

Bracknell and Wokingham College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

THE
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COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Bracknell and Wokingham College

South East Region

Inspected January 1998

Bracknell and Wokingham College is a general further education college situated in the Royal County of Berkshire. The college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report through its quality assurance system. The process involved most staff, some students and the governors. Since the report was written, the college has made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses it identified. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements but found that the report did not, in some areas, provide a sufficiently rigorous evaluation of the quality of teaching and students' achievements.

The college offers courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas and a large adult education programme. The inspection covered provision in six programme areas and aspects of cross-college provision. Links with employers are good. The corporation determines the strategic direction of the college. Since the college was last inspected, management has improved and considerable progress has been made in the arrangements for quality assurance. Financial management is good. Students receive appropriate advice and guidance. Teaching is generally well planned and good in most

curriculum areas inspected. Accommodation is generally fit for its purpose but it is underused. The provision of specialist resources is satisfactory. The quality and number of computers is good. The college should address: the quality of teaching, poor examination results and low retention in some areas; the industrial experience of some teachers; the opportunities for students with learning difficulties to progress to vocational courses; the inconsistent quality of student support; the provision of resources in some centres; and the evaluation of the quality of teaching.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science including computing	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business	3	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care	2	Governance	2
Modern languages	2	Management	2
Basic education	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Bracknell and Wokingham College serves the south-east area of the county of Berkshire. It owns seven sites, three of which are in Bracknell. The others are in Earley, Sandhurst, Wokingham and Woodley. The college provides an extensive adult education programme and uses accommodation in some 14 schools and community centres. There is strong competition to provide post-16 education in this part of the Thames Valley. There are three other further education colleges in the college's catchment area, a large number of private training providers and 15 well-established comprehensive schools with sixth forms.

2 The college is located in one of the most economically active areas of the country. Levels of unemployment are low. A large number of national and international companies are based in the area and there is a concentration of major electronic and computing companies. The population of the area is about 250,000. Some 80 per cent of the college's enrolments come from the Bracknell Forest and Wokingham districts.

3 In 1996-97, the college had 21,171 enrolments. At November 1997, there were 9,531 students of whom 805 were full time and a further 4,453 on adult education programmes not funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college employs 238 full-time equivalent staff of whom 84 are support staff. The college is divided into three schools and teaching and tutorial support is provided through 16 sections.

4 The college mission is 'to provide the education and training individuals and organisations need to enable them to achieve their full potential'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in one week in January 1998. Inspectors had previously analysed the college's self-assessment report and information on the college held by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the years 1995 to 1997. The data were found to be generally reliable when checked against class registers and examining body pass lists before the inspection.

6 Twelve inspectors and an auditor spent 49 days in the college. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students. Inspectors observed 98 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents.

7 Of the lessons inspected, 54 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 8 per cent were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. This profile compares with the average of 61 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 79 per cent, just above the sector

average for 1996-97 according to the chief inspector's annual report. The highest attendance was in health and care and modern languages at 86 per cent and the lowest in engineering at 70 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	0	7	0	0	8
GCSE	0	3	2	1	0	6
GNVQ	0	7	6	1	0	14
NVQ	1	9	4	1	0	15
Other vocational	6	18	14	4	1	43
Access to higher education and basic education	4	4	4	0	0	12
Total	12	41	37	7	1	98

Curriculum Areas

Science Including Computing

Grade 3

8 Inspectors observed 23 lessons in science, mathematics and computing. The college's self-assessment report makes insufficient reference to science and mathematics. It overstated the quality of teaching and learning and did not take enough account of poor examination results and retention on some courses.

Key strengths

- course planning
- well-prepared teaching materials
- good retention and examination results for adult students
- technician support
- good accommodation and equipment

Weaknesses

- ineffective teaching in a significant number of classes
- insufficient feedback on students' assessed work
- low retention rates for students aged 16 to 19
- little use of information technology (IT) in science or mathematics
- lack of integration of key skills

9 All courses have schemes of work that are shared with students. Lessons are well planned and good-quality materials are used for teaching and assessment. Good lesson planning is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. IT courses for adults are well taught with useful reference made to the vocational applications of the subject. Teachers on computing courses for younger students do not use a suitable variety of teaching methods to maintain students' interest. In science and mathematics, teachers do not have sufficiently

high expectations of their students and their methods do not take account of the wide range of students' ability. In many lessons, visual aids including the overhead projector and video were not well used. In the mathematics workshop, teachers were not always clear about the best teaching method to adopt and teaching was not always effective. Key skills are insufficiently integrated with subject teaching. Students are set work regularly and it is returned promptly, but teachers do not give sufficient feedback, particularly to students on computing courses.

10 Students' work is of an appropriate standard. Practical work is carried out safely. Examination results and retention rates for adult students on IT courses are good. In general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics and human biology and in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) human biology, pass and retention rates are generally much better for adults than for students aged 16 to 19. On the national diploma course in computer studies and in GCE A level subjects taken by younger students, examination pass rates are often well above the national average for general further education colleges, but retention rates are frequently below 40 per cent. In GCSE mathematics, pass rates are above the relevant national average but retention rates are low. Only about one-third of the students who start the course achieve the qualification. The college has recognised that retention is poor and action is being taken to improve it. Some work on value-added calculations has been undertaken, but data for specific GCE A level subjects are inadequate to support such calculations.

11 The college offers a good range of full-time and part-time vocational courses in IT and computing. It also provides day-release classes and IT training on employers' premises. There is some accreditation of students' prior learning. There is a little science provision.

Curriculum Areas

12 Teachers are well qualified. Technician support is good and teachers and technicians work well together. Resources for computing are excellent. This strength is recognised in the self-assessment report. There is, however, little use of IT equipment in mathematics and science. Practical equipment and library resources are adequate for the courses provided. Laboratory and classroom accommodation is generally good with the exception of a cramped biology preparation room.

Examples of students' achievements in science including computing, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level human biology (adult students)	Retention (%)	70	63	77
	Pass rate (%)	91	73	65
GCE A level human biology (students aged 16 to 19)	Retention (%)	*	33	42
	Pass rate (%)	*	86	73
Access to IT (adult students)	Retention (%)	+	92	96
	Pass rate (%)	+	81	86
National diploma in computer studies (students aged 16 to 19)	Retention (%)	59	63	61
	Pass rate (%)	82	84	100

Source: college data

*college unable to provide reliable data

+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

13 Fourteen lessons covering electrical, electronic, mechanical and motor vehicle engineering and computer-aided design were observed. The self-assessment report was comprehensive and clearly identified the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The findings of the inspection supported those strengths and weaknesses but judged that the college had underestimated its strengths in assessing the quality of engineering provision.

Key strengths

- practical sessions which provide good learning opportunities
- well-planned teaching
- the attention to safety in workshops
- the standard of assessments, assignments and practical work
- course organisation and management
- students' achievements on advanced vocational and craft courses

Weaknesses

- unclear criteria for grading assignments
- insufficient comments on students' marked work
- poor pass and retention rates on the first diploma/general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate courses
- insufficient support for students who need help with literacy and numeracy
- low attendance in some classes

14 Course and lesson planning is generally good. In some schemes of work the teaching methods, the resources required and learning objectives are identified; others are mainly lists of topics with no indication of the learning objectives to be achieved. The quality of

teaching and learning in laboratories and workshops is good. Most engineering students preferred the practical elements of their courses and enjoyed developing skills under the effective supervision and guidance of their teachers. In the better lessons, teachers involved students in discussion, managed question and answer sessions effectively, used equipment to demonstrate the theory being taught and used their own experiences to illustrate the effects of good and poor engineering practice. In other lessons, teachers did not involve their students sufficiently in the work, required them to copy lengthy notes and diagrams from the board or overhead transparency or had expectations that exceeded the students' abilities. Students are set assessments regularly and they are of an appropriate standard, although the criteria for grading are not always clear. The self-assessment report recognises that course teams need to address this issue. The quality of teachers' comments on students' marked work is not always sufficient to show them how their work could be improved.

15 In 1997, students' achievements improved in most engineering subjects following a decline in 1996. Pass rates on the national diploma and certificate courses in 1995 and 1997 were above the national average published in the FEFC's curriculum area survey report, *Engineering*. The majority of engineering students at the college are enrolled on courses leading to City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) vocational qualifications and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2. These courses include electronic and computer servicing, motor vehicle and electrical installation. Pass rates on these courses were similar to the national average in 1995 and 1996 but increased to an overall pass rate of 87 per cent in 1997. In 1996, the college replaced its engineering first diploma with the equivalent GNVQ intermediate level course. The pass rates for the first diploma in 1995, and the replacement GNVQ intermediate course in 1996 were poor, with less than 30 per cent of those

Curriculum Areas

originally enrolled achieving the final qualification. In 1997, the college reintroduced its first diploma which it considered more suitable for its students. The number of students on the higher national certificate course has fallen steadily over the last three years and the college has not offered the course this academic year.

16 Engineering courses are managed in two sections: electrical installation at the Priestwood Centre and electrical, electronic, mechanical and motor vehicle engineering and computing at the Church Road Site. Both sections are well managed. The college underestimated the strengths of management for this area. Course teams meet termly. There are clear agendas which include items on students' progress and achievement, teaching methods, target-setting and retention as well as administrative matters. Communication between the section heads and the relevant heads of school is good. Issues raised by external verifiers on their visits are discussed by course teams and appropriate action taken.

17 There is an appropriate range of equipment for engineering courses, although much of it is old. Since the last inspection, the mechanical engineering workshop has been

reorganised and now includes a motor vehicle section with good equipment, including two modern cars. There are appropriate computing facilities and a suitable range of books in the library. At the Priestwood Centre, there are no computers for students' use and few technical books which they can use. Although the centre is only about a mile from the main site, students from Priestwood do not often make use of facilities at the main site. This is not identified in the self-assessment report.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational	Retention (%)	68	45	74
	Pass rate (%)	81	55	92
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	74	75	33
	Pass rate (%)	64	33	33
One-year C&G craft courses	Retention (%)	80	63	67
	Pass rate (%)	72	65	87
Higher national certificate courses	Retention (%)	73	45	62
	Pass rate (%)	75	72	62

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 3

18 Inspectors observed 22 lessons across a wide range of business courses. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but the college overstated the quality of teaching and learning. Poor pass rates on some courses were not given sufficient significance.

Key strengths

- many well-planned lessons
- good record-keeping, materials and handbooks
- well-managed courses
- good computing equipment
- good examination pass rates on some courses and improved rates of retention

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching and classroom management
- insufficient individual support for students
- out-of-date business experience and professional qualifications of full-time teachers
- some poor examination pass rates

19 The college provides a wide range of vocational courses for full-time and part-time students. It has designed many short courses to allow adults to study at times and at a pace to suit their needs. There are schemes of work for all courses but some are insufficiently detailed. Many lesson plans are well structured and comprehensive but others do not provide enough information to be of use. The college has recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report.

20 The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory. In the better lessons, teachers use

a wide range of methods, vary the pace of lessons appropriately and make frequent checks on students' learning. Practical work is carried out safely. Most teachers keep adequate records of students' progress and have developed some good materials for students. Inspectors agreed with the college's own assessment of these teaching strengths. There is a good working relationship between students and teachers. In the less effective lessons, lesson plans are not followed, students copy work from whiteboards where handouts would have been more effective and not all students are sufficiently involved in the work. Some teachers do not make effective use of teaching aids such as overhead projectors and whiteboards. Other teachers do not make sufficient checks on students' understanding and learning or take enough account of the needs of individual students. These weaknesses in teaching and learning are not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Homework and assignments are set regularly, and are generally marked and returned to students quickly. Teachers' comments are mostly helpful. Some spelling and punctuation errors in students' work are not corrected.

21 Examination pass rates are mixed. There are some good pass rates in NVQ business administration, GNVQ intermediate, the certificate in management studies and the certificate in personnel practice. There are also some good pass rates in book-keeping, office skills and wordprocessing courses. Pass rates on the Association of Accounting Technicians course are as low as 8 per cent. They are also poor on GCE A level and GCSE courses and in courses for beginners in shorthand and in typewriting. The overall pass rates in the certificate and advanced certificate in marketing are poor. However, on some of the component papers of the examinations students' achievements exceeded the national comparators. Retention rates are erratic but have gradually improved between 1995 and 1997. Poor pass rates have not been adequately recognised in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

22 There is a good range of computing equipment with appropriate software. There are also some helpful self-help learning packages for students. The facilities and accommodation for the practice office have improved greatly since the last inspection. Full-time staff have substantial teaching experience but few have up-to-date business experience or relevant professional qualifications.

Examples of students' achievements in business, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GCE A level	Retention (%)	60	58	33
	Pass rate (%)	33	64	43
GCSE	Retention (%)	64	88	85
	Pass rate (%)	24	21	38
NVQ	Retention (%)	72	81	85
	Pass rate (%)	46	48	55
Other vocational	Retention (%)	65	80	87
	Pass rate (%)	58	68	40
Professional	Retention (%)	79	79	82
	Pass rate (%)	81	50	58
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	73	57	78
	Pass rate (%)	86	72	72
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	68	59	78
	Pass rate (%)	94	86	76

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in health and social care. The self-assessment report referred to full-time health and social care courses but did not include access courses. Inspectors agreed with the key strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- teaching which maintains the interest of students
- pass and retention rates on GNVQ programmes
- progression to employment and higher education
- carefully-monitored work experience programme
- good IT resources

Weaknesses

- the slow development of part-time provision for adult students
- few teachers with recent relevant professional experience

24 Teaching on health and social care courses is generally good, although a few lessons lack sparkle and imagination. Schemes of work and lesson plans vary in detail, but all cover the requirements of awarding bodies. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teachers include a range of learning activities in their lessons and encourage students to participate. Handouts and materials used by teachers are generally of a good standard. The key skills of communication, IT and application of number are taught by vocational teachers who ensure that exercises are vocationally relevant. Relationships between

students and teachers are friendly and productive, and students speak highly of the individual attention they receive. Assignments are of an appropriate level, are well marked and promptly returned. Teachers pay careful attention to the correction of errors of spelling and grammar. In the poorer lessons, teachers failed to inspire students or involve them in the work.

25 All students take part in well-managed work experience programmes. Students on the diploma in nursery nursing spend alternate weeks in college and on their work placement. On the GNVQ advanced course in health and community care, students have four two-week periods of work experience during their two-year course. They can also choose to spend an extra day a week on work experience or study for an additional GCE A level subject. Students and workplace providers are given clear guidelines on the activities that are expected during these placements. Teachers visit students on placement regularly and keep careful records of their progress.

26 Pass rates for courses leading to GNVQs are significantly higher than the national average. In 1997, all students who enrolled on the intermediate level were successful as were all those who completed the advanced programme. The pass rate for the first group of students on the diploma in nursery nursing was similar to the national average and the standard of students' work on the first year of the certificate in childcare and education shows that they are making good progress. All care students are given the opportunity to take a first aid qualification, the food hygiene certificate and a deaf awareness qualification, which most pass. Almost half the students on advanced courses progress to higher education and the others find relevant employment in the care sector.

27 Care courses are well managed. Regular course team meetings are held at which teachers discuss curriculum development and quality assurance issues. Currently, teachers are

Curriculum Areas

involved in a project on improving retention. They are giving additional support to students who are having academic or personal difficulties that might cause them to withdraw from their course. The self-assessment report identifies the need to offer a range of courses which will attract part-time students to fulfil the need for more qualified childcare workers that has been identified by market research. Little action to achieve this has been planned, and as yet no progress has been made. Care courses are located in three different sections. Opportunities are being missed to share good practice and experience across the different sections.

28 All care teachers possess relevant assessor and verifier qualifications. However, there has been little recent professional updating for teachers and the planned industrial placements for 1996-97 did not take place. The self-assessment report recognises that this is a weakness. The college does not have sufficient equipment for the demonstration of practical care techniques. There is a specialist room with modern computers for use by care students.

Examples of students' achievements in health and social care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	79	69	100
	Pass rate (%)	97	85	100
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	70	68	71
	Pass rate (%)	93	92	100
Diploma in nursery nursing	Retention (%)	*	*	78
	Pass rate (%)	*	*	86

Source: college data

*courses started in 1995, first results in 1997

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages

Grade 2

29 Inspectors observed 16 lessons in modern languages. The findings of the inspection support the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the large number of modern languages offered
- the range of English as a foreign language (EFL) courses
- well-planned and effectively taught lessons
- good pass rates for those students who enter examinations
- good retention of students
- effective management

Weaknesses

- low number of students entering for examinations
- lack of facilities to encourage students to study on their own
- poor enrolment on GCE A level courses

30 There is a wide range of languages offered at different levels. Since the last inspection, the college has extended the number of languages offered to include Arabic, Japanese, Polish, Russian and Welsh. Provision is also offered at more centres in the local community. The provision of courses in EFL has also expanded and there are courses at five levels for full-time students. Enrolment on GCE A level courses is poor.

31 Lessons are well planned. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods appropriately. In most lessons, teachers encourage students to express themselves confidently in the language being learned and to support each other in the

development of their oral skills. In a lesson designed to develop sporting vocabulary, there was a good range of activities which included students working in small groups or in pairs. Work in higher level classes is particularly challenging. In the small number of less satisfactory lessons, students' response is poor.

32 There is good retention on all courses. However, only about 50 per cent of those who complete their courses enter for examinations. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. Since 1995, examination entries have increased from 124 to 452 entries. Most students who enter for examinations are successful. Pass rates vary from 83 per cent to 100 per cent. Students' progress is recorded termly. This evidence is used to support admission to a course at a higher level for those who do not take the examination. Pass rates are good for the small number of students who take GCSE examinations. In 1997, all the candidates in GCSE Italian achieved a grade A* or A. The college's self-assessment report identifies that progression routes are well established. In French, 12 students have been successful in achieving the degree level final diploma of the Institute of Linguists.

33 The curriculum is well managed. There are regular meetings of section heads and course teams. All teachers except one are part time. A regular newsletter helps to keep them informed. Sixty per cent of teachers are native speakers; 11 do not have a teaching qualification. Most teachers have been observed teaching by full-time college staff. Staff development events are well supported. Equipment is generally adequate. There is restricted access to video at Montague House. Two rooms on the Church Road Site are specially designed for language teaching. Currently, there are no facilities for students who wish to study independently. The college did not identify this in its self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

Examples of students' achievements in modern languages, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
French level 1	Retention (%)	93	81	86
	Pass rate (%)	40	57	53
French level 2	Retention (%)	75	84	79
	Pass rate (%)	12	24	63
German level 1	Retention (%)	82	83	90
	Pass rate (%)	36	39	56
German level 2	Retention (%)	68	82	100
	Pass rate (%)	11	58	62
Italian level 1	Retention (%)	100	62	78
	Pass rate (%)	38	84	64
Italian level 2	Retention (%)	67	49	91
	Pass rate (%)	0	71	69
Spanish level 1	Retention (%)	95	80	64
	Pass rate (%)	45	60	71
Spanish level 2	Retention (%)	69	80	80
	Pass rate (%)	22	48	61

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education

Grade 2

34 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering adult basic education and specially-designed courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The self-assessment report made insufficient reference to courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many of the strengths recorded in the report were supported by the findings of inspection but the report failed to acknowledge some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a wide range of teaching strategies
- teaching designed to match individual needs
- well-planned and effective teaching
- key skills integrated and accredited
- good management of adult basic education
- quality of resources at the Bracknell Sites

Weaknesses

- failure of teachers to use students' interests to encourage learning
- insufficient emphasis on progress reviews on students' learning
- lack of opportunities for students with learning difficulties to progress to vocational courses
- few resources for staff and students at some centres

35 Teaching and learning is generally good. Students' learning is assisted by carefully planned teaching. In the majority of lessons, teachers use a variety of methods to develop students' confidence. Inspectors' findings support the college's assessment of teaching and learning. In some lessons, however, teachers

failed to use students' interests and personal needs to involve and motivate them. The lack of resources in some of the college centres limits the range of methods that teachers are able to use. For example, there was little use of IT or audiovisual equipment as an aid to learning. Teachers' initial assessment of students is thorough and appropriate learning goals are set. Records of students' progress do not show the learning they have achieved but are generally lists of topics or tasks undertaken.

36 Adult basic education students and those on specially-designed courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well motivated and apply themselves diligently during lessons. Many students expressed satisfaction with their course and identified personal achievements resulting from attendance at college. For example, one student explained that he had progressed so well in mathematics that he was now able to perform mental arithmetic calculations at work faster than his manager. Accreditation in literacy and numeracy and key skills is available. Although a high proportion of students were not entered for such accreditation, those that were achieved good pass rates which varied between 88 and 100 per cent.

37 Adult basic education is well managed. The course co-ordinator, who has a fractional post, meets part-time teachers regularly and makes frequent visits to observe lessons. Three formal staff meetings are held each year. The roles and responsibilities for course management and administration are clear and understood by all members of the team. The management of specially-designed courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is less good and poor communication has led to a lack of coherence between the different elements of the course. The college had not recognised that the range of courses for these students does not enable those with learning difficulties to progress to vocational courses. Students with disabilities on vocational

Curriculum Areas

courses are well supported. There is a clear link between course review and evaluation, and subsequent action planning. Data on students' achievements are not efficiently collected nor analysed.

38 The quality of accommodation and resources at the two main sites in Bracknell is good and students have suitable access to computers. At the other centres, the quality of resources is less good. Some rooms are unattractive, and students have insufficient access to computers. The college has identified this weakness in its self-assessment report. Most teachers are part time. Most have or are in the process of obtaining specialist qualifications. Good use is made of volunteers in both adult basic education and on courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

39 Since the last inspection the college has made significant improvement in its support for students. Inspectors agreed with the college's identification of the strengths and weaknesses recorded in its self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the wide variety of opportunities for students to obtain course information
- clear procedures, policies and entitlements for student support
- committed and experienced student services team
- the flexibility in arrangements for providing learning support
- support for students with disabilities following vocational courses
- arrangements for supporting students with children, including high-quality nursery provision

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies in the quality of student support
- lower levels of specialist support on some sites
- inequality of provision for part-time students

40 The college gives impartial guidance and helpful information to prospective students about the courses it offers. Publicity materials are clear and comprehensive. There are detailed procedures and documents to support recruitment and enrolment and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Students are aware of the opportunity to change their course if this is necessary. The process for course change is most effective on GNVQ programmes where a semester model operates.

Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is identified on application and at interview and links exist with schools to smooth transition for these students.

41 Induction of full-time students to their course is generally good and introduces them to college services. Where course handbooks exist they are valued by students but they are not available for all courses. The college is aware of this. Address books and diaries have been issued to all full-time students as a means of informing them about important matters such as the student charter and awareness of drugs-related issues. Diagnostic assessments for literacy and numeracy are conducted during induction by tutors, assisted by learning support staff. Assessments have been customised for different vocational courses. However, a review of an induction survey completed by students indicates that almost one-quarter of full-time students who responded to the survey and 90 per cent of the group of part-time students whom the college intended to assess had not been assessed.

42 Support for students is provided in a variety of ways. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have the use of specialist support (such as communicators) and special adaptations such as enlarged print books, materials in Braille and adapted headphones to meet their individual needs. Learning support staff work with subject specialists to provide support in literacy and numeracy. Of the students who were assessed as requiring help, 114 have received support from the learning support staff. Arrangements for providing support such as team teaching are effective but others, such as taking a student from lessons for individual support are less satisfactory as students miss elements of their course. The learning support team is willing to find the best approach for each student. Lunchtime 'drop-in' sessions are effectively run and their existence is widely known amongst full-time students. Two hundred students have

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used 'drop-in' facilities for help in a specific area.

43 The college has a good relationship with the local careers service. There is a partnership agreement which takes into account college objectives and the service provides the college with high-quality resources and support. Inspectors agree with the college's assessment that full-time students benefit from a range of careers education activities through their tutorial programme. Part-time students can obtain careers advice and information at specific times on two sites, but knowledge of this facility is sparse.

44 The college has an experienced team of staff who provide counselling and advice on financial, accommodation and personal matters. Links with external agencies extend the support available. The weakness, identified in the college's self-assessment report, of unsuitable accommodation for student counselling at one of the main sites has now been resolved. However, students on all sites do not have access to the same level of specialist support. The college nursery provides good-quality childcare and varies its opening times to meet students' needs. There is little evidence of student support provided in the evenings and this particularly disadvantages part-time students.

General Resources

Grade 2

45 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report was generally accurate.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and decorated accommodation
- library and learning resource centres
- systems to monitor use of accommodation

- work areas for staff
- the quality and number of computers

Weaknesses

- unequal distribution of resources across the college's sites
- limited access for those with restricted mobility
- insufficient sports and recreational facilities
- underuse of accommodation

46 The college owns seven sites and, in addition, it uses the facilities of 14 other centres. Currently, the college is preparing its accommodation strategy for submission to the FEFC. It intends to rationalise and improve its accommodation. Buildings are well maintained and decorated. They range from a Grade II listed sixteenth-century house to accommodation built in the 1960s, specifically for further education. The self-assessment report recognises that access to the upper floors of some of the buildings is limited for people with restricted mobility.

47 Most teaching accommodation is well furnished and equipped to a high standard, although some teaching spaces for engineering are shabby. The college has identified the underuse of accommodation as an issue and acknowledges that it needs to improve its efficiency in this respect. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the college reception areas. These are now bright and welcoming. There are no common rooms for students. Some seating is provided in the reception areas and at the Church Road Site, close to the refectory. There are refectories on the three main sites. Recreational and sports facilities are insufficient for the number of students. The college hires facilities when they are required. Accommodation for staff is good.

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48 There are resource centres at each of the college's main sites: Church Road, Wick Hill and Woodley Hill. The resource centre on the Church Road Site includes a library, computers for use by students and some 20 study spaces. The number of computers and study spaces are not always sufficient to meet student demand. However, students have access to computers in other rooms if there are not enough available in the resource centre. There is a good collection of books, journals, CD-ROMs and audio/video cassettes, and access to the Internet. The range of facilities at Wick Hill and Woodley Hill are similar. Students at Woodley Hill do not have access to the college's computerised library catalogue. The college has a large number of modern computers for teaching and a sufficient number of these are available to students for private study. The overall ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:4. Students at the Priestwood Centre do not have adequate access to computers or to library facilities. The college's self-assessment report has identified that current resources do not meet the needs of all of its students.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

49 The college has made considerable progress in improving its arrangements for assuring quality since the last inspection. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses recorded in the self-assessment report, but also identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a comprehensive annual cycle of planning and review
- established and well-managed quality assurance procedures
- action plans informed by an effective blend of course review and external verification

- effective committees for quality assurance
- governors' involvement in quality assurance
- the staff appraisal and development scheme

Weaknesses

- inadequate rigour of course reviews and action plans
- underdeveloped analysis of data on students' achievements in course reviews
- little objective evidence on the quality of teaching and learning

50 The college has developed and introduced a comprehensive quality assurance system covering curriculum and support areas. The strategic plan lists objectives that set the context for monitoring performance. The quality assurance system is clearly described and is well understood by staff. The college justifiably identifies course review and evaluation as the central aspect of its quality assurance arrangements. Review meetings, held at the end of courses, include students and use minutes of team meetings, student and staff evaluations, verifiers' reports and performance measures to assess the work and to plan future action. Many reviews lead to improvements in quality. Some action plans are, however, insufficiently rigorous and performance measures are not used consistently. The involvement of employers is regarded by the college as important but, as yet, few are involved.

51 The quality assurance manager is responsible for maintaining the 'action response database' which records action plans and progress following review meetings. College managers use information held on the database for developing effective action plans. An annual course review and evaluation report is prepared

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by the quality assurance manager which includes data on students' achievements and retention. The college recognises that progress is still to be made in achieving the most effective summary of information to aid analysis.

52 The self-assessment report appropriately recognises the effective work of the many committees which are involved in developing and monitoring the curriculum. Governors have a good understanding of their role in assuring quality. The work of their quality committee is particularly important in challenging managers to substantiate their judgements and to improve systems.

53 There is a clear and concise student charter. It sets standards for services and is accompanied by a transparent complaints procedure. As the self-assessment report indicates, complaints are dealt with effectively and actions reported to the corporation. Since writing its self-assessment, the college has produced a separate charter for work with employers.

54 The comprehensive self-assessment report prepared for the inspection is the third to be produced. Self-assessment is an established part of the annual cycle of planning and review. It involves all staff and incorporates the views of many students. In a thorough process, course teams identify strengths and weaknesses and provide evidence and action plans from which a lead member of staff in each reporting area writes an initial report and proposes a grade. The college's self-assessment team, of senior managers and lead staff, considers reports and agrees grades. The final report was drafted by the deputy principal and considered by special meetings of the academic board and the governors' quality committee. Governors conducted their own self-assessment. The report does not take sufficient account of employers' views. There is little evidence from observations of teaching or tasks. Some action plans associated with aspects of the self-assessment report are not as useful as they

might be. Progress reports on action already taken were available for the inspection team.

55 The college achieved the Investor in People award in 1996. There is a well-established appraisal and development scheme for all staff that was revised and updated at the end of 1997. At the time of the inspection, 81 per cent of eligible permanent staff had been appraised within the last two years. Teaching observation has been an optional element of the scheme; 38 per cent of full-time and fractional teachers, and 32 per cent of part-time teachers had been observed at the time of inspection. New arrangements will introduce teaching observation for all teachers. The outcomes of appraisal are integrated successfully with the well-managed staff development programme, but as the self-assessment report notes, the impact of this on improving performance is slow. There is an extensive annual programme of staff development.

Governance

Grade 2

56 Governors were fully involved in the self-assessment of governance and adopted a self-critical approach. However, there were limitations in the scope of its assessment and no specific targets or performance measures were used to measure progress. Inspectors and the audit service agreed with many of the judgements reached by governors.

Key strengths

- clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management
- thorough consideration of strategic plans, forecasts and budgets
- good briefings on college and community developments
- industrial, professional and public sector experience among governors
- effective committees with clear terms of reference

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Weaknesses

- few employed independent members
- insufficient professional financial expertise amongst the governors
- few training opportunities

57 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. 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.

58 Governors play a major role in strategic planning and in determining the mission of the college. This is identified in the self-assessment report. The college's strategic planning cycle is clear; governors are involved in developing strategic objectives and reviewing existing plans. College managers use these strategic objectives as the basis for their business plans. Plans are discussed by managers and the academic board before being adopted by the corporation. Strategic planning is properly linked to financial forecasting. The strategic plan for 1997 to 2000, approved in July 1997, builds logically on the planning and development of previous years.

59 Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The board has a determined membership of 20, comprising 12 independent members, a training and enterprise council (TEC) nominee, two staff members, a student member, the principal and three co-opted members. At the time of the inspection, there were vacancies for an independent and a co-opted member. The term of office of seven governors expires during 1998. The board has recorded in its self-assessment report the need to increase the number of employed independent members. Governors have an appropriate range of industrial, professional and

public sector experience but currently lack sufficient members with financial expertise. The appointment of independent governors has not always been recorded in full compliance with the instrument of government.

60 The board has an appropriate range of committees with approved terms of reference and clear responsibilities. The finance and general purposes committee monitors the financial performance of the college by means of financial forecasts and budgets. It also scrutinises the draft strategic plan. The remuneration and audit committees are particularly effective. Governors receive regular reports on the college's work which enable them to monitor its performance against strategic objectives but they do not receive a termly report from the principal summarising progress. The governors' quality committee monitors matters relating to course review and evaluation and students' achievements. This committee also evaluated the college's self-assessment report before it was approved by the corporation. The board receives regular monitoring reports on equal opportunities and other key policies.

61 Governors have a very useful and well-presented handbook which includes a code of conduct, standing orders and a policy on openness. There is no formal policy on governors' expenses. The self-assessment report recognises the need for additional standing orders, for example, on the appointment and appraisal of senior staff. A register of interests has been established but it does not include college staff with significant financial responsibilities. Governors receive good and timely briefing papers for meetings. Minutes are generally well drafted, although the phrasing of some is not sufficiently clear.

62 Governors are informed about issues affecting the college and the local community. They are regularly briefed by college managers, hold discussions with teachers and attend talks

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given by visiting speakers. Although governors have few formal training sessions, they have an agreed induction programme for new members. Governors work with employers' advisory committees to establish links with business and have been successful in securing support for the college from senior executives in major enterprises in the area.

Management

Grade 2

63 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses of management. There were some instances where the emphasis given to individual strengths and weaknesses varied and inspectors considered that there were some omissions.

Key strengths

- participative management
- clear procedures for planning
- full and detailed financial regulations and procedures
- comprehensive timely financial reports to governors and managers
- efficient management information system
- good relations with local employers and business organisations
- effective personnel management

Weaknesses

- lack of understanding of new management structure amongst some staff
- ineffective communications in some areas
- lack of experience of some managers

64 The college is generally well managed. The senior management team of seven includes

the principal, two deputy principals (academic and finance), the head of student services and the three heads of school. They provide effective leadership and have the support of staff in promoting the objectives of the college. At their weekly meetings, the management team receives well-prepared and informative reports from the main college management groups. The management structure was revised last year to clarify lines of responsibility. Responsibility for courses is delegated to schools dispersed across the three main sites. The new structure is beginning to work well but some managers are inexperienced in their roles. As yet, not all staff fully understand the new structure.

65 The communication of management information is better to some college centres than to others. Improving its effectiveness is a management priority and a communication strategy is being developed. There is a detailed system of course team and section meetings at which information is disseminated and discussed. Most staff participate as members of these and other college committees. Effective minutes, written to a standard format, are produced for all meetings and are used to keep managers informed of issues in the college. A regular staff newsletter informs staff about governors' and academic board meetings.

66 The college has an effective strategic planning process which reflects the college's mission and takes account of the resources required to achieve objectives. Most staff understand and are involved in strategic planning, although some are not fully aware of the process. The self-assessment report identifies this weakness. Procedures for strategic and business planning are well integrated with associated budget planning. Measurable targets with review and completion dates are included in each part of the process. The college does little of its own market research but uses detailed labour market information from the local TEC to inform its decisions. The college has achieved or exceeded

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its recruitment targets in each of the last three years.

67 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The finance department is well managed and adequately resourced. Financial returns and data on student numbers are accurate and sent to the FEFC punctually. Comprehensive and clear budget progress reports are produced for governors and managers. It would be appropriate for members of the finance and general purposes committee to receive these reports monthly. A new computerised accounting system has been introduced recently; it produces full reports for budget holders but certain reports are still not extracted directly from the system. There are comprehensive financial regulations and procedures. No significant internal control weaknesses have been identified by the internal or external auditors.

68 The management information system provides a range of timely, reliable, regular data for use in the college. Reports are available on student enrolments, retention and attendance. There is regular monitoring of the deployment of college staff and resources to promote efficiency and effectiveness. Methods of identifying actual unit costs are readily available and are used to inform decisions on the courses offered. The need for information to become more accessible for staff is recognised in the self-assessment report.

69 Links with local employers are strong and their views have influenced the curriculum through their representation on advisory committees. Marketing activities and publicity materials are better co-ordinated than at the time of the last inspection. The self-assessment report recognises that there is little liaison with schools.

70 Equal opportunities are central to the strategic objectives and values of the college.

The equal opportunities policy was discussed and approved by the corporation and disseminated widely. The head of student services leads a monitoring group and regularly reports on the implementation of the policy. There is little quantitative analysis or use of targets in implementing or monitoring the policy but these are being developed. There are established procedures to train staff, monitor promotional material and ensure equal opportunities in staff recruitment and student enrolment.

Conclusions

71 Inspectors found the self-assessment report useful in planning and carrying out the inspection. They considered its findings to be accurate in many areas. All the cross-college grades and one-third of the curriculum grades were judged by the inspection team to be well founded. However, the college overestimated some strengths, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning and to some aspects of students' achievements. In one curriculum area, the college had underestimated its strengths.

72 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	10
19-24 years	9
25+ years	80
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	22
Intermediate	13
Advanced	14
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	47
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	114	455	6
Agriculture	0	53	1
Construction	0	34	0
Engineering	69	477	6
Business	168	1,333	16
Hotel and catering	83	1,213	14
Health and community care	96	474	6
Art and design	98	2,030	22
Humanities	177	2,466	27
Basic education	0	191	2
Total	805	8,726	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	73	62	0	135
Supporting direct learning contact	19	0	0	19
Other support	84	0	0	84
Total	176	62	0	238

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£7,332,000	£7,456,000	£7,281,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.97	£19.65	£20.46
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	72%	70%
Achievement of funding target	109%	107%	101%
Diversity of income	38%	34%	34%
Operating surplus	-£42,000	-£65,000	£8,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), college (1996-97)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	77	101	92
	Average point score per entry	3.5	4.2	3.7
	Position in tables	middle third	middle third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	106	139	105
	Percentage achieving qualification	69%	68%	71%
	Position in tables	bottom third	bottom third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	129	135
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	53%	56%
	Position in tables	*	middle third	middle third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

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