

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
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FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

Curriculum areas

Science	10
Engineering	16
Business administration	22
Hospitality and catering	28
Health and social care	35
Art, design and media studies	43
Humanities	49
Basic skills	55

Cross-college provision

Support for students	62
General resources	71
Quality assurance	79
Governance	88
Management	96
Conclusions	103

College statistics

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

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology *South West Region*

Inspected January 2000

Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology is a large general further education college with two main centres in Gloucester and Cheltenham. It provides courses at over 100 other centres in the north and east of Gloucestershire. The college has adopted a thorough self-assessment process which is well understood and involves all staff and governors. The self-assessment report was comprehensive, evaluative and self-critical. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but judged that some strengths were overstated, particularly those relating to the quality of teaching and learning and students' achievements. At the time of the inspection, the college had made good progress in addressing many of the weaknesses identified in the report. Inspectors differed in a number of instances from the college's judgements about the quality of curriculum areas and cross-college provision.

The college offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in seven of these areas and in basic skills was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision.

Prospective students are well informed about the range of courses and opportunities available. Students benefit from some good teaching and good individual support from tutors. Senior managers provide a clear sense of purpose and direction. Governors are involved in determining the college mission and strategic direction. The college has adopted a thorough approach to quality improvement. It should: address some low attendance, retention and achievement rates; improve the quality of teaching and learning and address weaknesses identified in a number of programme areas; improve the quality of learning support and tutorials; and continue to improve its financial position and the use and quality of accommodation.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Business administration	2	Quality assurance	3
Hospitality and catering	3	Governance	2
Health and social care	3	Management	3
Art, design and media studies	2		
Humanities	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology was formed in 1990, following the reorganisation of further and higher education work by the local authority, and the transfer of the majority of higher education work to Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. The college is the largest of five further education sector colleges in Gloucestershire. It primarily serves a large rural area of North and East Gloucestershire, including the urban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester. Specialist courses recruit from a much wider geographical area, including overseas. It operates from two large centres and four smaller centres in Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. It also runs courses at over 100 community centres and has linked provision with five schools.

2 There are four other further education sector colleges in Gloucestershire: Stroud College of Further Education, Cirencester College, Royal Forest of Dean College and Hartpury College. Competition for school-leavers is intense. There are 42 secondary schools in Gloucestershire, of which 27 have sixth forms. Approximately 78% of school-leavers in Gloucestershire proceed to further full-time study after the age of 16. There are just over 5,000 16 to 19 year old students in the county of whom 2,025 study at Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology. In 1998-99, the college enrolled 25,444 students of whom 2,978 (12%) were full-time students. There has been a steady decline in the number of full-time 16 to 19 year old student enrolments since 1995. The college has substantial contracts with Gloucestershire Local Education Authority (LEA) with 25,000 enrolments on adult and community provision. Many of these contracts restrict enrolments to eight students in each class. Disaffected young people under 16 years of age are offered full-time programmes in the college including separate provision which concentrates upon choice and skills for work.

There is little franchised work; currently this accounts for just 1.5% of the college's Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) income.

3 A wide range of programmes is offered in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC and includes extensive provision for adults. In several programme areas courses range from pre-foundation to higher diploma level. The college retains close links with the Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education and with other establishments of higher education in neighbouring counties. It is also a major provider of programmes sponsored by the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There are strong strategic links with employers and community agencies. These links have led to a number of partnerships designed to widen participation and attract more people to take courses that will improve their knowledge and skills.

4 The total population of Gloucestershire is approximately 557,250. Most of the county's largest employers are concentrated in the college's catchment area. These include several multi-national aerospace manufacturers and the national headquarters of companies involved in telecommunications, banking and insurance, energy and food processing. Gloucestershire reflects the national trend of a continuing shift in employment from the manufacturing sector to the service sector. In November 1999, the unemployment rate in the Gloucester and Cheltenham area was 2.5%. This figure compares with a national rate of 4.1%.

5 The college principal was appointed in June 1997, and a new senior management team has been recruited over the last two years. Financial difficulties identified in 1997 have resulted in a major reorganisation and redundancies. The college employs 661 full-time equivalent staff of whom 410 are involved in teaching and learning. Over the last two years the college has withdrawn from a number of annexes and consolidated its

Context

accommodation. It has invested in major building projects and a wide area computer network. A revised accommodation strategy is in place to establish a new campus for the Cheltenham site.

6 The college mission was refocused in 1999 through a vision statement entitled 'GLOSCAT 21'. The mission is 'to meet the changing needs of our community for high-quality education and training'. To achieve this aim the college is committed to: being student centred; being responsive to community needs; embracing technology; invest in people; and provide value for money. The college policy of continuous improvement in the quality of provision is based on setting and achieving high targets, particularly for retention and achievement, and self-assessment.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week commencing 24 January 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and studied information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately three months before the inspection. The inspection was one of the first to include an inspection of the scope of basic skills provision below level 2. The inspection covered basic skills provision in separate specialist programmes, where it is integrated with vocational programmes and as part of learning support. The inspection was carried out by 20 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 79.5 days in the college. Two inspectors spent five days inspecting the provision of both basic skills and of business administration at centres in the county of Gloucestershire. Inspectors observed 156 lessons, examined students' work and inspected college documents. They met with college governors, managers, staff, students and

representatives of external groups and organisations. Inspectors used data on students' achievements derived from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources of evidence such as registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and were found to be generally reliable.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 58% were judged to be good or outstanding. This figure is below the national average of 65% recorded for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. The percentage of less than satisfactory lessons matched the average of 6% for all lessons observed during 1998-99.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	3	12	16	3	0	34
GCSE	0	5	5	0	0	10
GNVQ	0	14	11	1	0	26
NVQ	2	9	3	1	0	15
Other vocational	6	23	14	2	0	45
Other including basic skills	3	14	7	2	0	26
Total (No.)	14	77	56	9	0	156
Total (%)	9	49	36	6	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology	9.5	72
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 19 lessons and one tutorial covering a range of science subjects offered by the college. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but judged that a number of strengths and weaknesses had not been identified or were understated.

Key strengths

- effective planning of teaching and learning
- good achievement in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) physics and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects
- flexible provision to meet individual students' needs
- well-maintained and well-equipped laboratory accommodation

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory teaching
- retention below national average in 1999
- poor integration of information technology (IT) with science teaching
- some poor laboratory practice

11 The college offers a range of science subjects, the majority of which are provided at the Cheltenham campus. GCE A level courses are available in physics, chemistry, biology, human biology, and sports studies. There are GCSE courses in physics, chemistry and human physiology and health. Evening classes are available in GCE A level chemistry and in both GCE A level and GCSE biological sciences. There is a GCE advanced supplementary (AS) course in science for public understanding in addition to an access course in physical science.

12 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teaching and learning is effectively planned, though some schemes of work lack detail and some do not specify the teaching methods and learning activities that will be adopted in lessons. Courses are well managed. They are offered in different ways and at different times to meet the needs of individual students. Students can opt for accelerated courses and have the opportunity to study GCE A level subjects over one or two years.

13 Most teaching is satisfactory or better and at an appropriate level for the course. Most students enjoy their courses. In most lessons, teachers hold students' attention and stimulate discussion and interaction through appropriate questioning. In some lessons, learning objectives are not clearly stated and the purpose of learning activities is not sufficiently explained to students. In a few lessons, students do not contribute to discussions and teaching methods do not encourage them to take part. In the weaker lessons teachers fail to check students' understanding of key points. Clear, detailed and appropriate handouts and worksheets support some teaching. Most students' files are well organised and students' written work is usually neat, well structured and of an appropriate standard. Practical work is well organised and resourced. Students exhibit good practical and group work skills. In a minority of practical lessons, work is carried out with insufficient regard for health and safety. For example, teachers paid insufficient attention to safety requirements which necessitate students to wear laboratory coats and eye protection. The self-assessment report acknowledges that IT is seldom integrated with science teaching and inspectors agree.

14 Teachers are well qualified and most have a teaching qualification. They are well supported by laboratory technician staff. The teaching laboratories are well equipped and the furniture is modern and in good condition. Laboratory equipment is up to date and

Curriculum Areas

available in sufficient quantity to enable students to develop good practical skills. Materials and posters on display give the laboratories a particular subject identity. The learning centres on both sites are well equipped with computers for student use. However, only a minority of students wordprocess their assignments. Students appreciate the help given by learning centre staff and by individual science teachers outside timetabled lessons.

15 Students are set appropriate assignments and tests. Assignments are marked accurately and staff provide effective feedback to help students improve their performance. Both students and teachers effectively use well-designed assessment sheets. Pass rates in GCE A level human biology, biology, and

chemistry are close to the national average and improving. In GCE A level physics, students' achievements are consistently above the national average with a pass rate of 92% in 1999. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that retention rates have been low, particularly in GCE A level biology, human biology and sport studies. Retention rates in GCE A level chemistry and physics have declined over the last three years. Retention in GCE A level biology subjects dropped sharply in 1999 to 50%. GCSE achievements are good with pass rates around 90% and 30% of students achieve grades A to C. Retention rates in GCSE subjects have in the past been close to national averages, but some declined in 1999.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE physics	2	Number of starters	*	33	25
		Retention (%)	*	79	60
		Achievement (%)	*	62	93
GCSE science	2	Number of starters	130	154	128
		Retention (%)	59	78	62
		Achievement (%)	86	64	87
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	48	62	58
		Retention (%)	81	81	50
		Achievement (%)	59	68	70
GCE A level human biology	3	Number of starters	109	77	62
		Retention (%)	66	70	47
		Achievement (%)	36	41	61
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	45	56	59
		Retention (%)	78	77	63
		Achievement (%)	63	65	68
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	42	39	42
		Retention (%)	76	74	62
		Achievement (%)	72	76	92
GCE A level sports studies	3	Number of starters	13	19	27
		Retention (%)	54	68	48
		Achievement (%)	14	85	67

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

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

16 Inspectors observed 18 lessons covering the range of full-time and part-time programmes in engineering at both of the college's main sites. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but they considered that the report overstated the quality of teaching and learning and gave insufficient weight to students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good retention rates on most courses
- good range of courses with effective initial assessment and guidance for students
- effective industrial links
- good resources to support computer-aided engineering

Weaknesses

- many poorly planned lessons
- failure to address the range of student ability
- poor attendance on tutorial support programmes
- underdeveloped assessment planning and reporting methods

17 Engineering provision includes a good range of courses at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels, including craft and technician qualifications. Courses cover electronics, mechanical engineering, motor vehicle, electrical and fabrication and welding. The range of courses and effective initial assessment and guidance ensure that students study the most appropriate subject at the right level. There are good opportunities for progression. These strengths are recognised in the self-assessment report. The programme area is well supported by effective links with local industry. Inspectors

agreed with the self-assessment that this is a strength. These links provide effective work experience opportunities for some full-time students. Assignments on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced course are directly linked with work experience.

18 Much teaching is satisfactory or better and there are some examples of outstanding teaching. Students' practical learning is based on well-designed practical tasks and is enthusiastic. However, there is unsatisfactory planning by teachers in a significant number of lessons. Too often teachers fail to take account of students' differing abilities and fail to check that learning is taking place. In a minority of lessons, teachers fail to stimulate the students and do not encourage them to participate in the work through questioning and discussion. The planning of assignments is often poor and gives insufficient guidance to students. Written feedback from teachers is insufficiently detailed to help students improve their performance. The self-assessment report did not recognise these significant weaknesses.

19 Assessment of the learning support needs of full-time students does not always lead to effective support being provided. Teachers are conscious of the need to integrate key skills with the learning and assessment process, but often opportunities for the assessment of key skills are missed with little correction of spelling, grammar and punctuation. The mapping and integration of key skills with the GNVQ advanced course is an example of good practice. All substantive programmes have a timetabled tutorial and students receive the minimum tutorial entitlement. Tutorials are poorly attended and mainly consist of catching up with coursework.

20 Pass rates are at the national average for the engineering programme area. Retention is good and above the national average. Pass and retention rates, apart from those for motor vehicle studies, have shown a gradual

Curriculum Areas

improvement over the last three years. The self-assessment report recognised the strength in retention, but gave insufficient attention to students' achievements. Targets are set for retention and achievement and these are monitored at course level. The quality of students' work is of an appropriate standard and is often related to their work experience. In a fabrication and welding lesson, students were working enthusiastically on industry-based projects. Students assessed each other's work and gave encouragement to their colleagues. The assessment of students' work in the machine shop is measured against quality, accuracy and time taken. Relative weightings of these have been amended recently after consultation with employers. There are good levels of attendance on most engineering courses and good systems for monitoring and reporting absence.

21 Well-qualified teachers ensure that the curriculum requirements are met. The programme area employs technician instructors and training advisers for in-company assessment. They also work with other technicians and the learning centre staff to provide active support for students and teachers. Accommodation is fit for the purpose and mostly provides a satisfactory learning environment. Generally, the programme area is well equipped. The machine tool stock is dated, but has been well maintained and meets the programme requirements. There are few facilities which enable students to use digital read-out equipment on machine tools. There are good resources in support of computer-aided engineering. The learning centres have good stocks of engineering books and periodicals. However, much of the bookstock is becoming outdated. The engineering students are making increasing use of the learning centres.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G electrical/electronic	1	Number of starters	148	111	145
		Retention (%)	74	71	85
		Achievement (%)	41	*	61
C&G mechanical/ manufacture	1 and 2	Number of starters	124	134	54
		Retention (%)	82	93	94
		Achievement (%)	*	38	47
C&G electrical/electronic	2	Number of starters	91	61	88
		Retention (%)	81	82	89
		Achievement (%)	42	52	51
GNVQ and precursors mechanical manufacture	3	Number of starters	62	71	45
		Retention (%)	76	69	71
		Achievement (%)	73	69	82
GNVQ and precursors electrical/electronic	3	Number of starters	67	56	38
		Retention (%)	76	66	95
		Achievement (%)	45	73	85
Motor vehicle studies	All levels	Number of starters	43	51	37
		Retention (%)	81	78	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	73

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

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Business Administration

Grade 2

22 Inspectors observed 25 lessons covering a range of full-time and part-time provision at the main college sites and at a wide range of other centres in the community. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective work experience
- good retention on most courses
- well-planned and effective teaching
- good range of learning resources
- good IT facilities

Weaknesses

- poor achievement on integrated business technology courses
- low attendance and punctuality on many courses
- some poor assessment feedback

23 There is a wide range of provision of business administration courses giving good opportunities for students' progression. For example, students studying national vocational qualifications (NVQ) at levels 2 and 3 in business administration and customer service study in the same workshops. This has resulted in students enrolling on to the next level of study in their subject area. Students receive good-quality advice on progression to further and higher education courses. There is community provision of courses at foundation and level 1. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the teaching and guidance given on these programmes was generally of a good standard enabling adults and students with learning disabilities to return to learn.

24 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that lessons are well planned with an appropriate balance of theory and practical work and effectively managed. Teachers are appropriately qualified for the courses they teach and many hold assessor awards. Students are able to learn at their own pace with positive encouragement from teachers. They are encouraged to ask questions and to comment on their work. Students receive constructive and supportive individual tuition in workshops and tutorials. For example, in NVQ and foundation lessons in IT, teachers help students to develop their skills and are particularly understanding when students experience difficulties. There is a good range of practical workbooks with a series of exercises that are mapped across the course syllabus. These also take account of individual learning styles and needs. Students negotiate learning objectives with their tutor and are skilled at compiling portfolios and referencing their evidence in line with awarding body requirements. Key skills are taught effectively across the NVQ courses. In some assessments, opportunities for assessing key skills were missed. There were some poor examples of teachers' written feedback on students' assessed work which failed to identify clearly how students could build on their strengths and rectify their weaknesses.

25 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that courses are well managed with targets set for retention and achievement. There are strong links with industry which support an effective and efficient work placement programme for NVQ administration students and for some students on courses held at other centres in the community. Work experience provides a valuable source of evidence for students on NVQ courses and enables them to complete course units. Students are visited regularly and there is a thorough system for reporting and evaluating students' progress. Staff, work supervisors and students contribute to the recording of progress. At these

Curriculum Areas

meetings students share their experiences which inform and support their learning. Students report that the work experience is an invaluable part of completing and achieving their qualification. In tutorials individual targets are set with students on many courses. These are recorded and monitored regularly to ensure that students achieve them.

26 There is low attendance and poor punctuality on many courses. In a few lessons teachers do not question students about late arrival. In some cases, this affects the learning of other students in the class. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that retention on most courses is good and above national averages. Retention has declined slightly on some courses, such as NVQ level 2 administration, over the last three years. Pass rates on most courses are above the national

average and many students achieve high grades. However, the integrated business technology level 2 course which enrolls a significant number of students has poor achievement rates which are below the national average. There is careful monitoring of student destinations. Many students are offered employment from their work placement and many students return to courses on a part-time basis.

27 There are good IT facilities and the development of two new business learning centres provides opportunities for workshop activities and for students to learn on their own. Most accommodation is good. Most of the rooms are equipped with IT facilities that enable teachers to use IT in a variety of ways in teaching a wide range of courses.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Office procedures (short)	1	Number of starters	44	37	36
		Retention (%)	93	92	89
		Achievement (%)	66	81	81
Text processing (short and long)	1	Number of starters	236	188	221
		Retention (%)	94	95	92
		Achievement (%)	77	54	70
Integrated business technology (long)	2	Number of starters	167	166	335
		Retention (%)	92	100	95
		Achievement (%)	37	49	40
NVQ administration (long)	2	Number of starters	12	55	45
		Retention (%)	100	91	81
		Achievement (%)	50	59	69
Business administration (long)	3	Number of starters	8	10	13
		Retention (%)	88	90	100
		Achievement (%)	71	44	38
NVQ administration (long)	3	Number of starters	54	88	87
		Retention (%)	89	88	84
		Achievement (%)	46	23	89

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

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 3

28 Inspectors observed 11 lessons in hospitality and catering. The self-assessment report was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses, but considered that some strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- well-structured and effective teaching
- good progression routes to meet individual needs
- variety of well-resourced working environments
- well-developed industrial links

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement on many courses
- some specialist resources becoming outdated

29 The college offers a range of hospitality and catering programmes from foundation to advanced level and includes NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 and foundation, intermediate and advanced GNVQs. Other programmes offered include those in pastry and bakery, cake decoration and sugar craft, licensed trade and food hygiene and safety. New provision involving several community projects is widening participation in this area. The department has well-established close links with industry both locally and nationally, as identified in the self-assessment report.

30 There is much good teaching. Lesson plans clearly identify learning outcomes. Key skills have been effectively integrated with programmes of study. Teachers employ a variety of methods in lessons which take careful account of the different learning needs of

students whilst retaining students' interest. Practical lessons are well managed to industrial standards. Students often work independently with constructive support from teachers. Teachers use good examples of their own industrial experience to illustrate good practice and bring vocational relevance to their teaching. The variety of realistic working environments in the area provides good opportunities for students to gain valuable experience. All students are encouraged to gain industrial experience and those on GNVQ foundation and advanced programmes have effective and well-managed industrial placements as part of their studies. A variety of themed menus increases students' planning and technical understanding. Students are involved in various events outside the college such as the Cheltenham Gold Cup race meeting. During 1999, 30 students were successful in a variety of competitions.

31 Courses are well structured and well managed. There is an appropriate balance of theory and practice. Schemes of work are well structured and detailed in most cases. Students receive copies of schemes of work to help them plan their work. There are regular team meetings. Students' representatives attend these meetings and can influence course development.

32 There is a broad range of additional qualifications that students can gain to increase their knowledge and improve their employment prospects. Individual students' needs are identified during the initial stages at college. Assessments take place at college and in the workplace and good use is made of third-party witness statements. Students are actively involved in negotiating assessments that can take place outside the learning programme. Assignments are well structured and relevant to the industry. They are accurately marked with appropriate comments made by tutors. Some students make good use of IT in producing assignments. There is good use of photography

Curriculum Areas

by food preparation, sugar craft and cake decorating students to record completed products. Assessments are well monitored, recorded and internally verified. Accreditation of students' prior learning is underdeveloped, as recognised in the self-assessment report, but is being addressed. Parents and guardians are invited to the college to discuss progress of students.

33 On many courses, retention and achievement rates are poor, which was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. Retention at 55% and achievement at 59% on the GNVQ advanced hotel and catering are below the national average despite a slight improvement over the past three years. Achievement on the NVQ in food preparation remains below the national average despite rising from 44% to 61% between 1997 and 1999, but retention is good. Retention has declined on the NVQ serving food and drink and while achievement has improved over the past two years it is still below the national average at 54% in 1999. Some students who leave early, successfully complete related qualifications over a longer period of time. For example, of the 24 students who did not complete the GNVQ advanced in 1999, 58% are working towards it or have gained a hospitality qualification. Inspectors agreed that there is good progression to employment and further education. In 1999, 34% of GNVQ advanced students progressed to higher education.

34 Teachers possess good, relevant industrial experience and are well qualified. There is a well-constructed staff appraisal and development programme that includes industrial updating. Practical areas are well resourced with a variety of equipment; some items are becoming outdated and are in need of attention. Some areas have displays of students' work. Library resources are good and the department has a variety of appropriate learning resources for students to use during their studies.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
The Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene primary certificate in food hygiene	1	Number of starters	158	114	250
		Retention (%)	100	100	97
		Achievement (%)	82	90	87
NVQ craft baking (two-year programme)	2	Number of starters	17	12	10
		Retention (%)	53	67	70
		Achievement (%)	89	75	71
NVQ serving food and drink (one-year and two-year programmes)	2	Number of starters	35	120	104
		Retention (%)	94	81	62
		Achievement (%)	43	43	54
NVQ food preparation and cooking (one-year and two-year programmes)	2	Number of starters	63	174	146
		Retention (%)	96	78	79
		Achievement (%)	44	58	61
GNVQ intermediate hospitality and catering	2	Number of starters	26	28	31
		Retention (%)	85	93	77
		Achievement (%)	77	62	79
GNVQ advanced hospitality and catering	3	Number of starters	52	37	53
		Retention (%)	52	51	55
		Achievement (%)	48	53	59

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

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

35 The inspection covered health and social care courses and childcare courses from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors observed 19 lessons. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective use of work experience
- good progression opportunities
- thorough assessment procedures
- good tutor support on all programmes
- effective use of visiting speakers

Weaknesses

- low retention on many courses
- poor achievements on some courses
- some weaknesses in classroom management
- little use of IT
- some poor classroom accommodation at the Park campus

36 The health and social care programme area offers a good range of programmes, including GNVQs in health and social care, the certificate in caring for people, the national diploma in childhood studies, the diploma in nursery nursing and the certificate in childcare and education. The college also offers a range of short courses in care and childcare. This range offers good progression routes within the college and to higher education, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report.

37 Inspectors agreed that there is effective use of work experience which is valued by students. Teachers use the students' experiences to good

effect to reinforce classroom work. In one lesson, students used their experiences in the nursery setting to help them understand early learning goals. Course leaders regularly visit and monitor students in their placements and maintain close links with placement supervisors. Reports are shared with students in tutorials.

38 Teaching and learning is well planned with detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. In the best lessons, students engage in research or practical activities that make learning interesting. One group developed skills for interviewing by playing the roles of interviewer and interviewee. In some lessons, teachers do not introduce the work effectively and the aims are not made clear to students. In the weaker lessons, teachers do not effectively include all students in discussion or regularly check students' learning. In some other lessons, teachers did not leave enough time to summarise the work effectively. These weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed that there is regular and effective use of a wide range of visiting speakers, many from work experience placements.

39 There is little use of IT on the majority of the courses, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. GNVQ health and social care students are not encouraged to use their IT skills on a regular basis in assignments. There is insufficient IT teaching on childcare courses to prepare students for the requirements of the industry. Key skills, particularly communication, are addressed in all GNVQ assignments, but inspectors did not identify much evidence of key skills being addressed in lessons.

40 Assessment procedures are thorough. Assignments are appropriately linked to care practice and many draw on students' personal experiences. Tutors are rigorous in marking students' work and provide detailed and constructive feedback that enables students to improve their skills and make progress.

Curriculum Areas

41 Too many students fail to complete their courses. GNVQ foundation in health and social care had poor retention at 53% in 1999. GNVQ intermediate and advanced in social care and the certificate in caring for people had poor retention in 1998 and 1999. Students' achievements are poor on some courses. The achievement rate on the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care has been just below the national average in 1998 and 1999. On the GNVQ advanced in health and social care achievements have been poor for the last three years, at 69%, 70% and 49%, respectively. The certificate in caring for people had poor achievements in 1998 and 1999. These are weaknesses not identified in the self-assessment report. On childcare courses retention and achievement is good. Students show appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding

and skills in lessons and in their written work. For one assignment, childcare students had made a range of visual aids to help in storytelling. The aids were piloted during work experience and supervisors gave constructive feedback.

42 Most accommodation for health, social and childcare is of a satisfactory standard and fit for purpose. The library carries a reasonable range of materials relevant to the area. The learning centre has a good, up-to-date stock of books for reference purposes and space for the students to work on the two computers or quietly at workstations. A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is the poor classroom accommodation at the Park campus. The main base room for childcare courses and the outside huts are in poor condition with little space to display students' work.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation in health and social care	1	Number of starters	16	25	17
		Retention (%)	88	92	53
		Achievement (%)	57	57	89
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Number of starters	50	51	48
		Retention (%)	80	67	69
		Achievement (%)	75	68	70
Certificate in caring for people	2	Number of starters	14	28	17
		Retention (%)	100	75	59
		Achievement (%)	100	76	70
GNVQ advanced in health and social care	3	Number of starters	81	79	76
		Retention (%)	75	58	63
		Achievement (%)	69	70	49
National diploma in childhood studies (nursery nursing)	3	Number of starters	15	21	28
		Retention (%)	100	57	68
		Achievement (%)	93	67	89
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	39	40	49
		Retention (%)	95	88	82
		Achievement (%)	73	86	86

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

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design and Media Studies

Grade 2

43 Inspectors observed 21 lessons in visual arts, design, and media across the college. Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching methods
- good achievement on most vocational courses
- outstanding quality of work by part-time craft students
- effective development of distance learning
- good art and design media resource centre

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- detrimental separation of part-time courses from full-time vocational provision
- poor quality of some written feedback
- poor oral skills of vocational students on many courses

44 There is a wide and appropriate range of vocational courses in art, design and media, including GNVQ intermediate and advanced, GCE A levels, national diplomas in design and an access to higher education course. There is an extensive programme of City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) subjects offered at the Christchurch centre and GCE A levels at the Park campus. Progression routes are well established. The self-assessment report identifies good progression to higher education and inspectors agreed. There is, however, a detrimental separation of part-time courses from full-time vocational courses. There is an organisational separation of staff with little sharing of good practice or deployment of teachers to ensure that the skills they have are

appropriate to the courses they teach.

Curriculum development has led to provision of an innovative and exemplary distance learning course in C&G craft subjects which is successfully widening student participation. National diploma design courses are well geared to the needs of industry. Visiting lecturers assist in devising student projects and several college governors regularly offer advice on business studies and professional practice.

45 Most teaching is well managed. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. Teachers use a good range of appropriate teaching methods. Practical work is successfully integrated with theory. Teachers set students realistic, but demanding tasks. Students experience a variety of appropriate activities which stimulate and encourage their involvement. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that courses are well structured with clear schemes of work. Project briefs, handouts and support materials issued to students are well considered and informative. Practical assignments are well prepared and relevant to the industry. However, the quality of formal written feedback to students is not uniformly good and this is not recorded in the self-assessment report. Inspectors observed many students with poor oral skills. They are hesitant in discussion and lacking confidence, particularly in the use of basic art and design terminology. An overall teaching strategy to improve this is not yet in evidence. The self-assessment report identified the effective integration of key skills with GNVQ programmes and inspectors agreed with this.

46 The majority of students completing their course gain the qualification. There are good pass rates on most vocational courses. Pass rates for GNVQ intermediate and advanced art and design, the foundation (pre-higher education) and national diploma full-time courses are consistently higher than the national average, although those for the GNVQ courses declined in 1999. Retention rates on some

Curriculum Areas

courses are below the national average and this is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Retention has fallen from 100% to 77% over three years on the intermediate GNVQ.

Retention was low in 1999 on the foundation (pre-higher education) course at 73%, GCE A level media studies at 72%, and the national diplomas in communications and media at 71% and 70%, respectively.

47 The quality of most students' work is good and there were some examples of outstanding work. In three C&G part-time craft classes the standard of work is exemplary. The quality of students' work from the craft design classes features frequently in national exhibitions. The college displays students' work most effectively in public areas of the college and in a dedicated exhibition space at the Brunswick campus. There is a particularly joyful and pleasing series

of paintings on permanent display at the Park campus produced by students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

48 Many members of staff are practising artists and designers. They are well qualified and have valuable industrial and commercial experience which they bring to their teaching. The arts, design and media studio facilities are good and well equipped. An excellent media resources centre has been established at the Brunswick campus. The workshops for three-dimensional design and construction are small and lack equipment to enable students to work with metals and plastics. There is a lack of storage space in all three-dimensional areas, but particularly in display design where one-third of a studio has to be used to store students' project work. Good IT resources are available to staff and students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	30	21	26
		Retention (%)	100	95	77
		Achievement (%)	93	95	85
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	25	24	26
		Retention (%)	68	71	81
		Achievement (%)	100	100	86
GCE A level fine art and media studies (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	90	114	68
		Retention (%)	77	77	74
		Achievement (%)	86	76	82
National diploma foundation pre-degree art and design	3	Number of starters	22	25	22
		Retention (%)	95	92	73
		Achievement (%)	100	96	100
National diploma in design and in media studies	3	Number of starters	71	72	75
		Retention (%)	73	71	73
		Achievement (%)	93	92	95
Access to higher education art and design (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	12	17	28
		Retention (%)	75	88	75
		Achievement (%)	*	80	52

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

*unreliable data

Curriculum Areas

Humanities

Grade 3

49 Inspectors observed 24 lessons and two tutorials that covered courses in English, communication studies, psychology, sociology, history, geography and included a small number of courses in counselling and teacher education. Inspectors judged that the self-assessment report overstated strengths in teaching and learning and in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good pass rates in some GCE A level subjects
- wide availability of provision
- consistently methodical, well-planned teaching
- effective curriculum management across sites

Weaknesses

- low retention
- restricted range of learning methods
- low attendance
- some poor assessment

50 The college's GCSE and GCE A level provision of humanities and social studies subjects is widely available. Students are offered one-year, two-year, full-time, part-time, day and evening programmes. A variety of introductory and GCSE courses is offered on Saturday mornings. The further education teachers' certificate is offered at two different times during the year. Overall enrolments on humanities and social studies courses have declined between 1997 and 1999. This has made some classes small or no longer viable. Low and inconsistent attendance in many classes hinders the continuity and effectiveness of teaching and learning. In some curriculum

areas there is effective co-ordination and communication to overcome the split-site provision. In psychology, for example, there are common schemes of work, joint moderation of coursework and some sharing of resources.

51 There is insufficient opportunity for students to experience different methods of learning. Many lessons consist of exposition by the teacher, question and answer sessions and group work with clearly prescribed tasks. Lesson plans seldom indicate how the learning needs of individual students are to be met. Younger students rarely ask questions or reply at length to teachers' questions. They have few occasions for exploring ideas or developing wider skills. In some lessons, teachers are not effective in checking students' understanding. Teaching is methodical. It gives students a firm sense of direction. Students receive many well-prepared handouts. Teachers display good subject knowledge. They build students' confidence through guidance and practice to meet the requirements of examination syllabuses. Schemes of work for GCSE and GCE A level subjects give priority to knowledge at the expense of understanding and skills. In teaching and counselling lessons, adult students reflect on what they learn. Discussion is well focused and articulate with students showing an ability to apply theory to practice.

52 Different methods of assessment are used across the department and, as a result, students are sometimes uncertain about the criteria by which their work is assessed or the different ways in which teachers award grades. Teachers usually mark content thoroughly and add helpful comments. However, the feedback given to students on their work by teachers is not always effective and some students do not receive sufficient feedback to improve their performance. The weaknesses in teaching and learning identified by inspectors were not included in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

53 The self-assessment report provided insufficient analysis of students' achievements and retention. In 1997 and 1998, rates in two-year GCE A level courses were close to the national average for students aged 16 to 18. A clear improvement occurred in 1999. There were pass rates of 90% or higher on two-year GCE A level courses in psychology, English and communications studies. Pass rates on one-year GCE A level humanities and social studies courses in 1999 show a big improvement. For example, the pass rate in GCE A level English literature was 42% in 1997 and 89% in 1999. GCSE pass rates in 1997 were mostly above the national average but mostly below it in 1998. There were some high GCSE pass rates in sociology and communication studies in 1999. Over the period 1997 to 1999, retention fluctuated on GCSE and one-year GCE A level courses. It remains consistently low on two-year GCE A level courses. On many courses, retention declined from 1998 to 1999.

Low retention is recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Action intended to improve retention has yet to make an impact. Results for adult students on stage 2 of the further education teachers' certificate exceeded the national average in 1999 after the course had been redesigned to improve progression from stage 1.

54 Teachers are well qualified. Some staff have not yet developed sufficient confidence to make use of IT in their teaching. Very little students' work is on display in classrooms. The two libraries have an adequate stock of books. The sociology section of the Gloucester site offers a good range of data on national statistical and social trends. Humanities and social studies subjects have web pages on the college's network which direct students to an increasing number of relevant sites on the Internet.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE humanities and social science subjects	2	Number of starters	430	398	252
		Retention (%)	75	79	67
		Achievement (%)	57	43	52
GCE A level humanities and social science subjects (two-year course, students aged 16 to 18)	3	Number of starters	391	370	340
		Retention (%)	61	68	56
		Achievement (%)	78	75	90
GCE A level humanities and social science subjects (one-year course, students aged over 19)	3	Number of starters	328	259	277
		Retention (%)	73	79	69
		Achievement (%)	57	55	73
Further education teachers' certificate stage 2 and certificate in counselling skills in development of learning	3	Number of starters	69	54	51
		Retention (%)	90	98	90
		Achievement (%)	74	74	88

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

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

55 Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that there was some underestimation of both strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide-ranging curriculum at entry and level 1
- comprehensive quality assurance framework
- improving retention and achievement
- good integration and support for students with physical disabilities and/or specific learning difficulties
- well-motivated, participative students

Weaknesses

- restricted range of teaching methods
- underdeveloped diagnostic assessment and intervention
- little cross-college development of basic skills
- restricted provision to meet the needs of 16 to 19 olds

56 Inspectors observed 16 lessons and one study support session on the main college sites and at seven community centres. Lessons included family literacy, basic skills on vocational programmes, literacy, numeracy sessions, and Wordpower for a group of students with severe disabilities on an access to further education programme.

57 The college has effectively anticipated the national agenda for providing a comprehensive basic skills curriculum below level 2 as an integral core entitlement across the college. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that implementation is at an

early stage of development. The provision includes a separate specialist course, integration and support of basic skills within vocational and other programme areas, and basic skills as part of learning support. The provision is responsive, wide ranging and includes considerable community provision. The college has set demanding targets to increase and improve the provision for the current year. Full-time and part-time provision is available and developments include a successful family learning initiative, good standards of work in basic skills for deaf learners, an increase in the number of short courses and a challenging access to further education programme.

58 Most teaching is well planned and effective. It is supported by a recently developed quality assurance framework which provides teachers and students with a structure for negotiating an appropriate curriculum which takes account of individual students' needs. There is evidence that it is already being used to good effect. The strength of this framework was underestimated in the self-assessment report. Initial assessment is a formal part of the process and is used as a starting point for learning. However, following this, there is little diagnostic assessment to ascertain a student's more specific needs or to ensure that appropriate support is offered. For example, a student with auditory difficulties was offered phonic worksheets to help spelling development. This was not wholly effective and a more diagnostic process would have enabled teachers to develop methods which took more specific account of the student's particular difficulties. Some teachers rely too much on using worksheets for individual students' learning. Assignment work is well presented by teachers, particularly on the access to further education full-time course. There is some poor marking of students' work which does not give them any help as to how it might be improved. Teachers create a positive atmosphere in classrooms promoting participation in, and enjoyment of, learning.

Curriculum Areas

59 The college has developed productive links with external organisations to develop progression and opportunity. Workplace basic skills development, links with employment projects and family learning initiatives in the community all contribute to the role of the college in responding to the Moser report. The scope of basic skills provision across the college is still limited though partnership arrangements with vocational departments are becoming established. Targets have been set to strengthen basic skills learning support through more systematic referral of students from other programme areas. Teachers from other programme areas are being trained so that different sections can begin to take responsibility for developing the basic skills of their students.

60 Inspectors agreed that the college has undertaken a systematic process to address retention and achievement and improvements are clearly visible. Rates on most programmes are above the national average though the

college acknowledges the need to improve monitoring and to raise tutor awareness of the targets set. The development of National Open College Network (NOCN) level 1 accreditation has been particularly successful in enabling students to work for units in a more manageable way which fits in with the time they can give to attend courses and to study. The college encourages students to make their own choices and while this provides a sound model for planning goals and progression, further work is required to monitor its results to see if they lead to improvements in students' qualifications.

61 Resources are generally good including adequate accommodation in community venues. The development of learning centres at the main sites is appreciated by students who are increasingly confident in the use of these sites for group sessions. Initial concerns about the lack of confidential space within these environments have been successfully overcome. There is little use of IT to support learning.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G Wordpower/ communication foundation (discrete provision)	Entry	Number of starters	26	156	86
		Retention (%)	100	86	88
		Achievement (%)	96	13	58
C&G Numberpower/ numeracy foundation (discrete provision)	Entry	Number of starters	26	132	83
		Retention (%)	100	95	86
		Achievement (%)	0	7	67
C&G Wordpower/ communication (discrete provision)	1	Number of starters	7	38	33
		Retention (%)	100	100	91
		Achievement (%)	86	89	40
NOCN (discrete provision)	1	Number of starters	*	58	38
		Retention (%)	*	100	82
		Achievement (%)	*	3	59
Achievement test literacy (discrete provision)	1, 2 and 3	Number of starters	*	36	15
		Retention (%)	*	94	100
		Achievement (%)	*	6	60

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

*course not running

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

62 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated or represented normal practice and that the full significance of some weaknesses was not recognised.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry information and guidance
- effective induction
- good support given by personal tutors
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- provision of financial and personal help for students

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory arrangements to assess students' levels of literacy and numeracy
- low take-up of additional learning support
- inadequate records of students' progress reviews
- underdeveloped tutorial arrangements
- lack of clear arrangements for providing careers education and guidance

63 Support services available to students are well documented in a new guide for college staff. Management of support for students is shared between three senior managers. This arrangement generally works well and there is good collaboration between the various parts of the service. Some aspects of support for students are still being developed.

64 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there is good guidance for prospective students. The college's schools' liaison service offers an extensive range of services to schools to encourage pupils to progress to further education. The college adopts a wide range of recruitment methods. The college also provides an effective guidance service after the publication of GCSE and GCE A level results.

65 Application and admission arrangements are clear. All prospective full-time students receive an interview. Interviews are available on request for part-time students. All prospective students can request an interview with a member of the college's guidance team. Where appropriate, staff guide students to more suitable provision elsewhere. Students find staff at the college friendly and welcoming. The college has improved its enrolment and induction procedures in response to student feedback. Students find induction helpful and informative. An induction booklet has been produced to ensure that all students receive essential information.

66 Every student has a personal tutor. For part-time students this is often the course tutor. The support provided by personal tutors is good. A structured tutorial entitlement for all students was introduced in September 1999, in response to inconsistent practice identified by the college. There is no college-wide tutorial programme and no handbook of guidance for personal tutors, although these are being developed. Most tutorials are satisfactory or better. Students' attendance at some group tutorials was low. One-to-one tutorials enable students to discuss their progress with tutors. These meetings are supportive, but the records rarely summarise the students' current achievement or detail actions agreed to maintain or improve performance.

Cross-college Provision

67 The college does not have clear arrangements to provide careers education and guidance for students. In the past, it made extensive use of careers guidance provided through its partnership agreement with the local careers service. As the self-assessment report states, the college is developing a structured careers education programme as part of a bid to achieve Investor in Careers status. There are adequately resourced open access careers centres at the two main sites. Students can also book appointments with college guidance advisers or attend workshops on aspects of careers and entry to higher education.

68 The self-assessment report stated that all full-time students receive an assessment of their key skills levels at the start of their course. Different areas of the college use a variety of assessment methods. The introduction of a college-wide computer-based assessment this year proved problematic. The additional support needs of most part-time students are not assessed. Students can be referred to the learning support team by a number of routes, including self-referral. They can receive support by arrangement with tutors in the learning centres or from learning support tutors working alongside vocational teachers in lessons. Learning support tutors have some good informal links with course teams, but there is no formal liaison. Feedback is given to course teachers and personal tutors, but learning support tutors receive little response to their requests for further information about students. The documentation used in learning support and in the identification and review of students' specific learning goals is not always completed properly. Most students who have used the learning support service say that it has helped them. However, take-up is low. Inspectors agreed that there is good support for students with disabilities and/or specific learning difficulties on mainstream courses. The college makes a careful assessment of their needs and provides a wide range of appropriate specialist

support and equipment. The college has successfully established a course providing access to further education for adults with disabilities.

69 Students receive good personal guidance and support from student services. Financial and welfare advice is provided sensitively. Qualified professional counsellors are available to students in suitably private accommodation, addressing a weakness found in the last inspection. Students also have access to college chaplains. The college provides substantial support for students through its childcare provision and financial support funds.

70 The college's student liaison officer and a sports development officer work closely with the students' union executive and its sabbatical president. They arrange sporting and other activities. Work is in hand to encourage students' greater involvement in union affairs and to develop a programme of enrichment activities to meet the requirements of curriculum 2000.

Cross-college Provision

General Resources

Grade 3

71 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. Some of the weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- detailed and well-researched accommodation planning
- attractive and welcoming reception areas
- well-placed and good-quality accommodation for student services
- good access for students and staff to modern computers
- spacious and well-equipped learning centres
- high-quality accommodation and resources at the larger centres in the community

Weaknesses

- extensive and ageing estate with high maintenance and improvement costs
- poor access for students with restricted mobility in many areas
- some poor-quality teaching accommodation
- some low levels of accommodation usage
- few sports facilities

72 The college has a large and difficult estate, which is expensive to maintain and improve, at both its main sites. It has made some significant improvements to this accommodation over the last few years, but fundamental problems remain. The new centres in Tewkesbury, Cheltenham and Gloucester provide high-quality accommodation and resources. The accommodation strategy provides a clear vision for the future that will lead to major improvements in the accommodation available to students. Inspectors agreed with the

self-assessment report that the college's plans to vacate its site in Cheltenham and move to new, purpose-built premises are well advanced. These plans have received FEFC approval in principle. Both main sites comprise a mixture of old and more recent buildings. Some parts of all these buildings offer high-quality accommodation but, as the self-assessment report identifies, in other parts the accommodation is poorer. Some specialist accommodation is inconveniently located. For example, construction workshops are on the first floor at Gloucester.

73 As the self-assessment report identifies, the college has undertaken detailed analyses of its space utilisation. Three underused annexes have been vacated in the last two years. Many of the poorest quality teaching rooms at Cheltenham are now closed. The college still has some underused accommodation. Reception areas are welcoming and well adapted to their use. Improvements to the accommodation for student services have resulted in high-quality environments for this aspect of the college's work. They are attractive and spacious and include smaller rooms for private interviews.

74 There are wide differences in the quality of classrooms. Some classrooms are enlivened by good displays of students' work. The furniture and fittings in some classrooms are poor. Public areas and corridors often have attractive displays of art work. Difficulties with heating systems in some areas result in rooms that are too cold or too hot. The college is adequately maintained, but there are areas where the lack of maintenance detracts from the image of the area. In general, cleaning standards are adequate.

75 Inspectors agreed with the college that students and staff have good access to modern computers which offer a wide range of software and good access to the Internet. There has been a major investment in new computers; 45% of computers were new in the last 12 months. The

Cross-college Provision

ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:6.4. At the large learning centres at both main sites there are accessible computers and a wide range of other resources to support learning. These centres are supplemented in many areas by smaller subject specific learning centres that are also well equipped with modern computers. Staff IT skills are being improved by the introduction of an IT staff support workshop. The college has a clear information learning technology strategy. The intranet 'GlosWeb' has details of courses, resources and staff in each area of the college. Increasingly, staff and students are able to access teaching schemes and materials on a wide area network linking all sites.

76 The quality of teaching accommodation and resources at centres in the community varies widely. In the newer centres at Tewkesbury, and the 'Do IT' centres in Gloucester and Cheltenham the accommodation is spacious and resources are of high quality. A wide range of modern computers is available. Furniture is new and the centres are well designed to ease movement and work.

77 Catering and recreational facilities are adequate. The refectories are not attractive or well furnished. Only a minority of students regard them as offering good service and value for money. Facilities for indoor sports are available at the Cheltenham site, but not at Gloucester as identified in the self-assessment report. The college does not own any facilities for outdoor sports, but does run sports teams by leasing local sports fields. There are attractive day nurseries at both main sites, but they are in hatted accommodation away from the centre of each campus.

78 The college is not an easy environment for people with restricted mobility. The self-assessment report identifies that the college has made some progress in improving access, but does not identify the problems remaining as a weakness. At the Cheltenham site access to

some areas is impossible. For example, some science laboratories can only be accessed by a steep stairway. The Gloucester site is mainly accessible, although some areas are not easy. Paved areas and car parks are uneven. The college has made improvements, but further significant improvements are difficult to envisage without very significant costs.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

79 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in quality assurance. Inspectors gave more weight to the impact on retention and achievement in their overall judgement of the effectiveness of quality assurance.

Key strengths

- comprehensive quality assurance system with thorough auditing arrangements
- systematic compliance monitoring by senior managers
- thorough and consistent approach to self-assessment by teaching and support staff
- well-managed staff appraisal and professional development

Weaknesses

- lack of effect of quality assurance on students' achievements
- failure of some action plans to address all the identified weaknesses
- inadequate monitoring of charter commitments

80 In the last two years the college has developed a comprehensive quality assurance system. The quality assurance framework, the annual calendar of activities, the committee structure and the responsibilities of staff for

Cross-college Provision

quality assurance are clear and understood. A useful quality assurance manual is issued to all managers. Senior managers systematically monitor compliance with procedures and rigorously implement measures to address weaknesses identified by quality assurance activities. In recent years the commitment of managers to effective quality assurance has led to the development of a more self-critical attitude throughout the college.

81 Inspectors judged that quality assurance has not had a great effect on students' achievements over the last three years. There has not been consistent improvement in students' retention or achievements. In many curriculum areas, retention rates and pass rates remain close to the national average. Comparison with national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC for students' achievements shows that the college's performance at levels 1 and 2 are below national averages. Student retention has also fallen on a number of courses, for example, on GCE A level and GCSE. The college overstated the quality of its provision in its self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with seven of the 13 college grades but awarded worse grades for four curriculum and two cross-college areas.

82 Each teaching and support staff team is fully involved in the annual self-assessment process. Reports produced by course teams are aggregated into programme area reports. The quality review group, a group that includes external representatives, moderates these reports and those produced by the support staff teams. The self-assessment report recognises that the quality assurance of support services is not fully established. The senior management team and the corporation approve the final self-assessment report. The reports produced by teams and area managers demonstrate a conscientious approach to the evaluation of their activities. Each report is accompanied by an action plan, but some plans do not acknowledge the seriousness of some weaknesses or address some issues such as poor attendance and retention.

83 The college has an extensive and well-organised lesson observation programme for all staff teaching more than 150 hours a year as part of appraisal. Last year the college completed its first schedule of observations. The lesson observation grades awarded by the college were significantly higher than those awarded by inspectors. In 1998-99, the college judged 83% of lessons to be good or outstanding. During the inspection, inspectors judged 58% of lessons to be good or outstanding. Inspectors observed a wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning between departments judging that five of the eight areas were below the sector average. Prior to inspection the college had clearly acknowledged this weakness and internal quality audits produced a grade profile similar to that awarded by inspectors in some curriculum areas.

84 The college uses an appropriate range of measures to ascertain staff, students' and employers' views about the college and its courses. The results are scrutinised by managers and, where appropriate, targets for improvement are agreed. The self-assessment report recognises a weakness in the feedback of survey findings to students. By the time of the inspection this had been effectively addressed.

85 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement about the strength of its internal quality audits, started in 1998. A trained team spends up to four days carrying out a detailed audit of either a curriculum or cross-college area, using criteria and methodology similar to the FEFC. Useful reports and action plans are produced. The quality review group oversees the process. The product development and quality review committee of the corporation receives and debates detailed information on students' achievements.

86 There is a well-managed staff appraisal and professional development system. College targets for 1999-2000 are supported by performance measures and monitoring arrangements. Professional development is

Cross-college Provision

linked to appraisal outcomes and to college priorities. Recent activities include whole-college development days on customer care and continuous improvement and weekly training sessions for programme area managers. Staff have confidence in the appraisal and professional development systems.

87 The student charter is clear and concise. It contains a number of measurable commitments. It is supported by a useful parents' charter. Some charter commitments are monitored through the surveys of students' views, but not all performance against measurable commitments is systematically monitored and there is no overall summary of performance. Findings from surveys of students' views and inspection findings indicate that some students are unaware of the complaints procedure. A new complaints, compliments and suggestions procedure 'Talkback' was recently introduced. It has resulted in more systematic response to complaints and better monitoring arrangements.

Governance

Grade 2

88 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the self-assessed strengths and weaknesses. The college has made good progress towards rectifying the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- dedicated, well-informed governors
- good clerking arrangements
- clarity of strategic role
- thorough review of students' achievements and retention
- effective committees

Weaknesses

- little use of performance indicators to measure effectiveness of the board
- inadequate monitoring of some aspects of college performance
- underdeveloped communications with some college departments

89 Governors are dedicated and well informed on developments in education. The self-assessment report identified the need for better access to reference materials. In response, a well-provisioned resource room has been established for members' use. The search committee has been active in recruiting members to maintain a range of expertise but also reflect the diversity of the community served by the college. The self-assessment recognised the need for more systematic induction and training of members and an effective system has been introduced. New members are well briefed by the clerk, issued with a comprehensive handbook and mentored by an existing board member. Individual needs are considered and suitable training opportunities provided. A training programme for the whole board has recently been introduced to address needs identified by the skills' audit. Members have attended college groups to extend their knowledge of issues such as curriculum 2000. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors need to strengthen further their communication links with staff, students and external bodies.

90 The board was prompt to revise its determined membership in response to Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) guidance. The 19 members comprise, seven business governors, three community, three co-opted and two local authority governors, two staff governors, a student governor and the principal. The board has been

Cross-college Provision

active in succession planning for the transition. It has undertaken a skills' audit to inform this work. As noted in the self-assessment report, members have experience in business, industry, education, banking and accountancy.

91 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. Following a period of poor financial health, including three years' operating deficit, governors have monitored progress against the recovery plan. All governors now receive comprehensive monthly management accounts. Inspectors and auditors identified some weaknesses in procedural issues relating to the operation of corporation business.

92 The board and its committees are well supported by an independent clerk. Meetings of the board are well conducted, well attended and take place within an appropriately planned cycle of committee meetings. The corporation has met 13 times in the last 18 months. There are appropriate terms of reference and standing orders. Members are clear about their strategic role in relation to that of the executive. They are actively involved in determining the character and mission of the college and in consideration of operational plans in relation to the overall strategic direction. They were extensively involved in the update of the strategic plan. An annual public meeting was successfully introduced this year and arrangements have recently been made covering the public access to meetings. The register of interests is completed by all governors and updated annually. There is mutual respect and confidence between the board and the senior management. There are systematic and well-documented arrangements for the appointment and appraisal of senior postholders.

93 Governors' committees are effective in their work. There are seven committees that report directly to the board. The performance review committee monitors the financial performance of the college. The corporation intends to co-opt an external member with financial expertise to this committee. The audit committee, which includes two qualified accountants, effectively monitors the implementation of recommendations made by the internal auditors. The product development and quality review committee monitors educational quality and performance. Senior managers are rigorously questioned to clarify action being taken to rectify students' poor performance. The committee receives increasingly accurate and detailed reports on students' performance, but some areas of weaker performance are not yet given sufficient prominence.

94 There is inadequate monitoring of some aspects of college performance. This was recognised in the self-assessment and is included in current action plans. The college's analysis of ethnicity has been reported and members have requested further reports. A governor regularly attends the equality assurance group of the college, but the board does not yet regularly receive monitoring reports on all aspects of the equal opportunities policy. The board has been kept informed of the revision of the college charter, but performance in meeting charter standards has not been reported.

95 The board has taken appropriate measures to evaluate its own performance which are noted in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment of governance involved all board members. Weaknesses are being successfully addressed through an action plan that is regularly reviewed. However, governors recognise the need to develop further specific performance indicators and targets to measure the success and effectiveness of the board itself.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 3

96 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Considerable progress has been made to address the weaknesses. However, inspectors identified additional weaknesses relating to progress in securing some improvements in performance and some ineffective management of courses.

Key strengths

- senior management with clear sense of purpose
- clear line management systems
- effective strategies to widen participation
- comprehensive policies and procedures for equal opportunities
- good progress in addressing financial difficulties
- comprehensive management accounts and reports to budget holders

Weaknesses

- uneven progress in securing improvements in performance
- some ineffective course management
- the legacy of poor management information
- insufficient monitoring of students' destinations
- current financial position

97 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that senior management provides a clear sense of purpose and direction and that staff at different management levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Following the appointment of a new principal in 1997, the college underwent a period of significant restructuring. A new senior management team was appointed, a tier of programme area

managers was created and better links were established between academic and cross-college units. Managers have established a range of key policies and procedures in the last three years. These have proved generally successful, but there has been uneven progress in securing improvements in performance in some areas. To support programme area managers in their new roles, dedicated management training was provided. The college recognises that it needs to extend opportunities for systematic training and development to other managers.

98 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has experienced financial difficulties and this is reflected in its current financial position. A financial recovery plan was submitted to the FEFC in April 1999. Senior managers have taken action to improve the finances of the college and by the time of the inspection, good progress had been made. Comprehensive monthly management accounts are produced and reviewed by the senior management team. Budget holders receive detailed reports on expenditure and discuss these reports with members of the finance team each month. Returns on student numbers for 1998-99 were submitted to the FEFC some months after the set deadlines. The college's internal auditors have raised a number of material weaknesses in internal controls that the college is working to address.

99 At the last inspection in 1995, inspectors identified the need to develop the management information systems. The college acknowledges that progress in improving the systems for reporting student data has been slow. A comprehensive information strategy has been agreed and more robust systems for the monitoring of data on students have recently been put in place. At the time of the inspection, senior and middle managers had good on-line access to up-to-date information on their delegated budget, student enrolments and

Cross-college Provision

retention. The college recognises that the system needs to be further developed to allow more effective monitoring of students' attendance and destinations.

100 In recognition of the difficulties of communications across a large multi-site college, management has taken a number of steps to improve the flow of information. Following careful evaluation of annual staff surveys, attention has been given to informing teaching and support staff about the mission and corporate priorities. The strategic objectives have been presented by senior management to groups of staff and summarised effectively in a publication entitled 'GLOSCAT 21'. Access to electronic mail and the college intranet has been improved for staff and this is playing a positive role in improving internal communication.

101 Inspectors agreed that senior management has introduced a more robust approach to the setting and monitoring of targets. The processes of business planning and self-assessment have been more closely integrated to enable curriculum managers to have a greater involvement in agreeing course targets and assessing past performance. The college recognises that it needs to refine the process further. A lack of reliable data on students' achievements in previous years has prevented curriculum managers from undertaking a systematic analysis of trends in retention and achievement against national benchmarking data. At course team level the development of strategies to address weaknesses in teaching and guidance and poor retention and achievement is ineffective. Senior management is vigorously addressing this issue through a range of initiatives to improve learning and guidance. For example, the college's planning for the introduction of curriculum 2000 is concentrating upon improving the quality of teaching and guidance for full-time 16 to 18 year old students through the creation of dedicated sixth form centres.

102 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are effective strategic links with external organisations and that the college has a record of success in responding to community needs. There has been an expansion of provision in the community for adults and development of dedicated progression routes for students from minority ethnic groups. Each department has clear targets for widening participation and there are good working relationships between curriculum managers and managers responsible for community provision, marketing and business development. However, the legacy of problems with management information has inhibited the development of robust marketing and monitoring data to enable the college to fully assess the extent to which it is meeting local needs. Inspectors agreed that there are comprehensive policies and procedures in the area of equal opportunities. Monitoring of the impact of the policies has been constrained by the limitations of the management information system.

Cross-college Provision

Conclusions

103 The college produced its third self-assessment report for the inspection. The self-assessment report is clearly set out and provided a sound basis for planning the inspection. The report included sufficient detail to plan effectively the inspection of the scope of provision for basic skills. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the report. However, they identified further weaknesses during the inspection and placed greater significance on others identified in the report. Inspectors also considered that the college had overestimated the significance of some strengths, in particular those relating to retention and achievement, in arriving at the overall judgements for some areas of provision. Inspectors agreed with four of the eight curriculum grades awarded by the college. In cross-college areas, inspectors agreed with the college judgements in three areas, but found that weaknesses had been omitted or understated in the other two.

104 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 (May 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	13
19-24 years	12
25+ years	68
Not known	6
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (May 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	21
Level 2 (intermediate)	22
Level 3 (advanced)	19
Level 4/5 (higher)	4
Non-schedule 2	34
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	410	2,108	10
Agriculture	0	123	1
Construction	217	815	4
Engineering	147	870	4
Business	412	3,499	15
Hotel and catering	342	1,540	7
Health and community care	516	4,571	20
Art and design	422	3,757	16
Humanities	461	4,491	20
Basic education	51	692	3
Total	2,978	22,466	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 18% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (May 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	253	66	9	328
Supporting direct learning contact	70	9	3	82
Other support	188	54	9	251
Total	511	129	21	661

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£19,811,000	£19,385,000	£19,638,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.70	£17.59	£17.12
Payroll as a proportion of income	75%	71%	61%
Achievement of funding target	104%	101%	97%
Diversity of income	35%	35%	37%
Operating surplus	-£541,000	-£1,525,000	-£203,000

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

ALF - Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (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	606	981	1,114	1,246	1,783	3,004
	Retention (%)	92	88	90	94	88	96
	Achievement (%)	62	57	50	52	59	57
2	Number of starters	1,648	1,844	1,965	1,633	2,221	2,477
	Retention (%)	84	78	79	88	85	88
	Achievement (%)	59	65	59	53	61	52
3	Number of starters	1,628	1,928	1,974	2,121	1,843	1,884
	Retention (%)	79	74	77	85	80	83
	Achievement (%)	58	68	62	44	57	54
4 or 5	Number of starters	24	17	18	254	287	313
	Retention (%)	96	100	78	91	84	88
	Achievement (%)	38	63	69	36	51	59
Short courses	Number of starters	377	605	435	2,209	2,152	1,101
	Retention (%)	92	87	90	98	93	95
	Achievement (%)	76	31	51	79	25	49
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	457	537	582	6,917	6,775	7,078
	Retention (%)	92	96	97	99	99	99
	Achievement (%)	57	48	44	59	44	43

Source: ISR

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