

Tile Hill College of Further Education

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 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

Tile Hill College of Further Education

West Midlands Region

Inspected January 2000

Tile Hill College of Further Education is a medium-sized further education college in the south west of Coventry. It recruits many students from areas of economic and social disadvantage in the city and from neighbouring parts of Warwickshire and Solihull. The college's self-assessment involved all staff. It was developed from the reports of many teams and drew upon the outcomes of extensive lesson observation. The report was moderated by the senior management team and approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the report but considered that some weaknesses, particularly relating to students' achievements had been underestimated. The quality of teaching had been overestimated. Inspectors considered that some of the grades the college had awarded itself were overgenerous.

Since the last inspection there have been major changes in senior management, the college has had some financial difficulties and there has been a decline in students' achievements. The college is now making progress to improve its performance. Governors and managers have worked well together to secure improvements in quality but this work is not yet complete.

The links with many local groups and partners are very good. The college has made a useful contribution to widening participation through the development of outreach centres in the city and work with franchised partners. It is a major provider in the city for post-16 students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Inspectors agreed that the college has a strong reputation in motor vehicle engineering, with close links with the industry and courses of high vocational relevance. Work in five of the FEFC's programme areas was inspected, including two in basic education. The management of franchising is effective. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall but inspectors observed some lessons in which the teaching was not stimulating. Student retention and, particularly, achievement rates, though showing some improvement in 1999, are weak on many courses. Many aspects of governance are of good quality. Management has vigorously tackled shortcomings in the college but further progress remains to be made. Quality assurance arrangements have not yet secured sufficient improvement in students' achievements. Much of the college's accommodation is good and there has been substantial investment in new equipment. The learning centre offers good support to students. The college should improve: student retention and achievement rates; aspects of quality assurance, including course reviews; arrangements for recording and improving students' progress; and the take-up of additional learning support.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing, information technology and mathematics	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Business studies	3	Quality assurance	3
Media and performing arts	2	Governance	2
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3	Management	3
Basic skills	3		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Tile Hill College of Further Education is a general further education college established in 1969. Its mission is to provide high-quality cost-effective education and training that satisfies individual and corporate needs, ensuring equal opportunity for all the communities it serves.

2 The college has a strong commitment to widen the participation of those groups which have not traditionally entered further education and those which are disadvantaged. It offers access to higher education courses and many other courses for adults. There is a wide range of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college acts as sponsor for the city council's community education provision.

3 The college senior management team comprises the principal, vice-principal, six assistant principals with cross-college responsibilities, the director of finance and the head of administration. Eight schools carry responsibility for the curriculum.

4 The college offers a wide range of courses in engineering, computing and business, humanities, health and care, basic skills, and media and performing arts. It is a national centre for passenger-carrying vehicle engineering, and a regional centre for engineering in the motor industry. The college seeks to meet the needs of employers. The college believes that it has a strong local reputation for professional and other vocational training in many commercial areas.

5 The college's main site is situated in the south west of the city. There are also five other centres, four in the city and one in Kenilworth. There are four specialist centres: Charterhouse, providing enterprise programmes to corporate clients; the Knitting Centre; the Sarenda Sewing Centre for adults; and a further centre for passenger-carrying vehicle engineering. In addition, the college has franchise partnerships with a small number of providers.

6 There are three further education colleges in Coventry, which work closely together on a range of issues. A fourth specialist further education college for students with physical and sensory difficulties is next to the main college site. Coventry has 19 secondary schools, all with sixth forms. In 1999, 70% of 16 year olds in the city entered full-time education at school or college. A further 18% received vocational training from an employer or through government training schemes. There are five other sector colleges within 12 miles of Tile Hill College of Further Education.

7 Coventry has a population of 295,000. Manufacturing industry comprises 25% of jobs in the area while 62% are in services and distribution. The city's unemployment rate in October 1999 was 4.7%, compared with the West Midlands and national rates of 4.6% and 4.2%, respectively.

8 In July 1999, the college enrolled 10,621 students, of whom 1,472 were full time. Female students comprised 55% of the total and 66% were over 25 years of age. Minority ethnic students comprised 16% in comparison with 11% in Coventry.

9 The college employs 156 full-time equivalent teachers, of whom 125 are full time, 50 full-time equivalent teaching support staff, of whom 48 are full time, and 157 full-time equivalent administrative staff, of whom 142 are full time.

The Inspection

10 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 January 2000. The sample of provision to be inspected was notified to the college in November 1999. Fourteen inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 62 days carried out the inspection. They observed 92 lessons, scrutinised students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, staff, students, employers and representatives of local educational institutions, the Coventry and

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Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (the chamber) and local community organisations. The inspection included provision on main sites as well as franchised courses both locally and in the East Midlands. A team of four inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) worked with the inspection team during the college inspection. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training supported by the college in engineering (motor vehicle), health care and foundation for work. They interviewed 41 trainees, visited 24 work placements/employers, and observed four tutorial review sessions and one work-based assessment. Where it was appropriate to the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision. The inspection also contributed to the area review, led by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), of provision for young people aged 16 to 19 in schools, colleges and training organisations in Coventry. Before the inspection, inspectors studied the college's self-assessment reports and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. For the two years 1997 and 1998, data contained in the FEFC individualised student record (ISR) were used to provide data on students' achievements. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1999. Inspectors checked these against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were not always of the same quality. Although information on students' achievements was mostly accurate, this was less true of information upon retention.

11 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 92 lessons inspected, 57% were judged to be good or outstanding and 7% less than satisfactory, compared with national averages for 1998-99 of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	3	2	0	0	5
GCSE	0	1	4	0	0	5
GNVQ	1	2	1	0	0	4
Access to higher education	0	2	1	0	0	3
NVQ	0	4	2	1	0	7
Basic education	0	3	6	1	0	10
Other vocational	7	16	11	2	0	36
Other	1	12	6	2	1	22
Total (No.)	9	43	33	6	1	92
Total (%)	10	47	36	6	1	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*

12 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 (%)
Tile Hill College of Further Education	8.8	74
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

Computing, Information Technology and Mathematics

Grade 3

13 The inspection covered courses in computing, information technology (IT) and mathematics, including first diploma, national diploma, access to higher education, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and franchised IT courses. Inspectors observed 26 lessons. They mostly agreed with the college's self-assessment. However, they considered that some strengths were overstated and they identified other weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the broad and flexible provision
- much good teaching
- good pass rates on many courses in 1999
- a wide range of industrial standard hardware and software

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many courses
- lack of appropriately varied teaching and learning methods on full-time courses
- underuse of some computer technology in teaching and learning
- little sharing of good practice across the IT provision

14 The IT, computing and mathematics courses are distributed over four schools. There are also franchised IT skills courses designed to meet employment needs. The extensive range of courses meets the needs of a wide range of clients. There are numerous introductory level and short courses as well as work in community venues and flexible programmes such as GCSE mathematics. Individual courses are effectively planned and well managed.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that much teaching is good. In the best lessons, teachers give clear explanations of concepts and techniques and regularly check students' learning. Teachers on full-time courses use a narrow range of teaching and learning methods. In many lessons, teachers do not cater for the wide range of students' abilities. Some students wait for significant periods of time without attention while others struggle to complete the work. Some teaching methods were inappropriate. For example, a lesson in programming was taught by writing notes on the whiteboard while students typed them on to a computer. Teachers have developed effective learning materials for many introductory courses. Students are encouraged to work on their own with multimedia resources. In a minority of lessons, teachers used poor-quality overhead transparencies. Teachers mark students' work effectively and provide appropriate written feedback to show how students may improve their work. Some students' work in mathematics is untidy and contains careless mistakes. Few examples of group work were observed. Effective links between college staff in IT curriculum areas and franchise partners are at an early stage of development. There are few opportunities for teachers to share good practice.

16 Student achievement rates improved significantly in 1999. On most courses, students who completed the course achieved pass rates above the national average. For example, of the 476 students completing a short course in computer literacy and information technology, 362, 76%, passed. All students who completed the national diploma in computer studies passed and 53% of students on GCSE mathematics gained a pass at grade C or above. Achievement and retention rates are high on franchised courses. Of the 183 students who started an intensive eight-week computer technicians training programme during 1998-99, 182

Curriculum Areas

completed the course and 180 passed. Nearly all of them gained relevant employment in the field of IT. However, many courses have low retention rates which have been declining over the last three years. For example, the retention rate on the first diploma in IT fell to 47% in 1999, over 20% lower than the sector average. In GCE A level mathematics, the retention rate has fallen to 44% over the last three years. The sector average is 79%. The college recognises these weaknesses in its self-assessment report and is seeking to improve rates of completion on full-time courses. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of measures taken to achieve this.

17 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a wide range of computer equipment available to students. The learning centre provides a very good learning environment, particularly for lower level courses. The college is extending its use for other teaching. All courses are taught in specialist computer rooms and there are sufficient workstations for students to work individually. All students have access to electronic mail and the Internet. Much of the accommodation used by students is good. In some teaching rooms the inappropriate location of overhead projector screens, workstations and pillars impedes learning. Teachers do not make enough use of some of the computer technology available to them. The use of the college intranet is not sufficiently integrated with the teaching. On the higher level courses there is little use of specialist tools for systems design and development. This weakness was not identified by the college in its self-assessment report. There is little appropriate display of students' work or other relevant subject materials in some rooms.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing, information technology and mathematics, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 7261 certificate IT (short)	1	Number of starters	212	96	82
		Retention (%)	92	85	83
		Achievement (%)	53	71	77
Computer literacy and information technology (short)	1	Number of starters	1,055	1,211	663
		Retention (%)	89	91	85
		Achievement (%)	43	34	76
National Open College Network (short)	1	Number of starters	23	12	67
		Retention (%)	83	92	99
		Achievement (%)	16	64	74
First diploma IT (one year)	2	Number of starters	23	20	16
		Retention (%)	83	65	47
		Achievement (%)	35	54	100
C&G 7261 diploma IT (short)	2	Number of starters	20	37	39
		Retention (%)	95	81	90
		Achievement (%)	79	97	91
National Open College Network (short)	2	Number of starters	771	738	605
		Retention (%)	93	90	77
		Achievement (%)	53	58	86
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	137	233	184
		Retention (%)	61	70	41
		Achievement (%)	33	27	53
National diploma computer studies (one year/two year)	3	Number of starters	14	57	20
		Retention (%)	100	81	95
		Achievement (%)	64	86	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses. TSC inspectors also inspected this area and reached similar judgements about its quality.

Key strengths

- broad range of provision in vehicle and general engineering
- good links with industry
- clear links made by teachers between theory and industrial practice
- good specialist accommodation and equipment

Weaknesses

- poor management of some lessons
- weak individual action-planning

19 There are two schools of engineering. Most provision is in the service and manufacture of cars and the maintenance of public service vehicles. These areas have a broad range of courses which are well designed to meet the needs of the industry and students, and have clear progression routes from level 1 to 4. The schools have recently won substantial contracts to train employees for several national companies. The self-assessment report identified considerable flexibility in study opportunities for employed students, both in terms of location and the timing of courses. Students in general engineering can progress from craft to advanced level, with opportunities for specialisation. Some students study a combination of related qualifications that improve their employment prospects. The general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) offered did not recruit sufficient students to run. There is no provision at intermediate technician level. Students do progress from craft to advanced technician level.

There are some weaknesses in curriculum management. Teachers are not always adequately briefed and some course documentation is inadequate. Not all courses have a clear assessment schedule. Individual student action-planning is weak. Tutorial records are inadequate, reviews of students' progress are not comprehensive and actions arising from them are neither clear nor followed up.

20 In most lessons, teachers establish a clear link between theory and practical applications. In most practical lessons the skill and understanding of the students is developed effectively. Teachers skilfully demonstrate techniques to ensure that students appreciate the theory that underpins the work and, in most cases, pay due attention to health and safety. Students are given clear guidance on how to improve their performance. In theory lessons, teachers' explanations of new topics are often clear and well structured, with well-chosen examples to show industrial applications. In the best lessons, teachers draw upon students' work experience to extend their understanding. In some lessons, insufficient attention is given to meeting the needs of all students. Discussion with students is not well managed and there are insufficient checks on the level of understanding of all students. Recording of notes and the use of handouts do not always serve to improve students' understanding. In a few practical lessons, time is wasted because students are not clear what to do next.

21 Most teachers have close links with industry. Their good knowledge of industrial practice is used effectively in their teaching. Many teachers are actively involved with companies in the provision of training and some have benefited from in-company training. The work with companies has expanded significantly. This has put a considerable pressure upon staffing. The college is implementing a comprehensive new staffing strategy to address this. Much of the specialist accommodation is good, with ample space for practical work. The leased accommodation for public service vehicle engineering is poor. The

Curriculum Areas

college is planning to move to new workshops on the main site this academic year. The self-assessment report identified the good provision of specialist equipment in all areas. Students benefit from substantial donations of vehicles and other equipment from engineering companies.

22 The retention rate on many courses is good, particularly for part-time students. In 1998-99, it was more than 90%. Retention on most City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses is good. The retention rates for full-time students are lower and were significantly lower than for part-time students in 1998-99. Some of these students leave for employment. The schools do not systematically record and analyse the destinations of their full-time students. Inspectors agreed with the

self-assessment report that on many courses the achievement rates are high but considered that it did not fully acknowledge the poor performance on some others. Pass rates have improved for national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 3, but those for NVQ level 2 are weak. Pass rates on technician courses are high. Achievements on C&G levels 1 and 2 programmes are below national averages for the sector in 1998-99 but vary widely, for example, from 22% to 100% for C&G level 2 motor vehicle courses. Insufficient attention is given by course teams to student performance that falls below the target set. The unreliability of some data makes it difficult for staff to produce an accurate analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in achievements.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ	1	Number of starters	7	60	28
		Retention (%)	100	48	64
		Achievement (%)	0	52	88
C&G	1	Number of starters	249	163	208
		Retention (%)	77	72	82
		Achievement (%)	53	55	59
NVQ	2	Number of starters	42	380	82
		Retention (%)	69	83	79
		Achievement (%)	38	27	36
C&G	2	Number of starters	261	441	257
		Retention (%)	82	86	85
		Achievement (%)	46	42	48
C&G	3	Number of starters	91	188	102
		Retention (%)	93	87	85
		Achievement (%)	46	78	69
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	36	40	49
		Retention (%)	83	93	73
		Achievement (%)	70	67	84
NVQ	3	Number of starters	38	16	41
		Retention (%)	95	100	83
		Achievement (%)	92	38	77

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 3

23 Inspectors observed 16 lessons covering GNVQ, GCE A level, administration, management and professional courses. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional weaknesses and concluded that weaknesses relating to students' retention and achievements had been understated.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- wide range of professional and management courses
- good achievement on secretarial and office technology courses
- effective teaching of key skills on GNVQ courses
- high-quality accommodation for management and professional courses

Weaknesses

- narrow range of teaching methods and some poor-quality lesson plans
- significantly poor achievement on some professional courses
- low retention rates on some full-time business courses
- lack of rigour of some course reviews

24 The business provision recruits many part-time students to a wide range of courses. Full-time provision is limited. For example, there is one full-time secretarial course and there are no full-time GCSE or GNVQ foundation students. Most courses are offered at the main site but there is also some franchised provision. There is a good-quality specialist centre for short course and company training near the centre of Coventry.

25 In most lessons, teachers were enthusiastic, displayed up-to-date knowledge of business and used good-quality learning materials. In the more successful lessons, the students were encouraged to share their own relevant business experience. For example, a group of certificate in training practice students contributed to an analysis of training needs by reflecting on their own company's policy. A well-informed discussion about the relative merits of NVQ and management development programmes followed. However, in many lessons teachers used a narrow range of teaching methods and some lesson plans were of poor quality. Teachers tended to dominate discussions, and did not allow students to contribute sufficiently. Students were not given much experience of group work or opportunities to make presentations. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the monitoring of GNVQ students' progress is inadequate. Actions to improve this are not fully established. Key skills have been clearly linked to vocational studies and suitable learning materials are used to support key skills teaching. Students' work on management courses is fairly marked with helpful comments.

26 Inspectors noted the high levels of adult students' achievements in secretarial and administration courses. In 1999, the pass rates for wordprocessing at levels 1 and 2 were at, or above, the national average and the NVQ level 2 in administration course achieved a 100% pass rate compared with a national average of 74%. The self-assessment report recognised this but did not give sufficient weight to the retention and achievement data for GCE A level and GNVQ courses over a three-year period. Nor did it consider poor performance in some professional courses. For example, although the numbers enrolling for Chartered Institute of Management Accountants stages 1 to 4 rose from 17 to 56 between 1996-97 and 1998-99, the retention and achievement rates fell from above the national average to below it.

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Retention rates on full-time business courses are also below the national average for the sector, as is the pass rate in GCE A level business studies.

27 The management of the business provision has undergone recent changes but it is too early to judge their effect. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the wide range of professional and management courses is a strength. The courses offered at the Indian community centre and the recently accredited course for credit unions widen participation. Franchised courses in retail operations have been less successful, with trainees taking a long time to complete their courses. Course organisers have a responsibility for completing course reviews but some are not sufficiently rigorous.

28 Teachers are well-qualified and all are involved in the appraisal scheme. This has identified a need for industrial and commercial updating. Three members of staff undertake industrial placements each year. There are sufficient useful books in the library but there are also some out-of-date texts. Students have good access to IT facilities. Inspectors observed a group of GNVQ intermediate students who had been conducting a telephone enquiry to a national broadcasting corporation to gather information. The students used their own initiative to search the corporation's website using the facilities in the learning centre. The quality of accommodation for most teaching is good. The centre for management and professional courses has its own refectory. GNVQ students have complained about the absence of base rooms and this has recently been addressed. Some rooms have bright and stimulating wall displays but others are bare.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ accounting	2	Number of starters	33	37	48
		Retention (%)	82	84	77
		Achievement (%)	63	68	64
NVQ administration (one year)	2	Number of starters	4	25	19
		Retention (%)	100	64	84
		Achievement (%)	50	56	100
OCR intermediate part 2 wordprocessing (short)	2	Number of starters	125	129	101
		Retention (%)	96	95	86
		Achievement (%)	58	50	68
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	31	19	11
		Retention (%)	77	63*	64
		Achievement (%)	80	42*	100
NVQ short supervisory management	3	Number of starters	49	127	23
		Retention (%)	100	100	100
		Achievement (%)	45	55	70
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants stages 1 to 4 (one year)	unknown	Number of starters	17	34	56
		Retention (%)	94	94	86
		Achievement (%)	50	6	15
Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply professional stage (one or two years)	unknown	Number of starters	141	94	158
		Retention (%)	95	95	87
		Achievement (%)	41	0	30

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

*college data, checked by inspectors

Curriculum Areas

Media and Performing Arts

Grade 2

29 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses in media, performing arts, popular music and photography. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but attached greater significance to weaknesses in retention.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high pass rates in most subjects in 1999
- good standard of students' work
- effective lesson planning and classroom management
- some well-equipped specialist facilities
- demanding, well-devised assignments
- a broad range of initiatives to widen participation

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates
- students' poor attendance and punctuality on some courses
- some shortcomings in resources
- lack of a coherent curriculum development plan

30 The college offers a distinctive range of courses for full-time and part-time students. Work with disaffected young people, who learn film-making skills, and a drama programme which recruits students with physical disabilities from another local college widen participation. Popular music courses have been particularly successful in attracting new students. The school's business plan does not provide clear priorities for developing the curriculum. Several courses have recruited low numbers. Course co-ordinators clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

31 The quality of teaching is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. Lessons are well planned. Teachers use detailed schemes of work and encourage students' contributions and creative ideas. Innovative approaches include performing arts students who work as actors in films directed by media students and are auditioned for specific roles. These groups explore jointly the different performance requirements of film, television and theatre. Most assignment briefs are based on a practical knowledge of the industry and are succinctly written in language appropriate to the course level and experience of the students. However, the range of information provided for students is not always adequate. For example, assignments for the GNVQ intermediate in media contained no details of the assessment process. Most lessons were conducted at a lively pace, although in a few, teachers gave theoretical explanations without checking sufficiently whether students understood. In one lesson, the teacher gave many opportunities for students to develop their voice skills and knowledge of regional dialects in preparation for future auditions. Music students have toured America and Europe with a teachers' professional band. All courses have a clear vocational focus. On media and photography courses, teachers make good use of standard work sheets for audience research, for writing a script and for producing a story board. Students keep records of photo shoots, video editing and their performances. The NVQ course in photography requires students to develop appropriate work-related skills such as portraiture. Teachers regularly assess students' work. Clear oral and written feedback ensures that students are well informed about their progress. Punctuality and attendance in some lessons are still poor, although teachers ask students for an explanation. Students' progress is effectively monitored through regular tutorials and assessment schedules. They are encouraged to evaluate their achievement and progress.

Curriculum Areas

32 Good standards are achieved in media, music, photography and performance. Performing arts students confidently demonstrate their skills in voice, performance and characterisation. Students work effectively in groups and most adopt a disciplined approach to meeting deadlines. Practical work is of a good standard. Much written work is wordprocessed. Pass rates for 1999 on most courses were higher than the national average for the sector and showed a significant improvement on the previous year's results. There were pass rates of 100% on several courses. Pass rates for national diploma courses in media and performing arts increased by about 20% compared with 1998. There is no consistent track record of good achievement. Retention rates are well below the national average on most courses, despite improvements in 1999. In 1998, retention rates on national diploma courses were between 15% and 25% below the national average but improved in 1999. This weakness was seriously underestimated in the college's self-assessment report.

33 There are good facilities for television and radio production, video and sound editing and music technology. Media students have access to a well-equipped television studio and three adjacent editing suites. The photography facilities are too small for the range and level of courses on offer. The amount of digital editing and photo manipulation software available is insufficient. A newly built sound and recording studio has no effective soundproofing. The single performance space for performing arts adversely affects teaching and learning when more than one activity takes place. Teachers are well qualified, offer a good range of specialisms and several work as professional practitioners. Library resources require further development.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in media and performing arts, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G 7700 media techniques television and video competences	2	Number of starters	24	18	27
		Retention (%)	75	67	78
		Achievement (%)	50	50	24
National diploma media	3	Number of starters	13	16	36
		Retention (%)	100	50	69
		Achievement (%)	92	83	100
National diploma performing arts/popular music	3	Number of starters	*	12	12
		Retention (%)	*	50	83
		Achievement (%)	*	80	100
National diploma popular music	3	Number of starters	53	42	59
		Retention (%)	62	57	47
		Achievement (%)	76	100	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)
*course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 3

34 Inspectors observed 17 lessons. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses had not been identified.

Key strengths

- particularly good relations between staff and students
- an extensive range of modular provision
- high retention rates and regular monitoring of attendance
- good links with community partners
- good specialist accommodation

Weaknesses

- insufficiently demanding learning activities
- narrow methods of teaching
- insufficient monitoring of students' progress
- inadequate recording of students' achievements in some areas

35 The college is a major provider of programmes for students with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Coventry. It offers a range of courses to meet their needs. The curriculum is designed to offer a diverse range of optional modules accredited through college certificates and the National Open College Network (NOCN). There are full-time and part-time courses for adults and two full-time programmes for school-leavers with moderate learning difficulties.

36 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students receive good pastoral support but found that weaknesses in teaching methods and in the recording of progress and achievement had not been identified. Teachers are qualified, experienced and committed to their work. Teachers' relations with the students are good. Teachers have created a supportive environment and students enjoy coming to college. Most lessons start with different types of visual stimuli and input from the teacher, followed by worksheets on the topic. There is little use of individual or small group teaching and very few opportunities for students to work in pairs or at their own level and pace. Teachers give clear instructions when explaining tasks. Students spend part of the lesson working in a relaxed but purposeful way to complete the activities set. Teachers discuss students' work while they are doing it but there is little monitoring of students' learning and records of their achievement are not always kept. Tutorials focus on appropriate pastoral issues but pay inadequate attention to learning goals. Teachers do not set measurable targets, or devise strategies with students to help them achieve learning targets. Students' achievements are inadequately recorded.

37 Students attend literacy and numeracy lessons, where all students are placed into groups according to their ability. Students select from the wide range of options and elective modules to complete their individual programme. Every student is awarded a certificate at the end of the course. Some receive a college certificate and most achieve an NOCN award. Some have several modules certificated. The college has plans to alter the range of accredited awards next year. Retention rates and attendance are both over 80%. Students' timekeeping is often affected by unreliable transport. The college offers a high level of support to students through four full-time student support assistants and part-time support workers. These staff receive

Curriculum Areas

an induction handbook and are offered staff development. Some outside carers accompany their students to college. The college has positive links and good liaison with community partners who particularly praised the staff's responsiveness and flexibility.

38 The college has a designated budget for purchasing specialist equipment for students with additional support needs. The college's main site is fully accessible to students who use a wheelchair or who have restricted mobility and has designated car parking, ramps, lifts and toilet facilities. One classroom has been converted into an independent living area. Another is fitted out with computers, half of which were recently updated. These and other specialist areas, for cookery and horticulture, fully meet the needs of the programmes. Inspectors noted that specialist equipment and areas were sometimes used for general class teaching rather than specialist use.

39 Inspectors visited five centres of franchised provision spread across the East Midlands and observed lessons at each centre. In four of these the inspector reviewed course documentation and students' portfolios and found that planning, learning opportunities and students' achievements were well recorded. The process of negotiation between teachers and students and action-planning was good. Students were encouraged to learn from their mistakes, and there was support available to help them. In all centres, relations between teachers and students were good. Physical resources in one centre were poor. There were some weaknesses in the curricular links between the franchised provision and the college, in staff training and development and in the provision of learning resources. There are opportunities for franchise students to progress. A number of students have progressed to become associate tutors.

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

40 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in literacy and numeracy. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment, but considered that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses underestimated.

Key strengths

- attractive and welcoming learning environment on the main site
- individual records of learning with regular progress reviews on separate specialist courses
- revised portfolio of awards appropriate to students' needs
- some imaginative approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy

Weaknesses

- achievements below the national average on most courses
- inadequate availability and use of specialist basic skills IT resources
- underdeveloped separate specialist adult basic skills provision
- incomplete whole-college approach to basic skills development

41 The teaching of basic literacy and numeracy occurs mainly through additional support for students on their main programme of study. All full-time students are screened to assess their basic skills support needs. Students may also refer themselves or be referred by their tutor for help with basic skills. The small separate specialist provision for adults comprises five classes each week at the main college site and one class at 'Workworld', a city centre location. Some students achieve basic skills qualifications directly through their main

course of study. The college recognises that there is a relatively small amount of basic skills work and it plans to extend its separate specialist provision.

42 Teaching and learning for additional support and for separate specialist courses is satisfactory. Teachers have good relations with their students and lessons are well planned. Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that a wide range of appropriate teaching methods is used. There is little group work and most students work individually from paper-based handouts. There are some imaginative exceptions. One teacher introduced a selection of poems with an entry level group. These were read aloud, some by students, who were then encouraged to select and display their favourite poems. The college also offers 'IT for literacy and numeracy' with a focus on the development of new IT skills. Both students and the main course teachers readily acknowledge the value of the additional support, which is mostly offered through one-to-one tuition and some in-class support. Most teachers hold weekly meetings with students when shorter daily meetings would, for some students, be more effective to improve their learning.

43 As the self-assessment report recognises, achievements on most courses are below the national average for the sector, although retention rates are often better. The college is currently reviewing its courses to meet the needs of students more effectively. Students on separate specialist basic skills courses have individual learning plans, well-kept records of learning and regular reviews of progress. Record-keeping on additional support programmes is unsatisfactory. Copies of a progress card are sent termly to main course teachers, but most support tutors supplement this informally with written notes or telephone calls. The system of liaison between additional support tutors and main course teachers is not clear or effective. Some additional support tutors are not aware of the requirements of

Curriculum Areas

students' main courses. As a result, students receiving additional support do not always achieve as much as they might. Students value tutors' praise and encouragement in recognising their progress and achievement. Work is regularly marked but lacks detailed written feedback on how students can improve their performance.

44 The recent reorganisation of the college seeks to develop a cross-college approach to basic skills. It is too early to judge its effectiveness. Not all staff understand their revised roles and sometimes their other responsibilities lead them to put less emphasis on the development of basic skills and more on key skills. The reorganisation has improved communication within the basic skills team, but the basic skills policy has yet to be consistently implemented. Differences in approach, the level of resourcing and the quality of teaching across the college are still evident.

45 Inspectors did not fully agree with the self-assessment that teachers are well qualified. Most teachers possess teaching qualifications, but only have initial certificates in the teaching of basic skills. Most have only basic IT skills, although staff development has begun to address this. There is too much reliance on paper-based materials and not enough use of 'real-life' resources, for example, newspapers, or specialist IT software. Resources are barely adequate at one centre in the community which is used. The ethos and ambience for basic skills is uninspiring. Staff store resources in cardboard boxes. Teachers have to create their own materials, because of a shortage of resources for entry level work. One-to-one additional support tuition occurs in quiet, comfortable and convenient rooms adjacent to the learning centre.

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
Associated Examining Board level 1, 2 and 3 literacy/numeracy achievement tests	Entry	Number of starters	52	78	141
		Retention (%)	90	87	95
		Achievement (%)	74	57	90
C&G 3793 communications skills (Wordpower)	Entry	Number of starters	85	96	39
		Retention (%)	87	82	79
		Achievement (%)	42	24	23
C&G 3794 numeracy (Numberpower)	Entry	Number of starters	70	56	8
		Retention (%)	90	91	38
		Achievement (%)	49	27	67
C&G 3793 communications skills (Wordpower)	1	Number of starters	10	20	15
		Retention (%)	80	50	67
		Achievement (%)	50	30	50
OCR level 1 numeracy	1	Number of starters	*	64	76
		Retention (%)	*	72	88
		Achievement (%)	*	40	80

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

* Data not available

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

46 Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were normal practice and identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- procedures for enrolment and induction
- good range of services for additional learning support
- effective careers guidance

Weaknesses

- low take-up of additional learning support
- poor quality of many individual students' action plans
- ineffective recording of students' progress

47 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students receive effective guidance before entry to the college. There is impartial guidance. For example, where appropriate, staff suggest suitable courses offered by other providers. Procedures for admissions and interviews for prospective students are clear. Staff interview prospective students planning to enrol on full-time and substantive part-time courses. Students who are undecided about which course to study are referred for a general guidance interview. Others receive more detailed information about the course and further guidance from curriculum specialists. College and curriculum area prospectuses are informative and of good quality. A full-time prospectus is available on a CD-ROM. Publicity for community provision is available in minority community languages. The college uses a variety of recruitment methods, including newspaper advertising in partnership with other local colleges, a well-used website, mailshots aimed at specific groups, open evenings and

stands at trade exhibitions. There are well-organised procedures for enrolment and induction. Most students found the admission and interview process, enrolment, and induction informative and well managed.

48 The quality of most tutorials is satisfactory. Teachers receive some training and a useful succinct guide on tutoring. Each student has a tutorial entitlement depending on the type of course. Tutorials are mostly individual and focus on students' progress. There are some cross-college tutorial activities, for example, sessions on drugs awareness and health promotion. Although there is some effective recording of students' progress, in many instances it is not sufficiently thorough. For example, it is not clear from students' records what their strengths are or whether they require further help. A few students in their second term of study have yet to meet their tutor to discuss their progress. Written plans to improve students' progress have only been introduced recently. Most do not indicate the action to be taken, the name of the person responsible and the date when the target will be met.

49 The college provides a good range of services for additional support, a strength recorded in the self-assessment report. These include help with literacy, numeracy, IT and dyslexia. There is a well-resourced learning centre, the absence of which was a weakness at the previous inspection, and adapted materials, equipment and specialist services to meet students' individual learning requirements. Students can obtain the full range of support as part of their programme of study and through individual appointments in the learning centre. Students on full-time and on substantive part-time programmes receive an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy. In addition, tutors can refer, and students can refer themselves, for support. However, of those identified as needing help, less than half take up the offer of support. The quality of reviews of the progress made by students receiving support

Cross-college Provision

from additional learning tutors is inadequate. Individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed and contain little useful comment on progress.

50 Careers education and guidance is of good quality. As the self-assessment report recognises, the college provides a range of effective careers services and facilities, a strength recognised at the previous inspection. The well-resourced careers area contains up-to-date information and a guide to websites giving information on higher education and job opportunities. Full-time students receive a comprehensive programme of careers education as part of their programme of study, including advice on progression to employment and higher education. Guidance for employment has a clear emphasis on progression to jobs offering further appropriate training. Part-time students have the opportunity of careers guidance through appointments with the college careers adviser. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service, whose advisers provide the college's careers guidance. It includes individual guidance interviews, career talks and support for students who have been identified as at risk of leaving their course early. The college, in partnership with the local careers service, offers guidance on courses and career options to students, their parents and the local community after the publication of examination results.

51 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the college offers a range of useful services for students. These include a college nurse, guidance and assistance on welfare issues, student travel and accommodation. A personal counselling service is available. This service is also available to staff. Where appropriate, staff refer students to other specialist counselling and advice agencies. The college offers a range of childcare arrangements. These include a crèche, a nursery and support through its access fund for students to use childminders. Priority for places at the college nursery is given to lone parents. Arrangements for the administration and

allocation of access funds are clear. The disability statement is laid out clearly and is available in large print, Braille and on audiotape. The college offers a programme of sporting and enrichment activities, some of which are accredited.

General Resources

Grade 2

52 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, which focused almost exclusively on the main campus. They identified some additional weaknesses. A number of weaknesses identified in the self-assessment had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and welcoming accommodation
- carefully planned improvements since the last inspection
- good access for students with restricted mobility
- high-quality IT resources
- well-resourced library and learning centre
- good recreational facilities

Weaknesses

- lack of display materials
- some poor-quality teaching accommodation and facilities for staff and students
- no overall college policy for library and learning resources

53 The main campus is on a six-hectare site, 3.5 miles west of Coventry city centre. It has pleasant well-maintained grounds, including a small arboretum, and plentiful car parking. Security is good. All of the college's other centres, apart from Charterhouse, are leased or rented by the college.

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54 Most of the accommodation, at the main site and other centres, is well maintained and welcoming, as recognised in the self-assessment report. There is an effective planned maintenance programme. There have been many carefully planned improvements since the last inspection. Most general teaching rooms are of a good standard, well furnished and appropriately equipped. Minimum standards have recently been set for teaching areas. Some rooms are poor, particularly in two of the three mobile buildings still used for teaching, and many have little or no storage. There is a lack of display in the college to create a stimulating environment and to celebrate students' work. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Although the rate of space usage has improved, it remains below average for the sector. More than 95% of the main site is accessible to students with restricted mobility. Improvements since the last inspection have made Charterhouse fully accessible at ground floor level.

55 The college has high-quality IT resources, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. There are 500 up-to-date computers available for students' use, a ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of approximately 1:6. Students have good opportunities to use computers outside timetabled classes. All machines at the main site and other centres are networked and have standard up-to-date software. Internet and electronic mail facilities are well used by students and staff. The college intranet has a useful range of management reports but is not used for teaching and learning. There is good provision of IT at most of the college's other centres. The recently expanded learning centre has 80 workstations and provides support for basic skills and key skills, as well as open access to computers. It has a good range of equipment to support students with visual impairments, sensory difficulties and limited levels of literacy. There is a stock of 46 CD-ROMs but these are not installed on the network. The centre is well

managed and staffed and very popular with students. It has a good range of helpful study guides. The self-assessment report identified problems in providing technician support for IT. Recent new appointments have improved the speed and efficiency of the service but there are still some areas, including the college's other centres, where staff have to wait a long time for assistance.

56 Inspectors agreed that there is a well-resourced library, with 76 quiet study places and an adjoining room for students to undertake project work. It holds about 25,000 books and a range of journals, videos, CD-ROMs, CDs, audiocassettes and information packs. The library has eight open access computers. Although there are useful informal links between library staff and teachers in some curriculum areas, there are no formal links. However, individual staff and students can request purchases of books and journals and most requests are met. Weaknesses identified in the last inspection in some curriculum areas have been remedied but there are currently shortages of books in basic skills, performing arts and media, and some business studies books are out of date. The learning centre and library are open at times convenient for students but the library does not open on Saturday mornings. There is no overall college policy for library and learning resources and there are no arrangements for ensuring a supply of library books and other learning resources for students at most centres away from the main site. A learning resources committee has recently been re-established.

57 Social and eating facilities for students are good at the main site and have recently been refurbished. Students value the new social areas that have recently been opened. At other centres, facilities are few and sometimes poor, particularly at Binns Close. As the self-assessment report identifies, recreational facilities at the main site are good. They include a well-equipped sports hall and fitness centre and a refurbished recreational lounge.

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58 There are sufficient staff work areas. The ratio of computers to support staff is almost 1:1 and the college aims to increase the ratio to a similar level for teaching staff. However, some staff work areas are small and lack storage space. Staff facilities are poor at Binns Close. The college's accommodation strategy includes plans to relocate this centre to the main campus.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

59 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment of quality assurance. They identified some additional weaknesses that the college had not recognised.

Key strengths

- good integration of quality assurance and self-assessment systems
- use of targets for quality assurance in all areas of the college
- careful attention to reporting on progress in remedying weaknesses
- effective methods for obtaining students' perceptions of the college

Weaknesses

- uneven effectiveness of quality assurance in raising standards of students' achievements
- some poorly completed course reviews
- overestimation of the quality of teaching and learning

60 The college has a well-established quality assurance system. The quality assurance framework was last revised in 1999. There is good integration of self-assessment with college planning and other quality assurance activities. A self-assessment review committee keeps the operation of the system under scrutiny. The

academic board considers a good range of reports on quality. The college has received several national awards for the attention it pays to assuring quality.

61 Staff in all areas of the college set targets for their work. Course teams set targets for attendance, retention, achievement and levels of student satisfaction. Performance against these targets is reported in the college's half-termly management information report. However, there is insufficient use of quality or service statements to make clear the standards that students can expect whilst attending the college.

62 The college has developed appropriate mechanisms for monitoring the quality of its provision. Some are not always rigorously applied. Students' experience of the college is thoroughly monitored through surveys of students' perceptions, discussion groups and the use of comment cards. Questions in surveys are appropriately focused to cover the quality of teaching and students' experience in lessons. Course reviews are sometimes poorly completed. Course teams do not always recognise the weaknesses that are indicated by the statistical data they receive on retention and achievement, and necessary action points are not always included. There is an annual report to the academic board, the self-assessment committee and corporation members on the number and nature of the complaints received by the college. All students' written complaints are carefully tracked and recorded.

63 Heads of schools, the assistant principal responsible for quality assurance, the self-assessment review committee and the corporation's quality and performance subcommittee monitor progress on action plans to improve quality. Well-designed forms are used to keep track of how successfully the actions are being carried out. Reporting ceases only when it is considered that an action has been fully implemented.

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64 The findings of the college's lesson observation scheme overestimated the quality of teaching and learning in the college. Following the completion of a round of lesson observations, reports are produced on the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning in each of the college's schools. It is not clear how schools take account of course teams' findings.

65 Several aspects of the college's quality assurance arrangements are aimed at addressing weaknesses in students' achievements. Quality improvement strategies include a centrally held development fund for improving retention and achievement. The academic board reviews courses where improvements are required and also those deserving recognition for good performance. Pass rates in some areas have improved but there are a significant number of courses with very low pass rates. The college has carried out a pilot to measure the value-added to students' qualifications at entry. This is being extended across the college.

66 The college's self-assessment process is well established. There has been an annual self-assessment each year since 1995-96. Each head of school and senior cross-college manager prepares a summative self-assessment report for their areas of responsibility. Although these are subsequently reviewed, the college recognises the need to strengthen its validation arrangements and include external perspectives.

67 Opportunities for staff development are good. Individual training needs are identified. Staff development priorities are set each year. Each area of the college links its staff development programme to the college's strategic priorities. These are supported by the staff development budget. Staff development has not been evaluated recently across the whole college, although individuals evaluate their own development. Staff are appraised. The college's recognition as an Investor in People has recently been reconfirmed.

68 The college's quality assurance system is applied satisfactorily by the college's franchise partners. College surveys measure students' satisfaction. Regular visits by college managers include thorough checks on the quality of the provision. Links between the main curriculum areas of the college and the franchise providers are underdeveloped. For some, targets were not set last year and there has been little lesson observation of franchised work. The college recognises these weaknesses and is taking action to correct them.

Governance

Grade 2

69 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- productive working relationships between governors and managers
- governors' detailed monitoring of college finances
- close monitoring of students' retention and achievement
- effective maintenance of an appropriate range of skills in the corporation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped procedures for openness and accountability
- inappropriate scope of some committees' work

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

71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors have constructive working relationships with college managers. Governors' relations with managers are supportive but appropriately challenging. The record of corporation business demonstrates that governors ask searching questions of management. They require reconsideration of existing proposals or new options to be considered if they are not clear about management's proposals. Governors' participation in a 'link programme' with curriculum areas increases their understanding of curriculum and quality issues. It ensures a more informed participation by governors in the strategic planning and monitoring process. Governors clearly understand the distinction between management and governance.

72 Governors rigorously monitor the college's financial position through the finance and general purposes committee, which meets monthly. This strength was not specifically highlighted in the self-assessment report. Budgetary control reports and cashflow statements are reviewed at each meeting. Governors who are not members of the committee receive the same reports on a monthly basis. The corporation approves the annual budgets, including the three-year financial forecasts and the latest available budgetary control report and cashflow statement.

73 Attendance at corporation and committee meetings is satisfactory and meets governors' own targets. Governors have a wide range of skills. The search committee produces a matrix

to compare governors' experience and expertise against a profile of desirable skills. The corporation has an appropriate proportion of male and female members and of members from minority ethnic backgrounds. Induction procedures are in place for new governors and training takes place, often in collaboration with two local colleges. The training includes presentations from external agencies. The training needs of individual governors have not been identified.

74 As the college's self-assessment report states, the quality and performance committee contributes positively to the promotion of quality. Committee agendas concentrate on matters of quality. The committee receives clear and comprehensive papers regarding the quality of provision and students' perceptions of the college. Students' achievements are reviewed in depth and progress on action points arising from course reviews and self-assessment reports is monitored. The corporation receives frequent and detailed information on student retention, achievement and attendance.

75 The corporation has revised its composition in accordance with the revised instrument and articles of government but has not formally adopted the amendments. The scope of some committees is not consistent with their terms of reference. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. The audit committee receives and makes recommendations to the corporation on the approval of the college financial statements. This dilutes the committee's required focus on internal control. The finance and general purposes committee's terms of reference include reviewing and updating the mission and strategic aims of the college. This can confuse the committee's responsibilities with those of the corporation for determining the educational character and mission of the college.

76 Clerking arrangements are satisfactory. The clerk regularly attends training events to

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keep up to date with further education and governance issues. The clerk has appropriate administrative support. The cycle of governing body and committee meetings is scheduled in advance of the academic year, but does not identify the key items of business to be considered at each meeting and is not formally approved by the corporation. Agendas and papers are issued in good time for meetings. The clerk has been formally appraised in his role as clerk only once by the chair of the corporation. Governors value highly the work and knowledge of the clerk.

77 Procedures for openness and public accountability at the college are underdeveloped. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. A code of conduct has been adopted by the corporation but it does not cover all areas of good practice, as recommended by the Nolan committee. An annually updated register of interests is maintained for governors and senior staff and includes declarations in respect of partners and children. The level of detail for some declarations is insufficient. Governors make annual declarations of their eligibility for the role of governor. The college policy on attendance at corporation meetings does not refer to members of the public, press or other interested parties. The corporation has not formally agreed procedures for the operation of the search committee and made them available for public scrutiny. Minutes and papers of corporation and committee meetings are available in the library. The corporation has plans to hold an open annual general meeting.

Management

Grade 3

78 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but found a further strength and some additional weaknesses, one of which had been identified as a strength.

Key strengths

- strong links with a wide range of external bodies
- good management of franchised provision
- effective communications
- good support to budget holders

Weaknesses

- failure to achieve key targets for students' achievement
- insufficient reporting on health and safety
- underdeveloped market research

79 Since the last inspection there have been major changes in senior management. The college has experienced some financial difficulties and there has been a decline in students' achievements. The new management team is now well established and improvements have begun in the areas of financial health and students' achievements.

80 The recently reorganised management structure is meeting the college's needs. Staff clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Senior management's open and supportive style is appreciated by staff. Recent approaches to strategic planning have been comprehensive. Some school's business plans are thorough but others are not clearly linked to the college's strategic objectives and lack summaries of key actions, and references to students' retention and achievements. It is difficult to track the implementation of key

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objectives of business plans between consecutive years. This hampers efficient and effective monitoring of targets. Staff and other resources are effectively deployed. The effective communications include wide use of electronic mail and newsletters and an appropriate range of meetings and principal's briefings.

81 Recent measures to improve students' retention and achievements have only been partially effective. This was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report. The number of students who obtained their intended award was well below the national average for further education colleges in 1996-97 and 1997-98. In 1998-99, students' retention and achievements improved in some areas, although the extent of this has yet to be confirmed. Not all of the measures taken to improve pass rates have yet succeeded and, overall, achievement rates remain below sector averages.

82 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has productive links with a wide range of external organisations involved in education and training. Staff represent the college on relevant local and regional bodies. Useful links exist with local and national employers. The college has a good reputation in engineering, especially for automotive education and training. The chamber works with the college on several constructive initiatives, including work with disaffected young people at risk of being excluded from school. The college has developed a range of effective strategies to widen participation.

83 Franchising is well managed by an assistant principal supported by a franchise co-ordinator and other staff. The system for the issue of contracts follows the FEFC model contract. Managers are kept informed by regular and comprehensive reports. There are planned termly meetings between the franchise co-ordinator and the heads of centres. Frequent visits are made to partners to monitor compliance with their contract. Franchising has

supported the college in its mission to widen participation, for example, through the establishment of courses for minority ethnic groups and for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

84 Inspectors did not agree with the self-assessment that the management of health and safety is a key strength. Senior and middle managers are responsible for managing health and safety in the college. Regular and necessary safety audits of curriculum areas were carried out until 1998 but none were undertaken in 1999. The college's accident rate is low but risks to health arising from particular occupations are not assessed. Managers provide governors with accident statistics but there is no annual report on health and safety.

85 There are some weaknesses in the management information system. Problems with software have led to inaccuracies in student retention and achievement data. Inspectors agreed that the recording of students' destinations is not systematic. Staff have access to a range of management information, which provides data for schools and support areas. Useful and regular management reports include details of students' attendance, enrolments, average class size, and lecturers' hours.

86 The promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory. Equal opportunities issues are identified in college plans and are recognised as a priority area for staff development. Clear policies and procedures are applied to students' admissions and staff recruitment and selection. Managers are aware that equal opportunities are not always well integrated with most areas of the curriculum.

87 Market research is not well developed, as recognised in the self-assessment report. A new marketing manager has recently been appointed and a marketing strategy group established. The college is developing a new marketing and market research strategy but it is too early to judge its effectiveness.

Cross-college Provision

88 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The head of finance is a qualified accountant and a member of the senior management team. Budgetary control guidelines are contained in financial regulations and financial procedures. Budget holders receive good support from the finance team through budget reports, which include committed expenditure and a prompt response to queries. A new finance system introduced in 1999-2000 has the capability of providing on-line access to budget holders but this has not yet been implemented. During 1998-99, the financial information provided for the senior management team and governors comprised separate reports for income and expenditure, cashflow and liquidity. Income and expenditure variances were monitored on the basis of the projected year-end position rather than actual expenditure to date. The content of financial monitoring reports was revised in December 1999. The college has reported operating deficits for the last three years but achieved a small net surplus for 1998-99.

90 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.

Conclusions

89 The inspection team found the self-assessment report to be a useful basis for the inspection. Many of the judgements were realistic. The report was the outcome of a wide-ranging process, which involved all staff and corporation members. Strengths in teaching and learning were overstated and the college's grading of lessons was higher than that of inspectors. The college placed too much emphasis upon undoubted improvements in the last year rather than the quality of its achievements over time compared with national averages for the sector. The inspection team found that the college had been overgenerous in its grading of some of the cross-college and curriculum areas.

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	2
16-18 years	17
19-24 years	15
25+ years	66
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	34
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	31
Level 4/5 (higher)	8
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	160	2,231	22
Agriculture	25	128	1
Engineering	326	923	12
Business	113	3,053	30
Hotel and catering	26	155	2
Health and community care	239	670	9
Art and design	302	467	7
Humanities	137	924	10
Basic education	144	598	7
Total	1,472	9,149	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 39% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	125	31	0	156
Supporting direct learning contact	48	2	0	50
Other support	142	15	0	157
Total	315	48	0	363

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£10,205,000	£8,960,000	£9,535,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£17.81	£17.31	£16.94
Payroll as a proportion of income	72%	72%	71%
Achievement of funding target	100%	101%	100%*
Diversity of income	28%	29%	32%
Operating surplus	-£317,000	-£299,000	-£127,000*

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)

*projected

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	565	808	937	666	907	921
	Retention (%)	79	83	79	73	77	77
	Achievement (%)	33	43	46	33	41	40
2	Number of starters	918	642	810	768	630	961
	Retention (%)	75	70	78	76	78	80
	Achievement (%)	65	60	50	60	57	42
3	Number of starters	684	525	601	895	880	874
	Retention (%)	79	86	79	84	82	80
	Achievement (%)	62	63	60	62	61	52
4 or 5	Number of starters	8	0	0	107	160	148
	Retention (%)	88	0	0	89	81	81
	Achievement (%)	40	0	0	54	59	43
Short courses	Number of starters	405	599	692	5,486	5,481	5,815
	Retention (%)	85	95	92	88	92	92
	Achievement (%)	62	59	43	64	49	47
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	466	295	207	1,768	1,487	1,365
	Retention (%)	82	90	80	83	82	88
	Achievement (%)	64	36	29	68	57	66

Source: ISR

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