



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

Inspection report

Bolton Community College

Dates of inspection: 29 October–2 November 2001

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Basic information about the college

Name of college:	Bolton Community College
Type of college:	General Further Education
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Address of college:	Manchester Road Bolton BL2 1ER
Telephone number:	01204 531 411
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Chair of governors:	Ms Pat Dixon
Unique reference number:	130495
Name of reporting inspector:	Rhys Evans HMI
Dates of inspection:	29 October–2 November 2001

Part A: Summary

Information about the college

Bolton Community College was formed from the merger of the previous Community Education Service and Bolton College. The former operated at 137 sites across the borough whereas Bolton College had two main sites, one on Manchester Road, close to the town centre, and the other at Horwich to the west. The college recruits most of its students from the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton, north of Manchester. About one third of students are recruited from areas which attract additional funding from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) widening participation criteria. The college is the main provider of further education (FE) in the borough, where there is also a sixth form college and sixth forms in some local secondary schools. The college offers courses in all areas of learning except land-based studies. Some 18% of college students have a minority ethnic background, compared with 8% of the local community. The college currently has about 450 trainees on work-based training, mainly on modern apprenticeship programmes.

Bolton College was inspected by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and the Training Standards Council (TSC) in April 2000. Four of the nine curriculum areas inspected were graded less than satisfactory (grade 4s). Support for students, quality assurance and management were also grade 4. Governance was deemed poor and awarded a grade 5. The only aspect of cross-college provision graded satisfactory was general resources. Three of the seven occupational areas graded by the TSC were unsatisfactory. Trainee support was graded 2, equal opportunities was graded 3 and management of training and quality assurance were graded 4. A recovery plan was agreed with the FEFC in August 2000, part of which was the merger of the college with the Community Education Service in Bolton. At the time of the April 2000 inspection, the college was led by an acting principal on secondment from another college. The current principal took up her post in January 2001.

How effective is the college?

Inspectors judged that education and training in health and care, foundation studies and basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) was good. Provision in science and mathematics, construction, business, hair and beauty, computing and information technology (IT), and English and social sciences was satisfactory. In engineering and catering, the provision was unsatisfactory.

Key strengths

- good range of courses for students of all ages
 - provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (SLDD)
 - links with employers and organisations in the community to plan provision for students
-

- new leadership with an open and responsive management style.

What should be improved

- reliability of data available for management and quality assurance
- consistency and quality of tutorial arrangements for students
- proportion of students successfully completing their studies
- some aspects of the management of work-based learning
- some lacklustre and uninspiring teaching
- dissemination of good practice across the college
- application of good management practices.

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

Quality of provision in curriculum and occupational areas

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

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Science and mathematics	Satisfactory. Access and General Certificate of Education (GCE) courses are well matched to the needs of adult returners. Pass rates on access to science courses are good. No vocational courses, suited to learners aged 16 to 18, are available at levels 2 and 3. Assignments are marked thoroughly. Teaching in biology is good, but in mathematics it lacks variety. The management of science and mathematics courses is poor.
Construction	Satisfactory. There is a good range of courses. Pass rates at level 3 are good, but poor at level 1. The majority of teaching and learning is good. Workplace experience for work-based trainees is realistic, but there is little co-ordination of on-the-job and off-the-job training.
Engineering	Unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but some teaching on entry-level programmes is inappropriate for many students. Arrangements to provide support for students to help them make progress are inadequate. A substantial proportion of learners leave their courses early or fail to complete their studies.
Business and administration	Satisfactory. Most teaching is satisfactory or good. There is a broad range of courses on offer. Pass rates are improving on the modern apprenticeship programmes. Students' IT skills are developed well through their courses. There is no assessment in the workplace.
Computing and IT	Satisfactory. There is a good range of IT courses offered within the community. Students with disabilities are well supported. Although there are good retention rates on full-time level 1 and 2 courses, they are poor and declining on level 3 courses. Self-assessment of community provision is inadequate.
Hospitality and catering	Unsatisfactory. Much of the teaching is lacklustre and uninspiring. Students make good progress towards some, but not all, of the qualifications they take. Students are well motivated in spite of some outdated practices and old equipment. Some aspects of management are unsatisfactory.
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Satisfactory. Pass rates have improved to above national averages on most programmes. Students experience a comprehensive enrichment programme and have the opportunity to take additional qualifications to enhance their employability. Some lessons are uninspiring.

Area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
Child, health, social care and counselling	Good. There is much good teaching. Pass rates are above national averages on most courses and many students progress to more advanced courses in education, or employment or professional training. There are low retention rates on some level 3 courses.
English and social sciences	Satisfactory. Much of the teaching of English and social sciences is good. Students produce work of a high standard. There is a good range of provision, particularly for adults. Pass rates in the access to higher education (HE) courses are good, but have been poor in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and in GCE Advanced levels (GCE A levels), which are no longer offered.
Provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities	Good. The majority of teaching and learning is good or better. Learners gain in confidence in their studies and appreciate the effective and flexible arrangements for learning support. Teaching to meet students' individual learning needs and to assess their progress towards learning goals could be improved. There is little use of performance data to set targets.
Basic skills and ESOL	Good. There is a good range of provision that meets the needs of learners. Resources and support for students at centres in the community are particularly good. For other students, basic skills support needs further development.

How well is the college led and managed?

Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The new management team has begun to address the major problems it inherited, but it is too early to judge the effects of the action taken. Staff welcome the open and responsive management style that has been introduced and they feel better informed of the priorities the college has set. There have been improvements in teaching and learning. The quality and reliability of management data are still poor. Management in curriculum areas and in cross-college functions remains ineffective in some respects. The quality of experience which students gain varies significantly between different courses and curriculum areas. Too many students fail to complete their chosen course successfully. The process of self-assessment has been improved, but target setting is not fully established. The college's financial position is not yet secure and the risks associated with the recovery plan are significant. Governors now monitor the college's activity more carefully, although a number of items require closer attention.

To what extent is the college educationally and socially inclusive?

The college has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. This features prominently in its mission statement and there is ample evidence of its application in practice. Provision is good. The merger with the Community Education Service has improved the range of opportunities available within one institution for people who have not traditionally sought FE and training. Equal opportunities is promoted well in many lessons. A copy of the college's equal opportunities policy is displayed in classrooms, and the college's lesson observation form includes a section for the consideration of equality of opportunity in teaching and learning. The college's access policy ensures that places are reserved on courses for students with particular learning support needs.

How well are students and trainees guided and supported?

Since the last inspection, the college has improved the guidance and support arrangements for students and trainees. All full-time and substantive part-time students complete an initial assessment to identify their additional support needs. The core induction programme is good, but the extent to which issues identified during induction and initial assessment are followed up through regular progress reviews, differs between curriculum areas. Some personal tutorials are ineffective and in some areas, the time is used merely to extend subject teaching time.

Students' views of the college

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

What students like about the college

- support from their teachers
-

- adult environment
- range of courses and opportunities for progression
- ways adult learners are encouraged to gain confidence
- opportunities at the Manchester Road site to take additional studies
- good crèche facilities
- improved library facilities at the main sites.

What they feel could be improved

- access for students with restricted mobility to the Manchester Road site
- some teaching
- car parking facilities
- employers' involvement with, and awareness of, off-the-job training
- refurbishment of some classrooms and workshops
- equipment and resources for some vocational subjects
- action to reduce false fire alarms
- facilities for some evening students at the main site.

Other information

The college has two months to prepare an action plan in response to the report. It must show what action the college will take to bring about improvements in response to issues raised in the report. The governors must agree the plan and send copies of it to the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

Part B: The college as a whole

Summary of grades awarded to teaching and learning by inspectors

Aspect & learner type	Graded good or better (Grades 1 to 3) %	Graded satisfactory (Grade 4) %	Graded less than satisfactory (Grades 5 to 7) %
Teaching 16–18	48	46	6
19+ and WBL*	63	27	10
Learning 16–18	47	48	5
19+ and WBL*	65	27	8

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

** work-based learning*

Achievement and standards

16–18 year olds

1. Retention and pass rates have been poor on GCE A-level courses and significantly below national averages. These courses are being withdrawn and form only a very small part of the provision. In 1999/2000, only 62% of the 57% of students who completed their qualifications passed. However, this represents an improvement from the 40% pass rate in 1998/99. The average points score for students taking two or more GCE A levels was 9.1 in 1999/2000. This compares unfavourably with the Bolton Local Education Authority (LEA) figure of 16.9 and the national figure of 18.5 in 1999/2000.

2. At advanced level, General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) retention rates were slightly below the national average and pass rates slightly above. Both rates were an improvement over the previous two years. At intermediate level, the retention rate was around the national average at 79%, an improvement over the previous two years. Pass rates were unsatisfactory at 66%, having declined in each of the last three years.

3. At National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3, pass rates and retention rates were significantly below the national averages, although at 60%, achievement had shown an improvement over the previous year. At NVQ level 2, while retention rates were significantly below the national average, pass rates were above and had improved significantly over the last two years.

4. At GCSE level, only 57% of students completed their course, which is poor compared with the national average. Of these, only 33% obtained passes at the higher grades A* to C. The pass rates are below the national average of 37%.

5. The majority of students in work-based learning are aged 16 to 18. Of those taking foundation modern apprenticeships in 1999/2000, only 54% completed their training, and 21% successfully completed the framework. There are signs of improvement for 2000/01 in the retention rate of 83%. For advanced modern apprenticeships, retention rates are higher at 75%, but pass rates are still low at 44%.

6. For students studying at level 1, both retention and pass rates have improved. The retention rate is slightly above the national average, but pass rates are unsatisfactory. The majority of young people on entry-level programmes have high achievement and progress to level 1.

Adult learners

7. Most of the full-time adult students are on access programmes. In the year 1999/2000, the college enrolled over 1,300 students on these courses. The overall figures indicate consistent retention and pass rates for the years 1998/99 and 1999/2000. Pass rates on access courses are lower than the national average, though in some areas, such as science, IT and care, pass rates are particularly good.

8. The pass rates for those studying GCE A level in 1999/2000 are significantly lower than national averages, but the retention rate is near the national average. The number of students studying GCE A level is only a very small proportion of the college's overall enrolment of adults and is planned to reduce further.

9. According to college data, nearly 400 students were enrolled on NVQ level 3 programmes in 1999/2000. Pass rates are close to the national average. The retention rate is below the national average. Over 1,000 students enrolled for NVQ level 2 courses in 1999/2000, but the retention rate was lower than the national average. Pass rates on these courses are near to the national average. Pass and retention rates declined from the previous year. Few adults study on GNVQ programmes.

10. Over 200 adult students enrolled for GCSE subjects in 1999/2000. Pass rates at A* to C are below the national average, although they have improved compared with the previous year. Retention rates also improved, but they are still below national averages.

11. For the large number of adults studying programmes at level 1 and entry level, retention rates and pass rates were both near the national average and have improved over the previous year. Many adults take a range of courses that do not lead to accredited qualifications. Most are successful in improving their confidence and basic skills for personal development. When some of these students are entered for qualifications, they achieve well. Students on courses for those with mental health problems, gain confidence and successfully progress to other courses within the college.

Quality of education and training

12. Teaching, learning and attainment were graded by inspectors in 193 sessions. They judged that teaching was good or better in 57% of these, satisfactory in 35% and less than satisfactory in 8%. The best teaching was in construction, English and social sciences, ESOL and basic skills. The highest proportion of teaching graded as unsatisfactory was in hairdressing and beauty, engineering and business and administration. Although in all areas most teaching was at least satisfactory, there was too much that was lacklustre and uninspiring. Where lessons were good, the teachers had clear aims and objectives, and used a variety of appropriate methods to interest students in learning. In some poorer lessons, teachers were uninspiring and the work lacked pace and failed to excite the learners. Opportunities for students with learning difficulties to attain appropriate skills were good. In lessons for deaf students, tutors successfully used, and encouraged the students to use, signing, lip reading and speech in their learning. Students were confident about their learning and had a positive and friendly relationship with their teachers.

13. Most of the students enrolled at the college are adults. Many return to learn after a long period of absence from formal education. The location of courses in community locations where they live helps to build a bridge between students and the college. Much of the teaching of adults is carefully planned to develop their confidence and to encourage them to seek further opportunities to learn. Where adults can learn at their own pace, tutors provide good individual support. However, there were few opportunities for students to gain from small-group or whole-class interaction with each other.

14. Additional support was available for individual learners and, where necessary, for whole groups. Where this support was good, teachers were adaptable enough to meet the changing needs of learners. Learning support workers are adequately qualified, although many do not have the basic skills teaching qualification.

15. Key skills are not integrated with the work in many areas of the curriculum. Some vocational areas clearly integrate this work with the students' main programme of study, but others do not. The integration of key skills is particularly poor in the work-based learning. The co-ordinator for key skills informs the faculties of new learning resources and developments, but there is no cross-college management of key skills. In a few areas, the key skills have been introduced at a very late stage in the students' programmes. In one programme area, the key skills are taught on alternative weeks because of difficulties in gaining access to IT facilities. Some students have not had the results of the diagnostic assessment for their level of key skills.

16. In some curriculum areas, there was little co-ordination between work-based training and off-the-job training, and this was particularly the case where employers were unclear about the nature, structure or content of qualifications and the progress made or planned for their trainees. In other areas, especially engineering and health and care, there was clear co-ordination of work-based learning with the workplace provision.

17. There are 146 full-time teachers and 221 part-time, of which 52 are agency staff. Most teachers have a teaching qualification; 54% have degrees and 31% have formal assessor qualifications. The staff-development budget has not, in the past, enabled many staff to update their skills, but money from the standards fund, together with an increase in the college's budget allocation, now allows more staff to undertake development. Some staff in vocational areas use industrial placement and research projects to update their knowledge and awareness of current practice. Staff teaching business are encouraged through involvement in national bodies to develop their awareness of current practice in the sector. There is no effective strategy to ensure that all staff who need to update their industrial or commercial experience do so. Hospitality and catering teachers have had too little staff development to raise their awareness of what is good practice in the sector. The current, staff-development plan links staff development more closely to college strategic priorities.

18. Since the last inspection, the college has significantly improved the stock of library books. The library on the Manchester Road site has been relocated and refurbished to provide an attractive and welcoming facility. However, not all full-time adult access students on other sites have adequate recourse, either to the books they require, or the subject-related equipment needed. There has been a major effort to improve the stock of computers and the reliability of the network which has been a major source of frustration to students. Through the library and learning centres, students have good access to computers. There is less information about whether students can access computers which may be free in other locations. Students recognise and welcome the improvements which have been made. There are good learning materials available in centres in the community which meet the needs of the adults who study there, but some equipment in vocational areas on the main sites is dated and in need of replacement. The college still has an excess of accommodation. Much attractive refurbishment has been undertaken, but some classrooms are drab and provide a dull environment for learning. The crèche facilities are good. The college provides 1,200 places in 40 crèches across the college. This provision is well organised and the team works effectively to meet the needs of the students.

19. The college has devised clear systems for the assessment and monitoring of students' progress. Assessment is generally fair and accurate, although there are some instances where external verifiers have reported that assessment decisions have been generous. Assessments are set and marked regularly and returned within the times indicated in course handbooks. A good range of appropriate and work-related assessment methods is used. In most areas, assessment schedules are drawn up and given to students at the start of the course. Vocational courses have a common assignment format which helps to ensure clarity in the tasks set and encourages assessors to provide detailed feedback to help students improve their work. The main method by which students' progress is monitored is through the students' logbook, available for all full-time and substantial part-time courses. Tutors review the progress of individual students and draw up individual learning plans. However, plans are often not specific enough to enable students to implement the tasks set. The logbook is used to record progress and often needs to be supplemented by more detailed course-related records kept elsewhere. Some logbooks are not fully completed. In work-based training, some individual learning plans do not match the needs of individual learners

closely enough. Target dates were not clearly understood either by learners or employers and the plans were not updated following subsequent reviews and the achievement of units.

20. Assessment, verification and moderation procedures follow awarding body guidelines. In addition to internal verification, teachers carry out cross marking of assessments to help to standardise their marking. In key skills, the standardisation of assessment is not well done. In work-based learning, there are instances of poor planning of assessments and incomplete documentation. Employers have not been fully involved in the assessment process. A new system for ensuring that action plans arising from external verifiers' reports have been carried out has recently been introduced. The college has also drawn up clear guidelines on internal verification, which are adopted for different courses. Not all areas of the college have had parents' evenings, but these are now being introduced as a result of a parental survey. Parents have also indicated that they would like more feedback on students' progress and reporting arrangements to parents are now being introduced across the college.

21. The college has developed effective links with local 11 to 16 high schools. These links have been extended through the recent college merger to encompass a wide range of different community, charity and business groups. The college continues to provide 'taster' courses for Year 11 students and participates regularly in schools' career events. Student representation on college forums and within the community is good. This representation extends to the LEA education strategy group and a national business forum. The principal meets regularly with the area chairs of the forums.

22. College publicity is aimed effectively through good use of the media and well-designed and informative publicity materials to reach a wide range of the community, including those who would not normally enter FE or work-based training. Students feel that the college's wide range of programmes meets their needs and future aspirations. Courses for adults usually relate extremely well to their career aims.

23. Since the last inspection, the advice and guidance unit has improved the information that students receive prior to the start of their course. There is a structured process to ensure that impartial advice is given to students. Students appreciate the full range of study options on offer. A recent strategy has been introduced to identify those students whose attendance and achievement profile suggests that they are at risk of leaving their courses early. It is showing some signs of success in a few curriculum areas where effective strategies are in place to support these students. The support that the learners receive is monitored and recorded regularly. However, as yet, this strategy has had no measurable impact on retention rates across the college.

24. The college has developed a core induction programme, which the faculties adapt to suit their particular needs. Students speak highly of the activities in which they are involved and the information they receive about their programmes. However, the range of activities does not allow students to achieve some of the key skills that are required, or to gain a better understanding of the assessment procedures that will be used during their time on the programme.

25. The college has responded positively to the previous inspection report by developing a more effective system for learning support. All full-time students, and a substantive proportion of part-time students, complete an initial assessment prior to entry on to their course. All students receive the results of the screening tests. During the current year, 1,300 students completed a suitable diagnostic test and 800 students are receiving appropriate learning support. In the most successful areas, learners meet with their support worker and tutor for a six-weekly review of their progress. Learning plans are agreed, with clear targets. In a few areas, learning support is not adequate and this prevents learners from making the progress they need to achieve their goals. The take up of learning support by students is good.

26. The college's access policy ensures that those students who need learning support have an opportunity to enrol on any college programme. The policy states that three student places are kept free on every course for a specific time to ensure access for such students. Currently, there are 30 visually impaired students and five deaf students on mainstream programmes. Support for these students is particularly effective.

27. Inspectors observed 14 group tutorials and 1 individual tutorial. Four tutorials, which were planned, did not take place. All full-time students have a five-hour a week entitlement to tutorial, enrichment and key skills. Three different members of staff in three different parts of the college co-ordinate each of the areas, but there is a lack of cross-college management of the provision which results in very different experiences for students. The quality of the tutorial support continues to vary widely, despite continuing improvements and initiatives. The better tutorial schedules adhere to the six-weekly progress reviews. These reviews are recorded accurately and inform the students of their new targets. The completion of the tutorial logbook records students' progress effectively. Students are involved in the completion of this document and find it useful in helping them to identify clearly what they need to do to improve their work. However, there are areas where the tutorial provision lacks organisation and does not focus on the students' progress. In the poorer tutorials, the sessions are either an extension of the teaching timetable or they are unstructured.

28. The best of the enrichment programme provides an opportunity for learners to gain new skills and to follow their particular interests and hobbies, and creates new learning opportunities for work progression. In a few areas of the college, the enrichment opportunities are limited and are simply regarded as a part of the teaching programme. Some enrichment schedules are poorly planned, with too little consideration of students' subject timetable commitments to enable them to gain access to the enrichment programme of their choice.

29. There is good careers advice for those students wanting to progress to HE. However, there is no structured careers programme to introduce students to employment opportunities.

Leadership and management

30. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. There have been major improvements in aspects of leadership and management in the college. The new senior management team have established an open and responsive approach that is welcomed by staff throughout the college. Lines of communication within the college are now more effective. Staff feel that they are listened to and are well informed. Links with outside agencies are generally good, but communication with external bodies is not completely effective. One employer contacted the college and received less than friendly responses, which led to him placing trainees with another college. The strategic plan is well considered. It has been accepted by the local LSC as a replacement and an improvement on the original college recovery plan. Faculty business plans are linked to the strategic plan and are well documented. However, some of the actions and milestones proposed within these plans are not clear or appropriate. In one, the action to be taken is expressed as improving pass rates in line with college objectives by September 2001, in a plan which is due to run from 2001 to 2004. In others, they are vague, such as the general intention by course teams to increase achievement on a number of courses. Support functions have service agreements with measurable standards, an improvement made since the previous inspection.

31. Programme managers are all new to their posts. Considering the upheaval associated with the changes that have taken place in the college, they have settled into their roles well and team work is effective in most areas. However, there are a number of weaknesses in the management of the curriculum and cross-college functions. There is insufficient co-ordination of the teaching of key skills, tutorials and college-wide basic skills support. With the exception of the engineering and care programmes, there are some poor management practices in work-based training, such as the insufficient assessment of trainees whilst at work. In many cases, employers do not have sufficient awareness of the modern apprenticeship framework or of NVQ requirements.

32. The college does not have a history of effectively setting and monitoring the achievement of targets. A major effort has been made to try to establish a system over the last year. Many course teams have set targets, but a number of these are still poor. Some pass rate targets in the faculty of business and IT are incorrectly calculated. In some faculties, there are examples of targets set at levels below previous achievement, and in others, they are unrealistically high.

33. The quality assurance arrangements are much improved. The college has attempted to integrate the best of the systems that were in place in the two merged institutions. The quality assurance handbook is considered by staff to be a useful framework for a realistic system. Keen and enthusiastic staff have implemented a thorough scheme for lesson observation. The observation information is collated and is planned to be used during appraisals and by course teams and faculties, in order to share good practice. A less formal lesson observation scheme, based on teachers observing each other, is in place. Course reviews and evaluations take place three times a year. In addition, there are quality assurance reviews for whole faculties, also three times a year. Staff from the former Bolton College are

experienced in these activities, but many of those whose background is in the Community Education Service have implemented these procedures for the first time. The college is aware of the wide variation in the extent to which these reviews are implemented. Managers have accepted many of the reviews, even though they are poor. Much of the framework is still in the process of implementation and has not yet effected improvements in quality. The key indicators of student retention and pass rates used in reviews, although showing some signs of improvement, remain poor and below national averages.

34. The self-assessment process has involved many staff in the college, including all key managers. Comprehensive training preceded it. It has been effective in promoting an understanding of the quality assurance system, and in bringing staff together with a common purpose. The development plans to address the weaknesses identify actions, outcomes and deadlines. These plans are linked to the course review action plans. However, the outcomes identified are expressed in terms which make them difficult to measure effectively.

35. The college's financial position is not yet secure. It has substantial deficits and up until last year, had been operating at a loss for a number of years. The current managers are implementing a recovery plan and have made considerable headway in reducing costs. A small accounting surplus is forecast for 2000/01. The three-year financial forecast indicates that the college should be in a good financial position in three years time. However, the risks associated with the plan are significant. For example, a report produced to consider the merger of Bolton College and the Community Education Service has identified potentially serious financial implications relating to the anticipated over spend by the former Bolton College. An accommodation strategy for the new institution has still to be devised. Space utilisation within the college's Manchester Road site is very poor and the extent to which space is available, or used in centres in the community, is not known.

36. A major investment has been made in a new computerised management information system. It is intended that senior and middle managers will be able to use the information directly through their own computers. Currently, the quality audit manager uses the retention and achievement software and is working with others to enable them to use it. There is a history of poor data collection and use. Staff are not confident in the reliability of the information. In many cases, data held centrally do not match that held by course tutors. Inspectors identified many examples of inaccurate student enrolment, retention and achievement data. The unreliability of such information limits the ability of college managers to make accurate judgements about students' performance, and leads to concerns over the targets set by the college at a variety of levels.

37. During the period of merger, and with the introduction of new managers and a new college management structure, staff appraisal has not been given a high priority. Several staff have not had an appraisal interview in the last 12 months. However, a new system is now in place. Directors have undergone performance reviews with the senior management team. These were well structured and constructive. In each case, a number of actions have been agreed.

38. Equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusiveness are important aspects of the college's mission. There is a well-written policy, which is given a high profile. The policy document is displayed in many classrooms. There are examples of excellent practice, particularly with the work carried out in the community. People from groups which have been under-represented in FE are successfully encouraged to attend. Equality of opportunity is also promoted in lessons. For example, in all lessons observed in care, students from mixed cultural backgrounds engaged co-operatively in learning. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support matched to their needs. The college lesson observation form has a section for the consideration of equality of opportunity in the classroom. The unreliability of college data prevents the systematic monitoring of equal opportunities.

39. Governance at the time of the last college inspection was poor. Governors now monitor the college's activities more carefully. Three times a year, they have reports on the achievement of 20 performance indicators, which include those on student retention and pass rates, teaching quality and the progress made towards meeting financial and student achievement targets. The recovery plan and its financial implications are carefully considered through the finance committee of the governing body and the full board. However, a number of important items are not given sufficient attention. A college company with serious financial problems, which handled adult training contracts and was thought by some governors to have been closed in 1999/2000, is still in existence, but no reports on its performance are considered by the full board. The clerk to the board is new, and although he has appropriate academic qualifications, his experience is limited.

40. Within the constraints of having staff on differing contracts and conditions of service as a consequence of the merger, staff are well deployed. There are some inequities. For example, staff with management duties who were previously with the Adult Education Service, have reduced teaching loads and consequently time to carry out these duties. However, elsewhere management duties are carried out by teachers on full teaching timetables. There are also examples of courses with large numbers of students having insufficient full-time teachers.

Part C: Curriculum and occupational areas

Science and mathematics

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on access to science courses
- good teaching of biology
- thorough, supportive marking of assignments
- courses well matched to the needs of adult returners.

Weaknesses

- no vocational science courses at levels 2 and 3
- appropriate variety in the teaching of mathematics
- poor resourcing of science courses in community centres
- poor management of science and mathematics courses.

Scope of provision

41. The college offers full-time and part-time provision in science and mathematics. There is also integrated and separate preparation for key skills application of number, mainly at levels 1 and 2. In total, 438 students are studying mathematics and science; 233 students follow mathematics courses, and 205 science. Just over two thirds of the students are adults. The 141 students aged 16 to 18 are mostly enrolled on GCSE courses. There is one daytime and one evening GCE AS-level biology group. Some adults attend daytime GCSE science courses in biology, chemistry, physics, or mathematics at the main site, mainly as part-time students. GCSE biology and level 2 mathematics courses are also available as both day and evening courses at several community sites. Full-time and part-time access courses are offered at level 2 in mathematics and science, and at level 3 in science, mainly biology, at Manchester Road and at Westhoughton community learning centre. Thirty-six students are enrolled at level 2 and 39 at level 3. The inspection covered all full-time courses and a sample of part-time and evening courses at the main site and two other sites.

Achievement and standards

42. Pass rates over the last three years on access to science courses are well above the national average. Although the retention rate has been high, the number of students

completing the course at Westhoughton last year was low. Standards of attainment observed in lessons, both at levels 2 and 3, and in homework and coursework, are good. Students can apply mathematical and scientific principles to particular problems. They show that they understand concepts such as carbohydrate structure and function, by their answers to comprehension questions and by the questions they ask the teacher. Students carry out practical work carefully, with appropriate attention to safety procedures. They are able to plan experiments and to interpret their results, using graphical methods when required. In mathematics coursework, students use information communications technology (ICT) to display answers graphically.

43. Pass rates and retention rates on the national diploma in science course in 2000 were above the national average. The course has not been taught since. Both pass and retention rates on GCE A-level science courses have been well below national averages for the last three years. These courses are no longer offered. Two groups of students are following a one-year GCE AS-level biology course. The standard of work observed in lessons was above average. Students handle biochemical formulae confidently and are able to use terms such as peptide and hydrolysis of glycosidic bonds correctly. They carefully carry out practical work, such as chromatographic separation of proteins, and are able to calculate results correctly.

44. GCSE pass rates at the higher grades in science have declined slightly over the last three years, but are consistently above the national average for the sector. Retention rates are good. In GCSE mathematics, pass rates have also been close to national averages. Retention rates on courses at the former Bolton College have been similar to the national average. Pass rates for students who completed courses run by the former Bolton Community Education Service over the last two years have been above the national average. Students behave well in lessons, and apply themselves diligently to written exercises in mathematics. They are able to work out the factors of a number and identify the highest common factor. Students make good progress in practical work in science lessons.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE science (1998/2000) sciences (2000/01)	2	No. of starts	61	60	61
		% retention	56	67	77
		% pass rate	50	48	45
GCSE mathematics (one-year course)	2	No. of starts	125	85	*
		% retention	72	62	*
		% pass rate	38	44	*

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Access to science	3	No. of starts	12	11	*
		% retention	92	82	*
		% pass rate	82	89	*
National diploma in science	3	No. of starts	19	22	**
		% retention	74	77	**
		% pass rate	64	88	**
GCE A-level sciences	3	No. of starts	94	81	38
		% retention	62	54	54
		% pass rate	54	49	47

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

* college data unreliable

** course not running

Quality of education and training

45. Biology teaching is good. Specialist teachers effectively communicate their enthusiasm to students. Teachers use a variety of aids to promote learning, such as videos, biological models, and demonstrations and practical work for students. The use of these methods, along with skilled explanations by the teacher, inspired students, who enjoy their studies and learn well. Teaching of GCSE chemistry and physics has been adversely affected by recent staff turnover. Apart from the word processing of coursework assignments, there is little use of ICT in science teaching.

46. In mathematics, teachers do not vary their methods sufficiently or appropriately to meet the needs of all students. In most lessons, teachers gave a clear demonstration of a key principle or technique, and students then spent most of their time working through similar exercises. The workbooks used have been produced at the college and provide good syllabus coverage, but the questions set are not demanding enough for some students. Mathematics teachers make little use of basic teaching aids or equipment such as overhead projectors.

47. In all science and mathematics courses, homework assignments are set and marked regularly and coursework is imaginative. Marking is thorough and includes both correction of errors and helpful suggestions for improvement.

48. Access and GCSE courses are well matched to the needs of adult returners. Students are able to obtain the mathematics and science qualifications needed for nursing and other

health-related careers, and for teaching in primary schools. They have a choice of college site and type of course to suit their circumstances. At the main site, there is a good range of science and mathematics books and periodicals in the library. The Westhoughton site is poorly resourced and there are insufficient text books for students. There are few teaching aids at Westhoughton. For example, there is no human skeleton, no model of the human torso, no simple molecular models, no wall copy of the periodic table, and virtually no basic physics equipment. Equipment for mathematics and science at the main site is satisfactory for the courses taught, although physics meters are dated, and there is no multimedia computer for use in laboratories.

49. The national diploma course in science has not been replaced by another vocational course at level 3, such as the AVCE, and there are no vocational courses at level 2. Retake GCSE and GCE AS-level biology do not meet the needs of all students aged 16 to 18.

Leadership and management

50. Most mathematics and science courses are taught at two or more sites, but there is little sharing of good practice. There is no overall co-ordination of mathematics and science across the college. The recent expansion of access courses has improved adult provision, but there is no documented strategy for the development of courses for students aged 16 to 18. Self-assessment and quality assurance procedures are not sufficiently thorough. For example, reporting on pass and retention rates is too general, and procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are inadequate.

Construction

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

Strengths

- good range of provision
- good teaching and learning
- good pass rates at level 3
- good on-the-job experience.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates at level 1
- insufficient on-the-job assessment and evidence gathering
- poor employer awareness of NVQ programmes.

Scope of provision

51. The college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time provision in construction, which covers the main crafts at technician level. In addition, there is a distinctive programme in roofing, slating and built-up roof felting, which is not usually found in colleges. Some specialist provision, including plastering and wood machining, is made to meet local and regional industrial needs. Most courses are available at foundation, intermediate, and advanced level, both during the day and in the evening, and offer the awards of GNVQ, NVQ and national certificate and diploma. There are currently 43 students aged 16 to 18 and 24 adults on full-time college courses, 104 students aged 16 to 18 on foundation modern apprenticeships (FMAs) and a further 171 on advanced modern apprenticeships (AMAs). Of the 1,107 part-time students enrolled on the college provision in this area of learning, 65% are aged over 19 and attend, on average, a maximum of 7.5 hours a week. Some 4% of students are aged under 16. In the faculty of construction, 32% of students come from areas of social deprivation. Initial assessment carried out shows that a significant number of craft operatives require additional support. The inspection covered a sample of full-time and part-time courses, the modern apprenticeships, and a sample of part-time evening courses. Work-based trainees account for approximately 20% of total student numbers.

Achievement and standards

52. Most retention and pass rates in the last three years for courses at craft and technician level are satisfactory. Some retention rates, however, at craft level 1 are below the national average. The retention rate on a quarter of the courses in 2000 and 2001 improved to above the national average, but on most courses the rate is at the national average. A few advanced courses at craft and technician level have high pass rates and for the GNVQ

precursors course and City and Guilds craft at level 3, pass rates are above the national average. At craft level 1, pass rates are well below the national average.

53. Pass rates for work-based learning students following NVQ training programmes are low and show a declining trend over the last three years. Up to 50% of students on these programmes have learning difficulties and/or require additional support. Approximately one quarter of the total number of students on level 1 and 2 courses have learning difficulties. Most students at level 1 are aged 16 to 18. Adults form the majority in most other programmes. A student recently won a silver medal in a national skills competition for roofing.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ crafts	1	No. of starts	61	96	312
		% retention	70	60	63
		% pass rate	33	9	37
Other crafts	1	No. of starts	18	8	97
		% retention	78	0	94
		% pass rate	0	0	35
NVQ crafts	2	No. of starts	272	308	347
		% retention	49	58	55
		% pass rate	62	60	57
City and Guilds crafts	2	No. of starts	60	74	60
		% retention	83	85	55
		% pass rate	58	54	97
GNVQ precursors	3	No. of starts	78	60	80
		% retention	60	75	83
		% pass rate	70	89	79

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ crafts	3	No. of starts	71	53	92
		% retention	93	77	78
		% pass rate	89	76	80

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

Quality of education and training

54. Much of the teaching is good, and all but one of the lessons observed were at least satisfactory. There are comprehensive schemes of work. Lessons are well planned: aims and objectives are clearly stated. Teachers use a wide range of effective, well-produced materials to aid learning and generate students' interest. Teaching is geared, as far as possible, to meet individual students' needs and to help them to progress at their own pace to complete programme units. Students work well both individually and in groups, with teachers and support staff providing continuous support in the form of guidance, demonstrations and instruction. There is inadequate technician support in some areas, resulting in untidiness and poor maintenance of tools and equipment.

55. Students' files are updated regularly and achievements are methodically and accurately recorded. The standard of most students' portfolios and their practical work is good and teachers provide regular feedback on exercises and assignments. Assessment is thorough and effective, and teachers use a range of techniques to test students' competence. Students have a good understanding of the assessment arrangements.

56. There are good relationships between college staff, students and employers. Teachers use their knowledge, experience and network of industrial contacts to ensure that current practice is incorporated into programmes. Manufacturers and suppliers contribute materials and literature to help keep courses up to date. Work-based training students select their mode of attendance to suit the preferences and needs of their employers. Some students attend college on a day-release basis and others on a block-release basis. Employers appreciate this flexibility.

57. Students have regular and frequent reviews in which employers participate. In the case of students on work-based training, they do so in order to maintain a close watch on progress and to identify additional training needs. Course reviews, while self-critical, are not sufficiently thorough to be effective.

58. On-the-job training with one large employer is particularly well structured and well managed. Periods of carefully planned off-the-job training at the organisation's own specialist training centre are interspersed with workplace training. Students are allocated to

nominated work supervisors for an extended period of time under the close control of a training manager who is also present at formal reviews.

59. There is very little integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Despite their enthusiastic commitment to training, most employers are unaware of NVQ requirements and are unable to help students effectively to progress towards their qualification in a planned way. College and workplace training proceed in parallel, but largely in isolation of each other. On-the-job assessment and evidence recording does not take place regularly. The workplace experience of students is often out of sequence with the background knowledge and skills, which are being gained and practised at the college.

60. Classroom facilities are generally good, although the workshop areas are somewhat drab. Space in both the roofing and painting and decorating workshops is severely limited. Full-time students make good use of the library and learning centre, which has a small but good range of construction texts. However, most part-time students fail to make adequate use of either the IT facilities or the books. Additionally, while full-time students engage in a variety of enrichment activities provided by the college, part-time students do not, in the main, take advantage of these.

Leadership and management

61. The faculty is organised into three sections, namely, mechanical services and professional studies, electrical and electronics, and construction trades. Each section, consisting of specialist teaching staff, is headed by a programme manager who reports to the director of the faculty. All of the sections have a training officer for the work-based training provision, and a team of technicians. In addition, a cross-college training services co-ordinator and a number of administrative staff provide support to all aspects of the faculty's operations. The training provision is evaluated on a regular basis and there are six stages of critical appraisal which involve all staff. The benefits of self-assessment are well understood by staff who actively participate in the process. The self-assessment report did not identify all the weaknesses in the provision and overstated student retention and pass rates on most courses. There are satisfactory arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity and the avoidance of unfair or discriminatory practices within the college, although the same assurances are not extended to the workplace in the case of part-time students.

Engineering

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

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

Strengths

- management of work-based learning
- integration of key skills with motor vehicle programmes
- good motor vehicle resources
- productive links with industry
- high standards in practical work.

Weaknesses

- retention rates on many courses
- unsatisfactory pass rates
- inadequate learning support to meet identified learner needs
- poor tutorial provision on electronic programmes
- inappropriate entry-level programmes.

Scope of provision

62. Engineering provision covers a range of full-time and part-time courses including electronics engineering, motor vehicle servicing and body repair. Many adults and students aged 16 to 18 study part time, often supported by their employers. Students are able to choose from a range of courses from level 1 to level 4. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are productive links with employers. Students are able to choose from a range of courses from level 1 to level 4. Some students travel considerable distances to study at the college. Many full-time students benefit from periods of work experience with engineering employers. There are over 100 work-based learners, most of whom are in motor vehicle and some in fabrication and welding. A significant number of learners on work-based training attend courses that are designed to accredit their background knowledge. Many learners successfully progress between the various course levels. The curriculum area lacks appropriate entry-level programmes.

Achievement and standards

63. Much of the students' work is satisfactory or better. In practical lessons, students demonstrate good practical skills. In motor vehicle courses, there has been good integration of key skills, so that students are able to gain accreditation for their key skills while meeting the requirements of their NVQ units.

64. Retention rates on many programmes are unsatisfactory and are often significantly below the national average for the sector. Retention rates have also declined over the last three years. Pass rates on additional national certificate and national diploma programmes are poor, only 32% in 2000/01. Pass rates on NVQ programmes have been affected by the non-completion of portfolios for assessment purposes. This has particularly affected the results of the work-based learning students. Work-based assessment is now carefully managed by the training and development officers and is carried out by dedicated workplace assessors. Many current learners are making excellent progress with their portfolios.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ vehicle maintenance service	1	No. of starts	20	30	11
		% retention	65	63	55
		% pass rate	33	42	17
City and Guilds 2240 electronic servicing	1	No. of starts	42	49	57
		% retention	88	63	60
		% pass rate	41	35	50
NVQ engineering foundation	2	No. of starts	33	23	34
		% retention	79	70	56
		% pass rate	88	45	32
NVQ vehicle mechanical and electrical systems	2	No. of starts	65	58	37
		% retention	49	48	35
		% pass rate	58	*	54

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ and precursors	3	No. of starts	105	99	105
		% retention	62	86	68
		% pass rate	67	*	32
NVQ motor vehicle body repair	3	No. of starts	23	21	18
		% retention	13	33	55
		% pass rate	33	0	30

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

65. Most lessons are well planned. There are detailed schemes of work. Lesson plans specify the expected students' learning outcomes. In the best lessons, teachers made regular checks on individual students' progress, either through short exercises or by direct questioning. In a few lessons, teachers failed to make full use of the time allocated and lost the interest of their students.

66. In some electronics lessons, students had little interaction with the teacher and few checks were made on students' progress and understanding. Students were encouraged to use IT in only one of the lessons observed. There was scant evidence of the use of IT in their course work. Some electronics teachers do not have a teaching qualification, but all are vocationally qualified. Many items of electronic equipment, although adequate for teaching, are outdated. Teaching rooms are generally clean and well decorated, although some are not conducive to learning. In a few rooms, writing on the white board was difficult to see from the rear of the class.

67. Teachers of motor vehicle theory make extensive use of good resources, including well-designed written materials and a supply of modern motor vehicles provided by a leading vehicle manufacturer. Teachers of key skills are effective and link the work appropriately to students' learning goals. In one particularly good lesson, the teacher prepared third-year students for an exercise in coaching first-year students in vehicle valeting. It succeeded in meeting the supervising skills requirement for their NVQ at level 3, while at the same time enabling them to provide evidence for their key skills. Many students are assessed as having additional learning needs, but the arrangements for ensuring that these needs are met are inadequate.

68. Most students' practical work is good. Students benefit from having access to the extensive industrial-standard equipment available for motor vehicle training. Much of the

teaching space is good and is used by several external companies for their own training purposes. Facilities for fabrication and welding courses on two sites are in poor condition. There were instances of unsafe health and safety practices at both sites.

69. Work-based learners have regular reviews of their progress with their training and development managers. Previous reviews are considered and, where appropriate, actions are carried over, new and challenging targets set and pastoral issues dealt with. The motor vehicle training-development officer and college teachers work closely together. Both students and employers welcome the good service provided. Students on electronic courses do not experience a satisfactory level of tutorial support, nor do full-time students have access to a work experience programme.

70. The feedback on assessment provided to students is poor. In many cases, grading criteria were not given to students. Some scripts were not annotated and, in the few instances of written feedback, clear indication was not given to students of how they could further improve their work. The internal verification system is weak. The forms are not dated and there is no system for providing written feedback to the assessor.

Leadership and management

71. Engineering provision is part of the faculty of construction and technology. Electronics and motor vehicle engineering are located on two separate sites some six miles apart. The new management structure has only recently been established and the college quality assurance procedures are not fully established. The analysis of programme performance has been insufficiently critical and the self-assessment report pays too little attention to the unsatisfactory retention and pass rates.

Business and administration

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

Strengths

- good range of provision with good progression opportunities
- well-planned work experience across the range of full-time provision
- good individual support for students
- effective well-subscribed enrichment provision.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on NVQ accounting level 3 and GNVQ foundation
- no assessment in the workplace
- poor employer awareness of the modern apprenticeship framework requirements.

Scope of provision

72. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time provision, across six college sites, in business, teacher training, management and business administration, from foundation to HE level both during the day, in the evening and through open learning. The provision includes GNVQ foundation, intermediate and advanced in business and the AVCE in business studies. NVQ level 1 in administration is offered as a college course with NVQ levels 2 and 3 as work-based training. Medical and general secretarial courses are offered. There are professional courses in accountancy, marketing and personnel management. There are currently 26 learners aged 16 to 18 and 16 adults on full-time college courses, 11 learners on foundation modern apprenticeships, a further 16 learners on advanced modern apprenticeships and 8 on other training, ranging from NVQ level 2 to level 4 in administration and accounting. Of the 207 part-time students currently enrolled on college provision in this area of learning, 89% are aged over 19 and attend, on average, a maximum of 6 hours a week.

Achievement and standards

73. Most students' written work is well organised and presented. Students on advanced-level courses demonstrate good research skills, appropriate levels of knowledge and are able to interpret data and apply business theory to practical exercises. Most portfolios in NVQ administration and accounting demonstrate that students acquire appropriate knowledge, practical experience and presentation skills. However, there is little work-based evidence in portfolios and unsatisfactory provision for work-based assessment. Many students achieve a high level of IT skills. Pass rates on GNVQ/AVCE have improved each year from 1998 and in 1999/2000, were significantly above the national average. On GNVQ foundation and

intermediate programmes and on the NVQ level 3 accounting course, pass rates are below the national average. The pass rate is improving on advanced and foundation modern apprenticeship courses in administration and accounting.

74. Attendance rates on most courses are satisfactory. The college policy on student punctuality is rigorously implemented. Retention rates on AVCE are unsatisfactory and are well below the national average. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate have improved over the last three years and are above the national average.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation	1	No. of starts	16	7	14
		% retention	67	0	67
		% pass rate	40	0	38
GNVQ intermediate	2	No. of starts	12	22	12
		% retention	45	68	91
		% pass rate	40	54	70
AVCE	3	No. of starts	16	17	23
		% retention	27	88	39
		% pass rate	75	87	89
NVQ supervisory studies	3	No. of starts	19	6	6
		% retention	88	100	100
		% pass rate	21	33	83
NVQ accounting	3	No. of starts	49	58	46
		% retention	67	89	85
		% pass rate	3	22	46

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Advanced modern apprenticeship administration	3	No. of starts	14	12	5
		% retention	57	58	100
		% pass rate	57	42	40

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

Quality of education and training

75. Most of the teaching is at least satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers make objectives clear to students, and pay close attention to the needs of individuals and their preferred methods of learning. Some of the tasks set for NVQ level 3 students are not demanding enough to meet the requirements of administration level 3. On GNVQ and AVCE courses, teachers make appropriate reference to commercial visits made, or planned, for the future. All GNVQ and AVCE students undertake a period of work experience which teachers effectively draw upon in lessons. On management and professional courses, teachers use a variety of methods to maintain and stimulate students' interest, including questions directed to individuals, discussions and video recordings. In lessons on management and professional courses, students are encouraged to apply theories and concepts to their own work situations. On a trades union congress representatives' course, the class effectively conducted a fully participatory weekly meeting, electing a chair and secretary for the next meeting. Teaching is good on GNVQ, AVCE and City and Guilds 7303 courses. Lessons are well planned. Teachers make frequent checks to ensure that students are understanding the work and make good use of case studies to reinforce students' learning.

76. In a few lessons, the teacher failed to hold the interest of students. Some teachers rely too heavily on the use of the overhead projector, and some spend too much lesson time having students copy notes. In some lessons, teachers fail to set work that is suitable for learners of varying ability. There is a lack of individualised training for work-based learners which reflects their job roles in the work place. Students' attainments during lessons are satisfactory and appropriate to the level of the course. GNVQ and AVCE portfolios are well presented. Teachers return assessed work promptly, with good written guidance on how students can improve their work. There are effective internal verification procedures in place for the GNVQ and AVCE courses. Students comment on the improved access to and reliability of the IT equipment. The GNVQ and AVCE courses make good use of relevant Internet sites for students' research. Teachers pay close attention to equality of opportunity in their teaching and in their choice and use of learning materials. During the regular progress review for work-based learners, their understanding is developed through thorough questioning and discussion.

77. Students' induction is well organised. Students are given helpful informative materials. There is good individual support for students. Those who need additional learning support are identified at an early stage, and most take advantage of the help they are offered. There is close contact between learning support tutors, teachers, personal tutors and members of staff from Bolton training services, the college's work-based training unit. Each student's progress and attendance is regularly monitored through regular individual tutorials and progress reviews, and students agree action plans to help them improve their performance. Targets for those in work-based learning are determined by the content of the course for the year and are imposed rather than negotiated with individuals. There are opportunities for part-time students to attend tutorials. There is a good enrichment programme for full-time students which includes yoga and cinema criticism. The programme is valued by students and allows them to follow their personal interests.

Leadership and management

78. The programme leader for business and office studies has been in post since September 2001. The programme area has identified areas for improvement in the provision and has put in place strategies to address them. There are good communication and contractual arrangements between Bolton training services and the relevant faculties. Course team meetings are held regularly. On NVQ, GNVQ, AVCE, and management and professional courses, there are good schemes of work, assessment plans and course reviews. Not all course reviews consider progress made on the previous years' action plans. Programme design for work-based learners is not flexible enough to meet the needs of young people wishing to join at various times of the year.

Computing and IT

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

Strengths

- good range of IT courses across the community
- good retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and foundation programmes
- good support for students with disabilities.

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on many part-time courses
- inadequate self-assessment of community provision
- lack of work experience opportunities for full-time students.

Scope of provision

79. There is a good variety of computing and IT courses, which meet the needs of students and offer good progression opportunities. The provision includes GNVQ foundation and GNVQ intermediate IT, access to HE, AVCE in ICT, and the national diploma. Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses provide progression into HE. Many courses for adults are taught at centres within the community. They include computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT), integrated business technology stages 2 and 3 (IBT2, IBT3), European computer driving licence (ECDL), Internet technologies, introduction to IT, specific courses for the over 50s and for Asian women, 'taster' sessions and IT road shows, alongside various desk top publishing, multimedia, PhotoShop and web page design courses. There are currently 467 students enrolled on computing/IT courses at the main site and over 3,000 enrolments in the community-based provision.

Achievement and standards

80. There are good pass rates on the full-time level 3 courses, but retention rates are poor and have declined in recent years. However, the GNVQ foundation and intermediate programmes have good retention rates and pass rates are in line with national averages.

81. Many part-time community-based IT courses have very low pass rates. In several cases, less than one third of the students have achievements recorded. The low pass rates recorded for some courses is partly because some students only intend to complete individual elements of courses rather than pursue the full qualification. For example, students enrol on the Internet technologies course who only wish to study web design. Another reason is that some students on open-learning courses have been inappropriately enrolled onto CLAIT courses. In some cases, where students have continued with courses in later sessions, or sent

off their own log books, the college has not been aware that they have subsequently achieved qualifications.

82. Students on foundation and intermediate GNVQ programmes improve their learning skills through the integration of the wider key skills (improving own learning and performance, working with others and problem solving) in their work. Full-time students do not have enough opportunities to visit IT-related work places to gain experience or to observe the use of IT in the workplace. Computing and IT students demonstrate good practical skills and students at all levels use the Internet effectively for research. Most portfolios of work are well presented and reach the required standard.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
CLAIT	1	No. of starts	479	425	103
		% retention	88	100	78
		% pass rate	22	16	*
GNVQ foundation IT	1	No. of starts	18	19	28
		% retention	89	95	89
		% pass rate	75	94	68
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	No. of starts	27	28	38
		% retention	69	82	92
		% pass rate	83	74	69
City and Guilds 7261 IT	2	No. of starts	21	**	57
		% retention	86	**	56
		% pass rate	11	**	78
ECDL	2	No. of starts	21	569	458
		% retention	100	92	70
		% pass rate	10	24	30

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE IT	2	No. of starts	24	16	18
		% retention	38	44	67
		% pass rate	11	100	50
Access certificate in IT	3	No. of starts	12	11	19
		% retention	92	82	68
		% pass rate	82	89	92
GNVQ advanced IT	3	No. of starts	21	15	32
		% retention	71	60	41
		% pass rate	67	100	92

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

* data unreliable

** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

83. The teaching was at least satisfactory in all but one of the lessons observed, and much was good or better. Many of the adults on community-based part-time courses learn by working individually with computers and make effective use of the workbooks provided. These students appreciate being able to work at their own pace without undue pressure and clearly gain in confidence with helpful support from their teachers. However, several practical sessions consist entirely of individual work and students do not experience learning through small group work. In one successful lesson, the teacher invited students to observe each other's demonstrations and provided a quiz for students to complete in pairs to enable them to deepen their understanding. Teachers support students well, ensuring that they know what they need to do to improve. However, in some practical lessons, students waste time waiting for the tutor's attention, although occasionally they are assisted by their fellow students. Teachers do not always ensure that all students are drawn into discussions or encourage them to share their views and understanding of the work with others.

84. Teachers have good opportunities to update their technical knowledge and receive support to attend courses ranging from ECDL to degree-level work. Training is also provided on the needs of deaf students and how to integrate them in lessons. There is a good range of IT books in the library, but no recent computing magazines, an important resource in this subject area, the absence of which leaves students to rely too much for their research on the Internet. Most IT resources are adequate and the major network problems of last year,

which hindered students' progress, have been substantially reduced, but not yet eliminated. There are usually sufficient computers in each classroom for individual use. Resources in outreach centres in the community are not as good as those on the main site. Many community-based students work from floppy disks, rather than having their own areas of the network, and have access to versions of software which are different from those available on the main site. However, this does not adversely affect students' learning. The learning materials used in community centres are appropriate for the needs of adults.

85. On the main site, teachers can now book one of three portable projectors or an electronic whiteboard which they use as demonstration tools to good effect in the classroom. However, insufficient attention is paid to safety issues, such as the existence of trailing cables in classrooms.

86. Most students receive good advice before they join their courses. Induction programmes are effective throughout the provision. Advice and guidance sessions are available on several occasions throughout the year to ensure that community-based students are placed on appropriate courses, but some students are still enrolled on inappropriate courses. Places are reserved on all courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Signers provide effective assistance to deaf students in several classes, which enables the students to make good progress.

87. There is insufficient contact with parents of students aged 16 to 18 to inform them of their son or daughter's progress. Value added data are not used to inform target setting to help students make progress. Tutorial provision consists mainly of one-to-one reviews. These sessions can be dominated by subject-specific topics at the expense of a wider tutorial curriculum.

88. Assignments are well designed to meet course requirements. Assessment is carried out fairly and with effective feedback to students. Many students do not receive assignment schedules in advance and so are not able to plan their time effectively over the year.

Leadership and management

89. Key aspects of management in the department have recently been introduced or developed. There is now a programme manager for computing on the main site and a new post of programme manager for IT, who covers the community-based work. The last self-assessment report was mainly concerned with work on the main site and procedures for the monitoring of teaching and learning at centres in the community are not yet established. Target setting for the courses at centres in the community is now being introduced, more lesson observations of part-time staff are taking place and teachers are starting to use log sheets to review the progress of individual students.

Hospitality and catering

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

Strengths

- flexible timetable arrangements for students
- good work placements
- effective induction for full-time students.

Weaknesses

- out-of-date resources and equipment
- aspects of curriculum management
- unimaginative teaching in practical lessons
- poor pass rates on NVQ level 1 food preparation and NVQ level 2 food service.

Scope of provision

90. The college offers a range of courses in catering, including NVQs in food preparation and food service at levels 1, 2 and 3. These are offered on a full-time and part-time basis. Other vocational qualifications are offered to adult learners at five other sites across the Bolton area. There are currently 95 students on NVQ courses. Of these, 61 are on full-time programmes and 34 on part-time. The majority of NVQ students are aged 16 to 18. There are 86 students on community-based vocational courses, 6 of whom are following a certificate and diploma in professional cookery. There are 169 adult learners on non-vocational courses. The college also runs a school partnership with local schools. At present, 46 school pupils attend college weekly. There are 10 work-based learning students, 1 foundation modern apprentice and 9 taking NVQ level 2 in food preparation. The students attend college one day a week for off-the-job training.

Achievement and standards

91. The retention and pass rates are poor for NVQ level 1 food preparation and NVQ level 2 food service. These qualifications are treated as additional to the NVQ level 2 in food preparation, which is the primary learning goal for most students. This programme has been designed to include these additional qualifications to provide students with a good overall training for the catering industry. Pass rates for the NVQ level 2 in food preparation are good. Retention and pass rates for work-based learners are satisfactory. The majority of assessments are done at the college.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ food preparation	1	No. of starts	*	15	33
		% retention	*	67	82
		% pass rate	*	0	58
NVQ food preparation	2	No. of starts	36	78	50
		% retention	86	47	64
		% pass rate	67	80	97
NVQ food and drink service	2	No. of starts	53	147	25
		% retention	45	37	64
		% pass rate	75	52	52

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

* course not available

Quality of education and training

92. The college makes flexible timetable arrangements to meet the needs of students. Where low numbers enrol, classes are combined to ensure that the course can still run. This is well managed, works effectively and enables the college to produce a more realistic work environment for practical work. It also provides the NVQ level 3 students with an opportunity to gain evidence and experience in a supervisory position. Students who cannot be present on particular days are given opportunities to attend on others. Students who wish to progress at a faster pace are also given the opportunity to come in on their day off for assessments.

93. The induction programme for full-time students is good. All general areas of induction are covered in detail. The one-day outward bound course, held in the first week, develops the skills of working with others for students who are expected to work as a team in the kitchens and restaurant from day one.

94. Much of the teaching in practical lessons is dull and unimaginative. It fails to introduce students to the rich diversities that are now present in the catering trade. In practical lessons, teachers fail to give students an introduction or summary of what their objectives are during the lesson. Whiteboards are not used for teaching. Some kitchens are not adequately equipped for teaching to take place. In one practical lesson, the teacher was aggressive and condescending in his approach to the students. Work-based students attend

college one day a week to do both practical and theory work. Some of the students are put into classes with full-time and part-time students. Other students are taught in a separate group. The standard of teaching for some work-based students is barely satisfactory.

95. The training kitchens and restaurant are in need of refurbishment and updating. Equipment is basic and does not help teachers to show students what current practices are in the industry. The method of food service taught is not widely used throughout the industry and, although it provides a foundation for students, many practices are out of date and are no longer used. Menus are unimaginative and dated. Students are not being made aware of the latest trends in the industry. Teachers who have worked for the majority of their career in FE have had too little opportunity to update their skills and their awareness of current industrial practice. Staff development is not well managed. Teachers have little opportunity to influence the menus or service styles.

96. Individual learning plans for work-based students are not used to decide how quickly students need to progress to complete their qualification. There are no formal training plans for on-the-job training. Some students undertake additional qualifications which are offered through employers. The employment placements are good and offer students the breadth and depth of experience they need to complete the programme and progress to a higher level. There are poor links between the on-the-job and off-the-job training. The assessment process for both on-the-job and off-the-job training is weak and some assessments have not been internally verified. Trainees' portfolios contain little work-based evidence and trainees have only a partial understanding of how to collect or cross-refer evidence. Progress reviews and action plans lack detail and do not fully involve the employer. They do not result in amendments being made to the individual training plans. Students receive personal support from the work-based assessor together with assistance with basic literacy skills, but some of this support is not adequately recorded.

Leadership and management

97. There are weaknesses in the management of work-based learning. Communication between the training unit in the college and the curriculum area is weak. The two managers do not meet regularly enough to monitor the progress or welfare of the work-based catering students. There are poor practices in both areas which are associated with a lack of understanding of work-based learning. New internal verification procedures have recently been introduced. It is too early to judge their effectiveness. There is no systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching by the programme manager.

Hairdressing and beauty therapy

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

Strengths

- improved pass rates to above national averages on most programmes
- comprehensive vocational enrichment programme
- effective learner reviews
- good range of courses and flexible arrangements for attendance.

Weaknesses

- no formal on-the-job training for modern apprentices
- uninspiring practical rooms
- out-of-date equipment in some hairdressing lessons.

Scope of provision

98. The college offers a range of courses leading to NVQs in hairdressing at levels 1, 2 and 3 and in beauty therapy at levels 2 and 3. The range of complementary therapy and related courses includes holistic therapies, reflexology, Indian head massage, nail extensions and nail art. Pre-foundation and foundation in hairdressing and beauty have recently been introduced to enable progression for learners with lower abilities. There are also programmes designed specifically for adults who are looking for a career change. These are flexible and modular to meet individual needs. Students attend in the evening and on Saturday morning, or they can attend classes during the day. There are currently 76 students aged 16 to 18 and 158 adults on full-time college courses. Of the 202 part-time students currently enrolled on college provision in this area, 80% are aged over 19. The Bolton college training services currently has 23 trainees on hairdressing training programmes. There are six advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3, eight foundation modern apprentices and nine trainees on other work-based training working towards NVQs at level 2. The inspection covered all full-time courses, the modern apprenticeships and NVQ training.

Achievement and standards

99. The pass rates on hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic courses are above national averages. The standards of attainment observed in lessons and in students' portfolios are mostly satisfactory. Students' achievements are systematically recorded in their assessment logbooks and on sheets kept by teachers. Internal verification is effective. Most students' written work is satisfactory, but there is insufficient visual evidence of the work completed for their clients. There is little use of IT in students' portfolios. This has been

recognised by the college and additional time on the students' timetables has been allocated to enable them to use the resource-based learning centre. Retention rates for modern apprentices are poor. A co-ordinator is working with employers and trainees to improve retention. Achievement by trainees of their individual learning goals is poor. In 1998/99, 20% of the advanced modern apprentices completed their individual framework and 25%, in 1999/2000. However, 75% of the foundation modern apprentices achieved the framework in 1999/2000. On other work-based programmes 30% of trainees completed in 1999/2000 and 25% completed in 2000/01.

A sample of retention and pass rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NVQ hair	2	No. of starts	52	30	16
		% retention	50	88	77
		% pass rate	88	69	90
NVQ beauty	2	No. of starts	42	52	16
		% retention	71	75	77
		% pass rate	79	81	90
Diploma in holistic therapy	3	No. of starts	13	16	13
		% retention	85	100	77
		% pass rate	73	75	100
NVQ beauty	3	No. of starts	9	11	*
		% retention	88	50	*
		% pass rate	29	100	*

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

* data not available

Quality of education and training

100. The college-based students participate in a broad vocational enrichment programme. Hairdressing students learn manicure, pedicure and nail art techniques; beauty students study hair care and long hair styling. The hairdressing students can take barbering and ear piercing along with their main qualification. The beauty students can study acrylic and gel nail

extension, nail art, bronzing and Indian head massage. This broader range of skills will enhance the students' employment opportunities.

101. When students begin their programme of study, they receive a three-day induction programme. They are able to have immediate practical experience, which helps to motivate them and stimulate their interest. Their success is celebrated by a certificate of achievement. Adult students have an introduction to the Internet. Outside speakers from national companies give practical demonstrations which help to inspire and raise the aspirations of the students.

102. There is much good teaching on beauty and holistic programmes. Schemes of work and lesson plans follow a common framework. Students' achievements are recorded and progress is monitored regularly. There are standard forms for action planning which are used during tutorial sessions. Teachers express enthusiasm for the subject and successfully engage students in discussion. Some lessons are uninspiring. Teachers have clear aims and objectives, but they are insufficiently demanding to maintain students' interest. In some practical lessons, there are not enough clients for the students to work on. For the whole of the lesson they have to practice on each other or work on a practice block.

103. Practical rooms do not reflect commercial standards. Equipment is dated and some needs replacing. Theory rooms are sometimes too small for the number of students they have to accommodate. The support tutor has difficulty walking between the desks to assist individual students.

104. There is no formal on-the-job training for modern apprentices. Some training happens as part of the normal working day. There is not an identified time in the week dedicated for a training session at the work place. It is not planned formally to match the off-the-job training sessions at college. The college's workplace co-ordinator carries out assessment at the work place during the year. Every eight weeks, or sometimes more frequently, trainees receive effective reviews, which involve the employer. The trainees' individual learning plan is reviewed and used as a working document for action planning and progress review.

Leadership and management

105. Since the appointment last year of a new programme manager, several new procedures have been introduced. Students' attendance is monitored each morning and afternoon. This has resulted in improved attendance in most classes. Communication between the staff is good. Meetings are held each month, for negotiating, setting and monitoring retention and pass rate targets. The college work-based co-ordinator is particularly effective at ensuring that there are good links between on-the-job and off-the-job training for work-based trainees.

Child, health, social care and counselling

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

Strengths

- well-managed courses
- purposeful and productive external links
- effective promotion of equal opportunities
- much good teaching
- effective individual support for students
- good pass rates on most courses.

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on most level 3 courses
- missed opportunities to develop and assess key skills in lessons.

Scope of provision

106. The college offers a range of full-time and part-time provision in child, health, social care and counselling. Courses are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced level, both during the day and in the evening. The awards offered include GNVQs, NVQs in early years care and education, National Open College Network (NOCN) units of accreditation and Business Technology Education Council (BTEC) and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) certificate and diploma courses. Most of the full-time courses are offered at the Horwich and Manchester Road centres, and part-time provision is offered in 15 centres located throughout the Bolton, Horwich and Farnworth areas. There are currently 195 students aged 16 to 18 and 61 adults on full-time college courses. Of the 712 part-time students, all are aged over 19. The inspection covered full-time courses and a sample of part-time courses across six of the college centres.

Achievement and standards

107. Pass rates on most courses are good. Much of the college data on students' achievements for 2000/01 for health studies courses were unreliable. Inspectors were able to make judgements on only a small sample of students' achievements for that year. Pass and retention rates of students aged over 19 on level 1 and level 2 counselling courses were at, or above, national averages between 1998/99 and 1999/2000. At advanced level, the pass rates have consistently been well above national averages for three years, but the retention rate is poor. Standards of attainment were satisfactory or better. In lessons and in written work,

most students demonstrated the ability to relate theory to counselling practices at an appropriate level for their course. Students on the level 1 course were able to give good examples of the effect of directive counselling on clients. They were also able to relate the principles of non-directive counselling to counselling situations.

108. The pass rates of full-time students aged 16 to 18 on childcare courses are excellent. Since 1998, all of the students on full-time CACHE certificate and diploma courses who finished their courses have achieved their awards. On the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing course, pass rates improved significantly from 60% in 1998/99, to 92% during 1999/2000. The retention rate for full-time students on the CACHE certificate course were above the national average in 1999/2000. However, the retention rates for students on the CACHE diploma in nursery nursing and the BTEC national diploma in nursery nursing courses are poor. Only 61% of those enrolled completed the CACHE course in 1999/2000. Part-time adult students on NVQ early years courses in 2000/01 completed their portfolios and practical assessments within normal timescales, but poor resources for internal verification in the Community Education Service meant that students received their awards late. This issue has now been addressed.

109. Standards of attainment in childcare lessons are good. Advanced-level, full-time students aged 16 to 18, for example, demonstrated the ability to research, collate and present complex information orally, in note and diagrammatic form, on the transmission of nerve impulses, when they made small group presentations on the results of a chosen project on nervous disorders.

110. The pass rates of students aged over 19 on full-time and part-time access to health and social care courses are good at both level 2 and level 3. The retention rate of students on the level 2 course is excellent, but at level 3, retention rates are poor. Pass rates of students aged 16 to 18 on the GNVQ foundation in health and social care course were poor in 1999 and 2000. However, the introduction of in-class learning support has contributed to a significant improvement in pass rates in 2000/01 to 92%. The retention rates for foundation and intermediate-level GNVQ students have been consistently good since 1998. In lessons, written work and in the workplace, GNVQ students demonstrate the ability to link theory to workplace practices. One foundation-level student was able to relate to the children in a crèche on the first day of work experience using the skills learned in college. Students make good progress to FE or HE, professional training or employment.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GNVQ foundation health and social care	1	No. of starts	20	15	*
		% retention	84	80	*
		% pass rate	56	75	*
NOCN counselling	1	No. of starts	120	**	*
		% retention	98	**	*
		% pass rate	91	**	*
NOCN counselling	2	No. of starts	31	30	*
		% retention	90	93	*
		% pass rate	93	82	*
NOCN access to health and social care	2	No. of starts	36	16	*
		% retention	92	100	*
		% pass rate	94	94	*
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	No. of starts	24	21	*
		% retention	92	75	*
		% pass rate	77	87	*
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	No. of starts	14	14	*
		% retention	79	86	*
		% pass rate	100	100	*
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	No. of starts	28	33	*
		% retention	86	61	*
		% pass rate	100	100	*

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
NOCN access to health and social care	3	No. of starts	151	113	*
		% retention	79	72	*
		% pass rate	88	85	*

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

* data unreliable

** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

111. Most teaching was good. In the best lessons, well-qualified and experienced teachers used the experience of students to develop their understanding and relate theory to work practices. In a GNVQ foundation health and social care lesson on discrimination, the students experienced both positive and unfair discrimination through taking part in a word game in which the rules advantaged one group. Those unfairly discriminated against were quick to point this out. At the end of the lesson, all the students were very clear about positive and unfair discrimination and what it felt like to experience it. Work experience is well integrated with care programmes. Assessment activities are appropriately varied, fair and spread evenly throughout the year. Carefully designed assignments link college and workplace learning. The development of students' key skills is done through extra assignments rather than in lessons, and this increases the workload of students.

112. Support for students is good. Learning needs identified in initial assessment are met through in-class and additional support sessions. Language and basic skills support is available in the college centres. All students have regular tutorials to monitor and record their progress. Specialised support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. Students speak very highly of the support they receive from their tutors. Childcare facilities are offered at many centres.

113. The majority of classrooms used for childcare and health studies are adequate, although a few are too small, particularly those at Manchester Road. IT equipment at the Horwich centre is unreliable.

114. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively in all lessons. Students from a variety of different cultural heritages and learners with difficulties and/or disabilities work well together. Students interviewed had a good understanding of their own rights and responsibilities and those of clients in care.

Leadership and management

115. Counselling, health studies and childcare provision is organised in three separate departments within the same faculty. Communications are good. The merger has been well

managed with teachers from all centres meeting regularly and extending their experiences of teaching to include college and community-based courses. Staff regularly review their courses and the progress they are making against targets. They share decision making and good practice. Managers have set a clear agenda to raise standards. Course teams set targets to improve retention and pass rates based on historical data and an assessment of new student groups.

116. Courses are well managed. Documentation is detailed and well organised. An extensive range of external links provides varied opportunities for students to experience work in care and counselling settings. Improvements made to courses as a result of regular course reviews, include revising work experience arrangements and agreeing the common base knowledge for NVQ level 3 courses to be taught in 15 centres. Self-assessment was thorough and accurate. It involved all staff and some students.

English and social sciences

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

Strengths

- good pass rates on access to HE programme in 2001
- high standard of students' work
- much good teaching
- thorough and constructive marking of students' work
- good range of provision for adults
- good support for students.

Weaknesses

- poor GCE A-level results in 2001
- poor GCSE psychology results
- little use of ICT in English provision
- no key skills provision within many programmes
- little sharing of good practice.

Scope of provision

117. The college offers a good range of provision which meets the needs and interests of adult students and, to a lesser extent, students aged 16 to 18. Students can join most courses on either a part-time or full-time basis, depending on their total hours of study. GCSE and GCE AS-level courses in English, psychology and sociology are offered in the day, the evening, and through open learning. GCE A levels in these subjects were offered by the college until the end of the last academic year, when they were discontinued. Access to HE programmes are offered in humanities and social studies, community studies, health and social studies, and humanities. There is a wide range of options within these programmes to allow students considerable scope to follow their interests. A range of accredited courses at a lower level provide good opportunities for those who are not yet ready to embark on an access to HE programme. The GCSE, GCE AS-level and access programmes are offered at a number of community centres in the area as well as at the college's main site. This has helped the college to widen participation by attracting students who might be reluctant to attend college-based courses. There are just over 1,000 students enrolled on English and social science courses, and of these 85% are aged over 19.

Achievement and standards

118. Retention rates in GCSE and access to HE courses are close to the national average. Pass rates on the access courses are well above the national average. Retention rates in GCE A-level English and psychology were poor in 2001, as were the pass rates in all humanities GCE A-level subjects. GCSE pass rates were below the national average in 2001, with an exceptionally poor pass rate in psychology.

119. The standard of current students' work is high in all subjects. Students approach written tasks with care and application. They generally organise and present their work well, and demonstrate a good understanding of the subject matter. Most students have good note taking and essay writing skills, and their standards of written English are high. In most lessons, students work well both individually and in groups, and make thoughtful and well-expressed contributions to class discussion. Attendance and punctuality are good.

A sample of retention and pass rates in English and social sciences, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
GCSE sociology	2	No. of starts	36	15	*
		% retention	53	47	*
		% pass rate	58	43	*
GCSE English	2	No. of starts	154	110	*
		% retention	69	65	*
		% pass rate	53	49	*
GCSE psychology	2	No. of starts	41	27	47
		% retention	54	48	63
		% pass rate	36	42	3
Access to humanities and social sciences	3	No. of starts	40	12	21
		% retention	78	58	71
		% pass rate	58	71	93

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

120. Courses are well planned, schemes of work are detailed and appropriate and lessons are carefully prepared. All teaching is satisfactory or better. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subjects. They make effective use of a range of methods to involve students in learning and to sustain their interest. In the best lessons, they keep the work going at a good pace and make sure it is demanding enough to help students to make rapid progress in their learning. In one well-managed GCSE English lesson, students undertook a number of tasks individually, in pairs and in small groups and quickly developed a good understanding of the techniques of persuasive speech and writing. Teachers make extensive and effective use of relevant and helpful handout materials.

121. All the teachers in the curriculum area are graduates in appropriate subjects, and all have teaching qualifications. Relationships between teachers and students are professional, friendly and relaxed. Students speak highly of the help and support they receive from their teachers in lessons or tutorials or in their own time. The comprehensive induction programmes enable students to settle quickly into the college and their courses. All full-time and some part-time students have tutorials built into their programmes. A variety of arrangements ensure that other part-time students receive individual support from their subject teachers as required. Students have regular reviews of their progress during which action plans are agreed. Good support, either provided centrally or by subject teachers, is available to students with basic skills needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also receive good support.

122. Teachers mark students' work carefully and accurately, and provide written comments to help them improve their performance. The moderation or verification of students' coursework is thorough and meets the requirements of the awarding bodies.

123. At the last inspection, library resources to support English and social sciences were judged to be inadequate. Since then, the college has purchased additional resources and the book collection is now sufficiently broad and up to date. Although some use is made of ICT, including the Internet, to enrich the teaching of social sciences, its use to support English is as yet rare, apart from students being encouraged to word process some of their coursework. Although some of the access to HE programmes include good key skills provision, none of the other courses offer the students any opportunity to develop and gain a qualification in key skills. Classroom accommodation is adequate.

Leadership and management

124. The college has recently created a new humanities programme area bringing together staff and courses that previously belonged to two different organisations under a newly appointed programme leader. Significant improvements have already taken place to ensure that a coherent offer is made to prospective students who now have an enhanced range of opportunities, facilities and resources available to them as a result of the merger. There are plans to further rationalise and integrate provision before the next academic year.

125. Nearly all the teachers are full time or on fractional contracts. Meetings are not well attended by those on fractional or part-time contracts. Self-assessment reports and action plans are completed at course level. They identify many of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and there is evidence of improvements which have been made as a result. Targets for retention and pass rates are set and reviewed. There is little systematic sharing of good practice within the curriculum area, although a scheme for teachers to observe each other has recently been introduced.

Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

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

Strengths

- high retention and pass rates
- good teaching
- significant improvements in students' confidence
- effective individual learning plans
- good range of provision
- effective and flexible arrangements for learner support.

Weaknesses

- weak assessment of students' learning goals
- insufficient target setting.

Scope of provision

126. The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, sensory impairments or mental health difficulties. All full-time and most part-time courses lead to a qualification at entry level or level 1. There are currently 708 enrolments at 13 centres. Full-time student numbers have increased by 16% since 1999/2000 and full-time students aged 16 to 18 have increased by 32% in the same period.

Achievement and standards

127. Retention rates are good except on courses for students with mental health problems where the low rate reflects the medical and health problems of the students. On courses leading to qualifications, pass rates are well above national averages for entry-level and level 1 courses. In 2000/01, there were 100% retention and pass rates on the full-time work preparation skills entry-level course and the foundation access award entry-level course for students aged 16 to 18. There were 100% pass rates on the full-time independent living skills entry-level course and the full-time vocational access certificate level 1. Much of the provision for students with mental health problems does not lead to a qualification, and the success of students is judged by the confidence they gain and the progress they make in remaining in learning. In 2000/01, 190 students progressed to other courses.

128. The standards of attainment observed in lessons and in the students' work files for students with learning difficulties and sensory impairments are satisfactory or better. Attendance on all courses is excellent and in the majority of lessons, all students were punctual. The majority of young people on entry-level programmes progress to level 1 and there is good progression to other college courses for students from all courses in this area.

129. Students with learning difficulties on practical catering courses, retail and administration have the opportunity to train in realistic work environments and gain work-related skills. Students on most programmes develop personal and learning skills that are used as evidence for achieving qualifications. For students with poor literacy skills, the requirement of written evidence for qualifications means that they spend time on writing tasks that they do not understand.

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

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
Work preparation skills	entry	No. of starts	**	**	6
		% retention	**	**	100
		% pass rate	**	**	100
Independent living skills	entry	No. of starts	**	**	24
		% retention	**	**	79
		% pass rate	**	**	100
FE ASDAN award	entry	No. of starts	*	**	6
		% retention	*	**	100
		% pass rate	*	**	100
Vocational access certificate	1	No. of starts	**	12	11
		% retention	**	92	91
		% pass rate	**	91	100

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

* data unreliable

** data unavailable

Quality of education and training

130. In all lessons there were schemes of work and lesson plans, although in most lessons they were brief and concentrated on teaching methods only. In the best lessons, the range of teaching methods used and the tutors' enthusiasm built up students' confidence in learning. Students spoke highly of the gains in confidence they had made which enabled them to progress to further courses. Where tutors did not use methods which adapted the work to meet the needs of students with differing abilities, students became inattentive and occasionally hindered the progress of other students with their misbehaviour. Teaching is particularly good on the access to FE course for deaf students. In English communication, tutors who are themselves deaf, encourage students to use a range of communication methods. They illustrate through sign language the sound of difficult punctuation or words that the students do not understand. Young deaf students make progress in learning through well-paced lively activities. There is excellent communicator support for deaf students, both in separate specialist provision and in mainstream programmes. There is good teaching on catering courses for students with learning difficulties where they prepare and serve food for other students on a commercial basis in a college dining room. They work purposefully to tight schedules and understand the requirements of a real working kitchen environment. They are well supported and their learning and progress are managed sensitively. Practical sessions are followed by a structured lesson in which the success of the practical activity is reviewed and students' learning consolidated.

131. Students benefit from the realistic work experience in a college shop and a practice training office that offers a service to staff and students. They also have good opportunities for work experience organised for them. Young students on all foundation pre-vocational courses are well prepared in the skills needed to progress to vocational and work-related courses. Teachers keep detailed records of the progress students make towards achieving their qualifications.

132. Teachers are well qualified in their specialist subject and many have additional qualifications in learner support. Learning materials were often dull and uninspiring, and there was too much emphasis on the use of worksheets. In a few lessons, the handouts were too difficult for students with literacy or numeracy difficulties to understand. An independent living skills lesson for students with learning difficulties dealt with subject matter which was too theoretical, and neither the activities nor the materials engaged the students' interest. It had little relevance to their lives.

133. There are good arrangements with schools and other external agencies to assess students so that they are placed on the correct programme. All students have detailed individual learning plans that are reviewed with the students and, where appropriate, their guardian at least termly.

134. Students appreciate the responsive and flexible arrangements for learning support which are available to them. However, in a few lessons, the support for students with learning difficulties is not effective in assisting their learning. Students with learning

difficulties or mental health problems also agree specific long-term and short-term learning goals. These are often specific to improvements in the student's behaviour to aid his/her learning progress. However, whilst there is a procedure in place for frequent assessment of students' progress towards these learning goals, it is often superficial and does not help them to understand what they need to do to improve.

135. The majority of classrooms and IT rooms used by the students at Manchester Road are dingy and have only barely adequate resources. At Clarence Street centre, most rooms are better decorated and better equipped. There is a comfortable student common room and dining room. The catering kitchen is too small for the number of students. One classroom is totally unsuitable and is too small for a group of eight students. In this case, the poor accommodation and resources hindered students' learning. The students could not see the white board and the flip chart used instead was unsuitable.

136. Courses for students with mental health difficulties are held in 13 community centres, day centres and hospitals. The provision is developed in response to requests from a variety of external agencies and it continues to expand. Two successful externally funded projects have been nationally recognised as good practice and have been partially built in to the college's provision. There is a productive relationship with Bolton employment support team that gives work placement opportunities to students with learning difficulties.

Leadership and management

137. Staff are not yet involved in developing the strategic direction for this curriculum area. There are good course reviews in relation to the quality and range of the provision and service to students, but they do not set appropriate performance targets and there is no evidence of staff making effective use of college data. Equality of opportunity is promoted actively throughout the provision and in the policy of keeping a number of guaranteed places on mainstream programmes for students progressing from separate specialist provision. In 2000/01, this amounted to 190 enrolments.

Basic skills and ESOL

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

Strengths

- much good teaching
- high attendance rates in community classes
- good resources in the community
- thorough and systematic approach to initial assessment
- good range of provision.

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates for accredited courses
- weak management of cross-college basic skills
- insufficient monitoring of provision.

Scope of provision

138. In basic skills and ESOL, there is a good range of part-time provision catering for nearly 1,300 adults and some separate specialist provision for 64 full-time students aged 16 to 18. There is a programme for pupils aged 14 to 16 who have been excluded from local secondary schools for a variety of reasons. Provision is based at three main centres and eight other smaller centres. The family learning programme, which includes literacy, numeracy and 'Keeping up with the Children', is available at 15 local schools. ESOL is available at 21 sites in the locality, ranging from college centres, schools, community centres and health centres. Many ESOL courses are vocational, such as sewing and IT, using skills as the basis for language learning. At the time of inspection, 204 asylum seekers attended ESOL classes, many at the Manchester Road centre. More than 150 were on a waiting list.

139. In both subject areas, provision is offered from pre-entry level to level 2. Vocationally linked language learning offers opportunities for students to progress to courses such as childcare and to take nationally recognised qualifications.

140. Apart from the separate specialist provision, there is basic skills and language support for students on vocational and academic programmes. This is organised through the college's student services by the student support co-ordinator.

Achievement and standards

141. The achievement of externally accredited qualifications is below the national average for most students. Pass rates on the City and Guilds numeracy stage 3 course have improved, but remain 3% below the national average. All other accredited programmes continue to have pass rates well below the national average.

142. For courses where external accreditation is not appropriate, the college has organised the curriculum at levels that are understood by all staff and students, allowing progression through the levels. Data to evaluate success on these programmes are unreliable, affected in part by the different criteria used for collection of data which applied in the pre-merger institutions.

143. Students clearly gain confidence and make good progress to acquire the basic skills they need for their personal development. All students have initial assessment and teachers monitor their progress towards achieving their learning goals through regular reviews. Students are encouraged to progress to higher levels, as appropriate. Students' progress is recorded, although it may not always lead to a qualification.

A sample of retention and pass rates in basic skills and ESOL, 1999 to 2001

Qualification	Level	Completion year:	1999	2000	2001
City and Guilds wordpower foundation	entry	No. of starts	38	27	33
		% retention	100	93	84
		% pass rate	35	100	44
City and Guilds numberpower foundation	entry	No. of starts	44	30	33
		% retention	100	93	81
		% pass rate	33	100	19
ESOL basic	entry	No. of starts	13	63	*
		% retention	58	97	*
		% pass rate	14	33	*
City and Guilds numeracy stage 3	2	No. of starts	62	64	44
		% retention	66	75	74
		% pass rate	8	46	59

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

* data unreliable

Quality of education and training

144. Most teaching is good and in some lessons it is outstanding. The better lessons are well prepared. Teachers have clear objectives which they explain to students. Teachers encourage students to record what they have learned. In ESOL lessons, students practise the skills of listening and speaking, and teachers correct pronunciation. In good lessons, teachers are enthusiastic, use games or other practical activities, and encourage students to practise their learning in small groups. In one lesson, two computers were used to set up a competition between groups of students who had to think what missing words in sentences might be. The computer only revealed the word when it was spelt correctly. Students enjoyed learning and had fun. The attendance in such lessons was high. In some poorer lessons, students were often bored, especially when they were required to work individually for long periods on writing. Teachers do not allow enough time for students to practise oral skills. Attendance in such lessons was poor.

145. At community centres the resources are excellent. The group sizes are smaller than at the Manchester Road centre. All major centres have their own basic skills and ESOL resource rooms and these are well stocked. The community provision was successfully reassessed for the Basic Skills Agency quality mark in July 2001. Recommended class size by the agency is fewer than 10 and during the inspection the average attendance in classes with less than 10 students on the register was over 90%.

146. Staff are well qualified for the subjects they teach and all those teaching a substantial number of hours have teaching qualifications, although not necessarily in basic skills.

147. The curriculum area has been very successful in developing partnerships with the local schools and the borough council. Additional funding has been secured to provide facilities for adults to learn near to where they live. The family learning programme has successfully involved 245 adults at one of the centres between March 2000 and April 2001. Students have access to excellent resources. A van and driver takes laptop computers to different sites and provides technical support when required. Crèche facilities have enabled many mothers with young children to participate in learning, and students speak highly of the provision and the opportunities this has provided. Students also welcome the opportunities they have to progress to other courses in the college.

148. Basic skills support is available to students on vocational and academic programmes and this is organised through the head of learning support. All full-time and substantive part-time students have been assessed for their learning support needs and about 300 have been identified as needing basic skills support. Support is available either in vocational lessons or to students in separate small groups. Community centres have their own systems for student support and, as yet, there is no co-ordination at college level. It is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of this provision across the college, although low pass rate figures at levels 1

and 2 indicate the need for this to be done. Although students have individual learning plans and goals are set, there is no effective monitoring of whether students achieve their goals.

Leadership and management

149. In this curriculum area, new managers have only recently been appointed. Procedures are being implemented to improve retention and pass rates and the recording of students' progress. Staff have been fully involved in the development of self-assessment of this curriculum area. The review has led to changes in provision, such as the introduction of shorter courses, spoken language classes and English and mathematics workshops. Staff development is available to all full-time staff, less so to part-time staff. The centre has made a good start on introducing the new core curriculum, both for ESOL and basic skills, and appropriate staff development has been made available.

150. There is a lack of a college-wide basic skills strategy and there are insufficient links between the separate specialist provision and basic skills support for vocational and academic students. Some progress has been made in identifying basic skills needs across the college, but much more remains to be done.

Part D: College data
Table 1: Enrolments by level of study and age 2000/01

Level	16–18 %	19+ %
1	36.2	32.5
2	31.4	22
3	21.5	29.2
4/5	0.2	1.0
Other	10.7	15.3
Total	100	100

Source: Provided by the college in 2001.

Table 2: Enrolments by curriculum area and age 2000/01

Curriculum area	16–18 No.	19+ No.	Total Enrolments %
Science	1,600	2,342	19
Agriculture	11	2	0
Construction	464	523	5
Engineering	308	674	5
Business	287	2,311	13
Hotel and catering	274	337	3
Health and community care	489	2,014	12
Art and design	56	392	2
Humanities	1,556	4,816	31
Basic education	443	1,599	10
Total	5,488	15,010	100

Source: Provided by the college in 2001.

Table 3: Retention and achievement

Level (Long Courses)	Retention and pass rate	Completion year					
		16–18			19+		
		1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 00	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	1999/ 00
1	Starters excluding transfers	836	785	804	2,823	2,537	3,024
	Retention rate (%)	78	80	82	75	73	78
	National average (%)	81	80	80	80	78	79
	Pass rate (%)	54	43	57	59	60	65
	National average (%)	59	62	66	62	63	69
2	Starters excluding transfers	1,628	1,388	1,426	2,565	2,310	3,358
	Retention rate (%)	66	69	73	71	73	71
	National average (%)	76	76	77	79	78	78
	Pass rate (%)	55	52	64	60	60	59
	National average (%)	63	67	68	66	65	68
3	Starters excluding transfers	754	707	620	2,551	2,865	3,405
	Retention rate (%)	68	63	72	76	75	70
	National average (%)	77	77	77	79	79	79
	Pass rate (%)	55	51	71	64	67	67
	National average (%)	71	72	73	64	65	69
4/5	Starters excluding transfers	21	24	14	259	247	179
	Retention rate (%)	76	58	64	69	69	81
	National average (%)	83	84	80	84	84	81
	Pass rate (%)	81	71	33	65	72	61
	National average (%)	64	65	70	58	61	60

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

Sources of information:

- 1. National averages: Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates in Further Education Colleges in England, The Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*
- 2. College rates for 1997/98–1998/99: Benchmarking Data (1997/98) to (1999/2000): Retention and Achievement Rates, produced by the Further Education Funding Council, September 2000.*
- 3. College rates for (1997/98) to (1998/99): provided by the college in spring 2001.*

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

Courses	Teaching judged to be:			No of sessions observed
	Good or better %	Satisfactory %	Less than satisfactory %	
Level 3 (advanced)	61	32	7	57
Level 2 (intermediate)	46	40	14	71
Level 1 (foundation)	64	29	7	28
Other sessions	60	40	0	37
Totals	57	35	8	193