

Dudley College of Technology

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

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

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

Student Achievements

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

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

Summary

Dudley College of Technology

West Midlands Region

December 1998

Dudley College of Technology is one of the largest general further education colleges in the West Midlands. It is one of a group of colleges which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. The college's self-assessment process involved all staff and is an integral part of its planning. The self-assessment report was subject to critical scrutiny by senior and middle managers. Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the report but considered that it did not include all weaknesses and some strengths. In arriving at the grades for the curriculum areas, the college paid insufficient attention to students' achievements. For the aspects of cross-college provision, the differences in quality between areas were not fully taken into account. The college has a long and successful tradition of widening participation. It offers a broad range of courses, including substantial provision for local business. Much of the college's work with the community and commercial organisations is through collaborative partnerships. These account for approximately 40% of the college's provision. Work in six of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected and seven grades were awarded. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. Most of the teaching is good. In weaker lessons, teachers

fail to give sufficient attention to the needs of individual students. There are some high retention rates. Achievement rates have improved, but this has been accompanied by a decline in retention rates in some curriculum areas. There is a comprehensive and effective range of services to help students with personal matters and career decisions. Students receive impartial advice before they enrol and an effective induction to their course. Substantial investment in new developments and refurbishment has provided high standards of accommodation. There is effective quality assurance of the collaborative provision. Staff development is effectively managed. The college charter is well devised and wide use is made of surveys to gather the views of groups who use the college. Governors use their experience to monitor closely the college's financial performance. The college has clear and effective strategic leadership. There are many productive links with local groups. Resources are flexibly deployed and there is effective financial planning. The college should: improve achievement rates; evaluate its performance against more specific criteria and targets; improve library provision and the utilisation of accommodation; improve the overall quality of curriculum management and course review; improve the effectiveness of some tutorials; increase the use of additional support; and ensure the corporation pays greater attention to the quality of educational performance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics and science	3	Support for students	2
Construction	3	General resources	1
Business and management studies	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care and childcare education	3	Governance	2
Psychology, sociology and history	2	Management	2
Languages (Urdu – outward collaborative provision)	2		
ESOL and adult basic education	2		

The College and its Mission

1 Dudley College of Technology is a large further education college. Its history can be traced back 136 years to the Mechanics Institute. It is located in the heart of the West Midlands conurbation in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley which has a population of 318,000. There are four main sites in the borough attracting students from the neighbouring areas of Sandwell, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall and South Staffordshire. The college's main site is near to Dudley Castle; the other major campus is at Mons Hill adjacent to Wren's Nest Nature Reserve. Other sites include the internationally renowned Glass Centre at Brierley Hill and a post-16 centre in the grounds of Dormston School, Sedgley. The college offers a wide range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels as well as a range of higher education and access courses. There is substantial provision for local businesses through the Business Development Unit. The college places a significant emphasis on widening participation through its range of collaborative partnerships and this provision accounts for about 40% of the college's work.

2 Historically, Dudley's economy was heavily reliant on manufacturing but, over the last 10 years, there has been considerable diversification. Of the local companies, 72% employ less than 10 people. A new economic force in the centre of the borough is the Merry Hill and Waterfront development where 7,700 people are employed, 5,000 in the retail sector. Dudley was placed seventh out of 51 districts and cities in terms of job creation performance between 1985 and 1995. The borough has attracted over 100 foreign or United Kingdom owned companies employing over 8,600 people. Service sector employment grew by 38% from 1981 to 1993. The FEFC has identified the college as one of a group which typically recruits a high percentage of students from disadvantaged areas. Unemployment is low at

4.6%, but relatively high in areas close to the college and there is a problem of long-term unemployment. Minority ethnic groups account for 4.5% of Dudley residents.

3 There are six general further education colleges, two sixth form colleges and one tertiary college, and several schools with sixth forms serving the immediate area from which the college draws its students. Partnerships exist with a wide range of external bodies including employers, universities, the local education authority (LEA) and local training and enterprise councils (TECs). As a member of the Heart of England Colleges Partnership the college has been involved in the development of a joint website and teaching materials. Partner colleges have also been involved in joint training events on self-assessment, teaching observations and Investors in People. In partnership with Harold Washington College, Chicago, Dudley College of Technology is working with other Midlands colleges to gain accreditation to offer the USA associate degree programme from September 1999. The college has compact arrangements with 13 universities and provides educational services for 10 prison establishments.

4 The curriculum is organised into 14 divisions, grouped into four faculties. In 1997-98 there was a total of 33,810 students of whom 29,143 were part time. The age profile of students shows that 81% are aged 19 or over. The college has significantly increased its size over the last three years. There are 452 full-time equivalent staff of whom 243 are teachers, and 209 are support staff.

5 The college's mission makes a commitment to provide high-quality world-class education and training. In fulfilling its mission the college seeks to identify the needs of clients and to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of its provision. The college is committed to the principle of inclusive education and training and working closely with other organisations in order to provide opportunities for lifelong learning.

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 7 December 1998. Two weeks earlier the college's community-based collaborative provision was inspected. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For the two years 1996 and 1997, data contained in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide student achievement data. The college submitted student achievement data for 1998. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. In most areas the data were found to be accurate but, during the inspection, curriculum area inspectors spent a considerable amount of time working with college staff interpreting these data to provide a fair and valid view of students' achievements. In two areas, languages (Urdu – collaborative provision) and ESOL and adult basic education, there were

concerns about the reliability and/or validity of the data and it was not possible to produce a tabular summary. The college was notified in October 1998 of the sample of provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 17 inspectors for a total of 73 working days and two auditors for a total of eight days. They observed 110 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff, students, schools representatives, employers, representatives of Dudley and Sandwell TECs, representatives of Dudley Borough Council and members of the community.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the 110 lessons inspected, 65% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% were judged to be less than satisfactory or poor. These figures are similar to the average figures for colleges in the sector inspected during 1997-98.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	8	13	3	0	0	24
GNVQ	2	5	7	0	1	15
NVQ	2	6	2	1	0	11
Basic education	1	10	8	4	0	23
Other vocational	5	10	3	0	0	18
Other, including higher education	3	6	8	1	1	19
Total (No.)	21	50	31	6	2	110
Total (%)	19	46	28	5	2	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

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

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Dudley College of Technology	12.3	77
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics and Science

Grade 3

9 Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering the range and level of courses in science and mathematics. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. Some strengths were overstated and insufficient emphasis was placed on students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- improved range of provision that takes account of local need
- regular assessment and reporting of students' progress
- good retention on general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses

Weaknesses

- inadequate development of technical language skills
- insufficient interaction with students in some lessons
- inadequate additional subject support
- poor general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCSE results

10 The mathematics and science provision was expanded and modified for 1998. This was part of a strategy to address poor achievement rates and to widen participation. There is an appropriate range of courses to meet the needs of most students. Changes include the development of a foundation level science programme, a numeracy course with progression to GCSE and a modular mathematics syllabus at GCE A level. There are also general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) science programmes at intermediate and advanced levels and an access to higher

education programme. As recognised in the self-assessment report, there is little provision for employers. Some two-year courses have timetabled lessons for additional subject support in the second year; these are valued by students and provide an opportunity to cater for different levels of ability. They are not available for first-year students, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

11 Most courses are effectively managed and this was noted in the self-assessment report. There are regular meetings that involve all academic staff and technicians. Schemes of work form useful planning documents and are shared with students. Effective use is made of a common pool of high-quality learning materials. Homework is set and marked regularly. There are a small number of students who consistently fail to hand in work.

12 Teaching is well planned. Considerable care is taken to vary the learning activities in the longer timetabled lessons and good use is made of the resources to support students' learning. A high emphasis is placed on teaching the principles of safety. In most cases, there is effective linking of theory and practical work. Increasing use is made of information technology (IT), in some but not all courses. A young enterprise scheme project for GNVQ advanced students provides an excellent vehicle for developing and assessing a range of key skills. In some lessons, insufficient attention is given to developing an understanding of technical language. Teachers are not always aware of students' difficulties and do not always use questions sufficiently to confirm that all students understand the work. The practical skills of a minority of first-year students are not well developed.

13 Resources are adequate or good. Laboratory equipment meets course requirements and computers are available in all laboratories and mathematics classrooms. There is an adequate number of science periodicals in the library but the range of

Curriculum Areas

science and mathematics books is poor. Students make heavy use of CD-ROMs and the internet for research; both are easily accessible.

14 There are good retention rates on GCSE courses. As recognised in the self-assessment report, pass rates are poor for GCE A level and GCSE courses. Science achievements at GCE A level are showing some improvements but GCE A level mathematics has not improved over the last three years. For example the pass rate for GCE A level chemistry between 1997 and 1998 improved from 40% to 88% while the pass

rate for mathematics (pure and statistics) has remained at about 33%. Over the last three years, in the GCSE mathematics and science courses, only 23% of the students who sat the examination gained an A to C grade compared with the national average of 40%. The full-time GCSE programme is no longer offered by the college. Value-added analysis indicates that GCE A level pass rates are better than predictions based on students' GCSE results. Most students recruited from overseas do well.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE science and mathematics+	2	Expected completions	380	450	357
		Retention (%)	86	92	75
		Achievement (%)	25	22	20
GNVQ science	2 and 3	Expected completions	16	18	24
		Retention (%)	56	61	67
		Achievement (%)	89	71	56
Access to higher education mathematics	2 and 3	Expected completions	*	184	136
		Retention (%)	*	86	74
		Achievement (%)	*	78	68
Access to higher education science	3	Expected completions	13	13	10
		Retention (%)	87	75	82
		Achievement (%)	38	85	70
GCE A level mathematics	3	Expected completions	96	45	43
		Retention (%)	92	76	28
		Achievement (%)	30	38	25
GCE A level science	3	Expected completions	88	131	111
		Retention (%)	63	80	53
		Achievement (%)	44	42	61

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

+full-time course discontinued

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Construction

Grade 3

15 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering three areas of craft studies (trowel trades, wood trades and heating and ventilating) and two programmes in technician studies, GNVQ advanced and the higher national certificate in building. Inspectors agreed with some of the college's judgements about strengths and weaknesses, but found the self-assessment report did not give sufficient attention to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- well-planned teaching
- good links with schools
- high standard of practical work
- relevant and sufficiently demanding assignments
- good purpose-built workshops

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- poor retention rates
- ineffective integration of IT with courses
- lack of rigour in programme review and evaluation
- dated knowledge of some staff

16 The division of construction provides programmes at craft and technician level. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3 are offered in all craft areas. Advanced level in GNVQ construction and the built environment and a higher national certificate in building are offered within the technician section. Although these programmes meet most students' and employers' needs, there is no GNVQ construction programme at intermediate level to facilitate progression to higher levels. IT is not integrated with the curriculum and there is very little use of

vocationally relevant software. Strong links have been established with 11 local secondary schools through the construction curriculum centre. Using construction and the built environment as a context for learning, one full-time and four part-time members of staff teach NVQ units and GNVQ foundation units to 250 key stage 4 pupils. There are no formal industrial liaison or consultative committees in the construction division. Students on the full-time GNVQ programme are keen to undertake work experience to complement the skills they have acquired in the college but there are few opportunities for them to do so.

17 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that much of the teaching is good. There are comprehensive schemes of work and lessons are well planned. In the best lessons teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods and provide clear handouts to guide students through the learning activities. Teachers use questioning effectively to stimulate discussions. In practical lessons, students worked competently and displayed attention to safety. Craft students are aware of the regulations for the control of substances hazardous to health and risk assessment sheets are available in the workshops. Assignments and projects are work related and sufficiently demanding. The standard of work produced by a few students is barely adequate. Teachers provide detailed and constructive feedback to students on their work but some of the grading used for technician assessments is not in line with the recommendations of the awarding bodies. There are no structured group tutorials for GNVQ advanced students in construction and the built environment and the higher national certificate in building.

18 There is a good range of purpose-built workshops. These are well planned and well equipped. Some display students' work and materials creating a stimulating learning environment. Although much of the equipment is of industrial standard, there are a few dated machines in the wood trades workshop. A

Curriculum Areas

number of construction books in the library are dated and there is little specialist computer software. Teachers have appropriate qualifications but some lack recent and relevant industrial experience and knowledge. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses.

19 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that achievement and retention rates are unsatisfactory on some programmes. On the GNVQ advanced construction and the built environment courses, pass rates have been more than 20% below national averages.

Although the achievement rate for NVQ level 2 in construction craft showed a substantial improvement last year, the rate on the NVQ level 2 heating and ventilating programme has remained about 50% below the national average. Retention rates are poor on the GNVQ and higher national certificate programmes. The college sets targets for achievement and retention but performance indicators are not clearly understood by some staff. There is a lack of rigour and insufficient analysis of trends in enrolment, retention and achievement in programme review and evaluation reports.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ construction craft	1	Expected completions	48	126	110
		Retention (%)	94	100	88
		Achievement (%)	6	66	71
NVQ construction craft	2	Expected completions	99	57	37
		Retention (%)	89	78	95
		Achievement (%)	10	22	76
GNVQ advanced construction and the built environment	3	Expected completions	8*	19	9
		Retention (%)	75*	58	22
		Achievement (%)	33*	36	22
Higher national certificate building studies	4	Expected completions	**	9	15
		Retention (%)	**	44	73
		Achievement (%)	**	33	55

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

*national diploma in construction

**course not running

Curriculum Areas

Business and Management Studies

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 19 lessons covering full-time, part-time day and evening courses at foundation to advanced level, and lessons in company work and collaborative provision. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that some key strengths and weaknesses had been omitted.

Key strengths

- good teaching on higher level courses
- wide range of provision
- effective individual tutorials
- effective assessment

Weaknesses

- key skills not fully integrated with courses
- poor achievement on some courses over the last three years
- insufficiently demanding work for students on lower level courses

21 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment judgement that there is a wide range of provision in business and management studies. It has been effectively modified to take into account students' needs. Care has been taken to adjust course length to meet students' requirements. For example, the higher national certificate in business can be taken over one, two or three years by a mixture of day and evening attendance. Since the last inspection, the range of courses at foundation and intermediate level has been broadened and progression routes are clearly defined. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that key skills are not fully integrated with some programmes and that they

are not sufficiently developed at higher levels; steps are being taken to address this weakness. There has been substantial growth in the number of students following courses on employers' premises and this forms a significant part of the division's work. Many of the courses are offered to suit shift patterns and other company demands, including a significant amount of weekend work.

22 As the self-assessment report indicated, most of the teaching and learning is good. The best teaching is on higher level courses. The work provided for students on lower level courses is often insufficiently demanding. Lesson aims and objectives are made clear to the students and their experience of work is used effectively in discussion. There were examples of well-organised group work culminating in some good presentations by students. The quality of course handouts and booklets is high. Teachers make increasing use of IT to improve their presentations but some of the overhead transparencies used were of a poor standard. There are good staff and student relations and this is evident in effective individual tutorials. Assessment is rigorous and fair; teachers give constructive advice to students on how to improve their performance. Grammatical and spelling errors are carefully corrected.

23 The quality of most students' work is good and some is outstanding. Students work effectively on their own and in groups. They demonstrate the ability to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding, a strength not fully acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Achievements on higher national certificate and diploma courses are consistently high, confirming the judgements in the self-assessment report but they have declined on the GNVQ advanced course. In 1996 and 1997 there were poor achievements on courses leading to the certificate of the National Examining Board for Supervision and Management, GCE A level business studies and

Curriculum Areas

GNVQ intermediate, but they improved significantly in 1998. Retention has been low on some programmes in recent years.

24 The organisation of the division has recently changed. It is effectively led and staff are responding with enthusiasm to new challenges. Course teams meet regularly and are involved in setting targets for students' achievements. Retention is now closely monitored. Senior staff use computerised

management information regularly but their skills at interpreting these data need further development. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teachers are academically and vocationally well qualified and experienced and that staff development is a strength. They confirmed the value of the industrial secondment as a means of updating staff. Teaching accommodation and specialist resources are good.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate	2	Expected completions	29	35	33
		Retention (%)	76	77	73
		Achievement (%)	32	44	75
NVQ accounting	2 and 3	Expected completions	132	99	122
		Retention (%)	67	74	77
		Achievement (%)	39	63	59
GNVQ advanced	3	Expected completions	68	41	32
		Retention (%)	90	66	78
		Achievement (%)	91	77	76
GCE A level business	3	Expected completions	23	63	25
		Retention (%)	78	78	84
		Achievement (%)	57	69	100
Higher national certificate business	4	Expected completions	156	55	58
		Retention (%)	88	53	98
		Achievement (%)	78	75	84
Higher national diploma	4	Expected completions	36	56	30
		Retention (%)	97	77	87
		Achievement (%)	88	93	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care and Childcare Education

Grade 3

25 Inspectors observed 19 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report but considered that some were overstated. Several weaknesses were not given sufficient importance by the college. Inspectors found weaknesses in teaching and learning that were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good range of provision
- valuable contribution of work experience in childcare and education to students' learning
- high pass rate for level 3 childcare and education in 1998
- varied and appropriate learning activities in lessons

Weaknesses

- low achievement rates
- declining retention rates on the majority of courses
- some ineffective teaching
- weaknesses in curriculum management

26 The college offers a good range of courses in childcare, social care and health studies. These include a newly introduced national diploma in childhood studies, well-established nursery nursing courses, GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, and NVQs at levels 2 and 3. There are two courses which provide access to higher education; one for social work and the other for nursing and health. The recently extended provision of foundation level courses assists with widening participation. There is little part-time provision for adults in health studies and childcare.

A number of well-organised courses are run in conjunction with collaborative partners. The college has recently reorganised the management of the programme area. Two new curriculum area leaders have been appointed to provide greater coherence and stronger leadership in childcare and health. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of these changes. Curriculum planning for the programme area as a whole is not sufficiently developed. Not all course reviews are adequately documented and most do not make use of performance indicators.

27 There are examples of both outstanding and weak teaching. The aims and objectives of lessons are explained clearly at the beginning but conclusions are often rushed and teachers fail to summarise key points. In many lessons, teachers use a range of appropriate activities to promote learning. Group work is widely employed. However, in the weaker lessons, groups make little progress because teachers fail to define clearly the purpose of the activity. Teachers make good use of handouts and learning materials, although some overhead transparencies are difficult to understand. On some courses the development of students' key skills is given appropriate attention but on a few courses it is inadequate. Work experience makes a valuable contribution to students' learning. In one lesson, students received clear and well-devised guidelines on how to prepare for their work placement. Teachers give high priority to equal opportunities in their lessons.

28 One collaborative partner has an excellent study centre which is used for teaching an NVQ course. Students on the GNVQ foundation course have much of their teaching in the well-equipped study centre on the main site. There is insufficient space in some classrooms for practical work. All rooms have overhead projectors and whiteboards, but there is insufficient specialist equipment. There is a large number of books on childcare in the library but many are old. Some staff do not have relevant recent experience of the areas

Curriculum Areas

they teach. The self-assessment action plan acknowledged the need to update teachers' work-based knowledge and experience.

29 The self-assessment report stated that retention is poor. Inspectors found the problem more significant and widespread than the report acknowledged. Over the years 1996 to 1998, retention rates have been declining on most

courses. In 1998, pass rates were high in level 3 childcare and education and access courses. However, the pass rate for access courses has been very erratic over the last four years. Some NVQ results are poor. The college did not take sufficient account of pass rates in its self-assessment report.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in health and social care and childcare education, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Expected completions	19	21	17
		Retention (%)	74	48	65
		Achievement (%)	57	50	64
Childcare and education including NVQs	2	Expected completions	17	19	32
		Retention (%)	82	74	61
		Achievement (%)	0	71	74
NVQ care	2	Expected completions	284	441	*
		Retention (%)	99	93	*
		Achievement (%)	45	51	*
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Expected completions	51	36	36
		Retention (%)	69	64	47
		Achievement (%)	43	48	76
Childcare and education including NVQs	3	Expected completions	44	67	54
		Retention (%)	91	84	72
		Achievement (%)	72	61	90
NVQ care	3	Expected completions	36	64	*
		Retention (%)	89	67	*
		Achievement (%)	22	24	*
Counselling	3	Expected completions	25	36	37
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	96	64	81
Access to higher education	3	Expected completions	70	37	30
		Retention (%)	70	81	67
		Achievement (%)	67	33	95

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

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Psychology, Sociology and History

Grade 2

30 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report for this curriculum area. They considered that the report had understated the strengths of students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good-quality teaching
- development of students' critical and analytical skills
- effective assessment
- consistent and significant improvement in results at GCE A level
- many results in 1998 well above the national average
- curricula changed and developed to meet students' needs

Weaknesses

- low retention rates
- insufficient development of learning resources at the post-16 centre

31 The college has responded effectively to the needs of students by introducing new programmes such as the modularisation of the curriculum and a new part-time GCE A level route for mature students. The creation of the post-16 centre at Dormston has improved opportunities for GCE A level students in the borough.

32 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that teaching is good and that teachers provide an appropriate variety of classroom activities. Appropriate and contemporary materials form the basis of all teaching and learning. Teachers

organise their lessons well and impart information systematically, enabling students to understand theories and assimilate knowledge. Work in pairs and the completion of worksheets are successfully used to stimulate good levels of student involvement, although there is little use of group work. In a few lessons, teachers spend too much time imparting knowledge and fail to make sufficient checks that students are understanding the work. Key skills are not fully integrated with the content of the courses. As the self-assessment recognised, IT is underdeveloped in the curriculum.

33 Students' attendance and punctuality are good. During the inspection the average attendance was over 90%. Students respond well in class and complete homework tasks effectively. Most written work shows good organisation and analytical skills, but some is poorly presented and contains elementary errors in content, interpretation, grammar and spelling. Teachers' assessments of students' work are used to improve students' learning through careful comments on areas for improvement. The self-assessment report drew attention to some poor achievements and retention in the recent past. It also pointed to clear trends of improvement, including the most recent GCE A level results which are well above the national average for further education colleges. There has been a consistent and significant improvement in GCE A level results over the last three years. In contrast, pass rates at GCSE have been poor. This weakness was mentioned in the self-assessment report and has led to the introduction of more appropriate alternative courses for students. Retention rates for some courses are poor, as acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The retention rates for the one-year part-time GCE A level route have depressed the overall rates for this course, and staff have responded by instituting a new two-year part-time route.

34 As the self-assessment report indicated, teachers are well qualified and many are active

Curriculum Areas

as examiners and moderators. Staff have undertaken a good range of staff development activities in recent years. Teaching accommodation on the main college site is mostly of good quality. Rooms are of good size, well furnished and well equipped and have wall displays that create a clear subject identity.

Resources at the post-16 centre at Dormston are inadequate in nature and scope, a weakness not mentioned in the self-assessment report. They are supplemented by laptop computers and students can use the good facilities on the main site.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in psychology, sociology and history, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE sociology*	2	Expected completions	47	32	27
		Retention (%)	85	94	56
		Achievement (%)	0	53	13
GCSE psychology*	2	Expected completions	71	57	35
		Retention (%)	93	95	69
		Achievement (%)	38	26	38
GCE A level history	3	Expected completions	33	28	22
		Retention (%)	42	46	73
		Achievement (%)	36	54	81
GCE A level sociology	3	Expected completions	37	43	45
		Retention (%)	70	16	62
		Achievement (%)	54	77	100
GCSE A level psychology	3	Expected completions	76	46	69
		Retention (%)	51	67	65
		Achievement (%)	49	61	79
Access to higher education humanities	3	Expected completions	181	164	118
		Retention (%)	92	81	72
		Achievement (%)	42	65	73

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

*courses discontinued in 1998-99

Curriculum Areas

Language (Urdu – Outward Collaborative Provision)

Grade 2

35 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in a range of community locations. The self-assessment report covered the whole of the college's collaborative provision and did not specifically refer to Urdu. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements but considered that some strengths were overstated and that a few additional strengths and weaknesses had been omitted.

Key strengths

- effective teaching
- high rates of students' attendance, retention and achievement
- well-organised students' files with a high standard of written work
- provision for the cultural and academic needs of the local community
- effective widening of participation
- highly motivated students of all ages and ability

Weaknesses

- failure to meet the needs of all students
- some poor, small accommodation
- inadequate monitoring of students' achievements

36 Inspectors agreed with the college that it meets the needs of the community. The college's outreach division and its four collaborative partners provide full-time Urdu programmes in various areas of Birmingham. Many students are entering education for the first time, or returning after many years, and they value highly the opportunity to study within the local community. There are tightly controlled quality assurance systems. All centres offer full-time courses, of 15 hours, meeting five times a week,

either in the evening or during the daytime, usually at three levels. They follow common schemes of work and accreditation. This structure does not meet the needs of all students and there are no part-time courses, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. All students receive an effective initial assessment of their language skills. As the self-assessment report recognised, tutorial support is well integrated with course programmes.

37 Most teaching is effective and some is very good. Lessons are generally well planned. Teachers are highly committed to their work and have good relationships with students. A good learning ethos is evident in all lessons. One 72-year-old student spoke with enthusiasm of his pleasure and satisfaction at improving his letter writing skills in class. Students are well supported and on the whole happy to learn in groups which include a wide range of ability. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide variety of visual aids and resources, including flashcards, authentic materials and cassette recordings. In the less successful lessons, teachers failed to provide enough opportunities for students to contribute orally to the work. In a few lessons, students worked in silence on reading and writing tasks for prolonged periods. A few teachers spend too much time talking, and give little opportunity for students to ask questions or for discussion.

38 Students make good progress in developing their language ability and display good levels of speaking and listening skills. Their portfolios are well organised, containing written work of a high standard and clear records of their progress. Attendance, retention and achievement rates are high. The attendance rate in the lessons observed was 85%. The retention rate was 94% in 1996-97 and 97% in 1997-98. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that achievement rates are high. Almost all students who complete their courses achieve an award through the Open College Network. In 1997,

Curriculum Areas

100% gained an award and in 1998, when the number of students had increased from 270 to 381, the achievement rate was 99%. However, these achievement rates represent a wide variation in the number of credits at various levels obtained by individual students. The college does not have a system for monitoring students' achievements to show whether the number of credits and the level achieved by each student represents a satisfactory outcome in relation to the learning goals originally agreed.

39 Most teachers are well qualified and experienced. All teachers are native speakers of Urdu and most are bilingual. There is effective support for them at all centres. Although some of the accommodation is of poor quality, all classrooms had useful displays of students' work and learning materials. Many of the lessons take place in rooms in residential accommodation which are too small for the size of classes. In several lessons the room was so cramped that the teacher was unable to reach students in order to see and mark their work. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. All teachers have adequate basic resources but some centres are better than others. Computers have recently been installed in some of the centres. The distance between the centres and the main college makes it impractical for students to access resources at the main college sites.

Curriculum Areas

ESOL and Adult Basic Education

Grade 2

40 Inspectors observed 23 lessons covering English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), numeracy and literacy. For ESOL the inspection included the college-based and collaborative provision. Inspectors generally agreed with judgements in the college's self-assessment report, although some strengths and weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- well-developed initial assessment of students
- teaching that meets individual needs and builds upon personal experience
- the varied teaching and learning activities
- students' achievements of accredited qualifications, often for the first time
- clear links between the college's strategic plan and curriculum provision
- well-managed relationships with collaborative partners and other external agencies
- outstanding specialist accommodation in college

Weaknesses

- some outdated and irrelevant learning materials
- failure to review regularly students' progress
- ineffective monitoring of students' destinations
- poor teaching resources and accommodation of some community provision

41 The college offers a wide range of provision in ESOL, numeracy and literacy.

Classes are mostly designed for students working towards a specific level of achievement. Strong links have been established with a wide range of collaborative partners in the community and other external agencies. This has resulted in the participation of many students with little previous experience of formal education. The curriculum is well managed with regular team meetings and use of action plans which are subject to effective monitoring. In some ESOL provision in the community the accreditation and patterns of attendance are not always appropriate for students' needs.

42 Teachers use a good variety of teaching methods and provide appropriate learning activities for students. This was recognised in the self-assessment report and represents considerable progress since the previous inspection. Students' learning is regularly checked by teachers and the outcomes recorded. Many students gain in confidence through participation in skilfully led group activities. In a small number of lessons, teachers were not sufficiently skilled at managing group activities. Many of the materials used recognise students' cultural backgrounds and experiences and incorporate them into their learning. However, in some lessons, students were provided with outdated and inappropriate materials. Effective initial assessment of students' learning needs is carried out using appropriate strategies and materials. Most students then undertake an individual learning programme agreed with the tutor. A new pathways student record pack has recently been introduced to review and monitor students' progress but it is not yet widely used for this purpose. Tutorials are not provided for most part-time students. However, students speak very highly of the personal support they receive from tutors.

43 Most students compile a well-organised record of their work. A wide variety of work is successfully completed to an appropriate

Curriculum Areas

standard. It is linked to the requirements of accredited qualifications but often built around subjects or activities important to the students. For example, as part of a family literacy project within the community, a group of mothers were designing and producing reading books for their children. Students demonstrate pride in their work and participate enthusiastically in most classes. Many students gain accreditation for the first time and value this highly. However, understanding of the accreditation process is poor amongst most students and some staff. No specific targets with timescales are set for achievement by individual students. It is therefore difficult for the college to monitor students' success and this was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The college celebrates students' achievements through a public awards ceremony.

44 Newly built accommodation has recently been provided for college-based teaching. This is located centrally in Dudley and offers an excellent learning environment. It is highly valued by students. Specialist base rooms are well equipped and furnished. They contained a comprehensive range of graded materials. Students have access to computers but there are not enough to meet the needs of all students. As the self-assessment report noted, computers are not yet widely available for use in the community. The college is taking action to address this. Some accommodation in the community is too small for the size of classes and has an adverse effect on students' learning. The college provides training for community tutors and support is also provided by the college curriculum leaders. A high proportion of classes are taught by part-time teachers, some of whom have little teaching experience and few qualifications. This weakness was also acknowledged in the self-assessment report and is being addressed.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

45 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They found further strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- comprehensive range of support services
- effective induction
- impartial pre-course advice and guidance
- extensive range of careers services and facilities

Weaknesses

- lack of thoroughness in progress reviews and work plans for tutorials
- poor take-up by some students of additional learning support
- less well-developed support for part-time students

46 Potential students receive impartial guidance before enrolment. Course choice is covered in pre-enrolment interviews and, where appropriate, provision at other colleges is considered and recommended. Some curriculum areas have reviewed their provision in order to meet students' needs more effectively. Prospectuses and course leaflets are mostly informative and attractive, a strength recorded in the self-assessment report. Some leaflets do not have clear information on how to enrol on a course. Publicity materials for college-based programmes make little use of minority community languages. The college uses a range of effective recruitment methods, including visits to local schools, open and 'taster' days, a website and advertising. There are well-organised procedures for admissions.

Staff are provided with detailed guidance for induction and enrolment. Most students find enrolment efficient and induction effective.

47 There are well-structured tutorial arrangements for full-time students but their effectiveness varies between areas. Most students receive regular timetabled tutorials with a mix of group and individual sessions with tutors. In some areas, for example, business studies, the individual tutorials are of a high standard. Some schemes of work for group tutorials are thorough but many are not. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness. The college has an established system for assessing students' progress through individual tutorials. There are examples of good reviews of students' progress with clear actions and targets, but others are not thorough or are insufficiently detailed. There is a lack of tutorial provision for many part-time students.

48 Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that there is a good range of services and materials for additional support. Students can get help with communications, numeracy, IT and study skills. They can use timetabled group sessions, individual appointments or can call at the study centre, which has long opening hours. The college provides a range of materials and services to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college's disability statement is available in Braille. Tutors responsible for additional learning support conduct regular reviews of students' progress. However, there is no formal system for informing personal tutors about the progress and attendance of students in their tutor group. Full-time students receive a diagnostic assessment to assess their levels of literacy and numeracy when they start their courses. Those on substantial part-time programmes do not. Although the self-assessment report did not record this weakness, it did identify the low number of students taking up the offer of basic skills support in some curriculum areas.

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49 There is a wide range of careers services, a strength stated in the self-assessment report. These include the services provided by careers guidance officers, and provision of a range of software packages, university prospectuses and books on specific careers. There is a contract with the local careers service, whose advisers give guidance interviews and career talks. After publication of examination results the college, in partnership with the careers service, offers guidance on courses and career options to students, their parents and members of the local community.

50 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that there is a comprehensive range of well-used services for students who need help with personal matters. Counsellors hold professional qualifications and receive regular supervision. The college medical service is staffed by state registered nurses and runs health promotion events. The counselling and the medical services refer students to other agencies, where appropriate. The college provides advice and help on social security and student finance. Arrangements for the administration and allocation of access and hardship funds are clear.

General Resources

Grade 1

51 Inspectors agreed with much of the self-assessment report. A few additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- high standard of accommodation
- extensive refurbishment
- attractive, safe and welcoming environment
- extensive use of displays of students' work
- good refectory facilities on the two main sites

- well-equipped learning centres open seven days a week

Weaknesses

- underused teaching and learning accommodation
- insufficient library provision

52 The college is located on four sites. The main sites are at Broadway and Mons Hill. As noted in the self-assessment report, the college has invested considerable sums on accommodation in recent years. It has spent £11 million on new buildings and an additional £1 million on renovation. The Wolverhampton Street site has recently been redeveloped to a high standard. Its location in the centre of the town provides easy access for adult students. All buildings are well maintained. The quality, security and cleanliness of most buildings is high. Some accommodation is outstanding, including the learning and conference centres at Broadway and the purpose-built specialist accommodation at Mons Hill. The recently refurbished learning centre on the Rover company premises is of high quality, with good internal finishes, illumination and furniture. Parts of the Brierley Hill site are in need of refurbishment and redecoration.

53 The entrance foyers and reception areas are conveniently located and welcoming; the one at Broadway is particularly impressive. Throughout the college there is good use of displays of students' work, achievements and learning materials. The recently refurbished student refectories on the two main sites provide outstanding facilities. Most areas in the college are accessible to wheelchair users. At Mons Hill, there are some suitably adapted workstations but none are available in the open access centres. The few sports facilities in the college are supplemented by a local sports centre close to the Broadway site, where students can use the extensive facilities, either

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free or at discounted rates. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the changing rooms at the Broadway site need renovation.

54 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that some classrooms and other areas used for learning are underused. The college has well-developed plans for this accommodation to substantially reduce the under-utilisation of space. The college has developed a sophisticated computer-based system to optimise use of rooms. It is used effectively to match room and group size and improve the use of space.

55 The two main libraries are conveniently sited, well decorated and furnished and have good access for wheelchair users. The Broadway library is of appropriate size and layout. However, the library at Mons Hill is small and has insufficient study spaces. The library staff are experienced and well qualified and there are good links between them and teachers. The libraries are well used. In some curriculum areas the number of books is low and some books are out of date. There is a good selection of periodicals and journals and a good supply of CD-ROMs in most areas. Many of the learning materials are of good quality. The learning centres are used extensively by students. The college has made a substantial investment in information and learning technology resources. Students make heavy use of these facilities for assignment work. There is an extensive IT network with good access for most students and staff to the internet, the college's intranet and electronic mail facilities. Most equipment is of industrial standard. The college has equipped a 'state-of-the-art' computer-aided classroom with advanced technology teaching aids. The open-access IT centres have long opening hours, seven days a week, and at most times students have little difficulty finding a computer to work on their own. Qualified support staff are available to help students but there are not enough IT technicians to maintain the equipment.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

56 The self-assessment report was reasonably comprehensive although some judgements were contained in other parts of the report. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths but found more weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough staff development
- effective quality assurance in collaborative provision
- widespread and effective use of surveys of students' and other users' perceptions
- well-devised college charter

Weaknesses

- failure to ensure comprehensive and continuous improvement in students' performance
- some less effective course reviews

57 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college makes a strong commitment to quality in its strategic plan and corporate objectives. The college has obtained several awards for quality, including the charter mark. There is a well-devised quality assurance cycle supported by a manual of procedures. The college's quality assurance office effectively supports the implementation of these procedures, seeking to ensure that they are consistently applied across the college. In practice, this is often not achieved. Inspectors were not able to agree with the strength claimed in the self-assessment report that the quality assurance systems had yielded comprehensive improvements in retention and achievements. Improvements in the last three years have not been uniform. There have been some significant improvements in achievements. However, some of the 1998 achievement and

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retention rates are still below the appropriate benchmarking data for the college and, in the same year, retention fell in many areas.

Information on students' achievements and retention has been tabled at the academic board but the evaluation has lacked both rigour and recommendations for action.

58 Inspectors agreed with the weakness in the self-assessment report that course review and evaluation needs further development. There have been recent changes and staff are still developing their understanding. The quality of course reviews varies significantly. This was identified in the previous inspection. There are examples of course reviews where actions are clearly related to identified weaknesses, and where there are clear strategies to secure improvement. Some other course reviews are weak. Action plans are incomplete or insufficiently detailed. For example, low achievements on courses are not addressed by an action point. The college has set overall performance indicators. Most curriculum areas have targets for student achievement and retention but they have frequently not been evaluated. There is no systematic monitoring of attendance. Information about students' destinations is not included in some reports.

59 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college charter clearly identifies standards of service. It has a significant number of quantitative targets and includes separate sections for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the community and employers. There has been some analysis of the achievement of targets, for example, the speed of response to postal and telephone enquiries. Other targets, such as timescales for the return of students' assessed work, are monitored only if a complaint arises. The complaints procedure is clearly stated. The charter is also available in Urdu. Statements of customer service standards in cross-college areas are not yet comprehensive. They are thorough for student guidance, but in many

other areas they do not exist or are at an early stage of development. As noted in the self-assessment report, the college makes wide and effective use of surveys of students' and other users' perceptions of the college. Surveys use FEFC grades to measure quality but also include many comments from those taking part. There are two surveys of students' perceptions annually, some surveys of employers' perceptions and other surveys such as a survey of users of the college nursery. A survey of employers' perceptions led to the appointment of more industrial liaison staff.

60 Self-assessment is integral to cross-college and curriculum evaluation and planning. All staff were involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report which was subject to critical scrutiny by middle and senior management and the corporation. Senior staff and governors from another college were involved in the review of governance. Self-assessment was supported by the observation of teaching and learning and a simultaneous survey of learners' views of the lesson being observed has helped to emphasise learning as well as teaching. Few curriculum sections made use of the evidence from the observations and references to weaknesses in students' achievements are not always clear. Most action plans are not well developed.

61 Inspectors agreed with the strength of quality assurance in collaborative provision. This has improved substantially since the previous inspection. College representatives visit partners frequently and take action on areas of weakness. Lessons are observed. Students' attendance and achievements are carefully monitored. The relationship has improved the quality of the partners' provision, for example, in the accreditation of courses, staff development and improvements in quality assurance systems. Some of these developments are new. As noted in the self-assessment report, curriculum links between the college and partners are not yet fully developed.

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62 The college gives a high priority to staff development, which is well managed. As noted in the self-assessment report, priorities are carefully linked to the college's strategic objectives. There is a well-developed training plan built up from analysis of staff needs, arising from appraisal and managers' identification of needs. A professional development centre for teachers and support staff enables them to update their skills. There are thorough arrangements to disseminate outcomes of training. There is effective training for staff appraisal. All full-time and substantial part-time staff, now including support staff, are appraised.

Governance

Grade 2

63 Inspectors substantially agreed with the college's self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of governors' skills, experience and commitment
- public process for governor appointment
- close monitoring of the college's financial performance
- sound procedures for accountability
- effective clerking arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the quality of educational performance
- inadequate monitoring of strategic objectives

64 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business

in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It substantially fulfils its responsibilities under its financial memorandum with the FEFC.

65 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors bring a wide range of skills to the corporation and are committed to the success of the college. There are high levels of attendance at corporation meetings. The corporation has established a search committee and has carried out a skills audit of corporation members. As noted in the self-assessment report, the college has made effective use of public advertising to recruit governors and, as a result, there is a reserve list of potential governors. Procedures for the appointment of governors are not fully written down and the continuing eligibility of governors is not formally confirmed. New governors receive a useful induction pack. A governors' training event takes place annually. Some training is provided in the college for governors during the year but it is not based on a structured programme. Inspectors were not fully able to support the claim in the self-assessment report that governors' training is a significant strength. Governors are involved in the strategic planning process of the college, but the effectiveness of their monitoring of progress against the plan is limited by the absence of quantified targets in the operating statement and by the lack of regular reports on all of the performance indicators established in the strategic plan.

66 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors closely monitor the college's financial performance. The legal and finance committee and the corporation receive the college's management accounts at their meetings. Members of the legal and finance committee also receive monthly management accounts. Supporting information concerning student enrolment, unit achievement and staff numbers is provided in the principal's report which is presented to all meetings of the corporation. Governors oversee the strategic

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direction of collaborative provision arrangements. However, the financial report on these arrangements is not provided to governors as a separate element in the overall financial accounts.

67 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated the strength of the corporation's arrangements for overseeing the quality of the college's educational performance. Corporation members receive a curriculum report at each meeting. Governors consider that reporting on curriculum matters has improved, largely due to their insistence on having more information on students' achievements and retention. However, the reports and commentaries provided by the college do not enable them to identify clearly trends in students' achievements and to ask informed questions. While there has been some discussion about retention rates, there has been no systematic monitoring of the quality of students' achievements. Corporation minutes record little debate, and few decisions relating to curriculum issues. Governors are involved in many events at the college, including awards evenings and exhibitions, but they have few other direct links with areas of college activity.

68 The college has established effective clerking arrangements, as recognised in the self-assessment report. The clerk is independent, services all committees and has access to legal advice. Corporation and committee agendas and papers are hand-delivered seven days before each meeting to ensure that governors have sufficient time to consider them. There are good arrangements for the clearance of corporation and committee draft minutes with the chair of the corporation. The practice of circulating cleared corporation minutes with the subsequent meeting's papers can result in some delay. The corporation has an appropriate committee structure, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. However, the terms of reference for the legal and finance committee are not comprehensive. Performance indicators

have not yet been established by the audit committee for the college's internal auditors.

69 The corporation has established policies for openness and accountability. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this is a strength but considered that they were not yet fully implemented. The corporation has established standing orders and an updated register of interests which is available at its meetings. A code of conduct has been adopted together with a code of ethics which reflects current good practice. The corporation has established a policy on access to information but corporation and committee minutes and papers are not readily available. The college has held an open annual general meeting. The establishment of a 'whistleblowing' policy has been approved by the corporation and is undergoing final consultations.

Management

Grade 2

70 Inspectors agreed with a number of the college's judgements but they found some additional weaknesses. Some of the statements in the self-assessment report about strengths were descriptive rather than evaluative.

Key strengths

- dynamic, responsive leadership
- well-developed strategic planning
- long-standing record of widening participation
- efficient and flexible deployment of resources
- a rich variety of productive links with external organisations
- active promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- effective financial planning and monitoring

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Weaknesses

- underdeveloped use of performance targets
- inconsistent quality of course management
- lack of a college-wide approach to improving students' achievements
- inadequate co-ordination of cross-college curriculum issues

71 The college's management has effectively set a clear strategic direction for the college that is understood and shared by staff. It includes a long-standing and successful commitment to widening participation. As the self-assessment report stated, the college has grown steadily, expanding its range of provision, meeting its funding agreement and exceeding its unit targets in each of the last three years.

72 Strategic planning is well developed and underpinned by good use of labour market information from a wide range of sources, including local TECs. The corporate objectives in the plan are supported by an operating statement with specific tasks for named individuals. Divisional plans are closely linked to the corporate objectives of the college. They influence course teams' plans. Plans are monitored at regular intervals but the degree to which they meet specific performance criteria is not always analysed. College-wide targets for student achievement and retention have been set but these are not always reflected in course teams' plans. The college has introduced a system for setting more specific performance targets at course level but it is too early to judge its effectiveness. Although college managers have emphasised the importance of student retention and achievement, there is not yet a sufficiently consistent and rigorous college-wide approach to addressing weaknesses in students' achievements, as the college's self-assessment partly acknowledged.

73 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the new management structure introduced in September 1997 is clearly defined. Most staff are clear about their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability, even though some are working to outdated job descriptions. However, the new management structure has not yet led to good management of all curriculum areas. It does not include effective mechanisms for co-ordination of cross-college aspects of the curriculum. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report but the college has now designated staff to take responsibility for the co-ordination of cross-college aspects of the curriculum. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is effective communication with all staff. Staff were enthusiastic about the college's intranet and electronic mail system which enables communication across all sites. They have good opportunities for direct contact with each other at monthly staff development meetings and through a regular cycle of meetings at departmental, divisional and faculty level.

74 The college makes effective use of its resources. All staff work to flexible contracts. There has been significant development of courses at weekends, in the evenings and on company premises, using staff directly employed by the college. Resources for teaching and learning are allocated to divisions in accordance with a clearly understood system that, whilst allowing for some flexibility, relates future plans to past performance.

75 Access to management information is improving and the college has identified the need for a new management information system. It currently operates a number of systems, some of which are incompatible and involve unnecessarily complex procedures. There is considerable duplication of input and there are difficulties in providing comprehensive cross-college data. The college recognises the need to develop understanding of management

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information systems at course team level and staff are encouraged to undertake appropriate training.

76 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has had moderate operating surpluses for the last two years, and is forecasting surpluses for the next two years. About 30% of the college's income comes from non-FEFC sources, and the college has secured some important training contracts. The college's finance team is adequately resourced and is led by the director of finance who is a qualified accountant. He is a member of the executive team and attends both corporation and legal and finance committee meetings. Monthly management accounts are produced automatically from the financial information system through database software, although individual trading activities are not identified. Financial performance indicators have been established and performance is reported against them within the commentary to the management accounts. Budget holders receive monthly reports against the budgets they hold, and receive support from the finance section. The college's financial regulations are reviewed each year but could usefully be updated in some areas. The college's internal auditors have reported control weaknesses in respect of the administration of European Social Fund grants, but action to address many of these weaknesses has already been taken. The internal and external audit services have not been re-tendered since incorporation.

77 The college has particularly close and productive links with a wide range of external organisations. Representatives of local TECs, the Construction Industry Training Board, local employers, headteachers and community collaborative provision partners all praised the college's flexible and supportive attitude to meeting their needs. The college is an active member of a large number of local and regional collaborative partnerships.

78 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the college actively promotes and supports equal opportunities. There is a comprehensive set of relevant policies and procedures which are regularly monitored, reviewed and revised by a cross-college committee. The commitment of the college to equalising opportunity is understood by and effectively supported by staff and is implemented at all levels of activity. Specific courses are offered to meet the needs of minority groups in the community.

Conclusions

79 The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. The inspection team agreed that the report identified many strengths but considered that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses had not been recognised. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements for the curriculum areas but in most cases the self-assessment report paid insufficient attention to students' achievements. The college's grades for lesson observation were higher than those awarded by inspectors. Curriculum area grades awarded by inspectors were higher than the grade given by the college in one area and lower in two areas. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of all but one aspect of cross-college provision. For the cross-college aspects, the self-assessment had not fully taken into account significant variations in quality between different areas when arriving at judgements.

80 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	4
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	16
25+ years	65
Not known	2
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	50
Intermediate	25
Advanced	15
Higher education	4
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	6
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	442	1,518	6
Agriculture	19	9	0
Construction	181	1,385	5
Engineering	198	2,285	7
Business	432	3,459	12
Hotel and catering	73	3,441	10
Health and community care	470	7,147	22
Art and design	1,433	1,979	10
Humanities	806	3,165	12
Basic education	613	4,755	16
Total	4,667	29,143	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 41% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	236	7	0	243
Supporting direct learning contact	129	4	0	133
Other support	74	2	0	76
Total	439	13	0	452

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£17,399,000	£19,197,000	£19,850,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£15.88	£15.17	£15.12
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	63%	56%
Achievement of funding target	110%	117%	103%
Diversity of income	30%	30%	31%
Operating surplus	-£420,000	£208,000	£796,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
1	Expected completions	368	553	578	1,329	2,638	1,900
	Retention (%)	80	77	84	85	88	92
	Achievement (%)	36	36	54	31	47	49
2	Expected completions	1,403	1,308	1,263	1,908	2,646	2,394
	Retention (%)	81	81	83	88	92	89
	Achievement (%)	31	31	35	28	36	46
3	Expected completions	–	1,131	1,059	–	1,631	2,136
	Retention (%)	–	77	80	–	89	86
	Achievement (%)	56	56	55	20	49	40
4 or 5	Expected completions	–	49	49	–	679	833
	Retention (%)	–	90	92	–	88	83
	Achievement (%)	45	68	60	30	40	46
Short courses	Expected completions	423	293	333	1,349	3,662	5,860
	Retention (%)	88	98	98	85	98	100
	Achievement (%)	60	66	57	48	75	66
Unknown/unclassified	Expected completions	491	1,012	1,141	4,097	4,636	5,374
	Retention (%)	57	75	90	58	82	89
	Achievement (%)	31	53	65	28	79	75

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

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