

Bournville College of Further Education

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
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FUNDING
COUNCIL

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

*Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report
Sample size: 104 college inspections*

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college 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 students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. 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 included.*

Summary

Bournville College of Further Education

West Midlands Region

Inspected May 2000

Bournville College of Further Education is a general further education college in south-west Birmingham. It offers courses in all of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. Work in six programme areas together with basic skills and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, a number of strengths identified by the college were no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses which the college had not identified. In most curriculum areas insufficient weight was given to poor rates of retention and achievement on some courses.

The proportion of lessons judged by inspectors to be at least satisfactory is similar to the average for the sector as a whole. Comparatively fewer lessons were good or outstanding. In effective lessons students were motivated and responsive. Teachers ensured that students understood their work. In some of the less satisfactory lessons there was no appropriate planning to ensure that suitable demands were made on students of different abilities. Rates of student retention at levels 2

and 3 have been below the national average for the sector over the last three years. Students' achievements overall are at, or above, the national benchmarks at levels 1, 2 and 3. The college has been successful in widening participation in further education and continues to maintain a tradition of working with students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Since the last inspection the college has improved its financial position and the quality of, and access to, much of its teaching accommodation. There is good support for students with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Staff development activities are well managed. The college makes good use of the expertise of governors. The corporation closely monitors the educational performance of the college. Communications within the college are good. The college, through its highly effective contribution to local partnerships, continues to serve the needs of the wider community. The college should improve: the standard of provision in science; student rates of retention and achievement on some courses; additional learning support; tutorials and careers guidance; space utilisation; the library; course reviews and action plans; access to management information; and the quality of curriculum and cross-college management in some areas.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	4	Support for students	4
Floristry and horticulture	3	General resources	3
Leisure and tourism	3	Quality assurance	3
Childcare, health and social care	3	Governance	2
Access to higher education, teacher education and British sign language	2	Management	3
ESOL and pre-vocational access	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Bournville College of Further Education is a medium-sized general further education college which was established in 1913. It occupies a single site campus in south-west Birmingham. The college also provides courses for its local communities in 58 outreach centres away from the main campus. It recruits students from Birmingham, Bromsgrove, Dudley and Sandwell. The college provides courses in all programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Courses range from entry level to higher education. Most provision is in the curriculum areas of basic skills, business, health and community care, hotel and catering, humanities and science. The college has a business school, health and care centre, sixth form centre, science and technology centre and a wholly owned subsidiary, Praxis Solutions Limited. In addition, the college has franchise partnerships with a small number of local providers which account for less than 15% of total provision. The college has responded positively to the needs of many refugees and asylum seekers in the area.

2 The overall unemployment rate in the West Midlands is 4.3%, and in Birmingham 9.1%. In south-west Birmingham the rate varies between 4.7% and 10%. In some parts of the area from which the college recruits, the unemployment rate is 26% and deprivation is significant. The college has been identified by the FEFC as one of a group of colleges that typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Over half of the students currently enrolled are from such areas.

3 The college is open for six days and four evenings each week and its enrolment programme operates for 50 weeks of the year. In November 1999, 17,690 students were enrolled, of whom 16,223 were part time. Women students comprised 58% of enrolments. Students from minority ethnic groups comprised 36% of full-time enrolments and

13% of part-time enrolments. Students under 16 years of age totalled 148. The number of 16 to 18 year old students increased by 5% in 1998-99. While 57% of 16 to 18 year olds came from districts close to the college, there was an increase of 5% in the number enrolling from inner-city areas. In addition to specialist colleges, there are six other further education colleges and three sixth form colleges in Birmingham. The city has a considerable number of independent schools, grammar schools and schools with sixth forms as well as private training organisations.

4 The college's senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, director of finance, director of human resources and the corporation secretary. The college management team includes three faculty heads, the estates manager, community development manager, head of client and external relations and the faculty administration manager. Thirteen programme areas have responsibility for the curriculum. Since incorporation the college has continued to work well with Birmingham City Council and with the Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There are strong links with a range of higher education institutions and a formal partnership with two local ones. There are good links with local employers, local schools and a wide range of local community organisations. Since the last FEFC inspection in 1996 the college has improved its financial position significantly. It has also won many local, regional and national awards in both curricular and cross-college areas.

5 The college has a strong commitment to widen participation in education and training among those groups which have not traditionally entered further education and among people who are disadvantaged. Work with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities began in the late 1960s. The college's mission statement emphasises: financial efficiency; high-quality provision;

Context

and the importance of the 'social agendum', which covers work for the benefit of the local community. It also lists 11 values which are priorities for the college. These include references to continuous improvement and partnerships based on mutual goodwill. The college's key strategic aims are to: ensure a sound financial base; provide a diverse range of education and training; develop and expand partnerships; and apply a philosophy of continuous improvement.

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in May 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. Inspectors checked the college's own data on students' achievements for 1999 against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by the examining bodies. They found the data to be reliable. The ISR data were grouped in a format which made it difficult for inspectors of basic skills and provision of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) to produce a table of students' achievements. Fourteen inspectors and an auditor worked for a total of 64 days to carry out the inspection. Five inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) assessed provision for work-based trainees and worked with the FEFC's inspection team during the inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training in agriculture, health care and public service, and business administration, as well as management and professional training. Where it was relevant to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by the TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading provision that was funded by the FEFC.

The FEFC inspectors observed 99 lessons, scrutinised students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, other college staff and students.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 60% were good or outstanding. This is below the average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	1	3	0	0	4
GCSE	0	1	2	0	0	3
GNVQ	2	8	5	3	0	18
NVQ	3	5	4	0	0	12
Access to further education	1	1	3	0	0	5
Access to higher education	2	5	5	0	0	12
Other vocational	6	16	8	4	0	34
Other*	3	5	3	0	0	11
Total (No.)	17	42	33	7	0	99
Total (%)	17	43	33	7	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99:*

Chief inspector's annual report

**includes basic education*

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bournville College of Further Education	8.0	69
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99:*

Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 4

9 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Insufficient emphasis was placed on rates of retention and students' achievements.

Key strengths

- the high standard of specialist resources in the new science and technology centre
- well-planned lessons
- good pass rates on one-year general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) courses

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of information technology (IT) in lessons
- low and declining retention rates on many courses
- achievement below the national average on some courses
- poor attendance on some courses

10 The college provides a broad range of general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and GCE A level science subjects and the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced science. It has not recruited to GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses in recent years. Science is also offered as an integral part of some access courses, such as health studies. This is a valuable feature of the provision in science.

11 In most cases, course management is good. The minutes of meetings and course review documents show systematic monitoring of weaknesses that were identified in the self-assessment report, for example, low student attendance and poor achievement.

Recent changes which were a result of teachers leaving the college have adversely affected students' learning.

12 Teaching is satisfactory but fewer lessons were judged to be good or outstanding than is the case nationally. Most teaching and learning activities are well planned. There are appropriately detailed schemes of work. The careful attention which teachers give to safety is reflected in lesson plans, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods in their lessons, which frequently include demonstrations or practical work for students. For example, in a GCSE physics lesson good use was made of a demonstration on radioactive decay. A video of aspects of the Big Bang helped students revise. Mature students studying biology as part of access to health studies used an appropriate variety of modern equipment for tests related to fitness. Students carry out practical work with care and due regard for safety. In some lessons, teachers do not always ensure that the learning activities match the range of ability in the class. In a chemistry lesson the teacher required students to complete a calculation but provided no appropriate additional task for those who finished the work quickly. Some teaching of theoretical aspects of science relies heavily on the teacher's contribution; there is too little opportunity for students to participate in discussion. There is insufficient application of IT. The use of computers is restricted to very simple applications or to processing data from CD-ROMs. Homework is set and marked regularly.

13 The programme area has a good range of apparatus and other teaching resources. The new science and technology centre includes laboratories of a high standard, a resource room and an IT suite. The accommodation is well used for teaching and there are sufficient

Curriculum Areas

computers, books and periodicals for students. However, these facilities are only available to students on a 'drop-in' basis if a teacher is present. Teachers are experienced and knowledgeable. The self-assessment report notes the need to update the industrial experience of teaching staff. Technicians provide good support.

14 Retention rates for most courses are low and continue to decline. In 1999, approximately half the students enrolled failed to complete their courses. Many students from disadvantaged groups leave for reasons unconnected with the course. The self-assessment report recognises that retention is a matter of concern. A new strategy for monitoring recruitment and attendance has led to some improvement in the retention rate on some courses.

However, the retention rates on a number of GCSE courses remain well below the national averages for the sector. Attendance levels also cause concern. Monitoring in the current academic year has been more thorough and has led to improvements in attendance in GCE A level classes. However, college data show that average attendance rates for first-year GNVQ classes and an evening class in GCSE human physiology and health are below the average for the sector. The achievement rate on one-year GCE A level courses is good. Achievement in GCSE science is considerably lower than the national average. Achievement on GCE A level courses declined in 1999 and is below national averages. However, on all these courses students achieved better results in 1999, than had been predicted by an external agency following an analysis of the students' previous examination results.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE science (single award)	2	Number of starters	*	46	35
		Retention (%)	*	72	74
		Achievement (%)	*	39	15
GCSE sciences (separate subjects)	2	Number of starters	131	35	43
		Retention (%)	64	77	53
		Achievement (%)	38	52	26
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	31	35	44
		Retention (%)	65	71	57
		Achievement (%)	75	64	56
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	33	24	27
		Retention (%)	79	79	56
		Achievement (%)	88	89	73
GNVQ advanced science	3	Number of starters	40	5	12
		Retention (%)	63	60	42
		Achievement (%)	75	33	80

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college 1999

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Floristry and Horticulture

Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some strengths were overstated. They also identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- in horticulture effective collaboration with community organisations
- an effective response to the needs of students from disadvantaged groups
- good facilities for teaching floristry
- high standards of practical work in floristry
- good tutorial provision on floristry courses

Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement on some courses
- the failure to meet the needs of all students
- poor resources for students working on their own
- insufficient access to college services for students not studying on the college site
- inadequate development of key skills, basic skills and study skills

16 The college offers courses in horticulture and floristry at national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 2, and a work-based NVQ programme in environmental conservation. All but one of the courses are part time. In floristry there are good links with employers who provide students on NVQ programmes with work placements. Priority is given to the provision of appropriate learning opportunities for those students who have difficulty participating in further education. A range of NOCN modular courses has been developed

for non-employed horticulture students. The horticulture section, in pursuit of the college's mission, has developed courses based in local communities in partnership with community organisations and agencies. This provision is highly valued by the organisations involved. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that this collaboration is a key strength.

17 There is considerable variation in the standard of teaching and learning. Most teaching is satisfactory, and some practical floristry work is outstanding. For example, in a session on floral table decoration, students were required to contrast traditional and modern styles and create distinct examples of each. In fulfilling these requirements their work demonstrated creativity and proficiency. Most courses achieve appropriate standards in practical teaching. In less effective lessons, teachers do not provide the students with a clear understanding of how their studies link to other parts of the course. In some practical sessions inappropriate techniques were being taught. In floristry well-developed course plans are provided for students; this is not the case in horticulture where students do not have a clear idea of the work which lies ahead.

18 The college provides a good induction whenever students join a course. Floristry students benefit from regular tutorials. They are encouraged to consider the development of their skills in the context of their workplace, and to plan further work, which is then followed up at the next tutorial. In horticulture, tutorials are more informal, and there is no shared record or defined agenda. The students are not provided with information on the library or IT facilities. They do not receive sufficient encouragement to pursue their studies beyond the essential requirements of the course. Teachers do not always follow up their assessment of key skills and basic skills with appropriate feedback and action, a weakness the college recognised in its assessment.

Curriculum Areas

19 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that resources for floristry are a strength of the provision. Staff are well qualified and experienced and the specialist rooms are well equipped. Most horticulture students attend the Kings Heath Horticultural Training Centre, where the college has a service agreement with Birmingham City Parks. The park provides a good resource for horticulture. However, students at this centre are not made aware of the many services the college provides centrally, such as the library, computing facilities, advice services and learning support. At many centres in the community the resources are inadequate for the programmes offered. The college library stock is poor and little used by students and staff.

20 The college recognises in the self-assessment report the weaknesses in student rates of retention and achievement, and has taken action to address them.

Student retention rates are below national benchmarks and have continued to decline. For example, retention rates in horticulture courses have dropped from 77% in 1997 to 63% in 1999. Achievement rates are also poor for some courses. The proportion of students from disadvantaged groups has increased and includes, for example, residents of probation service hostels. The performance of many of these students is adversely affected by their personal circumstances. Most students' portfolios are well organised and comprehensive. Some courses use a wide and appropriate range of assessment methods including peer group presentation and artwork. In most horticulture programmes, however, assignment work is limited to the completion of a portfolio.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in floristry and horticulture, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ amenity horticulture	1	Number of starters	39	60	46
		Retention (%)	77	66	63
		Achievement (%)	30	43	+
NOCN horticulture	1	Number of starters	*	26	30
		Retention (%)	*	65	95
		Achievement (%)	*	100	63
NVQ amenity horticulture	2	Number of starters	31	15	15
		Retention (%)	84	53	73
		Achievement (%)	77	65	64
NVQ floristry	2	Number of starters	31	27	33
		Retention (%)	77	56	66
		Achievement (%)	88	73	+

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*course not running

+data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Leisure and Tourism

Grade 3

21 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report, but found some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching and learning
- effective integration of key skills within vocational programmes
- good achievement on GNVQ foundation and advanced courses
- effective arrangements for work experience
- good curricular support for students with sensory disabilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses
- a low achievement rate on the GNVQ intermediate course
- insufficiently demanding tasks in some lessons
- a narrow range of provision and study modes
- no specialist teachers for travel and tourism

22 The college offers GNVQ leisure and tourism programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels mainly to 16 to 18 year old full-time students. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the range of additional vocational qualifications available to full-time students improves their employment prospects. These additional qualifications include: languages; the community sports leader award; sports coaching awards; and computer

literacy and information technology.

The curriculum portfolio does not include any school link, access, work-based, evening or flexible learning provision. The narrow range of provision is not identified as a weakness in the current self-assessment report.

23 The teachers of courses in leisure and tourism carefully monitor students' progress and attendance throughout their programmes. A termly report on students is sent to their parents. Students' programmes of study have been adversely affected by staff changes during the academic year. As a consequence there have been delays in the completion of key skills logbooks and disruption to the assessment programme for the marketing unit.

24 The standard of most teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers have produced some well-designed and informative handouts for students. Enlarged and Braille copies of the handouts are provided for students with visual impairments. Students with sensory disabilities benefit from the help given by learning support assistants in lessons and on visits to leisure and tourism attractions. Teachers make frequent references to vocational examples drawn from industry. Most students work well in lessons and contribute fully when working in groups. In a few lessons the tasks set for students are undemanding and more able students who complete them quickly are left with nothing to do. Also, as a result of their poor time management, teachers were left with insufficient time to give an effective summary of lessons or to check that students had understood the key points. The self-assessment report does not refer to these strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning.

25 Assignment briefs are clearly written and are linked to relevant vocational contexts. In some GNVQ subjects at intermediate and advanced level, assessed work is returned to students well beyond the three-week target set by course teams. Work experience is well

Curriculum Areas

documented and effectively integrated with assessment programmes for most students. However, second-year GNVQ advanced students have not had access to work placements during their programme. Work on the development of key skills is an integral part of GNVQ programmes. For example, one IT lesson involved developing a database to monitor snow conditions in European ski resorts. Students' progress in key skills is effectively assessed and systematically recorded in an assessment logbook.

26 Students' rates of achievement and retention on the GNVQ intermediate course are well below college targets and national averages, as the self-assessment report acknowledges. Achievement of the qualification on this course fell from 50% in 1997 and 1998 to 40% in 1999. There has been insufficient action to address this decline. During the 1999-2000 academic year the retention rate is staying well below the national average. Although the retention rate on the GNVQ advanced course was poor in 1999, the

achievement rate is well above the national average, and is a major improvement on the rate for 1998. The achievement rate on the GNVQ foundation course is good and has been above the national average for the past three years. The standard of most students' work and portfolios is good. The percentage of students that gain high grades on GNVQ leisure and tourism programmes is above the national average. Progression rates from foundation and intermediate courses are good.

Three current first-year advanced students successfully completed GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses prior to progressing to the advanced programme.

27 Teaching base rooms are satisfactory. Some good wall displays provide a stimulating atmosphere for study. Students have good access to IT facilities. The library bookstock is adequate. Some part-time teachers lack recent industrial experience and there are no teachers on the course team who have specialist travel and tourism experience.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure and tourism, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation	1	Number of starters	22*	15	14
		Retention (%)	91*	47	71
		Achievement (%)	75*	86	78
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	13	25	18
		Retention (%)	92	80	56
		Achievement (%)	50	50	40
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	24	20	23
		Retention (%)	67	70	61
		Achievement (%)	94	36	86

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*college data

Curriculum Areas

Childcare, Health and Social Care

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 20 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements made in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses had already been addressed at the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good integration of work experience within courses
- a high achievement rate on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies
- an effective response to employer and community needs
- a well-planned and comprehensive induction programme
- good attention to the learning needs of adult students

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on several courses
- insufficient checks on students' learning in many lessons
- insufficient development of key skills in lessons
- an inadequate range of courses at some levels
- inadequate resources to support students' research
- weaknesses in curriculum organisation and management

29 The college offers a range of courses in childcare, counselling, and health and social care. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the provision is highly responsive to the requirements of employers. A broad range of qualifications,

including NVQ levels 2 and 3, effectively meets their needs. Unique courses for the professional development of therapy assistants draw students from a wide geographical area. Nearly all of the students are adults. There are some gaps in the range of provision in health and social care. Enrolments to GNVQ intermediate and advanced health and social care courses have shown a decline over the last three years; the foundation level failed to recruit in 1999. At level 4, provision is limited to the NVQ diploma in management of care studies.

30 The overall standard of teaching is satisfactory. Of the lessons observed, 11 were judged to be good or outstanding which broadly correlates with the college's own assessment. In the more effective lessons students were given a range of demanding and vocationally relevant activities. For example, second-year students on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies undertook a practical activity designed to illustrate the position of planets in relation to the sun. Students used a rhyme to help them to memorise the planets. The corridor was used to enable students to fix the planets at appropriate distances from each other and the sun to gain some idea of the distances involved. Students evaluated the exercise drawing out the potential learning opportunities for children at infants' school. In the less effective lessons, teachers failed adequately to check that students were making appropriate progress in their learning. There were insufficient opportunities to develop key skills in lessons.

31 Assignments are vocationally relevant, draw effectively on work experience and are fairly assessed. Staff make detailed written comments on the work, identifying areas for improvement. Regular internal verification ensures consistency. Key skills were clearly identified within assignments. In the more effective assignments students used a wide range of relevant information including data from the Internet. Most work is well

Curriculum Areas

presented and draws on appropriate IT skills. Inspectors agreed with the college that well-organised and effectively monitored work experience makes a significant contribution to students' learning. Every student has a named mentor in the workplace. Close liaison between the college placement officer and the mentor ensures that students are well supported.

32 Many courses have exceeded their targets for enrolment. Rates of retention and achievement on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies were substantially above the national average in 1999, a strength not noted in the self-assessment report. There are poor rates of retention and achievement on GNVQ intermediate health and social care. Retention rates were significantly below the national average in 1998 and 1999. Achievement rates have declined significantly over the last three years. Retention rates on the NVQ level 2 and level 3 childcare and education course were poor in 1999.

33 There are weaknesses in curriculum management. A small team of experienced full-time staff is responsible for a diverse and rapidly growing provision. There is no common format for lesson plans, schemes of work or monitoring the progress of individual students. A significant number of NVQ candidates did not achieve the full award within the allocated time. The college in its self-assessment report identified the need for additional assessors. Programme area and faculty heads regularly monitor course team meetings and action plans which result from them. A comprehensive well-managed induction programme includes assessment of students' learning needs. Students are well supported in individual tutorials where their attendance is closely monitored.

34 Teaching rooms are well maintained and fit for purpose although some are small. The lack of screens for overhead projectors reduces the effectiveness of teaching. There are insufficient current texts to support research-based learning. Library staff compile topic folders for student reference. Students regularly access computers and make good use of available CD-ROMs and the Internet.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in childcare, health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ childcare and education	2	Number of starters	17	59	25
		Retention (%)	42	41	36
		Achievement (%)	43	35	100
NVQ care	2	Number of starters	121	66	225
		Retention (%)	93	71	82
		Achievement (%)	72	89	90
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	18	23	10
		Retention (%)	72	57	60
		Achievement (%)	77	62	50
Associated Examining Board certificate in counselling	2	Number of starters	*	10	27
		Retention (%)	*	60	63
		Achievement (%)	*	100	100
BTEC national diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	27	21	18
		Retention (%)	100	67	94
		Achievement (%)	96	100	100
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	35	19	19
		Retention (%)	57	68	67
		Achievement (%)	70	62	78
NVQ childcare and education	3	Number of starters	16	38	44
		Retention (%)	69	79	57
		Achievement (%)	64	100	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

**course not running*

Curriculum Areas

Access to Higher Education, Teacher Education and British Sign Language

Grade 2

35 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment and noted that progress had been made in addressing some of the weaknesses at the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- flexible and effective arrangements for courses
- good teaching
- some good achievements by students
- good attention to equal opportunities
- effective curriculum management
- attractive teaching accommodation

Weaknesses

- the retention rate on some courses

36 The courses are offered in three different faculties. There are good opportunities for progression and many students on the access courses proceed to higher education. Full-time, part-time day and part-time evening courses are offered both in the college and in a number of community centres. There are flexible arrangements for the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses which meet the needs of those in employment, for example probation officers and youth workers. British sign language is offered to the police to assist them in communicating with deaf people. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that good attention is paid to issues that involve equal opportunities, both in the course structure and in the teaching. For example, access courses seek particularly to recruit

Asian women and African-Caribbean men, although the numbers recruited have been fewer than had been hoped. The access to higher education course has a module for Asian and African-Caribbean studies. Some deaf students take the teacher education courses and special arrangements are made to meet their needs, for example by modifying assessments and using interpreters in lessons.

37 Curriculum management is effective. All courses have thorough schemes of work and there are some good resource packs for teachers. Course teams meet regularly and minutes indicate priorities for action. The teams regularly review recruitment patterns, which have been uneven on some courses, and rates of retention and achievement. Attendance is carefully monitored. A valuable feature of the access to health programme has been the development of work placements for students. Some placements are also available on the access to higher education programme.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that much of the teaching and learning is of a high standard. Most lessons were well planned and included a sound introduction to topics. Learning was monitored thoroughly. Good use was made of audiovisual aids. Most handouts were informative and well designed. In a teacher education lesson planned to increase understanding of how to teach students with disabilities, the teacher who was assisted by a deaf student, emphasised the need to modify teaching methods to meet the needs of deaf students. A sociology lesson in access to health effectively combined the study of concepts related to professionalism, for example autonomy, with students' research into the nature of jobs in (or related to) nursing which they might wish to enter. In a few lessons, students' learning was not always effectively checked, for example their understanding of specific concepts. In some lessons, not all students were encouraged to make their own contribution. Students were sometimes late.

Curriculum Areas

39 Students' achievements are particularly good on access to health studies where they significantly exceed national averages for the sector. In most other areas students' achievements are at or above national averages. The quality of students' work is usually of a high standard. Staff make constructively critical comments which enable students to improve their performance. The best written work is of a good standard but less satisfactory work is too descriptive and contains weaknesses in grammar and spelling. Many portfolios in teacher education are of a high standard. Internal verification is well organised. External verifiers and moderators comment positively upon the standards achieved, especially on the teacher education courses.

The student retention rate is unsatisfactory on some courses, as noted in the self-assessment, particularly on the access to higher education course. Retention rates are better on the teacher education courses.

40 Staff are well qualified. The teaching accommodation is attractive and classrooms are well organised. There are some good packs available which help students to learn. The overall quality of learning resources is satisfactory. However, there are some deficiencies in the number of books available, for example in social care.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in access to higher education, teacher education and British sign language, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
British sign language (basic)	1	Number of starters	67	108	99
		Retention (%)	66	70	84
		Achievement (%)	86	71	74
British sign language (intermediate)	3	Number of starters	22	56	32
		Retention (%)	95	57	69
		Achievement (%)	23	48	25
Access to higher education and the professions	3	Number of starters	72	86	66
		Retention (%)	50	53	58
		Achievement (%)	81	80	89
Access to health studies	3	Number of starters	36	39	37
		Retention (%)	61	67	65
		Achievement (%)	86	92	96
C&G 7307 stage 1	3	Number of starters	266	192	298
		Retention (%)	95	98	96
		Achievement (%)	98	96	80
C&G 7307 stage 2	3	Number of starters	72	55	35
		Retention (%)	85	85	86
		Achievement (%)	78	83	87

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

ESOL and Pre-vocational Access

Grade 3

41 Inspectors observed 20 lessons in the college and in centres in the community . They agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- flexible and effective arrangements for courses
- much well-planned and successful teaching
- imaginative learning materials in the pre-vocational area
- high rates of retention and achievement on many pre-vocational access courses
- strong personal support for disadvantaged students

Weaknesses

- poorly structured teaching for English language beginners
- low attendance rates on many courses
- insufficient use of IT in teaching
- insufficiently thorough monitoring of the progress of ESOL students
- the low proportion of ESOL students achieving a qualification

42 There is a comprehensive range of pre-vocational access courses and courses in ESOL. They are aimed at: younger students who have significantly underachieved at school; adults returning to learning; the minority ethnic communities; and asylum seekers and refugees. Courses have been adapted or new courses written to meet the needs of specific groups of learners. The courses that are run in centres in the community attract students who might not have had the confidence to attend the college at

its main site. There are opportunities for students to progress to other courses at various points in the year. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. Local schools host many of the pre-vocational access and some ESOL courses. They also assist in the recruitment of learners among whom are parents of children at the schools.

43 As identified in the self-assessment report, much teaching is well planned and meets the needs of individual learners. In the most effective lessons, teachers ensure that students are concentrating on and understanding their work. Teachers explain instructions carefully and make sure that they have been understood by all students. Additional tasks are available for those who finish an activity before the rest of the group. In one ESOL lesson students built vocabulary around the topic of 'education' using brainstorming methods, group work and anagrams. Feedback from groups was sensitively encouraged so that all groups were able to contribute at an appropriate level. Students receive strong personal support from their teachers who create an atmosphere of mutual respect and run activities which increase students' confidence. Some teaching for ESOL beginners is poorly structured. Students starting late in the academic year join established classes, where the level is inappropriate for beginners. Over-reliance on whole-class teaching leads to frustration on the part of both the most and the least able students. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is little use of IT in teaching. Attendance rates are low on many courses, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. In spite of efforts to improve attendance rates, in six of the lessons observed less than half the students on roll were present.

44 There are high rates of retention and achievement on many pre-vocational access courses. For example, both these rates for students taking the course on access to

Curriculum Areas

vocational guidance for support staff have been above 90% for the last three years, which is significantly above national averages. In 1999, of 65 students starting a community-based course on 'Children at School and You', 64 completed the course and 54 achieved the full qualification. Achievement rates are well above national averages for the course for the certificate in further education but the retention rate has been falling for the last three years. Only 38% of ESOL students sat externally certificated courses, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Deficiencies in the initial assessment and subsequent monitoring of ESOL students prevent a sufficiently detailed assessment of their progress being made. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

45 Inspectors agreed that imaginative learning materials are used in the pre-vocational access area. Handouts in lessons are of a high standard. The college has developed an unusual and effective IT-based learning resource for use by students who cannot attend lessons which simulates a college environment.

Learners can visit different rooms in the virtual college to access different types of resources. They communicate electronically with other learners and their tutor. As a consequence of this successful initiative, the college has developed courses for tutors to learn to use this type of computer-mediated training. Teaching accommodation is generally adequate. The college acknowledges that poor sound insulation in one base room and inadequate IT classroom space in a centre in a school hinder learning opportunities for some students. The concentration of the ESOL provision in one area promotes a supportive and lively atmosphere amongst students and teachers.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in ESOL and pre-vocational access, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Certificate in further education	1	Number of starters	32	30	26
		Retention (%)	78	67	62
		Achievement (%)	88	60	75
Access to classroom assistants (NOCN)	1	Number of starters	139	95	135
		Retention (%)	75	85	77
		Achievement (%)	100	95	81
Access to vocational guidance for support staff (NOCN)	1	Number of starters	103	43	97
		Retention (%)	98	91	95
		Achievement (%)	98	97	90

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

46 The inspection covered provision and support in literacy and numeracy . Ten lessons were observed.

The self-assessment report identified most of the strengths but failed to identify the main weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a good range of provision and accreditation
- good progress by basic skills students to mainstream programmes
- a well-resourced workshop for specialist basic skills
- an effective range of teaching methods
- specialist basic skills support for students with a sensory impairment

Weaknesses

- ineffective management of basic skills across the college
- inadequate basic skills support for some students
- insufficient appropriately qualified teachers
- insufficiently detailed recording of learning
- weak links between course tutors and support tutors

47 The college offers a flexible range of basic skills classes which includes: provision in the evenings; classes run at centres in the community; and specialist provision for students with sensory impairments and mental health problems. The college is piloting the provision of basic skills to employees in the workplace. The students and employees appreciate the ways in which basic skills are related to their employment. Major weaknesses not identified

by the college are the lack of overall strategic planning and management of basic skills provision. The quality of provision is uneven. There are no standardised procedures or appropriate standards for basic skills. Expertise that exists in one area is not used effectively elsewhere across the college.

48 The standard of teaching on basic skills courses is good. Following a thorough initial assessment of students, individual learning programmes are devised and progress is regularly reviewed. There are opportunities for paired and group work. Worksheets and learning materials are related to real-life situations and students' interests. Good use is made of assignments, practical work and individual schemes of work. Teachers in this area are well qualified. Most teachers skilfully use open questions to help students to explore their ideas and to stimulate students' written work. Teachers support students in meeting the challenges which they have been set. For example, one student who had been given a complex assignment in manageable sections was thrilled at the quality and quantity of work produced. The more effective teachers skilfully develop the capacity of their students to work independently. The recording of learning for most students in basic skills classes and those receiving basic skills support is not sufficiently detailed. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment. There is specialist basic skills provision for students with a sensory impairment, many of whom have additional learning difficulties. Some are blind and deaf and others have mental health problems. Of these students, 60% are working towards external accreditation. Teachers demonstrate specialist expertise in supporting them.

49 Students in basic skills classes recognise the progress that they are making. One student spoke of an increase in confidence in applying for work; another reported successfully challenging a shop assistant when given

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incorrect change. Students are encouraged to work towards the achievement of qualifications. The number of students gaining external accreditation continues to rise. Increased opportunities for accreditation have led to growth in the number of students gaining a qualification at the centres located in the community. A significant number of students advance from basic skills to vocational courses, where they continue to receive good support for basic skills. Students are encouraged to participate in both self-assessment and peer assessment. The students are able accurately to identify opportunities for developing their own learning.

50 The provision of basic skills on vocational courses is weak. Tutors are unsure of the system for identifying support needs and some students with basic skills needs have not been formally identified or helped. One student was in college for 18 months before receiving the support needed. Liaison between course tutors and support teachers is weak. Some students are screened during induction, but assessment is not readily available for part-time students. The screening assessment is inadequate and in spite of an increase in numbers in 1999-2000 relatively few students take up support. In most support sessions the results of assessments are not used to construct an effective learning programme. Vocational tutors without specialist qualifications provide support where basic skills needs have been identified. Students are receiving support with assignments but their skills do not always improve as a result of such help.

51 The adult basic skills workshop is a well-resourced, specialist area, as identified in the self-assessment report. Materials are readily available to teachers and students. Suitable IT software is available and well used. There are insufficient appropriately qualified teachers teaching basic skills across the college. Staff development to raise the awareness of

issues involved in basic skills work among vocational tutors has been inadequate. The college recognises that its centres out in the community are poorly resourced. Some improvements have been made through the provision of laptop computers.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 4

52 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-managed advice and admissions
- effective specialist support for students with sensory impairments and specific learning difficulties

Weaknesses

- inadequate careers advice
- low levels of take-up of additional learning support on some programmes
- insufficient analysis of the effectiveness of learning support
- shortcomings in tutorial arrangements

53 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is an efficient admissions service. Enquiries for full-time and part-time courses are dealt with promptly by a helpful and well-managed team of staff in the client information and advice centre. This team arranges interviews and gives impartial advice and guidance; where appropriate a learning support teacher is involved in interviews. The college maintains contact with students once the offer of a place has been made. College open days and evenings provide opportunities for extensive information and advice to be given to prospective students. The college, through its good links with community organisations and employers, has persuaded more adults to enrol on courses. The college delivers information on programmes to addresses in postal areas where there is no tradition of participation by residents in further education. Some students feel that they are on courses which are inappropriate to their needs.

Links with schools are underdeveloped, and there are no 'taster' days or opportunities for pupils in years 10 and 11 to sample lessons at the college before starting a course there. Local school careers teachers do not receive annual briefings on course developments. There are no arrangements to match initial enquiries to final enrolments.

54 Most full-time students are given a comprehensive introduction to their studies, and receive informative handbooks and course guides. Teachers have a checklist of induction activities. Induction programmes are appropriately adapted to the requirements of different courses. The student handbook contains the charter, statements on equal opportunities and disability, and details of the college's services and facilities. Full-time and part-time students who join courses late do not always receive an induction.

55 Much tutorial practice is weak. Not all group tutorials are planned. In some programme areas individual tutorials lack structure and tutors are insufficiently thorough in monitoring the progress and achievements of individual students. There is no standard form for individual action-planning. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Parents of 16 to 19 year old students are kept informed of progress through written reports and invitations to parents' evenings. Students are encouraged to maintain their national records of achievement.

56 Many students do not receive sufficient guidance on opportunities for progression to more advanced courses or to employment. Many course tutors do not invite careers service staff or staff at the college information and advice centre to group tutorials to brief students on the options open to them. The college information and advice centre is well resourced for course and careers guidance and is equipped with specialist computer software. Some vocational tutors make good use of their own

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industrial experience when advising students. There are well-organised arrangements for counselling and, where appropriate, students are referred to external agencies. The college makes constructive use of the student disciplinary procedure to resolve problems of poor attitude or behaviour. Students know about the arrangements for the allocation of financial assistance from the college access fund. The college has recently established a multi-faith centre for use by staff and students. There is an informative college statement on disability. The student union has made little contribution to college life during the current academic year.

57 Students with sensory and/or physical impairments and specific learning difficulties, for example dyslexia, are well supported by specialist staff; appropriate equipment is provided. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Effective procedures ensure that individual students' needs are identified before they commence their programme of studies. Over 150 students are currently receiving specialist individual support. Qualified individual support workers act as communicators or note-takers and materials are modified so that they are appropriate to the needs of learners. Students value the help which they receive.

58 There are weaknesses in the implementation of learning support. Most 16 to 18 year old students in the sixth form centre, or on foundation or pre-vocational programmes are assessed for numeracy and literacy skills. Very few of the assessments have a vocational relevance. Support is offered through workshops and where appropriate, on an individual basis. There are examples of delays of up to a term from the time of assessment to the provision of learner support for a student. The college had difficulty in providing inspectors with information about the total number of students who were identified as needing additional learner support during 1998-99. There has been little analysis at either course

team or cross-college level of the numbers of students identified as requiring learning support and attending learning support classes, or of the impact of support on those students' subsequent achievements. There are no formal procedures for informing personal tutors of the attendance record and progress of students at learning support lessons. Management responsibility for the provision of learner support is shared between the sixth form centre and the programme area for supported learning. There are no clear guidelines for briefing course tutors on where individual students who require learning support should be sent.

General Resources

Grade 3

59 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-maintained accommodation
- some teaching rooms of a high standard
- good access to most areas for students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- an inadequate library
- low room utilisation
- underdeveloped IT provision
- inadequate social areas for students

60 The college occupies a single site in pleasant surroundings. Its buildings are grouped around a garden which contains attractive shrubs and trees. This area is much appreciated by those who attend or visit the college. The estate consists of six blocks built in the 1960s. The college also

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runs courses at centres in the community. The accommodation is well maintained. Buildings are clean and tidy. The maintenance programme for the buildings is well planned. A realistic 10-year plan indicates that the college faces rising maintenance costs. The college makes insufficient use of accommodation; it acknowledges that room usage rates are low. Some improvement in room utilisation has been achieved in 1999-2000.

61 The college has some good teaching areas which include outstanding modern laboratories in the science and technology centre. Nearly all rooms are well furnished and well equipped. Many classrooms have been upgraded effectively. For example, the college has adapted one block to provide good rooms for management training. A few rooms have been sponsored by external organisations. Staff workrooms are adequate but some are crowded.

62 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the library is too small. It contains insufficient study spaces for students. The bookstock is inadequate in two curriculum areas and there are too many out-of-date books. There is not enough room for an adequate stock of journals. An adequate supply of video tapes and CD-ROMs is available. The library is open each weekday and on Saturday mornings. The college has a sixth form centre and resource rooms for curriculum areas.

63 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the provision of IT is underdeveloped and constitutes a weakness in the college. They also agreed with the update to the report which stated that the college is taking action to address the weakness. For example, recently the college has added new computers to the college network. There is now an adequate number of computers, but overall the provision has not yet reached a satisfactory standard. The number of computers available in the library is inadequate. There is insufficient access to IT

provision in the evening. Recently, the college created a 'drop-in' centre stocked with 40 computers. At the time of the inspection, many students were still unaware of the existence of the facility and too few staff were available to keep the centre open and running. As a result of student dissatisfaction with the reliability of the computing facilities, action has been taken to improve the responsiveness of the system. As a consequence of the arrival of the new computers most computers in the college now have modern specifications and can operate up-to-date software. Access to the Internet in learning centres has been improved recently. There are intranets for staff and students. Their potential is underdeveloped at present, but the college has plans to improve this provision. Not all staff have electronic mail. There is an inadequate number of computers in some staff workrooms. Not all of the computers for staff were linked to the college network at the time of the inspection.

64 Progress has been made since the college's last inspection to improve access for students with restricted mobility. For example, ramps have been provided and a new lift has been installed in the science area. The upgrading of the north entrance to the college has helped to make access to the college easier for people with restricted mobility. Most areas of the college are now accessible to all its members.

65 The college has inadequate social areas for students. It has recognised that other than the canteens there is no social area where students can go to wait, or socialise or sit down in comfort during breaks in teaching. Sports facilities are inadequate. The drab college hall is used for some sporting and recreational activities and a few sports which mainly attract young male students. Youth workers assist with running recreational sessions during the lunch break and at other times of the week; they have steadily built up the options available over the last three years.

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Quality Assurance

Grade 3

66 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified several additional weaknesses. The college has addressed some of these weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-structured arrangements for quality assurance
- extensive and well-managed staff development activities
- a comprehensive and effective scheme for lesson observation
- effective quality assurance of franchised provision

Weaknesses

- inadequate improvement in rates of student retention
- weak course reviews
- poor action-planning to address identified weaknesses
- inadequate monitoring of college charters

67 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are well recorded and well-established processes for quality assurance. These cover all aspects of the college's provision. The college's commitment to continuous improvement is demonstrated in its mission statement, by its strategic objectives, and in the work of a number of key quality assurance groups. The quality assurance policy and manual contain clear quality assurance procedures for all aspects of the college's curriculum and business support areas. These procedures are understood and supported by staff. Issues involving quality assurance are regularly brought to the attention of staff through newsletters.

68 Over the last three years student retention rates at levels 2 and 3 have been below the national average for the sector. Systems have been designed to raise the standard of teaching and learning and improve rates of student retention. These systems have not yet proved successful. The self-assessment report recognises this weakness. In some programme areas students' achievements are poor. Students' achievements overall, however, are at or above the national benchmarks at levels 1, 2 and 3.

69 Many course reviews are weak and vary in the thoroughness with which they are completed. The analysis of methods of teaching and learning and of the standard of students' achievements is inadequate. In many course reviews, insufficient evidence is provided to enable judgements to be made. There is insufficient use of performance indicators and benchmarks to assess progress. Some strengths identified by the college are no more than normal practice and others actually contradict weaknesses that the college has also identified. The procedures for internal verification are effective.

70 Annual action plans in course and programme area reviews often lack sufficient detail to enable staff to address specific weaknesses. The plans are not clearly written, lack measurable objectives, contain no order of priority and frequently no named person is charged with the responsibility for taking action. Not all identified weaknesses are included in the action plan. Where actions were unsuccessful, teachers and managers have not subsequently analysed the reasons for failure. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that there has been little systematic comparison of the final achievements of students on vocational courses with the GCSE grades these students held on entry so that a calculation of the value added to their attainments could be made. However, some recent analysis of GCE A level and GNVQ

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advanced results showed that, in terms of the value added, these students were achieving slightly above the level to be expected on the basis of their entry qualifications.

71 The arrangements for quality assurance include an extensive and thorough schedule of lesson observations. The scheme is well supported by staff. Lessons are graded and the results used to evaluate the standard of teaching and learning. This information assists in the planning of the professional development programme for teachers. Good practice is shared. The grade profile resulting from inspectors' lesson observations closely matched the grade profile produced by college observers.

72 A strength not identified in the self-assessment report is the well-managed and extensive programme of staff development. Most staff are actively involved in professional development which is closely linked to corporate objectives and job requirements. There is a substantial amount of subject updating for teachers through external and college courses. Industrial secondment is arranged for some staff. The recently revised appraisal system is also used to identify staff development needs.

73 There are effective arrangements and procedures to assure the quality of franchised provision. These include: regular and thorough monitoring of courses; observation of teaching and learning; and the evaluation of arrangements intended to ensure appropriate support for students. There is regular monitoring of the use of documentation and of trends in rates of student retention and achievement. The level of students' rates of retention and achievement are equivalent to or higher than those reached on similar courses in the college. Where standards have been found to be below those acceptable to the college, contracts with franchised providers have been terminated or teachers have been removed from courses.

74 There are several college charters. These set out the college's commitment to students, employers and work placement providers. They are widely distributed and available in several formats. There is, however, no overall review of the extent to which the college is meeting all the standards set out in the charters. Some use is made of customer feedback. The views of students, staff and parents are regularly sought. Surveys of students' views are carried out twice each year by consultants and by some course teams. The results are analysed and the conclusions have led to improvements in courses.

75 Staff, governors, external consultants and several committees took part in the production of the self-assessment report. Course reviews contribute to the programme area reviews which form the basis of self-assessment of the curriculum. In several curriculum areas, however, the analysis of teaching and learning and of students' achievements was not sufficiently thorough. Some of the action plans are not well formulated. They are unclear, insufficiently specific or measurable, and not fully costed.

Governance

Grade 2

76 Inspectors and auditors agreed with a number of strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-informed governors with a broad range of experience
- sound policies for openness
- effective monitoring by governors of their own performance
- efficient and effective clerking
- thorough monitoring of the college's educational performance

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Weaknesses

- infrequent receipt of financial information by the corporation
- inappropriate use of the audit committee for receiving financial reports on franchising activity

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

78 The corporation has agreed a determined membership of 20 in line with the statutory modifications to the instrument of government. There are currently two vacancies. The corporation regularly evaluates its performance and has set attendance targets. Since 1996 it has monitored its performance against a set of clear indicators. Governors are highly committed to the success of the college and levels of attendance at corporation and committee meetings are good. All meetings of the corporation in the past year have been quorate.

79 Governors have a broad range of skills and expertise that includes professional experience in business, human resources, marketing, IT, architecture, and with local authorities. The corporation has deployed governors on committees in a way that makes the best use of their expertise. The range of skills of serving members is considered when making new appointments. For example, the recent appointment of a governor with expertise in IT and experience of sales and marketing has resolved a weakness identified in the self-assessment. At the time of the inspection the corporation was completing a skills audit. The corporation has a clear strategy and

appropriate procedures for the recruitment of new governors. The search committee operates effectively in scrutinising candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors. The effective annual programme of training and development for governors, which includes a residential event, is well attended. New governors are provided with an induction pack.

80 The corporation has established a wide range of committees that includes a public interest disclosure committee with a remit to consider and act upon reports received under the college's public interest disclosure procedures. All committees have terms of reference which clearly identify their responsibilities. The terms of reference of the audit and finance committees are comprehensive. Committee minutes and the full supporting papers are presented to the corporation for their consideration. The clerk to the corporation effectively supports the corporation and individual governors. This strength in clerking is not identified in the self-assessment report. The agenda and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings distinguish between items for discussion and decision and provide a good basis for decision-making. Minutes clearly record decisions, as well as giving summaries of discussion on key issues.

81 Auditors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the corporation has sound policies for openness. All governors annually update a register of interests. The corporation has a comprehensive range of policy documents which includes standing orders, a code of conduct, an ethical code and 'whistleblowing' procedures. The code of conduct incorporates the Nolan committee's seven principles of public life. Agendas, papers and minutes, with the exception of confidential items, are available for public inspection.

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82 The finance committee receives financial monitoring reports every month. The full corporation receives these reports four times a year. Considering that the college is operating a financial recovery plan, this is infrequent. Reports to governors on franchising activity which should be delivered to the finance committee are inappropriately submitted to the audit committee.

83 Governors are well informed about the college and the further education sector in general, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. They receive regular briefings on educational matters. Governors are encouraged to foster links with curriculum areas in the college. Feedback from governors following their visits has led to improvements, for example in the provision of wall displays in the sixth form centre. Governors have also observed lessons and attended meetings of relevant college groups, including the academic board.

84 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are effective arrangements for governors to monitor the academic performance of the college. The standards committee receives appropriately detailed reports on examination results and retention rates. Comparisons are made with national averages and with other local further education colleges. The reports and recommendations of the committee, including suggested targets, are discussed and agreed by the full corporation. Governors are aware that the college has poor retention rates at levels 2 and 3 and some areas of low achievement. The standards committee has called for further reports on areas where it has concerns, for example on the performance of students aged 16 to 18 at GCSE and GCE A level. The standards committee also validates the college's self-assessment and monitors the corporation's performance.

Management

Grade 3

85 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements contained in the college's self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weakness and considered that some strengths identified by the college represented no more than normal practice.

Key strengths

- the clear strategic direction
- effective cross-college communication
- highly effective external links

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on courses at levels 2 and 3
- insufficient access for managers to management information systems and electronic communication
- management weaknesses in some curriculum and cross-college areas

86 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Detailed management accounts are produced every month that include an income and expenditure account, a cashflow forecast, a balance sheet, unit monitoring data and financial information on the college company. They are appropriately reviewed by college managers. Financial objectives have been set and are monitored. Budget holders are appropriately supported by the finance section and are involved in the budget preparation cycle. The college's financial health has improved since 1997-98, although there are still low levels of solvency. The recovery plan has been successfully followed and the college is anticipating completing it ahead of schedule. Although a policy on the payment of governors'

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expenses exists, it has not been included in the financial regulations.

87 At the previous inspection rates of attendance, retention and achievement were identified as weaknesses. Since then the college has developed comprehensive systems for setting and monitoring targets. A handbook containing the extensive set of performance indicators used by the college is available to staff and governors. As the college identified in its own self-assessment, measures to improve rates of student achievements and retention have been only partially effective and the college has failed to achieve some of its own targets. Whilst overall student achievement rates are above national benchmarks and rising, there is poor achievement on a number of individual courses. The retention rates at levels 2 and 3 are below national averages and have declined for students aged 16 to 18.

88 There is clear strategic leadership in the college. Staff support the commitments to improving financial health, assuring quality and serving the community. The annually updated strategic plan is comprehensive. An analysis of local economic and training needs has been used in developing the plan. Changes in the local economy are identified in the revised plan for 1999-2000 and their implications for the community and the college are assessed. The plan is implemented through detailed operating statements and faculty and service plans. Progress is monitored in management meetings.

89 Managers understand their responsibilities. Reporting lines are well defined. Recent modifications to the structure reflect the community aspect of the mission and are intended to further strengthen the commitment to widening participation. The self-assessment report acknowledged shortcomings in systems for the management of work based at centres in the community. In addition there are significant weaknesses in the management of

a number of curriculum and cross-college areas, including support for students.

90 Communication in the college is good. There is an effective cycle of meetings for planning, target-setting and monitoring activities. An open approach to the circulation of minutes, and regular staff briefings and bulletins keep staff well informed about important matters affecting the college. Inspectors agreed with the college that managers have insufficient access to the management information system and to electronic communication. Plans are in hand to address this weakness. The quality of management information has improved since the previous inspection. Staff have confidence in the reliability of information and the quality of reports.

91 The process for allocating resources, as part of the college's annual programme planning exercise, is sound. However, in some curriculum areas, particularly where the provision has grown significantly, there is a shortage of resources. Some areas have too few staff with management responsibilities to cover satisfactorily the work of planning, organising and monitoring. The college has taken steps to reduce the high dependency on agency staff in some areas, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report.

92 Inspectors agreed that the college has good links with a wide range of organisations involved in education and training. The college's committed response to the needs of its community is a major strength. The college works with a broad range of partners which includes the TEC, local government, education authorities, health trusts, the police and probation services, and local employers. It is currently running courses in over 50 schools and community locations. The college actively seeks external recognition of its achievements. It has been successful in attaining a large number of local, regional and

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national awards. The college, as is noted in the self-assessment report, has undertaken a number of imaginative exercises in curriculum development, some of which have won Beacon awards. For example, French courses were run jointly for parents and their children at two local infant/junior schools.

93 The college is committed to promoting equal opportunities. Policies and codes of practice have been revised recently following wide consultation. There are clear monitoring arrangements. Equal opportunities reports contain useful analyses of staffing and of students' achievements. All areas of the college have recently conducted an 'equality assurance audit'. The TSC inspectors identified some concerns that involved equal opportunities issues in off-site work-based training. The management of health and safety is generally good. The college holds the gold award of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and performed well in its first British Safety Council five-star assessment.

weaknesses in retention and achievement when arriving at their judgements. Inspectors agreed with only one of the seven self-assessed grades proposed by the college for curriculum areas. In one instance the inspectors awarded a higher grade and in the remaining five areas the judgement was one grade lower. Of the five grades awarded for aspects of cross-college provision, inspectors agreed with two of the grades but found that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of three areas.

95 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.

Conclusions

94 The self-assessment report and its update provided a useful basis upon which to plan and carry out the inspection. The process of self-assessment is well understood by staff. Action-planning to address weaknesses identified through self-assessment is not fully developed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report but they considered that some of the strengths identified by the college were no more than normal practice. Some weaknesses and a few strengths identified by inspectors had not been recognised by the college. Inspectors had confidence in the reliability of the data provided by the college but they could not agree with some of the findings in the self-assessment report in relation to rates of student retention and achievement. In particular, most curriculum areas gave insufficient weight to

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	23
25+ years	61
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	24
Level 2 (intermediate)	35
Level 3 (advanced)	12
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	27
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1999)

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	305	4,891	29
Agriculture	73	184	1
Construction	22	36	0
Engineering	1	185	1
Business	166	1,338	9
Hotel and catering	82	1,170	7
Health and community care	192	4,187	25
Art and design	41	584	4
Humanities	293	2,524	16
Basic education	292	1,124	8
Total	1,467	16,223	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 51% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1998-99)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	111	5	18	134
Supporting direct learning contact	25	4	0	29
Other support	104	3	0	107
Total	240	12	18	270

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial Data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£8,473,000	£8,489,000	£9,314,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.38	£16.89	£16.66
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	68%	68%
Achievement of funding target	100%	99%	97%
Diversity of income	21%	21%	26%
Operating surplus	£92,000	£165,000	-£48,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	233	268	259	593	583	829
	Retention (%)	79	71	78	69	71	79
	Achievement (%)	65	62	57	61	67	69
2	Number of starters	722	820	685	848	1,060	1,290
	Retention (%)	68	66	68	61	71	71
	Achievement (%)	37	40	71	62	68	76
3	Number of starters	740	690	485	803	823	1,172
	Retention (%)	62	67	68	67	73	70
	Achievement (%)	59	66	64	67	63	70
4 or 5	Number of starters	1	–	–	29	59	64
	Retention (%)	100	–	–	86	92	80
	Achievement (%)	100	–	–	32	52	44
Short courses	Number of starters	262	445	1,658	5,487	6,876	10,502
	Retention (%)	87	88	99	95	91	95
	Achievement (%)	33	67	92	21	41	83
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	106	286	96	1,322	1,541	1,274
	Retention (%)	73	74	74	76	75	73
	Achievement (%)	70	33	77	48	51	88

Source: ISR

– ISR data not collected

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