



Priestley College

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Basic information about the college

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Name of college:

Type of college:

Sixth Form College

Principal:

Mike Southworth

Address of college:

Priestley College

Loushers Lane

Warrington

Cheshire WA4 6RD

Telephone number: 01925 633 591
Fax number: 01925 413 887
Chair of governors: Bill Bettley
Unique reference number: 130624

Name of reporting inspector: Glad Capewell HMI

Dates of inspection: 31 March to 4 April 2003

Part A: Summary

Information about the college



The total number of students in 2002 was 2,236, 1,014 of whom were full time aged 16 to 18. Approximately 3% of the students are from minority ethnic groups and 66% of students are female. About 60% of full-time 16 to 18 enrolments are at advanced level in a wide range of academic and vocational courses. There are also large numbers studying courses at level 2 and smaller numbers at foundation level. The college makes significant provision for adult students. PTS provides workforce development programmes. The adult evening provision comprises general education in a range of areas of learning. At outreach centres, courses are offered in information technology (IT) and basic skills. In 2001/02, the college made provision in 10 of the Learning and Skills Council's (LSC's) areas of learning. There are no work-based learning contracts held by the college. The college is working with the local authority and a local university to provide a higher education (HE) foundation degree.

The current principal was appointed in 2002. The senior management team was recently restructured and comprises the principal, vice principal, two directors (resources and business operations) and the college secretary, who is also the clerk to the corporation.

How effective is the college?



The quality of education and training is outstanding in humanities and good in science and mathematics, business and law, sports, leisure and tourism, childcare and health, performing arts and media and English and modern foreign languages. In information and communications technology (ICT), and art, design and technology, the quality of education and training is satisfactory. The college's key strengths and the areas that should be improved are listed below:

Key strengths

- o much good teaching
- high pass rates on many courses
- o good quality resources to support learning in many curriculum areas
- o well-maintained, refurbished accommodation
- o comprehensive and effective assessment and monitoring of students' progress

Aı	rea	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
inspected. Jud well students a judgements or	dgements are b achieve. Not al n curriculum ar	all judgements about provision in subjects and courses that were based primarily on the quality of teaching, training and learning and how the subjects and courses were inspected. Inspectors make overall reas and on the effectiveness of leadership and management in the), Good (2), Satisfactory (3), Unsatisfactory (4), Very Poor (5)
Quality of pro	ovision in curr	riculum and occupational areas
Quality of	andatan teras	deviluos and accountional anna
	ts of provision courses in the f	requiring improvement are identified in the sections on individual full report.
0	lack of rigou	r in some aspects of quality assurance.
0	low take up o	of learning support
0	some aspect	ts of the curriculum
0	retention and	d pass rates on some courses
What should	be improved	
0	strong staff a	and governor support for the college's aims and values.
0	strong focus	on raising standards and addressing weaknesses
0	effective sup	pport for students
	eff and the second	
0	good range of community	of courses for students aged 16 to 18 at level 3 and for adults in the

Good. Pass rates on most General Certificate of Education Advanced-level (GCE A-level) courses are high. Students achieve well in relation to the grades predicted for them on the basis of their prior attainment. There is much good teaching in chemistry and physics. Resources to support learning are good. Some retention rates, and the pass rates on biology and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) mathematics courses are low.
Good. Pass rates are high on GCE Advanced Subsidiary (GCE AS) and A-level courses in accounting, business and law. There is much good teaching and learning. Students develop their subject knowledge and critical skills well. Courses are well managed. Retention rates are poor on vocational programmes at levels 2 and 3.
Satisfactory. There are high pass rates on the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. Teaching and learning for students aged 16 to 18 is good. Pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses were low in 2000/02. There is insufficient liaison between on-site and community-based provision.
Good. Students' achievements on sports courses and some leisure and tourism courses are good. Teaching on a number of sports courses is imaginative and challenging. Assessment is effective. Students are well supported. Indoor sports facilities are poor. There is limited access to sports courses for some students.
Good. Students' pass rates on childcare courses are outstanding. Teaching is mostly good, but in a small number of lessons it is unsatisfactory. Teachers support and monitor the progress of students effectively. The pass rates of AVCE students have been low, but are much improved in students' recent assessments.
Good. Pass rates on most courses are above national averages. Much teaching and learning is good or very good. Lesson planning is exemplary. Individual support for performing arts students is good. A number of students do not achieve the grades predicted for them on the basis of their prior achievements. There are some inadequate specialist resources.
Satisfactory. There is much good teaching. Students are supported well and encouraged to work independently. Students' progression rates to FE and HE are high. Retention rates are low on some courses. The standard of students' work is affected by insufficient development of drawing and by the lack of some specialist resources.
Outstanding. Much teaching is very good or outstanding. There are consistently high pass rates on GCE AS and A-level courses. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are rigorous. Students of all abilities benefit from additional subject support. Course management is effective in maintaining high standards.
Good. Pass and retention rates are high on many courses. Most teaching is good or better. Students' work is regularly assessed and their progress carefully monitored. Retention rates are low on GCE AS English courses. Learning is not consistently effective in GCSE English.



Leadership and management are good. The college has clear values and aims that are strongly supported by governors and staff. Challenging targets are set for growth and students' achievements. These are generally met or exceeded for students aged 16 to 18, but not always for adult students. Teachers, managers and governors closely monitor students' performance. They make good use of accurate management information as part of the process. Course management is good and annual subject reviews are thorough. Resources are efficiently deployed. Equal opportunities are well promoted across the college. The college is working in an increasingly collaborative way with other 14 to 19 providers locally. Plans do not always have success measures to enable their impact to be evaluated. Monitoring procedures for some aspects of the college's work are under-developed or not rigorously applied.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?



The college's response to educational and social inclusion is good. It provides a wide range of courses for school leavers including an expanding vocational curriculum. The majority of courses are at advanced level, although students have the opportunity to study at foundation and intermediate levels. The college is working with students from a partner high school to provide vocational GCSE courses and to improve the staying-in-learning rate. Courses are offered in many community locations. The college is attracting a growing number of students who are traditionally underrepresented in FE. Two hundred adult students take evening courses on the main site. The number of adult enrolments is declining, however, at levels 1 and 2 and on short courses. The professional courses provided by PTS meet the needs of employers. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the proportion in the local population. Two thirds of the students are female; the college is currently investigating reasons for this gender imbalance. The college has responded well to the requirements of recent disability and discrimination legislation. Students are aware of the college's equal opportunities and race equality policies.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?



Students receive very good guidance and support. Prospective students have good opportunities for learning about the college and receive good pre-course advice and guidance. There are appropriate arrangements for the initial assessment of the learning needs of students aged 16 to 18 and of adult students in outreach centres. There is no systematic screening for literacy and numeracy for adult students on the main site and few take up their entitlement to support. In-class additional support is good, but there is low take-up of learning support by full-time students with severe difficulties in literacy. Students receive strong support from their personal tutors on personal and study issues. Subject and personal tutors monitor student progress and attendance thoroughly. There is rigorous follow up of students causing concern. The group tutorial programme is well structured and is generally well taught. Careers education is well planned and students make good use of high quality careers guidance.

Students' views of the college



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

0	very good teaching
0	good support from friendly, approachable teachers and tutors
0	they are treated like adults
0	college listens to student's views
0	good IT facilities
0	good careers advice
0	variety of enrichment activities.

What they feel could be improved

- o price and variety of food in the college refectory
- o key skills
- o transport difficulties for some students.

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

			V
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	74	20	6
19+ and WBL*	68	27	5
Learning 16-18	69	26	5
19+ and WBL*	57	38	5

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).

Achievement and standards



- 1. Pass rates have improved and are high on long courses at levels 1 to 3. On GCE A-level courses in 2001/02, pass rates were high, although the percentage of high grades declined from previous years. The college had a clear priority to raise achievement at level 2 in 2001/02. The pass rates on courses at levels 1 and 2 in that year improved significantly to well above national averages. There are very high pass rates on many vocational courses. Overall, at level 3 in 2001/02, students achieved the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE results. The average points score for each candidate was 253, which is close to the national average. The points score for each entry was lower than the national average, at 69. Pass rates on GCSE English and mathematics courses have been consistently low over a three-year period. The pass rates in the November 2002 examinations on these qualifications improved to a high level. Students' achievements in biology are poor at all levels. Pass rates on key skills courses declined to a low level in 2001/02, although they remained above the national average. The percentage of high grades achieved by male students at GCE AS and A level in 2001/02 was lower than that achieved by female students.
- 2. Retention rates have improved on long courses at level 1 and are now high. Retention rates declined on level 2 and key skills courses in 2001/02 to below the national average. At level 3, retention rates are below the national average, although they have steadily improved over a three-year period. The in-year retention rates this year on GCE A2 courses are very high, with many courses showing no withdrawals. In 2001/02, attendance rates were low and punctuality poor on a significant number of courses. The average attendance during the inspection week was 84%, which is equal to the national average for all inspections carried out in 2001/02 in colleges of the same type. Student numbers studying foundation and intermediate level vocational courses have shown a steady increase. Overall, the college has continued to increase its enrolments in this age group.
- 3. The standard of students' work is good on most courses. Coursework is well researched and presented in ICT, sport, leisure and travel and in business at level 3. Students' practical skills are well developed in sciences and ICT. In humanities and advanced level English, students have developed good analytical skills. Students in art, design and technology work well on their own, although their basic drawing skills are not well developed.

^{*}work-based learning

- 4. A high proportion of students studying GCE A-level programmes progress to HE. Significant numbers of students studying advanced level vocational qualifications also progress to HE. The number of students progressing between levels of courses within the college is high, particularly from GCE AS to A2 level. Many students go into appropriate employment.
- 5. Students frequently achieve success in enrichment activities. In sport, some have achieved international honours, for example, in rugby league. Several students have achieved flying licences through attending the college's aviation course. Many have achieved qualifications in activities such as first aid. The college celebrates the success of students through a series of awards and publications. The success of students at level 3 is promoted more strongly than for those at other levels.

Adult learners

- 6. Pass and retention rates improved at levels 1 and 3, and were high in 2001/02. Pass rates at level 2 and on short courses declined significantly in 2001/02. Overall enrolments at levels 1 and 2 for adult students are declining, but the college is attracting greater numbers of adults who traditionally have not taken part in learning. The number of students studying literacy and numeracy courses in outreach provision increased significantly this year.
- 7. Adult students work well in lessons and show high levels of motivation. Students studying on discrete or integrated adult literacy and numeracy courses at outreach centres improve their skills and confidence. For example, on a community newsletter project, a group of students working at entry level had learned how to use desktop publishing and structure a report. They had improved their spelling.

Quality of education and training



- 8. The standard of teaching is good and lessons are well planned. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 150 lessons. Teaching was good or better in 73% of these, satisfactory in 22% and unsatisfactory in 5%. Teaching was very good or outstanding in 35% of lessons observed. Teaching grades were slightly better for students aged 16 to 18 than for adult students, and learning grades significantly so. Teaching and learning at level 3 had the highest proportion of lessons graded good or better. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was at level 2, mostly on GCSE courses. The higher proportions of good or better teaching and learning were in lessons taught by full-time teachers.
- 9. In the best lessons, teaching and learning are thoughtfully planned to build on individual students' strengths and interests. In English and modern foreign languages, business and law, and performing arts and media, teachers ensure that the varied teaching styles are well matched to the ways in which students learn best. In these lessons, students demonstrate high-level practical and thinking skills. Practical work is effectively integrated with theory in science and in sport. In ICT, media and business, students make good use of IT to enhance their learning. Vocational relevance is effectively integrated into students' learning in child, health and social care. Students in art, design and technology are encouraged to work independently. In humanities, teachers cater well for the different needs of students, providing challenge for students of all abilities. The target language is used effectively in modern foreign languages to develop students' language skills. Teachers on the community programme effectively integrate basic skills into their teaching and make effective use of the core curriculum to prepare individual learning plans.
- 10. In the less effective lessons, students are often insufficiently challenged. The pace of some lessons is not well adapted to meeting students' learning needs. In others, there is ineffective or insufficient use of questions to refine students' understanding. In discussions, teachers sometimes do not allow enough time for students to reflect before providing the answer to questions, making the

promotion of debate and testing of understanding less effective. In some lessons, students' attainment is adversely affected by too little information on the topic to be studied, or by insufficient development of basic underpinning skills.

- 11. Teaching staff are well qualified. Almost all who teach students aged 16 to 18 have a first degree and teaching qualification; about 20% have a higher degree. Around three-quarters of those who teach on adult courses have a teaching qualification. Several managers have acquired qualifications in management. Staff have received training in the use of information on students' learning styles in their lesson planning, but in lessons observed inspectors found a marked variation in the extent to which this training was reflected in classroom practice.
- 12. The college has made good progress since the last inspection to improve accommodation and resources. In most curriculum areas, there are high quality specialist resources to support students' learning. These include handouts and study guides to enable students to organise their learning outside formal lesson time. New computers and interactive white boards have improved the opportunities to integrate information and learning technologies (ILT) into courses. A pilot scheme with sets of laptop computers allows subject teachers to incorporate ILT in their lessons in classrooms without IT facilities or at sites other than the main college. The college intranet is a useful means of sharing good practice, but not all subject areas have placed their curriculum materials on it. The college's learning resource centre has been well arranged to provide integrated access to IT and paper-based resources. Students make good use of the upgraded computer facilities.
- 13. Classrooms contain good displays of subject material and student work. The classrooms and communal areas are attractive and clean. Progress has been made since the last inspection to improve access for students with limited mobility. Some classrooms, however, remain inaccessible. The poor quality indoor sports facilities are being improved through the building of a new facility due to be opened in September 2003. Student recreational space remains limited, but plans are well advanced to make improvements based on an innovative combination of recreation, IT and communal facilities in the old gymnasium. The hall, which is the main performing arts teaching space, is not available for eight weeks in the year. The concrete floor is inappropriate for the teaching of dance.
- 14. There are good arrangements for the initial assessment of the learning needs of students aged 16 to 18 and of adult students in outreach centres. All full-time students are assessed for literacy and numeracy and key skills using an appropriate range of tools. Adult learners at outreach centres are also screened for literacy and numeracy. There is no systematic screening for literacy, numeracy or key skills for adult students on the main site and few take up their entitlement to support.
- 15. Homework is regularly set and promptly returned with helpful comments indicating how students can improve their standards. Inspectors noted a few samples of work that were inadequately marked, with incorrect information from students that was accepted as meeting the assessment criteria. Spelling and grammar are not always corrected, thereby missing the opportunity to improve key skills. There are thorough internal verification procedures in outreach centres and within business and sports, leisure and tourism courses for full-time students. No internal verification of assignments has taken place this year in art and design and some judgements of standards of work do not match those expected by the awarding bodies. Aspects of the internal moderation process lack rigour in ICT and in childcare.
- 16. Students' progress is thoroughly monitored by subject and personal tutors. Progress and effort are monitored every half term and unsatisfactory performance is followed up rigorously. Students are given personal indicators against which they set targets. In many cases, the targets are vague and do not have action points attached to them. Students who are working well receive congratulatory letters from the principal. At the end of the first term, students are given a minimum expected grade based on their GCSE results. Many subject tutors suggest specific action for improvement, but others exhort students to improve rather than showing them how to do this. The twice-yearly reports to parents are clear and helpful.
- 17. Students can combine subjects from the broad range on offer at GCE AS, A-level and vocational

programmes from foundation to advanced level. On most advanced vocational courses students also take at least one GCE AS. All GCE A-level students are expected to take GCE AS in citizenship in their first year, but retention rates are low and, in response to student feedback, the college is considering making the provision optional from next year. Eleven GCSEs are available for students to take alongside their main programme, but for some a GCSE is not an appropriate addition to their programme. The college allows students to take a full GCE AS programme with 5 GCSE grades at A* to C as a minimum requirement. For some students, this proves to be too ambitious. A higher than average number of students fail to complete their programmes.

- 18. In response to poor success rates in key skills, the college revised its strategy for the current academic year. The new strategy focuses on the key skill of communication. However, the completion of portfolios by students has been delayed and many students remain unsure of what they are expected to do. Few students who are offered the option of taking level 3 key skills in application of number and IT have chosen to do so.
- 19. The college has for some time diversified from its sixth form basis to make provision for adults and for local employers. Outreach provision is offered in 14 centres where a range of mainly basic skills, ICT and language classes are offered.
- 20. Full-time students aged 16 to 18 are encouraged to choose from a variety of enrichment opportunities. The programme offered is adjusted in the light of feedback from students. In many curriculum areas, there are high participation rates in subject enrichment activities. Such activities are often enhanced through links with external organisations.
- 21. Liaison with the four partner 11 to 16 schools is good. College representatives attend parents' evenings from Year 9 onwards. At the end of Year 10, pupils are invited for an introductory visit, and in Year 11 a series of open days are held. Contact with pupils at the 11 to 18 schools is made via Connexions. Advice and information are given at an initial interview to which parents are invited. Towards the end of the summer term, applicants can sample their chosen subjects as part of a 'Welcome Day'. Students are well supported by their personal tutors. Tutors' good knowledge of students and this approachability and helpfulness encourage students to seek help with personal or study issues. Tutors hold regular one-to-one progress reviews and follow up any cause for concern rigorously. Attendance is regularly monitored and absences followed up by attendance officers. Attendance has improved this year and during inspection was close to the average for sixth form colleges. The college works closely with the parents of full-time students. Parents speak positively of the interest that staff take in the welfare and progress of their sons and daughters.
- 22. All full-time students have weekly group tutorials. The well-structured tutorial programme includes core elements, together with options that suit the needs of particular student groups. Most of the nine tutorials observed by inspectors were graded good or better. In one very good tutorial, intermediate level students used local labour market information to identify job opportunities. In the two sessions where learning was judged unsatisfactory, the material had not been appropriately adapted for the group. Personal support is also available from the head of student services who manages the Learner Support fund, and the Connexions personal adviser. Students do not have ready access to trained counsellors.
- 23. Four learning support assistants provide good in-class support for 170 full-time students. Particularly good support is provided for students with Asperger's syndrome. Good support for literacy and numeracy is provided in outreach centres by tutors with specialist qualifications. The majority of those attending individual learning support sessions have a specific learning difficulty or disability, mainly dyslexia. Of the 24 students assessed as having severe problems with literacy in the initial assessment, only 15 have taken up the offer of support. The take-up of extra help with study skills is low and inspectors noted some students with poor skills. Learning support is promoted unhelpfully in college publicity as a service for students with problems rather than as a service that can help them achieve high standards.

Leadership and management



- 24. Senior managers and governors have set clear aims and values, which are well understood and supported by staff and the local community. The college has developed a more diversified curriculum, providing vocational learning opportunities for full-time students alongside a large range of GCSE, GCE AS and A-level subjects, and a number of part-time courses for adults. Targets for growth in 16 to 18 student numbers have been exceeded in recent years, but the college fell just short of its revised funding target last year owing to under-recruitment of adult students. There is a strong emphasis on collaborative approaches to post-14 learning. The college is working with several schools and the neighbouring FE college. The strategic plan has four over-arching aims and a series of operational strategies designed to achieve them. It does not identify clear measures of success for many of the intended actions that would enable more effective monitoring and evaluation of actions taken.
- 25. Subject areas and courses are well managed. Subject teams meet regularly. Meetings have a strong focus on curriculum issues and students' achievements. They do not focus as strongly on the quality of teaching and learning. Heads of department set clear targets for recruitment, attendance, retention and pass rates for each course. The extent to which other teaching staff contribute to target setting varies between departments. There is insufficient subject co-ordination between on-site and off-site curriculum provision. Departments do not have their own operational plans. In some departments, the annual action plan, designed to address the weaknesses identified in the annual review, has begun to evolve into a broader development plan. Most planning takes place centrally. Senior managers develop resource and budget plans in response to recruitment targets and resource implications submitted by heads of department. Managers at all levels give much attention to raising standards and addressing weaknesses. Communications between staff are good. Staff value the open and supportive style of the senior management team.
- 26. The college operates according to a clear quality assurance framework. Central to the approach are the annual subject reviews, which comprehensively evaluate the quality and effectiveness of provision. Reviews make extensive use of relevant data, including student feedback. Self-assessment is thorough, but standard practices are sometimes represented as strengths. There are basic service standards for support areas which are well understood by most staff working in them. The internal lesson observation system uses the Ofsted grading scale and includes an element of self-assessment. On average, the grades awarded by internal observers are more generous than those awarded by inspectors. Recorded judgements about learning describe students' involvement in learning activity, but do not assess the progress they make.
- 27. The views of students are systematically collected and used to inform the review process. Students are surveyed at key times in the year and at the end of their programme. Some subjects also get feedback from students in focus groups. There are no similar arrangements to gather systematically the views of parents or other stakeholders. The student council plays an active role in the college and there are student representatives on key committees. The new management team has taken a more robust approach to addressing key weaknesses. For example, closely monitored improvement plans have been developed for under-performing courses and clear strategies are in place to improve attendance rates and levels of achievement by male students. However, there are weaknesses in monitoring processes. For example, monitoring has failed to identify the inconsistencies in internal verification or the weaknesses in individual student action planning, and there is no procedure to check compliance with service standards.
- 28. Management information systems are reliable and well used. Managers and governors are provided with timely and accurate reports that enable them to monitor college performance against key enrolment, retention and pass rate targets. Staff have direct access to key data via a shared drive on the college network. Requests for specific reports are met promptly. The college currently operates a separate electronic register system and plans to introduce a single, integrated information system. The present system enables student attendance to be monitored and followed

up centrally on a daily basis as part of the attendance improvement strategy.

- 29. Equal opportunities are well promoted by the college. Students and parents are made aware of the college's policy through the college charters. The equal opportunities committee regularly initiates new developments. Useful work undertaken this year has raised the awareness of staff, students and governors of race equality and disability discrimination issues and responsibilities under recent legislation. Equal opportunities are a standard component of staff and student induction, the tutorial schedule and GCE AS citizenship, which is studied by most full-time students. Materials displayed in the college promote cultural diversity and counter gender stereotyping. The diverse range of student awards provides inclusive opportunities for recognition. Sensitivity to equal opportunity issues is evident at course and classroom level. The college analyses the staff and student profile, retention rates, attendance, achievement, value added data and responses to student questionnaires by ethnicity and gender. However, student questionnaires themselves do not address equal opportunity issues. The college does not set targets for under-represented groups and governors do not receive a report on equal opportunities.
- 30. Governors have a good range of expertise. Annual skills audits help to match governors' skills to the most appropriate committee membership. A strategic planning committee and a residential event provide governors with opportunities to review college strategy. Monitoring of students' achievements, course performance and the financial position of the college is rigorous, although this is not reflected in the brief format of the minutes. There are effective clerking arrangements and governors receive timely and detailed information to enable them to carry out their role. Presentations before the start of corporation meetings have recently been introduced and provide governors with useful up-dates on current developments in the sector. Governors have attended training courses, but individual training needs are not assessed in a systematic way. Governors take opportunities to meet students and staff at presentation and open evenings. They do not have formal links to curriculum areas. Some weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been only partially addressed. Governors carry out a self-evaluation, but there is not enough use of performance indicators to enable their own performance to be monitored. Strategic plan monitoring reports have recently become more detailed, but the lack of success measures for many of the actions in the plan make it difficult for governors to monitor their impact and value for money effectively.
- 31. Staff development is given a high priority. An annual plan is informed by a careful needs analysis, including consideration of the outcomes of staff performance reviews. The performance review system covers all full-time and part-time staff. It includes a review of teaching performance, and produces clear development objectives. There is no interim monitoring of whether training needs are being met, and not all reviews assess the extent to which the previous year's objectives have been met. There is a good level of internal and external staff development activity, and evaluations show a high level of staff satisfaction with internal development activities in particular. There has been a strong focus on sharing good practice during the current year, but, in most subject areas, this remains under-developed. There is no college-wide procedure to enable vocational teachers to undertake industry placements. The annual review of staff development does not evaluate its impact.
- 32. Financial management of the college is good. Central timetabling of staff and rooms ensures that teachers are fulfilling their contracted hours and part-time staff costs are closely monitored. Budget holders are clear about their budgets and receive regular and accurate reports on their expenditure. Cost control is exercised at college level. The college provides good value for money. There are few very small classes. The average class size in lessons observed during the inspection was 11.5. Money invested by the college has provided clear improvements in learning resources and the learning environment.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Sciences and mathematics

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1	

Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

- o consistently high pass rates on GCE A-level mathematics and physics courses
- good pass rates on GCE AS chemistry, electronics, mathematics and physics courses
- o much good teaching and learning in chemistry and physics
- o good accommodation and resources to support teaching and learning
- o effective support for students.

Weaknesses

- o low retention rates on some GCE AS and GCSE courses in 2002
- poor pass rates on biology courses and GCSE mathematics
- o no alternative to GCSE mathematics at levels 1 or 2.

Scope of provision

33. The departments offer a range of courses, mainly for full-time students aged 16 to 18. GCE AS/A levels are available in biology, chemistry, mathematics, further mathematics and physics. Electronics and geology are available at GCE AS only. GCSE courses are available in biology, mathematics, physics and science. There are 377 students on GCE courses and 241 on GCSE courses. There are no vocational courses in science. A small number of adults attend the courses provided by the departments.

Achievement and standards

34. There are consistently high pass rates on all GCE A-level courses except biology. The three-year average pass rates for GCE A-level physics and mathematics are 100% and 98%, respectively, and for chemistry, 95%. In 2002, pass rates on GCE AS physics and mathematics courses were high at 90% and 83%, respectively. Pass rates on GCE AS chemistry, electronics, mathematics and physics courses demonstrate that students achieved higher grades than those predicted for them on the basis of their achievements at GCSE. Biology pass rates are poor overall, but particularly at GCE AS (71%) and GCSE (11%). GCSE mathematics pass rates have been consistently low over the last three years, averaging 27%. Pass rates have been consistently high on the GCSE science course, with 64% of students achieving A* to C grades in 2001/02.

35. For 2002, the average retention rate on GCE AS and GCSE courses was low, at 75% and 76%, respectively. College strategies to improve retention rates and attendance are now being applied rigorously. In the majority of lessons observed, attainment was good. The average attendance rate during the inspection was 85%.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE mathematics (1	2	No. of starts	187	232	261
year)		% retention	75	84	76
		% pass rate	32	25	25
GCE A-level physics	3	No. of starts	21	28	24
		% retention	81	82	88
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE A-level	3	No. of starts	38	56	33
mathematics		% retention	79	84	94
		% pass rate	100	96	100
GCE AS biology	3	No. of starts	*	76	55
		% retention	*	91	80
		% pass rate	*	71	70
GCE AS mathematics	3	No. of starts	*	84	96
		% retention	*	85	69
		% pass rate	*	66	83
GCE A-level chemistry	3	No. of starts	26	29	30
		% retention	73	72	90
		% pass rate	100	90	96

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

*course did not run

Quality of education and training

36. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are thoroughly prepared and confidently delivered by enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. In one outstanding chemistry lesson, theory and practical work were successfully integrated. The students demonstrated excellent practical skills when cracking polythene and testing the product with bromine water. In most lessons, students respond well, show interest and work productively. In a few lessons, the teachers' use of questions do not fully test

students' understanding or promote discussion. When teaching was less effective, students are not sufficiently challenged or their knowledge and understanding adequately assessed.

- 37. Resources are good. High-quality handouts are used in all lessons and topic workbooks used in science. Helpful topic booklets prepared by teachers are prominent in students' files. Laboratories are large and well maintained by technicians. The rooms are visually stimulating, with interesting displays including posters, students' work and photographs of students.
- 38. The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are good. Students receive regular homework. Feedback from teachers is prompt and helpful. Teachers set minimum expected grades based on students' GCSE grades and against which students' progress is measured each half term. Attendance is regularly monitored and absences followed up.
- 39. Courses meet the needs and interest of students. There is a good range of GCE AS/A levels and GCSE courses. However, there is no alternative mathematics course at levels 1 and 2 for those students for whom a re-sit GCSE mathematics course is not appropriate.
- 40. Student guidance and support are very good. Students benefit from the individual support which is readily available outside of lessons. Mathematics and biology workshops are timetabled. They are attended by students who are referred by teachers, and by students who feel that they need help. Additional learning support for students with specific learning difficulties is effective. Around 80% of GCE A-level science students progress to HE, many to science-related degree courses.

Leadership and management

41. Leadership and management are good. The department has taken effective action to address the weaknesses in biology and GCSE mathematics. Early indications suggest that the strategies are proving effective in improving performance. Biology students produce work that is satisfactory or better. In GCSE mathematics, the high January module pass rates showed that improvement had been made. Annual reviews identify most of the strengths and weaknesses in the provision. Data on progress made relative to students' GCSE grades are used to review course performance. Managers and teachers receive regular reports on attendance and students' progress, which are used effectively to improve students' performance. Good practice is shared through the college intranet.

Business and law

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Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

- high pass rates on GCE AS accounting, business and law
- o high pass rates on GCE A-level business and law
- most teaching good or better

- thorough assessment and monitoring of students' progress
- o effective quality assurance arrangements on full-time programmes.

Weaknesses

- o low and declining retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and AVCE business
- o low retention and pass rates on GCE AS economics in 2002
- o students in large groups insufficiently challenged
- insufficient additional learning support.

Scope of provision

42. The college offers full-time business courses from levels 1 to 3, and a part-time professional accounting course at level 2. Courses include General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) foundation and intermediate business, AVCE business, GCE AS in accounting, business, economics and law, and GCE A2 level in business and law. The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 in accounting is offered by PTS. The GNVQ foundation business course recruits a small number of students each year. The range of part-time courses and courses below level 3 is narrow. GNVQ foundation students combine business studies with GCSE IT. There are 326 students aged 16 to 18 enrolled on full-time business courses and 7 adult students enrolled on part-time professional courses.

Achievement and standards

43. Pass rates are high on GCE AS accounting, business and law courses, and retention and pass rates are good on GCE A-level courses in business and law. The proportions of students achieving high grades in accounting, business and law in 2002 were above national averages. Results for GCE AS and A-level in 2001/02 show that many students achieved better results than those predicted from their achievements at GCSE. Retention rates are poor and declining on vocational courses at levels 2 and 3. Retention and pass rates on GCE AS economics were low in 2001/02. The standard of students' written work is good on level 3 courses, and satisfactory on level 2 courses. Many students progress to FE and HE courses and into employment. For example, 73% of students who were successful on GNVQ intermediate business last year progressed to the AVCE or other advanced level programmes at the college.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	25	21	15
business		% retention	84	76	73
		% pass rate	71	56	73
AVCE business	3	No. of starts	31	26	15
		% retention	77	81	63
		% pass rate	87	86	83
GCE AS business	3	No. of starts	*	77	88
		% retention	*	92	90
		% pass rate	*	93	95
GCE AS law	3	No. of starts	*	72	89
		% retention	*	86	88
		% pass rate	*	90	92
GCE A-level business	3	No. of starts	50	46	48
		% retention	74	80	96
		% pass rate	100	95	100
GCE A-level law	3	No. of starts	17	33	40
		% retention	94	79	90
		% pass rate	94	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

- 44. Most teaching is good or better. Lesson planning is thorough, and lessons are well structured. Teachers successfully employ a wide variety of teaching and learning approaches that promote the development of students' subject knowledge and higher-level practical and critical skills. A particular feature is the excellent use of carefully prepared learning materials in GCE AS and A2-level law lessons, such as topic sheets, briefing notes, and source materials. These help students to develop a thorough understanding of the English legal system. Students use IT to enhance their learning. Effective support was given to individual students, who displayed a keen interest in their work and worked well on their own. Students enjoy a varied programme of enrichment activities. Students on advanced level business programmes recently attended a 2-day business awareness programme, involving seminars with speakers from external companies. Teachers do not always organise a sufficient range of tasks to meet the needs of students with different abilities in larger business groups.
- 45. The assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are thorough. Assessment procedures are rigorously applied on full-time programmes. Initial assessment is effective. The results provide a basis for planning programmes of study. Students' work is marked promptly and thoroughly. Teachers give constructive feedback to help students to improve their work. Internal verification is rigorous. There are effective procedures to monitor punctuality and attendance. There is a good programme of tutorial support. Students on GCE AS and A-level courses are given good support to help them develop literacy, numeracy or study skills. There is inadequate in-class additional learning support for GNVQ foundation level students with literacy and numeracy needs, and inadequate workshop support in literacy and numeracy for GNVQ intermediate students.
- 46. Staff are well qualified and have relevant vocational knowledge. Classrooms are well equipped,

^{*} course did not run

pleasantly furnished and well maintained. The main suite of rooms in the Adamson building is not, however, accessible for wheelchair users. The standard of IT equipment is good. A wide range of good quality materials has been developed to support learning, particularly in law. Additional materials are available on the college intranet. Book stocks in the learning resource centre are generally adequate, although some textbooks in economics are worn and outdated.

Leadership and management

47. Leadership and management are good. Courses are well organised. Teachers work well together. Quality assurance arrangements are effective. Clear targets are set to improve performance, and staff make good use of accurate management data to monitor progress towards them. Course review and self-assessment are thorough, and course teams develop action plans to address weaknesses. Good practice is shared. Teachers promote equality of opportunity effectively.

Information and communication technology



Overall provision in this area is satisfactory (grade 3)

Strengths

- excellent pass rate on the AVCE course
- o good teaching on full-time provision
- o good use by ICT students of a range of intranet materials
- good integration of basic skills into outreach IT provision.

Weaknesses

- o low retention rates on GCSE and GCE AS in 2001/02
- low pass rates on GCE AS and GCE A level in 2001/02
- poor liaison between on-site and outreach ICT provision.

Scope of provision

48. The college offers a range of computing and IT courses at the main site. These include GCE A and AS, AVCE, GNVQ intermediate and GCSE IT. Approximately 250 adults study part-time courses in community venues throughout the area. These include new computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), Integrated Business Technology (IBT) at levels 2 and 3, the European computer driving licence (ECDL) and introductory courses. The total of enrolments on all ICT courses is approximately 500.

Achievement and standards

- 49. There are excellent pass rates on the AVCE in ICT (100%) and good retention rates on part-time courses. Pass rates on GCE AS are poor and consistently below national averages. GCE A-level pass rates fell to 15% below the national average in 2001/02. Modular results this year show significant improvement and high pass rates. Retention on GCSE IT fell to 20% below the national average in 2001/02. There has been a decline in pass rates on the short CLAIT course.
- 50. Many students have well-developed practical skills. They are able to work well at an appropriate pace on tasks set by teachers. Assignment work, often based on real commercial projects, is well researched and presented. One student had designed a successful membership database for a local leisure centre. Students are confident in the use of computer software and study materials. Students' attendance and punctuality are monitored and non-attendance is quickly followed up. Average attendance at observed lessons during the inspection was 81%. The majority of level 3 students progress to courses in HE.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
CLAIT (short)	1	No. of starts	443	311	141
		% retention	94	86	93
		% pass rate	73	76	68
GCSE IT	2	No. of starts	28	42	17
		% retention	75	88	59
		% pass rate	62	27	50
GCE AS IT	3	No. of starts	6	96	113
		% retention	67	88	72
		% pass rate	0	70	63
GCE A-level IT	3	No. of starts	36	60	36
		% retention	64	83	81
		% pass rate	87	92	72
BTEC national diploma	3	No. of starts	17	23	*
in computer studies		% retention	88	87	*
		% pass rate	87	100	*
AVCE ICT (double)	3	No. of starts	*	*	19
		% retention	*	*	79
		% pass rate	*	*	100

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

* course did not run

Quality of education and training

51. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching on 16 to 18 full-time courses is good. Teaching is well planned with a variety of stimulating activities. In one lesson, the teacher made skilful use of the network accesses and smart board technology to generate a valuable discussion of students' work. In the most effective lessons, teachers use skilful questioning to extend students' knowledge. In community venues, teachers ensure that lessons match the learning needs of adult students. In one session, in a community house, an enthusiastic teacher successfully accommodated the range of students' abilities and effectively developed the use of spreadsheets.

- 52. Teaching and learning for adult students are sometimes less effective. There were fewer lessons for adults judged to be good or better and a higher proportion of lessons graded as unsatisfactory. Where teaching is less effective, planning does not take account of the different abilities of students or there are not enough checks on learning. Sometimes there are long periods in workshops where students are unproductive whilst waiting for help from the teacher.
- 53. There is a well-equipped learning resource centre, which students regularly use outside lesson time. The library book stock is sufficient and up to date, but students' research is restricted by too few computer journals, leading to an over-reliance on the Internet. Tutors produce high-quality handouts and use them effectively in lessons. For example, in the community, where there is lack of whiteboards, the tutors produce clear handouts to help explain key concepts. Students benefit from an ICT intranet site, which is maintained by the department and holds assignments, class notes and handouts. Students use the intranet to acquire class notes for lessons they have missed. The standard of equipment varies between ICT rooms and outreach provision. In one lesson observed in the community, the failing equipment had caused students to fall behind in their studies.
- 54. Assessment and monitoring of students' progress are effective. Students benefit from their half-termly reviews that include monitoring of their performance against grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades. Assessment of work is fair and accurate. Students' marked work is returned promptly. Teachers' feedback to students on their assessed work does not always provide good guidance on how to improve.
- 55. Community IT courses are particularly effective in integrating basic skills within ICT courses. In one outreach class, literacy was integrated into a short introductory e-mail course. Students felt at ease moving between basic skills and IT classes on the same site. There is a wide range of full-time ICT programmes with clear progression pathways. Laptops are used to make short ICT courses available in local communities.
- 56. Many students receive good individual support in lessons. Tutors of students aged 16 to 18 show a high level of awareness when allocating their time in the classroom. Weaker students who are identified as needing support benefit from attending additional ICT workshops. Good support is given to students with learning difficulties and disabilities. In one lesson, specialist equipment had been purchased to support a partially sighted student. The curriculum for the full-time students aged 16 to 18 is enhanced with industrial visits, guest speakers and a HE/careers advice day. A new tracking system has been developed to improve attendance. Attendance has increased from 75% in 2001/02, to 82% this year.

Leadership and management

57. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The college has started to address the sharp decline in achievement for GCE AS and A-level courses in 2001/02 with a development action plan, which will be monitored. The newly created team is well motivated and enthusiastic. Staff readily supply additional subject support and closely monitor student progress. January modular exam results for GCE AS and A level this year showed a significant improvement compared to those

obtained in 2001/02. There is no joint planning between on-site and community provision. There are insufficient opportunities to share good practice. Curriculum planning lacks rigour and links to the college strategic planning process are unclear to staff.

Sports,	leisure	and	tour	ism
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Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

- o high retention and pass rates on GCE A-level and first diploma courses
- good teaching on most courses
- o good assessment and monitoring of students' performance
- o good support for students.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on national diploma applied science and AVCE travel and tourism
- o limited access to sports courses for some students
- o insufficient work experience within vocational courses.

Scope of provision

58. There are 195 students on full-time courses. Of these, 144 study sport. Courses include GCE AS and A2-level physical education, BTEC first and national diplomas in applied science, AVCE travel and tourism, GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism and GNVQ foundation in leisure and tourism. A limited range of sports courses is available. There is no sport provision at level 1. The college has football, rugby and netball teams. Opportunities for students to take part in visits or residential trips and international travel form a part of most courses. Additional sports coaching and leadership qualifications are available. Most students are aged 16 to 18.

Achievement and standards

- 59. Pass rates for advanced level physical education and the first diploma in applied science are consistently high. Pass rates on the first diploma in applied science have been above national averages for the last two years. Students make very good progress in relation to their level of attainment on entering the college. Some 64% of GCE A2-level and 60% of GCE AS physical education students achieved high grades and 70% of first diploma sport science students achieved merit or distinction grades in 2001/02. Unit test results this year are very good in leisure, travel and tourism.
- 60. Coursework is well presented. Students relate theory to practice well. They reach high standards of performance in sports. In 2002, three students represented Great Britain in rugby league, one in swimming, two in gymnastics, and several students achieved county honours in netball and football. Progression to FE and HE is good. Just over 60% of first diploma students progressed to the national diploma, and 68% of second-year sports studies students progressed to sports-related degrees in 2001/02.
- 61. Retention rates on the national diploma in applied science and AVCE travel and tourism are significantly below national averages. Other retention rates are at or above national averages. Achievement of key skill qualifications is generally low, particularly at level 3.

A sample of retention and pass rates in sports, leisure and tourism, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GNVQ part 1	1	No. of starts	*	19	14
foundation leisure and tourism		% retention	*	95	93
tourion		% pass rate	*	72	100
GNVQ internediate	2	No. of starts	20	22	20
leisure and tourism		% retention	68	82	93
		% pass rate	85	100	100
GCE AS sport and	3	No. of starts	*	32	39
physical education		% retention	*	91	82
		% pass rate	*	97	97
AVCE travel and	3	No. of starts	35	25	21`
tourism		% retention	65	58	67
		% pass rate	77	100	100
BTEC first diploma	3	No. of starts	34	20	25
applied science		% retention	91	65	88
		% pass rate	90	92	95
National diploma	3	No. of starts	*	16	51
applied science		% retention	*	67	70
		% pass rate	*	100	100
GCE A-level sport and	3	No. of starts	42	30	23
physical education		% retention	61	83	96
		% pass rate	84	95	100

Quality of education and training

- 62. Most teaching is good or better. Schemes of work and lesson plans are detailed. Sport tutors evaluate their lessons and use the results effectively to plan future sessions. Teachers successfully motivate their students and generate a sense of fun and enjoyment in lessons. Relationships between students and their tutors are excellent. A good range of learning activities is used in lessons. Theory is applied well in practical sport. Through a range of skills and games in one basketball lesson, the tutor effectively covered the nature of open and closed skills together with the concepts of serial, continuous, discrete, self-paced and externally paced skill classifications. In some lessons, tutors make good use of IT. There is some imaginative teaching. In GCE A-level physical education, students studied the impact of the media on sport. The tutor skilfully incorporated video, radio and the Internet in the lesson to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of each as effective media forms. Students were captivated by the lesson and their response was excellent. In leisure, travel and tourism, visits to local attractions as well as international trips form part of assignments. Where teaching is less effective, teachers are insufficiently varied in their approach or do not provide enough challenge for the full ability range.
- 63. The range and quality of resources within the department are satisfactory. There is a good range of journals and information files in the sport studies classrooms. The library stock provides a good number of texts for student use, but some are significantly out of date and do not meet students' needs. Access to computers is good. The college indoor sports facilities are poor and unsuitable for a range of practical activities.
- 64. Assessment is carefully planned. A wide range of assessment methods is used. The quality of assignments is good. Teachers' comments on written work are constructive and help students to improve their work. Students' progress is effectively monitored. Performance is reviewed every half term. Attendance, punctuality, attainment, effort and participation are carefully monitored. Parents are regularly informed of the progress of students. Internal verification is thorough. Assignment briefs are internally verified before being issued to students.
- 65. There are no sports clubs. There is insufficient work experience within vocational courses. Good links with local schools enable students studying coaching units to coach younger pupils.
- 66. Support for students from subject teachers and personal tutors is good. Weekly tutorials are well structured and valued by students. Induction programmes are effective. They include initial assessment to identify the learning needs of students. In lessons, the subject tutor and a learning support tutor provide individual support. The sports department provides additional subject support lessons for students who need help and to prepare students for examinations.

Leadership and management

67. Curriculum management is good. Communications between staff are effective. Quality assurance is well established. Lesson observations are conducted twice a year. Peer observations are used to share good practice and support new staff. Realistic targets for students' retention and pass rates are set and generally met. The annual review process is rigorous; action to address weaknesses is effectively monitored. Staff development is well organised and new staff are supported effectively by colleagues. Management information is available on-line and effectively used by staff to monitor students' performance.

Child, health and social care

Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

0	outstanding pass rates on childcare courses
0	good retention rates on the diploma in child care and education course
0	effective linking of college and workplace learning
0	good support for students from their teachers
0	effective community links
0	well-managed courses.

Weaknesses

- o low pass rates on AVCE course
- o poor teaching in a small number of lessons.

Scope of provision

68. The college offers full-time and part-time provision in child, health and social care during the day and in the evenings. Students are able to work towards NVQ, GNVQ, AVCE and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) awards. The range of advanced level courses is good. There are intermediate level childcare courses, but no intermediate level health and social care provision. Students can enrol on courses at the main college site and in community centres at several points in the year. The college offers a wide range of enrichment programmes, including sign language, sports coaching, play therapy and paediatric first aid. There are currently 120 students aged 16 to 18 and 6 adults enrolled on full-time courses. Of the 218 part-time students, 96% are over 19. The inspection covered the range of full-time and sampled part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

69. Pass rates on advanced level childcare courses are outstanding. Since 2001, all students who

completed their course achieved their award. In advanced level health and social care, pass rates have been well below national averages for the last three years. The department has improved the organisation of this course. The results of modular tests taken in January 2003 show significant improvements from the previous year, with 79% of students achieving A to C grades in 2003, compared with 8% in 2002. Pass rates on NVQ programmes and short courses for adults are at, or above, national averages.

- 70. Retention rates on the diploma in childcare and education course are significantly above the national average; all other retention rates are similar to national figures. In lessons observed, student attendance was 84%.
- 71. Most students demonstrate knowledge, understanding and practical skills at least at a level expected for the course. In a play therapy lesson, for example, students could clearly describe the therapeutic value of different play materials. In a day nursery, students confidently and competently changed toddlers' nappies and explained how they applied what they learned in college about health and safety and equal opportunities to tasks they carried out. In a few lessons students made little progress.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
First aid at work	1	No. of starts	*	170	34
		% retention	*	99	79
		% pass rate	*	92	96
NVQ early years child	3	No. of starts	*	33	50
education (EYCE)		% retention	*	88	62
		% pass rate	*	76	65
GNVQ advanced health	3	No. of starts	16	5	20
and social care/AVCE		% retention	81	0	71
		% pass rate	50	**	58
BTEC national diploma	3	No. of starts	*	12	29
childhood studies/EYCE		% retention	*	85	83
0.000,2102		% pass rate *		100	100
CACHE diploma in	3	No. of starts	*	22	13
childcare and education		% retention	*	91	92
		% pass rate	*	100	100

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

Quality of education and training

72. The quality of teaching and learning is generally good. College and workplace learning are effectively linked. Professionally experienced teachers link theory to current work practices. Work experience is fully integrated into all courses. In effective lessons, teachers give students tasks gradually increasing in complexity that build on previous learning and ensure students are able to apply theory to the vocational context. In a `psychological aspects of health' lesson, the teacher asked students to give definitions of aggression and the signs and causes of aggressive behaviour in children and elderly people. Students subsequently applied what they had learned ensuring

^{*} course did not run ** not applicable

effective interaction between carers and clients.

- 73. In a small number of lessons, learning objectives are not shared with students and learning activities are not sufficiently challenging. Students are not given sufficient information to develop their understanding. They do not focus on their work and fail to achieve the learning objectives.
- 74. Assessments are fair and at appropriate levels for courses. Teachers distribute assignment schedules to avoid overloading students with work. Most work is accurately marked and students receive constructive feedback to help them make improvements. Some work is not marked correctly. Incorrect information from students was accepted as meeting assessment criteria. Teachers do not always correct poor spelling. All units of work are internally verified, but the process occasionally lacks rigour. Teachers systematically monitor, track and record the progress of students.
- 75. Teachers support students well. Attendance is closely monitored and all non-attendances are followed up. Staff provide additional workshops at lunchtime and one evening each week so that students having difficulty with their work can get help. High-achieving students are given extended reading and additional research activities. Careers education and guidance is good. Some 98% of students who left college last year progressed to employment, FE or HE.
- 76. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The range and quality of resources are generally good. Students have good access to computers. They are able to borrow games from the resource centre to use on childcare placements. Classrooms are bright, with good wall displays celebrating students' work and providing stimulating learning environments. A few classrooms are too small for group sizes.

Leadership and management

77. Courses are well managed. Work schemes identify learning and assessment strategies for vocational and key skills topics. Lesson plans include details of how learning activities can be adapted to meet the abilities of all students. Teams meet regularly to review their courses and the progress students make. Lesson observations and students' views are used to inform the judgements about the quality of provision. The department promotes equal opportunities effectively. Students involved in designing children's toys talked about design features of their toys chosen to avoid gender stereotyping or giving offence to particular groups. Excellent links with the local community enable students to experience a wide variety of work settings and visit a useful range of community services to reinforce learning on aspects of their course. The department provides short courses for and a vocational GCSE for school pupils. Excellent links with a primary school in Prague enable childcare students to experience early years care and education in another country.

Performing arts and media



Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

- o high pass rates on GCE A-level and AVCE courses
- much good teaching

- wide range of enrichment opportunitiessupportive tutorials
- highly effective curriculum planning.

Weaknesses

- not all students achieve the grades predicted for them on the basis of their prior attainment
- o some inadequate accommodation and access to resources.

Scope of provision

78. The college has recently increased the range of full-time GCE AS/A-level and AVCE courses in media and performing arts to include GCE A2 level film studies, dance and AVCE in performing arts. Student numbers in the area have risen significantly over the past two years. Approximately 265 students are enrolled this year on advanced level courses, 27 of whom are studying on the AVCE in performing arts. There are no courses below level 3.

Achievement and standards

- 79. Pass rates on most courses are above national averages. There are high pass rates on GCE A2 and AVCE courses. Some 65% of students on AVCE courses achieved high grades in 2001/02. Pass rates and the number of students achieving high grades on GCE AS in performing arts courses declined in 2001/02. Teachers have identified under-performance in theoretical modules as the primary cause. GCE AS media and film studies both had 100% pass rates in 2001/02; the number of students achieving high grades was above the national average. Retention rates are high on GCE A2 level courses, but they are below national averages in GCE AS dance, drama and film studies. A significant number of students did not achieve the grades predicted for them on the basis of their GCSE grades on GCE AS drama, dance and media in 2002.
- 80. Students make good progress in lessons. They learn from their peers through the extensive and effective use of group work. The majority of students contribute readily to classroom activities and work effectively on their own in the learning resource centre. Music students enhance their skills as a result of the individual instrumental and vocal tuition they receive.
- 81. The overall attendance during the inspection in lessons observed was 84%. Many students achieve their HE and employment goals.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCE A-level media	3	No. of starts	45	49	43
		% retention	82	78	95
		% pass rate	97	97	98
GCE A-level drama	3	No. of starts	22	18	17
		% retention	76	61	94
		% pass rate	93	100	100
AVCE performing arts	3	No. of starts	*	*	25
		% retention	*	*	83
		% pass rate	*	*	100
GCE AS media	3	No. of starts	*	74	61
		% retention	*	90	84
		% pass rate	*	92	100
GCE AS drama	3	No. of starts	*	25	43
		% retention	*	87	72
		% pass rate	*	100	94
GCE AS film studies	3	No. of starts	*	*	24
		% retention	*	*	77
		% pass rate	*	*	100

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

Quality of education and training

- 82. Most of the teaching is good or very good. Teachers are enthusiastic and dedicated. Lesson planning is exemplary and takes account of students' prior attainment. Subject tutors routinely assess the key skill of communication. In the best lessons, learning activities are carefully sequenced and tasks closely aligned to assessment objectives. In one GCE AS media lesson on new technologies, students researched and summarised information, then made a successful presentation on the potential of digital radio. Students were able to talk with confidence about the new topic. In a GCE AS music composition lesson, contrasting topics of Bach chorales and serialism were selected to meet students' differing interests.
- 83. In less successful lessons, the teacher dominates discussions excessively. Students are insufficiently challenged, and not given enough responsibility for their own learning. Sometimes, there is not enough opportunity for students to interact and learn from each other.
- 84. The department is developing the use of ICT in learning. Students use computers in the dance studio for analysing movement. Music students make extensive use of software for score production. There is good practice in media, where the use of ICT is widespread. New digital editing facilities enable students to produce high-quality video productions. Resources throughout the area are well maintained by the full-time technician. Music and media classrooms have attractive wall displays. The large screen film viewing facilities and projection software are used effectively to support learning.
- 85. Staff are well qualified and many have higher degrees. Teachers have a good command of their subject and, in two cases, recent industrial experience. The college hall, the main performance and teaching space, has a concrete floor and is not available during the examination periods. This

^{*} course did not run

prevents students from having appropriate access to rehearse for practical assignments. Restricted access to media rooms results in some students making ineffective use of their time. The suite of music rooms is not sound proofed.

86. Students' progress is monitored regularly in supportive tutorials. Action plans are drawn up and students issued with minimum expected grades. Targets are challenging and help to motivate students. Tutorials are held twice weekly. Links between personal and subject tutors are good. Performing arts tutors provide additional academic support. Careers advice from Connexions is helpful.

Leadership and management

87. Curriculum planning is good. Managers are open and supportive. There are clear targets for pass and retention rates that are understood and supported by teachers. Staff are supported in attaining these targets by a vigorous staff development programme that includes in-house training events designed to support the raising of standards. Annual reviews are generally robust. Teachers analyse students' achievements carefully. The performing arts team holds regular, minuted meetings to monitor the quality of provision. The media studies department relies on a more informal system of continuous review. This system does not provide sufficient evidence for teachers to make sound judgements on the quality of provision.

Art, design and technology



Overall provision in this area is satisfactory (grade 3)

Strengths

- o much good teaching on GCE A2 level art and on community classes
- o effective use of visits to underpin initial research
- o good progression to FE and HE.

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on some courses
- o limited development of students' drawing skills
- insufficient specialist resources.

Scope of provision

88. There are 155 students on full-time programmes and 137 students studying part time. The college offers programmes in GCE AS and A2-level art, design technology and graphics, AVCE single and double award in art and design, and BTEC diploma in art foundation. There is a GNVQ intermediate art and design programme and a small range of adult evening provision offering GCSE, GCE AS and A2-level art. National Certificate of Further Education (NCFE) multimedia has been newly introduced in 2002. Community courses are available at a small number of local venues offering Open College Network (OCN) units at levels 1 and 2 in watercolour, crafts and glass painting.

Achievement and standards

- 89. The range of standards of students' work and achievements is wide. In 2001/02, 100% of students were retained on the diploma in art foundation, but pass rates fell significantly to 12% below the national average. Pass rates on the AVCE art and design award were also lower than the national average. Retention rates are low on the GNVQ intermediate art and design course, but pass rates have improved and are now high.
- 90. Recruitment to the GCE AS art doubled in 2001/02. The pass rate on this course declined and was low, but retention rates improved to a satisfactory level. Although the pass rate was below the national average in 2001/02, the retention rate on the GCE A2-level course was high at 100%. The retention rate on GCE AS design and technology is low. All eight students on GCE A2-level design and technology were retained and achieved the qualification. Attendance in lessons observed during the inspection was 84%. There is a high rate of progression from full-time courses to FE and HE. In 2001/02, 100% of students on the art foundation course progressed to HE. About 90% of AVCE students progressed to related art and design courses or employment. A high proportion of GNVQ intermediate students progressed on to advanced level programmes.

A sample of retention and pass rates in art. design and technology, 2000 to 2002

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
OCN practical crafts	2	No. of starts	*	*	14
		% retention	*	*	93
		% pass rate	*	*	100
GNVQ intermediate art	2	No. of starts	21	8	18
and design		% retention	86	88	72
		% pass rate	44	57	92
AVCE art and design	3	No. of starts	* *		25
		% retention	*	*	80
		% pass rate	*	*	84
Diploma in foundation	3	No. of starts	9	11	19
studies		% retention	100	91	100
		% pass rate	100	100	84
GCE AS art	3	No. of starts * 54		106	
		% retention	*	78	85
		% pass rate	*	92	82

GCE A-level art	3	No. of starts	41	52	29
		% retention	60	70	100
		% pass rate	87	93	93

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

Quality of education and training

- 91. There is much good teaching. Teaching and classroom management are very good on GCE A2 level graphics, GCE A2-level art and on community courses. On these courses, students work well independently and make good progress. The use of a range of media and techniques is evident in their portfolio and sketchbook work. Contextual reference is well embedded throughout all courses. In some classes, good use is made of `prompt' sheets to underpin learning. In graphics, all students are able to use competently a range of software design packages. Teaching in the community is well planned and taught. Adult students acquire a wide range of skills.
- 92. In some lessons, however, planning of learning is not effective and students are not sufficiently challenged. There is limited development of basic drawing skills on many courses; this has a negative effect on students' attainment. There is an over-reliance on ready-made images for initial research, with many students using the Internet as the main source for primary investigation.
- 93. Staff are well qualified. Three out of the seven core team members have a higher degree. The good general studio accommodation creates a stimulating working environment. The specialist design graphics suite and workshop are used effectively by students. There are limited specialist art resources, with few opportunities for printmaking, textiles and photography. This restricts the breadth of students' portfolio work. There is insufficient storage space for students' work. Art foundation students have their own base room and work places, although some individual workspace is cramped. Some outreach accommodation is also too small.
- 94. Visits are integrated effectively into courses to support the early stages of project research. Students frequently visit the Liverpool Tate and John Moore exhibitions, and there are good opportunities for them to visit museums and places of architectural interest. AVCE art and GCE AS/A2-level design technology students have designed and produced the annual Warrington Business Awards as part of a live project.
- 95. The monitoring of students' progress on art, design and technology courses is good. Assessment is thorough in most cases, with constructive and helpful written feedback. Good use is made of individual progress-monitoring in GCE A2 graphics and product design. Students with writing difficulties are able to tape record their evaluations and presentations for assessment. Assessment is not consistently rigorous. Internal verification has not yet taken place this academic year.
- 96. Since September 2002, AVCE students have been encouraged to take a related GCE AS/A2-level qualification. Tutors' relationships with students are good and the majority of students are well supported. Subject tutorials are regular and students feel able to discuss their studies and personal issues openly. Students benefit from additional drop-in workshops, supervised by tutors.

Leadership and management

97. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Communication within the team is good and staff receive good support from managers. There is currently no comprehensive strategy for the development of the whole of the arts programme. Community and adult classes are managed separately. Annual reviews use well-informed target setting effectively, although they did not identify some key areas of weakness. There is a good programme of staff development for both full-time and part-time staff.

^{*} course did not run

Humanities

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Overall provision in this area is outstanding (grade 1)

Strengths

- o consistently high pass rates on GCE A-level and most GCE AS courses
- o some very good and outstanding teaching
- high-quality classroom resources
- o comprehensive monitoring and assessment of students' progress and skills
- o options within advanced courses which meet a range of students' skills and interests
- o good additional subject support for students
- very good course management.

Weaknesses

o ineffective question and answer techniques in some lessons.

Scope of provision

98. Approximately 460 full-time students aged between 16 to 18 study courses in geography, geology, government and politics, history, psychology and sociology. Of these, 439 are on level 3 courses. Over half of the students are on psychology courses. In addition, GCE AS citizenship is provided for students aged 16 to 18 in their first year of full-time study. At the time of inspection, 264 students were completing this course. Six adult students attend a GCE AS evening course in psychology. Geography and psychology courses contain a range of optional studies. History provides a mixture of micro and macro studies.

Achievement and standards

99. There are consistently high and outstanding pass rates at GCE A level. All but one of the 65 psychology students achieved a pass grade in 2001/02. For the last two years, all GCE A-level history and sociology students achieved their qualifications. At GCE AS pass rates are at, or above, national averages in most subjects. They are well above averages in geography and sociology. The proportion of students obtaining high grades at GCE A level in these subjects has improved significantly and is above national averages. Retention rates have also improved. They are above national averages on GCE A-level courses and at national averages for GCE AS programmes.

100. Students produce good standards of work and they achieve their potential on most programmes. Most acquire sound subject understanding and use knowledge skilfully to explore wider issues. Investigation, analysis and evaluation skills are well developed. Students learn to grapple with complex issues. They accomplished challenging analytical tasks in a geography lesson on weather systems. In a history lesson on religious dissent and conformity, students examined with insight the intellectual arguments surrounding monarchical power. Over a two-year period, approximately two-thirds of students continued from GCE AS to A2 level.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE psychology 1	2	No. of starts	20	25	13
year		% retention	70	72	69
		% pass rate	57	28	67
GCE AS history 1 year	3	No. of starts	*	48	61
		% retention	*	88	92
		% pass rate	*	98	91
GCE AS psychology 1	3	No. of starts	*	139	151
year		% retention	*	79	86
		% pass rate	*	91	91
GCE AS sociology 1	3	No. of starts	*	50	50
year		% retention	*	70	84
		% pass rate	*	83	95
GCE A-level geography	3	No. of starts	23	13	19
2 years		% retention	91	77	95
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level history 2	3	No. of starts	24	32	34
years		% retention	79	84	94
		% pass rate	94	100	100
GCE A-level	3	No. of starts	71	70	65
psychology		% retention	70	80	98
		% pass rate	96	100	98

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

^{*} course did not run

- 101. Much teaching is very good or outstanding. Lessons are well planned with challenging objectives. Teachers share their enthusiasm for their subjects with students. A variety of teaching and learning methods is used to involve all students in learning. In the best lessons, students are actively involved from the outset and encouraged to exchange opinions. In a health psychology lesson, for example, the teacher's doctor-patient role-play was highly effective in demonstrating interpersonal skills. Adult students studying psychological investigations improved their skills in the use of statistics, using data from a peer-group questionnaire on personality. History teachers provide advanced extension classes to meet the needs of more able students. In most lessons, extension tasks are provided for quicker students. Students' oral competence is weak and they are reluctant to take part in discussions. They lack confidence in answering questions. Answers given are often peremptory. In a few lessons, question and answer techniques fail to probe understanding or promote discussion.
- 102. High quality resources are used well in lessons. Teachers are well qualified and regularly update their subject skills. Most lessons take place in comfortable subject base rooms. These are well equipped and have appropriate wall displays that include students' work. Stimulus material is used prudently to illustrate key points and reinforce learning. Students regularly use intranet and Internet sources. Materials for the intranet are well developed in citizenship, psychology and history. Students can access these materials from home. Study workbooks provide useful frameworks for learning.
- 103. Students' progress is rigorously monitored and assessed. Good use is made of the induction period to identify learning needs. Staff maintain comprehensive student records. Assignments are set regularly. In history and the social sciences, teachers use cover sheets to provide constructive, detailed feedback that is helpful to students. Teachers carefully monitor students' progress with projects and assignments. Additional sessions are provided in geography for this purpose. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored.
- 104. Support for students is good. Much additional subject support is provided. In geography and sociology, there are regular revision workshops. Handbooks and subject-focused material on the intranet provide helpful sources of guidance on study skills and careers, especially in psychology. Curriculum enrichment activity is well developed in history, psychology, and politics. In geography, there is a biennial fieldwork expedition to Kenya.

Leadership and management

105. Courses are well managed. Teachers work well together and managers promote a culture of improvement. Teachers hold formal meetings to discuss student progress. Student files are of high quality and well maintained. They include detailed schemes of work. Insufficient emphasis, however, is given to expected learning outcomes. Management information is increasingly used to inform action planning and target setting. Self-assessment is reliable, but there is insufficient focus on the quality of teaching and learning. Good practice is shared.

English and modern foreign languages

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Overall provision in this area is good (grade 2)

Strengths

o high pass rates on advanced level courses

- good proportion of high grades on most courses
- good or very good teaching in the majority of lessons
- thorough assessment and moderation procedures.

Weaknesses

- o low pass rates in GCSE English language
- low retention rates on GCE AS English literature and English language courses
- low proportion of high grades in GCE AS English language
- students insufficiently challenged in some lessons.

Scope of provision

106. The college offers full-time and part-time courses from foundation to advanced level in English and modern foreign languages. There are 435 enrolments on daytime English and modern foreign languages courses and a further 118 on evening courses. Day provision is mainly for students in the 16 to 18 age group. Evening provision is mainly for adults. The inspection covered full-time and part-time courses.

Achievement and standards

107. Pass rates are high on advanced level courses. Pass rates in GCE A-level English language, French and GCE AS German were all 100% in 2002. A high proportion of high grades was achieved in GCE AS English literature, French, German and Spanish. The proportion of high grades in GCE AS English language was low. The proportion of students completing their course in GCSE Spanish has been consistently high. Generally, three quarters of the part-time students in modern foreign languages complete and achieve an accredited award. Individual students' achievements in GCE AS English language are lower than predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. Pass rates on GCSE English language are low. Retention rates on the GCE AS English language and English literature courses declined and were low in 2001/02. At 77%, they were both considerably below the national averages.

108. Standards students demonstrate in lessons and in their written work are satisfactory or better. Advanced level English students can analyse language and text effectively. Modern language

students understand the spoken and written foreign language well and respond to it with a good degree of accuracy. However, some GCSE English students have difficulty in writing at an appropriate standard.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	2000	2001	2002
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	143	128	175
language		% retention	65	82	76
		% pass rate	60	32	34
GCE A-level English	3	No. of starts	43	35	27
literature		% retention	81	88	96
		% pass rate	100	100	96
GCE A-level French	3	No. of starts	of starts 20 15		14
		% retention	75	85	86
		% pass rate	100	100	100
GCE AS English	3	No. of starts	*	63	69
literature		% retention	*	84	77
		% pass rate	*	91	96
GCE AS French	3	No. of starts	*	28	28
		% retention	*	92	67
		% pass rate	*	91	94
GCE A-level English	3	No. of starts	21	36	19
language		% retention	73	66	100
		% pass rate	100	90	100

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

Quality of education and training

- 109. Teaching in English and modern foreign languages is at least good in most lessons. Teachers prepare their lessons thoroughly taking account of students' prior attainment. They have good subject knowledge, which they share with students through interesting and stimulating lessons. There is constructive feedback to students to help them improve. The target language is used consistently and effectively in most modern foreign languages lessons. Teachers and language assistants bring first-hand knowledge of the language and culture they teach. The quality of learning is enriched through the use of authentic materials. Students are making good progress in all skill areas. Adult students are enthusiastic and bring maturity and experience to discussions.
- 110. Students are encouraged to think critically and develop their knowledge and understanding of language and literature. In GCSE English lessons, students were able to compare poetry from a variety of cultures. Advanced level students showed good knowledge and understanding of The Tempest and Translations. In the weaker lessons, the pace is inappropriate, explanations are not clear and some students are not sufficiently challenged.
- 111. Staff are well qualified and regularly update their knowledge and skills. Resources are good. The library stock is up to date and meets the needs of advanced students. The language laboratory allows students to work at their own pace. Course information and learning resources are available

^{*} course did not run

on the intranet.

- 112. English and modern foreign languages students take part in theatre, cinema and museum visits to enrich their learning. They attend conferences and exhibitions and university-sponsored activities. Visiting speakers talk on a range of subjects. For example, a talk on East Germany was given to modern linguists. Modern foreign languages students took part in a joint visit to Paris with business studies students. All modern foreign languages students have weekly sessions with the foreign language assistants to improve their vocabulary and fluency.
- 113. Support for students is good. Teachers know the students well and provide additional help with coursework. One-to-one support is effective in raising standards of achievement. Pre-course guidance and induction are good. The college makes every effort to meet individual needs in one-to-one tutorials.

Leadership and management

114. The English and modern foreign language departments are effectively led and managed. Tutors work well as a team. Management is collaborative and consultative. There are regular meetings that focus on curriculum issues and raising standards. There are effective arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning. All staff are observed at least once a year. Performance targets are set through the appraisal system. The staff development programme helps tutors to meet their professional and personal goals. Departmental self-review is effective; it forms a basis for planning future provision. Strategies are identified to address weaknesses.

Part D: College data



Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age

Level	16-18	19+
	%	%
1	3	19
2	19	7
3	57	12
4/5	0	1
Other	21	61
Total	100	100



Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age



Curriculum area	16-18	19+	Total
	No.	No.	Enrolments %
Science and mathematics	1,335	544	16
Land-based provision	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Engineering, technology and manufacture	37	0	0
Business administration, management and professional	257	502	6
Information and communication technology	1,183	710	16
Retailing, customer service and transportation	0	0	0
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	297	15	3
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	0	0	0
Health, social care and public services	211	927	10
Visual and performing arts and media	457	471	8
Humanities	2,735	202	26
English, languages and communication	1,362	163	13
Foundation programmes	151	94	2
Total	8,025	3,628	100

Source: provided by the college in 2003

Table 3: Retention and achievement

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Level (Long	Retention and			Complet	ion year		
Courses)	pass rate		16-18			19+	
		2000	2001	2002	2000	2001	2002
1	Starters excluding transfers	227	66	38	186	174	132
	Retention rate	77	79	87	77	82	80
	National average	81	83	*	74	74	*
	Pass rate	63	60	94	69	75	71
	National average	70	66	*	65	66	*
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,092	548	637	155	169	113

	Retention rate	83	82	77	72	76	76
	National average	81	81	*	75	74	*
	Pass rate	68	84	97	81	82	63
	National average	79	83	*	68	67	*
3	Starters excluding transfers	1,149	2,526	2,623	238	190	196
	Retention rate	80	81	83	69	73	76
	National average	80	84	*	70	71	*
	Pass rate	84	90	90	70	65	82
	National average	85	85	*	63	66	*
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	3	0	0	31	8	10
	Retention rate	**	**	**	58	**	**
	National average	**	**	**	*	**	**
	Pass rate	**	**	**	72	**	**
	National average	**	**	**	*	**	**

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.

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

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Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	sessions observed
Level 3 (advanced)	77	20	3	104
Level 2 (intermediate)	64	22	14	28
Level 1 (foundation)	57	36	7	14
Other sessions	100	0	0	4
Totals	73	22	5	150

^{*} data not available

^{**} too few students to provide a valid calculation

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