

Bilston Community College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
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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

Bilston Community College

West Midlands Region

Inspected January 1999

Bilston Community College is a general further education college in the south of Wolverhampton. It has a strong commitment to widening participation. During the last few years, the college expanded its collaborative provision across England. This expansion has been poorly managed. The college became aware of the seriousness of its weak financial position early in 1998. Governors and senior managers prepared a draft recovery plan which included significant reorganisation and restructuring and plans to reduce expenditure. An acting chief executive took up post in November 1998. At the time of the inspection, the college was part of the way through the restructuring process. The self-assessment report did not address many of the quality statements in Council Circulars 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection*. With one exception, inspectors did not agree with the grades the college awarded for curriculum areas. Similarly, in aspects of cross-college provision inspectors awarded worse grades than the college in all but one area. Inspectors and auditors found serious weaknesses that were not included in the self-assessment report. The 1996 and 1997 ISR returns and the college's own student data for 1998 were unreliable. The college was not able to assess performance, including student retention and achievement rates, using accurate data. Inspectors were only

able to confirm the accuracy of some student data in two curriculum areas for 1998. The quality of provision at the college is mostly poor and has significantly declined since the last inspection.

The inspection covered aspects of cross-college provision and work in seven of the 10 FEFC programme areas offered by the college. The grades awarded to lessons were significantly below the national average for 1997-98. Much of the teaching is weak and there is poor student retention and achievement in many areas. The quality of provision in business studies, childcare and basic education was satisfactory. Provision in computing and IT, construction, art and design, teacher education, access to higher education and English was unsatisfactory. There were few strengths in the college but they included: a broad range of courses and some effective teaching. The college should address: inadequate support for students; weak teaching; poor attendance and low retention; low achievements; inaccurate data on students' performance; and inadequate management of the curriculum. In addition, the college should establish: effective management and governance; rigorous procedures for quality assurance; a sound financial position and effective financial control; detailed and accurate management information; proper accounting for public funds; effective strategic planning; and thorough monitoring of performance by governors. Improvements should be made to accommodation, IT and library facilities.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	4	Support for students	5
Construction	4	General resources	4
Business studies	3	Quality assurance	5
Childcare	3	Governance	5
Art and design	4	Management	5
Access to higher education and English	4		
Teacher education	4		
Basic education	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Bilston Community College was established in 1984 in the south of Wolverhampton. It has eight sites in the borough. Other post-16 local providers include a further education college, a local authority adult education college, most of the schools in the borough and various training organisations. In addition, there are other further education colleges in the neighbouring boroughs of Dudley, Walsall and Sandwell. The area that the college serves is economically and culturally diverse. In 1998, unemployment was 8% in the Wolverhampton south-east constituency but was considerably higher in the residential areas close to the college's main sites. Of the Wolverhampton population, 19% are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

2 The college offers courses in all 10 of the programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The highest number of enrolments is in science, health and community care, humanities and basic education. Several vocational areas are small and represent under 5% of enrolments. The college has a strong commitment to widening participation. The college's mission is to be 'the best college for open access and equal opportunities through meeting individual education and training needs and aspirations largely by local, regional, national and international partnerships with other providers, employers and communities'. In the last three years, the college significantly expanded its provision in the region and nationally through collaborative arrangements; in 1997-98, according to college data, this amounted to 50% of provision. Recently, collaborative provision has been significantly reduced and concentrated within the region; in 1998-99, it represents an estimated 25% of provision.

3 Figures provided by the college for November 1998 show 9,742 students, of whom 86% were students over 19 years old. In 1997-98, 34% of students were unemployed and a further 10% have a disability. Since the college was established, enrolment of students

from minority ethnic groups has been higher than in the local and national population, at 24% in 1997-98.

4 A substantial proportion of the college's income is derived from work with collaborative partners and sources other than the FEFC. In the last few years, the college has generated significant financial deficits. In summer 1998, when the scale of the financial problems became clear, urgent actions were taken by governors. A recovery plan was prepared and the college began to restructure the management, withdraw from ventures not considered as core activity and also to rationalise its use of different sites. In November 1998, the newly appointed acting chief executive revised the programme of management restructuring to reduce the number of managers to 110 from 224, and to increase the number of teachers.

5 The management restructuring was due to be completed by February 1999, two weeks after the inspection. At the time of the inspection, the college's weak financial position and the partly completed reorganisation caused some uncertainty among staff. In July 1998, the college employed 747 full-time equivalent staff of whom 163 were in teaching posts. The college's key strategic objectives are to:

- implement the first stage of the recovery plan
- maintain the confidence of the FEFC and bankers
- improve retention and achievement rates
- ensure the achievement of FEFC funding unit targets
- achieve these objectives while maintaining a commitment to widening participation and equality of opportunity.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 18 January 1999. A sample of collaborative and community-based provision was inspected in the previous week. Before the inspection, inspectors reviewed the self-

Context

assessment report and considered information from other directorates of the FEFC.

7 The lack of reliable information available from the college affected the planning of the inspection and inspection activity. Student numbers provided by the college before the inspection were inaccurate and subject to frequent change. Some lesson timetables provided for specialist inspectors were inaccurate and opportunities to observe lessons were missed. There are major weaknesses in the college's data on students' achievements. Before the inspection, inspectors checked data against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The college's data in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) for 1996 and 1997 and those submitted by the college on students' achievements for 1998 were found to be unreliable. Despite considerable effort by college staff and inspectors during the inspection, in all areas there were either significant gaps in the data or they were

unreliable. It was possible in only two curriculum areas to validate data and produce partial student achievement tables for the report.

8 The college was notified in November 1998 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 19 inspectors and three auditors working in the college for a total of 96 days. Inspectors observed lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, students, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), and community and commercial organisations.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. The percentage of lessons judged to be outstanding or good was 18% below, and the percentage judged to be unsatisfactory or poor was 13% above the national averages recorded for all lessons inspected in 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	0	1	1	4	0	6
GNVQ	1	3	3	3	0	10
NVQ	3	5	8	2	1	19
Higher education	0	4	4	1	0	9
Basic education	1	8	7	2	0	18
Other vocational	9	11	9	5	0	34
Other	1	1	3	1	0	6
Total (No.)	15	33	35	18	1	102
Total (%)	15	32	34	18	1	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*

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10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bilston Community College	7.6	59
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

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 4

11 Inspectors observed 13 lessons of college-based provision. The self-assessment report was insufficiently self-critical and did not provide an adequate analysis of student retention and achievement. Statements in the report were not supported by evidence. Action plans are weak and are not being adequately monitored. Some actions have been taken to make improvements to the quality of provision.

Key strengths

- good range of courses
- up-to-date information technology (IT) resources

Weaknesses

- ineffective teaching methods
- poor retention on most courses
- inadequate monitoring and reporting of students' progress
- weak course reviews
- ineffective management of full-time courses

12 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is a good range of courses in computing providing opportunities for students to study full time or part time at the main college or in community-based centres. There are courses leading to general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), BTEC higher national certificates and diplomas, and a National Open College Network accredited certificate in access to higher education. Part-time courses provide a wide range of entry levels and opportunities for students to progress to more advanced courses. A variety of attendance patterns is offered, including weekend courses.

13 More than half the lessons observed were ineffective; they failed to provide appropriate support for students' learning. In some lessons, the presentation of information was poorly structured and students were unable to gain confidence and make progress. On GNVQ courses, students receive insufficient guidance on building their portfolios. In some lessons the teaching is good. Teachers use a range of learning methods, including demonstrating and group discussions, and provide well-presented and comprehensive workbooks to help students to work on their own and gain practice in using computer applications. Schemes of work for some courses are inadequate. Most teachers accurately assess students' work but they give little guidance on how students can make improvements. The self-assessment report acknowledged that arrangements for monitoring students' progress are weak, and inspectors agreed. For example, on full-time courses teachers keep inadequate records of the work students have completed and their performance. On part-time courses, teachers have started to make some improvements to the records kept of students' achievements. Students do not have regular opportunities to review their progress. Tutorial support is either not available or is ineffective.

14 Only about one-third of all students enrolled at the beginning of the year had completed any assessed work by the second term. On the GNVQ courses, students had made little progress for this stage of their course and had not submitted any work for assessment. Most students achieve a satisfactory level of competence in using computer packages. When students complete work, it is usually of an appropriate standard. On the national diploma course, most students' work is well presented. On courses in IT, student attendance rates are low. The self-assessment report did not adequately identify the unsatisfactory levels of retention and achievement on most courses. In the last two years, only one-quarter of the students enrolled for the national diploma and

Curriculum Areas

the GNVQ intermediate have completed their course. Pass rates on these courses have been satisfactory. Pass rates on the access to higher education course in IT are similar to the national average. In 1998, most students who achieved the access certificate progressed to a higher education course. Pass rates on part-time IT courses are low; about 50% of students who complete courses gain an award. This year, there is a high level of withdrawal from all courses. Attendance in lessons observed was very low at 45%.

15 Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that opportunities for work experience are a strength. None of the full-time courses include work experience. Where work experience is required, for example in some courses offering national vocational qualifications (NVQs), most students are placed in the college. Transition to work is not effectively supported by these arrangements.

16 Frequent changes in course management and staff responsibilities, absence of staff and the unavailability of teachers to take classes has

led to disruption to students' learning and a high level of students' dissatisfaction. Attendance of full-time students is not effectively monitored. The self-assessment recognised that some teachers are not well informed about assessment requirements and have misguided students. Some action is being taken to improve communications between teachers by more use of electronic mail and electronic noticeboards. Course reviews lack evaluative comments on teaching and learning and students' achievements are inadequately reported. Plans for improving provision are not clearly identified or monitored.

17 A well-managed computer centre is equipped with up-to-date computers and software packages. The use of this equipment is effectively supported by a team of IT assistants. The centre provides an attractive working environment and is popular with students. Other computer resource areas are not well organised and do not provide access to suitable software.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in computing and information technology, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998 **
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	*	29
		Retention (%)	*	*	24
		Achievement (%)	*	*	71
National diploma in computer studies	3	Expected completions	*	*	21
		Retention (%)	*	*	33
		Achievement (%)	*	*	71

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

*data not reliable

**college data checked by inspectors against source documents

Note: data for other courses are not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 4

18 The inspection covered college-based and collaborative provision. Ten college-based craft and technician lessons were observed and a range of evidence was gathered relating to teaching and students' learning in collaborative provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that insufficient emphasis had been placed upon weaknesses in students' achievements. Some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- good range of courses
- realistic working environments
- some high standards of practical work on work-based projects

Weaknesses

- ineffective theory teaching
- inadequate teaching of key skills
- poor students' achievements
- weak curriculum management
- failure to analyse and use students' achievement data
- untidy workshops presenting health and safety risks
- inadequate links with industry

19 There is a broad range of courses covering most aspects of construction with clear progression routes from foundation to higher levels. There are NVQs in brickwork, painting and decorating, plumbing, and wood trades and higher national certificates in building and housing studies. On craft courses, students can enrol at any time in the year and courses leading to NVQ qualifications are offered at

weekends. The self-assessment did not identify that these flexible arrangements, including programmes for individual students, are not well managed. There is no system to ensure that students receive a structured induction when they start their course. Registers and student records are not always completed. Few students have individual tutorials, and arrangements to identify and meet students' learning support needs are inadequate. Although there are some specialist short courses for employed students, insufficient attention is given to researching the needs of industry. There are no liaison committees, nor does the college regularly seek the advice of employers. Full-time craft students do not have the opportunity to undertake work experience.

20 The majority of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching in practical sessions is well planned and of adequate quality. There are too few lessons in theory. In theory lessons, teaching is not effectively planned and teachers provide few opportunities for students to develop their understanding of theoretical concepts. In these lessons, teachers fail to vary their teaching methods appropriately and give insufficient attention to meeting the individual learning needs of students. For example, in one lesson the teacher merely read aloud from a textbook. Few teachers make use of visual aids. The self-assessment report did not give sufficient emphasis to these weaknesses. Students in collaborative provision undertake large-scale work experience projects. This enables them to develop a broad range of practical competencies but there is no planned teaching of theory. There are inadequate opportunities for students to develop the basic knowledge needed to support their practical work. Students' time is sometimes wasted as they wait for project work to become available. In craft courses, there is inadequate teaching of key skills. Students receive no tuition in IT and no effective support to develop their skills of communication and application of number. There are clear criteria

Curriculum Areas

for the marking of students' work, but teachers often do not provide sufficient written comment to help students improve their performance.

21 The self-assessment report did not clearly identify weaknesses in students' achievements. Enrolment, retention and achievement targets are not adequately monitored by either course teams or college management. The college was unable to provide inspectors with comprehensive and reliable data on students' achievements. However, evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that many students do not achieve the qualification they are seeking within the time period agreed in their learning agreement. There are some poor retention rates. Few craft students progress from intermediate to advanced level. It is not possible to provide a tabular summary of students' retention and achievements in this curriculum area for the reasons given in paragraph 7 in this report. Most practical work produced by students is of an acceptable standard; some on work-based projects is good. Students take pride in their portfolios and working files.

22 Teachers are appropriately qualified but few have recent industrial experience. Staffing problems have disrupted some students' learning. Most workshops provide realistic working situations. For example, in painting and decorating a two-storey structure simulates the external elevation of a house. The self-assessment report identified a number of weaknesses in the accommodation. There is no building science laboratory and the materials testing laboratory is underused. Woodwork workshops are too small for the size of groups using them; they are untidy and have little storage space. Some workshops pose potential health and safety risks. Teachers make little use of wall space to display technical information and students' work. The library stock for construction is outdated. There are few reference materials for students on housing courses or for those studying in collaborative

provision. The computer-aided design centre has up-to-date industrial standard software. Painting and decorating students do not have access to computers.

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 3

23 Fourteen lessons were observed across the range of courses including college-based, community-based and collaborative provision. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overestimated some strengths and failed to identify a few strengths in teaching and learning and some weaknesses in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- high pass rates on secretarial text processing and Institute of Management courses
- provision available on a flexible basis
- good links with industry

Weaknesses

- low attendance and retention rates on some courses
- insufficient detail in the marking of students' work
- some poor schemes of work and lesson plans
- little co-ordination of the business curriculum across programme areas
- poor resources

24 There is a broad range of vocational, management and professional courses, including GNVQs in business studies at intermediate and advanced level, a BTEC national certificate and higher national certificate, NVQs at levels 2 to 5, and a range of professional qualifications mainly delivered on employers' premises. Business administration courses are offered with flexible hours of attendance throughout the year, including weekends, to meet local community needs. Provision is also offered in a range of

community-based centres. Recruitment onto the GNVQ business programmes is low. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that there are good links with employers both locally and nationally. These have resulted in the joint development and delivery of a number of management courses. For example, one course provides strategic leadership training for employees of a major local employer.

25 The standard of most of the teaching is good. This strength was underestimated in the self-assessment report. The majority of lessons observed by inspectors were effective. A significant minority of lessons are poor quality. Varied teaching methods sustain students' interest and teachers use their up-to-date subject knowledge well. In one accountancy lesson, the teacher made good use of students' experience of work to illustrate the purpose of petty cash. Individual tutorial support enables students on flexible programmes to study at their own pace. Interesting and challenging assignments are often related to students' employment. There are examples of students' work having been carefully marked but teachers' comments on some assignments are not sufficiently detailed to help students improve their work. The planning of courses is underdeveloped. Many schemes of work and lesson plans are no more than lists of topics to be covered without reference to learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment schedules. Little use is made of work experience or visiting speakers for full-time GNVQ advanced students.

26 The quality of students' written work is good. Students' portfolios on GNVQ and professional and management courses are well presented, of an appropriate standard and demonstrate good research skills. In the best lessons, students are motivated and show a good knowledge of their subjects. Some students do not develop adequate communication and study skills. This was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

Retention on some full-time programmes is poor. For example, in 1997-98, retention on the GNVQ intermediate was 56% and retention on the current second-year GNVQ advanced programme is 33%. Attendance in the lessons observed was unsatisfactory at 53%, with an average class size of five. Students who complete their programmes achieve high pass rates. Pass rates in secretarial text processing and Institute of Management team leader certificate are good.

27 There is little co-ordination of the business curriculum across the programme teams and in centres in the community. There is little sharing of good practice or staff development. Course teams meet regularly but devote inadequate time to quality and curriculum issues. Monitoring and recording of students' retention and achievements is not effective. Induction

arrangements for students who enrol late are sometimes not implemented. These issues were not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The internal verification system is thorough.

28 The overall standard of equipment, learning resources and library books for full-time and part-time courses is poor. On business administration courses and on courses taught at community centres, students are supported by good-quality learning materials. In business administration, IT equipment and software is not of industrial standard and hinders the speed at which students can work in lessons and their performance in time-constrained examinations. Most teaching rooms are fit for purpose. The standard of most accommodation and specialist facilities for provision in the community is good.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998 **
Secretarial text processing	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	226
		Retention (%)	*	*	75
		Achievement (%)	*	*	87
GNVQ advanced and BTEC national certificate	3	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	89
Institute of Management team leader certificate	3	Expected completions	*	*	68
		Retention (%)	*	*	97
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

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

*data not reliable

**college data checked by inspectors against source documents

Note: data for other courses are not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 3

29 Ten lessons were observed of college-based provision. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report and identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- clear and comprehensive course documentation
- good-quality teaching
- well-managed work experience
- flexible timetabling of provision

Weaknesses

- high withdrawal rates
- low attendance
- lack of effective monitoring of retention
- insufficient professional updating of staff
- insufficient library stock

30 A range of childcare courses is provided, including the awards of the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education as well as BTEC national diploma and national certificate programmes. Modes of attendance include full-time, part-time day, evening and weekend provision. Course documentation, for example student course guides, placement diaries and staff handbooks are of good quality.

31 Most teaching is effective. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that lessons are well planned and include varied teaching methods. Teaching is supported by useful schemes of work and lesson plans. A few plans lack detail and do not set clear learning objectives. In most lessons, teachers explain the aims of the lesson and intended learning outcomes clearly to students. Students are

effectively encouraged to link theory to work-based activities. In a lesson on healthy diets for pre-school children, the teacher used imaginative and well-produced printed learning materials and a range of brochures to help students decide if the diets they proposed would be sufficiently nutritious. Students benefit from well-planned and carefully monitored work experience. There is effective liaison between college staff and work placement providers. Assignments are well planned with clear submission deadlines. Most teachers mark assignments carefully but some give little guidance to students on how they might improve their work. They often do not correct or advise on spelling or grammar. Students speak positively about the help and support they receive from their teachers.

32 Students make steady progress in learning new skills and developing their knowledge and understanding. They apply theory well to practical work. The average attendance rate in lessons observed, although higher than in other curriculum areas inspected, was less than satisfactory at 71%. Retention rates are low on some courses. For example, in 1997-98, the college estimates that retention was 42% on the national certificate course and 57% on the national diploma course. Retention is not effectively monitored. Registers for 1998-99 indicate that withdrawal rates are high on some courses. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed that pass rates, based upon figures provided by the college, are generally good for students who complete their course. However, these data are not fully reliable. It is not possible to provide a tabular summary of students' retention and achievements in this curriculum area for the reasons described in paragraph 7 in this report.

33 There are classrooms specifically dedicated for work in this area. These rooms are used well by students to practise their skills in creating displays for children. Some of the classrooms and surrounding areas used by

Curriculum Areas

students are in a poor state of decoration and repair. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

34 Inspectors agreed that teachers are appropriately qualified; all teachers hold a teaching qualification and most have relevant vocational qualifications. Teachers who do not hold assessor awards are working towards them. Staff are given few opportunities for professional updating by attending training courses or gaining up-to-date professional experience in the workplace. The majority of part-time staff do not have the opportunity to participate in staff development activities. This weakness was not referred to in the self-assessment report. The library stock is inadequate.

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 4

35 Inspectors observed 16 lessons, the majority of which were college based and the rest were community based. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report had overstated some strengths, and omitted some strengths and a substantial number of weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of provision with clear progression routes
- good progression to higher education

Weaknesses

- poor retention
- poor attendance on full-time courses
- the fragmented organisation and management of the programme area
- insufficient attention given to monitoring students' achievements
- inadequate specialist IT and software applications for design
- poor resourcing of provision in community centres

36 There is a broad range of art and design courses in general art and design, fashion, performing arts, music, photography and ceramics with clear opportunities for students to progress to more advanced levels of study. The extensive provision in community centres is mainly accredited at level 1 by the National Open College Network. In 1997-98, 90 courses were offered. There is a lack of target-setting for enrolments. In 1997-98, more than 50% of courses had enrolments of fewer than 10 students. Recently, a new higher education course was introduced with little evidence of demand and it was allowed to run with only two students.

37 About half of the teaching observed was of good quality. In these lessons, teachers are responsive and supportive to students with different levels of ability. They provide useful learning materials. Full-time and part-time vocational students are encouraged and taught to understand professional practice. In other less satisfactory or weak lessons teachers failed to vary their teaching methods appropriately. In some classes, as many as four groups from different programmes were combined, and in lessons for these classes, students do not receive tuition which takes account of their level of study. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are adversely affected by students' poor punctuality and irregular attendance. Attendance in lessons observed averaged 58%. In the small sample of courses observed at centres in the community, attendance was better. There was particularly poor attendance in lessons in IT key skills. Insufficient attention is given to monitoring punctuality and attendance.

38 Students' drawing and painting and work in clay is of a satisfactory standard. However, their portfolios lack examples of other three-dimensional work and contain little evidence of photography, the use of sketchbooks or IT applications. Most students who complete the access to higher education course and the level 3 general art courses achieve the qualification they seek. A good proportion of these students progress to higher education. Retention rates are low, particularly on the access to higher education course and the intermediate GNVQ. It is not possible to provide a tabular summary of students' retention and achievements in this curriculum area for the reasons described in paragraph 7 in this report.

39 There is no coherent curriculum development plan for the programme area. The fragmented organisation and management of the provision has adversely affected students' experience. There is a recent history of

Curriculum Areas

disruption to provision, including regular changes in line management arrangements that have led to a lack of continuity in provision. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The use of targets, performance indicators and benchmarking data is underdeveloped. Course reviews do not include analyses of students' achievements or comparisons in performance with previous years or against national averages. These weaknesses were not recognised in the college's self-assessment report.

40 Staff are suitably qualified and their expertise is well deployed across the broad range of courses. Students have access to few computers. Those that are available are not up to date and have an inadequate range of software applications. The self-assessment report acknowledged that there has been little capital investment in art and design. New premises have not been effectively adapted, with the exception of the facilities for ceramics which are of good quality. The library stock of books and other materials is inadequate. Students on courses held in the community have poor access to specialist resources such as sewing machines and pattern-cutting tables.

Curriculum Areas

Access to Higher Education and English

Grade 4

41 Eleven college-based lessons were observed covering classes in English, study skills, social policy, social work practice and youth and community work. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's evaluation of some aspects of the provision but thought that it underestimated weaknesses in teaching, students' achievements, academic management, quality assurance and library resources.

Key strengths

- wide range of access to higher education courses
- effective use of video-taped materials

Weaknesses

- poor rates of attendance
- weak management of lessons
- poor retention
- some poor pass rates
- fragmented curriculum management
- poor recording and monitoring of students' achievements
- inadequate library stock

42 The college offers a wide range of access to higher education courses. Most subjects are within the humanities programme area. These include law, library studies, psychology, religious education, social science, social work and sports studies. Figures supplied by the college indicate that recruitment to the access programme as a whole fell from 332 in 1995-96 to 188 in 1997-98. The college recognises that recruitment and marketing have not been effective. English courses are offered at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level

(GCE A level). Programmes are available in the day, evening and at weekends and opportunities are offered for different patterns of study, for example, short intensive courses.

43 The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall. Significant weaknesses in teaching were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Some teachers have low expectations of students. For example, several teachers dominate discussions and readily supply answers to questions when students could easily work these out for themselves. Some teachers fail to check regularly on students' learning. Teachers use video-taped materials well to stimulate learning. In a GCSE English class, video-taped extracts from a good production of a Shakespeare play helped to remove obstacles which sixteenth-century English presents to the modern reader and enabled students to respond directly to the drama. A minority of teaching is lively, demanding and clearly directed at meeting students' learning needs. Some learning materials are of high quality. Most teachers give helpful written comments on students' coursework, clear evaluations of the standard achieved and useful guidance on how the work could be improved. Errors in written English are almost always corrected.

44 In general, students are attentive and responsive in class, but some lose interest when learning activities are insufficiently demanding. In lessons observed, attendance rates varied significantly but were poor overall, at 58%. In a few lessons, learning was disrupted by students' poor punctuality. Some students do not develop the study skills needed for their courses. Some students' written work is of a high standard, particularly on access courses; it shows a well-informed grasp of the topic and an ability to examine and analyse evidence. Some access students make substantial improvements in their work as their course proceeds.

45 The college does not have figures for retention, but the self-assessment report acknowledged that there has been a high rate of

Curriculum Areas

withdrawal from courses. Overall success rates are poor. College figures indicate that the proportion of students enrolled in access to higher education courses who achieved the full certificate in one year, was 30% in 1995-96 and 23% in 1996-97, well below the national average. In 1997-98, despite an improvement to 38%, the pass rate remained below the national average. Figures supplied for GCSE courses in English indicate that retention is poor. Information from the examining board shows that in 1995-96, 30%, and in 1997-98, 20%, of those who entered for the GCSE examination did not sit the examination. The pass rates for those who took the examination are similar to the national average; in 1995-96, 55% achieved the higher grades A to C, 31% in 1996-97 and 47% in 1997-98. Pass rates for the small numbers of students on courses leading to GCE A level English are poor. The self-assessment acknowledged that some pass rates are poor. College figures indicate that 50 of the 71 students who achieved full access certificates in 1997-98 went on to higher education courses. It is not possible to provide a tabular summary of students' retention and achievements in this curriculum area for the reasons described in paragraph 7 in this report.

46 Some courses are carefully planned and well documented, but overall arrangements for curriculum management are confused and fragmented. Staff responsibilities have not been clearly defined. The management of resources and the monitoring of the quality of teaching and students' progress is ineffective. There are few opportunities for staff to work together and share good practice. There is inadequate monitoring of students' achievements. The self-assessment did not identify this significant weakness.

47 Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. The library stock of books and other materials is insufficient to meet students' needs. At one site, students had difficulty in gaining access to the library in the evening.

In a GCSE English class, some students were unable to make progress because they did not have a copy of the novel being studied. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment. Teaching accommodation is adequate overall.

Curriculum Areas

Teacher Education

Grade 4

48 Inspectors observed 10 lessons covering the range of college-based, community-based and collaborative teacher education provision. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and most of the weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report and, in addition, identified a number of other weaknesses.

Key strengths

- broad range of courses
- good study packs

Weaknesses

- poor standards of teaching
- low attendance and retention
- low pass rates
- weak recruitment and marketing
- inadequate monitoring of performance
- shortcomings in resources

49 As the college identified in its self-assessment, there is a broad range of teacher education courses, covering general teaching courses such as City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 730 and training and development lead body awards, as well as more specialised ones such as the teaching certificate in exercise studies. Provision extends from introductory levels through to level 5 courses. The breadth of provision offers students opportunities to progress to more advanced study. This year, some courses, particularly those at introductory levels, are not running as a result of poor marketing and low recruitment. There is a good range of study options for C&G 730 courses. It is available at a number of centres in the community as well as at college sites and is offered in a number of modes of attendance, including weekly or fortnightly

classes, open learning, and monthly Saturday classes.

50 The overall standard of teaching is unusually low for teacher education. In many lessons, teachers do not set a good example of practice to students. In a significant number of lessons, teachers make insufficient demands on students, and their expectations are too low. Although the use of work in pairs or groups adds variety to lessons, these activities are often not well managed or productive. In some lessons, teachers fail to take into account the wide range of students' abilities. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Lesson plans and schemes of work range from those that are well structured to those which are merely a list of topic headings. Teachers' relationships with students are particularly supportive. Students appreciate the relaxed and friendly atmosphere created by teachers. Individual support is effective.

51 Attendance rates were low at an average of 61% in lessons observed. Some students effectively develop skills and understanding but others make poor progress. Arrangements for students to develop and record their acquisition of key skills are underdeveloped. A number of students made good independent use of an educational studies website developed by a member of staff. Most students organise their files and portfolios well, demonstrating an understanding of course requirements. The self-assessment report identified that retention rates are poor and inspectors agreed. Most students who complete their course achieve the qualification but, overall, success rates are low. It is not possible to provide a tabular summary of students' retention and achievements in this curriculum area for the reasons described in paragraph 7 in this report.

52 Provision is not effectively managed. Responsibility for courses resides with the various parts of the college that have decided independently to establish courses in teacher

Curriculum Areas

education. There is insufficient sharing of good practice and standards. There are also significant weaknesses in collating data, including those relating to retention and achievements. The quality of provision is not adequately monitored. Some improvements have been made to the management of the C&G 730 course but these are not, as yet, complete.

53 The self-assessment report recognised that a lack of specialist resources, such as audiovisual aids and multimedia equipment, means that students have little opportunity to assess the value of using different teaching equipment. The only teaching aid used regularly is an overhead projector but this is not always used effectively. The bookstock is inadequate, although this is partly alleviated by the use of effective study packs for students on the C&G 730 course. The quality of some teaching accommodation is poor, particularly at centres in the community.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 3

54 Eighteen lessons were observed including collaborative provision, community and college-based provision in basic skills, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and provision for students with learning difficulties. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a number of additional significant weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses that contribute to widening participation
- development of students' skills
- good progression rates from some courses
- some well-equipped specialist teaching rooms and learning centres

Weaknesses

- ineffective teaching
- poor attendance rates
- inadequate co-ordination of the provision
- lack of accurate data on provision and achievements

55 There is a comprehensive range of basic education courses. Much of the community-based and collaborative provision has been successful in attracting students from groups which have not usually entered further education. Courses are provided in community settings such as day centres, primary schools, hostels for homeless men and in the workplace. Representatives from the partnership organisations speak highly of the college's positive response to the needs of the community. The quality of basic education is higher in the college than in collaborative and community-based provision.

56 Some teaching is of poor quality, a weakness not identified by the college in the self-assessment. The quality of course documentation, including schemes of work and lesson plans, ranges from good to poor. Lesson plans rarely take into account the individual needs of learners of different abilities. In the better lessons, teachers relate learning activities to students' interests and experience of life. For example, ESOL teachers promote the use of everyday language by covering relevant topics such as healthy eating. Some teaching is imaginative and successful in motivating students to learn. For example, a course in volunteering helps students to find placements and plan how to develop skills that will be useful in voluntary work and paid employment. Some teaching is dull and uninspiring and there is an over-reliance on worksheets and printed learning materials, some of which are of poor quality. The work provided for more able students is sometimes insufficiently demanding. Some teachers do not use an appropriate range of teaching methods to meet the needs of students with diverse abilities. Attendance is poor in many lessons; the average attendance in lessons observed was 59%.

57 Initial assessment procedures for college-based courses are well developed for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and in basic skills. In collaborative and community-based provision insufficient emphasis is given to using initial assessments as a basis for planning a student's programme of study. The modular 'access to lifelong learning' programme, for students who have poor basic skills, provides a wide range of study options but the combinations of modules chosen by students, often with little guidance, sometimes lack coherence. The student diary used by basic skills students is often only partially completed. Its potential value as a record of achievements is not realised. Teachers' reviews of students' progress concentrate mainly on tasks students have done and pay insufficient attention to what students have learned.

Curriculum Areas

58 Most students who attend regularly make steady progress. Students with learning difficulties develop a broad range of practical skills, improve their self-confidence and are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. There are some distinctive achievements. For example, in one community-based centre, students have developed considerable skills and self-esteem through researching and writing a book about the history of the local primary school. A number of students have been motivated by winning a national 'Outstanding Adult Learners' Award'. A good proportion of full-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and many basic skills students progress to more advanced courses or move to other courses.

59 The self-assessment acknowledged that co-ordination of basic education provision across the college is a weakness. Curriculum managers have little reliable information about the range of courses offered, overall retention rates and students' achievements. Evaluation of provision does not include rigorous analysis of performance. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment. Inspectors agreed that, despite curriculum managers' efforts, communications are not effective for part-time teachers and those working in community-based or collaborative provision. There are few opportunities for teachers to share good practice. A teachers' handbook for ESOL provides useful support and outlines helpful methods for teaching and assessing students' progress.

60 Some specialist centres and teaching rooms are well stocked with teaching and learning materials. The Key-in basic skills centre, the dedicated ESOL room and the skills centre for students with learning difficulties are excellent. The quality of accommodation and resources at some of the centres in the community is poor. Few attempts are made to integrate the use of IT with the curriculum, even where computers are available. Other teaching aids such as

video-taped materials are rarely used. Some good use is made of voice recognition technology to help students with specific learning difficulties with their writing. As identified in the self-assessment report, the majority of teachers hold specialist teaching qualifications or are working towards them. Teachers are skilled in helping students to feel positive about learning. Students are appreciative of the support they receive from teachers.

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Support for Students

Grade 5

61 Inspectors were unable to agree with the college's self-assessment report on support for students. They considered that most strengths were overstated and that many serious weaknesses were not identified. Inspectors attached greater significance to most of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- there are no key strengths

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of student support
- weak pre-course guidance and information
- inadequate initial assessment and guidance
- failure to identify effectively or provide for individual support needs
- ineffective tutorial support for most students
- lack of careers education and guidance

62 The college's commitment to widening participation and equality of opportunity is not reflected in the quality of its support for students. Since the previous inspection, the quality of support for students has declined sharply. Poor-quality support has had an adverse impact on students' experiences and their achievements. There is no coherent management of student support. This has resulted in some students receiving appropriate support but many receiving none. These significant weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

63 Inspectors did not agree with the statement in the self-assessment report that guidance is a

strength. Many students are not able to make an informed choice about their studies. They are not offered guidance before enrolling on courses. Some full-time students are offered places by telephone without any discussion about the suitability of courses or alternatives. Inspectors found some students enrolled on inappropriate courses. For example, some students on GCSE courses in English did not have the level of skills in English needed for the course. Where interviews take place before students enrol, in most cases staff do not record them. The college prospectus and other key publicity materials for 1998-99 were not produced until late in the summer term, giving little time for students to discuss options with staff at the college or, where relevant, careers advisers and teachers in schools. This weakness was acknowledged in the self-assessment report. A system to record students' initial inquiries has recently been introduced but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

64 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that not all approaches to induction across the college are effective. Many students receive no induction. Those studying with collaborative partners and many part-time students are not informed of support services and other facilities offered by the college. Many of these students do not receive the useful student handbook provided to most full-time students.

65 Arrangements for identifying and providing learning support are inadequate. The self-assessment report did not give sufficient weight to this weakness. There is no systematic initial screening or diagnostic testing to identify students who may need help with numeracy, literacy or ESOL. Students requesting such help on the application form often receive no response from the college. No learning support is offered to students in many curriculum areas. Some curriculum areas have set up learning support workshops but few students use them. The self-assessment report identified that students are offered little opportunity for their previous learning to be accredited. The college's

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disability statement gives some information on the support provided to students with disabilities but it is not clearly presented and the statement is not readily available. Where students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities study on programmes specifically designed to meet their requirements, support is effective. The college was not able to supply information about students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on other programmes.

66 Many students do not receive tutorial support. There is no tutorial programme on many full-time courses, for example, some access to higher education courses. Few students are offered regular opportunities to review their progress and prepare action plans to assist them in their studies. These significant weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The college has recently developed a tutorial framework but this is not being implemented systematically. Where tutorials are timetabled, they are often not effective. Many students receive informal support from their tutors which they value. There is no systematic following up of students' absences. Class registers in lessons observed by inspectors showed that significant numbers of students had left their course during the first few weeks. The college does not effectively record or analyse students' withdrawals or transfers to other courses.

67 Most students receive little or no guidance on the opportunities available on completion of their course. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The centrally located careers guidance service is a useful resource but the take-up by students is low; in the autumn term of 1998, 17 students attended appointments. Some effective careers guidance arrangements are made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are clear procedures for students to receive help in making applications to higher education but these are not always implemented. Many students are not given sufficient guidance and

many are unaware of the help available. There are examples of students who, after trying to get support from staff at the college and failing, seek advice elsewhere. The college has a good range of higher education prospectuses and other careers materials.

68 A satisfactory range of other support is available for students. The college overestimated the strength of these support services. The counselling service is valued by some students. In 1997-98, it was used by 43 students. No formal monitoring of client satisfaction has been undertaken. The system for booking appointments does not provide sufficient confidentiality and some counselling rooms lack privacy. An experienced centrally located guidance team provides a service to some students on personal, welfare and financial issues. Many students are unaware of this service. Childcare services are appreciated by some students. The college's distinctive youth and security service contributes to creating a safe college environment.

General Resources

Grade 4

69 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment of general resources. They thought, however, that some weaknesses were understated while some strengths were overemphasised.

Key strengths

- good IT network and extensive use of electronic mail

Weaknesses

- underused classroom and workshop space
- poor access to some accommodation for students with restricted mobility
- inadequate learning resources

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70 The college has eight sites all within 1.5 miles of each other. The accommodation is mostly over 30 years old and varies in quality. The college is clean and landscaped areas are maintained to a satisfactory standard. There are few displays of students' work and other educational materials. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Since incorporation in 1993, the college has undertaken substantial repairs and refurbishment work costing over £3 million. Many sites, however, still require improvements, estimated by the college to cost in the region of £700,000. At present, funds are only available for essential maintenance. Some accommodation is of outstanding quality, including the IT learning centre, the information centre at Westfield Road and the main hall at Green Lanes. Most sites have suitable communal areas for students. Staff rooms are adequate but a few are small and untidy. There are few areas available for storage in the college. Inspectors agreed that the college's use of a large number of centres at a distance from the college makes provision more easily accessible to local communities.

71 Entrance foyers in the main sites are unwelcoming and are in need of refurbishment. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The college acknowledges that on most sites, people with restricted mobility have access only to rooms on the ground floor. Refectory areas have been improved to a reasonable standard and their size and opening times are appropriate. Inspectors agreed that the sports hall and dance studio are well used but that changing rooms are inadequate. The equipment in the sports area, especially in the weights room, is outdated. The college recognises the need for improved toilet facilities, including more that are adapted for use by people with restricted mobility. Internal and external signposting is poor.

72 The self-assessment report acknowledged that classrooms and workshop areas are

underused. The available space for teaching and learning is substantially higher than needed for the present student population. For example, in 1997-98 Westfield site had on average only 13% usage. Managers have not effectively matched student numbers to available classroom space in order to improve utilisation. The self-assessment report recognised this weakness.

73 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that library facilities are inadequate. Libraries are not well used by students. The bookstock is mostly outdated and the number of journals is low for the size and range of the student population. Library IT facilities are poor. The library budget is low and, in recent years, very few books have been purchased. Each of the college's three libraries is small for the size of the site and has insufficient study spaces and storage areas. Opening times are good at one library and poor at the other two. Library staff are well qualified but low staffing levels mean that, in general, only basic library services such as issuing and collecting books are available. Some programme areas have productive links with the library. Inductions to the library are effective and there are some useful booklets on library services.

74 Inspectors agreed that the IT network between the three main sites and some sites in the community provides an effective system for staff and students to access a variety of IT resources. While the number of computers available for staff is generally satisfactory, there are insufficient computers for students. The ratio of full-time equivalent students to workstations is poor at 20:1, based upon 1997-98 college statistics. Much of the IT equipment is not up to date. Specialist staffing levels are too low for maintaining computer equipment across all sites.

75 The large IT centre is a good resource and supports both timetabled and 'drop-in' use of IT throughout the week, including evenings and weekends. Timetabled sessions reduce the

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access for 'drop-in' students to unacceptably low levels for most times in the day. Several useful IT publications, many prepared by college staff, are available for students and staff. Access to some 40 general reference CD-ROMs is good. This stock is complemented by a large collection of subject-based CD-ROMs which can be booked through the library. However, the computers in the library are not suitable for using CD-ROMs. The college-wide network offers students ready access to the internet. The college is developing its own intranet and plans to use it for course-related learning materials. Progress has been slowed down by staff shortages. Inspectors agreed that staff and student use of the college-wide electronic mail facility for both academic and administrative activities is good.

76 There is a draft IT policy document but there are insufficient staff to implement it and inadequate funding to update and replace computer equipment. Some relevant staff development has been undertaken to prepare staff for using software packages.

Quality Assurance

Grade 5

77 Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional significant weaknesses. They considered that some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were, in fact, weaknesses.

Key strengths

- there are no key strengths

Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements for quality assurance
- lack of reporting on performance
- few service standards and performance targets

- lack of reliable statistical data
- poor course reviews
- no systematic approach to obtaining and using the views of students
- poor self-assessment process
- weak quality assurance of collaborative provision

78 The quality of the students' experience and performance is not assured. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant decline in the quality of the college's provision. The self-assessment did not acknowledge this. Inspectors found that arrangements for quality assurance do not cover all aspects of the college's work. They did not agree with the statement in the self-assessment that 'review and evaluation procedures cover all aspects of the college's curriculum'. During the last few years, the college has identified the need to extend and change its quality assurance procedures but this has led to a complex and incoherent structure which is not understood by staff. Management responsibilities for quality assurance are not clearly defined. Inspectors agreed that the academic board has not been effective in monitoring quality assurance. The college does not report effectively on performance. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There are few performance indicators and targets, and those that do exist are not used effectively. Arrangements to plan improvements are weak. The college has little reliable statistical data which prevents effective analysis of trends in performance. Following the last FEFC inspection of collaborative provision in 1997, the college introduced a structure for control and monitoring of this provision. The college acknowledges that the reviews of quality in collaborative provision remain inadequate.

79 The completion of annual course reviews is not always efficient and their quality is mainly poor. Course teams collect information for

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programme evaluation logs, which form the main part of the course review system. Some logs are incomplete and most contain little analysis. Comments are descriptive and lack critical evaluation. Significant areas, such as the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements are not addressed. Most action plans are inadequate. Arrangements to collect students' and other customers' views about the quality of provision are not systematic, a weakness identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some course teams conduct surveys of students' views and, in a few programme areas, summaries of findings are fed back to students and lead to plans to develop and improve provision. However, most summaries are incomplete and include no analysis of data or plans for improvement. There are well-structured arrangements for the internal verification of courses, but they have had little impact on quality.

80 There are few service standards and those that are available are not used effectively to improve quality. The college charter is clearly set out but contains no measurable standards against which the college's performance can be compared. Most students are given a copy of the student handbook, which contains a summary of the charter, but staff do not inform them of its significance. There is no formal monitoring of the extent to which the college fulfils its charter commitments. None of these weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report. There are clear arrangements for dealing with the high number of students' written complaints and these are dealt with efficiently. Students are strongly critical of the lack of response to verbal concerns and complaints and some are unaware of the formal procedures. There is no overall analysis of complaints made, and no monitoring of trends in complaints or actions taken to address concerns.

81 The college introduced a pilot self-assessment scheme in 1997. The report used for the inspection was the second one produced

by the college. The self-assessment process is weak. The framework omits some aspects of college provision, especially in cross-college areas. Quality statements in Council Circular 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection* are not addressed. Although most teaching staff were involved in the process, many support staff and students know little about it. Much of the self-assessment is based on weak course reviews and inadequate data. Arrangements for moderation are not effective. Action plans are insufficiently precise. Self-assessment procedures are not effectively linked to strategic planning. Arrangements for lesson observations are underdeveloped and they have not been effectively used to inform self-assessment. The college introduced a small-scale lesson observation scheme last year with little consultation and without any central co-ordination. These weaknesses were identified and a new scheme with clearer aims is currently being developed.

82 Inspectors agreed that there are useful policies and systematic procedures for staff development. However, although some priorities are clearly specified, these have not resulted in measurable improvements in the quality of provision. There has been insufficient funding to meet all identified needs for external training. The college has made efforts to secure increasing opportunities for professional development within its budget constraints. For example, they have very recently entered into a reciprocal arrangement with Wolverhampton University whereby staff at both institutions can access each other's courses at no cost. A few staff have already enrolled on courses to improve their professional qualifications. The college recognises that its appraisal process is outdated and no longer meets the needs of the organisation. Most staff had a professional development review last year but the devolved nature of the current system has resulted in inadequate information to identify some staff development needs and to review the effectiveness of appraisal.

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Governance

Grade 5

83 Inspectors and auditors were unable to agree with the college's self-assessment of governance. Most strengths identified in the self-assessment report were not supported by evidence. Many weaknesses were not identified and the significance of others was understated.

Key strengths

- there are no key strengths

Weaknesses

- failure to ensure the solvency of the college
- acceptance of inadequate and inaccurate financial information
- no effective oversight of collaborative provision
- failure of audit process
- lack of involvement in strategic planning
- lack of effective monitoring of students' achievements and retention
- 'whistleblowing' procedure not yet in operation

84 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

85 The corporation lacks expertise in the running of large businesses and experience in senior management. Governors failed to sufficiently challenge proposals from the college executive. The corporation has a determined size of 20. At the time of the inspection, there

were six vacancies one of which is long-term. Strategies to identify new governors have resulted in eight expressions of interest. The corporation has identified, through a survey of governors' skills, that financial and legal skills need to be increased as well as representation from local industry and senior educational management. Training and induction for governors is not effective.

86 The self-assessment report acknowledged that governors have failed to assure the necessary quality of financial forecasting and cashflow management. Governors, including those of the finance and general purposes committee, did not begin to receive the college's full monthly management accounts until autumn 1998. There are a number of companies with links to the college. Although many of the directors of these companies are governors and managers of the college, the corporation has not received or requested adequate reports on these companies' finances. This would have been prudent. Governors have received reports on the college's extensive collaborative provision but have not ensured that effective control was established. An investigation into the eligibility for funding of a large proportion of this provision is currently in progress.

87 Governors had little involvement in drawing up the strategic plan. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, there has been insufficient governor involvement in the examination of the achievement of strategic objectives and financial targets. Governors have approved budgets that did not provide a sound basis for the continued solvency of the college. Despite becoming aware early in 1997 of a reduction in annual income of some £3.5 million, governors endorsed a continuing policy of expansion. Governors accepted a provisional budget for 1997-98 which included unrealistic income assumptions.

88 In June 1998, it became clear to governors that the college was in a very poor financial position and that a significant reduction in

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expenditure was urgently needed. They promptly set up a governors' working group with senior management and took action to begin to address the serious difficulties faced by the college. Plans for the recovery of the financial position, involving significant reductions in the management structure, were considered by the corporation during the summer and autumn. Following the appointment of the new acting chief executive and completion of the first phase of reorganisation, the recovery plan is being developed further. It has not yet been agreed by the corporation or the FEFC.

89 Governors have not effectively overseen audit processes at the college. Although the audit committee has monitored and reported to the corporation on auditors' plans and reports, internal audit plans have not been sufficiently comprehensive. Governors have not sufficiently queried why adjustments to the draft 1997-98 financial statements of £2.9 million, relating to audited financial statements from previous years, were not identified previously.

90 Inspection reports, including the 1997 report on collaborative provision which identified significant weaknesses, were not sufficiently considered by the corporation. Governors have not monitored the action plan arising from the 1994 inspection, which highlighted the need for improved monitoring of students' attendance, retention, achievements and destinations. The corporation has not monitored these key indicators of college performance and students' success. The corporation has recently established a curriculum and quality committee with a brief to receive information on curriculum matters, including students' achievements and retention. It is too early to judge its effectiveness. The corporation receives reports on the meetings of the academic board but it does not monitor the implementation of the college's equal opportunities policy.

91 The corporation has the following committees: finance and general purposes; audit; employment policy; remuneration; search and curriculum quality. The corporation and its committees have met with appropriate frequency and meetings have been well attended. The finance and general purposes committee has not been effective in monitoring and reporting to the corporation upon the state of the college's finances. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, the updating of job descriptions for senior staff and governors' appraisal of their performance has been irregular. Lack of regular appraisal has meant that governors have forfeited an opportunity to monitor the progress made towards and achievement of strategic objectives and financial targets. The remuneration committee has not demonstrated that salary increases for the former principal and chief executive were linked to performance.

92 The conduct of business has been assisted by clear agendas and minutes for corporation and committee meetings. There are procedures and policies relating to accountability and openness of the corporation including, for example, a code of conduct, standing orders and registers of interests which cover all senior staff as well as governors. However, some governors have felt that often they have not been presented with a full range of options and information upon which to base their decisions. In recent years, the college has received wide-ranging anonymous and signed allegations. The corporation is only now considering a draft 'whistleblowing' policy.

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Management

Grade 5

93 Inspectors and auditors did not agree with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. They considered that some of the strengths claimed were weaknesses, that some weaknesses were understated and that other serious weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- there are no key strengths

Weaknesses

- failure to sustain the quality of provision since the last inspection
- weak management
- imprudent financial planning and monitoring
- poor value for money in the use of public funds
- failure to account for public funds
- ineffective strategic planning
- lack of monitoring of college policies and performance
- ineffective management information systems
- weak market research

94 During the last few years, inadequate management arrangements have led to a significant decline in the quality of educational provision. In 1997, much of the responsibility for management was delegated to 21 'subcolleges'. At the time of the inspection, a management restructuring was being implemented but it is too early to assess its effectiveness. The college's draft recovery plan is being further developed. The plan includes the sale of college property, over 100 staff redundancies, and many other staff stepping down to lower grade posts.

95 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. The college's financial planning and monitoring has been imprudent. The budget for 1997-98 was formulated on the basis of flawed assumptions, including over-optimistic forecasts of income. An audited £2 million accumulated surplus in July 1997 is restated as a £0.9 million accumulated deficit in the draft financial statements for 1997-98. This reflects provisional adjustments to previous years' accounts totalling £2.9 million. These relate mainly to inaccuracies in the level of the college's income and debtors. The draft 1997-98 financial statements also show a £3.7 million operating deficit, whereas the budget was set to break even. A sizeable operating deficit is also forecast for 1998-99. If these deficits are confirmed, the college will have liabilities that are significantly greater than its assets. The college has serious cashflow difficulties and is dependent on advance funding from the FEFC and a large overdraft from its bankers to continue operating.

96 The delegation of much of the college's finance function to 'subcolleges' led to weakened financial control. Income monitoring is independent of the college's central financial information system. Monthly management accounts are produced within 15 days of the end of each month but their validity is undermined by the inaccuracy of the current budget and the failure of the college's student records system to provide reliable information. Internal audit coverage of the student records system has been inadequate. Budget holders have access to the college's financial system, but they do not receive monthly budget reports. The college's financial regulations are not comprehensive. Financial performance indicators have been established only recently. The head of finance, a qualified accountant, is not a member of the senior management team. Many of the college's financial and statistical returns to the FEFC are submitted late and some contain significant

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inaccuracies. The college has not been able to demonstrate its proper use of public funds.

97 The relationship between the college, a charitable foundation, some companies connected with the college and joint ventures is unclear. The college has not established mechanisms for scrutiny and control. The college charges companies for the facilities and staffing it provides. These companies are in the process of being wound up and the college is seeking to recover substantial monies that may be owing.

98 Inspectors agreed that staff strongly support what is held as the college's core vision; to widen participation for the community. In recent years, the emphasis given to international work, collaborative provision outside the region and income-generating activities has diverted the college's efforts. The college is now refocusing its work to concentrate on the local community. The college's strategic plan was drawn up by senior managers, with little consultation. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that market research is ineffective and has had little influence on the college's plans. Income targets were set, but some were highly optimistic. Operational plans are often vague or unrealistic and have little bearing on the college's work.

99 There is no systematic management of the college's provision. Common standards in provision for students are not secured across the college. Whole-college policies have not been properly implemented or monitored. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the management structure is ineffective. They could not agree that delegation of responsibilities to 'subcolleges' is a strength. Delegation has led to fragmentation and duplication of provision, unproductive internal competition and few opportunities for staff to share good practice. Cross-college committees and groups lack a rationale and terms of reference. Their powers of decision-making and relationships to each other are not understood

by staff. Day-to-day management and administration of the college are poor. Some curriculum managers are not aware of the extent of the provision within their area. Registers and timetables are not kept accurately. Collaborative partners experience delays in payment and responses to correspondence.

100 The self-assessment report did not identify the significant weaknesses in information systems. There is no management information systems policy or strategy and no recent attempt to identify the information needs of college managers. Systems for the collection and processing of information are inadequate and often are not implemented. Curriculum managers do not have reliable student data for their areas of responsibility. By January 1999, the college had only managed to locate 60% of the registers for 1997-98. The college has recognised these issues and is taking action.

101 Inspectors did not support the college's self-assessment that there are strong links with external organisations. Some relationships with community partners are productive but links with collaborative partners do not include rigorous monitoring. In the last few years, relationships with some organisations have deteriorated. The college is starting to rebuild these. The number and quality of links with employers vary widely in different parts of the college, ranging from non-existent to excellent.

102 The college's commitment to equal opportunities is reflected in the college vision, job descriptions for staff and in most college literature. The college employs a similar proportion of staff from minority ethnic backgrounds to that in the local population. Women are well represented at all levels of the management structure. There is a recently revised equal opportunities policy. However, there is no effective co-ordination of the implementation or monitoring of the policy.

103 Since summer 1998, management has worked rapidly to restructure the college. The number of management posts is being reduced.

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Staff understand the reasons for, and support, the management reorganisation. The restructuring process is being efficiently managed and some reductions in expenditure are being achieved. Internal communications are improving.

Conclusions

104 The self-assessment report for the inspection was the second undertaken by the college. The self-assessment process is ineffective. There are no quality assurance arrangements which enable cross-college areas to produce reliable self-assessment reports and curriculum area self-assessment reports were based upon weak programme area reviews. Inspectors found that much of the evidence to support strengths was inadequate or unreliable. Many of the strengths were overstated. The college failed to identify or placed insufficient emphasis upon many weaknesses. Students' achievements were often not fully considered and when performance data were used for evidence they were incomplete and unreliable. The inspection team was not able to agree with many of the college's judgements. Inspectors agreed with only one of the grades awarded by the college to curriculum areas. In all but one of the cross-college areas, the inspection team judged the college to be significantly overgenerous in its assessment. Serious weakness had not been recognised in the areas of support for students, quality assurance, governance and management. Inspectors awarded worse grades to cross-college aspects in all but one area.

105 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	2
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	15
25+ years	71
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	56
Intermediate	19
Advanced	14
Higher education	3
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	8
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	196	1,230	15
Agriculture	19	34	1
Construction	324	34	4
Engineering	77	179	3
Business	299	610	9
Hotel and catering	141	164	3
Health and community care	583	925	15
Art and design	106	501	6
Humanities	195	2,044	23
Basic education	132	1,949	21
Total	2,072	7,670	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 39% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	216	75	30	321
Supporting direct learning contact	117	46	10	173
Other support	185	63	5	253
Total	518	184	45	747

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£20,154,000	£25,152,000	£21,996,000
Average level of funding (ALF) Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£11.74	+	£14.95*
Payroll as a proportion of income	65%	62%	71%
Achievement of funding target	193%	+	98%
Diversity of income	17%	22%	28%
Operating surplus	£507,000	£619,000#	-£3,712,579**

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

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

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

+agreed data not available

*provisional data

#accounts are likely to be restated as significant deficit

**draft audited accounts

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