

**Leek College
of Further
Education and
School of Art**

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100*

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

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

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

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

Retention and Pass Rates

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

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

Summary

Leek College of Further Education and School of Art *West Midlands Region*

Inspected November 1997

Leek College of Further Education and School of Art is a small further education college serving the towns and villages of the rural Staffordshire Moorlands. The college produced a clear, comprehensive and generally accurate self-assessment report. The report made careful cross-reference to the college's quality assurance reports. It was developed through wide internal consultation, and was approved by the corporation.

The college offers a wide range of courses in all of the FEFC's curriculum areas. Provision in four areas was inspected, together with cross-college functions. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities integrate well with other students and many attend mainstream courses. Higher education provision is franchised from a local university. The college was amongst the first to offer teleworking training qualifications. It has good links with schools in the region, employers and the TEC. The standard of teaching is high. The quality of hair and beauty provision is outstanding. Students' achievements overall are satisfactory but retention rates are below the national average. Support for students is good. The college is well governed. Management of the college is good and the structure is clear and effective. Communications within the college

are good. High priority is given to effective marketing. Quality assurance arrangements are of a high standard and are well understood and supported by staff. There is a commitment to continuous improvement in the services offered, especially in the care and support of students. Accommodation is well maintained and efficiently used, but some buildings are old and of poor quality. The college has an extensive information technology network. The college should improve: the financial information for the governors to make it more detailed; student retention rates; some students' achievements; and the accessibility of its accommodation to wheelchair users.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Business studies	2	Support for students	2
Health and social care	2	General resources	2
Hair and beauty	1	Quality assurance	1
Art and design	2	Governance	2
		Management	1

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Leek College of Further Education and School of Art largely serves students from the rural towns and villages of the Staffordshire Moorlands, an area with a population of some 95,000. The main campus is located in the centre of Leek and the Biddulph campus is nine miles away. Increasing numbers of students are drawn from the Stoke conurbation and the neighbouring rural areas of Derbyshire. Unemployment in the Moorlands is around 3 per cent which is below the regional and national average, although it is higher in the vicinity of Stoke-on-Trent. Some 64 per cent of school-leavers stay on in full-time education and 26 per cent enter employment and training. The participation rate of students in Staffordshire in education after the age of 16 is below the national average but it is higher in Leek. Some students have to travel a considerable distance to reach the main college. As a result, the college has a policy of expanding its provision at centres out in the community. The local economy is heavily dependent on small to medium size enterprises. There are some major companies in the locality. Leek has two schools with sixth forms and there are also five other school sixth forms within the Moorlands. The college is the largest provider of 16 to 19 education and training in the area.

2 The college offers a wide range of general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses, some general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses, some national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses and provision for adults. The college was one of the first in the country to offer teleworking training qualifications. The college is a federated college of Staffordshire University for higher education.

3 The college's mission is to provide the highest quality standards of education, training and recreational opportunities through

programmes based on individual recognition, attainment, equality of access, flexibility and relevance. Leek College of Further Education and School of Art, 'considers every individual to be important and capable of success'.

4 The college had 3,301 enrolments in 1996-97, of which 79 per cent were from students aged 19 years and above. In November 1997, there were 2,572 students on courses funded by the FEFC and 729 on other courses. The college has increased its enrolments by about 40 per cent during the last three years, and it has achieved efficiency savings of nearly 29 per cent. The college employs 242 staff, of whom 63 full-time equivalents are teaching staff and 55 full-time equivalents are support staff. The college management team comprises the principal and seven directors. At the time of the inspection, the college was divided into three curriculum directorates: creative and commercial studies, human and physical studies, and lifelong learning with seven, eight and three course teams, respectively. Inspection covered seven of these course teams.

Context

The Inspection

5 Inspection took place during the week beginning 24 November 1997, and was carried out by seven inspectors working for a total of 26 days and an auditor working for five days. Before this, inspectors had studied the college's self-assessment report and the information which is held about the college by other divisions of the FEFC. Inspectors checked data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997 against key sources of information such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Approximately eight weeks before the inspection, the college was informed of the areas of provision which would be inspected. Inspectors observed 50 lessons, and examined students' work and a variety of college documents. They held meetings with representatives from industry, schools, the careers service, and members of the local community. Other meetings were held with governors, managers, college staff and students. Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) provided a written response to inspectors' questions.

6 Teaching is good and a significant proportion of teaching on vocational courses is outstanding. Of the lessons inspected, 82 per cent were good or outstanding and 18 per cent were satisfactory. This profile is much higher than the average for colleges inspected in

1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was 77 per cent, and this matches the average for the sector published in the chief inspector's annual report. The highest attendance was in business at 83 per cent, and the lowest in hair and beauty at 69 per cent. The average class size was 11.1 which is slightly above the national average according to the chief inspector's annual report. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	2	2	0	0	5
GNVQ	1	10	5	0	0	16
NVQ	5	5	0	0	0	10
Other vocational	10	7	2	0	0	19
Total	17	24	9	0	0	50

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

7 The inspection covered a substantial sample of the college's provision in this area, including courses at NVQ levels 2 and 3, for both full-time and part-time students. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, except in the key area of students' achievements and retention, where strengths were overstated.

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching and learning
- comprehensive and systematic feedback by teachers to students on their progress
- students' work of a good standard
- the students' skills at working in groups
- modern information technology equipment and industry-standard software

Weaknesses

- low pass rates and poor retention rates on some programmes
- some poor take up of learner support
- ineffective timetabling of some key skills sessions

8 The business studies area is located in the directorate of creative and commercial studies. Most courses are at intermediate and advanced levels, but students can progress to higher education within the college by taking a higher national certificate course which is franchised from Staffordshire University. Links with higher education are good. Some units in business at foundation level are available in the college but these are mainly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In general,

enrolment targets are achieved. The GNVQ courses recruit well although the college has to compete strongly with local schools for GNVQ business students. The recent introduction of a GNVQ course in retail and distributive trades run in conjunction with a GNVQ in business, is proving popular and successful. Staff are not qualified to undertake accreditation of prior learning for students wishing to undertake NVQ programmes at levels 4 and 5.

9 Inspectors agreed that teachers are highly motivated, enthusiastic and appropriately experienced. They work well in course teams. Senior staff are readily accessible and they respond quickly to issues raised by staff and students. Staff are enabled to update their industrial and commercial experience through the staff development programme. Teachers employ appropriate teaching methods. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned, they have clearly-stated aims and the teachers carry out effective checks to make sure that the students understand what is being taught. However, some schemes of work are no more than a list of topics. There are good working relationships between staff and students. Staff have developed useful learning materials which help students to learn on their own. Students receive comprehensive and systematic feedback on the quality of their work to help them to improve their progress and performance. Inspectors broadly agreed with the college's judgements about teaching and learning in this area. There were a few examples of poor classroom management. Most staff make good use of visual displays in classrooms to assist the students' learning.

10 Most students' work is good and some is of a high standard. Most students' notes and files are well organised. Students work well in groups and contribute effectively to discussions and meetings. In general, students' achievements are satisfactory and, in some cases, they are good. Many students progress to

Curriculum Areas

further or higher education or to employment. The self-assessment report, however, overstates the strength of students' achievements and gives retention rates which are higher than they really are.

11 The 1997 pass rates do not take into account a significant number of students who completed their course late. The pass rate on NVQ courses is improving each year but the retention rates are poor. GCE A level and GCSE results in subjects taken by a very small number of students are not included in the college's table of examination results. Pass rates in intermediate vocational courses are declining.

12 Inspectors agreed that students have good access to modern networked computers. Software is of industrial standard and there are sufficient good-quality printers. Teaching and other specialist rooms are generally well suited for their purpose although some information technology rooms are overcrowded.

Examples of students' achievements in business studies, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diploma and certificate)	Retention (%)	75	58	62
	Pass rate (%)	93	56	66
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ first diploma and certificate)	Retention (%)	88	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	86	73	55
NVQ	Retention (%)	35	48	48
	Pass rate (%)	40	53	56
Professional and management	Retention (%)	66	56	88
	Pass rate (%)	77	87	87

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

13 The college's self-assessment reports contained a section on teaching and learning which applied specifically to health and social care. The sections on students' achievements, curriculum content, organisation and management, staffing and specialist resources referred to the college as a whole. There was a specific reference to some results on health in the section on students' achievements. In the other three areas of the report, there were no specific references to health and social care. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made about the strengths of the provision but found that weaknesses were not well defined.

Key strengths

- effectively-planned teaching and learning
- the suitable and varied teaching and learning methods
- fair assessment and useful feedback to students on the quality of their work
- the effective learning support for students to help them to develop key skills
- good contacts with parents
- some good achievements
- some good accommodation

Weaknesses

- restricted access for some students to enrichment and extra-curricular activities
- difficult learning situations arising from some mixed groupings of students
- disruptive effect of late arrival of some students in lessons
- the significant decline in success rates on GNVQ advanced courses

14 Teaching and learning are planned effectively by the course teams to meet the requirements of national awarding bodies. The judgements in the self-assessment report on the quality of learning are based on sound evidence which includes schemes of work and lesson plans, records of lesson observation and students' responses to questionnaires. The assessment of students' work is fair and systematic and students receive constructive feedback on the quality of their work. Teaching and learning take place in well-equipped classrooms where every opportunity is taken to display students' work.

15 Many lessons were good and their features included: the sharing of clear lesson objectives with the students by the teacher; a full explanation to the students of the purpose of well-designed learning activities; good group work by students; positive relationships between staff and students; well-presented overhead transparencies and handouts; and clear briefing for students about their assignments. The feedback to students on the quality of their assignment work is thorough. In many lessons, most students were highly involved in their learning activities, although a few gave poor responses to questions and they lost concentration. A few lessons were dominated by the teacher so that students had little opportunity to contribute in class. For example, students had difficulty in concentrating in a lesson in which the teacher spent a great deal of time reading aloud from handouts. Records of lesson observations carried out by college staff were used to provide evidence for the judgements in the self-assessment report. In a childcare session students watched a video which examined children's behaviour in a distinctive daycare centre run by the national health service. The timing of this session was well planned to respond to students' concerns of how they should deal with unacceptable behaviour from children while on their work placements.

Curriculum Areas

16 The self-assessment report identified that some students lack appropriate skills in information technology, numeracy and literacy on entry to their courses. The provision of effective learning support for students to help them to develop key skills is an integral part of courses. Key skills teaching has been successfully combined on GNVQ courses in health and social care, business and leisure and tourism.

more imaginative approach to equal opportunity issues in teaching and learning.

17 Students' achievements on GNVQ advanced courses in health and social care have declined significantly and are now below the national average. On intermediate courses, they are just above the national average, at 55 per cent. Results on the college's popular BTEC national diploma course in childhood studies, although generally good, have fluctuated between 73 and 92 per cent in recent years. Retention rates vary from satisfactory to good. Retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses have declined.

18 Equal opportunities is a component of each programme. Staff find it difficult, however, to engage the students' interest in equal opportunities because many courses are predominantly taken by female students. Since they live in an area where there are few persons from minority ethnic communities, the students have little direct experience of multicultural issues. There is scope for the college to devise a

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

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
GNVQ advanced	Retention (%)	*	71	41
	Pass rate (%)	*	80	41
GNVQ intermediate	Retention (%)	70	68	55
	Pass rate (%)	64	52	55
BTEC national diploma childcare	Retention (%)	90	73	83
	Pass rate (%)	86	92	73

Source: college data

*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Hair and Beauty

Grade 1

19 The college offers a broad range of courses including those leading to NVQ levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and courses in theatrical make-up and in complementary therapies. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of this provision. Nearly all the weaknesses identified in the report had subsequently been resolved before inspection.

Key strengths

- effective and well-planned teaching
- the professional and commercial atmosphere in the salons
- highly motivated and responsive students
- the location of the hair and beauty salons in the town centre and their accessibility to the general public

Weaknesses

- the failure to staff the reception desk at times thereby leaving the building unsecured

20 This area of the college's work is responsive to industry and it has a new advisory board. Staff support one another and work well together as a team. They monitor students' progress and deal effectively with the students' individual problems. Staff are well qualified and most have recent industrial experience. Students work enthusiastically. They are attentive, responsive and well motivated. Staff have developed innovative solutions to the problems caused by a shortage of resources. For example, in order to provide students with the 'assessment range' required for NVQ testing, staff create opportunities for assessment by arranging work placements or visits to other institutions. Inspectors agreed that the salons

are well equipped to commercial standards. Hair and beauty is located in a separate building in the town. It has an attractive and comfortable reception area, with magazines, photographic displays of the students' hair and beauty skills, and clearly presented lists of treatments available and prices.

21 Students' portfolios are well presented and they clearly show how the students' work conforms to assessment requirements. The portfolios include evidence of information technology skills. Assessment evidence is drawn from an appropriate variety of sources. Inspectors agreed that assessment and verification are thorough. Students speak positively about their studies, the support they receive from staff, and their progress and achievements. Opportunities for the accreditation of prior learning are discussed with students and evidence of such accreditation is clearly recorded. Tutorials for full-time students are well organised. Attendance is effectively monitored. Tutors work well together in teams to ensure that the time allocated for group and individual tutorials is used effectively and that procedures for appraising students' progress and performance are carried out during tutorials.

22 Most weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report have been addressed. Key skills lessons in information technology are timetabled for full-time students, and communications, information technology, and numeracy skills are becoming an effective, integral part of the curriculum. Examples of good teaching in key skills included the teacher's use of printouts from the Internet in a reflexology class, the application of costing to salon display materials, and the use of diagrams to demonstrate visual communication issues when dealing with the layout of the salon.

23 Levels of achievement and retention are good and have improved following the introduction of new interview procedures and strategies for supporting students. Curriculum

Curriculum Areas

files contain reasons why students withdraw from a course and they contain records of students' progress and achievements. Students can enrol on courses when it suits their personal circumstances.

24 Students are not always able to carry out client treatments simultaneously because of restricted salon space. In some lessons, teachers miss opportunities to assess students' skills. Inspectors agreed that there is not enough space in the beauty and complementary therapies salons for consultations with clients to be carried out in sufficient privacy. Inspectors agreed that the salons are not easily accessible to clients and students who have restricted mobility. The ground floor is accessible from the rear to wheelchair users. The reception area is sometimes left unattended and when it is, the building is unguarded and teachers have to leave classes in order to respond to enquiries.

Examples of students' achievements in hair and beauty, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	*	80	82
	Pass rate (%)	*	73	82

Source: college data

**course not offered*

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

25 The inspection covered lessons from the full-time programme of courses. These included lessons on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses, the BTEC national diploma course in general art and design, the BTEC diploma course in foundation studies and GCE A level classes in art and photography. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment in general but did not agree with some of the judgements on students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good teaching and the continual strengthening of students' learning
- the significant improvement in examination results on level 3 vocational courses in 1997
- results above national average in vocational courses
- above average retention rates on some level 2 vocational courses
- effective tutorial arrangements
- the wide range of skills and effective teamwork of the small group of staff

Weaknesses

- a few courses with low retention rates and poor achievements by students
- the absence of a longer-term curriculum development plan
- restricted range of courses with no progression route to higher education within the college
- some poor accommodation

26 The college offers a core of full-time courses in general art and design which is complemented by an extensive range of part-time recreational classes. Adult and

part-time students take part in full-time programmes whenever it is to their benefit to do so. Opportunities for students to progress within the college through a route from general art and design vocational course at level 2 to one at level 3 are well established. They cannot, however, progress within the college to higher education. A recent rationalisation of the full-time programme has reduced the range of courses and there is now a need for the college to develop a long-term curriculum development plan. The self-assessment was undertaken before the reorganisation of the curriculum and consequently it did not identify issues arising from it.

27 Teaching and learning are well planned. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teachers use varied methods of presentation and that they have benefited from sharing good teaching practice. Teachers strengthen students' learning through skilled question and answer techniques. Assignment briefs are detailed. They give the aims and objectives for assignments and stipulate what is expected of the students. Good supporting material or visual references are used to give assignment briefings a wider context and to make them more interesting to the students. Most classes contain students with varying levels of attainment and experience. Teachers manage and guide students' learning effectively. Students find the tutorial arrangements supportive and they can obtain individual help when they need it. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that staff communicate with the students well. Other issues identified by the inspection that were not included in the self-assessment report were that the time allowed for the completion of a few assignments was too long and that some class work activities did not challenge students to think and apply their skills and knowledge.

28 Students' work across the range of programmes is of an appropriate level. Retention rates on the GNVQ intermediate

Curriculum Areas

course have recently been above the national average. Students' achievements on the level 3 vocational course have improved. Most of the students' achievements on vocational courses are above national averages. Student records are well kept. The pass rate for the GNVQ intermediate course has fallen and there are some poor results on the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses. Retention rates for GCE courses are low. Inspectors could not agree with the college's judgement in the self-assessment report that most examination, retention and progression rates are excellent. Nevertheless, inspectors agreed that through the college's good links with industry students are enabled to undertake realistic work experience. For example, students have undertaken a project for a local theme park and they have designed a corporate logo for a local company.

studio spaces are small and some classes have to be divided in order to use them. As a result of the reorganisation of the curriculum there is more accommodation for art and design than can be used efficiently.

29 The members of the small teaching team are well qualified and have a wide range of skills and experience. Technician support is good, but insufficient. In general, the range of equipment is appropriate for the courses provided. Most students have good access to computers and information technology is an integral part of course programmes. The learning resources centre has a small stock of art and design books but most of these are new and suitable for the courses. There is a good selection of art and design periodicals. Most

Examples of students' achievements in art and design, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (GNVQ, national diplomas)	Retention (%)	71	54	84
	Pass rate (%)	68	42	80
Intermediate GNVQ	Retention (%)	91	100	89
	Pass rate (%)	45	100	67
GCE A levels	Retention (%)	76	98	68
	Pass rate (%)	50	59	95

Source: college data

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

30 The inspectors agreed with much of the college's assessment of its strengths in this area but found some weaknesses to be understated. Some weaknesses identified by the college had been resolved by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- a broad range of centrally-organised and well-managed services
- systematic and effective procedures for the admission, induction and day-to-day support of students
- impartial guidance for students before and on entry to courses
- the effective monitoring of recruitment
- the thorough induction programme for full-time students
- the good tutorial support for full-time students
- good arrangements for ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated with other students in the college
- the college's close and effective working relationship with the local careers service

Weaknesses

- insufficient take-up of learning support by students diagnosed as needing it
- the poor quality of some induction for part-time students

31 The college's centrally-organised support for students is good and well managed. Inspectors agreed that the college's reputation for looking after its students well is justified. Students confirm that there is a broad range of services to support them. Considerable efforts

have been made to try to ensure consistency of the level of support available to all students. Students are encouraged to discuss their problems and concerns with their personal tutors but they also have direct access to the central support staff.

32 The inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that students receive impartial guidance before joining, and during, their course. This finding was confirmed by the views of students, staff in local schools and members of the careers service. The college has a policy on the accreditation of students' prior learning but there is little evidence, as the self-assessment indicates, that this is implemented. Publicity materials are well presented. They have been developed after wide consultation with staff, students, the college's customers and other interested parties and have been well received. The new and comprehensive database used by marketing and admissions staff, enables publicity materials to be sent to the most appropriate recipients and levels of recruitment to be constantly monitored.

33 A well-designed four-day induction programme is provided for full-time and part-time day students. It successfully provides students with an introduction to the college. It achieves this by mixing students of all ages from different programme areas in a series of carefully-planned activities which relate to the college and its community. The induction programme is highly valued by students and staff as indicated in the college's report. During induction, emphasis is placed on the *Charter for Further Education* and on the college's charter. In addition, diagnostic assessment of students' learning needs is carried out and students' goals are prioritised. Induction arrangements for part-time students, other than those who attend during the day, are less systematic and some students felt that they were not effective.

34 For many years, the college has used the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) extended tests to assess students' levels of literacy and numeracy

Cross-college Provision

on entry to courses. The college also requires students to write a piece of continuous prose. Some of the staff who mark these tests are slow in providing feedback on the students' performance in them to course teams and to the students themselves. Additional support for their learning is available to students but some students who need such support do not take it up. Many students, however, have benefited from learning support. The college has not carried out any investigation into whether the examination results and retention rates of students who choose to receive learning support are better than those of students who opt not to do so. There are effective arrangements for students who wish to change their course to transfer to an alternative one.

35 Inspectors agreed that support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities join mainstream courses where possible, and follow an accredited programme of study. The college has difficulties in obtaining work experience placements for full-time students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The absence of some placements reduces the scope and effectiveness of the students' programmes of study.

36 All full-time students have tutorials. There is no college-wide tutorial programme but important topics such as drug abuse are addressed during tutorials. The staff handbook contains a guide for tutors but it is left to individual tutors to use tutorial time effectively. Tutorials take place regularly and they are a good channel of communication within the college. Each student has his or her progress appraised three times a year during tutorial periods.

37 The careers information provided for students is of good quality. The college has a service agreement with the Staffordshire Careers Service. Careers advisers are associated with particular programme areas and this enables them to develop beneficial and close

working relationships with college staff. In some areas, there are effective procedures for helping students who wish to apply for higher level courses. There are good opportunities for students to meet employers, undertake visits to companies or have extended periods of work experience. The careers information provided for students is of good quality.

38 Most students understand how to seek help with personal issues. The services provided are judged by students and inspectors to be effective. Some mature students, however, were not aware of the access fund. Nursery provision in the college is good. The effectiveness of the college's equal opportunities policy and disability statement is carefully monitored through the regular review of complaints received and surveys of students' views.

General Resources

Grade 2

39 The college has made several improvements to its resources since the last inspection. The most significant of these is the provision of a learning resources centre on the ground floor of one of the newer main buildings. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. However, inspectors identified other strengths and weaknesses that were not in the college's report. Some weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and efficiently-used accommodation
- the well-equipped learning resource centre
- the combined refectory and shop
- the good ratio of high specification computers to full-time equivalent students

Cross-college Provision

- a comprehensive information technology network and infrastructure
- video and information technology links with local industry

Weaknesses

- some old and poor-quality perimeter buildings
- insufficient technician support for information technology
- the inaccessibility of some accommodation to students with restricted mobility

40 The college has four main buildings and various outbuildings in close proximity near the centre of the town. A nearby annexe is leased from the district council for hairdressing and beauty courses. There is also an annexe in the nearby town of Biddulph with a video-conferencing link to the Leek town site. Many of the college's accommodation problems were inherited when the college was incorporated in 1993. The college's centre is in an historic building adjacent to a Grade I listed building shared with the district and the county council. There are unresolved issues over the transfer of assets from the local authority and conservation area limitations on the future developments of the college's sites and buildings. There are two good modern buildings housing business courses, information technology rooms, and the learning resources centre. The fourth building is an old single-storey gymnasium which is of historic interest. On the perimeter of the college site there are a number of old temporary buildings and a small Victorian mill and all this accommodation is of poor quality.

41 In general, the college's accommodation is well maintained. Most corridors have stimulating displays of students' work and pictures or posters. There is a small but welcoming reception area. There is a well-planned maintenance programme.

42 The college has made considerable efforts to help wheelchair users by moving most major facilities to ground-floor locations and by providing ramps. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges the weakness that some of its accommodation is not easily accessible to wheelchair users, and that none of its three-storey buildings in the town has a lift.

43 Most learning resources and information technology facilities are housed in one building. The library stock of 12,000 items is small, but many books and materials have been purchased in the last five years. The computerised library catalogue is not directly accessible to students. The college has installed a new library management system on the academic computer network but it does not yet provide access to the catalogue. There is an adequate number of study spaces. The college plans to improve access to the library for wheelchair users when funds become available.

44 Communal areas for students are recognised as limited to a small multi-purpose gym and a recently-reorganised area which also serves as a shop and snack bar. These areas are appreciated by students. The college pays for students to use the local authority recreational centres in Leek and Biddulph. Staff rooms and administrative areas are small but well located.

45 The college's self-assessment acknowledges that it has an extensive information technology network. Sound investment in an information technology infrastructure and in computers enabled the college to provide students with good numbers of high specification machines with up-to-date software. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is 1:7.5. Staff and students have access to the Internet. There is equipment to run a high number of CD-ROM applications. Local companies have access to training and support from the college through its video-conferencing facilities. The college also provides rural communities with information technology

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equipment and training. The popularity of the Internet and its heavy use across the college are placing strains on the computing facilities, particularly the open access machines in the learning resource centre. There are not enough technical support staff for information technology to meet the high demand from students and staff for assistance in using the computing facilities.

Quality Assurance

Grade 1

46 The college's quality assurance has many strengths. It is based on the concept of 'customer care' and it aims to ensure that the college fully meets the needs of all whom it serves. The college's self-assessment was thoroughly presented and was clearly linked to evidence and action planning.

Key strengths

- a commitment to the continuous improvement of 'customer care'
- well-established and effective quality assurance procedures
- the setting and achievement of high standards through the quality assurance procedures
- the college's charters
- the comprehensive staff handbook
- the effective methods for obtaining the views of students, employers, and staff on the quality of provision
- the well-established staff appraisal process and effective staff development programme

Weaknesses

- the limited use of performance indicators in course reviews
- insufficient involvement of line managers in staff induction

47 The principal plays a major part in the setting and development of high standards. All staff have a commitment to the continuous improvement of all the services offered by the college. Quality assurance is well understood and supported by all staff. Ways of ensuring quality are outlined in well-defined policies and stated procedures which have been updated in line with recent FEFC publications on self-assessment. The documentation on quality assurance is kept in the quality assurance room where it is accessible and inspectors noted regular use by staff.

48 The monitoring of the quality of the college's provision is achieved by an effective combination of inspection, evaluation and review processes. Support areas are inspected through a comprehensive review process which includes canvassing of the views of line managers and all who use the support services. Lesson observations have been undertaken for the last five years. Most full-time teachers and about one-third of part-time teachers have their work in the classroom formally observed. Observation focuses on detailed aspects of lesson preparation and on the way the lesson is taught and managed. The grades given in the self-assessment report were similar to those awarded by the inspectors. Formal course reviews include the evaluation of retention rates, students' achievements and the quality of teaching and learning. All reviews identify strengths and weaknesses and include brief comments on retention rates and on students' achievements where appropriate. Most reviews include detailed action plans for improving provision. The college sets itself a series of realistic and achievable targets. The college understands that the course review process does not include any comparison of students' results with national averages. The review process is monitored by curriculum directors, the quality review team and the quality assurance subcommittee which reports to the academic board. As a result of this monitoring issues are identified upon which action is required.

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49 It is recognised that the college's commitment to quality is strengthened by termly meetings between small groups of staff and the principal. These meetings promote debate and identify areas for improvement, which are then addressed by the working groups formed for this purpose. The college's charter and the 'internal customer charter' are well established, widely distributed and well understood by staff and students. They reflect the college's aim to meet the needs of all students and customers. For example, one charter measure is to offer money back to those who are dissatisfied with the college's services. This offer has rarely had to be made.

50 The college obtains views on the quality of provision from students at various stages in their studies. The views of employers, or visitors to the college are also gathered regularly. Ten students are randomly interviewed by the senior management team each week to obtain their views of the course they are studying and these are immediately fed back to the curriculum areas.

51 There is a useful induction programme for new staff but, as the college has recognised, the involvement of line managers in this induction process needs to be formalised. An annual staff appraisal scheme involving all staff has been in place for six years. Appraisal and staff development are linked to strategic, departmental and individual objectives. Staff training needs are identified at course team level and these are taken into account in planning staff development activities. When several staff have the same training needs an internal course is provided for them. Most staff undertake some staff development training each year. The college attained the Investor in People standard in December 1996.

52 The college's self-assessment report was produced as a result of the quality assurance process undertaken by course teams and curriculum directors in the college's 'quality group'. Most staff were involved in this process,

and the self-assessment report was approved by the corporation. It was clearly presented, and contained a statement of strengths and weaknesses and references to the college's quality assurance files and other college documentation.

Governance

Grade 2

Key strengths

- the governors' broad range of skills and effective working relationship with college managers
- the effective self-evaluation of the corporation's performance
- the appropriate clerking arrangements
- well-structured arrangements for induction of new governors
- strategic plans with well-defined targets
- the marketing subcommittee's valuable contribution to the strategic plan

Weaknesses

- strategic plans and financial forecasts not formally approved by the corporation before being forwarded to the FEFC
- governors do not receive sufficiently-detailed financial and non-financial management information
- governors do not receive written progress reports on the strategic plan
- insufficiently-detailed terms of reference for the resources subcommittee

53 The self-assessment report concludes that the college is well governed. The college's self-assessment report is thorough and generally accurate, but some weaknesses noted by inspectors were not identified by the college.

54 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the

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governance of the college is good. 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.

55 The current membership of the corporation comprises the principal, a staff governor, a student governor, three co-opted governors, 10 independent governors, including a TEC nominee. Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds and their expertise has been effectively used by the college. They are drawn from industry, commerce, special and higher education and the professions, including finance. Five of the governors are women. The corporation has not published procedures for appointing new governors. Inspectors agreed that induction arrangements for governors are good, and some training for governors is provided.

56 The self-assessment correctly identifies that the clerking arrangements for the corporation are effective. The corporation meets at least once a term. Meetings are generally well attended. Well-written reports are prepared for them. Appropriately-detailed minutes of meetings are kept. Corporation papers, except for a small number of confidential items, are available for public inspection. The corporation has adopted standing orders but they could usefully be extended. The corporation has established a register of interests, but this needs to be developed to include comprehensive details of governors' personal and financial interests and of any significant financial responsibilities held by individual members of staff.

57 Governors conduct their business efficiently and they take an active interest in the college. The corporation has recently undertaken a useful evaluation of its own effectiveness. Governors clearly understand their role and there are good working relationships between governors and senior managers.

58 The corporation has an appropriate and wide range of committees. There are committees for resources, marketing, accommodation, audit, remuneration and there is a search committee to consider nominations for new members. The role and responsibilities of the resources committee are not adequately defined in its terms of reference. The resources committee is not provided with the financial management information it needs at sufficiently regular intervals. The audit committee monitors the implementation of audit recommendations effectively and regularly reviews progress in putting audit plans into action. The marketing committee makes an effective contribution to the marketing plan which, in turn, informs the strategic planning process. Appropriate arrangements have been developed for the appointment and development of senior staff.

59 Governors are able to comment on the college's mission statement and strategic objectives, and on the strategic plan itself. Owing to the timing of corporation meetings, strategic plans were not formally approved by the corporation before they were forwarded to the FEFC. Instead, the final versions of plans were discussed in detail by the resources subcommittee and approved by the corporation chairman. The current strategic plan includes an operating statement summarising specific targets, timescales within which these must be reached and details of who has responsibility for implementing aspects of the plan that the college intends to put into action in 1997-98. The management team's reports keep the corporation informed of the college's activities, some of which cover strategic issues. Inspection confirmed that governors also regularly discuss progress towards the achievement of strategic objectives. However, the corporation does not receive specific, written reports detailing progress towards fulfilling the short-term objectives set out in the operating statement.

60 The college's strategic plans and financial forecasts are appropriately linked. The estimates of income and expenditure take into

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account the anticipated levels of activity within the college. Although governors understand the college's financial position, they are not provided with some essential or up-to-date financial management information. The corporation does not regularly receive sufficient non-financial management information.

Management

Grade 1

61 The inspection team agreed with the college's assessment of strengths and weaknesses of its management.

Key strengths

- effective leadership
- a clear and effective management structure
- a comprehensive approach to strategic planning
- good links with external organisations
- effective marketing of provision in line with the strategic plan
- the opportunities for staff to discuss college-wide issues with management
- a finance team appropriate to the needs of the college

Weaknesses

- new courses not reviewed by the academic board
- access to on-line computerised management information for staff

62 Inspectors agreed that the management of the college is good and there is effective leadership. The management structure is clear and well understood. Staff are efficiently and effectively deployed. Their teamwork is good. Budgets are held by the college management team and they are used to good effect to ensure that the curriculum is properly implemented.

63 The college adopts a consultative and comprehensive approach to strategic planning which is informed by effective market research and educational reports. The college's mission statement is well publicised and understood. Staff are committed to the values, aims and objectives of the institution. There is effective monitoring of strategic plans. The use of performance indicators is established but the college's information system has not yet been developed to provide more sophisticated models to help managers with planning.

64 The self-assessment correctly identifies communications within the college are good. At weekly briefing sessions, staff have an opportunity to raise issues with senior management. Groups of staff have a meeting with the principal at least once a term as part of the college's 'it's our business' initiative, and this provides them with an opportunity to discuss college-wide issues. Staff value these sessions because they allow effective two-way communication between themselves and management.

65 The academic board generally provides a useful forum for advising management on the college's academic performance. It has addressed some key issues relating to the college's performance, such as examination results but not the decline in students' retention rates. The academic board does not formally review new courses.

66 The college is aware that it has good links with a number of external organisations. It has entered into federated college status with Staffordshire University and as a result, there will be opportunities for the students of the Moorlands area to progress to higher education. The college is also collaborating with four other further education colleges of a similar size on joint staff development and external validation for quality control. There are productive links between the college and secondary schools and special schools in the region. The college has extensive contacts with local employers.

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67 There is a close and productive relationship between the college and the Staffordshire TEC. The college's Moorlands Training Services runs training credit and modern apprenticeship schemes. The college acts as a validating centre for a teleworking qualification on behalf of the Telecottage Association and has developed a national network of approved centres which provide training for this qualification. The college was successful in securing TEC funding in 1996-97 to launch a video-conferencing project which is now continuing with support from other partners.

68 Marketing receives high priority and is effective. The college's marketing staff have a clear understanding of their role. The marketing strategy is supported by a comprehensive marketing plan which is updated regularly. Market research is extensive and thorough. The link between marketing and admissions services provides management with reliable information on recruitment trends.

69 The college has a comprehensive policy on equal opportunities. It has been updated to include the disability discrimination statement and to reflect the recommendations of the Tomlinson report on 'inclusive learning'. Some targets have been set against which the college can measure its performance on students' recruitment.

70 The college's computerised management information system is able to provide comprehensive and generally timely internal management reports. The database provides information on students from initial enquiry to enrolment. Course details are updated weekly. The college carries out effective year-on-year analysis of enrolments. Self-assessment identifies that curriculum directors and staff do not have direct on-line access to computerised management information.

71 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's

financial management is good. The finance team is led by the director of finance and personnel. It has sufficient experienced staff to deal with its workload and responsibilities. Financial forecasts fully reflect the expenditure implications of strategic plans. The procedure by which these plans are established is clear and well understood. Management accounts are produced within 15 working days, which does not accord with best practice. Cashflow information provided in the management accounts contains limited details of longer-term forecasts. The management accounts are regularly considered by the college management team. Budget holders receive timely reports on expenditure and expert financial advice when necessary. Financial regulations cover a number of essential matters and have recently been revised.

Conclusions

72 The college was inspected early in the new inspection cycle. The inspectors found that the self-assessment report provided a useful basis for the inspection. Many of the findings of the inspection team were in line with those of the college. However, in some cases inspectors found that the weaknesses identified by the college were understated. They considered the college's self-assessment for governance was overgenerous. Inspectors were in full agreement with the college's grade profiles for lessons observed. The curriculum and most cross-college grades awarded by the college matched those awarded by the inspectors.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	20
25+ years	59
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	12
Intermediate	35
Advanced	17
Higher education	8
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	28
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	94	387	19
Agriculture	1	2	0
Construction	2	13	1
Engineering	57	122	7
Business	131	525	25
Hotel and catering	31	5	1
Health and community care	199	227	17
Art and design	85	52	5
Humanities	79	392	18
Basic education	23	145	7
Total	702	1,870	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1997)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	26	37	0	63
Supporting direct learning contact	6	1	1	8
Other support	41	5	2	48
Total	73	43	3	119

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£3,129,405	£3,185,000	£3,391,321
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£19.41	£18.80	£18.86
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	65%	63%
Achievement of funding target	98%	100%	105%
Diversity of income	33%	29%	30%
Operating surplus	£52,111	-£71,000	£198,606

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

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

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

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

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

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

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	46	33	72
	Average point score per entry	3.3	4.6	3.7
	Position in tables	middle third	top third	middle third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	57	60	85
	Percentage achieving qualification	96%	72%	74%
	Position in tables	top 10%	middle third	middle third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	45	31
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	78%	68%
	Position in tables	*	top third	middle third

Source: DfEE

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

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

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *(continued)*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	69	73	72
	Retention (%)	88	85	71
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	39	52	75
	Retention (%)	79	81	94
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	62	67	55
	Retention (%)	82	71	65
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	38	60	51
	Retention (%)	75	81	85

Source: college data

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