

Barnfield College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has a legal duty to make sure further education in England is properly assessed. The FEFC's inspectorate inspects and reports on each college of further education according to a four-year cycle. It also inspects other further education provision funded by the FEFC. In fulfilling its work programme, the inspectorate assesses and reports nationally on the curriculum, disseminates good practice and advises the FEFC's quality assessment committee.

College inspections are carried out in accordance with the framework and guidelines described in Council Circulars 97/12, 97/13 and 97/22. Inspections seek to validate the data and judgements provided by colleges in self-assessment reports. They involve full-time inspectors and registered part-time inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work they inspect. A member of the Council's audit service works with inspectors in assessing aspects of governance and management. All colleges are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

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Grade Descriptors

Inspectors assess the strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of provision they inspect. Their assessments are set out in the report. They use a five-point scale to summarise the balance between strengths and weaknesses.

The descriptors for the grades are:

- grade 1 – outstanding provision which has many strengths and few weaknesses
- grade 2 – good provision in which the strengths clearly outweigh the weaknesses
- grade 3 – satisfactory provision with strengths but also some weaknesses
- grade 4 – less than satisfactory provision in which the weaknesses clearly outweigh the strengths
- grade 5 – poor provision which has few strengths and many weaknesses.

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	–

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not shown.

Summary

Barnfield College

Eastern Region

Inspected March 1999

Barnfield College is a large general further education college with sites in Luton and Bedford. The college has a successful tradition of widening participation in education and recruits a high percentage of its students from disadvantaged areas. In preparation for inspection the college produced a clear and detailed self-assessment report. The process of self-assessment was well planned. The college's self-assessment process involved corporation members and all staff and is an integral part of its planning. The self-assessment report was subject to critical scrutiny by senior managers. Some of the weaknesses identified have been addressed since the report was written. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. The college offers significant provision in all of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Work in six FEFC programme areas was inspected and seven grades were awarded. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected.

Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in the college's estate. The college's accommodation is of a high standard and there is good access for students

to a range of specialist teaching and learning equipment. Progress is being made in addressing the inadequate access for students with restricted mobility to some areas. Students are well supported academically and have access to a good range of learning support services. Standards of teaching are high. The curriculum provision in hairdressing, beauty and sports therapy is outstanding. Vigorous action has been taken to improve quality assurance procedures since the last inspection. Governors take a full part in setting the strategic direction of the college and work closely with managers. The college has good financial management. The college has clear leadership and is well managed. Communications throughout the college are excellent. The college should improve: the take up of additional learning support for literacy and numeracy; the monitoring of action plans at course level; the reliability of its data on students; the ineffective year-on-year monitoring of achievements against targets by governors and managers; and retention rates on some courses.

The grades awarded as a result of the inspection are given below.

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Construction	2	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	1
Business	3	Quality assurance	2
Hospitality and catering	2	Governance	1
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	1	Management	2
Childcare	2		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Barnfield College is the largest of four colleges of further education in Bedfordshire and Luton. In 1997-98, the college enrolled a total of 27,700 students of whom 5,400 were under 18 and 4,400 were aged 18 to 24. The college operates on four sites in Luton, a fifth in Bedford and through 66 centres in the community throughout Bedfordshire. In February 1998, the college employed 184 full-time teachers and 249 full-time support staff. In addition, it employed 400 hourly paid staff in teaching and support areas.

2 The college serves a community characterised by continuing involvement in the manufacturing industry. Much of this is concentrated on the automobile industry, although manufacturing jobs are forecast to fall in number. Employment in distribution, hotels and service industries is expected to increase by approximately 6% by 2002. Unemployment has fallen dramatically in Bedfordshire and Luton from an average of 18% in 1997 to less than 5% at the end of 1998. There is considerable variation in levels of unemployment between wards with some still recording around 10% and three wards, Biscot, Dallow and Luton South, together accounting for 33% of Luton's unemployed. The population of Bedfordshire and Luton was 548,300 in 1996 and is continuing to grow. The largest growth is predicted in Luton wards which have a high minority ethnic population and higher than national average levels of unemployment. Minority ethnic groups represent over 20% of the residents of Luton and the figure rises to 33% amongst the 16 to 30 age group.

3 The college draws its students from Luton and the nearby rural areas of south Bedfordshire and north Hertfordshire. In some specialist curriculum fields such as construction, engineering and sports provision, the college draws learners from a much wider area. Barnfield College, in partnership with other local colleges and agencies, has taken a leading role

in the government initiative for widening participation and has begun to focus recruitment and retention strategies on those areas with low levels of prior participation and learning. The college recruits over a fifth of its students from the five Luton wards showing the highest levels of deprivation and lowest levels of educational attainment at 16. A quarter of students who declare a disability or who are eligible for total fee remission are concentrated in these wards. Since its previous inspection in 1994, the college has acquired new premises and considerably expanded its provision in engineering, electronics, motor vehicle engineering, construction and computing. These programmes attract large numbers of white males from areas with a tradition of low levels of participation in learning.

4 The University of Luton is a member of the Bedfordshire and Luton Colleges Federation, which supports the collaborative planning of further and higher education provision. There is a tertiary system within the Borough of Luton and the only remaining sixth form is at the nearby Cardinal Newman RC High School. In 1994, following its last inspection, the college decided to concentrate on vocational courses and withdrew all full-time general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) provision. A wide choice of full-time GCE A levels is offered by the nearby Luton Sixth Form College. The proportion of young people staying on in full-time education in Luton has risen to 65% but is still lower than the national average. The percentage of young people in Luton who obtain five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades C or above is 34% compared with 44% for Bedfordshire and a national average of 46%.

5 The college is managed by a principalship comprising the chief executive and two vice-principals with responsibility for finance and resources, and quality and curriculum, respectively. The senior management team comprises the principalship together with four site principals and an assistant principal with

Context

responsibility for self-financing work and college administration. There are 17 programme area leaders with responsibility for curriculum development and delivery. Six business support managers are responsible for the development of whole college functions such as estates, student support and marketing.

6 The college's mission makes a commitment to open access for all learners within a community that has areas of low achievement at GCSE, higher than national average levels of deprivation, and a cultural diversity which demands sensitivity and innovation in meeting learner needs. The college has conducted an inclusive learning audit and has developed an inclusive learning action plan. Through its mission the college seeks to:

- ensure students are well prepared for employment
- provide exceptional levels of service to customers
- ensure students achieve primary learning goals
- manage resources cost-effectively
- create an environment where students can manage their own learning.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 22 March 1999. The inspection team had previously reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors were unable to use data on students' achievements produced by the FEFC and based on returns of the college's individualised student record (ISR). The college acknowledged that the ISR returns for 1996 and 1997 contained a large number of inaccuracies. Accurate ISR data were not available to inform the inspection. The college submitted data on students' achievements from internal records for 1996, 1997 and 1998 which were checked and agreed

before the inspection against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. These data were found to be largely accurate and were used as the basis for inspectors' judgements on students' achievements in each of the curriculum areas. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before its inspection. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 56 working days. They observed 87 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 87 lessons inspected, 74% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% less than satisfactory compared with national averages for 1997-98 of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	2	9	2	0	0	13
NVQ	10	15	4	1	0	30
Other vocational	9	19	13	3	0	44
Total (No.)	21	43	19	4	0	87
Total (%)	24	50	22	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The average level of attendance was 78%. Attendance rates were at or above national averages in most areas inspected but in construction were well below national averages.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Barnfield College	9.5	78
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 2

10 Fourteen lessons were observed covering the main areas of construction and building services. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the self-assessment report, although some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- good teaching and management of learning
- high standards of students' work
- good retention and pass rates on the majority of courses
- well-resourced and well-managed practical work areas
- good guidance and support to students

Weaknesses

- information technology (IT) skills not taken up in part-time national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses
- poor monitoring and take up of additional learning support
- new course planning and review processes not yet established

11 Inspectors agreed that there is a diverse range of full-time and part-time courses at all levels. Part-time provision is well matched to the needs of local industry with which there are well-established links. There are short courses for industry and 'taster' courses for local schools. Opportunities are provided for disaffected pupils to attend craft courses. The construction curriculum is largely determined by leading industrial bodies and all awards lead to nationally-recognised vocational qualifications. The management team communicates effectively with staff. New course planning and review procedures have yet to be firmly established, an

issue not recognised in the self-assessment report.

12 The management of learning is good and is a strong feature. Clear lesson plans and comprehensive schemes of work are shared with students. An appropriate range of teaching and learning methods is used. Suitable open learning material is used extensively and enables students to join courses at different times during the year. Inspectors agreed that this aspect of teaching and learning is a strength, as recognised in the college's self-assessment report. Teachers use a range of models, manufacturers' brochures and other visual aids to stimulate students' interest. These, and references to industrial practice, ensure that the topics taught are relevant. Furthermore, teachers frequently take account of students' industrial experiences when discussing construction work. There is a regular review of students' progress accompanied by effective action-planning for future learning. Students are given good guidance and support. However, many students who need additional learning support do not take up the available opportunities in the college. This weakness is identified in the college self-assessment report, but has not yet been addressed. Key skills are integrated with most courses but few part-time students take advantage of provision for developing IT skills. This weakness was not recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

13 Most students produce work of a high standard and good examples were noted in painting and decorating, plastering, and on technician courses. Many students develop good skills in drawing in courses such as interior design. In practical lessons, craft students work safely, at a good pace and produce work to industrial standards. The self-assessment report did not fully recognise the high quality of students' work, although there was acknowledgement of the annual prize awards for students' work and the success of individual

Curriculum Areas

students in regional competitions. Some general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) and NVQ portfolios are of a high standard.

Retention rates are good on most courses and some are very good. Retention rates on NVQ level 2 and 3 courses and GNVQ precursors have been above 80% during the last three years. On NVQ level 1 courses, retention rates have improved by 15% from an already high rate between 1997 and 1998. Most courses have high pass rates and for NVQ courses at all levels these are between 10% and 20% better than national averages. Inspectors agreed with this key strength in the college's self-assessment.

14 Most teachers have extensive industrial experience. All have the necessary technical, teaching and vocational assessor qualifications. The college's library has an adequate range of

books and journals. Students have good access to IT equipment and software. An extensive amount of building reference data is stored electronically. There is a good range of tools and equipment of a similar standard to those used in industry. Some equipment is old but is well maintained and serviceable. Workshops and other practical work areas are spacious and well managed. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most workshop accommodation is of a high standard. However, one workshop lacks adequate storage for the large quantities of bricks in the workshop and this restricts working space. General purpose and specialist classrooms are of a good standard, comfortably furnished and adequately equipped.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in construction, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ craft courses	1	Expected completions	*	*	160
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	60
NVQ craft courses	2	Expected completions	*	*	233
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	72
NVQ craft courses	3	Expected completions	*	*	82
		Retention (%)	*	*	84
		Achievement (%)	*	*	72
GNVQ precursors	3	Expected completions	*	*	11
		Retention (%)	*	*	82
		Achievement (%)	*	*	89

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 The inspection concentrated on mechanical, fabrication and welding, electronic and automotive engineering courses. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors agreed with the college's key strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high standard of teaching
- well-managed and documented courses
- excellent specialist engineering equipment and resources
- good students' achievements
- good opportunities for progression
- well-established employer links

Weaknesses

- poor levels of retention on some courses
- low attendance in some classes
- lack of work experience opportunities for full-time students

16 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a comprehensive range of programmes in engineering which meets the needs of the local area. There are good opportunities for students to progress from foundation level courses to higher national programmes in automotive engineering. However, as the college identified in its self-assessment, progression from foundation level is low. The college has well-established links with local employers which include marketing events, students' award evenings and sponsorship deals. Teachers have developed relevant short course provision for industry. The curriculum is well managed. Programme team and course meetings are well documented. There are formal team meetings which include members of the governing body. Most course teams work effectively. There are

detailed course handbooks for most programmes which include assessment criteria. Course reviews include the setting of new targets for enrolment, retention and achievement.

17 Teaching was good or outstanding in the majority of lessons. Lessons are well structured and teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching and learning methods. A wide range of resources are employed to maintain students' interest and improve their learning. Some theory lessons take place in laboratories so that teachers can give practical demonstrations to illustrate theoretical points. For example, in a stimulating lesson on the removal and refitting of a McPherson strut from a front suspension system the students were given background information on the reasons for its removal and a health and safety briefing in the classroom. Students, working in pairs, then replicated the teacher's demonstration in the workshop. In a few lessons, teachers did not adequately check whether students were learning. For example, in a lesson on semiconductor materials each student was given a handout copied from a textbook, but no attempt was made to explain the main points and students were expected to ask questions only if they had problems in understanding the text. Teachers provide detailed feedback on students' assessments and record the progress students make in developing key skills. Students on part-time NVQ programmes are assessed in the workplace to ensure that they are able to demonstrate competences acquired at college. By contrast, approximately half of the full-time engineering students do not have work experience as part of their course. The college recognised this as a weakness in the self-assessment report and has set targets for improvement.

18 Industrial standard, up-to-date specialist equipment and well-maintained accommodation support teaching in all engineering disciplines. There are extensive IT resources and good use is made of computer-based learning materials. Many large items of equipment and materials

Curriculum Areas

have been donated through industrial sponsorship. The engineering section is spacious and includes large workshops, classrooms and laboratories. All facilities are well equipped. Recent additions include a machine workshop from a local training agency. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of specialist equipment is a significant strength. There is a well-resourced library with up-to-date bookstock including journals, CD-ROMs and several copies of texts most frequently used. Teachers are well qualified and have a good range of specialist skills. All have achieved or are working towards assessor awards. Teachers and students are well supported by technicians.

19 Over the past three years, retention and pass rates for most courses have been above the national averages. Retention on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) programmes and NVQ level 3 has been good at 80%. Retention on the Edexcel national and higher national programmes have been below the national averages. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Attendance was less than 40% in a few classes but the overall average for the observed sample was good at 82%. In their practical work students demonstrate appropriate levels of skill and knowledge, sometimes at a high level.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of achievement and retention rates in engineering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Vocational courses	1	Expected completions	*	*	202
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	86
BTEC first award	2	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	39
		Achievement (%)	*	*	60
NVQ	2	Expected completions	*	*	21
		Retention (%)	*	*	57
		Achievement (%)	*	*	67
Other vocational courses	2	Expected completions	*	*	51
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	80
NVQ	3	Expected completions	*	*	53
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	*	*	74
BTEC national awards	3	Expected completions	*	*	69
		Retention (%)	*	*	42
		Achievement (%)	*	*	69
BTEC higher national award	4	Expected completions	*	*	7
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
Other vocational courses	4	Expected completions	*	*	88
		Retention (%)	*	*	95
		Achievement (%)	*	*	30

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

20 The inspection covered GNVQ business at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Ten lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effectively-planned and managed courses
- thorough assessment procedures
- good teaching in the majority of lessons
- extensive key skills provision
- the high pass rate on GNVQ foundation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped links with employers
- declining pass rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced
- low retention rates on GNVQ foundation and advanced
- the inability of some students to manage their time and work effectively

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that business courses are effectively planned and managed. A range of vocational and professional courses is offered from foundation to advanced level, including GNVQ business at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and GNVQ business IT at intermediate level. Short courses in administration and office technology are offered up to level 3, and professional qualifications in accounting, marketing, and personnel are available.

22 Course documentation is thorough and well organised. There are coherent schemes of work and lesson plans. Assignments are well

designed and include the assessment of key skills. The best assignments link theory with current business practice. Assessment procedures are fair and consistent. Teachers' written comments on students' marked work are appropriate and constructive. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the teaching of key skills is thorough and appropriately related to programmes of study. There is a good level of additional support for literacy and numeracy on all courses. A computer learning system has recently been introduced to enable students to develop further their numeracy and IT skills. There are insufficient opportunities for many students to relate the direct experience of work to their own course. This restricts students' understanding of the link between theory and practice, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. The use of visiting speakers, external visits and work placements to increase students' experience of business practice is not well developed. There is a cross-college forum for formal discussion of the business curriculum, but the opportunity this provides for a co-ordinated approach to the development of the curriculum and to the sharing of good practice has not been fully exploited.

23 Good standards of teaching were observed in the majority of lessons. In the best lessons, a range of teaching methods was used to sustain students' interest, and to promote a better understanding of the subject. For example, students in a foundation business lesson were asked to prepare a short sales presentation for a product or company of their choice, and to make individual presentations to the rest of the group, using samples or handouts to illustrate their talk. Students spoke with confidence, and clearly enjoyed the activity. Presentations were video-recorded by the teacher for a future discussion on presentation techniques. In some lessons, where there was a range of ability levels in the class, teachers did not set work which was sufficiently demanding for all students. For example, in an advanced business

Curriculum Areas

lesson the teacher asked the students to take notes from overhead slides, a task which many students found tedious.

24 In the best lessons, students were motivated and contributed well to learning activities and discussions. Attendance rates were good on all programmes. Some assignments and portfolios of students' work showed good analytical skills, but others lacked depth and were poorly presented. A significant minority of students have not developed appropriate time management skills resulting in late submission of assignments. The pass rate on the GNVQ foundation in business has increased from 79% in 1996 to 93% in 1998, which is well above the national average, but the retention rate was below the national average in 1996 and 1997. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course has declined from 68% to 59% over the last two years and is

below the national average. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course has declined from 70% to 55% over the last three years, and is well below the national average. Retention on the advanced course has been erratic and in 1998 was poor. This is in line with a decline in the prior qualifications of students who enter the advanced course. The college acknowledges some weaknesses in the retention and achievements on GNVQ business at all levels.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students have access to an appropriate range of specialist resources. A computer suite contains up-to-date equipment and software, and access is provided to the internet. There is an adequate range of specialist books, case studies, handouts and other learning materials. Staff have appropriate qualifications and undertake regular professional development.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in business, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ foundation	1	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	65
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	*	41
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	59
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	*	*	60
		Retention (%)	*	*	55
		Achievement (%)	*	*	55

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering NVQ and GNVQ provision. They agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high standards of teaching
- outstanding pass rates for NVQ catering and hospitality at level 2
- good pass rates for NVQ catering and hospitality at level 1
- students' well-developed social, technical and teamworking skills
- appropriate range of courses

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on most courses
- unsatisfactory retention rates for NVQ reception and GNVQ courses
- poor pass rates for some courses
- lack of numeracy and IT lessons for craft catering students

27 There are clear and well-understood arrangements for the organisation and management of hospitality and catering courses. The programme area has regular minuted meetings. As the self-assessment report recognised there is a wide and appropriate range of courses that meets the needs of industry and students. Courses offered include full-time and part-time NVQs in professional cookery, pastry, food service and hotel reception, and GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level and the Hotel and Catering International Management Association certificate. In association with the University of Luton, a degree in hospitality management is available.

Short courses are offered on food hygiene and wine and spirits.

28 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the teaching of hospitality and catering is of a high standard. Programmes of learning are carefully planned. Teachers produce good schemes of work, although sometimes the objectives of lesson plans do not relate clearly to the learning activity. Most teachers use a range of effective teaching methods. Teachers provide good individual guidance and support to students and make effective use of the realistic work environments. In a lesson on the NVQ pastry course, the teacher successfully combined board work and discussion with students to establish the criteria for planning menus. In the coffee shop, NVQ level 1 students prepare and serve a wide range of dishes which enables them to extend their food production and service skills. The students' work in the coffee shop provides a good replication of the pressures and standards found in industry. In the kitchens, the variety of dishes prepared introduces students to both modern and traditional culinary practices, including some from ethnic cuisines. Students work well in teams in the realistic work environments. Most students' social and technical skills are good and this was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The operation of the restaurant, the restaurant kitchen and the coffee shop is not supported by the regular use of appropriate documentation such as job descriptions. Lessons in the key skills of numeracy and IT are not available for craft catering students.

29 Teachers hold appropriate professional qualifications and have relevant trade experience in the areas in which they teach. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that some teachers have been slow to achieve appropriate vocational assessor awards. Specialist accommodation and equipment for hospitality and catering courses is good and conforms to the standard found in industry.

Curriculum Areas

The design of the restaurant kitchen is poor. The layout of stoves and other pieces of major equipment adversely affects the flow of dishes to the service area. There is a good range of periodicals and books in the library. The collection of videos is particularly notable. Library staff have produced a helpful leaflet on the different services they can provide for hospitality and catering students.

30 Pass rates were outstanding in 1998 for the GNVQ advanced and the NVQ level 2 food preparation and cooking and serving food and drink. Results were good for the pastry cook certificate, NVQ level 1 catering and hospitality and for all short courses. Over the last two years, the pass rates for the wine and spirit certificate and the NVQ reception course have been poor, an issue not identified in the self-

assessment report. In 1998, the retention rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses were unsatisfactory. On most courses, retention rates have declined in the last two years. The fall in retention rates was recognised in the self-assessment report and appropriate action is being taken. Where destinations are known, most students progress to other courses in further or higher education or to employment. Students from the college are successful in catering competitions. In 1999, at the East Anglia Salon Culinare students won a number of gold, silver, bronze and merit awards. The hospitality and catering industry sponsors many prizes at the programme area's annual prize giving. In collaboration with a local charitable organisation the college organises a cookery competition for local schools.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hospitality and catering, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
East Midlands Further Education Council pastry cooks stage 1	1	Expected completions	*	*	21
		Retention (%)	*	*	71
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
NVQ catering and hospitality	1	Expected completions	*	*	64
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
Wine and Spirit Education Trust certificate	2	Expected completions	*	*	35
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	48
NVQ catering and hospitality (food preparation and cooking and food service)	2	Expected completions	*	*	71
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering	2	Expected completions	*	*	12
		Retention (%)	*	*	42
		Achievement (%)	*	*	60
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Expected completions	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	50
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 1

31 Inspectors observed 10 lessons and a tutorial covering hairdressing, beauty therapy and sports therapy. Inspectors agreed with the judgements identified in the self-assessment report. At the time of the inspection, many of the weaknesses identified by the college had been addressed.

Key strengths

- high standard of teaching
- consistently professional standard of students' practical skills
- high levels of retention and pass rates on all courses
- the integration of key skills with courses
- effective course management
- excellent specialist accommodation and equipment
- productive links with industry

Weaknesses

- declining achievements on NVQ level 1 and 2 hairdressing

32 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college offers a wide range of full-time and part-time courses to meet the needs of students and employers. The courses offered include NVQ level 1, 2 and 3 in hairdressing and beauty therapy. A good range of courses, for example, reflexology, aromatherapy and Indian head massage, is available in holistic therapy at level 3. An Afro-Caribbean hair course has helped widen participation in hairdressing and the provision for sports therapy has expanded. Courses are effectively managed by a cohesive and enthusiastic team of staff. There are regular minuted team meetings; action plans are

produced and carefully monitored. Course documentation is well maintained and there is regular review of the provision.

33 Teaching is of a high standard and is evaluated regularly. A wide range of teaching and learning activities is used to meet the needs of individual students and to extend their knowledge and practical skills. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students are able to attend college at times which are convenient to their specific needs. For example, part-time evening anatomy and physiology students are offered tutorials on a Saturday morning. Students attain professional standards in their practical work. In a hairdressing lesson, students who had achieved an NVQ level 1 were demonstrating skills well above this level by perming and colouring hair professionally and safely. In another outstanding lesson, a blind student was learning aromatherapy massage helped by a learning support tutor.

34 Teachers are well qualified and have current vocational experience. There are effective links with industry through work placement schemes and by inviting employers to the college. In hairdressing, a monthly 'insight into industry' evening is held, to which all students are invited. Local hairdressers demonstrate technical skills and discuss elements of hairdressing with students. Students speak positively about these opportunities to extend their knowledge. In beauty therapy a well-known international company visits the students annually and has accepted six recruits from the college this year.

35 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, accommodation for hairdressing, beauty therapy and sports therapy courses provides an excellent working environment for students. The new health and fitness suite provides an excellent work experience facility for the sports therapy students and is open to the community as a health and fitness club. Equipment and learning materials are of a high standard. Since

Curriculum Areas

the introduction of a key skills programme this academic year, students are making more use of the IT facilities available to them. This has improved both portfolio presentation and displays in the reception area.

36 As the self-assessment report stated, student retention and achievements are well above national averages. In 1998, NVQ level 1 beauty students achieved a 91% pass rate and a retention rate of 96%. The pass rate on the NVQ level 3 hairdressing course has consistently improved from 50% in 1996 to 82% in 1998. Over the last three years, the retention and pass rates on holistic therapy courses have been consistently high and above the national average. The downward trend in the pass rate on NVQ level 1 and 2 hairdressing has been recognised by the college and is being

appropriately addressed by changes to the curriculum. Retention issues in the programme area are being addressed by the introduction of foundation level courses and individual learning plans for students. Learning support is effective. For example, in a hairdressing lesson additional learning support was provided for students with literacy, language and numeracy difficulties. There is good integration and development of key skills across the provision. Students' studies are enriched by regular participation in regional and national competitions in which they have a high rate of success. For example, over the last three years students have won prestigious national awards in hairdressing and beauty therapy competitions.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ beauty therapy	1 and 2	Expected completions	*	*	48
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	83
NVQ hairdressing	1 and 2	Expected completions	*	*	101
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	72
NVQ hairdressing	3	Expected completions	*	*	56
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	*	*	82
Holistic therapy courses	3	Expected completions	*	*	253
		Retention (%)	*	*	84
		Achievement (%)	*	*	89

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

37 The inspection concentrated on childcare courses. Inspectors observed 15 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report which covered all courses in child, health and social care but concluded that insufficient emphasis had been given to the poor students' achievements on some childcare courses.

Key strengths

- high pass and retention rates on the national diploma in childhood studies
- good retention on NVQ courses
- well-planned work experience linked to college studies
- good integration of theory with practice
- effective use of review and individual target-setting with students

Weaknesses

- poor retention and pass rates on some courses
- failure of teachers to use opportunities to develop students' key skills

38 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time childcare courses within the programme area for child, health and social care. There are good opportunities for students to progress from foundation to advanced level on full-time and part-time courses. Part-time courses have been successful in attracting adult returners to education. Courses are well organised and documented. Targets are set for retention and achievement and appropriate action plans have been implemented where targets have not been met. Inspectors concluded that the NVQ childcare and education course reviews lacked rigour but recognised that

the college has taken action to address this issue.

39 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a wide range of learning opportunities available to students. Lesson aims and objectives are made clear to students. In the majority of lessons, students successfully used their experiences of work and displayed a good understanding of theory and its practical application. For example, in a lesson on the topic of the family students spontaneously offered examples of children's different behaviour patterns when under stress. They discussed the management of this behaviour and analysed the rationale for the different approaches they would use. In group discussions most students demonstrated a high level of analytical skill. Teachers made good use of question and answer techniques to consolidate students' learning. Learning support teachers who work with vocational teachers provide effective additional help to students with their written work. In some classes where there was a wide range of ability, teachers failed to meet the needs of all students. The pace of work was often slow and the more able students were given work which was insufficiently demanding. In a few instances, teachers failed to check that learning was taking place.

40 Effective systems are used to monitor students' progress. Students have regular reviews with their teachers and agree realistic individual targets with timescales for their achievement. On NVQ courses, there is often insufficient written guidance on students' portfolios of work to help them improve the standard of their written work. Mistakes in spelling and grammar are not always corrected. Teachers do not take full advantage of opportunities to help students develop their key skills. In practical lessons, opportunities to encourage the application of number skill were often missed. Only a few students make full use of the good access they have to a 'drop-in' key

Curriculum Areas

skills centre. These issues were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Students make good use of a computer with specialist software programmes for children. In one practical lesson, students used sewing machines to make a soft doll and to design and make an appropriate costume. The brief provided a good opportunity for students to develop the everyday sewing techniques required when caring for children.

41 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the vocational updating undertaken by teachers is good. Classrooms are attractively decorated with displays of students' work. There are good specialist resources and a useful range of books and journals.

42 Inspectors did not agree fully with the college's judgements in the self-assessment report on students' achievements. In the last

two years retention on the NVQ courses has been outstanding at 100% but the pass rate has been low. However, many students continue their course beyond the expected end date to gain the award. Changes to assessment arrangements have led to an increase in the number of students successfully completing their NVQ course within the agreed timescale. The pass rates on the BTEC national programmes are outstanding but retention on the certificate course is well below the national average. In 1998, the retention and pass rates was low for the first cohort of students completing the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing. Appropriate action has been taken to address this and, at the time of the inspection, retention in the second year of the course for students who started in 1997 was 90%. Destination data indicate that all students completing in 1998 progressed to employment.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in childcare, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ childcare and education	2	Expected completions	+	*	12
		Retention (%)	+	*	100
		Achievement (%)	+	*	50
NVQ childcare and education	3	Expected completions	+	*	14
		Retention (%)	+	*	100
		Achievement (%)	+	*	57
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing	3	Expected completions	+	+	30
		Retention (%)	+	+	60
		Achievement (%)	+	+	67
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	20
		Retention (%)	*	*	95
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
BTEC national certificate childhood studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	47
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

+course not running

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

43 The inspection covered full-time and part-time provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in two departments. Inspectors observed 14 lessons, including a tutorial. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- key skills reinforced in many lessons
- the good use made of students' life and work experience
- good students' achievements
- well-managed curriculum
- the successful development of programmes to widen participation

Weaknesses

- failure of teachers to provide sufficiently demanding work in some lessons
- insufficient checks on students' learning in some lessons
- lack of use of initial assessment to devise individual learning programmes

44 The college is particularly responsive to adult learners and its extensive work in community settings has significantly widened participation. For example, lip-reading courses have been established across the county and there is well-developed provision for adults with mental health difficulties, students with complex learning difficulties, and frail elderly people. There are productive links with social services, health services and a number of agencies. Good links with special schools enable students' progression from school to further education.

Inspectors agreed that the curriculum is well managed and there is good communication between staff.

45 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is well planned and generally effective. Some imaginative methods are used to help students learn, including the use of role-play with students who have learning difficulties to consolidate their understanding of concepts and to develop their communication skills. Key skills are developed in many lessons. For example, in a cookery class students were reminded about concepts of time and number and helped with communication skills. In the best lessons, good use is made of students' prior experience. In a health and social care lesson students were asked to focus on a person they had known with a disability or care need and to use their knowledge to create a case study. Teachers keep accurate and detailed records of students' progress and these enable all staff to be well informed about students' needs.

46 Students with learning difficulties on full-time courses have a well-developed work experience programme which is of central importance to their course and this key strength is recognised by the college. Students find the work experience of great value and some teachers make good use of it in lessons. Other teaching is less effective. In some lessons, for students with learning difficulties, students' individual needs are not addressed and little attention is given to their individual learning programmes. In a few lessons the work is not sufficiently demanding and some students remain uninvolved, and wait for the teacher to set them tasks or check their work. Insufficient care is taken in some lessons to check that students understand the work they are doing. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report. The college has recognised the failure to use initial assessments to create appropriate individual learning programmes for students, and action has been taken to address this issue.

Curriculum Areas

47 Most staff are well qualified and have appropriate experience in teaching and supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Their knowledge is also up to date. As recognised in the self-assessment report, vocational staff have insufficient training to enable them to support students with learning difficulties. Teaching resources are centrally available and accessible to each staff team. Good use is made of resource collections on each main site. Most teaching accommodation is good, although the Charles Street centre requires some improvement to student facilities.

48 Inspectors agreed that there are good pass rates on full-time programmes for students with learning difficulties. For three years, achievement figures have been higher than the national average reported in the FEFC

curriculum area survey report, *Basic Education*. In 1998, the achievement rate on courses was 86% or better. Since the last inspection clear progression routes for students have been established and inspectors agreed that this is a major improvement. An increasing number of students with learning difficulties have progressed to vocational programmes and employment. A quarter of students leaving the pathfinder courses in 1997 went on to NVQ level 1 or GNVQ foundation level courses. In 1998 the figure rose to nearly one-third. Other students progress to independent living courses. Retention rates have declined. Students' achievements are celebrated through award ceremonies which recognise the value of the work they do.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Buckinghamshire Open College Network (ACES)	Pre-entry	Expected completions	*	*	383
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	*	*	90
Buckinghamshire Open College Network (Rotheram)	Pre-entry	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	87
		Achievement (%)	*	*	90
Buckinghamshire Open College Network and ASDAN 'Workright'	Entry	Expected completions	*	*	65
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	86

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*data not reliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

49 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors particularly noted the significant improvements in tutorial arrangements since the writing of the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- comprehensive and impartial pre-entry advice and guidance for full-time students
- the good partnership arrangements with local schools
- well-structured and effective induction
- effective tutorial systems for monitoring students' progress
- excellent systems for careers education and guidance
- the readily available financial advice and appropriate levels of assistance

Weaknesses

- lack of systematic arrangements to identify students' additional support needs
- the low level of take-up of learning support
- inadequate arrangements for welfare support

50 Roles and responsibilities for all aspects of support services for students are clearly understood and effectively co-ordinated and managed. Well-documented policies and procedures have helped to ensure the same levels of service across the college sites but this was not noted in the self-assessment report. Pre-entry advice and guidance is comprehensive and impartial, a strength identified in the self-

assessment report. A wide range of events is arranged in collaboration with local schools. This includes contributions to careers guidance for year 9 school pupils and successful Saturday workshops for year 10 and 11 pupils. A series of college open days enables prospective students to sample the curriculum. The college is active in heightening awareness of vocational education. For example, year 6 school pupils take part in short courses in bricklaying, painting and decorating and plastering.

51 Inspectors agreed that induction is effectively organised. Standard procedures are consistently applied across all college sites. Students value the induction which includes the use of an informative student handbook providing details on college standards, facilities and services. In addition, helpful information is supplied in booklets which are specific to each course. Some courses also provide a pre-induction session before the start of the academic year during which initial assessment begins.

52 A standard test is used to assess students' learning support needs. This has not provided sufficiently reliable information to develop effective individual additional learning support plans for students and this was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. There is no systematic initial assessment of students' IT skills. In recognition of these issues the college has well-advanced plans to improve the initial assessment of students. The take-up by students of additional learning support is low and action has been taken to encourage more students to attend. In addition, the college has invested in a computer-based learning system to support skills development in communications and numeracy at a range of levels. There are examples of good practice in hairdressing and business studies where basic skills have been effectively integrated with vocational studies. There is a good level of specialist staff who provide appropriate support for students with physical disabilities.

Cross-college Provision

53 Tutorial arrangements for full-time students provide constructive feedback to students on their progress. At the time of writing the self-assessment report the college identified that some tutorials were of poor quality. Inspectors concluded that appropriate action has been taken and that the quality of tutorials has improved significantly. In addition to weekly timetabled tutorial sessions students have a six-weekly review which is systematically documented. The tutorial provision for some part-time students is less effective. However, teachers in some curriculum areas offer tutorials on Saturdays to suit the requirements of individual students. Careers education and guidance for full-time students is of a high standard. Libraries on each main site have a well-resourced careers centre with up-to-date materials. Staff have appropriate training in careers to support and advise students. A pilot project on career guidance for adults has been successful and is being extended across the college.

54 Advice to students on financial support is readily available through student services which are prominently located adjacent to reception on each main site. The college provides some financial support to students who are unable to gain funds from other sources. High-quality childcare facilities are available through two college nurseries. A nursery is available for the children of students at the Westbourne centre. A welfare counsellor provides advice and guidance on personal, emotional or domestic issues but this service is inadequate for the number of students across all sites. This issue was not noted in the self-assessment report. The college operates a 'prefer to refer' approach to its counselling service and the welfare counsellor maintains an effective network of referral agencies.

General Resources

Grade 1

55 There have been extensive improvements to the college's accommodation and general resources since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified some additional strengths.

Key strengths

- high standard of accommodation
- well-maintained learning environment
- attractive and welcoming reception area
- excellent sports and recreational facilities
- good access to IT facilities
- well-resourced libraries and resource centres

Weaknesses

- inadequate access for those with restricted mobility

56 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the standard of accommodation is high. Since the last inspection continuous improvements have been made to the accommodation. The college operates from four sites in Luton, and the Westbourne centre that is 20 miles away in Bedford. The buildings on the New Bedford Road and Rotheram Avenue sites are of a good standard and suitable for their current use. Four classrooms on the New Bedford Road site are in huttred accommodation and action is being taken to remove them. The Technology centre is a modern, former industrial, building successfully converted to education and training facilities of a high specification. Facilities for engineering, motor vehicle technology and construction are of industrial standard. The Westbourne centre and Charles Street site were built as schools in the

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late Victorian period and are used mainly for adult provision. The Westbourne centre has been successfully refurbished but the leased accommodation at Charles Street site has a poor level of decoration.

57 All sites, with the exception of Charles Street, are well maintained. There is a detailed planned maintenance programme for 1999 to 2004 which is effectively managed. The accommodation strategy is relevant to the future needs of the college and is reviewed annually. Classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors and other teaching aids. Space is effectively utilised. Students' work is widely displayed throughout the college. The attractive and welcoming reception areas on the three main sites were not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. The areas are well staffed by helpful and fully-informed receptionists. College and general information is easily accessible. Student services are conveniently located in each reception area.

58 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that access to some parts of the college by people with restricted mobility is unsatisfactory. This issue was also identified at the last inspection in 1994. Wheelchair users do not have access to the upper floors of the tower blocks on the New Bedford Road and Rotheram Avenue sites. This excludes them from access to the library and resource centre on the former site and from one programme area and the Barnfield Business Training Services on the latter. Plans are well advanced to improve access significantly in the summer of 1999 by the construction of lifts to the two tower blocks and other adaptations to buildings.

59 As identified in the self-assessment report, students have good access to up-to-date IT facilities. The number of computers available to students has improved considerably since the last inspection. Approximately 280 machines are located in classrooms and specialist rooms and 390 machines are available on a 'drop-in' basis. This represents a full-time equivalent

student to workstation ratio of 6.5:1 which is above the sector average. Computers for students' use are networked on each site but are not networked between sites. The use of workstations by students is systematically monitored. Staff have good IT facilities in their workrooms.

60 There are well-equipped library and resource centres on each of the three main sites and resources rooms at the two smaller centres. Each library is managed by a qualified librarian supported by an appropriate number of staff. Librarians liaise effectively with curriculum staff to ensure that learning materials meet the needs of students. There is a cross-college library committee which effectively co-ordinates the service. Each library prepares its own catalogue of materials. Financial allocations to each library are appropriate and are based on the number of students and type of curriculum on each site. In 1998-99, the total allocation for the purchase of library stock was above the average for the sector. The libraries at New Bedford Road and Rotheram Avenue have insufficient study spaces. The resources rooms at Charles Street and the Westbourne centre are currently being improved to provide a better service to students and staff.

61 Common room facilities are provided at the three main sites and effectively meet the needs of students. Opening hours have been determined following consultation with students. Vending machines are available when refectories are not staffed. Student refectories are appropriately furnished. At the Charles Street and Westbourne centres there are comfortable coffee bar areas with vending machines. The overall standard of decoration and facilities for students is high. Students have access to a wide range of excellent sports and recreational facilities. This was not identified in the self-assessment report. At Rotheram Avenue there is a sports hall, a gymnasium, six football pitches and two tennis courts, and at New Bedford Road there is a gymnasium, four football pitches and a health and fitness suite.

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The college runs a number of sports teams, including a female football team, and participates in local leagues. The college's health and fitness centre, hairdressing and beauty salons and restaurant facilities are extensively used by the local community.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

62 Major improvements have been made to the quality assurance arrangements since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- strong commitment to the continuous improvement of quality
- clear and well-understood quality assurance systems
- robust audit of quality assurance procedures
- effective appraisal and staff development
- rigorous self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- standards for quality underdeveloped in some business areas
- underdeveloped use of measurable targets at course level
- some ineffective monitoring of action plans at course level

63 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that its commitment to the continuous improvement of the quality of its provision is a strength. Academic quality assurance arrangements have been significantly strengthened since the last inspection and especially within the 18 months before this inspection. The college has analysed its activities and created a code of good practice in

a 'learning providers handbook' which all teaching staff are required to use. Quality assurance procedures are further supported by 'the student pathway', a collation of all policies and procedures relating to teaching, learning and the support of students. Staff clearly understand and use this system and its procedures, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report.

64 Course review is well established. Inconsistencies in the presentation of reports, noted at the last inspection, have been overcome. While enrolment targets have been set for many years, those for retention and achievement are less well established. In 1997-98, there was more target-setting for, and review of, full-time courses, though this was not the case with all part-time courses. While targets have been set in all performance areas for 1998-99 inspectors were not able to evaluate whether these have effectively addressed the problems of low retention and achievement identified on a number of courses. This issue was not identified in the college's self-assessment report.

65 The college charter is widely distributed to students. While there are no specific measurable standards in the charter, students are made aware of their rights and entitlements through induction. The outcomes of complaints made in accordance with a comprehensive complaints procedure are analysed and contribute to reviews. Questionnaires inviting students' views are issued, at course level, three times a year. These are analysed and the results used in course reviews, and also summarised in programme area reports, but these data are not yet aggregated to give a picture of trends across the college. Student representatives from each course communicate students' views at regular course meetings. The college does not have regular procedures for seeking, and responding to, the views of employers.

66 The college has recognised that standards for business support areas are a weakness.

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In central college functions, service level agreements have been introduced recently. These identify the range of services to be provided but they do not incorporate standards against which to measure performance. Service standards are being developed for those business support activities which are specific to individual sites. In some areas, such as learning support, service standards are being piloted but are not yet proven. In some other areas, standards have yet to be agreed and finalised. However, standards for performance measurement are set in development plans and at an individual level during appraisal.

67 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a robust process to enable managers to monitor compliance to quality assurance procedures. Course teams monitor students' performance and attendance every six weeks. Programme area leaders regularly check on the implementation of procedures by reviewing a sample of documents such as course records, registers and learning packs; they also regularly attend course meetings. Site principals carry out similar audits from time to time and meet regularly with programme area leaders to identify areas of concern. The practice of monitoring the implementation of agreed action points is not always effective at course level. While discussions at course team meetings are recorded, the minutes do not always record the actions to be taken. Consequently, in some cases, it is not possible to identify that agreed action has been carried out. The college recognises that some course reviews do not adequately record and monitor their action plans from one year to the next.

68 Inspectors agreed that staff appraisal and development processes, identified in the last inspection report, continue to be a strength. All staff, with the exception of a few part-time staff, receive an annual appraisal. The outcomes are recorded in a personal action plan with targets for improvement and these form the basis of staff development programmes. The annual

staff development programme is designed to meet the strategic and site priorities. There is significant funding to support attendance on external courses. The college has continued to free all full-time staff from teaching duties on one half day each week to make attendance easier. There are effective systems for monitoring the progress of appraisals and the outcomes of staff development. Staff are required to evaluate their own training and to disseminate findings to colleagues.

69 The first self-assessment report was produced in 1996-97 and the second in 1997-98. The report is comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors broadly agreed with the contents of the report and most of the judgements. Self-assessment reports have been produced for all programme areas, and some have subsidiary reports for sections and business functions. All staff have had an opportunity to contribute to the development of their own area assessment and to comment upon other reports. The framework for identifying strengths and weaknesses and action plans has also been used to revise the system for the reporting of annual course reviews.

Governance

Grade 1

70 Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They noted that the high standards set by governors resulted in the significance of some weaknesses being overstated.

Key strengths

- effective self-assessment process for governance
- sound arrangements for conduct of corporation business
- comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability

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- good training programme for governors
- close involvement in the improvement of quality
- productive partnership between governors and senior staff
- active role in determining the strategic direction of the college

Weaknesses

- no fully developed policy on community contacts

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

72 There are sound arrangements for the conduct of corporation business, and meetings are well attended. They are scheduled one year in advance and timetables have been set for the distribution of agendas, papers and minutes. Detailed committee papers are informative and few papers are tabled at meetings. A large volume of business is dealt with efficiently. The corporation has an appropriate range of committees. The audit and quality committees have co-opted members with specialist skills. The finance and employment committee closely monitors the college's financial position by the receipt of the college's management accounts. The college's annual budget for 1998-99 was approved by governors only as part of the college's three-year financial forecast for 1998 to 2001.

73 The corporation has comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability. A register of interests has been completed by all governors and staff with significant financial responsibilities and is publicly available for inspection. Governors sign an annual

declaration confirming their continued eligibility. The corporation has adopted a code of conduct for governors and standing orders. The corporation also has a 'whistleblowing' procedure. Corporation and committee minutes are publicly available throughout the college and in public libraries.

74 Governors have an appropriate range of skills. The corporation has a well-established self-assessment process which includes the completion by individual members of questionnaires on the conduct of their business. This resulted in the establishment of a search committee and the appointment of an external clerk to the board who has been set annual targets. The corporation responded positively to the government's forthcoming changes to the composition of governing bodies by redetermining its membership from 10 to 15 governors, including members from the community. Inspectors agreed with the governors' own assessment of the need to develop a more formal policy on their contacts with the community. There is a good training programme for governors. New governors follow a structured induction process. Governors attend an annual residential course to consider strategic issues in detail and to formulate views on their own development as part of the self-assessment process. A report is provided on the course and action points are pursued. A joint seminar with governors of other institutions has been held to consider good practice in governance. Governors attending other external courses have provided written reports on lessons learnt.

75 Governors have good working relationships with the senior management team. As a result of governors' discussions there have been significant changes to strategies for the development of the college's IT and accommodation. The corporation has given specific guidance to managers on collaboration with other colleges. Governors have established good communications with staff. The chair of

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the corporation addresses an annual meeting for all staff and a message from him is included in the staff handbook. Individual governors meet with programme leaders to consider developments in their sections and have advised on links with employers. Staff appreciate the attendance of governors at award events. There is a regular reference to governors' matters in the principal's newsletter.

76 Inspectors agreed with the college that governors express their commitment to the improvement of quality through an active quality assurance committee. This committee has fostered developments such as a project on added value to measure students' progress. The committee has also called for reliable validated data on students' achievements, and a format for annual comparisons with achievements in previous years has now been established. Programme leaders give presentations on academic progress in their sections and this has improved governors' knowledge of the curriculum. The committee works closely with the academic board but recognises their distinctive roles. A joint annual meeting of the two bodies underpins this close relationship. Inspectors agreed with the college that governors are fully aware of their strategic responsibilities and play an active role in the planning process. The board has revised its procedures for monitoring the strategic plan which now also includes operating statements on governance. The board is finalising a scheme to measure progress on all areas of college activity combining industrial practice with FEFC performance indicators.

Management

Grade 2

77 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- clear vision and firm leadership
- well-understood management structures
- good communications
- effective procedures to establish the college's strategic direction
- the wide range of collaborative partnerships
- effective financial planning and budgeting arrangements
- good level of internal audit resource

Weaknesses

- inadequate reporting on the implementation of the equal opportunities and health and safety policies
- an underdeveloped management information system for maintaining students' records

78 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that management structures are clear and understood by staff. The college is well led and effectively managed, as recognised in the self-assessment report. The senior management team meets weekly. Minutes of meetings are comprehensive and identify responsibilities for action. All staff have definitive job descriptions. Staff understand their roles and have received appropriate training to carry out their responsibilities. A comprehensive range of well-documented policies and procedures gives clear guidance and helps to ensure a consistency of approach between the sites. Staff regard managers as responsive and speak appreciatively of their open and consultative style. Senior managers have responsibility for managing cross-college functions, for example IT and the library, but there are no clearly identified procedures for the co-ordination of these functions across the sites and for reporting on their activities. This issue was not identified in the self-assessment report. Site principals

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hold weekly site meetings to ensure that issues raised at senior management team meetings are effectively disseminated. There is effective communication throughout the college. Communications are promoted through cross-college working groups which cover whole-college, site and programme area meetings, a range of newsletters, and the 'open door' policy of managers. There is an appropriate range of personnel policies, recently updated to include part-time staff. The staff:student ratios and the efficient use of part-time staff are carefully monitored. The college provides teachers with time for curriculum development to respond to the key strategic aim of widening participation.

79 There are systematic procedures for the development of the strategic plan which involve consultation with the community. Staff contribute at all levels to the strategic planning process through carefully-structured meetings. The college derives well-defined operational objectives from a wide range of market information. The college's strategic objectives for the period 1998 to 2001 are linked to its mission and vision of the needs of its community in 2005. Objectives are supported by appropriate measurable numerical targets. However, governors and senior managers have not been able to monitor effectively the college's achievements against targets because of management information systems that have been historically unreliable. Site principals effectively monitor the achievement of individual course and business support team objectives. Each site has an academic board which meets before the main college academic board. Site academic boards have a common agenda and fully inform the main academic board on a range of issues.

80 In seeking to achieve its mission, the college has developed productive working relationships with a wide range of local and regional businesses and agencies. The college has played an important part in bids for funds

from central government and has good links with training agencies. There are productive collaborative arrangements with local colleges. External agencies speak highly of the college which they see as responsive and approachable.

81 The college acknowledged in its self-assessment report that its computerised management information system for maintaining students' records is inadequate. The system is unreliable and does not allow information to be adapted to suit different purposes and different levels of demand, and has prevented governors, managers and staff from effectively monitoring achievement against targets. Until recently, ISR returns to the FEFC were delayed owing to problems with the management information system. The college is taking steps to replace the student record system. There is no management information users' group to inform the college of users' current and potential management information requirements.

82 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance function is headed by the vice-principal and deputy chief executive who is a member of the principalship. Financial planning and monitoring procedures are well established. Budget holders and the finance team exercise exceptionally close control over expenditure. Budget holders are fully supported with timely reports, at monthly intervals, showing actual expenditure in addition to committed expenditure. Management accounts are prepared quarterly to a timetable that integrates with meetings of the finance and employment committee and the corporation. The content of the management accounts is comprehensive and includes reporting against a range of financial performance indicators. Recently updated financial regulations and procedures are detailed and widely distributed. Training is given to staff with financial responsibilities. The college has allocated a high level of

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resources to internal audit, indicating its commitment to the effectiveness of this external scrutiny. Currently, the college is financially sound.

83 Governors, managers and staff take an active interest in promoting and monitoring equality of opportunity. There are comprehensive policy documents, covering a range of areas, including widening participation. However, there is no regular reporting to academic board and governors of how effectively equal opportunities are promoted throughout all of the college's activities, an issue not recognised by the college in its self-assessment report. There is no regular monitoring by programme area leaders of equality of opportunity issues in schemes of work and lesson plans. The governing body has not received a report on the implementation of the health and safety policy since June 1997.

Conclusions

84 The self-assessment report used by inspectors was the second one produced by the college. The inspection team found that the report provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. Staff and corporation members were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The report presented a clear and comprehensive evaluation of the college's work. Subsidiary reports for sections and business support functions provided useful additional information. The report was supported by detailed evidence which was presented clearly and succinctly. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements. A few additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with all of the cross-college grades given by the college. In three of the curriculum areas the inspectors awarded a lower grade.

85 Strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection are listed under each section of this report. The main strengths and weaknesses are identified in the summary.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	14
25+ years	64
Not known	6
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	34
Intermediate	30
Advanced	22
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	12
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	111	1,623	15
Agriculture	8	25	0
Construction	155	408	5
Engineering	165	725	8
Business	377	1,654	17
Hotel and catering	240	154	3
Health and community care	539	1,279	16
Art and design	351	666	9
Humanities	127	1,422	13
Basic education	181	1,413	14
Total	2,254	9,369	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 23% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	159	109	0	268
Supporting direct learning contact	79	13	4	96
Other support	141	4	15	160
Total	379	126	19	524

Source: college data, rounded to nearest full-time equivalent

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£14,307,000	£14,581,000	£15,326,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£16.05	£15.61	£15.71*
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	63%	61%
Achievement of funding target	103%	106%	101%
Diversity of income	17%	19%	21%
Operating surplus	£78,000	£400,000	£537,000

Sources: Income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators Supplement 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators Supplement 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – college (1996), Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

*provisional data

FEFC Inspection Report 76/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

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