support and drop-in support. Many students who are timetabled to go to the centre do not attend. The centre is cramped and the files and boxes of materials make the centre feel dated. There is good provision of computers for basic skills students, including eight laptops for use in community venues. The college has recently appointed a cross-college manager for basic skills and increased basic skills teaching staff. Staff have appropriate qualifications and experience and they are up to date with new curriculum developments in basic skills. Three tutors focus on the development and provision of in-class support for vocational teachers. Another basic skills teacher has responsibility for developing links with the community. Partnerships are being developed, for example, the college has a role in the Stockport adult learning plan.

129. Support for students with dyslexia is good. A well-qualified team of specialist support teachers provide regular and effective support for students with dyslexia. The range of college courses is narrow. It does not provide sufficient opportunities for progression and it does not enable students to

apply the skills they have learned in a variety of different contexts, for example, in relation to financial literacy.

Leadership and management

130. Managers have a clear strategic vision for development of basic skills across the college and in the community. Positive developments are taking place, although much remains to be done. The management of basic skills, key skills and foundation programmes have been brought together. Both key skills and basic skills are being integrated into the teaching of vocational topics. The college has a key skills policy. Strategies for teaching key skills are outlined in a key skills handbook. Basic skills awareness training has recently been provided for 70 teachers.

Part D: College data

Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18	19+
1	28	21
2	38	31
3	23	26
4/5	0	11
Other	11	12
Total	100	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age

Curriculum area	16-18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments
Science and mathematics	998	952	12
Land-based provision	4	11	0
Construction	459	328	5
Engineering, technology and manufacture	542	412	6
Business administration, management and professional	270	1,399	11
Information and communication	935	760	11

technology			
Retailing, customer service and transportation	18	142	1
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	218	190	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	257	367	4
Health, social care and public services	396	1,404	11
Visual and performing arts and media	1,066	352	9
Humanities	326	523	5
English, languages and communication	310	580	6
Foundation programmes	1,584	682	14
Other	30	227	2
Total	7,413	8,329	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16-18			19+		
		1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
1	Starters excluding transfers	721	875	1,111	1,310	1,717	973
	Retention rate	73	77	83	63	72	73
	National average	80	79	*	78	78	*
	Pass rate	56	76	80	57	78	77
	National average	65	68	*	66	68	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,526	1,905	1,839	1,818	2,061	1,549
	Retention rate	72	71	69	79	72	66
	National average	76	76	*	79	78	*
	Pass rate	71	64	83	63	78	83
	National average	66	69	*	65	69	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,251	1,929	1,403	1,813	2,370	1,556
	Retention rate	60	65	74	71	70	69
	National average	76	77	*	78	78	*

	Pass rate	67	67	80	62	71	83
	National average	74	76	*	66	69	*
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	34	**	**	969	665	652
	Retention rate	68	**	**	72	80	76
	National average	79	82	*	81	84	*
	Pass rate	64	**	**	67	63	75
	National average	66	55	*	56	53	*

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 1999 to 2001: Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, Learning and Skills Council, September 2002.

2. College rates for 1999 to 2002: College ISR.

** data not available*

*** too few students to provide a valid calculation*

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)	68	28	4	98
Level 2 (intermediate)	60	30	10	80
Level 1 (foundation)	60	35	5	20
Other sessions	66	31	3	38
Totals	64	30	6	236