

Bedford College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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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

Bedford College

Eastern Region

Inspected January 2000

Bedford College is one of four colleges of further education in Bedfordshire and Luton. The college operates on four sites in Bedford. The college attracts students mainly from Bedford and the Luton area. In preparation for inspection the college produced its third self-assessment report. The report is comprehensive and self-critical. It includes: developments made since the last inspection and progress on action points from the previous self-assessment report. Governors and all staff contributed to the self-assessment report through their membership of course teams or business support area teams. All reports from these teams were scrutinised by a panel which included a member of the corporation and an external representative. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the college was over-optimistic in its assessment of students' achievements in some curriculum areas. A concurrent inspection was undertaken by the TSC.

The college offers courses in all 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Work in four of these areas and in basic skills across the college was inspected. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. The college is well managed. It has a good record of success

in meeting targets for enrolment and achievement. The level of students' achievements has improved over the last three years. Links with the community are strong. Teaching is generally sound and the management of courses is effective. Communications across the college are good. The strategic planning process is thorough. Self-assessment is comprehensive and all relevant processes are well established. College finances are rigorously monitored. Governors conduct their business openly and there is much good practice in the clerking of the corporation's business. The college should improve: the poor retention and pass rates on some courses; the reliability of its retention data on students; some weak teaching and learning; the tutorial arrangements; the poor quality of its provision for basic skills; the rigour in reviewing some aspects of the curriculum; market research and liaison with employers; and the inadequacies in some accommodation and learning resources.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	3
Engineering	2	General resources	2
Health and social care	3	Quality assurance	3
Art and design	2	Governance	2
Basic skills	4	Management	2

The College and its Mission

1 Bedford College is one of four colleges of further education in Bedfordshire and Luton. The college operates on four sites in Bedford. In July 1999, the college enrolled a total of 10,543 students of whom 81% were part time. The college is an associate college of De Montfort University and has established links with the University of Luton to widen participation in further and higher education. The college offers a wide range of courses in all 10 programme areas funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The majority of students study on courses in business, information technology (IT), engineering, and health and community care. Since the last inspection there has been significant growth of courses in sport and leisure and in the performing arts. A wide range of full-time general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) subjects is offered.

2 The college serves a community more dependent than in other surrounding areas on the manufacturing industry, particularly the automotive industry. Employment in local manufacturing is forecast to remain stable. Growth is forecast in distribution, hotels and the service industries. Bedfordshire has low levels of unemployment at about 3.4% but contains two wards which are among the most deprived in the Eastern region, Queen's Park and Cauldwell and Kingsbrook, where unemployment is approximately 7%. The population of Bedfordshire is estimated to grow by about 2% by 2006 to 401,000. The Bedfordshire population is younger than the national average; about 5.7% are over the age of 75 compared with 7.1% nationally. Just over 5% of the residents of Bedfordshire belong to minority ethnic groups.

3 Bedfordshire has 17 upper schools which provide education for students aged 13 to 18. Seven upper schools are in the town of Bedford. There are also six single-sex independent secondary schools in the town. Of the secondary school population, 74% attend local

education authority (LEA) schools. This proportion is well below the national average and reflects the size of the private education sector in the area. The percentage of young people in Bedfordshire who obtain five subjects in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grades C or above is 46%, which is in line with the national average but 4% below the average for the east of England. The proportion of students remaining in full-time education is 72%. The college's full-time students are mainly drawn from the local schools and those within the Luton area. An Education Action Zone is currently being established in Bedford. Higher education in the county is provided mainly by the University of Luton, Cranfield University and De Montfort University.

4 The college is a member, together with the three other local further education colleges and the University of Luton, of the Bedfordshire and Luton Federation for Further and Higher Education. The federation promotes further and higher education in the area, and acts as a forum for collaborative bids for funding. The college is a member of the Bedfordshire and Luton Lifelong Learning Partnership. Other members include: the three other Bedfordshire and Luton colleges; the Bedfordshire and Luton local authorities; the Careers Service; and the Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise. The college is also an active member of the two Bedford single regeneration project boards.

5 The college is managed by an executive comprising the principal, academic director, finance director and the human resources director. The senior management team comprises the executive, the quality assurance manager and the information and learning technology manager. The curriculum is managed by nine programme area managers. Eight business support managers are responsible for cross-college functions such as student services and marketing. The college employs 277 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 110 are full-time equivalent support staff.

Context

6 The college is committed in its mission to making a contribution to the local community and economy, and to being the first choice for potential students in the locality for education and training. It has four core values covering customer service, students' achievements, performance and people.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 10 January 2000. The inspection team had previously reviewed the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. Data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements in 1999. These were checked against primary sources of evidence, such as registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. The data were found to be largely accurate. There is no students' achievements table attached to the section of the

report on basic skills as the college does not offer courses which lead to a specific basic skills qualification. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately two months before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 49 working days. They observed 66 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated a variety of college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. The Training Standards Council (TSC) team of eight inspectors worked jointly with FEFC inspectors on the inspection of IT, health and social care and engineering. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the 66 lesson inspected, 63% were judged to be good or outstanding and 13% less than satisfactory compared with national averages of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Basic skills	0	3	5	5	0	13
GNVQ	2	9	4	1	0	16
NVQ	0	3	0	0	0	3
Other vocational	5	15	6	0	1	27
Other	0	4	1	2	0	7
Total (No.)	7	34	16	8	1	66
Total (%)	11	52	24	12	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*

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bedford College	10.6	73
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 and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 The inspection covered courses in computing and IT. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. TSC inspectors observed two lessons, as well as reviews of trainees' work and work-based assessment.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- well-managed practical lessons
- a good range of high-quality learning materials
- effective assessment procedures
- a broad range of computing and IT courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention on most courses
- lack of work experience opportunities for full-time students
- ineffective teaching in a few lessons
- some out-of-date resources

11 Inspectors agreed with the college that the broad range of full-time and part-time computing and IT courses provides good progression opportunities from foundation level to higher education. A good selection of short courses in office skills and specialist hardware and software meets the needs of students and the IT industry. A well-devised course specifically for adults returning to education has been successful in preparing students for progression to higher education. Courses are well planned and well managed as noted in the self-assessment report. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed. Lesson plans clearly identify the learning objectives which are shared with students.

12 Most teaching in computing and IT is good. An appropriate variety of effective learning activities, including exposition, question and answer sessions, individual exercises and practical tasks, helps to maintain students' interest. Practical lessons are particularly effective. Students demonstrate a high level of proficiency in programming, fault finding and office skills which are appropriate to the stage of their course. In the less successful lessons students are not fully attentive and activities are insufficiently demanding. In a few lessons teachers' presentations were too long and explanations of topics were unclear; students were bored and lost interest. Learning materials are of a high quality and designed specifically to match course content and assessment needs. Good-quality handouts help students to learn the work thoroughly. Students on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) IT courses make good use of test papers on the college intranet to assess their own learning. Interactive computer-based learning materials for computing and mathematics are successfully used by students.

13 Arrangements for assessment are effective. Assignments are imaginative and related to the computing industry. Students on GNVQ IT foundation courses each prepared a rolling computer presentation with graphics and text downloaded from the Internet to add to their own information on their chosen topic. Teachers provide appropriate written feedback, but in a few cases, comments are too brief to help students to improve their performance. Key skills of numeracy and communication are taught separately and assessed mainly as an integral part of the course assignments. On GNVQ courses, students' portfolios are well organised and of a good standard. Inspectors agreed with the college that students' progress is carefully monitored and recorded. There are no work experience arrangements for full-time students.

Curriculum Areas

14 Improvements have been made to the quality of specialist hardware and software since the self-assessment report was produced. Up-to-date software effectively supports teaching and learning on most courses. Some library books are out of date and for some topics there is too narrow a range of textbooks. Teachers are well qualified. Part-time teachers effectively contribute relevant up-to-date specialist skills based on their current employment in the IT industry. Good use is made of examples from industry to relate theory to its practical application. There is a good level of technical support. Most practical rooms are spacious and well furnished. A few general classrooms are crowded and restrict the use and effectiveness of some teaching methods.

15 The self-assessment report underestimated the significance of the low levels of retention which are below the national average on most courses. Action has been taken to improve monitoring of attendance. There is evidence that retention on the current academic year's courses has improved. Over the last two years a high pass rate has been maintained in GCSE IT. The pass rate is poor on the GCE A level computing course as is noted in the self-assessment report. Retention and pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate are about the national average. Pass rates on the national diploma and the certificate significantly improved in 1999 to above the national average but retention rates were low. Inspectors agreed with the college that there are good results in the NVQ level 2 using IT and wordprocessing and keyboarding examinations.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ IT foundation	1	Number of starters	+	+	14
		Retention (%)	+	+	57
		Achievement (%)	+	+	50
GNVQ IT intermediate	2	Number of starters	18	34	39
		Retention (%)	78	88	77
		Achievement (%)	57	80	57
GCSE IT	2	Number of starters	+	25	18
		Retention (%)	+	52	66
		Achievement (%)	+	83	92
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	23	4	37
		Retention (%)	*	*	33
		Achievement (%)	14	100	64
BTEC national certificate computer studies	3	Number of starters	15	32	27
		Retention (%)	*	*	23
		Achievement (%)	25	36	83
BTEC national diploma computer studies	3	Number of starters	33	48	49
		Retention (%)	*	*	40
		Achievement (%)	85	68	80

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

*data not reliable

+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 21 lessons in automotive, electronic, mechanical and aeronautical engineering. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but concluded that the significance of poor achievement on some courses was underestimated. The TSC observed work-based training in mechanical and motor vehicle engineering.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- the well-managed courses
- improved students' achievements
- the wide range of engineering programmes
- high-quality specialist resources

Weaknesses

- some poor retention and pass rates
- lack of work experience opportunities for full-time students

17 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a comprehensive range of programmes in engineering, providing students with good opportunities for progression. The provision covers courses at craft, technician and higher technician levels in mechanical, electronic and electrical, welding and fabrication, aeronautical, motor vehicle and sound engineering. The broad range of part-time and specialist courses attracts students from a wide geographical area. Employer links are well established and include an engineering advisory panel, and contributions from employers to awards ceremonies and sponsorship arrangements. Inspectors agreed with the college that the curriculum is well managed. Course teams meet regularly. Minutes of meetings are carefully

recorded and contain clear action points. Course documentation is comprehensive and well organised.

18 Teaching was good or outstanding in most of the lessons. A wide range of teaching materials and specialist resources helps to maintain students' interest and extend their learning. Lessons are well structured and teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods. For example, in a practical lesson the students measured the forces on a supported beam. In small groups, students worked purposefully. They correctly resolved those forces into vertical and horizontal components and then calculated the beam reactions. Finally, the students completed a well-prepared assignment which reinforced the practical activity. In the less successful lessons teachers did not check adequately that students had a thorough understanding of the subject and had sufficiently increased their knowledge. In a poorly planned engineering workshop lesson not all students were fully engaged in the activity. There was insufficient response from students for the teacher to know whether or not they had understood the tasks. Individual subject-based tutorials are provided on a 'drop-in' basis for both full-time and part-time students. Students' progress is monitored and recorded at these tutorials and students are required to complete an action plan for their future development.

19 In their practical work students demonstrate a high level of knowledge and skill. Teachers carefully explain theoretical concepts and then students apply these principles to develop their skills in practical lessons. In a sound-engineering lesson on microphone techniques, students correctly identified and illustrated the correct microphone technique from a range of applications and demonstrated microphone placement for a variety of musical instruments. Students effectively used the Internet and college intranet to complete the assignment. In an aircraft lesson, systems

Curriculum Areas

airframe failure by corrosion was considered. Students gave presentations on selected types of corrosion and, in addition, the teacher gave actual examples of corrosion from airframes. Students' assignments are of a good quality; many are wordprocessed. Teachers provide constructive written feedback on most marked work from students. Insufficient attention is given to the development of key skills on some courses.

20 Well-maintained accommodation is equipped with up-to-date industrial standard specialist equipment. The purpose built motor vehicle training centre on a local industrial complex is operated jointly with a local training provider. Workshops are well equipped and spacious and there is a good range of IT provision to support students' learning. A new recording studio for sound engineering is situated on the main site. The engineering workshop has been refurbished. It includes a new computer suite and a computer numerical control lathe and milling machine. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the quality of specialist resources is a strength. Library bookstock is adequate and up to date and there is a good range of journals and CD-ROMs. Teachers are well qualified and have relevant specialist skills and professional qualifications.

21 In 1999, pass rates on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) level 1 and advanced technician courses improved to above the national average. In 1997 and 1998, the retention and pass rates were poor on many courses but this conclusion is not included or acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Over the last three years the pass rates on some courses have improved. Over the same period retention rates have fluctuated. The average attendance in the lessons observed was good at 86%. There is no observation and assessment of NVQs in the workplace. There is a lack of opportunities for work experience for full-time students which is noted in the self-assessment report.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G craft	1	Number of starters	134	143	36
		Retention (%)	90	89	63
		Achievement (%)	40	43	81
C&G craft	2	Number of starters	299	183	232
		Retention (%)	*	*	73
		Achievement (%)	54	38	72
Intermediate technician	2	Number of starters	4	28	+
		Retention (%)	57	100	+
		Achievement (%)	75	86	+
NVQ	2	Number of starters	63	30	69
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	19	33	64
C&G craft	3	Number of starters	64	54	14
		Retention (%)	75	89	70
		Achievement (%)	19	24	64
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	60	81	110
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	50	78	80

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

**data not reliable*

+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 3

22 The inspection covered health and social care courses from foundation to advanced level. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. The TSC inspected courses for work-based trainees in childcare and care.

Key strengths

- well-planned and imaginative teaching
- the effective monitoring of students' progress
- good progression
- the good standard of students' work

Weaknesses

- aspects of classroom management
- some poor achievements
- low and declining retention on some courses
- insufficient assessment of key skills

23 The college offers a broad range of programmes in health and care, including: GNVQs in health and social care; national certificates and diplomas in social care and health studies; and NVQs in care up to level 4. A range of higher national certificates is also offered. The courses provide good progression routes for students both within the college and to higher education and employment. These strengths were not identified in the self-assessment report. Courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly to discuss course and department issues. Minutes of meetings are well maintained and prompt action is taken to address issues that are raised. There are productive links with local social service providers.

24 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching is well planned. Teachers use appropriately detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Learning objectives are carefully explained to students. In the best lessons students engage in research, develop presentational skills and are involved in practical tasks. One group had set up an imaginative display on the effects of alcohol on health. It invited other college students to view and discuss their work. In the weaker lessons teachers do not check that students have understood the work and the time allowed for some activities is misjudged. Key skills are underdeveloped in some courses, a weakness partially identified in the self-assessment report. Where key skills units are taught, they are not integrated with other aspects of a course or its assessment work; they are insufficiently assessed. Work experience forms an important part of the curriculum for all health and social care courses and is highly valued by students. Teachers regularly monitor and visit students in their placements. There is a lack of integration of equal opportunities issues with teaching and assessed work. Where students undertake work for specific parts of a course covering equal opportunities the work is of a good standard and students demonstrate sound levels of understanding. However, students do not apply this understanding to other areas of their work. Equal opportunities issues are not routinely addressed in lessons. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

25 Inspectors agreed with the college that students are well supported in their studies. Students complete individual learning plans and identify goals that are then monitored carefully by their tutors. Tutors maintain comprehensive records of students' achievements and use tutorials to review students' progress regularly. Students' portfolios include comprehensive tracking sheets where grades for each unit are recorded. Teachers give constructive and detailed feedback to students on their assignments.

Curriculum Areas

26 Accommodation for the health and social care courses is fit for purpose. All rooms have overhead projectors and whiteboards; most rooms have videos. Some of the classrooms are untidy. Displays of students' work, particularly in the main corridor of the department, effectively improve the learning environment. There is an adequate stock of books and journals in the department and the library carries a good range of materials relevant to the area.

27 Students show appropriate levels of knowledge, understanding and skills in lessons and in their written work. The standard of students' work is good on the majority of courses. Files and portfolios are well organised. Students' achievements are generally poor.

Pass rates on the national diploma and certificate social care courses and on the NVQ programmes have been consistently below national averages. Pass rates for the GNVQ intermediate in health and social care were significantly below the national average in 1997 and 1998 although there was an improvement in 1999. The pass rate on the GNVQ advanced in health and social care was well below the national average in 1999.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
BTEC first diploma in caring	1	Number of starters	+	+	15
		Retention (%)	+	+	79
		Achievement (%)	+	+	73
GNVQ intermediate in health and social care	2	Number of starters	26	14	11
		Retention (%)	84	74	79
		Achievement (%)	54	36	73
GNVQ advanced in health and social care	3	Number of starters	+	+	12
		Retention (%)	+	+	86
		Achievement (%)	+	+	33
National diploma and certificate in caring services (social care)	3	Number of starters	40	35	9
		Retention (%)	*	*	19
		Achievement (%)	75	63	78
NVQ care	3	Number of starters	+	26	55
		Retention (%)	+	*	68
		Achievement (%)	+	46	13

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

*data not reliable

+course not running

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 2

28 Ten lessons were observed covering a range of art and design programmes. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- well-structured and effective teaching
- thorough assessment procedures
- good achievement on most courses
- well-managed courses
- effective support to meet individuals' learning needs
- high-quality IT facilities

Weaknesses

- insufficient checks on students' learning
- poor retention on GCE A level
- some inadequate accommodation

29 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a wide range of art and design courses. There are good opportunities for progression from foundation level to higher education courses. The part-time courses in art, design and computer-aided design provide a good choice to meet the individual needs of students. Programmes are well planned and well managed as noted in the self-assessment report. There is a strong and supportive leadership across the programme area. There are regular team meetings with core agenda items which include curriculum planning, student retention and attendance, and self-assessment. Action points from the meetings are documented and progress towards their achievement is carefully monitored.

30 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is much good teaching. Most lessons were good or outstanding. Schemes of work are appropriately detailed and lesson planning is thorough and effective. Teachers

use a suitable variety of teaching methods to help students to learn. These include formal lectures, practical activities, demonstrations, group work, and one-to-one tuition. In a few lessons not all students concentrated on the task that had been set. At the end of some lessons, teachers did not summarise the main topics and check that students had understood the work.

31 Students undertake field trips to Wales, London and Barcelona to deepen their studies and develop a more extensive cultural awareness. Carefully constructed pre-visit briefs include: clear aims and objectives; an itinerary of visits; information to be gathered; and details of how the information should be used in a design project. Project briefs are imaginative and well written. They often contain illustrated examples as additional guidance for students, who find them invaluable as a source of reference throughout their studies. Emphasis is placed on the importance of drawing skills, on collecting visual materials and on the thorough exploration of ideas before the actual design is started. Students work confidently with a variety of media and specialist tools as part of their practical work. Students' portfolios are of a consistently high standard and include good observation drawings.

32 As is acknowledged in the self-assessment report, students' progress is assessed in a variety of ways. Peer- and self-assessments and regular critiques are used effectively for students' final assessment. Students frequently receive constructive written and verbal feedback from teachers. They confirmed that they found the staged assessment method supportive. It helped particularly during a long project, in planning the development of work and fully thinking through sets of ideas. Students' additional learning needs are identified and met effectively. For a GNVQ intermediate group, a literacy support tutor worked alongside the specialist tutor in the design studio and provided sound learning support.

Curriculum Areas

33 High-quality specialist IT resources are well used for teaching purposes and as a 'drop-in' facility for students. Staff are appropriately qualified and many are practising artists and designers. Visiting artists enhance and broaden students' learning experiences. Several studios are too small for the numbers of students which restricts learning opportunities. Art and design courses are located on three floors and in two buildings. This separation impedes the sharing of good practice and to an extent prevents students learning from their peers. These shortcomings in accommodation are noted in the self-assessment report.

34 On GNVQ courses, pass rates have steadily improved over the last three years and are above the national average for the sector. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that pass rates on most courses are good and are above or in line with the national averages for the programme area. Over the last three years, the retention rate has declined on the C&G interior decorative techniques course. The retention rate on the two-year GCE A level fine art course is poor. The college recognises that pass rates are low on some part-time courses. Inspectors agreed that the exhibition and fashion show celebrated students' success.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G interior decorative techniques part 1	1	Number of starters	17	26	10
		Retention (%)	76	77	60
		Achievement (%)	62	70	67
C&G interior decorative techniques part 2	2	Number of starters	7	7	23
		Retention (%)	71	86	57
		Achievement (%)	80	50	92
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	15	23	9
		Retention (%)	93	70	67
		Achievement (%)	43	69	83
GNVQ advanced	3	Number of starters	29	22	15
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	80	80	93
National diploma in graphic design	3	Number of starters	23	19	17
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	69	87	87
Diploma in foundation studies	3	Number of starters	76	93	87
		Retention (%)	91	92	98
		Achievement (%)	88	89	91
GCE A level fine art (one year)	3	Number of starters	3	37	48
		Retention (%)	67	86	75
		Achievement (%)	0	100	97
GCE A level fine art (two year)	3	Number of starters	7	35	27
		Retention (%)	71	*	30
		Achievement (%)	60	75	100

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

*data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 4

35 The inspection covered a range of basic skills provision which included: programmes for adults in outreach centres; in-class learning support; English and mathematics on full-time entry level programmes; basic skills workshops; and level 1 key skills in communications and application of number. Thirteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They concluded that the college had overstated the strengths and underestimated the significance of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- comprehensive basic skills support
- good teaching on community-based programmes
- development of basic skills to widen participation in education

Weaknesses

- inadequate initial assessment of some students' learning needs
- insufficient attention to the learning needs of individuals
- some inappropriate learning activity
- poor attendance
- insufficient monitoring of students' progress
- insufficient appropriately qualified teachers

36 Basic education is managed by the general education department which has responsibility for: outreach provision; learning support; entry level programmes; and key skills co-ordination. The college has recently extended its community provision to four outreach sites. One of these is

a local nursery school where provision for parents is supported by the Bedford Health Promotion Authority. The college is a member of local partnerships committed to widening participation in further education. It responds positively to meeting the needs of students who require help in basic skills. Recent activity has included a summer school for asylum seekers and the provision of basic education in the workplace.

37 Inspectors agreed with the college that teaching on community-based courses is good. English and mathematics lessons are well planned and well evaluated. Teaching is lively and engages students' interest. IT is used effectively to improve writing skills. Inspectors found that teaching on other basic skills courses is less satisfactory. Teachers pay insufficient attention to the learning needs of individual students in planning, teaching and evaluating their lessons. For example, on entry level programmes the initial assessment of students' learning needs does not provide a baseline from which to identify the specific needs of each student or to plan how those needs will be met. This weakness was not explicitly identified in the self-assessment report. There are some inappropriate learning activities. In some lessons there is too much emphasis on teaching the whole class together with little or no variation in learning activity. This can, for example, involve everyone in the class completing standard worksheets. Inspectors agreed with the college that the emphasis on paper-based activities is a weakness. There are few opportunities for students to relate activities to their own experience, even when the content is directly relevant to their vocational area.

38 Students are provided with a comprehensive range of support options for basic skills. These include: individual support in the classroom; individual support at pre-arranged times; additional tutorial time; and attendance at group workshops. The take-up of support by those students identified as requiring

Curriculum Areas

this help has increased substantially compared with the previous year, when provision was only offered centrally on a 'drop-in' basis.

39 Inspectors agreed with the college that there are weaknesses in the monitoring of students' progress in basic skills. The recording of the progress of individual students is not consistent and records are insufficiently detailed. In reviews of students' progress, their achievements are described in general terms rather than in relation to the achievement of specific skills. The monitoring of the contribution made by classroom assistants supporting students in lessons has yet to be developed. The attendance at the lessons observed during the inspection was low at 62%.

40 The self-assessment report acknowledged that the majority of basic skills teachers do not have an appropriate qualification. Classroom assistants are not given an adequate induction. There is an appropriate range of specialist resources to support teaching, including teaching at outreach centres. The key skills centre is uncomfortably noisy and crowded at times.

41 Under new arrangements for learning support, introduced in September 1999, basic skills provision is integrated with other aspects of students' main programmes of study. At the time of inspection, it was too early to evaluate the effect of these new arrangements on students' achievements. On pre-access courses, achievements are good. There is a high level of success on entry level programmes.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

42 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good initial guidance and admissions procedures
- effective arrangements for learning support
- good support for students from individual tutors

Weaknesses

- insufficient evaluation of the impact of learning support
- the ineffective use of some students' individual learning plans
- some poor practice in group tutorials

43 Since August 1999, the management of support for students has been shared between two directors. At the time of the inspection, most key staff had been in post for a term or less and inspectors concluded that it was too early to judge the effectiveness of the new structure. The college has a clear admissions policy requiring applications procedures to be monitored against charter commitments. Students and work-based trainees report generally high satisfaction with pre-entry information. As noted in the self-assessment report, publicity materials are attractive and informative and the Internet is used to publicise courses. The college holds open days and 'taster' days for pupils in years 10 and 11 from local schools.

44 All full-time and many part-time students have a formalised induction to the college. There is useful guidance to help tutors to plan activities which are specific to the students'

courses. Some students found the induction helpful, but others either found it too short or too long. Those who were returning to the college to enrol on another course found some aspects irrelevant. As identified in the self-assessment report, the college reviews induction annually and action is taken to improve the procedures.

45 Most students complete a diagnostic skills test to identify additional learning needs. This process is generally effective. The initial assessment of the needs of work-based trainees is not as well developed. In September 1999, the college changed its arrangements for providing learning support. Students no longer attend a centralised learner support unit. Learning support staff help students either by assisting them in the classroom or working with small groups in rooms close to their main study areas. Individual help is also available in the college skills centre. Under the new arrangements there has been a significant increase in the number of students who have been identified as needing additional learning support receiving help. Means of measuring the impact of learning support on students' rates of achievement and retention have not been developed, despite the falling retention rate over the last three years among full-time students. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report. Arrangements to help students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties are generally effective, and there is sufficient individual help for students with mobility difficulties. There is little use of accreditation of prior learning for work-based trainees.

46 The college tutorial policy entitles students studying for more than six hours a week to a minimum of one individual tutorial each term. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that individual tutor support for students is a strength. Part-time students and work-based trainees are also allocated a tutor whom they can approach with any problems;

Cross-college Provision

they find these arrangements helpful. While students report positively on subject and individual tutorials, there is significant dissatisfaction with general group tutorials. Many group tutorials are not well planned and the sessions are often unproductive. Some tutors cover aspects of careers advice in group tutorials, but there is no centralised recording of such activities and opportunities are missed to share good practice. This weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report.

47 Working jointly with their tutors, students are expected to complete an agreed individual learning plan which includes activity to promote the development of key skills. Useful guidelines are provided to assist tutors in this process. Inspectors found insufficient attention had been given to monitoring the use of individual learning plans and they were not always referred to during individual tutorials. In the best examples, plans are detailed and provide students with good guidance for their future development but many are superficial. Some students were introduced to the plans for the first time during the week of the inspection. Students who attend the skills centre for key skills development expressed considerable dissatisfaction. The value and relevance of developing the skills has not been explained adequately to students. Learning materials for key skills are not always pertinent to the students' course. The college does not have a policy for the development of key skills.

48 The college has helpful welfare and counselling services. External agencies are available to students on request for health, social or counselling advice. A nursery is provided for 20 children aged two to five years and priority is given to students' children. The majority of students using the service receive financial help from the college towards nursery costs. There is an active student council, which organises social and fund-raising events. The council is represented on the academic board and on the corporation. There is a limited

enrichment programme of extra-curricular activities for students, comprising mainly sports provision.

49 Since the last inspection, the college has increased provision for careers education and guidance, particularly through changes made since September 1999. The college has appointed a full-time careers adviser. The partnership agreement with the Bedfordshire Careers Service is clear and working relationships are good. Inspectors found that it was too early to gauge the full effectiveness of the new provision.

General Resources

Grade 2

50 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that one of the weaknesses had been understated.

Key strengths

- well-maintained and well-equipped teaching rooms
- welcoming reception and student services area
- significant refurbishment of accommodation
- commitment to the improvement of environmental performance

Weaknesses

- insufficient 'drop-in' access to computers
- under-utilisation of classrooms
- inadequate library facilities
- narrow range of specialist resources to support students with sensory impairments

Cross-college Provision

51 Since the last inspection, the college has continued to improve its accommodation. Its largest site located in the centre of Bedford, includes a range of 1960s buildings for specialist accommodation, student services, learning resources and a sports hall. The three other sites are smaller and have specific uses. Two industrial buildings located in Kempston are used for construction and motor vehicle engineering programmes, and the Enterprise House site in Queen's Park houses community-based provision. There has been significant investment in hairdressing and beauty therapy, performing arts and IT facilities. The accommodation strategy does not adequately address the effective use of space.

52 Inspectors agreed with the college that the standard of most teaching rooms is good. Minimum standards have been established for general teaching areas. The majority of classrooms and workshops are clean, tidy and appropriately furnished, although there is little emphasis on visual display to stimulate interest in subject areas. The college has an effective five-year maintenance programme and responses to routine maintenance requests are prompt. Security is unobtrusive and effective; video surveillance systems provide a good level of external security. On all sites much of the accommodation for teaching staff is good, although in some areas it is cramped. Administrative areas are well equipped. The student common room is spacious and modern; there are easy chairs and a pool table.

53 The college has developed an IT strategy in response to a weakness identified in the last inspection report. Investment in up-to-date equipment and software has increased significantly since the last inspection. Development of the college's IT provision is effectively overseen by a co-ordinating group. All college buildings have a fully integrated communication and telephone system. All staff have access to the college's intranet and the Internet. The college has over 500 modern

computers providing a computer to student ratio of 1:7. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of machines and technical support is good. Students have insufficient opportunities to use computers outside timetabled classes. There are only 31 dedicated computers available to students on a 'drop-in' basis. This weakness was understated in the self-assessment report. Access to the Internet by students is at an early stage of development.

54 The learning centre on the main site has a wide range of resources including videotape recordings, audio cassettes, CD-ROMs, periodicals and over 48,000 books. It has 97 study places, 23 computers and four CD-ROM machines, and a quiet study area. The centre maintains detailed information on students' usage. The college acknowledges that at peak times the centre is cramped and noisy. There is an inadequate library stock for some curriculum areas, for example IT, sport and leisure, and business and management. The learning centre computerised system does not include books located in curriculum areas, a weakness not identified by the college. A range of leaflets gives the sources of information available for subject areas, including Internet sites. Most students receive a general induction to the learning centre and a further induction which is specific to their curriculum area. Opening times meet the needs of most students.

55 The college makes provision for students with particular requirements, especially those with physical disabilities. There are designated parking spaces for drivers with disabilities near each main building on the main site. Most teaching areas on the main site are accessible to wheelchair users, with the exception of some workshops for the music curriculum area. There is no wheelchair access at Enterprise House. The college publishes a map with details of access for people with disabilities. There is an effective policy of finding appropriate alternative rooms to ensure that students with

Cross-college Provision

restricted mobility can pursue their studies. There is a narrow range of specialist resources to support students with sensory and other impairments. The college does not maintain a central record of the specialist resources which are available to help students. There are no large computer monitors and adapted keyboards. There is no mini-com facility at the main reception or other sites. The college has a commitment to improve environmental performance. An environmental policy encourages managers and staff to take an active interest in environmental issues in their area of activity.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

56 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. The college has made good progress in addressing weaknesses since the report was produced.

Key strengths

- effective linkage of rigorous self-assessment to strategic planning
- the thorough assessment of the quality of teaching
- a well-documented and well-monitored course review process
- sound arrangements to support improvements in quality assurance
- effective staff development linked to appraisal and strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- a lack of rigour in the review of some courses
- lack of effective assessment of some aspects of the curriculum
- no systematic procedures to gather the views of employers

- insufficient arrangements to assess quality assurance by franchise providers
- inadequate quality assurance for short courses

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation and college staff have a firm commitment to improving quality. The quality strategy identifies appropriate key objectives linked to a clear quality policy. A comprehensive handbook contains detailed guidelines for quality assessment procedures. Informative reports on standards are presented to the executive, the academic board and the standards and achievement committee of the corporation. Staff understand their responsibilities for assessing and improving quality of provision.

58 Self-assessment reports have been produced annually for three years. A cross-college group which includes a member of the corporation and external consultants scrutinised the report prepared for inspection. A working group of the corporation continues to make a significant contribution to the development and validation of self-assessment. The self-assessment report is comprehensive. Judgements are explicitly stated with appropriate evidence to substantiate them. The college's analysis of students' retention rates on some two-year courses was based on inaccurate data and led to inappropriate judgements for some qualifications. A thorough and well-organised lesson observation scheme has helped in the dissemination of good practice and improvements in teaching. The self-assessment report recognised the need for more comprehensive standards of service in some areas of the college's work. The subsequent revision of the charter contains explicit statements of the standards students and employers can expect from the college.

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59 The college has not systematically assessed the quality of the key skills provision and the effectiveness of links with industry and work placements providers. These weaknesses are noted in the self-assessment report and action is being taken to rectify them. The quality handbook states that franchise providers are required to comply with the college's systems but no explicit procedures exist to assess provider arrangements. The college training agency completed a self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection by the TSC. In common with most other college areas, the training agency has identified service standards and made arrangements to monitor achievement of associated targets on a monthly basis. There are inadequate arrangements for assessing the quality of training provided in the workplace. The quality of students' assessments is monitored by internal verification and careful scrutiny of external verifier reports. However, internal verification reports do not follow a common format and there is insufficient attention to ensuring that the required standards are applied.

60 The college carried out a reliable audit of course reviews and found that over one-third were not adequately completed. Additional guidance to course leaders resulted in review reports being rewritten. Some teams did not appropriately evaluate teaching and learning and some course reviews did not provide an accurate assessment of rates of retention or achievement. Action plans often lacked clear action points and did not always identify responsibilities. Improvements have been made to course reviews to address these weaknesses. Course teams meet regularly and course documentation is well maintained. Since the self-assessment report was produced, action has been taken to monitor action plans more effectively. However, inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that procedures are not yet applied consistently across the college. Arrangements to evaluate short courses are not uniform and there is inadequate reporting to senior managers.

61 There are sound arrangements to support improvements in quality of provision. A sophisticated model has been developed to identify improvement targets for courses. It is based on previous levels of performance and national benchmarking data. Improvements in students' achievements have been made in the last three years. Monitoring of course reviews, external verifier reports, complaints and student retention rates enable courses at risk to be identified. Recommendations for improvement are made following investigation and discussion with course teams. Students' views about their courses and the college are analysed but there is insufficient use of surveys to monitor the effectiveness of action taken. Student surveys show some increase in levels of satisfaction since the last inspection. The self-assessment report acknowledges that there are no systematic procedures to gather the views of employers or parents. Complaints are carefully monitored, resolved swiftly, and used effectively to identify areas for improvement.

62 Staff development is well managed. Inspectors agreed that training and development is closely related to the achievement of college and personal objectives. The self-assessment report identified low attendance on in-college activities which led to a review of the overall objectives and programme of training. Insufficient emphasis has been given to industrial updating and this shortcoming was not included in the action plan arising from the self-assessment report. The college achieved Investor in People status in 1998. During 1998-99, over 90% of permanent staff attended a training event. The appraisal of staff is well established and in the last year appraisal reports were completed for 99% of staff.

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Governance

Grade 2

63 Inspectors and auditors were in broad agreement with the college's judgements on governance in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were understated.

Key strengths

- good clerking arrangements by an independent clerk
- effective procedures for the recruitment of governors
- good arrangements for the induction and training of governors
- regular and rigorous monitoring of college finances
- highly effective remuneration committee
- the open and accountable style of the corporation

Weaknesses

- insufficient measures to evaluate the performance of the corporation
- shortcomings in the scrutiny and reporting of franchised provision
- inadequate market information

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

65 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that good clerking arrangements have been established. The clerk to the corporation has a comprehensive job description and attends appropriate training. The clerk to the corporation has no other responsibilities within the college and clerks all

committees. Corporation and committee business is clerked to a very high standard with clear and timely agendas, minutes and prepared papers.

66 There are effective procedures for the recruitment of governors. The corporation took appropriate action to re-determine its membership in accordance with the modified instrument and articles of government. The search committee carries out a thorough and systematic annual audit of governors' skills and has been active in nominating new governors and in seeking local community representation. The corporation has staff and student membership. The turnover of governors is low. Public advertising has been used successfully to attract new governors. Comprehensive nominations procedures have been established. These strengths are not clearly highlighted in the self-assessment report.

67 The self-assessment report did not identify the strength of the arrangements for the induction, training and development of governors. There is a well-devised and comprehensive induction pack. The training needs of governors have been thoughtfully analysed. Governors' development days are well planned and attendance is high. These are supplemented by special briefings in advance of some corporation meetings to ensure that governors are well briefed. There is a clear statement on the relative roles of governors and managers; these roles are well understood.

68 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation closely monitors college finances. All governors receive the college's monthly management accounts. Meetings of the finance, estates, and strategic committees carefully consider financial reports and advise the corporation. Governors are closely involved in the budget setting process. Insufficient consideration has been given recently to some aspects of franchised provision and this weakness is not identified in the self-assessment report. Although the strategy for franchising has been updated, there

Cross-college Provision

are no reports on the quality of provision. Governors do give annual approval to existing franchise holders either through committee or the corporation. The current level of franchised provision is low. The college has a highly effective remuneration committee as noted in the self-assessment report. For each senior postholder there are clear and measurable objectives linked to the college's strategic objectives and these are reviewed by the remuneration committee.

69 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation demonstrates openness and accountability. A register of interests is completed by all governors and senior postholders and is updated annually. The corporation has established comprehensive and clear procedures for openness and accountability including standing orders, a code of ethics, a code of conduct and a 'whistleblowing' procedure. An annual general meeting is held and an annual report produced.

70 The previous inspection report identified that there were insufficient procedures for the corporation to evaluate its own performance. Proposals were tabled in May 1999 to take this matter forward but inspectors agreed with the observation in the self-assessment report that governors were unclear about the next stage. The corporation's established indicators which can be used to measure its effectiveness or as a basis for setting targets are limited to attendance records. This weakness is noted in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that there is insufficient labour market information on which to steer the overall college strategy. The corporation lack information on the financial viability of courses.

Management

Grade 2

71 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements. Progress has been made in addressing many of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- record of success in meeting targets for enrolment and achievements
- rigorous implementation of strategic objectives
- good communication across the college
- effective human resources management
- strong community links
- effective financial monitoring

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped links with employers in many curriculum areas
- insufficient market research
- poor record in improving the rate of student retention

72 The college's management structure and its lines of communication and accountability are clear. Following a major reorganisation in 1997, the college introduced a comprehensive and successful management development programme for middle managers. Management of courses is generally effective. There is a senior manager with overall responsibility for nine academic programme managers. Although line management is clear, the college recognises that it needs to strengthen arrangements for co-ordinating the curriculum and student support. Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection in improving internal communication. Annual staff surveys are used to check staff perceptions and improve the effectiveness of communication. Inspectors

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agreed with the self-assessment report that the management of human resources is effective. There are comprehensive policies and procedures for the management of staff and an agreed communications strategy. Staff deployment is carefully monitored. Good working relationships exist between teaching and support staff.

73 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the strategic planning process leads to rigorous implementation of corporate objectives. Comprehensive operational plans for both curriculum and business support areas form the basis for setting personal objectives for staff. These objectives are translated into measurable targets and performance indicators, which are carefully monitored and reviewed. The college acknowledges that it does not make sufficient use of market research information to support decisions. There is insufficient local labour market intelligence and what is available does not adequately assist developments in the curriculum. Little use is made of information contained on the student database.

74 Managers make effective use of the wide range of reports from the college's management information system. Reports are in a standard form and are available on the corporate intranet. Systems for recording student data are generally sound. However, the miscalculation of some retention rates on two-year courses resulted in an over-optimistic perception of performance in some programme areas. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has been successful in raising levels of student enrolment and achievement. There is a comprehensive approach to the setting and monitoring of targets for individual courses, programme areas and the college as a whole. FEFC benchmarking and performance indicator data for the period 1995-96 to 1997-98 together with the college's data for 1998-99 demonstrate a sustained improvement in student enrolments and achievements. Achievement rates have risen

from a low base to a level close to the average for general further education and tertiary colleges. The college has not fully recognised and addressed problems of declining levels of student retention on full-time courses.

75 Links with the community are strong. This strength is acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The college has worked successfully with the local authority and community groups to widen participation. In conjunction with the LEA and local schools the college has successfully developed a 'way to work' programme for over 40 year 10 and 11 pupils. In 1999, about 500 pupils attended a summer school at the college. The college recognises that it needs to extend its links with employers. In engineering, there are extensive links with employers but in other curriculum areas employer liaison is weak. There is not a common approach to students' work experience and on some courses arrangements are inadequate.

76 Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service concludes that the college's financial management is good. The college enjoys moderate levels of solvency and is forecasting to break even in the next three years. The financial forecast for 1999 to 2002 was prepared in good time for approval. A clear budget process for 1999-2000 was documented although the high level budget statement presented to governors was not easily comparable to the first year of the financial forecast. Only a few financial performance indicators have been established. Comprehensive and timely monthly management accounts are prepared which contain income and expenditure, balance sheet information and cashflow forecasts. Management accounts are received by the senior management team. Budget holders receive comprehensive reports. The college has achieved a good record of returns to the FEFC. Financial regulations have only recently been updated and are in draft. The college's internal

Cross-college Provision

audit service and external auditors have not identified any significant deficiencies in internal control.

77 Inspectors agreed that the college has a strong commitment to equal opportunities. The equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and effectively promoted. In response to an identified under-representation of male staff and of staff drawn from the black and Asian communities, the college has modified its recruitment policy. There is close monitoring of student data to indicate the extent to which the college serves its local communities. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is significant variation in awareness of equal opportunities across the different curriculum areas. An equal opportunities monitoring group has been established to address this issue.

Conclusions

78 The college produced its third self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The inspection team found that the self-assessment report was a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. At the time of the inspection, the college had made progress in addressing some of the weaknesses in the report. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the cross-college grades. However, they concluded that the college had been overgenerous in their grading of four of the curriculum grades.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	1
16-18 years	27
19-24 years	19
25+ years	50
Not known	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	18
Level 2 (intermediate)	42
Level 3 (advanced)	25
Level 4 /5 (higher)	6
(non-schedule 2)	9
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	547	1,560	20
Agriculture	1	21	0
Construction	62	434	5
Engineering	256	719	9
Business	156	807	9
Hotel and catering	102	558	6
Health and community care	392	1,271	16
Art and design	300	95	4
Humanities	207	2,734	28
Basic education	32	289	3
Total	2,055	8,488	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 13% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (December 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	165	2	0	167
Supporting direct learning contact	60	2	0	62
Other support	46	2	0	48
Total	271	6	0	277

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£10,872,000	£10,438,000	£10,859,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.26*	£17.43*	£17.02*
Payroll as a proportion of income	62%	56%	55%
Achievement of funding target	117%	101%	100%
Diversity of income	21%	21%	22%
Operating surplus	£617,000	-£104,000	£89,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), audited accounts (1998) college (1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 98/43 (1997), audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

*provisional data

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	231	888	1,524	415	1,287	1,557
	Retention (%)	91*	88*	95*	88*	93*	96*
	Achievement (%)	33	67	70	34	80	60
2	Number of starters	1,064	1,521	1,739	1,054	1,630	1,547
	Retention (%)	76*	80*	82*	83*	79*	88*
	Achievement (%)	32	46	45	37	50	47
3	Number of starters	1,009	1,112	1,296	1,296	1,421	1,524
	Retention (%)	91*	77*	82*	87*	79*	87*
	Achievement (%)	43	51	73	52	51	59
4 or 5	Number of starters	23	17	18	216	308	345
	Retention (%)	100*	82*	100*	95*	89*	89*
	Achievement (%)	61	38	38	52	48	53
Short courses	Number of starters	174	209	286	415	498	454
	Retention (%)	92*	94*	92*	92*	91*	93*
	Achievement (%)	62	46	57	41	36	59
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	835	2,397	1,302	5,215	7,096	4,403
	Retention (%)	94*	97*	97*	96*	98*	97*
	Achievement (%)	29	75	67	43	61	70

Source: ISR

*ISR data may not be reliable

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