

Coventry Technical College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
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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

Coventry Technical College

West Midlands Region

Inspected December 1999

Coventry Technical College is a medium-sized general further education college in the centre of Coventry. Many of its local students are from areas of substantial economic and social deprivation. It also recruits students to specialist courses nationally and internationally. The college's self-assessment process involved all staff and governors. External consultants assisted with the production and moderation of the report, which was the third produced by the college. The report was comprehensive and supported by extensive evidence. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements but considered that it did not give enough weight to some significant weaknesses. By the time of the inspection the college had implemented a number of aspects of its action plan.

The college offers a broad range of courses in all of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in five of these was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Much teaching is good and almost all is satisfactory. Provision in art and design is unsatisfactory. Action taken by the college has led to improvements in retention and achievement rates but they remain low on a number of courses. Most students and work-based trainees

receive good support and there is a particularly effective service for students with disabilities. Accommodation and resources for learning are generally of good quality. There have been improvements since the last inspection, including substantial investment in IT resources, but library facilities are insufficient. Quality assurance is well established but is less effective for franchised provision. Governors are committed and effective. They pay thorough attention to the quality of the college's educational provision. Management structures are clear and internal communications are good. The college's useful links with many external organisations have helped to widen participation. There are significant shortcomings in financial management. Strategic planning and monitoring had until recently been weakened by the use of an excessive and unwieldy number of targets. This has recently been addressed. The college should improve: provision in art and design; students' retention and achievements on a number of courses; the initial assessment of part-time students; students' attendance, especially in hairdressing and beauty and art and design; weaknesses in financial management; library facilities; monitoring arrangements for franchised provision; and the quality of its strategic planning and monitoring.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Construction	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Health and care	3	Quality assurance	2
Hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapies	3	Governance	2
Art and design	4	Management	3
Modern languages and teacher training	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Coventry Technical College is a medium-sized general further education college. It is located in the centre of Coventry on two neighbouring sites, a 1936 building at the Butts, and the 1986 Maxwell site which has purpose-built construction facilities. The student population is drawn from all over Coventry, and some specialist provision attracts people from the region, the United Kingdom and overseas. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Ten of the 18 wards within a 3-mile radius of the college are among the 15% most deprived wards in England.

2 The college offers courses from basic education, through craft, technician and access courses, to higher education and professional updating provision, covering all of the FEFC programme areas. Included in the range of vocational programmes are 250 trainees on modern apprenticeship, national traineeship and other government-funded schemes. There is a wide range of national vocational qualification (NVQ) provision for work-based trainees and other students in employment at levels 1 to 3 and a number of programmes available at level 4.

3 The city of Coventry has historically been heavily dependent on manufacturing industry but over the last 10 years there has been considerable diversification with consequent changes in employment patterns and skill requirements. However, manufacturing remains the dominant employment sector and, despite difficulties during major recessions, the college has a large proportion of engineering and construction provision. Unemployment in the city remains higher than the average for the United Kingdom and for the West Midlands, and there are pockets of very high and long-term unemployment.

4 The college works collaboratively with a wide range of partners. It is an associate college of the two local universities. There are 19 secondary schools in Coventry with sixth forms and three other further education colleges, as well as two large universities, the local education authority's (LEA's) community education provision and many private training providers.

5 The total number of students enrolled in the college in 1998-99 was 11,586, of whom 9,935 were on FEFC-funded courses. Of the FEFC-funded students, 83% were aged over 19, 39% were full time, 14% were on day-release courses and 13% on higher education courses. The proportion of students at the college from minority ethnic groups was 18% compared with 12% in the city's population. The college employs 364 full-time equivalent staff. The college is divided into six schools: arts; business, management and continuing studies; construction and the built environment; engineering; languages and teacher training; and science and health studies.

6 The college's mission is to advance knowledge, skills and creativity by providing accessible lifelong learning aimed at enhancing vocational opportunities. It recognises that to accomplish this it must provide a wide range of accessible and flexible learning opportunities, and has established a number of initiatives to this end. It has made the development of a strong system of support for individual students a priority. It aims to be very responsive to the needs of industry and has cultivated strong links with a wide range of local companies. It has a well-established distance learning unit and fully equipped vehicles for technology training. The college has twice been awarded the national Charter Mark for excellence in customer service.

Context

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 6 December 1999. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. This included data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998, which were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college supplied achievement and retention data for 1999. Inspectors checked these against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 53 days. Inspectors observed 73 lessons, including tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, college managers, staff and students. A team of seven inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the

college inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training supported by the college in construction, engineering, health, care and administration, accountancy, and hairdressing. They interviewed 49 trainees, visited 45 work placements/employers, observed 10 training sessions, eight trainee review sessions and eight work-based assessments. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons observed, 67% were judged to be good or outstanding and 6% were less than satisfactory. This compares with 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	4	0	0	0	4
GNVQ	0	3	7	0	0	10
NVQ	3	7	5	2	0	17
Access to higher education	0	3	0	0	0	3
Other vocational	8	17	7	2	0	34
Other	2	2	1	0	0	5
Total (No.)	13	36	20	4	0	73
Total (%)	18	49	27	6	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*

Context

9 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 (%)
Coventry Technical College	10.8	71
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

Construction

Grade 3

10 The inspection covered courses in construction crafts and technician areas at levels 1, 2 and 3. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that the analysis of data on student retention and pass rates had not been sufficiently rigorous. The TSC inspectors observed work-based training in construction for nine trainees.

Key strengths

- strong links with employers and innovative partnerships
- high-quality training and assessment facilities
- good course organisation and management
- well-presented students' portfolios

Weaknesses

- poor retention in foundation and advanced level crafts
- poor and declining pass rates on many courses
- some inadequate specialist accommodation and resources
- poor development of students' key skills

11 The school of construction and the built environment offers a broad range of courses and is improving the participation of adults. It has strong links with local construction employers and is responsive to their needs, particularly in providing training for gas safety regulations. It also works in partnership with Coventry City Council and other agencies. The school operates an innovative Construction Employment Unit, providing training and employment opportunities for local people,

many of whom progress to employment.

Curriculum management is effective. Course teams operate well and course files are carefully maintained. Each team shows some aspect of good practice but this is insufficiently shared across the school. Students' records are detailed and their destinations are well known. Internal verification procedures operate well.

12 Most teaching is good. Schemes of work are thorough, although lesson plans are underdeveloped. In most lessons, teachers use a variety of methods to interest students, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers in wood trades effectively incorporate computer-based presentations in lessons. Teachers demonstrate good practical skills. For example, in electrical installation, a teacher showed students deftly how to cut and shape metal channel to support electrical cables on walls and around obstacles. Students' interest was maintained by selecting individual students to undertake similar tasks. High standards of safety were observed in most practical lessons. The identification and development of craft students' key skills is generally poor, though improving. These skills are not identified in lesson plans and are rarely recorded by students or teachers. Students' assignments make clear what students have to achieve and marking is accurate and fair.

13 Students are well motivated and hardworking. They often participate well in lessons and speak positively about their work and the personal support received from teachers. Most practice is of industrial standard and some is excellent. Portfolios of students' work are good, for example, those produced for a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced project on the historical context of town planning, especially the development of Coventry since Roman times. The best examples contained imaginative use of information technology (IT). The college encourages students to participate in college and national competitions and community projects.

Curriculum Areas

14 The self-assessment report stated that some NVQ craft courses had low retention and achievement. Inspectors considered that this understated the weakness. Overall, in 1999, retention rates in three of the six main areas of provision declined and two improved. In 1999, the pass rate in foundation crafts was 54% compared with 72% nationally. The pass rate for intermediate crafts was 57% compared with the national average of 69%. In advanced crafts, 53% of students gained the qualification, compared with a national average of 72%. Pass rates for the NVQ in site supervision fell in 1999 to 48%, compared with the national average of 89%. Of the 614 students who started their course between 1997 and 1998, only 224 achieved a qualification.

15 FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that the college offers a wide range of high-quality training and assessment facilities. Teachers

make efficient and effective use of the space provided in workshops. Employers support the college well. For example, the Coventry Construction Employers' Charity has donated an 'all weather' cover for outside work and a high-quality liquid crystal display projector for classroom teaching. There are some good industrial posters and examples of students' practical work on classroom and workshop walls. Students' access to networked computers through the school's learning centre is inadequate and few specialist learning materials are available on the computers. Some classrooms are too narrow and this hinders teaching and learning. New facilities for testing building materials are too detached from main teaching areas. Surveying equipment is good. Staff are well qualified and suitably experienced. Hand tools have been improved and specialist machines are well maintained.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Foundation vocational (crafts and general operations)	1	Number of starters	168	263	182
		Retention (%)	59	54	58
		Achievement (%)	51	52	54
Intermediate vocational (crafts)	2	Number of starters	234	254	285
		Retention (%)	71	74	70
		Achievement (%)	55	61	57
Short gas safety courses for industry	2	Number of starters	395	808	39
		Retention (%)	98	98	100
		Achievement (%)	99	97	97
Advanced vocational (crafts)	3	Number of starters	69	58	68
		Retention (%)	72	86	72
		Achievement (%)	77	58	53
Advanced vocational (technician)	3	Number of starters	76	91	53
		Retention (%)	61	89	70
		Achievement (%)	61	51	43
NVQ in site supervision	3	Number of starters	97	101	26
		Retention (%)	85	93	96
		Achievement (%)	85	100	48

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

16 The inspection covered electrical, electronic and communications engineering, including work on the site of a franchise partner. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had not identified significant weaknesses in student retention and achievement. TSC inspectors observed work-based training in engineering for 10 trainees.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- high achievement rates on full-time technician and franchised courses
- effective widening of participation
- effective course management
- good standard of students' assignments

Weaknesses

- falling retention rates on technician programmes
- low achievement on advanced part-time courses
- some ageing equipment for teaching micro-electronics

17 Electrical, electronics and communications form part of the school of engineering. The area covers the Engineering and Marine Training Agency certificate in engineering training and intermediate and advanced technician courses in engineering, communications and computer engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, and music technology. Most of the teaching and practical activities take place in specialist laboratories and workshops at the Maxwell site. In collaboration with a local commercial recording studio, the college offers

courses accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN) in sound engineering and music production. This provision effectively widens participation, as the students are predominantly those who would not otherwise take advantage of college courses. The students gain confidence and most achieve a qualification. Many of the full-time diploma in music technology students started initially on the franchise scheme. Course quality is monitored by course teams who meet on a regular basis. Agenda items include students' retention, achievements and progression. Students are represented on course teams and report on meetings and the actions resulting to their peer group. The results of student questionnaires are discussed. The reports of external verifiers and moderators are sent to course teams to be acted upon.

18 Teaching in the majority of lessons is good, a strength identified in the college's self-assessment report. Teachers follow appropriate schemes of work and lesson plans. Most handouts and course notes are of good quality. In the most successful lessons, teachers used an appropriate variety of teaching methods, including demonstrations, use of video and IT equipment, practical work and group discussions, handouts and learning packages. In one lesson, students exploring the choice of components to build a fast reliable music recording system used the Internet to search for components and examine them for compatibility. Teachers use question and answer techniques effectively to draw out students' experience, to involve students in discussion and to check on learning. In the less successful lessons, not all the students were actively taking part in the work set and the teacher failed to check that learning was taking place. In some lessons, the teacher talked too much and provided too few opportunities for students to ask questions. Students are highly motivated and their files are well organised. Their assignments and assessment work show a high standard of

Curriculum Areas

attainment and are at an appropriate level. They use IT in the production of their work. Students receive effective feedback on their progress and understand what they need to do to improve their performance. Their attendance is closely monitored and they speak highly of their courses and the college.

19 The standard of accommodation is high. Capital funding from the European Regional Development Fund and Skills Development Fund has provided up-to-date technology equipment and facilities. Computer-aided teaching has been introduced, with electronic teaching modules covering a range of electrical and electronics subject disciplines. These facilities are not currently available for students on national certificate courses. At the Maxwell site, micro-electronics is taught using systems that, although still relevant, are at least 15 years old. They are becoming unreliable and increasingly fail to reflect industrial practices. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers have appropriate engineering and teaching qualifications and have obtained, or are working towards, appropriate verifier and assessor awards.

20 There are high pass rates on full-time intermediate and advanced technician and franchised provision courses. Technician courses have pass rates ranging from 67% to 91% compared with a national average of 66% to 72%. Retention rates are falling on technician courses and in 1999 were below the national average. Achievement rates on part-time advanced technician courses have been consistently well below the national average over the last three years. Whilst the self-assessment report acknowledged areas of both good and poor retention and achievement, it failed to identify underlying trends.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Intermediate and advanced technician (full time)	2 and 3	Number of starters	41	56	16
		Retention (%)	80	79	63
		Achievement (%)	73	67	91
Advanced technician (part time)	3	Number of starters	37	56	20
		Retention (%)	88	85	53
		Achievement (%)	46	67	60
Short courses for franchised provision	various	Number of starters	68	81	115
		Retention (%)	96	90	89
		Achievement (%)	65	77	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Care

Grade 3

21 The inspection covered provision in health, childcare and counselling. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated. The self-assessment report gave insufficient weight to weaknesses in retention and achievement. TSC inspectors observed training in health and care for six trainees.

Key strengths

- good teaching in the majority of lessons
- well-managed courses
- effectively planned and monitored work experience
- good levels of support for students

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on the majority of courses
- poor and declining retention rates
- poor completion rates for course units on NVQ programmes

22 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time health and childcare courses. It is also a lead member in a local partnership which provides support and assessment for NVQs in childcare and play work. Enrolments for full-time courses have declined significantly. The college has expanded its provision of first aid, counselling and access to health courses. The access to health programme offers considerable flexibility in attendance patterns. Students can enrol at three different points within the year and can complete the course over one or two years. Inspectors agreed with the college that courses are well managed. Course teams hold regular meetings that deal increasingly with key issues relating to retention, students' progress and curriculum review and development. Course handbooks provide clear guidance to students on course content and assessment methods.

23 There is much good teaching. Teachers use detailed schemes of work and lesson plans with clear objectives. In the more successful lessons, teachers used a variety of appropriate methods including exposition, question and answer sessions, group work and role-play. Teachers were knowledgeable and provided good opportunities for students to contribute to discussion. They made effective use of high-quality handouts and overhead transparencies. There was a good rapport between students and teachers. In a few lessons, the teaching was less well managed. For example, teachers made insufficient checks on students' learning and failed to ensure that the work was sufficiently demanding for all students. Inspectors agreed with the college that work experience is effectively planned and monitored. Students are well prepared for work placement and value the experience it provides. Teachers maintain good contact with placement providers and carefully monitor and record students' progress in the workplace.

24 Students speak highly of their supportive relationship with their teachers. All full-time and part-time students are allocated a personal tutor and meet regularly with them. In its self-assessment report, the college identified weaknesses in students' attendance and has taken measures to address this. Students' attendance is rigorously monitored by all tutors. Parents and guardians of 16 to 18 year olds receive regular reports on students' progress.

25 Teachers are well qualified and most have relevant specialist and vocational experience. Most accommodation is good. The majority of courses have base rooms that have been imaginatively refurbished and contain attractive displays of students' work. There is a well-used learning workshop for science and health courses that includes an IT facility. Specialist equipment and library facilities are adequate; there is a small but generally up-to-date selection of books and specialist journals.

26 Most assignments are at an appropriate level. Students' portfolios on GNVQ and NVQ courses are well organised and many are of a high standard. Inspectors agreed with the

Curriculum Areas

college that there are appropriate progression routes for all courses. There are high pass rates on first-aid courses and on the foundation course in counselling. However, pass rates on most courses are low, a weakness that was not identified in the self-assessment report. In 1999, most pass rates were below national averages and some had declined. For example, the pass rate for the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies fell from 100% in 1998 to 77% in 1999 and for GNVQ advanced health and social care it fell from 76% to 43%. The self-assessment report underestimated the extent and significance of low retention. The retention rate on the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in

childcare and education has been below the national average for the past two years and is falling. In 1999, the retention rate for the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies was significantly below the national average. In recent years, a large number of NVQ students did not complete the qualification. This year, the rate of completion of NVQ units has shown some improvement. Course teams are aware of the need for action to improve retention and achievement on most courses. They have made a number of changes to bring about improvements but at the time of inspection it was too early to judge whether these changes had been effective.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
First aid	1	Number of starters	31	330	282
		Retention (%)	97	100	100
		Achievement (%)	97	100	100
Counselling (foundation)	Mixed levels	Number of starters	*	67	50
		Retention (%)	*	78	68
		Achievement (%)	*	98	94
Counselling – certificate in counselling skills; certificate in therapeutic counselling	2	Number of starters	*	52	96
		Retention (%)	*	75	81
		Achievement (%)	*	95	75
Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	63	33	20
		Retention (%)	90	76	65
		Achievement (%)	68	68	54
Access to health, science and social studies	3	Number of starters	42	31	30
		Retention (%)	62	38	64
		Achievement (%)	77	80	38
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	22	51	33
		Retention (%)	41	76	68
		Achievement (%)	33	76	43
National diploma in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	25	23	32
		Retention (%)	72	96	69
		Achievement (%)	61	100	77

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

*courses started in 1997

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing, Beauty Therapy and Holistic Therapies

Grade 3

27 The inspection covered courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapies. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. TSC inspectors observed work-based training in hairdressing for seven trainees.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- effective use of students' prior knowledge and experience
- students' practical work informed by industrial standards
- good pass rates on part-time courses

Weaknesses

- poor achievements on some full-time programmes
- low levels of attendance
- IT and key skills not integrated with the curriculum
- low retention rates on some programmes

28 The college offers a range of NVQ courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Well-established courses in aromatherapy, body massage and reflexology have been extended by the introduction of other BTEC qualifications in complementary healthcare. Students can attend at times to suit their needs. As identified in the self-assessment report, the planning and organisation of courses is generally effective and allows students to attend in ways that suit their circumstances. Progression routes have been improved in holistic therapy by the introduction of NOCN courses that progress to BTEC programmes. There is a higher national certificate programme in complementary

healthcare with options for specialisation and flexible attendance. Communications are generally effective but there is no consistency in the systems being used across the three curriculum areas. The school plans to address this by sharing good practice between the three areas. As identified in the self-assessment report, there are effective links with industry. Student work placements are well established in hairdressing. The college's hairdressing liaison committee holds meetings jointly with the National Hairdressers' Federation. Employers visit the college and students are able to enter competitions and visit national conferences.

29 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that lessons are well organised and that students work confidently and competently in the salon environment. Appropriate and relevant practical skills were being developed in salons and some students were encouraged to share their experiences in order to help each other learn. Learning objectives were shared with students. However, in some lessons students were not set targets and the work they were doing was not sufficiently demanding. For example, in a beauty therapy lesson, students due to complete level 2 beauty therapy were not set targets to complete all their level 1 units. Most students were fully involved in their work and enjoying their studies. In a level 2 beauty therapy group, students were given the task of assessing the teacher while she gave a demonstration. This ensured their participation and concentration and introduced them to new assessment criteria. Teachers encourage students to work to commercially acceptable standards. Students completing their level 1 in hairdressing were being pushed to complete practical long hair work on blocks in an acceptable time in order to enter local competitions. College students have won a number of prizes in the past two years. As the self-assessment report identified, IT and key skills are not yet fully integrated with the curriculum. Teachers are undertaking staff

Curriculum Areas

development in key skills in order to address this and are planning strategies to improve this aspect of students' learning in the future.

30 Students' portfolio work is of an appropriate standard but most students do not use IT to improve their presentation. The self-assessment report identified some poor achievements in full-time hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes. In 1998, only 53% of NVQ level 2 beauty therapy students achieved the award. The college is addressing this by increasing the length of the course from one year to 18 months. Some achievements on part-time courses are good, including the body massage course, which has had a pass rate of over 80% for the past three years. Individual students' achievements are celebrated by means of college certificates, which help to motivate students. For example, students in a hairdressing class were aiming to complete their NVQ level 1 before Christmas in order to attain a college certificate. Students enjoy their studies

and speak positively about the help they receive from teachers. However, retention is poor on a number of courses and levels of attendance during the inspection were low.

31 Inspectors agreed that teachers are well qualified and hold relevant assessor awards. Accommodation has been well adapted to provide appropriate facilities for hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy. As identified by the school, reception facilities are not adequate. The holistic therapy room does not have a reception area and the hairdressing and beauty therapy reception areas are separate.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapies, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ in hairdressing	1	Number of starters	65	85	57
		Retention (%)	62	69	72
		Achievement (%)	**	76	95
NVQ in hairdressing	2	Number of starters	51	121	40
		Retention (%)	53	40	62
		Achievement (%)	77	67	68
NVQ in beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	32	45	*
		Retention (%)	81	53	*
		Achievement (%)	80	55	*
NVQs in epilation, beauty therapy and body massage	3	Number of starters	24	51	42
		Retention (%)	80	78	76
		Achievement (%)	94	70	70

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

*course changed to 18 months

**no agreed data

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 4

32 The inspection covered the full range of the college's art and design courses. Inspectors agreed with several judgements in the self-assessment report but identified significant additional weaknesses concerning students' achievements and retention.

Key strengths

- the use of trips and live projects to enrich learning programmes
- well-planned courses supported by clear schemes of work
- good range of specialist facilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on most courses
- poor levels of attendance
- slow progress of some students in achieving the full award for national diploma courses
- insufficient variety of teaching and learning methods in some lessons
- insufficient focus on experimentation and creativity

33 The college offers a wide range of courses, including five specialist national diplomas and courses for adults. There was a significant decline in the number of students recruited in 1998 but numbers have started to improve this year. The recent appointment of two programme area co-ordinators is intended to strengthen the management of the programme. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that individual courses have clear schemes of work. The school does not rigorously analyse data on students' achievements, although there is evidence of recent improvements in this area. Tutorials are valued by students. Key skills are appropriately integrated with courses.

34 Teaching is satisfactory or better. Much teaching is carried out through assignment and project work. Briefs for students' projects introduce students to a wide range of topics. Visits to exhibitions and live projects are used effectively to extend students' learning experiences. To celebrate the millennium, graphics students designed and made woven bookmarks to be presented to children from a local primary school who were exploring the origins of the local weaving industry. Another group of students designed a weather vane for one of Coventry's oldest churches. Teachers effectively demonstrate new skills and techniques. In some successful lessons, teachers introduced specialist software packages to develop students' IT skills and gave effective demonstrations of the use of toning and tinting techniques in photography. In some lessons, teachers failed to vary the activities sufficiently. Opportunities for group work were missed and students' oral contributions were not used effectively to increase their learning. In a number of lessons there was too much concentration on the development of skills to meet course requirements and not enough attention to encouraging students to explore and experiment with materials. Inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that there was an appropriate balance between these activities. Some students had underdeveloped research skills and embarked on projects without sufficient forward planning. For example, some students embarking on an art history project had carried out insufficient initial research to establish a clear focus for their studies.

35 The self-assessment report acknowledged that retention had been poor on some courses. The significance of this weakness was understated. In 1997 and 1998, over 80% of courses had poor retention and in 1999 there was poor retention on all main courses. Admissions criteria have been changed in the current academic year and other measures have been introduced to bring about improvement. Attendance rates in lessons observed by

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inspectors were poor and average group sizes were small. Pass rates improved on a few courses in 1999, for example, the GNVQ intermediate art and design course. A common programme of study developed for general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) students resulted in improved achievements in 1999. However, pass rates for most courses have been low for two of the last three years and pass rates on BTEC national certificates and GCE A level courses have been below national averages for the past three years. There has been satisfactory progression from the GNVQ intermediate course to national diplomas and for students on national diploma courses to higher education. However, progression rates from the specialist access course to higher education have been very poor

for several years and this course has been discontinued. A significant percentage of students did not achieve the full award for the national diploma within the expected time and most did not subsequently achieve it.

36 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that specialist resources are good. There are well-equipped rooms for practical photographic work and separate rooms for theory and portfolio building. Life drawing studios are spacious and well lit. Fashion workrooms provide opportunities to use a range of equipment but there is little storage space for students' work. Studios are well maintained. Teachers have kept abreast of developments in their specialist disciplines but there is scope for greater sharing of good teaching practice.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G qualifications	1	Number of starters	149	158	76
		Retention (%)	68	75	67
		Achievement (%)	69	69	70
NOCN art and design	Mixed levels	Number of starters	71	56	69
		Retention (%)	58	57	72
		Achievement (%)	80	69	73
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	19	15	13
		Retention (%)	63	67	62
		Achievement (%)	58	70	100
BTEC national certificates in design	3	Number of starters	22	28	22
		Retention (%)	77	76	55
		Achievement (%)	65	69	42
GCE A level art and design	3	Number of starters	35	111	81
		Retention (%)	68	59	41
		Achievement (%)	19	52	79
BTEC national diplomas in design	3	Number of starters	107	130	76
		Retention (%)	72	79	67
		Achievement (%)	55	82	95
Access to art and design	3	Number of starters	34	27	20
		Retention (%)	59	70	70
		Achievement (%)	35	74	22

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

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages and Teacher Training

Grade 2

37 The inspection covered courses in modern languages and teacher training, including some franchised provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Several weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- wide range of provision with buoyant enrolments
- good retention rates on most courses
- high pass rates in the teachers of English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) certificate
- good use of the target language in modern languages courses
- effective use of group work in teacher training

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of IT
- some insufficiently explicit feedback to students on teaching practice
- poor recording of students' progress in modern languages

38 The school of languages, teacher and assessor training has a wide range of provision, with courses in 16 languages, including British Sign Language, and a varied programme of teacher training courses. Enrolments are buoyant. There is good progression in languages and teacher training from preliminary through to advanced level. The school provides training courses for three major car manufacturers. It works closely with the University of Warwick by providing the first two years of a four-year degree in European studies. Courses are well managed. As identified in the

self-assessment report, there are good communications between staff and effective use is made of electronic mail, a newsletter and regular meetings.

39 Most teaching is of a high standard. On teacher training courses there is a strong emphasis on group work. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is good tutorial support for students. On the course leading to the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificate for further and adult education teachers, students learn how to teach their particular specialism and explore different teaching styles. Students from a variety of vocational backgrounds share their subject knowledge and teaching methods. In a 'micro-teaching' lesson, students gave effective 10-minute lessons on a diverse range of topics, including the treatment of sports injuries, how to dress an eye wound and the dangers of alcohol. They used well-prepared visual aids, demonstrating the good training they had received in using resources, a strength stated in the self-assessment report. Teachers encouraged discussion that included helpful constructive criticism from the students.

40 Languages teachers make good use of the language being taught. In a GCE advanced supplementary (AS) French lesson, the teacher used a lively warm-up activity in which students had to find adjectives for each letter of the alphabet. In a British Sign Language lesson, the teacher used a colourful display of photographs to stimulate work on the family. As stated in the self-assessment report, students participate well in class activities and help each other to learn. In a Punjabi lesson, mother tongue speakers who had come to improve their reading and writing skills worked successfully with students learning Punjabi as a foreign language. The teacher skilfully met the needs of this group, which contained students working at three different levels. Students value the quality of the support they receive. They appreciate the Monday evening 'drop-in' sessions in the language centre but make little use of the audio and video facilities provided. Inspectors did not agree that the use of IT in modern languages is

Curriculum Areas

a strength. The self-assessment report recognised lack of use of IT in teacher training as a weakness and staff development days have been organised to address this issue.

41 There is good retention on many courses. The certificate in TESOL has large numbers and there are good retention and achievement rates. GCSE results in languages in 1999 were good. Many students of modern languages are on courses leading to NOCN awards. Retention is generally good but some achievement rates are poor.

42 Students on the further and adult education teachers' and TESOL certificate courses undertake teaching practice. The feedback from teachers on students' teaching practice sessions is constructive and encouraging, although it does not always include sufficiently specific

suggestions for improvement. Written feedback in teacher training courses is detailed and teachers keep good records of students' progress. In languages, teachers provide a useful initial questionnaire to help students assess their progress. They mark students' written work carefully but do not systematically complete records of students' progress.

43 Teachers are well qualified. Those in modern languages are trained assessors. The school has extensive involvement with relevant external professional organisations. All teaching rooms are well equipped and all teachers of modern languages have their own portable cassette recorders. There is a well-equipped languages centre with a broad range of paper-based, audio and video materials.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in modern languages and teacher training, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NOCN languages	1	Number of starters	258	312	248
		Retention (%)	72	82	89
		Achievement (%)	52	75	47
NOCN languages	2	Number of starters	67	100	104
		Retention (%)	67	92	83
		Achievement (%)	80	55	67
GCSE languages	2	Number of starters	*	*	49
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	94
NOCN languages	3	Number of starters	222	97	123
		Retention (%)	86	82	79
		Achievement (%)	58	63	67
Trinity College London certificate in TESOL	3	Number of starters	245	443	371
		Retention (%)	96	100	98
		Achievement (%)	91	97	98
C&G 7307 further and adult teachers' certificate	Mixed levels	Number of starters	**	193	167
		Retention (%)	**	80	93
		Achievement (%)	**	79	71

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

*no entries in 1997 and 1998

**no agreed data

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Support for Students

Grade 2

44 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths represented normal practice and that some weaknesses were insignificant.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for pre-entry guidance and admissions
- well-planned enrolment and induction
- comprehensive support for most full-time students with additional learning requirements
- good careers facilities
- effective tutorial support

Weaknesses

- no assessment of the literacy and numeracy support requirements of most part-time students
- ineffectiveness of action to address poor retention on some courses
- lack of clarity of some individual action plans

45 Most students receive relevant guidance before enrolment, a strength indicated in the self-assessment report. Prospective full-time and substantive part-time students have an interview before enrolment. Students who are undecided about their proposed course receive a general guidance interview. Others have an interview with curriculum specialists. If appropriate, provision at other colleges is recommended. There are clear entry criteria for each course. The college uses a variety of recruitment methods, including newspaper advertising in partnership with other local colleges, a website, mailshots aimed at specific groups, open evenings and advice days and local

careers fairs. Prospectuses and course leaflets are informative. A translation service is available, if needed. Arrangements for enrolment and induction are carefully planned but, as the self-assessment report indicates, some students on part-time evening provision do not receive a college induction. TSC inspectors found that this was also the case for work-based trainees who started training at times different from the usual. Most students consider the processes for admission, interview, enrolment and induction informative and efficient.

46 The quality of tutorial support is good. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. Each student has a personal tutor. For most part-time students this is the class teacher. Tutorials include both group and individual sessions. Students on open learning programmes can obtain tutorial support by telephone and electronic mail. Teachers receive regular training on tutoring and a tutor co-ordinating group shares good practice. The recording of most students' progress is thorough. However, in some instances individual plans to improve students' performance are unclear or incomplete. The college recognises that retention in some areas is unsatisfactory. Action has been taken to address this, but on some courses it has not yet proved effective.

47 Inspectors from the FEFC and TSC agreed with the college that a comprehensive range of careers services and facilities is provided. The well-used careers area has a wide range of up-to-date information. Helpful services include job boards with information on part-time and full-time employment, talks by employers on job opportunities and a guide to Internet sites giving information on jobs. The college holds an annual careers fair supported by local employers and universities. Full-time and a number of part-time students receive careers education as part of their programme of study. Other part-time students have the opportunity of careers guidance through appointments with the

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college careers adviser. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service whose advisers provide individual guidance interviews, career talks and support for students who have been identified as being at risk of leaving their course early. The college and careers service offer guidance and help on courses and career options to students, their parents and the local community following the publication of examination results.

48 The college has a comprehensive range of services, including help with communications and numeracy, to support students with additional learning requirements. This strength was also identified by the TSC inspectors. Students can obtain support through timetabled group sessions, as part of their programme of study, through individual appointments or by using support workshops at times convenient to them. There are adapted materials and equipment and support services to meet students' individual learning requirements. The college provides a service for a number of other colleges and universities in Coventry and Warwickshire to support students who are deaf or have partial hearing. Documentation to record the support provided is completed thoroughly but the use of individual learning programmes and plans to improve students' performance is underdeveloped. A weakness recognised in the self-assessment report is that some full-time and most students on substantial part-time courses do not receive a diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy. This was a weakness found during the previous inspection. There are various arrangements to inform course tutors about the progress students are making in additional support sessions but there is no formal college-wide system.

49 The recent centralisation of support services for students has given greater coherence to the advice and guidance provided on social security, accommodation and financial support. The personal counselling service is staffed by trained counsellors and refers

students to external agencies, when appropriate. Although the college does not have its own childcare facilities, help is made available through local nurseries and childminders. Students who had used these services considered that they had met their requirements well. Arrangements for the allocation of access and hardship funds are effective. The college has access to a number of local bursaries from Coventry-based charities to provide financial support for students.

General Resources

Grade 3

50 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements about resources in the self-assessment report. They did not agree with one key strength.

Key strengths

- well-maintained accommodation
- good IT resources
- the wide range of resources available for students with sensory impairment

Weaknesses

- low space usage
- insufficient library provision
- few recreational facilities

51 The college is located on two sites close to the city centre. The Butts site, with a neo-classical façade that is a local landmark, was purpose built in the 1930s. It incorporates a full production theatre used by the community. The building has been extended in recent years and the workshops have undergone some refurbishment. The Maxwell centre is 400 metres away from the main site. It has a modern purpose-built centre for construction and some engineering facilities. The classroom block at the Maxwell centre is in poor condition

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and is difficult to adapt to create an appropriate learning environment. The college has taken out of use, or disposed of, buildings it has identified as unsuitable but inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is still room for improved efficiency in the use of space.

52 Inspectors also agreed that accommodation is well cared for and that most areas are well maintained and well decorated. Improvements since the last inspection include the refurbishment of reception and circulation areas and the provision of social space for students. Staff appreciate the good service and rapid response they receive from maintenance staff. The 10-year maintenance plan is comprehensive and is regularly updated and audited by external consultants. While a new staff common room provides a pleasant social area, staff workrooms are of uneven quality and have little storage space.

53 Most areas of the college are accessible to students with restricted mobility. All areas of the Butts site are accessible but differing floor levels between the original and new buildings pose some difficulties for wheelchair users. Automatic door press pads have improved access on the ground floor and there is a good number of designated car parking spaces for people with disabilities. Access is more difficult in older buildings at the Maxwell centre. The college's student access and support unit provides specialist resources for students with a wide range of sensory impairments. Inspectors agreed that there were few recreational facilities for students. An old gymnasium is the only sports facility. A small room provides a multi-gym style environment but the main sports hall requires significant refurbishment and is mostly used for examinations. There is no student common room at the Butts site but the multipurpose courtyard provides a distinctive, high-quality social area for students.

54 Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that library provision is a strength. The library is too small and plans for it to be extended have been postponed. The library is located at the Butts site, in an area shared with the student advice and counselling service. As the self-assessment report states, the number of study spaces is low. There are too few books and some are out of date. The available resources are well signposted. Each curriculum area has a member of the library staff as a point of contact. However, their role is limited, as the emphasis is on acquisitions rather than curriculum involvement. At the Maxwell site there is a learning centre but no library. The centre contains 12 computers and some useful CD-ROM resources but it is small and is open for only one hour at lunchtime. Some books and other resources purchased by the library are made available to students within curriculum areas at the site.

55 As the self-assessment report indicated, IT resources for students' use are good. There has been substantial investment in IT since the last inspection. There are 383 computers available for students' use and just over half are networked. Open access is available at 69 computers in IT suites, with a further 31 available in curriculum areas. Learning centres have been developed within curriculum areas. For example, there is a business unit where employers and their staff can acquire IT skills. Video-conferencing facilities are available in three curriculum areas. Two technology vehicles are currently being refurbished to support learning in the community. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is an extensive college network in place. Networked computers provide access to the Internet and electronic mail facilities for students and staff. A college intranet is being developed. Although at an early stage, it contains learning materials, information about key skills and links to relevant Internet sites. Collaborative projects with local colleges have

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enabled the development of attractive learning materials which are accessible on the intranet. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that staff access to computer facilities and the Internet is good. While the college has a policy statement on IT, there is no overall strategy to monitor its implementation or to improve planning. The small team of technicians and a helpdesk provide a responsive service.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

56 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated and that insufficient emphasis had been given to some weaknesses. The college has taken action to address a number of the weaknesses identified in the report.

Key strengths

- a well-established self-assessment and quality assurance process
- rigorous annual quality surveys of all areas of the college
- the college charter and associated service standards
- an effective appraisal system

Weaknesses

- the excessive and unwieldy number of targets in use
- underdeveloped monitoring and self-assessment for franchised provision

57 There has been a strong commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement within the college for many years. There is a clear quality assurance policy. Quality assurance and self-assessment reports are regularly reviewed and acted upon at academic

board and corporation meetings. Quality assurance arrangements are the responsibility of the director of curriculum and quality, who is supported by a quality committee comprising quality managers drawn from each of the schools and major support areas.

58 Each teaching school and support area has an annual quality survey. The core survey team is drawn from members of the senior management, the quality committee and governors. The survey process involves comprehensive observations of teaching or of appropriate activities for a support area. Recently, cross-college functions, such as the tutorial system, have been included.

59 The self-assessment report was self-critical. It covered curriculum, cross-college and support areas thoroughly. Strengths and weaknesses were supported by extensive evidence and cross-referencing. The information from the quality surveys and from course and school self-assessments contributed to its findings. It contained a thorough evaluation comparing the college's self-assessment with the FEFC publication *Effective Self-assessment*. The evaluation included actions to address weaknesses, some of which have already been implemented. Staff and governors have been involved in the production of the self-assessment report for the last three years. The elements of the annual self-assessment cycle are well documented and timed to contribute to the strategic plan and the annual review of performance targets.

60 Since last July, a small number of performance indicators have been set and monitored. These include indicators for class size and retention, concerns identified in the self-assessment report. The college's key strategic objectives have recently been published in the staff handbook. Prior to this, a large number of targets and performance indicators had been introduced over the years to monitor the achievement of the college's strategic

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objectives. These had become unwieldy and difficult to measure. Targets and performance indicators are reviewed and revised annually by the academic board and corporation.

Information from annual surveys of staff and students' opinions is gathered systematically at key stages in the college year.

61 The transition to a new computerised management information system has impeded the production of some performance indicators. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. However, recent new software has enabled the production of standardised retention and achievement data at course level for comparison with national benchmarking data published by the FEFC. In addition, a variety of information, including data on attendance and course retention is being generated. Quality assurance managers in each curriculum area ensure that procedures are implemented properly and are promoting good practice in quality assurance and course reviews. They have improved the critical self-evaluation of course teams, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Some curriculum course files contain examples of systematic course information but others are incomplete. Some information is spread over a variety of documents.

62 The process of monitoring and self-assessment for franchised provision is underdeveloped. The college policy on franchised provision sets appropriate standards for quality and the provision is monitored as part of the annual quality surveys. However, the monitoring and recording of visits is inadequate and self-assessment is at an early stage of development.

63 The college gained the Charter Mark in 1995 and again in 1998. At the time of the inspection it was one of only seven colleges to achieve this standard for a second time. The college's charter is readily available and clearly identifies to students, employers and the

community the standards and services they may expect. An abbreviated version is included as part of the students' learning agreement.

Versions are available in large print and in British Sign Language for visually impaired and deaf students. The charter and its service standards are reviewed annually by the academic board and corporation.

64 FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that appraisal and staff development are well developed. All support staff and teachers who teach for more than four hours a week are appraised. Appraisal includes observation of a teaching or support activity and leads to the identification of training needs. The system is well documented and staff evaluations of appraisal are used to improve the appraisal process. The outcomes of staff training and development are used to inform individual, school and strategic planning. Comprehensive training and development plans for schools and support areas are produced annually. Common training activities are identified and, where possible, in-house courses are provided. The college's status as an Investor in People has recently been confirmed for a third time.

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Governance

Grade 2

65 Inspectors and auditors were broadly in agreement with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They identified a key weakness that had been identified as a strength in the college's self-assessment.

Key strengths

- thorough monitoring of the quality of the college's educational provision
- effective arrangements for identification and induction of new governors
- effective and appropriate use of committees
- well-organised, efficient and open conduct of corporate business

Weaknesses

- inadequate scrutiny by governors of financial management information

66 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.

67 Governors have a wide range of appropriate skills and experience. They are highly committed to the college and levels of attendance at governors' meetings are high. Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. As the self-assessment report states, the college has established effective nomination and appointment procedures. Advertising has been used successfully to identify new governors. Induction procedures are thorough. Training and development needs

are assessed on an annual basis, and training provided as necessary. Governors are required to make annual declarations of eligibility.

68 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the corporation has established an appropriate range of committees, clearly setting out their terms of reference, membership, decision-making powers and reporting requirements. Committee minutes and key papers are presented to the corporation for their consideration. The terms of reference of the audit and finance committees are comprehensive. The cycle of board and committee meetings is set one year in advance and the key decisions to be made are identified. All meetings of the corporation in the past year have been quorate. The corporation regularly evaluates its performance against best practice and has set attendance targets.

69 The corporation has adopted sound policies for openness and accountability. All governors and senior staff annually update a register of interests. The corporation has established a comprehensive range of policy documents that includes standing orders, a code of conduct, an ethical code and 'whistleblowing' procedures. Agendas, papers and minutes, except for confidential items, are available for public inspection. The corporation has been prompt in considering and acting upon initiatives in good practice in governance.

70 Clerking arrangements are very effective. The corporation and committees receive a high level of support. The clerk has a comprehensive job description and receives good administrative support. Agendas are well organised and deadlines are set for the production of supporting papers. Agendas clearly identify documents circulated in support of each item of business. Papers include an executive summary and set out the nature of the report. Discussions and actions are well reported and minuted.

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71 The corporation has approved the college's financial strategy and key performance indicators. Financial implications are discussed and inform the decision-making process. However, inspectors and auditors did not agree with the self-assessment report that the corporation undertakes rigorous monitoring of finances. Governors have received financial reports at every meeting of the finance committee but the quality of these reports has been poor. The analysis of results by school and support areas does not readily reconcile to the overall summary of income and expenditure. Franchised provision activities throughout the year have not been adequately reported.

72 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that governors pay close attention to students' performance. Reports from the academic board are sent to the performance and development committee. This has a very wide brief to monitor strategic planning, promote quality improvement and monitor student support. It regularly evaluates information on students' retention and achievements in the light of previous years' performance and national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC. Close attention has been paid to particular aspects of students' performance, for example, the achievement and retention rates for students aged 16 to 18. Governors have a clear understanding that retention rates and the achievements of students aged 16 to 18 are important areas requiring improvement.

73 Governors' involvement in strategic planning has increased substantially. They have recently approved key strategic objectives, addressing a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Governors' links with the college's curriculum areas have been strengthened, for example, by the involvement of some governors in quality surveys. They have found this helpful in increasing their understanding of non-financial areas of the college. Heads of school make regular

presentations to the corporation. A voluntary scheme for governors to act as mentors to curriculum and cross-college areas has recently been established. This aims to improve governors' knowledge of the college and to make their expertise available to middle managers.

Management

Grade 3

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

Key strengths

- the extensive links and partnerships
- thorough attention to equal opportunities
- effective planning at school and support area level
- effective communications

Weaknesses

- aspects of management information
- insufficient monitoring of income and student units
- inadequate reporting of financial performance

75 The college works in a strongly competitive environment. It recruits a significant number of students from disadvantaged areas. It has sought to diversify its curriculum by expanding higher education, increasing provision for overseas students and developing its training provision. Managers seek to maintain a broad curriculum while providing it more efficiently. The senior and middle management structure is clearly organised and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. There are regular senior and middle management meetings and a curriculum and teaching group reviews college-wide curriculum issues. Links between

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these groups are effective. The clear minuting of action points enables further consideration to be given to the progress made in resolving such issues. Course management is good. Internal communications are effective and well supported by regular newsletters and an increasing use of electronic mail.

76 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the college has useful links with many external organisations. It works closely with other colleges in Coventry. There are particularly effective relationships with employers in the construction and engineering industries. Close collaboration with the local community includes involvement in the Coventry 14-24 Strategic Forum. The college has recently opened a training centre in partnership with Coventry City Football Club. Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise commented favourably on the college's relationships with local employers and its contribution to local training needs.

77 Curriculum and cross-college business plans are well developed. They have clear aims and objectives, and include a useful analysis of strengths and weaknesses and key objectives for the year. Progress in meeting these objectives is monitored. Staff are closely involved in strategic planning. The college sets many targets. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the operating statements accompanying the strategic plan blurred the distinction between operational and strategic matters and had made monitoring of the strategic plan difficult. The corporation has recently approved new key objectives and supporting performance indicators as a basis for strategic review and measuring improvement. Reporting the progress made against these measures has begun but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this development.

78 The college met its FEFC-funding targets until last year and the number of students, particularly part time, has increased. However,

class sizes remain small across the college and the use of teaching staff time, although improving, is low. The college commissioned a benchmarking survey to indicate areas for improvements in efficiency. Subsequent action, including reorganisation of staffing, has led to significant savings.

79 Students' retention and achievements are carefully monitored. The college has taken action to secure improvement in areas where performance is poor. There have been some poor achievements, particularly for students aged 16 to 18. The performance of students aged 19 and above, who represent 83% of the total, has mostly been better than that of students aged 16 to 18 and is improving.

80 The college makes good use of market research. It works closely with other local organisations to identify key areas of development. Useful initiatives have included the development of community provision to support widening participation, courses in music technology, the growth of care courses and support for students aged under 16 excluded from schools. The college's distance learning for industry is a distinctive feature.

81 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. While financial regulations are regularly reviewed and the college has taken some measures to improve its financial efficiency, inspectors considered that the college overstated the quality of its financial management. The college has low levels of solvency and is currently repaying an historical debt. The college's finances are monitored by the senior management team through its consideration of the management accounts. The finance team is adequately resourced but the post of finance director is currently vacant. Management accounts have not been produced on a monthly basis. They are manually prepared. Some key income and expenditure items do not fully reflect the actual financial

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activities of the college to date and have not been prepared on this basis. Audited annual accounts differed significantly from forecasts. The analyses of activities by school and support area cannot be readily reconciled to the overall income and expenditure summary. The activities of college companies and franchise partners have not been adequately reported. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The college has had significant difficulties with its financial software in recent years. The monitoring of student units and actual income streams is still being developed. College auditors have raised some internal control issues, including arrangements for franchised provision and student records.

82 There are weaknesses in management information. The updating of the software was followed by significant difficulties in presenting financial and non-financial information and some reports were not readily available. The college has worked hard to improve this. Staff met by inspectors had noted improvements but not all have adequate access to management information data. Returns to the FEFC have frequently failed to meet the required deadlines.

83 FEFC and TSC inspectors agreed that thorough attention is paid to equal opportunities. The college has a good record of support for students with disabilities. Its support unit for students with hearing impairment has a strong regional reputation. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is higher than in the local population and there are some useful initiatives in encouraging women to enter traditionally male employment areas, including construction and engineering. However, the college has not met targets set by the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise for recruitment of work-based trainees from minority ethnic groups. There is good analysis of students by gender and ethnicity and some schools have analysed students' achievements using these criteria.

Conclusions

84 The self-assessment report, the third produced by the college, provided a helpful starting point for carrying out the inspection. It was a thorough attempt to produce an objective evaluation of the quality of the college's provision. An update produced shortly before the inspection provided useful evidence of the progress the college had made in carrying out the action plans arising from self-assessment. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment but they awarded a grade one below those given by the college in four of the six curriculum areas inspected and in two of the five cross-college areas. The self-assessment had not fully taken into account areas of weakness in students' achievements and financial management, some of which had come to light after the production of the self-assessment report.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	15
19-24 years	17
25+ years	58
Not known	8
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	14
Level 2 (intermediate)	21
Level 3 (advanced)	30
Level 4/5 (higher)	16
Non-schedule 2	19
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	152	658	8
Agriculture	2	3	0
Construction	210	546	8
Engineering	234	701	9
Business	78	603	7
Hotel and catering	13	541	6
Health and community care	161	3,145	33
Art and design	185	236	4
Humanities	86	1,732	18
Basic education	40	609	7
Total	1,161	8,774	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 44% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	122	27	42	191
Supporting direct learning contact	71	4	3	78
Other support	82	5	8	95
Total	275	36	53	364

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£11,009,000	£11,349,000	£11,699,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£20.60	£17.97	£17.38
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	69%	69%
Achievement of funding target	130%	108%	93%
Diversity of income	32%	35%	37%
Operating surplus	£25,000	-£257,000	-£102,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (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	277	312	369	1,411	1,408	999
	Retention (%)	67	69	74	68	69	77
	Achievement (%)	46	59	70	35	58	75
2	Number of starters	652	717	691	1,028	1,131	982
	Retention (%)	74	70	67	72	75	78
	Achievement (%)	40	61	64	57	77	51
3	Number of starters	809	832	1,059	2,465	1,673	1,079
	Retention (%)	78	76	76	83	81	81
	Achievement (%)	67	44	63	58	70	72
4 or 5	Number of starters	-	7	11	175	258	295
	Retention (%)	-	100	82	87	86	87
	Achievement (%)	-	71	50	61	64	81
Short courses	Number of starters	257	519	639	1,847	5,443	6,534
	Retention (%)	93	95	90	88	92	95
	Achievement (%)	13	51	81	55	89	79
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	242	426	356	1,296	1,536	1,412
	Retention (%)	81	86	84	78	81	79
	Achievement (%)	44	29	52	61	76	67

Source: ISR

-ISR data not collected

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