INSPECTION REPORT

Southend-on-Sea LEA

21 May 2004

ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:
- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

Southend-on-Sea LEA

Contents

Summary

Detailed inspection findings

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. When Southend-on-Sea (Southend) became a unitary authority in 1997, adult and community learning was in the department of education and lifelong learning, where it remains. Southend-on-Sea Borough Council adult education service (the service) is delivered through the Southend Adult Community College, which has its main site in a former secondary school in Southchurch. There are other sites in Leigh-on-Sea, Prittlewell and Shoebury. Classes also take place at a wide range of community venues, schools and other premises across the borough. The college principal reports to the assistant director (learning achievement and school effectiveness) within the council, and also to a governing body made up of elected and co-opted members. Two vice-principals have operational responsibility for quality assurance, curriculum planning and equality of opportunity, and assist with strategic planning for the service. There are curriculum team leaders responsible for the management of programmes in each of the service's seven curriculum areas.

2. Family literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) workshops take place throughout all primary and some secondary schools in Southend. Literacy and numeracy and other outreach provision takes place in community settings, such as a family centre, an activity centre, in premises of organisations providing shelter for the homeless, a hotel, with ex-offenders and minority ethnic groups, with heritage language schools and in residential accommodation.

3. A range of family provision takes place at weekends and focuses mainly on literacy and numeracy. There are heritage languages partnerships with a range of community groups. Two of the main strategic partnerships that have been forged by the adult college are with the voluntary sector and local schools.

4. The service contracts for its main source of funding with the Essex Learning and Skills Council through two streams. The adult and community learning stream largely relates to non-accredited provision, while the further education stream relates to accredited provision. One-third of the work leads to a qualification. In 2003-04, additional funding was obtained from a range of funding bodies.

5. In 2002-03, there were 7,271 learners, compared with 7,321 in 2001-02. Of these, 1,937 were men, 4,959 were under 60 years of age and 1,816 were over 60.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Sciences & mathematics

6. Eighty-two learners are working towards accredited qualifications in mathematics or science. The college offers general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) and general certificates of education advanced levels (GCE A levels), in mathematics in

Southend and Leigh-on-Sea, and biological science at Shoebury. Seventeen learners are on a non-accredited forensic science course at Shoebury and upon completion receive a college certificate. Six part-time tutors teach these subjects and all are qualified and experienced. The team leader also manages the humanities curriculum area.

Business administration, management & professional

7. The service provides a range of qualifications including accounts, beginners' bookkeeping, budgeting and cashflows, business basics, and teaching qualifications. There are 25 learners on accounts programmes. Beginners' bookkeeping has six learners and the budgeting and cashflows course has eight learners. There are eight learners on the business basics course. Twenty-two learners are working towards a teachers' certificate, including nine volunteers and learning support tutors. The curriculum area has five staff, all of whom are part time.

Information & communications technology

8. Information and communications technology (ICT) courses are provided at the college, at six community venues, and in three schools; two are linked with outreach projects to widen participation and one is in the centre for training voluntary and community organisations. At the college's main site, a drop-in centre is available to all learners.

9. Non-accredited courses vary between a single three-hour session and up to 27 weeks of two- or three-hour sessions. Some courses are a taster of an accredited course or a brief introduction to topics such as internet radio, creative publishing or digital photography. Other courses provide support for new computer users or a more detailed introduction to office software, desktop publishing or internet web page design. Courses are available to help those with learning disabilities or a visual impairment to benefit from using computers and the internet.

10. At level 1, accredited courses include an introductory computer literacy course or modules from an examination-based qualification in information technology (IT). At level 2, further modules from the examination-based qualification in IT or a computer literacy and business technology course are offered. Two advanced modules are available at level 3 of the examination-based qualification in IT.

11. During 2002-03, there were 1,147 enrolments on ICT courses. Since the start of the present year, there have been 1,243 enrolments, about a quarter of which are for courses leading to a qualification. Two-thirds of learners are women, 15 per cent are from minority ethnic groups, 4 per cent have declared a disability and 35 per cent are aged 60 years or over.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

12. There are 28 programmes in sport and hospitality, most of which are non-accredited. Currently there is one accredited course in cake decorating. A reduced number of courses have been offered in 2003-04, compared with previous years. Most of the courses are sports-related, and include tai chi, pilates, yoga and exercise classes.

13. Courses are provided at four venues, which include the adult college main site, a community centre and two schools. Courses are available during the week in the morning, afternoon and evening. There is no weekend provision. A few short courses have been provided as outreach provision. Courses take place for one or two hours a week, for 13 weeks in each of the autumn and spring terms. There are shorter courses offered as taster sessions during the summer period.

14. One thousand one hundred and twenty-seven learners have enrolled in 2003-04. In 2002-03, there were 969 learners and in 2001-02, there were 1,027. Currently 88 per cent of learners are women, 4 per cent have declared a disability and 10 per cent are from a minority ethnic group. Part-time tutors, who generally work between two and four hours a week, teach the courses. There is a curriculum team leader who is responsible for curriculum planning and overseeing the provision.

Visual & performing arts & media

15. Visual and performing arts and media is a large curriculum area, representing almost a third of the college's provision. In 2003-04 there were 2,100 enrolments on over 200 courses, a slight decrease on the previous year's figure of 2,300. Provision includes accredited courses at levels 1, 2, and 3 in ceramics, photography, art and design, music theory and craft subjects including patchwork and quilting and interior design. In the non-accredited portfolio, there is a range of courses in drawing and painting, ceramics, clothing, music (appreciation and instrumental studies), dance and drama. A team of 60 part-time tutors delivers the courses.

16. Most of the non-accredited courses are for 13 weeks and are offered at either Southend or Leigh-on-Sea. A number of courses are offered twice during the academic year and take place at various times of the day. Some courses take place at both venues. There is little weekend provision. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is very small. In the visual arts courses, 75 per cent of learners are women. In music courses there is an even gender balance. On music and visual arts courses, most learners are over 25 years of age.

Humanities

17. A range of 20 part-time day and evening courses were taking place at the time of the inspection. Thirteen of these courses are accredited: classical civilisation, history, law, psychology and sociology across a range of GCSE and GCE A levels. The courses are between two and two and a half hour sessions, and they all run for 31 weeks. Seven further adult and community learning courses were also taking place.

18. Courses take place at three venues, but primarily at the Southend site. There are 11 tutors, 10 of whom are part time, and they are managed through a system of regular staff meetings and a range of monitoring and evaluation systems. In 2003-04, there were 99 enrolments on accredited courses, and this represented an upward trend from 2002-03. Eighty-four learners are enrolled on the adult and community programme, giving an overall total of 183 learners. A further 85 learners completed the courses which concluded in February 2004. In accredited courses the female learners predominate by approximately a ratio of four to one, but in the adult and community programme the ratio is approximately three to two. These courses were devised to resolve the gender imbalance. Most learners on accredited courses are in the 25-50 age range, but in the adult and community programme most are over 50 years of age.

English, languages & communications

19. Adult and community learning provides courses in foreign languages, English and communications. In 2002-03, 1,592 learners were enrolled on 113 courses. In 2003-04, 1,593 learners have enrolled on 130 courses. The range of modern foreign languages includes Spanish, French, Italian, German, Greek, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Mandarin, Hindi, Japanese, Arabic and Turkish, but at the time of inspection, there were no courses in Greek, Hindi and Turkish. Currently there are 10 courses in English, two courses in sign language and one course each in lip reading and an internationally recognised communication programme for people with communication and learning difficulties.

20. Most courses are for two hours and run for 13 or 30 weeks. Classes take place at five sites, seven days a week, during the day, at twilight or in the evening. Spanish, French, Italian, German and Greek are taught to GCE A level. Lesser taught languages are offered up to beginners' or intermediate levels. Thirty-five courses lead to qualifications. Thirty per cent of learners are men, 4.5 per cent come from a minority ethnic group and 23 per cent are over 60 years of age.

Foundation programmes

21. The foundation programme area comprises courses in literacy, numeracy and ESOL, courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and family learning courses. This is one of the largest programme areas in the college with 2,719 enrolments in 2002-03. Currently there are 295 learners on literacy, 169 learners on numeracy, 368 learners on ESOL and 115 learners on family learning programmes. In addition, 119 learners on learning difficulties and disabilities courses attend literacy classes and 30 learners on learning difficulties and disabilities courses attend numeracy classes.

22. Courses are provided at the college main site, in the community, in schools and in the workplace. Classes are timetabled in the daytime, late afternoons, evenings and, for family learning, at the weekends. There are a number of partnership projects with employers and the voluntary sector. The provision is managed by the head of essential skills and the head of business and community development. They are supported by two full-time outreach workers, a family learning co-ordinator and a learning difficulties and disabilities co-ordinator, two full-time staff and four fractional post holders. There are over 30 hourly paid tutors.

Community development

23. Community learning is broadly subdivided into four project titles. 'AdVance Partnership' training involves working with voluntary and community groups in the design and delivery of customised courses. 'Reach out' projects, covers work including linking into existing projects in the community and providing additional support through training and shared resources. 'Workplace Training' involves working with employers and statutory bodies in the design and delivery of courses to help individuals and meet the needs of employment. 'Lifelong Learning' responds to local needs and national priorities through a wide range of partnerships.

24. The area is managed through a strategic management team which meets six times a year, an operational management team which meets monthly, and by regular course team meetings and individual communications. Community learning has links with over 250 voluntary and community organisations and works closely with a range of employers and is linked with a range of schools in the area. The curriculum is planned and designed to meet the needs of specific gender, ethnicity, culture, faith and ability groups, including teaching assistants, care workers, Hindu elders, Albanian and Chinese communities, and to provide courses to attract non-traditional learners including men and disaffected young people.

25. Classes offered range from one day to 27 weeks throughout the year and at times to suit the client groups. The curriculum is delivered mainly by 50 part-time tutors and in some cases supported by volunteers and support-workers in a wide range of venues including schools, employer premises, church halls and the main college site.

26. The curriculum provision includes around 40 projects with approximately 250 learners on accredited and non-accredited courses. There are also existing projects being supported, covering a range of occupational skills including care, IT, health and safety, and music technology. In 2003-04 there have been over 1,000 learners taking courses, many of which include literacy, numeracy and language support.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	20
Number of inspection days	97
Number of learner interviews	551
Number of staff interviews	108
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	48

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

27. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, science and mathematics, humanities and community development are good. Business administration, management and professional, ICT, sport and leisure, visual and performing arts and English and languages are satisfactory.

Overall, foundation programmes are satisfactory, including the provision of literacy, numeracy and ESOL courses. However, the courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the family learning courses were good, and inspectors awarded contributory grades of 2 for these aspects of the foundation programme. The leadership and management are satisfactory, quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory, and measures to ensure equality of opportunity are good.

GRADES

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	4

Sciences & mathematics	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Visual & performing arts & media	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Humanities	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

English, languages & communications	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	3

Community development	2
Contributory grades:	
Adult and community learning	2

KEY FINDINGS
Achievement and standards

28. **Achievement on accredited courses in science and mathematics is good.** Four of the six GCSE mathematics courses had 100 per cent pass rates for the past two years. Overall, 85 per cent of retained GCSE mathematics learners achieved a grade C or above over that period. In the current year predicted grades are good and there is very good retention on these courses. The retention rate on the forensic science course is good.

29. **In business and professional courses, there are very good pass rates.** GCE A2 level accounts courses achieved an outstanding 100 per cent pass rate of which 86 per cent were A or B grades in 2003. GCSE accounts, and the level 4 certificate in teaching had pass rates of 93 per cent and 95 per cent respectively in 2003. Overall, there is good achievement and attainment on business basics and teaching qualifications courses where the standard of learners' work demonstrates development of skills in analysis and evaluation.

30. **There is good retention on accredited courses in ICT.** During 2002-03, retention was 85 per cent. For the present year, retention for completed courses is over 90 per cent. Achievement on accredited courses in 2002-03 was satisfactory. The present overall achievement is satisfactory, but has fallen for completed courses, which represents about half of the courses.

31. **Learners develop good practical skills in ICT.** Learners on introductory courses quickly overcome their fear of computers to perform a range of useful tasks. On higher-level courses, learners develop more advanced skills ranging from website design to the use of professional digital imaging software.

32. **Learners demonstrate good skills on sport and leisure courses** and this allows them to make progress and maintain levels of health. These include physiological and

psychological benefits in their mobility, dexterity, well-being, balance, posture and cardio-vascular-respiratory system. Standards of work are generally satisfactory, and sometimes very good, for example, on the accredited catering course.

33. **There are poor retention rates on some fitness and sports courses,** such as yoga and pilates. The retention rate for these courses in the current academic year is 44 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. Strategies have been established to make improvements such as changing the length of courses, offering taster sessions and introducing a certificate to celebrate attendance of more than 80 per cent.

34. **In visual and performing arts, the levels of achievement are good on craft courses.** Pass rates in papercraft, interior design and Victorian crafts are good. Retention rates on some non-accredited courses are good. Fifty courses have retained all the learners who started this year, many of whom intend to progress to other courses. Many of the accredited courses have poor pass rates and too many learners do not achieve their qualification. Pass rates were 58 per cent in 2002-03 and 59 per cent in 2003-04. The curriculum team leader has identified this problem and has developed strategies to improve the pass rates.

35. **Achievement in humanities is generally good on accredited courses,** with most learners passing at A level or achieving good grades in GCSEs. Results in law and sociology are exceptional at A Level, with a 100 per cent pass rate in advanced supplementary (AS) and A2 level examinations in 2003. There were some erratic patterns of attendance which affected coursework preparation and interrupted learning on some courses, particularly history and sociology.

36. **Learners' achievement, attainment and development of skills in English are good.** This was partially identified in the self-assessment report. Learners are able to discuss complex ideas with confidence, and interpret literary material and concepts with a high level of skill, using sophisticated language. Learners in creative writing classes are taught to explore a very wide range of personal experience and emotion with clarity, perception and attention to style. They publish a collection of their work each year and have recently been invited by a major company to provide descriptive literature for their product. In 2002-03 achievement on accredited courses was good. On GCSE English, 60 per cent of grades were at or above grade B, and in GCE A level English literature, 75 per cent were at grade B or above.

37. **In the foundation area, nationally recognised qualifications are offered in literacy and numeracy and strategies are in place to encourage learners to take qualifications.** In 2003-04, 160 learners were entered at levels 1 and 2 in literacy and numeracy. In 2002-03, 95 learners were entered for level 1 literacy and 69 per cent achieved their qualification. Of the 38 learners who entered for literacy at level 2, 72 per cent achieved. Progression from level 2 numeracy to GCSE mathematics is good. Overall, learners gain confidence from development of literacy, numeracy and language skills. They progress to other adult education courses.

38. On community development programmes, attendance, retention and achievement

are satisfactory. Learners have personal learning goals related either to their employment or social circumstances. Learners who had previously shown disaffection with the education system have been tempted back into learning. The service's community learning programmes contribute to lifelong learning through the development of essential and vocational skills.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Sciences & mathematics	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	6
Business administration, management & professional	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	5
Information & communications technology	0	0	6	14	1	0	0	21
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	1	0	3	9	0	0	0	13
Visual & performing arts & media	1	6	8	9	4	0	0	28
Humanities	1	4	2	2	0	0	0	9
English, languages & communications	1	5	8	9	2	2	0	27
Foundation programmes	0	6	11	15	1	0	0	33
Community development	0	2	5	8	0	0	0	15
Total	**4**	**27**	**47**	**67**	**9**	**3**	**0**	**157**

39. **Much of the teaching is stimulating and lively in science and mathematics.**

40. **There is good individual support for science and mathematics learners.** Tutors are very generous with their time outside lessons. They arrive early and stay late, and learners can telephone or e-mail them. Tutors have a good relationship with their learners and are very responsive to their needs.

41. **Planning and monitoring of learning in some science and mathematics lessons are not detailed enough,** and some schemes of work are too general. Even in well-taught lessons, tutors do not evaluate their performance adequately. There is no diagnostic screening except for GCSE learners. Learning styles are tested, but this information is not always used to plan differentiation in teaching. Some reviews do not plan learning or set specific goals.

42. **There is little use of information learning technology (ILT) in lessons,** and there are no computers available in two centres. There is no specialist software and few learners use the centre. Staff use a limited range of teaching methods in some lessons. There are no interactive whiteboards and few staff use overhead projectors. However, in one good lesson an overhead projector was well used to demonstrate symmetrical shapes.

43. **The assessment of business and professional learners' work is good.** The tutors mark learners' work in a timely fashion, with text comment, and summary evaluations that clearly explain how learners can improve and develop their knowledge and skills. Staff

provide a satisfactory induction which enables learners to settle into their programmes quickly, and to understand their rights and responsibilities and the demands of the course. Learners have good working relationships with their tutors.

44. **Teaching on some business courses does not meet the needs of learners with differing abilities.** There are no planned teaching strategies to differentiate learning styles. Extension materials are not produced to meet the needs of mixed-ability learners and some struggle to understand the theory. Many lessons are dominated by the tutor and many learners rapidly lose their concentration. In the better lessons, good use is made of learners' experience and work roles.

45. **There are some poor learning resources for business courses.** The learning centre has no paper-based materials for pre-entry business or teaching qualifications. The book stock for accounting consists of just one text for each course. Computers are available to learners in the learning resource centre but not in classrooms. There is ineffective subject support. Diaries are completed by learners on some courses, but topics which need additional support are not always followed up by tutors.

46. **On ICT courses there is outstanding support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.** The learning support assistants all provide good, constructive, patient and good-humoured support to their learners, and ensure that each one has a good learning experience. All the learners are appreciative of the level and quality of support that is provided.

47. **The college ICT provision is responsive and well targeted.** A wide range of entry-level non-accredited provision provides an introduction to computers for many learners. There is a range of outreach provision in community venues, and effective partnerships with the voluntary sector. The college has progression routes into accredited courses and through them to level 3 qualifications. Many learners take advantage of these routes. Courses are offered at different times allow learners to attend.

48. Resources at the college are satisfactory. However, technician support is not always readily available for ICT classes. Resources to support learners with additional needs are available and are well used. A crèche provides parents with the opportunity to participate in learning while their children are cared for in a safe environment.

49. **There is a narrow range of teaching methods in ICT.** Too few sessions use group work to introduce topics. Most classes rely on individual learning. Tutors are knowledgeable and respond quickly, but do not take the opportunity to check learning and understanding. Some classes are poorly structured and do not have clear objectives for the session.

50. **Progress reviews for ICT learners are weak.** Targets are not usually negotiated with learners and the tutor keeps the records. Learners describe this process as an administrative activity and they do not have a personal copy. The information from the reviews is not used to plan individual learning.

51. **There is particularly good professional expertise among sport and leisure tutors.** Staff are well qualified in their subject and attend a good range of professional development activities. The staff are aware of latest industry trends, and some tutors have good international links or have contacts nationally and locally.

52. Support and guidance for sport and leisure learners are satisfactory. Support staff and volunteers are made available to learners. For example, wheelchair users in a fitness class are sensitively supported with their physical movements during exercises.

53. **Tutors use a limited range of teaching methods to meet preferred learning styles.** There is limited movement around the group to check and correct techniques, and there is inadequate use of learning resources or materials in classes. However, teaching methods are satisfactory in cookery and food courses.

54. **The recording of initial assessment and learners' progress is poor.** In most classes health screening takes place and is recorded. However, in a few classes it does not take place and some learners who started a course late did not complete a health questionnaire. The initial discussion document is not completed in some cases and some documents do not contain sufficient detail. Learners' progress is not routinely reviewed and there is no formal target-setting.

55. **The curriculum provision in sport and leisure is insufficient.** There is a narrow range of courses offered, for example only one accredited course. The college only offers a few taster courses during the summer period. This long break during the summer is unsatisfactory and does not meet learners' needs. There are plans to run new courses in travel and tourism, and to offer courses over longer and shorter timescales.

56. **In visual and performing arts, there is much good teaching** which develops independent learning. Learners on the sculpture and the preparing working designs courses understand the value of independent research using the internet, library resources and observational drawing to broaden the range of designs they produce. Learners receive good individual support from tutors during classes. They progress well and acquire skills through well-thought-out activities.

57. **There are good resources on visual arts courses,** and learners benefit from studios that are light, airy and spacious. These workspaces allow learners to experience working on a large scale in subjects such as life drawing and interior design. Several studios in the Southchurch centre have been recently equipped with a computer and scanner.

58. **There are examples of good assessment practice.** In addition to detailed written feedback from the tutor, learners are involved in comprehensive peer assessment activities. Learners have feedback from each of their fellow learners and continued peer support for coursework.

59. **There is good support for all learners especially those with disabilities and learning difficulties.** In lessons they benefit from help given by dedicated support workers, many of whom are volunteers and who work closely with teachers. Photography staff work

with a photographers' society for disabled people to provide equipment that allows learners to participate fully in the lessons. Teachers build good relationships with learners and go out of their way to support their interests in the subject.

60. **There is unsatisfactory teaching in media.** A narrow range of teaching styles is used and in a video editing session, learners were not fully engaged in practical activities. With only one computer available learners watch demonstrations of editing with no opportunities to practise these skills. There is insufficient formative feedback and some ineffective lesson planning in photography.

61. **The equipment is inadequate in technology subjects.** Music keyboards are shared between a number of learners and they often have to wait to practise their skill. Media editing software is only available on one computer in the classroom and none is available in the learning centre.

62. **Learners do not always have full information about course content and progression opportunities.** Learners are not fully aware of progression routes to accredited courses. The curriculum team leader plans to ensure that learners for all accredited courses at level 2 or above have an interview with a member of the college guidance staff before enrolment from September 2004.

63. **Teaching is good on all humanities courses** and most learners make good progress. Teachers use a variety of methods and use considerable subject expertise to encourage independent learning. Learners are challenged to succeed, and tutors ensure that all learners are fully supported. Marking is usually informative and gives learners advice on how to improve. The promotion of literacy is a key feature of many sessions, with learners being encouraged to read widely and constructively.

64. **The support for humanities learners is effective.** Tutors offer support to individuals and groups, in accredited and adult and community learning. Learners gain considerable confidence as they begin to explore new educational perspectives. The personal support and benefits to confidence are valued by all learners.

65. **There is some ineffective application of assessment criteria in adult and community learning and on accredited courses in humanities.** The awarding body has been involved in discussions to resolve the weakness in coursework assessment on accredited courses. Managers and tutors are using examples of good practice which exist elsewhere in the programme area to resolve the weakness.

66. **There is insufficient use of self-evaluation by some tutors when planning humanities classes and courses.** Tutors do not always record the effectiveness of teaching strategies, nor the extent to which learning outcomes match learning goals. Recording of the evaluation information is not thorough.

67. **The teaching is poor in modern foreign languages classes.** In many lessons tutors use the target foreign language without checking regularly that learners understand it. In some classes, the pace is too slow and does not challenge many learners, while in others

it is very fast and activities are not developed sufficiently. Some lessons are dull and uninspiring and there is little use of pair or group work and almost no role-play. However, in some classes, sensitive teachers develop motivation and enthusiasm.

68. **A wide range of European, oriental and community languages is offered to meet community needs.** Learners speak highly of their classes and feel they are making progress. They make good use of the progression routes available. In many instances they progress from non-accredited courses to accredited courses. Learners value contact with native speakers and enjoy the opportunities for social interaction.

69. **Initial course information for languages is adequate** and helps learners choose a suitable course for their needs. The central information and advice service is effective in advising learners, and there is a self-assessment questionnaire designed to help language learners select the most appropriate course. Absentees are contacted and receive homework and notes from missed lessons.

70. **The assessment of learners' language skills is unsatisfactory** in non-accredited programmes. Initial assessment is not precise enough to identify learners' previous knowledge and skills and is not used to deal with individual needs. Achievement records often show what has been taught, not what has been learnt. There are no standard tasks to measure progress and the standard achieved.

71. **Teaching and learning are good for those on learning difficulties and disabilities and family learning courses.** Overall, 50 per cent of lessons are good or better. Learners are made to think and make decisions for themselves in sessions for those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

72. **Much of the teaching in family learning is informal, but it is effective in developing skills for life.** In good sessions, there is a balance of group and individual activities. There are frequent checks on learning and opportunities for learners to practise recently learnt skills.

73. **Foundation courses are innovative and responsive to the needs of local communities.** New learners are attracted to family learning courses through schools and weekend events in appropriate locations. Good partnership working with heads of schools has expanded the provision to over 20 schools. The main college is open to the Chinese community each Sunday to provide a range of activities requested by learners. Progression to employment and other adult education courses is good.

74. **The new purpose-built crèche facilities at the main centre and childcare arrangements in schools enable new learners to take part in foundation courses.** Satisfactory arrangements are made for learners with specific learning difficulties. A range of equipment is available for those with sensory or physical needs. Most tutors have been trained to give impartial advice and guidance.

75. The study skills centre in the main centre does have resources for independent use. Accommodation is satisfactory at all sites and access is good. Some rooms have displays

of learners' work, but many are general rooms and have little display or storage space.

76. **Curriculum resources for foundation programmes are new and up to date in the main centre and in many other venues.** However, they are not being used extensively in all classes. Many learners would like to use computers as part of their sessions but there is little opportunity for them to do so. In numeracy classes, little use is made of learning aids, such as weighing equipment or shapes, to aid learning.

77. **Information from initial assessment is not always used to plan lessons in foundation courses,** nor is it used for setting individual targets. There is a good system of initial screening, assessment and diagnostic assessment for all learners. However, it is not always carried out promptly or with late enrollers. Learners are not encouraged to record their new vocabulary in a systematic way in personal vocabulary books. Learners' work files are disorganised.

78. **Small classes and poor attendance in some courses do not allow group work and discussion to be used effectively.** Over half the lessons observed had five or fewer learners. In weaker sessions learners often work individually practising skills that are not related to their everyday life. There is too little creative writing or writing for everyday tasks like letter or report writing, and insufficient use of IT to support learning.

79. **In community development programmes there are innovative strategies to encourage learners into projects.** Some classes are specially run to accommodate specific groups or needs relating to gender, ethnicity and faith. Tutors have sound subject knowledge and up-to-date expertise which makes the teaching relevant to specific vocational areas or particular ethnic groups. In the better taught classes, the tutor plans effectively and clear objectives are shared at the start of the session.

80. **There are very strong partnerships to widen participation and benefit community organisations.** There is evidence of effective marketing strategies which have increased the number of courses on the community programme. Specific courses are tailored for particular interest groups including welfare organisations for the blind or learners with dementia, a group dealing with young offenders, and a range of community groups from different ethnic backgrounds. Other groups, such as those dealing with young offenders or those working with people with mental health issues, have also been involved with college initiatives.

81. **The college is meeting the needs and interests of learners in its community development arrangements.** Targets are being consistently met. Over 250 new learners and more than 20 new capacity-building initiatives have been added to the college provision under the 'reachout' branch of community learning.

82. **There is particularly good and flexible additional support for individuals and groups on the main college site, as well as at off-site locations.** A translator is available to facilitate learning on a course for Albanian elders. Tutors are praised by learners because of their willingness to be available to support and advise even outside the class meeting times, and also for the levels of dignity and respect given and promoted. Flexibility in

curriculum delivery in timings and location is benefiting the learners and increasing enrolments.

83. **There is a limited range of teaching methods used on community development courses,** and too much reliance on tutor input in the classes. In some classes learners are given photocopies from textbooks with no regard to the fact that the class contains learners of mixed ability. In most lessons the content of sessions is thoughtfully conceived but the means of delivering it is not varied.

84. **The assessment of learning is ineffective** and some community development learners do not know how well they are progressing. Tutors give good verbal assessment and feedback on learners' work, but little is recorded and learners have no supporting evidence of their learning.

Leadership and management

85. **The leadership is effective** and there is a clear strategic direction for the adult community college. Senior council officers have a good understanding of the work of the college. The principal of the college, supported by two vice-principals, provides open and responsive management. Governors are committed to the success of the college and twice each year review the curriculum to ensure that it is in line with the college's mission.

86. **There are very effective partnership arrangements with a wide range of organisations,** including over 40 local schools. The family learning partnership involves the LEA, the adult college, Southend SureStart and minority ethnic groups. Also, the college works well with many voluntary sector and community groups. For example, the association of voluntary services links the college with over 250 community groups. The college works effectively with employers to encourage skills development in the workplace.

87. **Communication in the college is generally good.** All full-time staff have access to e-mail and most are well informed. Curriculum team leaders hold staff meetings at a range of times to encourage part-time tutors to attend. Staff are aware of the college's strategic direction and share its mission.

88. **The targets which come from the annual appraisal for full-time and part-time staff are insufficiently robust.** Staff are mainly well qualified and a programme for part-time tutors to gain appropriate teaching qualifications is on offer. The college has produced a professional development plan, but it is not sufficiently linked to the strategic plan. There is inadequate staff development to meet their needs in some curriculum areas.

89. **There are very good support arrangements for learners, particularly for those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.** Specialist equipment such as materials in large print and Braille, extra large screens and keyboards for visually impaired learners, communicators and hearing loops for hearing impaired learners, adjustable tables, chairs and easels and the provision of translators are all available. In addition to specialist

equipment the college also provides additional support in the classroom through support tutors. They also attend appropriate staff development.

90. **The setting and monitoring of targets is inadequate** as a means for improving performance in curriculum areas. Some targets are unclear and poorly understood by staff and managers. The assessment of retention and achievement against targets is irregular and ineffective. Staff have little ownership of the targets in their area of learning. Monitoring the achievement of targets is hindered by unreliable management information which is produced centrally.

91. **Management information systems are inadequate.** Historical data does not record transfers and this inflates the number of starters and gives an unrealistic picture of the previous years' retention rates. However, a new management information system officer who has good commercial skills has been recruited and is carrying out much effective work to produce reliable data. Errors have been analysed thoroughly and corrected. Alternative reporting systems have been developed in-house to provide more flexible and realistic information for managers and team leaders. This work continues to improve accuracy, but the systems are not yet robust or reliable.

92. **The college is successful in the promotion of equality, diversity and social inclusion.** Courses are offered at 60 community locations as well as the locations in Southend, Leigh-on-Sea, Shoebury and Prittlewell. The college's policies and procedures relating to diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunity are clearly written, accessible and comprehensive. Staff and learners are fully aware of policies and procedures, and an inclusive culture predominates in all aspects of the service's activities.

93. **Numerous collaborative projects have widened participation and progression opportunities for learners.** Managers and staff are enthusiastic and committed. They successfully bid for new sources of external funding, such as Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), European Social Funding (ESF), and European Regional Development Funding (ERDF), to support innovative and community-focused projects for under-represented groups.

94. There was an audit of the college premises to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and considerable adjustments have been made. **All staff, managers and members of the college governing body have attended disability awareness training in the past two years.**

95. **The college has an effective complaints procedure.** Problems are dealt with appropriately. Complaints are analysed every six months by area of learning and feedback to learners is well publicised in the college, with details of responses and action taken to remedy complaints. Learners have confidence that their views are taken into account by staff and managers.

96. The current quality assurance framework for the college was produced in January 2004. **Quality assurance is a regular agenda item at team meetings at all levels** and on frequent staff development days. However, quality assurance arrangements are not yet

effective in raising the standard of assessment and monitoring the learners' progress. A system for the observation of teaching and learning is in place, but follow-up actions are not effective in improving the variety and range of teaching techniques in the classroom.

97. **Assessment practice is poor in many areas.** Weak and subjective initial assessment is not useful to effectively plan learning. Weaker lesson plans do not identify differentiation and little use is made of tutors' self-evaluation. The mid-year learner questionnaires are not analysed until the course has ended. Systems to assess achievement on non-accredited courses are incomplete. Self-assessment activity does take place in team meetings but it is insufficiently focused, and produces poorly defined targets.

98. The self-assessment process is carried out annually. The current report is the college's third. Many of its judgements were recognised by inspectors in their observations. The development plan is an agenda item at meetings and many points have been actioned and dealt with. However, **the self-assessment is insufficiently evaluative.**

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths
- clear strategic direction
- very effective partnerships with local schools and other key stakeholders
- very good support for learners
- innovative strategies for targeting under-represented groups

Weaknesses
- inadequate management information systems
- inadequate use of targets for development planning
- ineffective arrangements for quality assurance

Sciences & mathematics

Strengths

- good achievement on accredited courses
- much stimulating and lively teaching
- good individual support for learners
- very effective action to raise pass rates in GCSE mathematics

Weaknesses

- some weak planning and monitoring of learning
- little use of information and learning technologies in lessons

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- very good pass rates on most courses
- good assessment of learners' work

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching
- poor learning resources
- some ineffective subject support

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good retention on accredited courses
- good practical skills development for learners
- outstanding support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- well-targeted and responsive community provision

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods
- weak progress reviews for learners
- inadequate target-setting to improve achievement rates

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths
- good acquisition of skills
- particularly good professional knowledge and expertise among tutors
- good promotion of equality and diversity

Weaknesses
- poor retention in fitness and sport courses
- narrow range of teaching methods
- poor recording of initial assessment and learners' progress
- insufficient curriculum provision

Visual & performing arts & media

Strengths
- good achievement on craft courses
- much good teaching to develop strong independent learning
- good range of courses with good progression opportunities in visual arts
- good support for learners

Weaknesses
- poor pass rates on many accredited courses
- unsatisfactory teaching in media subjects
- insufficiently developed systems for effective programme evaluation

Humanities

Strengths

- good retention and progression in non-accredited courses
- strong concept and skills development in non-accredited courses
- good achievement in law and sociology
- good teaching
- effective support for learners
- effective programme management

Weaknesses

- erratic attendance on accredited courses
- insufficient use of evaluation in some lesson planning
- some weak assessment practice

English, languages & communications

Strengths

- good attainment and skills development in English
- very good learning opportunities to meet the needs of the community
- strong commitment to equality of opportunity in programme design and delivery

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in some modern foreign languages classes
- unsatisfactory assessment of language skills in non-accredited provision
- ineffective measures to assure the quality of languages provision

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good support for learners
- good teaching in learning difficulties and disabilities and family learning

Weaknesses

- weak session planning on some courses
- insufficient use of teaching and learning resources
- weak assessment and target-setting for learners
- some small classes and poor attendance

Community development

Strengths

- innovative approaches to encourage learners into projects
- very strong partnership links to widen participation and benefit community organisations
- particularly good and flexible additional support for individuals and groups

Weaknesses

- limited range of teaching methods
- ineffective assessment of learning

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LEA:

- accessibility of college locations
- the friendly atmosphere
- the college is not too big like other colleges
- opportunity to share culture with others
- the support from tutors
- the feeling that the college belongs to the community

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LEA COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of time waiting to get on a course - it should be shorter
- the length of some courses - they are too short
- the reliability of computers in some community centres
- the size of classes - some are too big
- the number of parking spaces - there should be more
- the number of evening classes - there should be more

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LEA:

- deal with poor teaching in some areas
- enhance target-setting
- develop more rigorous action-planning to follow observations of teaching and learning
- increase the use of information and learning technologies in classes
- continue to enhance quality assurance measures

Language of the Adult and Community Learning Sector

Terminology varies across the range of education and training settings covered by the *Common Inspection Framework.* The table below indicates the terms appropriate to Adult and Community Learning

Single term used in the framework	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning	
Provider	Provider	Any organisation providing opportunities for adults to meet personal or collective goals through the experience of learning. Providers include local authorities, specialist designated institutions, voluntary and community sector organisations, regeneration partnerships and further education colleges
Learner	Learner	Includes those learning by participating in community projects, as well as those on courses. Learning, however, will be planned, with intended outcomes.
Teacher / trainer	Tutor	Person teaching adult learners or guiding or facilitating their learning.
	Mentor	Person providing individual, additional support, guidance and advice to learners to help them achieve their learning goals.
Learning goals	Main learning goals	Intended gains in skills, knowledge or understanding. Gains may be reflected in the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. Or they may be reflected in the ability of learners to apply learning in contexts outside the learning situation, e.g. in the family, community, or workplace. Learners' main goal/s should be recorded on an individual or, in some cases, group learning plan. Plans should be revised as progress is made and new goals emerge.
	Secondary learning goals	These may include planned-for gains in self-confidence, and inter-personal skills. These should also be included in learning plans where appropriate.
Personal and learning skills	Personal and learning skills	These include being able to study independently, willingness to collaborate with others, and readiness to take up another opportunity for education or training.

Other terms used in Adult and Community Learning

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Unanticipated, or unintended learning outcome	Adults often experience unanticipated gains as a result of being involved in learning. These include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence and a growing sense of belonging to a community. Gains of this kind should be acknowledged and recorded in any record of achievement.
Subject-based programme	A programme organised around a body of knowledge, e.g. the structure and usage of the French language or ceramic glazing techniques. Students could be expected to progress from one aspect of the subject to another, to grasp increasingly complex concepts or analyses or to develop greater levels of skill or to apply skills to a new area of work.
Issue-based programme	A programme that is based on the concerns, interests and aspirations of particular groups, for example members of a Sikh Gurdwara wanting to address inter-faith relations in their town, or parents worried about the incidence of drug abuse in their locality. Issue-based learning tends to be associated with geographically defined communities, but the increasing use of electronic means of communication means that this need no longer be the case. Progress is defined in terms of the group's increasing ability to analyse its situation, to access new information and skills which will help it resolve its difficulties and generate solutions and its growing confidence in dealing with others to implement those solutions.
Outreach provision	Provision established in a community setting in addition to provision made at an organisation's main site(s). Outreach programmes may be similar to courses at the main site(s) or be designed to meet the specific requirements of that community.
Neighbourhood-based work	The provider's staff have a long-term presence in a local community with a specific remit to understand the concerns of the local residents and develop learning activities to meet local needs and interests.
Community regeneration	The process of improving the quality of life in communities by investing in their infrastructure and facilities, creating opportunities for training and employment and tackling poor health and educational under-achievement. Community regeneration requires the active participation of local residents in decision-making. Changes and improvements are often achieved either directly or indirectly as a result of the adult learning activities which arise from this.

	Relating the term to Adult and Community Learning
Community capacity building	The process of enabling local people to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence to take advantage of opportunities for employment, training and further education and to become selfmanaging, sustainable communities.
Active citizenship	The process whereby people recognise the power they have to improve the quality of life for others and make a conscious effort to do so: the process whereby people recognise the power of organisations and institutions to act in the interests of the common good and exercise their influence to ensure that they do so. Adult learning contributes to active citizenship.

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear strategic direction
- very effective partnerships with local schools and other key stakeholders
- very good support for learners
- innovative strategies for targeting under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information systems
- inadequate use of targets for development planning
- ineffective arrangements for quality assurance

99. The chief education officer provides strong leadership and clear strategic direction for the adult community college. This contributes to the implementation of elected members' vision to develop a lifelong learning culture within Southend where education is valued within the community. Senior officers have a good understanding of the work of the adult college. The principal of the college, supported by two vice-principals, provides open and responsive management. Governors are nominated by a variety of organisations representing the community. In addition there are four student representatives who are elected by the student body. Governors are committed to the success of the college and twice each year review the curriculum offer to ensure that it is in line with the college's mission.

100. There are very effective partnership arrangements with a wide range of organisations within the borough including over 40 local schools. The family learning partnership involves the LEA, the adult college, Southend SureStart and minority ethnic groups. The college is seen as integral to the schools' improvement agenda and is highly valued by local head teachers and senior managers. In addition, the college works well with a local association of voluntary services, which links the college with over 250 community and voluntary sector groups. The college's close links with community organisations involves partners at a strategic and operational level in the identification and implementation of relevant programmes of learning for the community it serves. The college works effectively with employers to drive the development of skills in the workplace.

101. Communication in the college is generally good. All full-time staff have access to e-mail and most are well informed. Curriculum team leaders hold staff meetings at a range of times to encourage part-time tutors to attend. Staff are aware of the college's strategic direction and share its mission.

102. The borough introduced a new performance management scheme at the beginning of 2004 which applies to full-time staff. Part-time staff are appraised under a different scheme and in some areas of learning there has been non-compliance with the appraisal schedule. The targets which come from the annual appraisal system for full-time and part-time staff are insufficiently robust. Staff are mainly well qualified and a programme for part-time tutors to gain appropriate teaching qualifications is on offer. The college has produced a professional development plan, but it is not sufficiently linked to the college's strategic plan. There is inadequate staff development to deal with the individual needs of staff in some curriculum areas, for example to resolve weaknesses identified through lesson observations. Some staff are currently attending a management development programme, but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

103. The support arrangements are very good for learners. Staff provide high levels of support to learners and particularly for those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Support includes specialist equipment for learners with physical disabilities, materials in large print and Braille, extra large screens and keyboards for visually impaired learners, communicators and hearing loops for hearing impaired learners, adjustable tables, chairs and easels and the provision of translators. In addition to specialist equipment the college also provides additional support in the classroom for accredited and non-accredited courses, through support tutors who are appropriately trained. Learners are given advice and guidance at the start of their course and further information on progression opportunities towards the end of their course. Progression is arranged to provide times, subjects and activities that will provide the best level of support for learners. Some learners do not take up the support offered and sometimes enrol on what may be unsuitable courses. A recently opened community nursery on the college main site is another example of collaboration between the borough and other community stakeholders. The college offers a 'leisure and pleasure' course for learners with learning difficulties and arranges transport to bring learners from a nearby town.

104. There is a satisfactory curriculum review process that involves governors as well as curriculum leaders and managers. The college has taken a decision to avoid the culture of 'club classes' and instead concentrates on provision that offers opportunities for progression from non-accredited to accredited courses. Prospectuses are produced three times a year and managers take the opportunity to refine the curriculum offer in the light of learner feedback.

105. The setting and monitoring of targets is inadequate. Some targets are unclear and are not fully understood by staff and managers. The assessment of retention and achievement against targets is irregular and ineffective. Part-time staff, in particular, are rarely involved in the process of target-setting. Most are established by college managers with insufficient consultation with staff. Targets are adequately monitored at course team and curriculum level. Monitoring the achievement of targets is hindered by unreliable management information which is produced centrally. Managers find it difficult to plan effectively for the future development of programmes.

106. Management information systems are inadequate. Inaccurate data provides misleading statistics. Historical data does not record transfers and this inflates the

number of starters and gives an unrealistic picture of previous years' retention rates. Unreliable reporting gives different results with the same data. There are two systems in the college and figures do not agree. Information provided to funding bodies is very complex to prepare, and analysis of the statistics provides another different view. Data cannot currently be used for continuous improvement. However, a new management information system officer has been recruited and is doing much effective work to produce reliable data. The 2003-04 registers and source information have been checked thoroughly against the core data from the management information system. Errors have been analysed and corrected. Alternative reporting systems have been developed in-house to provide more flexible and realistic information for managers and team leaders. The officer has developed a productive relationship with the system vendor and has identified and obtained solutions for previously unrecognised software problems. This work continues to improve accuracy, but the systems are not yet robust or reliable.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 2

107. The college successfully promotes equality and diversity and the extension of social inclusion. Courses are offered at 60 community locations as well as in Southend, Leigh-on-Sea, Shoebury and Prittlewell. A wide range of programmes is offered to meet the needs of the local community.

108. The college's policies and procedures relating to diversity, inclusion and equality of opportunity are clearly written, accessible and comprehensive. All documents are dated, signed by a senior manager, and have clearly stated periodic review dates. Staff and learners are fully aware of policies and procedures, and an inclusive culture predominates in all aspects of the service's activities.

109. Numerous collaborative projects, such as working with elders from different minority ethnic groups and faiths, encouraging younger people into college through the provision of music courses, providing courses designed to preserve the heritage of the many Chinese families in the area (including teaching Mandarin to Cantonese speakers) and designing a curriculum to attract more men, have widened participation and progression opportunities for learners. Managers and staff are enthusiastic and committed. They successfully bid for new sources of external funding, such as SRB, ESF and ERDF to support innovative and community-focused projects for under-represented groups. Council members, officers and head teachers in the borough regard the college and service as central to the widening of participation among previously under-represented population groups.

110. An audit of the college premises to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has meant that considerable adjustments have been made to the Southchurch site to make it accessible for wheelchairs users and other learners with restricted mobility. Improvements have also been made at other sites, and a lift is to be installed at the Leigh-on-Sea site. Staff and managers and all members of the college governing body have attended training in disability awareness in the past two years. Learners have access to a well-equipped learning resources centre, but there are too few computers in classrooms.

111. The college has an effective complaints procedure and concerns are dealt with appropriately. Complaints are analysed every six months by area of learning and feedback to learners is well publicised with details of responses and actions taken. Learners have confidence that their views are taken into account by staff and managers.

Quality assurance   Contributory grade 4

112. The quality assurance framework for the college was produced in January 2004. It is well-thought-out and focuses strongly on the learning process. The framework is augmented by a manual which sets out a series of monitoring tools and another contains the schedule of meetings. Although the documents are new they build on a series of activities which have gradually evolved over five years and have been refined annually at staff development events.

113. Staff roles and responsibilities for quality assurance are clearly and concisely defined. A series of simple flowcharts and tables effectively record the processes and the instruments to be used to measure their success. The conditions of service for staff require them to implement these procedures and disciplinary action has been taken for some who did not comply. There is a carefully planned schedule of meetings. Quality assurance is a regular agenda item at team meetings at all levels and on frequent staff development days. External partnerships have been used effectively to develop better quality assurance systems. For instance, observation of teaching and learning has been in place for five years and is subject to peer review. A moderation exercise with another partner college resulted in a more thorough pattern of observation grades being given across the past year, and clarification of criteria for internal observations.

114. Quality assurance arrangements are not yet effective in raising the standard of assessment and monitoring of learners' progress. The observation of teaching and learning system is in place, but follow-up actions are not effective in improving the range of teaching techniques in the classroom. There is poor assessment practice in many areas. The weak and subjective initial assessment is not useful to effectively plan learning. There is very little diagnostic screening of learners. Progress reviews are often seen as a paper exercise and are not used systematically to plan individual learning. Weak lesson plans do not identify differentiation and little use is made of tutors' self-evaluation. The mid-year learner questionnaires are not analysed until the course has ended. Systems to assess achievement on non-accredited courses are incomplete. The self-assessment activity in team meetings does take place, but it is insufficiently focused and has poorly defined targets. Tutors complete end-of-session course reviews and these are used by team leaders to review and develop programmes. However, in some areas of learning this process is not working to the benefit of learners.

115. The self-assessment process is carried out annually. Many of the judgements in the most recent report were recognised by inspectors. The development plan is an agenda item at meetings and many points have been actioned and dealt with. However, the self-assessment report is insufficiently evaluative.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Sciences & mathematics   Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	82	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement on accredited courses
- much stimulating and lively teaching
- good individual support for learners
- very effective action to raise pass rates in GCSE mathematics

Weaknesses

- some weak planning and monitoring of learning
- little use of information and learning technologies in lessons

Achievement and standards

116. Achievement on accredited courses is good. In 2002-03 all GCSE biology learners who were retained passed their examination. Four of the six GCSE mathematics courses had 100 per cent pass rates for the past two years. Overall, 85 per cent of retained GCSE mathematics learners achieved grades at C or above over that period. In the current year predicted grades are good and there is very good retention on these courses. Many of the learners are achieving much higher grades in modules than those predicted by their initial diagnostic tests. Numbers on GCE AS and A2 level courses are very small, but pass rates are improving on these courses. Learners achieve good standards in class work.

117. The retention rate on the forensic science course is good. Most learners have progressed from the beginners' course on to the next level and several learners have taken up careers in related areas. The data on retention in past years is unreliable, and no judgement of trends has been possible.

Quality of education and training

118. Much of the teaching is stimulating and lively and this was recognised in the self-assessment report. Of the six classes observed, five were good or better and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The tutors are well qualified and experienced and their enthusiasm inspires learners. There is a friendly atmosphere and classes are well paced with materials which are appropriate to adults. Learners interact well and are given good

feedback. Work is well marked with helpful comments and guidance. In one very good revision class, a teacher managed differentiation of learning well with intermediate- and higher-level GCSE learners. She used very effective imagery and humour to remind learners about the shape of graphs. These learners worked enthusiastically for three hours without a break. In the forensic science class, learners were able to apply their knowledge very effectively to estimate time of death by examining a victim's symptoms.

119. There is good individual support for learners. Tutors are very generous with their time outside lessons. They arrive early and stay late, and learners can telephone or e-mail them. Tutors have a good working relationship with their learners and are very responsive to their needs. Accredited courses have eight hours of optional tutorials which tutors schedule flexibly to suit the learners' requirements and their own commitments. Learners with additional needs are offered support with literacy, numeracy and language. A tutor of A level mathematics arrived half an hour before the lesson began so that she could offer appropriate support to a learner who had difficulties with the technical English, as well as the concepts and practice of mathematics.

120. The range of courses is limited, but in the past other subjects were offered with low take-up. Needs analysis has identified what is popular, and the offer is constantly under review. For instance it has been identified that teachers in training need to study science, and a general science course is planned for next year.

121. Planning and monitoring of learning in some lessons is not detailed enough. Some schemes of work are too general. Even in well-taught lessons, tutors do not evaluate their performance adequately to record learners' difficulties or areas that need further explanation. Initial assessment takes place but it is very subjective. There is no diagnostic screening except for GCSE learners. Learning styles are tested but this information is not always used to plan differentiation in teaching. The standard lesson plan structure does not prompt staff to think about this aspect, although in good classes teachers use alternative ways to explain quite difficult concepts. All learners have four reviews, but some of the reviews do not plan learning or set specific goals. Monitoring sheets for assignments or tasks are used inconsistently. Some contain plenty of detail about marks, while others are crossed off with no comment about learners' performance. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

122. There is little use of ILT in lessons. No computers are available in two of the centres. The self-assessment report highlighted this need. There is no specialist software for learners and few of them use the learning centre. Staff use a limited range of teaching methods in some lessons. There are no interactive whiteboards and few staff use overhead projectors. Some projectors are poorly sited. In one good lesson an overhead projector was used well to demonstrate symmetrical shapes.

Leadership and management

123. The curriculum area team has taken very effective action to increase the success rates in GCSE mathematics. These learners represent half the accredited provision. Four of the six staff in the team also work with the essential skills team and one trains teachers

of numeracy. The team attends focused meetings to analyse the reasons for poor retention. It has identified that some learners need more time for explanations and practice, and that others need a faster-paced course. The course now has three options: fast track, intermediate or twice weekly. It is available on two sites in the daytime and in the evening. The results of thorough diagnostic screening are used to direct learners to the most appropriate course. Retention on all courses has increased. For instance, on the twice-weekly evening class for less able learners, all have been retained and all but one are expected to achieve their qualification. With one module left to complete, four of the 11 learners already have a grade B from the modules they have taken. The work that has taken place on the GCSE mathematics courses is being used as a pilot to introduce better initial guidance and support on other science courses.

124. The self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. Staff have regular meetings at times to suit those who work part time, and elements of the development plan are routinely discussed. The attendance rate of the humanities, science and mathematics staff at these meetings is 75 per cent. All the science and mathematics staff have been observed teaching and the observation system is accurate and self-critical. Staff have attended conferences and awarding body events as well as internal training.

Business administration, management & professional   Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	69	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths
- very good pass rates on most courses
- good assessment of learners' work

Weaknesses
- some unsatisfactory teaching
- poor learning resources
- some ineffective subject support

Achievement and standards

125. The pass rates are very good. GCE A2 level accounts courses achieved an outstanding 100 per cent pass rate, of which 86 per cent were A or B grades in 2003. GCSE accounts and the level 4 certificate in teaching had pass rates of 93 per cent and 95 per cent respectively in 2003. The bookkeeping course pass rate for 2002-03 was 60 per cent. Two GCE A2 level learners and one learner on the GCSE accounts course in the summer of 2003 were placed in the top five marks in accounting, out of 2,349 and 1,149 learners, respectively, who took the examinations nationally.

126. The retention rate for this academic year is 73 per cent, compared with 78 per cent for 2003. Overall, there is good achievement and attainment on business basics and teaching qualifications courses. The standard of learners' work demonstrates skills development in analysis and evaluation.

Quality of education and training

127. The assessment of learners' work is good. The business and professional tutors mark learners' work quickly and fully, with comments and summary evaluations that clearly explain how learners can improve and develop their knowledge and skills. Assessment and verification procedures are in line with awarding body requirements. Learners interviewed during the inspection understand the progress they are making and know what to do to complete their qualification.

128. The support for learners is satisfactory. Staff offer an induction which enables learners to settle into their programmes quickly, to understand their rights and responsibilities and the demands of the course. Learners have good working

relationships with their tutors. They have satisfactory personal support to help them to complete their course, including access to specialist agencies. Additional tutor and mentor support is provided to learners on the certificate in teaching course. Literacy and numeracy needs are identified and met appropriately. Guidance and support are sensitive to equality of opportunity.

129. The programmes and courses satisfactorily meet the needs and interests of learners. There are effective links with the local association of voluntary services. The college has an open-door policy on a range of entry-level business and accounting courses that deliver tailored programmes to meet learners' needs. However, there is no progression route for learners on the business basics course.

130. Teaching on some courses does not meet the different needs of learners. There are no planned teaching strategies to differentiate for the learning styles of learners. Extension materials are not produced to meet the needs of mixed-ability learners. Many lessons are teacher dominated and learners listen passively. Many learners in observed sessions were losing their concentration. In the better lessons, good use is made of learners' experience and work roles. Learners develop a capacity for critical analysis and evaluation of each other's journals during collaborative discussions on the teaching certificate course. Peer group learning was also taking place during these reflections.

131. There are some poor learning resources. The learning centre has no paper-based materials for pre-entry business, or teaching qualifications. The book stock for accounting consists of just one text for each course. There is access to computers but no intranet or recommended web sites for research. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and attend regular professional development activities. There are satisfactory teaching rooms with appropriate wall displays to promote learners' development. Computers are available to learners in the learning resource centre but not in the classrooms.

132. The subject support is ineffective. Diaries are completed by learners on some courses, but topics that need additional support are not always followed up by tutors. Many learners fall behind the group and experience difficulty understanding some concepts.

Leadership and management

133. Programme teams meet regularly. The self-assessment report for the area is self-critical and identifies problems to be resolved, but some key weaknesses were not identified. There is limited review of progress and no recording of retention for the current academic year. The small group of teachers works closely as a team and formal and informal communications are effective. Staff meetings are held regularly and are minuted, but subsequent action is only partially monitored. Equality of opportunity is promoted well in the department.

Information & communications technology   Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1243	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention on accredited courses
- good practical skills development for learners
- outstanding support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- well-targeted and responsive community provision

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods
- weak progress reviews for learners
- inadequate target-setting to improve achievement rates

Achievement and standards

134. The retention is good on accredited courses. During 2002-03, the retention rate for accredited courses was 85 per cent. For the present year, the retention rate is over 90 per cent. The overall retention rate on non-accredited courses fell to below 75 per cent in 2002-03, but is improving in the current year.

135. Achievement on accredited courses in 2002-03 was satisfactory. The present overall achievement is satisfactory, but has fallen for completed courses. Achievement for non-accredited courses has not been recorded before the present year. Learning objectives are now identified for all such courses and achievement is currently being recorded in terms of learners' successful completion. The need to further improve retention and achievement has been recognised by the college and a number of strategies have been introduced.

136. Learners develop good practical skills. Learners on introductory courses quickly overcome their fear of computers to perform a range of useful tasks, from letter writing to e-mailing photographs to families overseas. Learner's self-confidence increases and they talk with pride of booking a holiday or buying concert tickets using the internet. This experience encourages lifelong learning, and significant numbers progress to other courses, often for a qualification that will improve their employment prospects. They master industry standard software and develop advanced skills that range from website design to the ability to use professional digital imaging software, and set up complex spreadsheets or databases.

Quality of education and training

137. There is outstanding support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In many of the classes observed there was a range of additional support for learners. For example, a learner with dyslexia was provided with pink handouts and enlarged photocopies and a large computer screen and keyboard. A reader provided verbal reinforcement as well as vocational support. There was also support for learners and a tutor with visual impairment, with the provision of a magnifier to enlarge the handouts, and two headsets for a learner who needed to hear the instructions and to be told what she had actually typed. With this additional support one of the learners has made good progress and has completed the qualification before the end of the course. The learning support assistants all provide good, constructive, patient and good-humoured support to their learners. All the learners are appreciative of the level and quality of support that is provided.

138. The college ICT provision is responsive and well targeted to the community. A wide range of entry-level, non-accredited provision provides an attractive introduction to computers for many learners. Bite-sized courses are a simple way for learners to experience computing and are aimed at those who may be reluctant to commit themselves to a longer course. There is a range of outreach provision in community venues and effective partnerships with the voluntary sector. The college has progression routes into accredited courses and through them to level 3 qualifications, and many learners take advantage of these routes. The information on course content has been improved. Courses are offered at different times to provide for flexibility of attendance for learners, but this flexibility has yet to be applied to some of the assessment models. A major curriculum review is under way to ensure that the provision remains responsive to learners' needs.

139. Resources at the college are satisfactory. There are two training suites with 48 computers. One of the rooms is large and accommodates two classes at a time. Both areas have air conditioning. There are eight scanners, an interactive whiteboard, colour and mono printers and digital cameras. A system for broadcasting tutor input directly to the computers has recently been installed in one of the rooms and some staff have received training on the use of this equipment. However, limited use is currently being made of these resources. Some of the software is not the latest version and this creates some difficulties for learners who have already upgraded software at home. Technician support is not always readily available for ICT classes. There is a limited stock of published material and resources; staff rely heavily on handouts and encourage learners to buy their own textbooks. Resources to support learners with additional needs are available and are well used. A crèche provides parents with the opportunity to participate in learning while their children are cared for in a safe environment. Participation in an e-learning project has brought some recent benefits to the college in the form of a pilot virtual learning environment. Tutors are able to access the environment through the learning centre, where they are able to provide learning materials online.

140. Teaching and learning standards are generally satisfactory, but only 29 per cent of teaching sessions observed during inspection were graded good. This is significantly lower than the college's own teaching and learning observation grade profile. There was one unsatisfactory session and in most sessions there was little inspirational or challenging teaching. During the inspection, the average attendance rate was 78 per cent and average class size was six learners.

141. The completion of units for accredited courses is recorded accurately. Formal assessment exercises are carefully marked by tutors, but there is little written feedback on learners' work.

142. Initial assessment is satisfactory. An enhanced process to improve retention and achievement has been implemented, but it has not yet made an impact. The college encourages potential learners to attend guidance interviews, and these are mandatory for all those who want to study for a qualification. At present, learners complete a self-assessment of their knowledge, but this does not provide evidence of their practical computer skills. A practical initial assessment exercise is planned for the new academic year. Good additional learning support is available for learners who need it.

143. There is a narrow range of teaching methods. Too few sessions use group work to introduce topics. There is sometimes an over-reliance on worksheets or textbooks. Insufficient use is made of interactive teaching equipment and projection to promote learning. For example, demonstrations involve learners watching the tutor's computer display. Learners work through printed course material and ask for help when necessary. Tutors are knowledgeable and respond quickly, but do not check learning and understanding. Some learners complete a learning styles assessment during their induction but have little understanding of its purpose. The results are not used to plan lessons or influence teaching. Some classes are poorly structured and do not have a clear statement of objectives. Few sessions end with an overview of learning or assessment of progress.

144. Progress reviews are weak. Learners on longer courses are encouraged to complete a record of their progress and set themselves personal targets. However, targets are not usually negotiated with learners and the tutor keeps the records. Learners describe this process as an administrative activity and they do not have a personal copy. The information from the reviews is not used to plan individual learning. Learners' progress is monitored in terms of the start and completion of each course objective, but learners' levels of performance are not recorded. Some tutors use session plans to note individual learner progress, but these are often poorly completed and do not quantify performance.

Leadership and management

145. The self-assessment report identified two of the areas identified by inspectors, but was insufficiently evaluative.

146. Communication with tutors is regular through termly meetings, twice-yearly

conferences, notices in registers and e-mail. Observations of teaching are carried out annually. Notes of the observations are comprehensive, but the action plans do not have target dates for improvements. Staff are offered a range of professional and vocational qualifications and can take part in a range of staff training activities. However, this development does not arise from any form of training needs analysis and there is little evaluation of its effectiveness and impact on their performance. There are inconsistencies in the delivery of the same course by different tutors. Equality of opportunity is working in practice in the curriculum area, with positive approaches to encouraging diversity, but there is insufficient reinforcement of staff awareness of equality of opportunity and its application in the learning situation. Learner feedback is collected at the end of the programme while some mid-term evaluations are kept in files until the end of the year. There are few opportunities for tutors to meet and share good practice in similar areas of delivery across the college.

147. Learners are not yet formally screened to identify their literacy and numeracy needs. However, they may be referred by tutors after the vocational self-assessment exercise, or they may request support.

148. There is inadequate use of target-setting to improve retention and achievement. Data is not analysed on an ongoing basis to provide information on trends. There are a number of different versions of data with different interpretations being drawn. Targets for retention and achievement are discussed in team meetings, but they are not well recorded and some staff are unaware of targets. There are no specific, measurable targets for individual tutors and individual courses. Those staff who are unable to attend meetings do not have an appreciation of data issues. Although actions have been taken to improve retention and achievement, there is insufficient monitoring of their effectiveness.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel
Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1127	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good acquisition of skills
- particularly good professional knowledge and expertise among tutors
- good promotion of equality and diversity

Weaknesses

- poor retention in fitness and sport courses
- narrow range of teaching methods
- poor recording of initial assessment and learners' progress
- insufficient curriculum provision

Achievement and standards

149. Learners demonstrate good acquisition of skills which allow learners to make progress and maintain levels of health. These include physiological and psychological benefits in their mobility, dexterity, well-being, balance, posture and cardio-vascular-respiratory system. One learner had made significant rehabilitation improvements after recovering from a knee-joint replacement operation. These new skills have allowed lifestyle improvements for learners to use in their daily life, such as home decorating and gardening. Learners also value the sociological benefits from participating in courses. Standards of learners' work are generally satisfactory, and sometimes very good, for example on the accredited catering course. Attendance during inspection was satisfactory. There is a sensitive approach to attendance monitoring and follow-up of absences.

150. The retention rates are poor on some fitness and sports courses. There has been a trend of poor retention rates and this is repeated in the current year. Many learners have dropped out of courses such as yoga and pilates. The retention rates for these courses in the current academic year are 44 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. These are below the college's benchmark targets. The self-assessment report identifies retention as a weakness. Strategies have been established to make improvements, such as changing the length of courses, providing taster sessions and introducing a certificate to celebrate learners who attend more than 80 per cent or more of lessons. However, it is too early to identify improvements and some of the strategies have not yet been introduced.

Quality of education and training

151. There is particularly good professional expertise among tutors who are all part time. Staff are well qualified in their subject area and attend a good range of ongoing professional development activities. Some tutors have good international links and others have contacts nationally and locally. This networking significantly benefits learners. For example, teaching staff were able to advise learners about events taking place regionally and advise on participation in activities outside the classes.

152. The venues which are used for courses are satisfactory. Accommodation is large enough, tidy and brightly lit. However, the main college site has no food technology provision. Cooking and food courses are offered at other venues, but there is poor access to learning resources and storage areas at these sites.

153. Support and guidance are satisfactory. Support staff and volunteers are available for learners. For example, wheelchair users in a fitness class are sensitively supported with their physical movements during exercises. All learners are offered support with literacy, numeracy or language, but none have taken up this support during 2003-04.

154. There is a narrow range of teaching methods used in most classes. Most tutors stand at the front of the class and give demonstrations and instructions. There is a narrow range of teaching styles or methods used to meet preferred learning styles. There is limited movement around the group to check and correct techniques, and inadequate use of learning resources in classes. However, teaching methods are satisfactory in cookery and food courses.

155. The recording of initial assessment and learners' progress is poor. There are inconsistencies in the use of documents. The induction checklist is suitable, but it does not indicate what tutors should do when it is completed or which learners were present when it took place. In most classes, health screening is carried out and recorded. However, in a few classes it did not take place and some learners who started a course late did not complete a health questionnaire. The initial discussion document is not completed in some cases and in other cases does not contain sufficient detail. There are individual and group progress sheets which records the course learning objectives that have been met. This record also allows learners to add their own individual goals. However, the progress sheet is not being used effectively. Learners' progress is not routinely reviewed and there is no formal target-setting.

156. The curriculum provision is insufficient. Only one accredited course is available. The college only offers a few taster courses during the summer period and learners who make progress in their fitness levels lose all these benefits during the break. Courses in this area of learning are offered on only four sites and there is no weekend provision. There are few progression opportunities; for example, learners who return to a tai chi class have to start from the beginning. The accommodation and staffing resources are inadequate. For example, a bridge class was offered and large numbers of learners were recruited. This course was cancelled as no staff were available to teach it. However,

curriculum management and planning is satisfactory. The college has reviewed its provision and made changes in its offer. There are plans to run new courses in travel and tourism, learning numbers through sport and to offer courses over longer and shorter timescales.

Leadership and management

157. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Classes include mixed-ability groups and there is a good balance of learners from minority ethnic groups, disabled people and people with learning difficulties. Classes are appropriately paced to meet different needs. Arrangements for support are in place. Staff and learners are fully aware of equal opportunities. Most staff attend development activities, such as disability awareness and basic skills awareness. Marketing material is sensitive and promotes inclusiveness. Courses have been developed and provided to attract learners into non-traditional subjects, for example men onto food courses. A women-only exercise class is running at the request of a Muslim community group, to allow them to meet the requirements of their faith.

158. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Observation of teaching and learning is carried out at least once a year for each tutor. Staff are given verbal and written feedback, which is monitored by the curriculum team leader. There is some sharing of good practice. The self-assessment process involves staff, learners and other stakeholders. However, the self-assessment report does include most of the strengths and weaknesses identified during inspection.

Visual & performing arts & media   Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	2100	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement on craft courses
- much good teaching to develop strong independent learning
- good range of courses with good progression opportunities in visual arts
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on many accredited courses
- unsatisfactory teaching in media subjects
- insufficiently developed systems for effective programme evaluation

Achievement and standards

159. The levels of achievement are good on craft courses. Pass rates in papercraft, interior design and Victorian crafts are good. Learners on the accredited interior design course are able to talk confidently about their research which has appropriate historical and contemporary references to design sources. Some learners gain commercial design commissions as a result of their portfolios. They use this experience to their advantage, recording the project design, costings and outcomes in their research books which contribute to their final assessment. One learner on a patchwork and quilting course had made independent research visits to look at the techniques and style of a major designer and author and incorporated it into her own work.

160. Retention rates on some non-accredited courses are good. Fifty courses have retained all the learners who started this year, many of whom intend to progress to other courses in the area.

161. Many accredited courses have poor pass rates and too many learners who enrol on these courses do not achieve their qualification. In some instances learners attend until the end of the course but do not submit work for external assessment. The curriculum team leader has identified this problem and has developed strategies to improve the pass rates. It is too early to make a judgement on the impact of these measures.

Quality of education and training

162. There is much good teaching to develop strong independent learning. Teachers explain carefully and clearly the importance of extensive research and the development of ideas for producing individual creative solutions. Learners on the sculpture and the preparing working designs courses understand the value of independent research using the internet, the library and observational drawing to broaden the range of designs they produce. Additionally, visits are arranged by tutors to major museums, galleries and other national design venues. Learners receive good individual support from tutors during classes. They progress well and gain skills through well-thought-out activities. Learners are keen to explain how pleased they are with their tutors and many return to study for several years. In music theory classes a number of learners have progressed from grade 1 to grade 5. In the most successful lessons tutors are able to relate practical activities to their own industrial practice. A tutor on the stained glass course described to learners how to install finished pieces into buildings undergoing restoration.

163. There are good resources on visual arts courses and learners benefit from studios that are light, airy and spacious. These workspaces allow learners to experience working on a large scale in subjects such as life drawing and interior design. Several studios in the Southchurch centre have recently been equipped with a computer and scanner, although there is not enough evidence to show whether they are being used effectively. Staff qualifications and professional development are appropriate for the level of courses they teach.

164. There are examples of good assessment practice. On the interior design course there is a well-recorded and very effective assessment of learners' progress. In addition to detailed written feedback from the tutor, learners are involved in comprehensive peer assessment activities. Learners have standardised feedback at the end of critiques from each of their fellow learners and continued peer support for coursework. Learning outcomes on non-accredited courses are identified and achievement is recorded on a standard form which is given to learners at the end of their course. However, some tutors do not understand the purpose of this paperwork and it is not valued by learners.

165. There is a good range of courses which allows appropriate opportunities for progression on many visual arts courses. There are many specialist courses which are rarely available elsewhere. There are almost 2,000 learners on visual arts and performing arts courses this year. Learners appreciate the flexibility of courses offered during the day and in the evenings and on different sites.

166. There is good support for all learners, especially those with disabilities and learning difficulties. They receive effective and wide-ranging support in and out of the classroom. In lessons they benefit from help given by dedicated support workers, many of whom are volunteers and who work closely with teachers. Photography staff work with a photographers' society for disabled people to provide equipment that allows disabled learners to participate more fully in the lessons. Teachers build good working relationships with learners and go out of their way to support their interests in the

subject. Tutors spend time with learners outside the lessons, answering questions and providing information and advice about the subject. Many of the tutors spend time discussing the subject with learners during break times.

167. There is unsatisfactory teaching in media. A narrow range of teaching styles is used and in a video editing session learners were not fully engaged in practical activities. With only one computer available, learners watch demonstrations of editing and have no opportunities to practise their skills. There is insufficient formative feedback and some ineffective lesson planning in photography. Assessment in photography was identified by the college as a weakness in 2002-03, and this has not been resolved. Some work was submitted for assessment in December, but learners have not received any feedback. In another photography lesson, learners requested feedback as it was not given by the tutor.

168. There is inadequate equipment for learners in technology subjects. Music keyboards are shared between a number of learners and they often have to wait to practise their skills. Media editing software is only available on one class machine and is not available in the learning centre for learners to continue their work.

169. Learners do not always have full information about course content and progression opportunities. Learners are not fully aware of progression routes to accredited courses. Some tutors report that learners enrol on courses for which they are unsuited and do not fully understand the amount of time and effort needed for a successful outcome. The curriculum team leader plans to ensure that learners for all accredited courses at level 2 or above have an interview with a member of the college guidance staff before enrolment from September 2004.

Leadership and management

170. There is good communication between the manager for the area and tutors. The curriculum team leader is readily available to support the large number of part-time tutors in the programme area. A flexible termly meeting schedule is arranged, with repeat meetings in the morning, afternoon and evening. For staff who cannot attend meetings, the team leader uses e-mail as well as postal communications and classroom visits to provide updates and to get their views.

171. The systems are insufficiently developed for effective programme evaluation. Some tutors do not complete the end-of-course report and it is not possible to systematically monitor the quality of courses. The development plan does not identify actions that will fully resolve key weaknesses. The review of the development plan in March 2004 shows progress against only one of the three items which are due for improvement by that date. There is also no firm indication of progress on other issues which are due to be completed by the end of 2003-04. Staff appraisals and staff reviews are not carried out regularly enough to have an impact on learning opportunities. Too few staff appraisals were carried out last year.

Humanities   Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	183	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and progression in non-accredited courses
- strong concept and skills development in non-accredited courses
- good achievement in law and sociology
- good teaching
- effective support for learners
- effective programme management

Weaknesses

- erratic attendance on accredited courses
- insufficient use of evaluation in some lesson planning
- some weak assessment practice

Achievement and standards

172. Achievement is generally good on accredited courses, with most learners passing at A Level or achieving higher-grade passes in GCSE. Results in law and sociology are exceptional at A Level, with a 100 per cent pass rate in AS and A2 level examinations in 2003. In psychology the pass rate was 80 per cent, with further modular passes already being secured in 2004. A level learners in all three subjects have progressed into higher education.

173. In 2003, 100 per cent higher-grade GCSE pass rates were achieved in citizenship, history and sociology, but pass rates in law and psychology were only at 67 per cent, from much larger entries. There were some erratic patterns of attendance and this affected coursework preparation and interrupted direct learning.

174. Coursework reveals considerable depths in conceptual understanding. In classroom observations learners demonstrate considerable maturity of thought and are able to make good connections between theory and practice. Learners who attend regularly develop extremely effective analytical and deductive skills, and increase their confidence. Learners on the newly established classical civilisation GCSE course are making very good progress towards their learning goals.

175. Learners in adult and community provision demonstrate considerable commitment to the interdisciplinary courses available. There are very high attendance rates in all 15

courses on 2003-04. Learners debate at a very sophisticated level. Many learners have attended several courses as well as the summer school. Many adult and community learners are attracted from outside Southend by the interdisciplinary courses available.

Quality of education and training

176. Teaching is good on all courses and most learners make good progress and achieve high standards. Teachers use a variety of methods and use considerable subject expertise to encourage independent learning. Learners are challenged to succeed, and tutors also ensure that all learners are fully supported. Marking is usually informative and gives learners advice on how to improve. Tutor records show that they have a detailed understanding of the strengths, weaknesses and needs of all learners and they use this awareness to structure interactive learning. The promotion of literacy is a key feature of many sessions, and learners are encouraged to read widely and constructively.

177. The support for learners is effective. Teachers offer professional and personal support to individuals and groups, in accredited and adult and community learning. There is an established learning pathway in the accredited area which enables learners to join at an appropriate level, building on their prior attainment and experience and providing appropriate support at all stages of learning. This is proving a successful pathway to higher education, in law and sociology in particular, and for other learners going into full-time further education.

178. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are suitably qualified and the accommodation allows a satisfactory context in which learning can take place.

179. There is some inconsistent application of coursework assessment criteria on accredited courses. Also there is some ineffective application of skill-based evaluative criteria used to assess the progress of learners in adult and community learning courses. The awarding body has been involved in discussions to resolve the weakness in coursework assessment on accredited courses. Action is now being taken to deal with the weaknesses, and managers' and tutors' actions are influenced by examples of good practice from other programme areas.

180. There is insufficient use of self-evaluation by some tutors when planning classes and courses. Tutors do not always record the effectiveness of teaching strategies, nor the extent to which outcomes match learning goals. Recording of the evaluation information is not thorough. Evaluation of teaching sessions does not sufficiently influence future planning. This weakness has been recognised by managers and is also being dealt with by reference to good practice elsewhere in the programme area.

Leadership and management

181. Strategic considerations are translated into practice to raise standards of achievement and to support learners. There are very high expectations of all staff. Minutes of meetings show that staff clearly understand the strategies and direction of provision. Tutors appreciate and value the clear leadership and support.

182. Course design in adult and community learning has been successful in challenging learners, promoting a better gender balance in enrolments and in encouraging progression. The provision of various interdisciplinary courses has met the objectives.

English, languages & communications   Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1593	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good attainment and skills development in English
- very good learning opportunities to meet the needs of the community
- strong commitment to equality of opportunity in programme design and delivery

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in some modern foreign languages classes
- unsatisfactory assessment of language skills in non-accredited provision
- ineffective measures to assure the quality of languages provision

Achievement and standards

183. Learners' achievement, attainment and development of skills in English are good. This was partially identified in the self-assessment report. Learners are able to discuss complex ideas with confidence. They interpret literary material and concepts with a high level of skill, using sophisticated language at a level in excess of what is expected. They demonstrate a good understanding of linguistic terms and critical concepts. Learners in creative writing classes are taught to explore a very wide range of personal experience and emotion with clarity, perception and attention to style. They publish a collection of their work each year and have recently been invited by a major company to provide descriptive literature for their product.

184. In 2002-03 achievement on accredited courses was good. On GCSE English, 60 per cent were at or above grade B, and in GCE A level English literature, 75 per cent were at grade B or above.

Quality of education and training

185. The teaching is poor in some modern foreign languages classes. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. In some cases, schemes of work and lesson plans are little more than lists of topics. In many lessons, tutors use the target foreign language without checking regularly that learners understand it. In a few instances, there is too little use of the foreign language and learners cannot adequately develop their listening skills. In most classes, tutors do not adapt the pace of the lesson to the needs of individual learners. In some classes, the pace is too slow and does not challenge many learners, while in others it is very fast and activities are not developed sufficiently. Some

lessons are dull and uninspiring and there is an over-reliance on teacher-led activities. Authentic materials, visual stimuli and audiovisual and ICT are rarely used to create variety and additional learning opportunities. Learners are rarely encouraged to develop independent learning skills. For example, there is little use of pair or group work and almost no role-play. Where group work takes place, there is little monitoring and learners are often unclear about what they should be doing. However, in some classes, sensitive teachers develop motivation and enthusiasm. This puts learners at ease and creates a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere to promote learning.

186. Learning opportunities are very good and meet the needs of the community. This was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. A comprehensive and well-structured framework is in place for a wide range of European, oriental and community languages. There is evidence of good, responsive curriculum innovation to meet community needs. For example, there is a Spanish course for learners with learning difficulties, parent and child classes in Spanish and French, and Mandarin for Cantonese-speaking tutors. Polish language classes are also being introduced. Good links are being created between skills for life courses and mainstream English programmes to enable learners to progress. Learners make good use of the progression routes available. For example, in one language, learners progressed from a non-accredited beginners' course to GCSE and all learners gained grades at C or above. Learners with learning difficulties on a Spanish course have already attended similar classes in French and have moved on to study another language. Learners value contact with native speakers and enjoy the opportunities for social interaction.

187. Resources are generally satisfactory. Classrooms are clean and fit for purpose. However, in one centre a classroom was too small for the number of learners expected. There is a languages centre on one site which includes a classroom equipped with computers. However, little use is made of IT for teaching. Most of the tutors in modern foreign languages have an appropriate teaching qualification and in English all tutors have a teaching qualification. However, there are few opportunities for modern foreign languages tutors to update their language teaching skills.

188. Support for learners is satisfactory. Initial course information is adequate and helps learners to choose the most suitable course for their needs. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The central information and advice service is effective and there is a self-assessment questionnaire which is designed to help language learners select the most appropriate course. Learners are able to access appropriate additional support. For example, in a Mandarin class, a learner with dyslexia was given additional support. Absentees are contacted and receive homework and notes from missed lessons.

189. The assessment of learners' language skills is unsatisfactory in non-accredited courses. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. Initial assessment takes place, but is not precise enough to identify the learners' previous knowledge and skills. It is not used by the tutors to help them plan the programme or to deal with individual needs. There is no common framework of assessment to ensure a standard approach. Learning outcomes are set for each course but the assessment of progress against these

outcomes is not thorough. They are often marked as having been achieved because of participation in activities, although there has been no formal assessment process. Achievement records often show what has been taught, not what has been learnt. There are no standard tasks to measure progress and the standard achieved. Learners are often unaware of areas for development and the true level of their linguistic skills.

Leadership and management

190. Equality of opportunity is a strength in this programme area. At the time of the inspection, there were nine languages available, many of them offering progression from beginner to advanced level. There is evidence that this approach is attracting new learners into the provision. In one Spanish class, most learners had not studied formally since leaving school. The curriculum has also been developed to attract under-represented groups, such as the provision of a Spanish class for learners with learning difficulties. External funding has been imaginatively used to run a 'keeping your language alive' project in partnership with the Chinese community. New progression routes are being developed into English courses. There are many instances of classes being moved to accommodate learners with restricted mobility. In one class, a stroke victim was taking part in classroom activities, supported by his wife.

191. The curriculum leader carries out graded observations of teaching and learning. The grades are broadly in line with inspectors' findings. Each tutor is given an action plan to identify areas for development. However, these plans are insufficiently detailed and there is no programme of targeted professional development to improve their language teaching skills.

192. Measures to assure the quality of the languages programme are currently ineffective. Considerable work has gone into developing quality improvement processes, but these have not yet resulted in the intended outcomes. Learners' views are sought through a mid-course evaluation questionnaire, but this is retained by the tutor until the end of the programme and is not routinely used by managers to improve course and lesson planning. Learning agreements are used to describe course content with no language-specific outcomes. Schemes of work and session plans often do not show how learners' progress will be measured. No individual learning plans were seen during the inspection.

Foundation programmes   Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	1096	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good support for learners
- good teaching in learning difficulties and disabilities and family learning

Weaknesses

- weak session planning on some courses
- insufficient use of teaching and learning resources
- weak assessment and target-setting for learners
- some small classes and poor attendance

Achievement and standards

193. Foundation programmes are satisfactory overall, including the literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision. However, courses for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and courses in family learning are good. Inspectors gave contributory grades of 2 to these aspects of the provision.

194. Nationally recognised qualifications are offered in literacy and numeracy, and strategies are in place to encourage learners to take qualifications. In 2003-04, 160 learners have been entered at levels 1 and 2 in literacy and numeracy. In 2002-03, 95 learners were entered for literacy at level 1 and 69 per cent achieved their qualification. Of the 38 learners entered for literacy at level 2, 72 per cent achieved. Fewer learners are entered for numeracy qualifications, with 27 entered at level 1 and 2 in 2003-04, and a 92 per cent rate of achievement overall.

195. Progression from numeracy at level 2 to GCSE mathematics is good. In 2001-02, 155 learners achieved entry-level qualification, increasing from 133 in the previous year. Learners increase their confidence by the development of their literacy, numeracy and language skills. They progress to other adult education courses. The retention rate overall is good at 89 per cent for 2001-02, rising to 91 per cent for 2002-03.

Quality of education and training

196. Teaching and learning are good in learning difficulties and disabilities and family learning courses. Overall, 50 per cent of lessons are good or better. Learners are made to think and make decisions for themselves in learning difficulties and disabilities

sessions. For example, demanding vocabulary and complex colour concepts are used to introduce learners to make aesthetic choices. One tutor took advantage of the college's exhibition of artefacts to stimulate learners' creativity. In one session, learners were kept motivated and challenged as they looked through each other's portfolios and expressed their views in a group situation.

197. Much of the teaching in family learning sessions is informal, but effective in developing skills for real life. For example, some learners who have recently arrived in the country are developing English language skills in a nearby primary school to cope with practical issues such as visiting the doctor and communicating with their children's school. A Chinese class is well planned and uses many practical and fun activities to develop parenting skills for the adults while developing Chinese language skills in the children. In good sessions, there is a balance of group and individual activities. There are frequent checks on learning.

198. Foundation courses are innovative and responsive to the needs of local communities. New learners are attracted to family learning courses through schools and weekend events in appropriate locations. Good partnership working with heads of schools has expanded the provision to over 20 schools. The main college is open to the Chinese community each Sunday to provide a range of activities and courses requested by learners. Progression to employment and other adult education courses is good for this group. For example, one ESOL learner improved their English, gained teaching qualifications and is now teaching a group. ESOL provision is offered to women-only groups in a local mosque, and to nurses in the local hospital. The essential skills and songwriting course has developed learners' literacy skills through composing lyrics for songs that have been set to music and celebrated on local television. An integrated English, mathematics and IT course in the community is designed to meet the complex needs of a wide range of adults.

199. Induction is satisfactory. All learners are introduced to the college facilities. Support for learners is good. A team of learning support workers and volunteers link well with tutors to provide additional help. Some volunteers are well qualified and support all learners on the course. Peer mentoring is effective and learners gain confidence from explaining and helping their peers. The new purpose-built crèche facilities at the main centre and childcare arrangements in schools enable new learners to take part in foundation courses. Satisfactory arrangements are made for learners with specific learning difficulties. A range of equipment is available for those with sensory or physical needs. Most tutors have been trained to give impartial advice and guidance.

200. The study skills centre in the main centre does have resources for independent use. IAccommodation is satisfactory at all sites and access is good. Some rooms have displays of learners' work, but many are general-use rooms and have little display or storage space.

201. Curriculum resources are new and up to date in the main centre and in many other venues. However, they are not being used extensively in all classes. For example, no audiovisual resources are used for language learning in classes. In one successful class,

the tutor encouraged learners to access bilingual dictionaries on the internet, but this practice is not widespread. IT, and particularly the internet, is not incorporated in most sessions. Many learners would like to use computers as part of their sessions but there is little opportunity for them to do so. In numeracy classes, little use is made of simple learning aids, such as weighing equipment or shapes. Staff have satisfactory experience and are encouraged to gain further qualifications.

202. The results of initial assessment are not always used to plan lessons or to set individual targets. There is a good system of initial screening, assessment and diagnostic assessment for all learners, but it is not always carried out promptly or with late enrollers. Diagnostic assessment is not completed early enough in the course to be of benefit when agreeing individual learning plans. Reviews are planned and in some classes there are ongoing checks on learning. However, the targets are broad and learners are rarely involved in setting their personal targets. Completed work is not always marked. Summaries of activities are not sufficiently evaluative to plan the next steps of learning. Learners are not encouraged to record newly learnt vocabulary in a systematic way in personal vocabulary books. Learners' work files are disorganised. Internal verification is satisfactory and team members receive regular feedback through internal and external reports.

203. Small classes and poor attendance in some courses do not allow group work and discussion to be used effectively. Over half the lessons observed had five or fewer learners. In weaker sessions, learners often work individually, practising skills that are not related to their everyday life. The sessions are not varied or paced well, and are not sufficiently challenging for more able learners. There is an over-reliance on worksheets and little contextualised learning. There is too little creative writing or writing letters or reports, and insufficient use of IT to support learning. There is little group work or learning through discussion.

Leadership and management

204. The management of change and quality improvement is good. Staff are given clear direction to raise standards. All staff have retention and achievement targets. Communications and teamwork are effective, with frequent meetings and informal exchanges. A number of conferences are held where staff receive information, give feedback and explore new ways of working.

205. Staff understand the quality assurance framework, but it is not thoroughly implemented. For example, different documents are used for lesson planning. Good practice is not routinely shared with all staff. Staff observations do not always lead to improvements in teaching and learning. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process, but the report only identified some of the strengths and weaknesses.

206. Learners on the learning difficulties and disabilities course are able to access a wide variety of courses. They benefit from a high level of volunteer and peer support. Adaptive technologies are available and are used well in classes. Tutors are sensitive to other cultures and make the learners aware of different cultural perspectives.

Community development   Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Adult and community learning	250	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- innovative approaches to encourage learners into projects
- very strong partnership links to widen participation and benefit community organisations
- particularly good and flexible additional support for individuals and groups

Weaknesses

- limited range of teaching methods
- ineffective assessment of learning

Achievement and standards

207. Attendance, retention and achievement are satisfactory. Learners have personal learning goals related either to their employment or social circumstances. For example, one learner wishes to improve his numeracy skills in order to pass the initial tests used by a local transport company in their recruitment system. A whole group is taking an ESOL course so that it can be more effective when dealing with patients in the health service.

208. Learners who have previously shown disaffection with the education system are tempted back into learning. The service's community learning programmes contribute to lifelong learning through the development of essential and vocational skills.

Quality of education and training

209. Innovative approaches encourage learners into learning through existing interests. For example, an interest and involvement in music attracted learners to a course which uses the music industry to introduce design skills to produce promotional material and to understand health and safety regulations. Some classes are run to accommodate specific groups or needs relating to gender, ethnicity and faith. Tutors have sound subject knowledge and up-to-date expertise which makes the teaching relevant to specific vocational areas or particular ethnic groups. A tutor of Muslim women is able to converse with them in their own language. In the better-taught classes, the tutor plans effectively and clear objectives are shared at the start of the session. The learners see the significance of tasks and are motivated to succeed.

210. There are very strong partnership links to widen participation and benefit

community organisations at strategic and operational level. This has widened participation and benefited community organisations. The college has set up groups which are dedicated to work with those sections of the community that have gained least from education and training in the past. The aim is to enhance employment prospects and deal with social exclusion concerns. There is evidence of effective marketing strategies which have increased the number of courses on the community programme. When the results of a training needs analysis questionnaire was less then 8 per cent, a sequence of visits, telephone calls and individual contact was instigated and six new courses were launched in three new venues. Specific courses are tailored for particular interest groups, including welfare organisations for the blind or carers working with people with dementia, a group dealing with young offenders, and a range of community groups from different ethnic backgrounds. Courses include one dealing with understanding legal compliance of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and another helping mothers who wish to return to work. Courses are designed and planned to deal with anger management, confidence building and increasing self-esteem. Other groups, such as those dealing with young offenders or those working with people with mental health issues, have also been involved with college initiatives.

211. The college is meeting the needs and interests of learners in its community development arrangements. Targets are consistently met. Over 250 new learners and more than 20 new capacity-building initiatives have been added to the college provision under the 'reachout' branch of community learning.

212. There is particularly good and flexible additional support for individuals and groups. This support is evident on the main college site as well as at off-site locations. A translator is available to facilitate learning on a course for Albanian elders. Pre-course material clearly states essential information such as aims and objectives, costs and possible progression routes. Tutors are praised by learners because of their willingness to be available to support and guide, even outside the class meeting times, and also for the levels of dignity and respect given and promoted. One tutor uses e-mails to keep learners informed of their progress and to return marked work. Enrichment activities, such as a trip to London are being organised to enable ESOL learners to use the underground and visit sites as a follow-up to a classroom activity to familiarise learners with landmarks and British culture. Additional support is provided for the learners through the use of volunteers and support workers, in some cases working on an individual basis. Physical access issues have been dealt with in centres and support is given to enable learners with sensory impairments to participate fully. Flexibility in curriculum delivery in timings and location is benefiting the learners and increasing enrolments.

213. Overall, resources are satisfactory. Access is restricted at some locations off-site but most centres are available to all learners. In some cases facilities are very good. There are impressive studio facilities for learners in music.

214. There is a limited range of teaching methods used. There is too much reliance on tutor input in the classes which are judged to be satisfactory. In some classes learners are given photocopies from textbooks with no regard for learners of mixed ability. In

some cases ICT equipment is available, but in some cases it is not used at all or to the best advantage. Some of the learners are not challenged sufficiently and opportunities to increase and extend learning are lost. In most lessons the content of sessions is thoughtfully conceived, but the delivery is not varied.

215. The assessment of learning is ineffective and some learners do not know how well they are progressing. While most tutors give good verbal assessment and feedback on learners' work, little is recorded and learners have no supporting evidence of what has been learnt. In part of the accredited provision assessment, moderation and verification processes are not yet fully established. The learners from the previous year have still not had their work signed off and no qualifications were achieved. The work and assessments of current learners has not yet been internally moderated, but the college now has measures to remedy this.

Leadership and management

216. The area of community development has a clear strategic focus. The strategy team which meets six times a year includes senior staff from the college and representatives from key partners. The operational management team meets each month and has very close links with community user groups and individuals. Internal and external college communication systems, formal and informal, are well established. Minutes of meeting are recorded and action plans are drawn up. Some quality assurance measures are in place, including course evaluations, lesson observations and questionnaires for learners' views.

217. The self-assessment report identified some key strengths but others were no more than normal practice. Action and development plans have been prepared.