# Dunstable College

*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.*

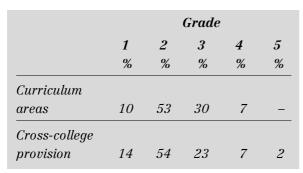# Contents

# 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

## Dunstable College

### *Eastern Region*

**Inspected September 1999**

Dunstable College is the smallest of the four colleges of further education in Bedfordshire. The college draws its students mainly from the Luton and Dunstable conurbation. In addition to the courses provided at the college a developing range of courses are provided at 15 community-based locations throughout Dunstable, Luton and the surrounding area. The self-assessment process involved corporation members and all staff. Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report was inaccurate and insufficiently self-critical. Many of the strengths were overstated and the college failed to place sufficient emphasis upon some of the weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the report but identified additional weaknesses. Many significant weaknesses had not been acknowledged in the provision for basic education and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college offers provision in all of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Work in five FEFC programme areas was inspected. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected.

Since the last inspection there has been uncertainty about the future direction of the college. There have been few significant improvements in the quality of the college's provision. The corporation has now successfully refocused its efforts to ensure an independent future for the college. In the last year a new principal has been appointed, a revised management structure introduced, a new strategic plan developed and the college's financial position improved. The college's financial position is effectively monitored. There is good access for students to IT and a wide range of learning resources. Courses in the community are effectively organised and teaching of adults is well planned and well managed. There are good links with a range of community and external bodies and effective use of work placements to support students' learning. The college should improve: the generally low standard of teaching; the poor quality of its provision for basic education and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the arrangements for quality assurance and monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and learning; the use of targets and performance indicators to identify and improve retention and achievement; the monitoring of the implementation of its strategic objectives and action plans; and the control arrangements for collaborative provision and distance learning.

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

| Curriculum area | Grade | Cross-college provision | Grade |
|---|---|---|---|
| Computing and information technology | 3 | Support for students | 3 |
| Engineering | 3 | General resources | 3 |
| Business studies | 3 | Quality assurance | 4 |
| Health and childcare | 3 | Governance | 3 |
| Basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities | 5 | Management | 4 |

## The College and its Mission

1    Dunstable College is based at a town centre site in Dunstable.  The college is smaller than the other two general further education colleges and one sixth form college in Bedfordshire.  The college draws its students mainly from the Luton and Dunstable conurbation, but also recruits from the nearby rural areas of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.  A developing range of provision is delivered at 15 community-based locations throughout Dunstable, Luton and the surrounding area.  In 1998-99, the college enrolled 5,340 students.  In July 1999, the college employed 224 full-time equivalent staff of whom 97 are teachers and 127 support staff.

2    The college serves a community which continues to have a strong involvement in manufacturing, mainly in the automobile industry.  However, manufacturing jobs in the area are forecast to fall in number.  There is considerable local variation in the level of unemployment with some nearby areas of Luton recording levels of around 10%.  Despite a significant reduction in employment levels within the once dominant motor industry and the existence of considerable pockets of social deprivation within the Luton and Dunstable conurbation, there are signs of regeneration. Jobs in distribution, hotels and service industries are expected to increase by approximately 6% by 2002.  Unemployment has fallen dramatically in Bedfordshire and Luton from an average of 18% in 1997 to less than 5% at the end of 1998.

3    The population of Bedfordshire and Luton was 548,300 in 1996 and is continuing to grow. In Luton, the population is expected to reach 182,700 by the year 2001.  The largest growth is predicted in Luton wards with a high minority ethnic population and higher than national average levels of unemployment.  Minority ethnic groups represent over 20% of the residents of Luton and the figure rises to 33% amongst the 16 to 30 age group.

4    Extensive sixth form provision is available in five 11 to 18 schools within the college catchment area and competition with schools remains significant.  There is increasing co-operation between the three colleges established in the south of the county of Bedfordshire and the new unitary authority of the borough of Luton.  The college is an active member of the Bedfordshire and Luton Federation for Further and Higher Education and the Lifelong Learning Partnership for Bedfordshire and Luton.  Both of these bodies include the University of Luton with which the college has a strong working relationship.  The college also works co-operatively within the Bedfordshire and Luton Widening Participation Strategic Partnership.

5    The college provides courses in all 10 Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas with the majority of students studying on information technology (IT), business and health and community care courses.  Land-based courses represent a small part of the provision.  About 20% of the work funded by the FEFC is delivered through collaborative provision.  The college does not provide a full-time programme of general certificate of education advanced levels (GCE A levels).  It expanded its provision to its highest post-incorporation level during 1998-99.  While there has been a drop in the demand for engineering courses, the college has responded by securing new courses in art and design, beauty therapy and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.  Much of this successful expansion is provided at centres within the local communities.  A broad range of courses has been aimed at young people who are underachieving in education and students from minority ethnic communities in partnership with other organisations.  Over 27% of full-time students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.  This is notably higher than the percentage of people from minority ethnic groups living in the immediate vicinity of the college.  Of the total student population, 44% were male and 56% were female.

6    Dunstable College is organised into three departments: business and management; art, design and technology; and care and social studies.  These operational departments are complemented by the college support unit and the corporate services unit.  As well as the three heads of department and the two heads of unit, the college management team includes the principal and chief executive and the director of finance, who is also deputy principal.  There is an independent clerk to the corporation.  The structure has been in place since March 1999.

7    The college's strategic plan for 1997 to 2000 was based on the assumption that the college would merge with the University of Hertfordshire.  Following the rejection of its merger proposals in March 1998, the corporation refocused its efforts to ensure an independent future for the college.  This required considerable commitment from governors, particularly in view of the college's difficult financial situation.  In the past 18 months the corporation has appointed a new principal, drawn up a new strategic plan, improved the college's financial health and approved a new management structure.  The new Dunstable College strategic plan, 1999-2000 to 2001-02, re-establishes the prime goal of an independent and viable future for Dunstable College.  The mission statement is entitled 'Achieving Excellence in Education and Training' and states 'We will provide education and training opportunities to the highest national standards for work and life'.

## The Inspection

8    The college was inspected during the week beginning 27 September 1999.  Inspection of the management and quality assurance of collaborative provision was conducted in the week beginning 20 September 1999 together with inspection of some of the provision in the local community.

9    The inspection team had previously reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC.  Inspectors made use of students' achievements data produced by the FEFC and based on returns of the college's individualised student record (ISR).  Students' achievements data for 1996, 1997 and 1998 were used as the basis for inspectors' judgements on students' achievements in each of the curriculum areas.  The college was unable to provide reliable data for retention and achievement for students completing qualifications in 1999.  The inspection took place early in the college year and the college was unable to enter data in time for the inspection, but was also waiting for some data to be supplied by awarding bodies.  The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before its inspection.  The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 51 days.  They observed 59 lessons, evaluated students' work and examined college documents.  Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students.

10    The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.  Of the 59 lessons inspected, 42% were judged to be good or outstanding and 19% less than satisfactory compared with national averages for 1998-99 of 65% and 6%, respectively.

**Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study**

| Programmes | Grade | | | | | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| GNVQ | 0 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| NVQ | 0 | 7 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 10 |
| Other vocational | 3 | 11 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 27 |
| Other | 0 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 13 |
| Total (No.) | 3 | 22 | 23 | 6 | 5 | 59 |
| Total (%) | 5 | 37 | 39 | 10 | 9 | 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 repor t*

11    The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The average level of attendance was 81%. Attendance rates were well above the college average in business, and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and about the average in engineering and health and childcare.  Attendance rates in computing were well below national averages.

**Attendance rates in lessons observed**

| | Average number of students | Average attendance (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Dunstable College | 14.0 | 81 |
| 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 repor t*

# Curriculum Areas

## Computing and Information Technology

### *Grade 3*

**12    The inspection covered courses in computing and IT.  Inspectors observed 15 lessons which included some in centres in the community.  Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment repor  t but concluded that the college placed insufficient emphasis on the weaknesses.**

**Key strengths**
- well-planned lessons with clear objectives
- effective teaching of adults
- good student retention and achievement on many part-time courses
- effective delivery of courses in the community
- extensive range of IT courses

**Weaknesses**
- narrow range of teaching methods
- poor attendance of many full-time students
- low retention and achievement on full-time courses
- insufficient links with industry
- lack of depth of analysis in course reviews

13    The wide range of computing and IT courses provides progression from foundation to advanced level.  The broad range of introductory and short courses and the extensive provision in the community enable students to attend at locations and times convenient to them.  Full-time students have few opportunities to obtain experience of professional and industrial practices through work placements.  Although some courses are provided for companies, curriculum links with industry and commerce are few.  This weakness is only partly acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

14    Courses are effectively managed.  Timetabling is efficient.  Record-keeping and scheduling of student assignments are appropriate.  Community provision is well organised.  Course teams have regular meetings.  Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are insufficient links between curriculum plans and the college's strategic plan.  Feedback from students is not used systematically in course reviews.  Data on students' achievements are not analysed thoroughly and there is little use of national benchmarking data.  These weaknesses are not included in the self-assessment report.

15    Almost half the lessons were good and a few were outstanding.  Schemes of work are well planned.  Lessons have clear objectives which are shared with students.  The standard of teaching and learning in lessons provided at centres in the community are good.  In practical lessons, support for individual students was effective and particularly successful for the adult learners who had recently returned to study and who had quickly become sufficiently confident to usefully assist each other.  Teachers regularly checked students' learning and gave supportive guidance to enable students to improve their performance.  However, in many lessons they used too narrow a range of teaching methods to make the lessons fully effective.  In the poorer lessons, teachers failed to make sufficient use of visual aids, of IT to assist with presentations, or of teaching materials accessed by IT or using IT.  Structured group work was seldom used to investigate topics and stimulate discussion.  The self-assessment report identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning but action plans to rectify the weaknesses are inadequate.

16    Inspectors agreed that specialist resources are a strength.  Specialist teaching rooms have up-to-date equipment which is comparable with that used in industry and commerce.  Some teaching takes place in the 'drop-in' IT workshop where the layout of computers and the distraction caused by other users reduces the effectiveness of lessons.  Teachers are well qualified but they lack recent experience of the IT industry.

17    On the part-time and short courses most students complete their studies and achieve their qualifications.  Students' achievements on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses are high.  However, the pass rate has decreased on computer literacy and information technology courses completed within a year; only one-third of the students who took the examination passed last year.  Over the last three years the pass and retention rates on full-time courses have been below the average for the sector.  Fewer than half the students who originally enrolled on the national diploma in 1997 completed their studies.  There was a low level of attendance for lessons observed during inspection.  College records indicate that this is a persistent problem and it is acknowledged in the self-assessment report.  Students' assignment work is of an appropriate standard for the level of the course.  Teachers give helpful and comprehensive written and verbal feedback to students.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| Computer literacy and information technology | 1 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 482<br>93<br>59 | 491<br>94<br>70 | 1,070<br>92<br>64 |
| C&G IT certificate | 1 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 235<br>99<br>74 | 54<br>93<br>90 | 57<br>93<br>20 |
| NVQ | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | +<br>+<br>+ | +<br>+<br>+ | 121<br>91<br>89 |
| Integrated business technology | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 163<br>94<br>37 | 162<br>81<br>71 | 277<br>92<br>50 |
| First diploma in IT applications | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 24<br>71<br>59 | 31<br>90<br>39 | 37<br>73<br>41 |
| National diploma in IT applications | 3 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 24<br>63<br>92 | 19<br>53<br>50 | 23<br>78<br>54 |

*Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)*
*\*reliable data unavailable*
*+course not offered*

# Curriculum Areas

## Engineering

### Grade 3

**18    Inspectors observed 11 lessons, including full-time, part-time and evening courses at a range of levels.  Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the college's self-assessment report.**

**Key strengths**

- effective teaching in most lessons
- good use of an appropriate variety of teaching methods and learning activities
- many achievement rates above the national average
- good organisation of timetables to maintain the range of provision
- links with local community organisations to widen participation

**Weaknesses**

- poor retention rates on advanced technician courses
- low achievement rates on intermediate technician courses
- insufficient monitoring of the quality of courses
- some out-of-date facilities

19    A wide range of courses at foundation, craft and technician levels includes the major engineering subject areas.  The broad range of courses is identified by the college as a strength and inspectors agreed.  In recent years the local engineering industry has declined, resulting in a reduction in engineering enrolments.  The curriculum has been sustained by the effective amalgamation of courses to maintain viability.  For example, students taking modern apprenticeships are combined with a national certificate course to cover the theory needed for the NVQ qualification.  There has, however, been a decline in enrolments on full-time

intermediate technician courses attributed to the introduction of the modern apprenticeship scheme.  There are strong and effective links with local community organisations providing, for example, motor vehicle courses as part of a crime reduction programme within an urban renewal project for disaffected young people.  Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that links with local partnerships are a strength.

20    Some course teams do not adequately assess or monitor their effectiveness.  For courses sponsored by industry, team meetings cover students' progress, attendance and performance; other course teams fail to have these topics as agenda items.  Little use is made of students' perceptions of their courses obtained from questionnaires.  The college tutorial policy is not fully implemented by all engineering courses and some students do not receive an effective tutorial programme.  However, tutorials for individuals are held, when required, to monitor their progress.

21    Teaching in most lessons was effective.  This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.  Students speak highly of their courses at the college.  Teachers follow appropriate schemes of work.  Most lessons were well planned and had clear aims and objectives which resulted in the structure of the lessons being carefully matched to the learning objectives.  Teachers recapitulated salient points to reinforce students' learning.  In the most successful lessons, teachers used question and answer techniques effectively and classroom activities were varied appropriately to promote and maintain students' interest.  Teachers took care to relate topics to students' knowledge and experience.  They used simple aids to illustrate basic concepts, and introduced students to appropriate equipment and machinery to extend their learning.  Students' files are well organised.  In some lessons, teachers adopted inappropriate teaching methods.  In these lessons students spent too much time copying

notes from a whiteboard or transparency, or the teacher talked too much and failed to involve all the students sufficiently in the work. In a few lessons, students became bored and lost interest. Whilst on their courses, students' attendance is closely monitored. Safe working practices are observed at all times in workshops.

22 Equipment such as computer numerically controlled machine and workshop tools, pneumatic and hydraulic equipment, and a 12 station programmable logic control facility reflect curriculum change and follow recent industrial advances. However, many courses are taught in facilities that are in need of refurbishment and replacement if they are to reflect modern industrial practices. The self-assessment report recognised this shortcoming and plans are in hand to improve

the facilities. Teachers have appropriate engineering and teaching qualifications and verifier and assessor awards. Few staff have recent industrial experience. There are an adequate number of technicians.

23 Achievement rates are above the national average on the majority of City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses. Achievements on NVQ level 2 courses in 1997 were well above the national average. NVQ courses generally show a year-on-year improvement in achievement rates. The rapid decline in NVQ level 2 enrolments after 1997 results from a local training provider ceasing operations. Retention rates are below the national average on advanced technician courses. Intermediate technician courses show achievement rates below the national average. Weaknesses in students' achievements were acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| C&G | 1 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 59<br>97<br>63 | 16<br>63<br>70 | 15<br>93<br>80 |
| C&G | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 247<br>94<br>40 | 123<br>88<br>58 | 182<br>83<br>58 |
| Intermediate technician | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 36<br>81<br>34 | 21<br>76<br>69 | 4<br>100<br>33 |
| NVQ | 2 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 58<br>72<br>43 | 124<br>88<br>87 | 11<br>100<br>100 |
| Advanced technician | 3 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 62<br>66<br>58 | 59<br>64<br>76 | 53<br>72<br>54 |
| C&G | 3 | Number of starters<br>Retention (%)<br>Achievement (%) | 33<br>97<br>56 | 14<br>100<br>79 | 17<br>100<br>77 |

*Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)*
*\*reliable data unavailable*

# Curriculum Areas

## Business Studies

### *Grade 3*

**24    Inspectors observed 10 lessons on NVQ administration courses and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) business at intermediate and advanced levels, and the national diploma in public services.  They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but noted that the college failed to acknowledge some students' low achievements and weaknesses in teaching.**

**Key strengths**

- successful recruitment of adult learners in community provision
- effective contribution of work experience to students' learning
- thorough assessment procedures
- good pass rates on GNVQ intermediate business
- many good specialist resources

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient account taken of the differing learning needs of students
- poor pass rates on most courses
- retention below national averages
- lack of rigour in course review and evaluation

25    Since the last inspection, the college has successfully introduced administration courses for adult learners and offers GNVQs in business at foundation and intermediate levels at some centres in the community.  Enrolments for the full-time national diploma in public services are good.

26    Course documentation is well organised.  Schemes of work and lesson plans clearly identify tasks and learning outcomes which are relevant to the industry.  Assessment procedures are fair and consistently applied.  Assignment tasks make effective use of students' work experience.  Teachers' written comments are helpful and constructive.  Assignments on GNVQ courses emphasise the development of students' key skills.  The college recognises the need to develop key skills on public services courses and has strengthened the link between the key skills and curriculum teams.  There are good opportunities for students to undertake work experience.  Teachers visit employers, and students are set assignments based on their work experience.

27    In the best lessons, there was sound planning and teachers used a variety of appropriate teaching methods to sustain students' interest and extend their knowledge and understanding.  For example, in a national diploma in public services lesson on human behaviour, the teacher provided a stimulating preliminary exercise to introduce students to the use of communication skills in problem-solving.  Students tackled the task with vigour, and worked well as a group to find solutions to the problem.  In the less successful lessons, teachers did not sufficiently cater for the different needs of all students.  Students' interest was not effectively maintained and class discussion and activity was not managed to ensure that all students were involved.  These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.  Business courses are generally well managed.  However, course review and evaluation lacks rigour.  Analysis of performance against targets is unsystematic.  However, action has been taken to respond to poor levels of performance on the first diploma in public services and the college decided not to recruit any students to the course this year.  The college acknowledges some weaknesses in the course review and evaluation process.

28    Inspectors agreed that students have access to an appropriate range of specialist resources, which includes a well-appointed practice office used for business administration courses. Students also have access to a wide range of learning packs and workbooks for their work in the practice office. There is an adequate range of specialist books, handouts and other learning materials. The computers in the administration IT workshop lack up-to-date business software. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, and undertake relevant professional development.

29    The quality of students' written work is sound. Most portfolios of evidence are well organised and presented and show a good understanding of business theory and practice. Some weaker students' portfolios are poorly organised and demonstrate a poor ability to research and present conclusions and arguments. Students on courses in business administration demonstrate a good standard of computer literacy, and show an ability to learn

and work on their own. The number of students completing their courses is below the national average for the sector and pass rates are generally poor. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course has improved since 1996 and was above the national average in 1998. The retention level on this course has also improved. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced course has declined over the three years to 1998 and is well below the national average. The retention rate has been erratic and is slightly below the national average. Retention on the first diploma in public services declined sharply and pass rates were below the national average in 1997 and 1998. Retention and achievement levels on business administration courses have remained close to the national average. The significant weaknesses in students' achievements were not identified by the college in the self-assessment report.

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

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GNVQ intermediate business | 2 | Number of starters | 24 | 26 | 15 |
| | | Retention (%) | 75 | 77 | 80 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 67 | 85 | 83 |
| First diploma public services | 2 | Number of starters | 17 | 7 | 9 |
| | | Retention (%) | 100 | 71 | 56 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 100 | 40 | 60 |
| NVQ business administration | 2 | Number of starters | 108 | 116 | 109 |
| | | Retention (%) | 79 | 80 | 68 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 55 | 48 | 69 |
| GNVQ advanced business | 3 | Number of starters | 37 | 61 | 72 |
| | | Retention (%) | 70 | 57 | 71 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 77 | 55 | 44 |

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

*\*reliable data unavailable*

## Health and Childcar e

### *Grade 3*

**30    Inspectors observed 11 lessons.  They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths were overstated.  The report gave insufficient weight to weaknesses in students' achievements.**

**Key strengths**
- clear aims and objectives in most lessons
- well-planned and well-monitored work experience
- effective integration of key skills on GNVQ courses
- high pass rates on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies

**Weaknesses**
- failure to take sufficient account of the needs of individual students
- low pass rates on the majority of courses
- low and declining retention rates on some courses
- the lack of recent practical experience among staff

31    The college offers GNVQs in health and social care at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, the national diploma and certificate in childhood studies and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing and certificate in childcare and education.  Enrolments to full-time and part-time courses are declining. As a result, some first-year and second-year students are taught together.  Individual course teams meet regularly but there is little liaison between childcare and health and social care teams and insufficient attention is given to sharing good practice.

32    Most teaching is satisfactor y.  Schemes of work and lesson plans are clear and well structured.  In the majority of lessons, teachers took care to share aims and objectives with students and made effective use of question and answer techniques to encourage students to contribute.  However, few learning activities were matched to the different learning needs of students and most teachers relied too much on teaching the group as a whole.  There was little use of handouts or reference materials.  Some handout material was poorly presented.  The self-assessment report identified the promotion of equal opportunities in the curriculum as a strength.  Inspectors did not agree with this judgement.  They found examples of the use of inappropriate language by teachers which conveyed a biased view of gender issues. Students were not sufficiently encouraged to recognise issues of equality of opportunity when planning their practical activities.

33    Students value the support they receive from tutors.  All students meet with their personal tutor on a regular basis.  Tutors maintain good records of students' progress. Inspectors agreed with the college that the well-planned and carefully-monitored work experience makes a valuable contribution to students' learning.  There are clear guidelines for students and work placement supervisors.  A work placement co-ordinator provides effective administrative support.  Teachers maintain good levels of liaison with work placement supervisors.  Assignments are designed carefully to enable students to provide evidence of their development of a range of key skills and are generally of an appropriate level.  GNVQ assignments demonstrate effective use of action-planning.  Assignment work for childcare courses is well presented.  There is an appropriate emphasis on developing key skills in a relevant vocational context.  Assessment is fair.  Teachers provide good levels of feedback to students and make helpful suggestions about how work should be improved.

34    Staff are well qualified and have relevant experience in the care professions.  However, as the self-assessment report recognised, there is a need for most staff to update their practical experience.  The college has recently taken steps to increase the number of staff with assessor qualifications.  Temporary accommodation used for some courses suffers from extremes of temperature.  Classrooms have been designated as subject base rooms and some contain attractive wall displays.  There is adequate equipment for practical activities.  The library holds a broad stock of books and journals relating to health and childcare.

35    Pass rates on the national diploma and national certificate in childhood studies are consistently above the national average. However, pass rates on the majority of courses are low and, in most cases, below the national average.  Out of 50 candidates registered for the NVQ level 3 childcare and education award since 1995, only three have completed the full award.  This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report.  The self-assessment report did not identify the poor and declining retention rates on some courses.  During the period 1996 to 1998, retention on the national certificate in social care, and the national diploma and Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childhood studies has remained below the national average.  The college has taken some steps to address low achievement.  Retention and pass rates for GNVQ advanced health and social care and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing increased significantly in 1999.

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and childcare, 1996 to 1998**

| Type of qualification | Level | Numbers and outcome | Completion year | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| GNVQ foundation | 1 | Number of starters | 13 | 13 | 10 |
| | | Retention (%) | 100 | 92 | 70 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 62 | 40 | 33 |
| GNVQ intermediate, Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education certificate in childcare and education | 2 | Number of starters | 96 | 74 | 62 |
| | | Retention (%) | 76 | 74 | 84 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 62 | 60 | 56 |
| National diploma childhood studies, national certificate childhood studies, national certificate social care, GNVQ advanced, Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education diploma in nursery nursing | 3 | Number of starters | 163 | 196 | 153 |
| | | Retention (%) | 82 | 68 | 72 |
| | | Achievement (%) | 76 | 55 | 70 |

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

*\*reliable data unavailable*

## Basic Education and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

### *Grade 5*

**36    Inspectors observed 12 lessons. Inspectors did not agree with most of the judgements about strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.  No weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment repor   t for teaching and learning.**

**Key strengths**

- well-managed work placements supporting progression to employment for some students

**Weaknesses**

- lack of identification of students' specific learning goals
- failure to plan learning activities to take account of students' abilities
- poor management of classroom activity
- insufficient attention to checking students' learning
- poor recording of progress and achievement
- inadequate assessment of the effectiveness of teaching

37    Course descriptions for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities place strong emphasis on developing greater independence and preparation for employment. The majority of courses last for two years.  Basic education provides courses for adults in basic English, computing, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and a spelling workshop.

38    Effective collaboration with external agencies, and strong links with a work experience placement community project and with a local church, provide work experience for some students.  The self-assessment report understated the clear documentation and thorough monitoring of students' work experience.  Some students have progressed to open employment, or to work in charity shops and the voluntary sector.

39    Most teaching is poorly planned.  Schemes of work are lists of activities and contain no aims, objectives or learning outcomes.  Lesson plans focus on the completion of whole class activities and do not identify individual learning outcomes.  Learning activities are not planned to meet the needs of individual students.  The external accreditation framework is being inappropriately used as a syllabus.  Evaluation of learning does not routinely inform further planning of teaching.  These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

40    The self-assessment report did not identify assessment of students' learning needs as inadequate.  There are no common procedures to identify the learning needs of students at initial assessment or to inform all staff teaching on the programmes about individual students. Inappropriate tests are used.  For example, a complex learning styles questionnaire was used with adults, the majority of whom had very low levels of reading and writing.  The results of the questionnaire were not analysed or used to plan individuals' learning.

41    Students' learning is not effectively supported by appropriate classroom activities. Teaching in most lessons was unimaginative with the demands made on students being limited to following instructions.  In 75% of lessons observed, learning activities did not match students' differing levels of ability.  For example, some second-year students repeated activities done in the first year.  Students' skills and knowledge were not extended as they were completing tasks they could already do.  In a

cookery class, all students, first and second year, were making a cake. One student indicated that he had made the same cake two or three times before and the only difference this time was using orange zest. Over-reliance is given to paper-based activities with students who have limited reading and writing skills. In some lessons, non-readers copied materials from worksheets, to time, without understanding what they were doing. There is poor management of learning support assistants in lessons and a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities. Learning support assistants are used to help students complete tasks rather than to encourage the development of students' independent learning skills. The self-assessment report does not recognise these major weaknesses.

42    The self-assessment report did not recognise that the arrangements to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning are inadequate. Teachers do not review or check that learning has taken place and are not able to identify what each student has learnt. Little attempt is made to engage students in discussion and reflection on what they have learnt. Course monitoring and evaluation does not result in appropriate action plans to address weaknesses or improve the quality of courses or students' learning experiences.

43    Most staff have further education teaching qualifications. Few staff have a teaching qualification that relates to provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some learning support assistants have a C&G certificate in learning support. Learning support assistants have not received sufficient training for them to know how students can best be supported in their learning. Teaching accommodation is satisfactory. Rooms have been equipped with new computers and printers, but the inspectors saw no evidence that they were being used to help students learn.

44    The recording of students' progress and achievement is poor. There are no common procedures for identifying and recording individual students' progress and achievement. Course documentation and students' files do not contain reliable evidence about their learning and achievement. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Accreditation of courses has been introduced since the last inspection and all students are working towards gaining Open College Network credits. All students leaving the programmes in 1997-98 achieved one or more credits in the Chiltern region Open College Network at entry level. Twelve students gained certificates of achievement in basic oral skills with the English Speaking Board. Students have successfully progressed to other college programmes, such as NVQ level 1 in IT. Information about the destinations of students who do not move to other college programmes is not comprehensive. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### Grade 3

**45    Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report.  The college had not recognised most of the weaknesses identified by inspectors.**

**Key strengths**
- well-organised pre-entry information and guidance
- effective induction arrangements
- a comprehensive tutorial handbook
- effective provision of additional support

**Weaknesses**
- some weak tutorial practice
- lack of a coherent programme of careers advice
- inadequate arrangements to support distance learning students
- underdeveloped procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of student support

46    The support services available to students are well documented and effectively administered.  Student services are dispersed across the college and lack a central focus.  A student services enquiry desk has been relocated to the reception area.  Interview rooms and staff offices are located on the ground and first floors.  The standards of service which students can expect are explicitly stated in the college charter.  However, there is no overall review of performance against the charter commitments and insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the full range of student support services.

47    Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college provides comprehensive pre-course guidance and advice.  Students are provided with clear information on the content of courses and the entry requirements.  Prospective full-time students benefit from individual guidance interviews.  Careers advisers are available during enrolment to give impartial advice to students.  There is some effective liaison with schools but the college recognises that links with schools need to be developed further.  The college holds a series of open days and is responsive to requests from schools to give presentations to pupils and attend career events.

48    Inspectors agreed that induction arrangements for full-time students are effective.  Teachers are given a checklist of induction topics.  College induction is supplemented by well-considered introductory topics and activities specific to students' courses.  The programme of introductory and team-building exercises helps students to get into their studies quickly.  Students are issued with a helpful 'survival guide' which details their rights and responsibilities and indicates how they can use support services.  The self-assessment report notes that induction for part-time students is unsystematic and new guidelines have been introduced to address this.

49    A comprehensive tutors' handbook contains clear guidelines on what should be included in the tutorial programme.  Helpful support materials and activity sheets cover each aspect of the tutorial entitlement.  There is some weak practice in the way tutorials are conducted which was not identified in the self-assessment report.  Many of the tutorial sessions observed were poorly structured and students quickly lost interest.  Where inspectors found good practice, students benefited from effective support for their academic work through regular action-planning and monitoring of their progress.  There is appropriate advice and assistance for students to help them complete

their application for progression to higher education. Students speak positively about the personal support from tutors and the range of support services available to them.

50    Careers education and guidance is provided for 16 to 19 year old students through a partnership agreement with the Centre for British Teachers. This arrangement provides a good opportunity for students to have individual advice and guidance sessions. A careers module is included in tutorials but there is no coherent programme for careers education for all students and no effective monitoring of the quality of careers education. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that advice on progression opportunities is not routinely available to all students. Adult students appreciate the advice provided by a specialist careers adviser from the adult guidance service 'Learning for Life'.

51    Students receive good support from a professional counsellor but the accommodation for counselling is inappropriate. Financial and welfare advice is provided sensitively. A liaison officer works with students and helps to arrange sports activities and a range of charity events. The college provides a room for use by the student union.

52    Effective additional support is provided for most individual students as noted in the self-assessment report. Initial screening tests for literacy and numeracy take place during induction. Students are referred to the learning support unit where individual students' needs are carefully assessed. Individual action plans with dates for the review of progress are negotiated. The progress of each student is carefully monitored and records are well maintained. Attendance is voluntary and some students choose not to take advantage of the additional support which is available to them. There are insufficient alternative 'drop-in' facilities for students who require help with their studies. Appropriate support is provided

for students with disabilities studying on mainstream courses. There are also suitable arrangements to support students studying at centres in the community. However, there are inadequate arrangements to support distance learning students. This was not identified in the self-assessment report.

## General Resources

### Grade 3

**53    Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and all of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report.**

**Key strengths**
- well-maintained and appropriately-furnished accommodation
- good level of IT resources
- wide range of learning resources

**Weaknesses**
- ineffective management of accommodation
- some poor-quality temporary buildings
- lack of access to some areas for those with restricted mobility
- the lack of co-ordination of learning resources

54    The college is located on an attractive single site. The college company and some administrative staff are based in nearby office accommodation in the town centre. Since the last inspection the college has sold some land adjacent to the college. Car parking has been improved and there are designated spaces for drivers with disabilities. Site security is good. The reception area is a welcoming focal point for students and visitors. Most rooms are pleasantly furnished. Poor-quality temporary buildings are used for a significant amount of teaching. The quality of some staff workrooms is poor and some are overcrowded. Inspectors

agreed with the self-assessment report that the college is generally clean and well maintained. A five-year maintenance plan is updated annually. Routine maintenance is carried out systematically. Accommodation standards have not been developed and the college does not have a strategy for the future development of the site or its accommodation.

55    Adaptations have recently been made to the student common room and refectory, creating a bright and spacious area which includes a staff common room. The student common room is dominated by some groups of students. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are lengthy queues and some overcrowding at peak times in the refectory. There are no sports facilities on the college site. Arrangements have been made for students to have free access at designated times to some of the sports facilities at the leisure centre adjacent to the college. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there is no access to some areas for wheelchair users or those with restricted mobility. Some learning resources are only accessible by inconvenient and circuitous routes. Toilet facilities are inadequate for those with disabilities. Childcare facilities are not provided by the college.

56    There is a wide range of learning resources for students. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, there is no strategy for upgrading and replacing equipment.

57    There is a good range of teaching aids and most rooms have chalk or whiteboards and overhead projectors. High-quality audiovisual equipment and video-conferencing facilities are readily available and centrally managed. Only a few teaching rooms and general circulation areas have attractive displays of students' work. There is detailed analysis of space utilisation and accommodation operating costs. As identified in the self-assessment report, procedures for the allocation of general teaching rooms are inefficient.

58    The library is well organised. Learning resources are divided between the ground floor and the upper floor. There is no direct lift access to the upper floor. Students do not have easy access to computers in the library for their work. The library is well stocked with about 23,000 books but some are outdated. There is an extensive range of 1,500 videos, 29 CD-ROMs and about 80 journals. The careers section has a wide range of information and computer software. The computerised library system is not year 2000 compliant. There is insufficient co-ordination of the library, learning resources and IT facilities across the college. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, links between curriculum areas and the library are weak.

59    Students have access to 366 up-to-date computers with appropriate software including 38 laptops specifically for use in centres in the community. There is approximately one computer for every eight students which is the same as the sector average according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report.* Students have good access to a 'drop-in' IT workshop with about 80 computers. In addition, there are two key skills workshops with about 40 computers used mainly for timetabled lessons. There is no information and learning technology strategy but the college policy is to replace hardware on a three-year rolling programme. Since 1997 the college has invested approximately £250,000 and £190,000 on IT equipment for students and staff, respectively. There is good technical support for IT. Students have controlled access to the Internet and there is an appropriate code of conduct for users. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that IT resources are a strength.

## Quality Assurance

### Grade 4

**60    Since the last inspection the college has made slow progress in developing its quality assurance systems.  Inspectors did not agree with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report.  They considered that the significance of many of the weaknesses was understated.**

**Key strengths**
- effective course review in some areas
- well-organised staff development

**Weaknesses**
- ineffective self-assessment
- insufficient use of targets and performance indicators
- ineffective arrangements to evaluate the quality of the collaborative provision
- failure to link staff development to strategic planning
- lack of impact of quality assurance procedures on overall improvements in performance

61    The college's commitment to improving quality is stated in its mission and the strategic plan.  A senior manager has responsibility for quality and there is an expectation that teaching and support staff will take responsibility for raising standards.  One of the main reasons for the recent reorganisation of the college is to ensure that quality is given greater priority.  Inspectors agreed with the college that self-assessment is not yet an integral part of the college's planning process.  The self-assessment process is not linked effectively to other quality assurance procedures and has not led to overall improvements in performance.

62    Self-assessment activities were introduced in 1997 and cover both the curriculum and business support areas.  In preparation for inspection the college produced its first self-assessment report according to the framework defined in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*.  The report lacks sufficient evidence to substantiate the judgements and does not take full account of the views of students and employers.  Many of the statements listed as strengths are not evaluative.  The action plan is inadequate.  It contains no milestones or dates by which actions are to be completed.  There is no indication of measurable outcomes.

63    A lesson observation scheme was introduced in 1997 to enable college managers to make judgements about the quality of teaching and learning.  The process helps curriculum managers to provide useful feedback to teachers to enable them to improve practice.  The self-assessment report does not include evidence drawn from lesson observations.  Lessons are not graded and the outcomes from observations have not been used to assess standards of teaching and learning across the college.  There has been insufficient dissemination of examples of good practice to improve teaching.

64    Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the use of targets and performance indicators is underdeveloped.  The corporation has recently set targets for student retention and achievement and performance indicators for staffing and some business support areas.  Insufficient attention has been given to the setting of realistic targets for courses and to checking levels of students' achievements.  Poor retention and achievement are not addressed systematically.

65    Procedures for course review have been designed to encourage critical evaluation by course teams.  The course management system requires course team leaders to maintain records of students' attendance and progress.

Arrangements for assessment, including internal and external verification, are given appropriate weight. Curriculum inspectors found some weak practice in course review. Some course teams have taken action in response to issues identified through evaluation and managed to improve student retention. In other course reviews there was little evidence of self-critical practice.

66   The college charter provides information on the college's mission and the services available to students. In some areas it identifies service standards. For example, targets are set for processing student applications and for the return of assessed coursework. There is a clearly-defined procedure for handling complaints. A useful overview of the processing of complaints is provided in reports for the academic board and the corporation. However, there is no monitoring of the extent to which the college has responded effectively to complaints within the set deadlines. Neither is there a system for assessing the extent to which the college meets its charter commitments.

67   There is a well-established system of staff appraisal. It is designed to support professional development and helps to identify training needs. There are good staff development opportunities for full-time and part-time teachers and support staff. Staff development activities are well documented and the self-assessment report recognises the need to evaluate their effectiveness. However, staff development plans are not directly linked to strategic objectives. Induction for new staff is well organised and, in some departments, a mentoring system is in place. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1997.

68   There is good co-ordination of collaborative provision at the administrative level and some monitoring visits by college staff take place. However, systems to assure the quality of collaborative provision are inadequate. There is little systematic monitoring of student retention and achievement and no annual evaluative

report of the performance of each partner. There are good working relationships with the college's four established collaborative partners. However, too much reliance is placed upon the quality assurance systems of the partner organisations. The college has recently contracted with a new partner to provide distance learning courses on a national basis. The college lacks significant experience of distance learning and has not established a comprehensive system to assure itself of the quality of this provision.

## Governance

### Grade 3

**69   Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths wer e more descriptive than evaluative. The weaknesses identified in the report had been partially addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors found some additional significant weaknesses.**

**Key strengths**
- governors' broad range of relevant expertise
- effective induction of new governors
- close monitoring of financial performance
- effective clerking arrangements
- comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability

**Weaknesses**
- lack of measurable targets to enable monitoring of the strategic plan
- failure to systematically monitor students' retention and achievements
- inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities
- insufficient oversight of collaborative provision and distance learning developments

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

71    The corporation has responded appropriately to changes in the constitution of governing bodies.  There are now 17 members with one vacancy.  Three of the members are women and one governor is from a minority ethnic background.  The self-assessment report recognises that minority ethnic representation should be increased.  Governors bring a broad range of expertise to the corporation.  The search committee has been effective in identifying governors with appropriate skills and experience.  New governors are supported by a mentor and undertake a comprehensive induction programme.  Training for governors is well developed.

72    The clerk to the corporation is experienced and clerks all corporation and committee meetings.  Corporation meetings are scheduled one year in advance.  Board papers are sometimes lengthy but provide helpful background information.  The corporation has established comprehensive procedures for openness and accountability.  Corporation and committee minutes are publicly available.  A detailed governors' handbook provides guidance on duties and responsibilities.  All governors and staff with significant financial responsibilities have completed a register of interests.  Governors sign an annual declaration confirming their eligibility to be members.  The corporation has adopted a code of conduct for governors and a comprehensive set of standing orders.  A 'whistleblowing' procedure is in place to enable governors, staff, students and the public to raise concerns whilst protecting their confidentiality.

73    The business of governance is largely conducted through three committees: finance and resources; governors' standards; and audit.  These committees operate within their terms of reference.  Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that clear financial monitoring and control is in place.  Governors who are not on the finance and resources committee receive management accounts.  The college's annual budget for 1999-2000 was approved as part of the college's three-year financial forecast for 1999-2002.  The audit committee closely monitors the effectiveness of the college's control systems.  Two members with specialist skills are co-opted to this committee.  Audit committee meetings are well organised.

74    The self-assessment report did not fully reflect the attention that governors have paid to evaluating their own performance.  They complete an annual self-evaluation questionnaire that is discussed in detail by the corporation and leads to an action plan.  Progress on the action plan has been carefully followed up and has led to a number of improvements.  These include the establishment of a new committee structure designed to broaden the involvement of all governors in key aspects of the corporation's work, making best use of their expertise.  The revised committee structure also includes a wider remit for staff and student governors.  The search committee has been given the task of devising a means for governors to assess their individual performance.  The clerk to the corporation closely monitors attendance and produces an annual report.  Some members have had poor attendance records and personal attendance targets have now been set.  As the self-assessment report states, there are good working relations between governors and senior managers and frequent informal meetings between the chairman and the principal.

75    Governors have been appropriately involved in strategic planning and have set clear objectives for the college. They have established a number of 'focus groups' as part of their commitment to working with local community partners to widen participation in learning. However, many operational objectives in the strategic plan do not have clear and measurable targets. Governors do not receive regular updates on progress in achieving these objectives. The governors receive annual reports on the implementation of some policies, for example, on health and safety. However, there have been no reports on the implementation of the revised equal opportunities policy approved by the corporation in March 1997. These weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report.

76    The corporation's monitoring of student retention and achievement has not been systematic or comprehensive. Governors have not received a clear picture of strengths, weaknesses and trends in students' achievements. The corporation has recently established a standards committee with a remit to monitor the college's performance. Although the corporation receives regular reports on collaborative provision activities, they are not sufficiently detailed and do not provide analyses of the academic performance of collaborative partners. A decision to undertake a major commitment to distance learning was undertaken without appropriate arrangements for sufficient support for students and for quality assurance being in place. Governors' approval for this commitment has not been formally recorded.

## Management

### Grade 4

**77    Inspectors were unable to agree with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some statements were merely descriptive and wer e insufficiently self-critical. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses.**

**Key strengths**
- actions taken to improve communications
- liaison with other organisations to successfully widen participation
- effective financial reporting and monitoring

**Weaknesses**
- lack of management information
- insufficient attention to monitoring operational plans
- lack of clear links between operating plans and strategic objectives
- insufficient monitoring, implementation and review of college policies
- underdeveloped control arrangements for distance learning provision

78    The introduction of a revised management structure has been well managed and effectively supported by consultation with all staff. Shorter lines of communication between managers and staff, regular briefings and college newsletters keep staff well informed. Decisions taken at management team meetings are communicated effectively through staff meetings. The revised academic board and its subcommittees have become a useful forum for advising the principal on academic matters. Most staff welcome the more open style of management, although their views have not been formally surveyed by the college. However, despite recent improvements, inspectors were unable to agree with the self-assessment report that staff are sufficiently involved in formulating the strategic plan.

79    The revised strategic plan provides a clear statement of the college's values.  Operating plans are not presented in a standard form and do not all clearly relate actions to corporate objectives.  Some lack measurable targets for improvement or well-defined statements to meet strategic aims.  Insufficient attention has been given to monitoring progress in implementing operational plans, an issue not identified in the self-assessment report.  There is no formal review by the senior management team of the progress made in implementing all key objectives.  Reports refer mainly to financial matters and recruitment targets.  Inspectors were unable to find adequate evidence of progress reviews for other objectives, either in minutes of college management meetings or in reports to the corporation.  Key decisions have been taken for IT and accommodation in the absence of comprehensive strategies.  These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

80    The college's student information system produces regular and timely statistical reports on students' recruitment and financial matters.  Staffing costs as a percentage of total expenditure have been closely monitored and controlled and, in 1998-99, were estimated to be 59%.  Not all managers have easy access to, or make good use of, the standard reports.  The system is unable to meet managers' requirements for summary reports.  Managers are not provided with appropriate reports enabling them to effectively monitor student retention and achievement.  The college did not provide an accurate summary analysis of retention and achievement for students completing qualifications in 1998-99.  The data provided by the college had significant errors and shortcomings.  The aggregated data held centrally did not match figures held in departments.  Inspectors were unable to rely on the data provided by the college for 1998-99 and so could not make use of the college summary data in the reports of students'

achievements for curriculum areas.  A newly-established users' group intends to review management information needs.

81    The implementation of some college policies is not effectively monitored.  Inspectors identified significant shortcomings in the implementation of quality assurance policies, the arrangements for student support and the allocation of resources.  There is an established equal opportunities policy and some positive initiatives have promoted greater awareness of equality of opportunity, such as staff training on harassment.  However, the college has overestimated its strengths in promoting equal opportunities.

82    Productive links with community groups, local education authorities (LEAs) and local firms, such as a large automotive manufacturer, demonstrate the college's commitment to collaboration and widening participation, as noted in the self-assessment report.  Well-established links with the Bedfordshire and Luton Federation for Further and Higher Education have encouraged the development of joint initiatives between several education and training providers.  One example of an initiative is the adoption of a uniform approach to working with the careers service.  There are productive links with the Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Training, leading to contract work worth £800,000.  Work developed jointly with Luton University has continued to grow.

83    The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate.  The finance department is led by a qualified accountant who is a member of the senior management team.  The budget planning process is clear and appropriate.  The monthly management accounts are produced promptly.  They provide comprehensive information on the college's current and future financial position, including the operation of the college company.  Budget

holders receive timely reports of actual and committed expenditure against budget. Financial regulations and procedures are comprehensive and are available on the college intranet. The college has acted to implement past audit service recommendations. Proceeds from the sale of land significantly improved the overall financial health of the college during 1998-99. Surplus funds are carefully invested. Since late 1998-99, the college has provided distance learning for students through an intermediary. The director of finance has assumed oversight of this provision, which has significantly contributed to the college's operating surplus for 1998-99. However, the arrangements for controlling this provision, including audit coverage, are currently incomplete.

## Conclusions

84    Inspectors found the self-assessment report did not provide an accurate or fully comprehensive assessment of the college's work. Many strengths lacked an evaluative judgement and the report was insufficiently self-critical. The views of students and employers were not taken into account sufficiently. Most curriculum sections did not pay enough attention to teaching, learning and students' achievements. Many of the strengths were overstated and the college failed to place sufficient emphasis upon some of the weaknesses. Action plans to remedy weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report were inadequate. They did not identify clear statements of the actions needed, appropriate targets or measures of success, or responsibilities.

85    Inspectors agreed with only one of the grades awarded by the college to curriculum areas. Many significant weaknesses had not been acknowledged in the provision for basic education and for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The inspection team considered that the college was overgenerous in its assessment of the quality of the curriculum and did not agree with most of the grades awarded for cross-college aspects. The grades determined by inspection were lower than the college had awarded.

86    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)

| Age | % |
|---|---|
| Under 16 | 0 |
| 16-18 years | 19 |
| 19-24 years | 15 |
| 25+ years | 66 |
| Not known | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

*Source: college data*

## Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

| Level of study | % |
|---|---|
| Level 1 (foundation) | 57 |
| Level 2 (intermediate) | 31 |
| Level 3 (advanced ) | 11 |
| Level 4/5 (higher) | 1 |
| Non-schedule 2 | 0 |
| Total | 100 |

*Source: college data*

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

| Programme area | Full time | Part time | Total provision % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Science | 152 | 1,687 | 35 |
| Agriculture | 70 | 33 | 2 |
| Construction | 96 | 15 | 2 |
| Engineering | 38 | 240 | 5 |
| Business | 210 | 900 | 21 |
| Hotel and catering | 53 | 176 | 4 |
| Health and community care | 233 | 369 | 11 |
| Art and design | 110 | 234 | 6 |
| Humanities | 34 | 450 | 9 |
| Basic education | 160 | 80 | 5 |
| Total | 1,156 | 4,184 | 100 |

*Source: college data*

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 21% 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)

| | Perm-anent | Fixed term | Casual | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct learning contact | 77 | 20 | 0 | 97 |
| Supporting direct learning contact | 40 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Other support | 77 | 6 | 4 | 87 |
| Total | 194 | 26 | 4 | 224 |

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

**Financial data**

|                                     | 1997        | 1998        | 1999        |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Income                              | £7,407,000  | £7,002,000  | £8,023,000  |
| Average level of funding (ALF)      | £16.14      | £16.02      | £16.15      |
| Payroll as a proportion of income   | 62%         | 63%         | 56%         |
| Achievement of funding target       | 100%        | 99%         | 100%        |
| Diversity of income                 | 33%         | 30%         | 33%         |
| Operating surplus                   | -£196,000   | -£156,000   | £762,000    |

*Sources: Income -  Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*
*ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*
*Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*
*Achievement of funding target - Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998) College (1999)*
*Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*
*Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college (1998 and 1999)*

**Students' achievements data**

| Level | Retention and pass | Students aged 16 to 18 | | | Students aged 19 or over | | |
|-------|--------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|       |                    | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| 1     | Number of starters | 142  | 210  | 425  | 725  | 535  | 608  |
|       | Retention (%)      | 78   | 87   | 89   | 83   | 76   | 83   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | 75   | 60   | 60   | 65   | 62   | 61   |
| 2     | Number of starters | 706  | 593  | 453  | 799  | 635  | 560  |
|       | Retention (%)      | 79   | 76   | 77   | 85   | 75   | 86   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | 50   | 57   | 57   | 66   | 64   | 65   |
| 3     | Number of starters | 483  | 545  | 382  | 544  | 687  | 526  |
|       | Retention (%)      | 77   | 67   | 75   | 86   | 75   | 86   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | 63   | 63   | 61   | 53   | 51   | 75   |
| 4 or 5 | Number of starters | n/a | n/a  | 4    | 48   | 52   | 49   |
|       | Retention (%)      | n/a  | n/a  | 100  | 100  | 79   | 92   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | n/a  | n/a  | 50   | 87   | 39   | 29   |
| Short courses | Number of starters | 525 | 722 | 507 | 5,077 | 3,114 | 3,331 |
|       | Retention (%)      | 94   | 95   | 94   | 94   | 91   | 94   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | 65   | 75   | 75   | 77   | 80   | 75   |
| Unknown/ unclassified | Number of starters | 503 | 433 | 383 | 391 | 254 | 336 |
|       | Retention (%)      | 87   | 73   | 88   | 95   | 81   | 79   |
|       | Achievement (%)    | 68   | 69   | 51   | 61   | 68   | 60   |

*Source: ISR*
*n/a not applicable*

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