Leeds College of Technology

Contents

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

Source: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Sample size: 112 college inspections
Note: percentages subject to rounding

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 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 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

Leeds College of Technology

Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Inspected November 2000

Leeds College of Technology is a general further education college with its main centre, City campus, in the centre of the city of Leeds. The college has two additional centres at East Bank and South Leeds. It is the only college in the city to provide printing, engineering and motor vehicle courses. It also provides courses in IT, media, photography, business management and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In preparation for the inspection, the college produced a comprehensive self-assessment report. The self-assessment process is effective and rigorous. Staff were fully involved and the report was approved by governors. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report. However, the college overstated the quality of teaching and learning in some areas. Inspectors agreed with all the grades for cross-college provision and all but one of the curriculum grades proposed in the college's self-assessment report.

Since the last inspection, the college has improved students' achievements and strengthened its links with industry and other external partners. It currently provides training and education for nearly 800 companies. It has reduced its reliance on funding from the FEFC and widened participation. The college has very good links with schools and the community, and prospective students are given effective and objective advice on their education and career options. The college has addressed the issue of excess space. Much accommodation has been refurbished and equipped to a high standard. Specialist facilities for motor vehicle, printing and IT are good. Arrangements for managing the college are effective. There is a comprehensive quality assurance system and an effective staff appraisal scheme. The governors effectively promote the college in the local community and the governance of the college is conducted openly. The college should improve: poor attendance and punctuality on many courses; some declining retention rates; weaknesses in classroom teaching; some untidy and drab accommodation at the South Leeds and East Bank centres; arrangements for developing basic skills; some aspects of support for students; access for those with restricted mobility; use of student data and action-planning by course teams; and governors' involvement in monitoring academic standards.

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

Curriculum area	Grade
Computing and information technology	2
Mechanical engineering and manufacturing	2
Motor vehicle	1
Electrical and electronics	2
Media, print and photography	2
Basic skills	3

Cross-college provision	Grade
Support for students	2
General resources	2
Quality assurance	2
Governance	2
Management	2

The College and its Mission

1   Leeds College of Technology is a general further education college, which was established in 1966 to provide education and training in technology, engineering and science. The college now offers a broad range of courses with a particular focus on technology and the manufacturing industries. The college has three main centres: City campus in the city centre, South Leeds and East Bank. In partnership with Leeds City Council and other colleges, the college also offers courses at the East Leeds Family Learning Centre.

2   Leeds has a population of 727,000. Unemployment in Leeds currently stands at 3.9%. This compares well with other cities. However, in the inner city unemployment is 8% and in some wards it is as high as 15%. Of the total population of Leeds, 30% live in wards amongst the 10% most deprived in the United Kingdom. The college draws most of its full-time students from these areas. In 1999-2000, the college recruited 1,282 full-time students and 4,784 part-time students. In 1999, the percentage of pupils leaving school with five or more subjects at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above was 39.4%, compared with a national figure of 47.9%. The college recruited a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas in the academic year 1999-2000.

3   In Leeds, there are six other further education colleges and one sixth form college. The college has well-established links with other colleges in the city. Benefits of this partnership include group purchasing arrangements, joint staff development, school links, and European and other projects. There are two universities in Leeds, and the college shares in the teaching of some of their degree courses. The college provides courses for schools, of which one supports a work-related curriculum and another is for disaffected pupils. The college has placed 10 video-conferencing workstations and design

software in schools, enabling remote access to the college's computer controlled machines. The college is also a member of the West Yorkshire Consortium of Colleges and works with many other colleges in the region on joint initiatives and projects.

4   The college provides training and education to nearly 800 companies. It has established a print media centre which is used by print and packaging companies across the region. The college also works closely with engineering companies through its involvement in the Leeds Manufacturing Initiative and Leeds Training Trust, a training association representing approximately 60 engineering companies. The college is a major provider of courses in information and communications technologies. It is an accredited regional centre for information technology (IT) networking courses and an approved training provider for a well-known software company. The college has made the use of information and communications technology in the curriculum a priority. This has been supported by the development of on-line learning materials, in partnership with colleges and universities in the region.

5   Approximately 63% of the college's income comes from the FEFC. It is one of the Leeds Training and Enterprise Council's (TEC's) major providers of foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship programmes. The college also receives significant support from the European Social Fund.

6   The college mission states that 'Through excellence in education and training, Leeds College of Technology will contribute to the region's competitiveness and enable individuals to realise their learning potential'.

The Inspection

7   The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 November 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 1998 and 1999 were derived from the individualised student record (ISR) and supplemented by data provided by the college on students' achievements for 2000. 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. The college was notified of the sample of its provision to be inspected approximately 10 weeks before the inspection. The FEFC inspection was carried out by a team of 12 inspectors and an auditor for a total of 49 working days. They observed 75 lessons (including some tutorials), examined students' work and evaluated a number of college documents. Meetings were held with college governors, managers, other college staff and students. A team of seven inspectors from the Training Standards Council (TSC) inspected telecommunications, motor vehicle, electrical installation and printing as well as the generic areas of equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance. The two teams shared information and evidence. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account by FEFC inspectors 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 1999-2000. Of the 75 lessons inspected, 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and approximately 5% less than satisfactory compared with a national average of 62% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	0	2	5	0	0	7
NVQ	0	2	1	0	0	3
Other vocational	13	18	15	4	0	50
Other	1	8	6	0	0	15
Total (No.)	14	30	27	4	0	75
Total (%)	19	40	36	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Context

9   The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Leeds College of Technology	12.3	78
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1999-2000: Chief inspector's annual report

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 2

10   Inspectors observed 12 lessons in computing and IT. They agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report, but identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses meeting the needs of students and industry

- high achievement rates on most courses

- good progression rates between courses and to higher education

- well-planned and well-organised lessons

- good curriculum management

Weaknesses

- some ineffective teaching

- poor attendance and punctuality in some lessons

11   As identified in its self-assessment report, the college has a wide range of courses which meets the needs of students and local industry. The college is an accredited regional centre for networking courses and an approved training provider for a popular suite of computer software. Introductory level courses are available through a 'drop-in' centre. Progression rates to higher national certificate and to higher education courses are good. The college has an agreement with a local university giving preferred places to students from the access to higher education course. Courses are well managed and course files are well organised. Each course has a clear handbook. Course teams meet regularly and clear minutes are produced. Courses are reviewed systematically but action-planning is poor. Assessment schedules are drawn up and shared with students. Students have regular progress reviews and are set achievable targets. Where appropriate, parents receive regular reports on students' progress.

12   Much of the teaching is well planned and effective. In most lessons, there are clear schemes of work and lesson plans. Students are highly motivated, attentive and well disciplined. However, in some lessons teachers do not provide a wide enough range of appropriate learning activities, and students spend too much time taking notes. In some lessons students do not respond to teachers' questions and teachers make little attempt to check on students' understanding. In one lesson where students were using a multiple choice question paper, the teacher identified the correct answers to the questions but failed to indicate why other options were wrong. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students arriving late for lessons are not always questioned why, and in almost half the lessons observed one-third of students were absent. These weaknesses were not given sufficient emphasis in the self-assessment report.

13   As recognised in the self-assessment report, achievement rates on most courses are well above national averages. Retention rates are generally at, or close to, the national average on the national diploma in computer studies, and achievement has been significantly above the national average for the last three years. On the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced IT, retention and achievement rates have been consistently above the national average. On part-time programmes, retention and achievement rates are above the national average. The national vocational qualification (NVQ) in using IT has had retention and achievement rates above the national average for the last three years. Access to higher education courses in computing have high retention and achievement rates. Recruitment on most courses is growing steadily.

Students' work is of a good standard and it is assessed accurately. Key skills are not always fully integrated with the curriculum and opportunities for their assessment are missed. Written feedback to students is sometimes inadequate.

14 Teaching accommodation is well decorated and well furnished, but there is a lack of visual display material. One room had only a small whiteboard for the teacher to write on. Some computing rooms are badly arranged and this restricts the amount of workspace for each student. Handouts and workbooks are of good quality but occasionally contain errors.

Hardware and software is up to industrial standards and suitable for the courses. Students have access outside the classroom to computers similar to those used in lessons but at peak times these are insufficient to meet demand. None of the lessons observed used a multimedia projector. Library stocks are adequate for the number of students and the range of courses on offer. Books are supplemented by the college intranet and students are directed to selected websites. Not all full-time staff have teaching qualifications or assessor awards. Some staff have updated their technical skills and industrial experience through work carried out with local companies.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and information technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ in using IT	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	34 91 95	31 90 96	33 88 97
C&G 7261 IT (one-year course)	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	66 55 42	182 66 63	318 63 74
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	33 91 53	21 67 50	66 77 53
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	18 89 100	16 81 83	14 79 100
National diploma in computer studies	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	22 73 83	22 73 100	37 68 100
Access to higher education computing	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	44 61 74	37 62 91	62 68 90

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Mechanical Engineering and Manufacturing

Grade 2

15   Inspectors observed 14 lessons in mechanical engineering and in fabrication and welding. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- innovative curriculum developments

- good teaching on craft courses

- detailed monitoring and reporting of students' progress

- good retention and achievement rates

Weaknesses

- some poor specialist resources

- weaknesses in some teaching

16   The college offers a range of craft and technician courses up to level 3, which can be studied in both full-time and part-time modes of attendance. A range of specialist welding courses meets the needs of industry and the local community. Engineering appreciation courses are provided for local universities and there is substantial TEC-funded provision. There are good arrangements for introducing school pupils to engineering courses at the college. For example, there is a three-week 'taster' course in the summer, before enrolment, and another 'taster' course aimed at the recruitment of women to engineering courses. Once in the college, women students benefit from specific support arrangements. Despite these arrangements the number of women students is low. The marketing of mechanical engineering courses is also aimed at attracting students from minority ethnic groups. There are some gaps in the provision. For example, there are no higher technician courses. The college has collaborated with the Leeds Training

Trust to market jointly the GNVQ intermediate course, in order to improve recruitment and enhance the students' experience. In addition to their GNVQ, these students take an NVQ level 2 in engineering manufacture and undertake work experience throughout the year. Innovative developments include: video-conference links with industry; European student exchange for full-time students; and the development of computer links with local schools. The self-assessment report recognised these strengths.

17   The proportion of mechanical engineering lessons which were graded good or outstanding is similar to the national average for engineering. Teachers have clear schemes of work, and lesson plans indicate the teaching methods and materials to be used. Good use is made of handouts and workbooks. Relations between teachers and students are good and encourage learning. Workshop activities are well planned and well organised. Modern communication techniques are being used to enhance teaching. For example, in one lesson a video link was established with a machine tool manufacturer. In this well-managed session, the students asked probing questions of the managers about computer numerical control applications, in preparation for a visit to the company. However, in some other lessons, teachers failed to provide for the needs of the more able students, who were sometimes left with little to do. In some lessons, teachers failed to ensure that students understood the work, and in others, they failed to explain sufficiently the basic concepts involved. Students' progress is monitored closely through regular reviews. Reports of progress and attendance are sent, where appropriate, to parents and employers. The strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and monitoring of progress were accurately identified in the self-assessment report.

18   Attendance in the lessons observed was high. Students generally respond well to the teaching, particularly where they were required

to perform practical tasks. In the workshops and drawing office they worked in a mature fashion, producing good work. Some of the written work produced by students was of a good standard, and neatly presented. Most pass rates on craft courses are well above the average for the sector. Only at level 3 were they below the sector average in 2000. Retention rates on the craft courses are also good. Pass and retention rates on the GNVQ courses were similar to the sector average in 2000. The self-assessment report identified the strengths and weaknesses in students' achievements.

19   Teachers have appropriate vocational and teaching and assessor qualifications. Some of the engineering equipment has been recently improved. For example, there is a modern and well-equipped computer-aided design suite, new computer controlled machine tools have been purchased and computer-aided teaching facilities have been installed. Much of the machine shop equipment is old but serviceable. In some areas, such as welding, the specialist equipment is less than satisfactory. Machine tools and equipment suffer from breakdowns. Facilities to support mechanical engineering theory are underdeveloped. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. The teaching of metrology, materials sciences, engineering science and electronics is adversely affected by the lack of appropriate equipment in the laboratories, and the lack of technician support. Some classrooms have been recently furbished to a high standard. However, some engineering accommodation is drab and untidy.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mechanical engineering and manufacturing, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	**1999**	**2000**
Mechanical craft skills	1	Number of starters	145	172	27
		Retention (%)	82	96	70
		Achievement (%)	84	73	84
Mechanical craft skills and fabrication and welding	2	Number of starters	54	37	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	69
		Achievement (%)	*	*	76
NVQs in mechanical engineering	2	Number of starters	78	290	231
		Retention (%)	81	85	65
		Achievement (%)	43	64	95
GNVQ intermediate engineering	2	Number of starters	†	11	15
		Retention (%)	†	73	73
		Achievement (%)	†	75	73
Computer-aided engineering	2	Number of starters	128	57	122
		Retention (%)	84	68	74
		Achievement (%)	88	97	94
Mechanical craft studies and fabrication and welding	3	Number of starters	28	38	33
		Retention (%)	100	*	79
		Achievement (%)	14	*	50
GNVQ advanced engineering	3	Number of starters	†	10	14
		Retention (%)	†	80	57
		Achievement (%)	†	75	75

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
* unreliable data
† course not running

Curriculum Areas

Motor Vehicle

Grade 1

20   The inspection covered motor vehicle diagnosis, servicing and repair, vehicle refinishing, and body building and repair lessons. Inspectors observed 12 lessons and agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- wide range of courses with good progression routes

- good induction and initial assessment of students

- high proportion of good teaching

- good achievement on most courses

- close relationships with industrial organisations

- well-equipped workshops and high-quality modern vehicles

Weaknesses

- below average retention on level 2 provision in 1999-2000

- some drab teaching and workshop accommodation

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21   The college offers a wide range of craft, technician and higher technician courses which meet the needs of students and employers. There are good opportunities for students to progress to further study. Courses cover motor vehicle mechanical and electrical systems, vehicle servicing and repair, heavy vehicle mechanical repair, vehicle body repair, paint and body building. The pre-foundation programme in motor vehicle studies provides a course for young people with modest ability who wish to enter the motor vehicle servicing and repair industry. These students acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills to help them to progress to foundation level. The car restoration programme has a high reputation and recruits regionally, nationally and internationally. The curriculum area has effective links with local industry. All full-time students spend time in work experience with local firms. A number of international companies use the college as a centre for staff development. The resources they provide benefit other college students.

22   The standard of most teaching is high. Nine of the lessons observed were graded good or outstanding. No lessons were unsatisfactory. Most lessons are well planned using comprehensive schemes of work, and detailed lesson plans. Practical work is based around well-designed tasks which students complete at their own pace, seeking help from the teacher when needed. Students work with care and confidence and they enjoy easy access to appropriate tools and materials. In an introductory lesson on motor vehicle electronics systems, computer-based electronics and engine diagnostics equipment was used. Students worked through assigned tasks at computer terminals investigating a range of electrical defects. They were able to work at their own pace and after successfully completing each phase, progressed to the next. The teacher monitored students' progress on a computer terminal and gave appropriate support, where needed. Most teachers use questioning effectively to engage students in their work and to check that learning is taking place. Relationships between staff and students are good. In a few theory lessons, teachers failed to motivate some students.

23   Over the past three years, examination pass rates for motor vehicle courses have been consistently at, or above, the national averages. In 1999-2000, the pass rates for City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses were significantly above the national average. Retention rates for most level 3 courses have been consistently high although some level 2

courses have poor retention rates. The college has already taken steps to remedy low retention on NVQ level 1 courses by replacing this provision with more appropriate courses. Achievement rates are good. Students' practical work is of a high standard and there are examples of outstanding written work from students on the technician programmes. Assignments are often well researched and presented using electronically scanned colour pictures to illustrate the text. There are high levels of attendance on most motor vehicle courses and good systems for monitoring and reporting absence. The attendance for lessons observed was above the national average. The college takes part in national and international skill competitions. In 1999, a motor vehicle student was highly commended in the final of the automobile section of the Skills Olympics competition in Canada.

24   Staff have appropriate vocational or professional qualifications. Most have teaching qualifications and appropriate assessor and verifier awards. Workshops are well equipped and provide spacious areas for each motor vehicle specialism. Recent investment in new technology includes an autotronics simulation suite. This is furnished and equipped to a high standard. However, some areas in the workshops, which are mainly used for storing larger items of equipment and vehicle bodies, are untidy and unclean. In addition, some of the motor vehicle teaching areas are dull, uninspiring and in need of redecoration.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in motor vehicle, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G	1	Number of starters	96	99	82
		Retention (%)	84	77	67
		Achievement (%)	69	68	81
C&G	2	Number of starters	218	147	121
		Retention (%)	87	71	63
		Achievement (%)	40	63	76
NVQ	2	Number of starters	101	71	20
		Retention (%)	66	89	65
		Achievement (%)	*	*	*
C&G	3	Number of starters	104	116	83
		Retention (%)	92	91	93
		Achievement (%)	56	57	76
NVQ	3	Number of starters	58	47	83
		Retention (%)	97	83	72
		Achievement (%)	*	61	*

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
* unreliable data

Curriculum Areas

Electrical and Electronics

Grade 2

25   The inspection covered lessons in electrical installation, electronics and telecommunications. Inspectors observed 12 lessons and generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- most pass rates above national averages

- good retention rates

- good range of provision

- productive links with industrial and training companies

Weaknesses

- some mundane teaching

- poor attendance on some level 1 courses

26   The courses offered provide choice and progression from level 1 to level 3 and above. Many are offered in a variety of attendance modes. Full-time courses are complemented by additional studies designed to encourage students' success and progression. These strengths are included in the self-assessment report. The portfolio of courses is regularly reviewed. As a result, alternative provision has been introduced to replace some courses which have had poor performance, and courses which recruit low numbers of students have been discontinued. For example, a specialist level 1 electronics servicing course with declining enrolment and poor pass rates has been replaced with a C&G progression award. Individual courses are generally well managed. Files and records are in good order. Teaching teams review performance and consider improvement strategies at their regular meetings.

27   Relationships with industrial firms and training providers are good. Representatives from these organisations frequently visit the college to meet their trainees. They join the teachers at course review meetings, and their organisations have contributed valued specialist resources. Many specialist training courses for industry are provided both in the college and on employers' premises. For some of its courses, the college is the only provider in the region.

28   Teachers use detailed plans for their lessons, but the schemes of work for some courses are insufficiently detailed. Most teachers involve students in lessons, directing questions to individuals and drawing on their industrial experiences. In one excellent lesson in telecommunications, almost all the theoretical concepts were covered in this way. The teacher treated all the students' answers with respect and used them constructively to build students' knowledge. A short practical task was used to show how theory could be applied. However, theory lessons are generally not so well taught as practical lessons. In some less successful lessons, teachers failed to engage the students sufficiently in demanding work. Teachers were too discursive so that the lesson lacked focus. Assessments are set at an appropriate standard, but a few teachers do not comment on written work in sufficient detail. The self-assessment report was over-optimistic in its judgements on the overall quality of the students' learning experiences.

29   Students work attentively in lessons. They willingly contribute their own experiences of work to discussions. Some lessons are poorly attended. On higher level courses, absences were sometimes known to be due to work commitments. Students' written work is of an appropriate standard, and there are some outstanding achievements on level 3 courses. On most courses, retention rates are better than the national average. The proportion of enrolled students that completed the national certificate course in engineering (electrical and electronic)

in 1999-2000 is almost 20 percentage points higher than the national average. However, a few courses have low retention rates. The NVQ level 2 in installing electrical systems and equipment has a rate more than one-third lower than the national average.

30   The majority of pass rates are well above corresponding national averages. Achievements on C&G level 2 courses, where national pass rates are low, are particularly good. On the one-year national certificate in building services, all enrolled students in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 completed and passed the course. Poor pass rates on the NVQ level 2 in 1997-98 and 1998-99 were due to students not completing all assessment requirements within the course timescale. Subsequent submissions of evidence generated in the workplace have improved pass rates. Better course management has resulted in a pass rate in 1999-2000 which is above the national average. The self-assessment report

identified the strengths and weaknesses in course performance. The college takes part in national and international skill competitions and in 1999 a student was highly commended in the final of the electrical installation section of the Skills Olympics competition in Canada.

31   Teachers and support staff have appropriate technical and professional qualifications, though the proportion with internal verifier qualifications is low. Specialist laboratories and workshops are of good quality and equipped to an appropriate standard, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Most electrical installation rooms are dedicated as base rooms for major courses. They are often bleak and poorly furnished. However, wall displays are relevant and noticeboards show important course information, including course retention and achievement rates.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in electrical and electronics, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	**1999**	**2000**
C&G 2360 part 1 electrical installation	1	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	81 98 63	76 98 95	134 78 85
C&G 2360 part 2 electrical installation	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	106 92 61	89 93 63	120 92 65
C&G 2240 part 2 electronics servicing	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	48 * *	56 * *	46 61 67
NVQ in installing electrical systems and equipment	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	81 * *	97 * *	90 43 69
National certificate in engineering (electrical/electronic)	2	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	64 * *	75 95 44	50 78 72
C&G 2240 part 3 electronics servicing	3	Number of starters Retention (%) Achievement (%)	98 73 81	85 72 97	88 60 90

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
* data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Media, Print and Photography

Grade 2

32   The inspection covered provision in media, printing and photography. Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They considered that some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were overstated.

Key strengths

- good use of IT to support learning

- high pass rates

- a broad and appropriate range of courses

- good specialist resources

- high standard of students' technical work

Weaknesses

- adverse effect of students' poor punctuality on learning

- below average retention

- lack of visual awareness and creativity in students' work

33   In this area the college has a wide range of programmes which are effectively managed and organised. Inspectors agreed that the curriculum is planned to meet the needs of individuals, the community and industry. There are courses at all levels from introductory workshops for school pupils, through to higher national awards and vocational degrees. Programmes allow varied modes of attendance. There are bespoke courses for industry and community groups. Communication between teachers is strong. There are weekly meetings at school, subject and course levels. Media and photography teachers have a breakfast meeting each Monday. Meetings are minuted and action plans produced, but plans sometimes fail to address important weaknesses. Problems raised by student representatives and surveys are followed up. Staff have taken part in planning days and individual staff development for curriculum 2000. Many teachers are engaged in writing new, more flexible units for examination bodies. Students have a broad range of study options, including on-line learning for courses in printing.

34   Most teaching is good. All courses have detailed schemes of work and assessment plans which ensure coverage of the curriculum. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers use a good range of appropriate teaching methods. A range of on-line learning materials and interactive CD-ROM packages have been developed to support learning. There is some imaginative teaching which enthuses students. For example, printing students are asked to produce a publicity flyer. Research, copywriting, designing and printing are co-ordinated and integrated in different unit lessons. In machine printing, trainees are given responsibility for making fine adjustments to advanced equipment. In some lessons, however, teachers fail to set work which is sufficiently demanding. Some teachers in the programme area are also key skills tutors and they use the students' experience to develop key skills in a vocational context. For example, aspects of numeracy are taught in relation to photographic exposure. Assignments are supported by special packs which direct students to information on the intranet, video and the Internet. For example, students preparing a pop video were shown videos and directed to a number of useful websites and on-line programmes. Assignments and marking are subject to thorough internal verification. Clear targets are set for students' achievements and student attainment is regularly reviewed in tutorials. Students are well informed about their progress and, where appropriate, parents receive two reports each year.

35   As indicated in the self-assessment report, achievement rates are generally above the

national average but there is poor retention in many areas. The number of students passing their examinations on level 1 courses exceeds the national average by more than 10 percentage points. Students produce work of a high technical standard, and their work is generally well presented. They are competent with equipment. A number of national awards, in photography and printing, have been won by college students over the past three years. Some work, however, shows a lack of creativity and visual awareness. Drawing is not yet strongly developed. Attendance at lessons observed was below the national average for the programme area.

36   Resources are generally good and in some areas outstanding. Most accommodation is spacious and comfortable. Several areas are carpeted, have good furniture and a range of visual aids. A few are drab and lack relevant displays. Most teachers are well qualified. Some have rich industrial experience which they use to good effect in their teaching. Inspectors agreed that there is an extensive range of high-quality equipment, particularly in printing. Origination, plate-making, printing and finishing are all supported by outstanding equipment. Equipment in other areas is mainly good and improving. Photography lacks dedicated digital processing and digital editing facilities. The stock of books and journals in the library for this curriculum area is not large. Additional bookstocks are held in the programme area, as are relevant computer-based resources.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in media, print and photography, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Printing programmes	1	Number of starters	47	28	21
		Retention (%)	62	79	67
		Achievement (%)	45	41	93
GNVQ intermediate and first diploma	2	Number of starters	47	45	42
		Retention (%)	62	67	62
		Achievement (%)	56	85	81
Printing modules	2	Number of starters	182	164	175
		Retention (%)	81	84	88
		Achievement (%)	61	91	90
BTEC national diplomas	3	Number of starters	129	88	88
		Retention (%)	76	64	57
		Achievement (%)	89	94	87
Printing modules	3	Number of starters	83	66	101
		Retention (%)	86	86	87
		Achievement (%)	90	91	96

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

37   The inspection covered literacy and numeracy below level 2, which is provided as part of learning support and as part of vocational courses. Inspectors observed nine basic skills lessons and did not agree fully with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They also identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching and good classroom management

- many students meeting short-term targets

- positive and constructive feedback to students

- readily available additional learning support

Weaknesses

- too much reliance on generic worksheets

- some inadequate students' work records

- tutors' lack of basic skills teaching qualifications

- inadequate basic skills support for evening class students

38   Basic skills is managed by the learning support unit. There are no discrete basic skills courses in the college. Most courses are in key skills at level 1, and these courses are readily available to the majority of students. They are taught, either by vocational teachers or learning support staff, as an integral part of vocational courses. In addition, some basic skills courses are taught in learning centres at each of the three sites. Three members of staff act as cross-college co-ordinators. They are responsible for basic skills teaching in the learning centres and on vocational courses. There is good communication between learning support managers, course team leaders and teaching staff. Managers, in the learning support unit, are very active in the planning and development of basic skills across the college. There is inadequate basic skills support for students attending evening classes.

39   All students complete an initial assessment to identify their basic skills requirements. Action plans are completed and short-term goals identified. A high proportion of students achieve the goals identified in their action plans. Many lessons are well managed. In these lessons, teachers had well-developed schemes of work and effective lesson plans. Teachers give positive and constructive feedback to students. In the most successful lessons, teachers plan to meet the range of needs in the class. However, some teachers make too much use of generic worksheets, which do not meet the needs of individual students. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was lower than the national average for the programme area. However, none of the lessons was less than satisfactory. Teachers often use effectively a variety of appropriate teaching methods. In one lesson, some good team teaching resulted in students making presentations to the rest of the group. This integrated approach worked well and students developed a variety of skills. However, students are often unable to demonstrate that they understand the tasks that they have recently covered. In some lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding and they move on too quickly for some students. In other lessons, students' work records were not up to date and others were completed by the tutor without the student being present. In such cases, the students did not understand or see the relevance of the review process. Attendance at some lessons is low. The college has put in place strategies to address poor attendance and retention.

40   The college is revising its portfolio of awards for basic skills. The aim is to increase the number of students who benefit from basic skills provision, and address their learning needs through low level key skills. The recent changes to the basic skills portfolio make it difficult to identify trends in retention and achievement, as only a few courses have been running for more than one year. For this reason a table showing student retention and achievement is not included in this section of the report. However, more than half of the basic skills students attending learning support sessions achieved their intended qualification in 1998-99. The pass rate on some Associated Examining Board (AEB) courses was 100%. This is well above the national average. Retention varied between 40% and 61% on level 1 courses. The majority of students gain confidence and make measurable progress.

41   Teachers are well qualified in their subject area but most lack basic skills teaching qualifications. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. The college is providing some training for staff teaching basic skills. In addition, basic skills co-ordinators provide teachers with work-related projects to help develop appropriate teaching methods. Accommodation is good and the learning centres are welcoming places for students. Computers are available but are not always used effectively. The college is working hard to improve resources.

Support for Students

Grade 2

42   Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. However, a few strengths were overstated and additional weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- effective initial advice and guidance

- good links with schools and the community

- good induction arrangements

- well-developed careers guidance, welfare and counselling support

- effective support for students with restricted mobility and/or sensory impairment

- good enrichment opportunities

Weaknesses

- *poor quality of some tutorial support*

- *failure of additional learning support to meet the needs of all students*

- *lack of rigour in some student reviews*

- *uneven level of support for part-time students and students at some centres*

43   Support for students is well managed. The college measures the effectiveness of its support arrangements. Analysis shows significantly higher retention rates for students who receive extra support than those who do not.

44   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that links with schools and the community are extensive. For example, vocational 'taster' programmes raise year 10 and 11 pupils' awareness of opportunities at the college. Women into science and engineering events for girls in year 9 and an after-school club give even younger pupils a chance to experience college work. In 1999-2000, 30 disaffected pupils attended motor vehicle courses at the college. Attractive prospectuses and leaflets are widely distributed to job centres, community centres and schools. A wide range of information about the college is on the Internet. However, the college does not produce ethnic language publicity materials in languages used by many in the community served by the college.

45   The centrally administered admissions and enrolment systems work well. As noted in the self-assessment report, prospective students receive good and impartial guidance and information during their initial contacts with the college. Enquiries, applications and enrolments are followed up efficiently. Admissions staff liaise closely with curriculum areas and refer specific enquiries appropriately to tutors. Increasingly, students enrol using the Internet. There is little use of the accreditation of students' prior learning and some students study aspects of their course for which they are already qualified.

46   Well-planned induction programmes help students to adjust to college life and inform students of their rights and responsibilities. All students receive a course handbook. Some good handbooks include detailed introductions for late starters to the course, but a few handbooks do not contain enough information. An induction pack is provided for all courses. The three-week summer 'taster' courses for new students in engineering are very popular and effective in ensuring that students join the most appropriate course.

47   A new college-wide tutorial policy and management structure for tutorials was introduced in September 2000. The manager responsible for student quality works with a senior tutor in each curriculum area to manage the tutorial support provided by personal tutors. Full-time students and those on substantive part-time courses are entitled to regular tutorial

support. Guidelines list the essential content of group tutorial programmes and personal tutors have received training. Not all students receive their entitlement. Few tutors use lesson plans. There is little sharing of teaching materials. Tutorial arrangements for part-time students are less formal. The quality of teaching in some tutorials is poor, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Tutorials are not included in the college's programme of lesson observations. Some student progress reviews are left incomplete with no targets for students or clear action to be undertaken.

48   All full-time and substantive part-time students are offered a screening test for additional support in numeracy and literacy when they start college. In some curriculum areas, such as engineering, there are also vocationally specific tests. Most learning support for full-time students is provided in key skills lessons. However, on some courses all students study for the same level rather than at the level for their particular needs. Little vocationally relevant additional support is provided. The self-assessment report did not identify these weaknesses in learning support. Some support is also provided to individual students during lessons and on a 'drop-in' basis in learning centres. Provision for part-time students is less developed. Some personal tutors do not receive reports on their students' progress in literacy and numeracy. Support for students with specific learning difficulties, sensory impairment or restricted mobility is well managed and effective. At the time of the inspection, 31 students received support for dyslexia, and 10 students with hearing impairments received support.

49   The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service, Leeds Careers Guidance. The college's careers staff provide good information and guidance. The careers library at the City campus is well equipped. Welfare and personal counselling provision is comprehensive, a strength noted in the

self-assessment report. Students with personal problems receive good support from qualified counsellors. Up-to-date and accurate guidance on financial matters is available. There is less support for adults or for students at other centres.

50   The student liaison officer and the students union organise social and recreational activities. Students, apart from those at the East Bank centre, can choose from a wide range of enrichment activities. The college is contracted to manage the millennium volunteers scheme in the Leeds area. The scheme provides the college's students and pupils from secondary schools with excellent opportunities to work with schools, community organisations and local charities. In 1999-2000, there were over 100 student placements under the scheme.

General Resources
Grade 2

51   Inspectors broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. They considered that some strengths were overstated and identified a further strength.

Key strengths

- up-to-date IT to support learning
- good identification and use of excess space
- some well-maintained buildings and facilities
- good facilities for staff in work areas

Weaknesses

- insufficient sports and recreational facilities for students
- poor access for those with restricted mobility at two centres

52   Since the last inspection the college has successfully reduced its size from four to three centres. The accommodation strategy is linked to strategic objectives and is monitored effectively. The majority of courses are at the City campus situated in the centre of Leeds. The college has two other centres: at South Leeds, where most engineering courses are based, and at East Bank, a former factory, which is leased by the college and used for some engineering and community IT courses. The reception area at the City campus is attractive. Student services are conveniently sited in the foyer area. Reception staff at all college centres are welcoming and helpful. At the South Leeds centre there is a good counselling room. There is unobtrusive security at all college centres. The college has good directional signs inside and out. At the main centre there is good access to all areas of the college for those with restricted mobility. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, access is poor at the other two centres where, for example, learning centres and many other facilities are not accessible.

53   The college makes good use of room utilisation surveys. Where surplus accommodation has been identified it has been let and has raised income. For example, at the South Leeds centre, a training centre for ministry of transport test assessors uses part of the building. There is an efficient and well-managed building maintenance programme. Many refurbishment projects are undertaken in-house. The quality of this work is good. There is a quick response to requests for repairs and essential maintenance. Refurbished areas at all centres have been thoughtfully developed in consultation with staff. The college has equipped some key classrooms at each centre to a high specification. These rooms have video-conferencing and electronic whiteboard facilities. They are often used for distance learning by industry. Most general classrooms are well furnished to a standard specification which includes overhead projector, whiteboard and screen. However, there are some poorly decorated classrooms and stairwell spaces, particularly at the East Bank centre. In some other areas there are few displays of students' work and little visual material to enhance the environment.

54   In its recent information and communications technology strategy, the college has prioritised the development of on-line learning and made a considerable investment in the development of IT. The IT network has been upgraded to provide a college intranet and fast Internet links at all centres. There is an IT helpdesk which provides staff with good assistance. There are well-resourced IT learning workshops at all centres. The ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students is high at 1:4. Computer workstations are up to date and run industrial standard software. There is a good range of on-line learning materials. Well-qualified staff support this provision. Most staff have good access to computers and the college network. They can access student data from most staff rooms, although they are unable to receive information on student attendance.

55   The learning centres at each college site combine library and IT resources. They include support workshops for communication and application of number. The learning centres are well managed and the use made by students is closely monitored. Many students use the Internet to retrieve information. A wide range of other material is available, including CD-ROMs, videos and periodicals. Although there has been a small increase in the number of books held in the learning centre since the last inspection, there are insufficient books for some curriculum areas. Some departments hold a stock of textbooks that are made available to students.

56   There are insufficient sports, recreational and social facilities for students at the college.

Refectories are the only areas where students can meet socially. At the East Bank centre the refectory is overcrowded at peak times. At the City campus there is an office for the students union, and a crèche. Multi-faith prayer rooms are available at each centre. Most staff workrooms are well planned and of a good standard. For example, since the last inspection, teachers at the South Leeds centre have been relocated into a large purpose-built staff room. The room is well furnished and well decorated and staff have good access to IT equipment. Staff across the college are provided with ample storage space for teaching materials and good reprographic facilities. There is a staff common room at two of the college centres.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

57   Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- wide staff involvement in self-assessment

- comprehensive quality assurance processes

- good student participation in quality assurance

- extensive staff development linked to appraisal and strategic planning

- well-developed use of targets by course teams

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of data on students' perceptions

- shortcomings in quality assurance in some service areas

- ineffective action-planning by some course teams

58   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has a strong commitment to continuous improvement. There are effective procedures for quality assurance. The college's recently revised quality assurance policy and comprehensive quality assurance procedures are clear and understood by staff. A senior manager is responsible for quality assurance. The quality assurance subcommittee of the academic board provides effective monitoring and advises on the implementation of the quality assurance policy.

59   An important and effective aspect of the quality assurance of courses is regular internal inspections undertaken by the quality audit committee. Assessment of teaching and learning is supplemented by analysis of data on students' achievements and specialist resources. Good use is made of national benchmarking data. There is a well-established and thorough lesson observation scheme. Teachers, including part-time teachers, are observed by two observers who provide a written appraisal of the lesson and award a grade. An external assessor from another college is involved in moderating lesson observations. Inspectors considered, however, that the college had overstated the strengths and understated the weaknesses of teaching and learning.

60   Course teams complete an effective annual review and evaluation. Performance against targets and national benchmarking data are considered. Action plans are produced and monitored. These form the basis of school self-assessment reports. Action-planning by some course teams is ineffective. The self-assessment review group rigorously scrutinises draft self-assessment reports, interviews lead managers, and agrees a grade. There are arrangements for the internal validation of new courses using specific criteria for quality and recommendations are made to the academic board. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the full internal validation process is not completed for some

courses before they start. Arrangements for internal verification are effective.

61   The college has a number of service level agreements defining the minimum standards to be offered by service units in the college. They set out monitoring arrangements, and the measurement of performance against standards provides the basis for an annual review. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are shortcomings in the use of service standards in some areas. For example, some lack a specific focus and there are no standards for the marketing and personnel functions. Monitoring of performance against standards in some units is good, for example in IT support, but in others it is poor.

62   The college charter sets out clear commitments to students, parents and employers. It was reviewed in October 2000. Performance against charter commitments is not systematically monitored or reported to managers or governors. The involvement of students in quality assurance processes is good. Most full-time courses have an elected student representative who participates in course team meetings. The perceptions of students, employers and parents are used in the evaluation of courses and college services. However, employers' perceptions are only collected once every two years. There is insufficient use of data on students' perceptions in course reviews and there are no arrangements to provide students with feedback.

63   There is a well-established system of annual staff appraisal. Staff are appraised by their line manager, who monitors individual action plans. Some staff also undertake appraisal of their line manager and both sides speak positively about the benefits of this. Inspectors agreed that arrangements for staff development are good. The staff development policy prioritises staff development according to the needs of individuals as well as curriculum or service area needs. Staff development activities

are linked to the college's strategic and operational objectives. Staff who have attended external courses disseminate the outcomes within the college and complete an evaluation report and action plan. This is reviewed after three months by their line manager. The staff development plan is reviewed as part of the college's annual strategic and operating statement review cycle. A well-supported programme of internal staff development is offered throughout the year. Staff may take any accredited college course free of charge. A cost-benefit analysis of staff development is undertaken annually. Staff speak positively about access to staff development activities which are listed on the college intranet. The college has had its Investor in People status re-accredited. There is an established staff mentor system for newly appointed staff.

64   There is effective and realistic target-setting by course teams. Targets for recruitment, retention and achievement are set in the preceding academic year and take into account national averages and previous performance. Performance against target is generally good. Students' achievements have improved from a low level and are generally at, or above, national averages for similar colleges. The college uses value-added measures to monitor the performance of general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) students and has participated in the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) post-16 value-added pilot scheme.

65   There is an effective and thorough self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with the college that staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is approved by governors. Action plans address weaknesses and are regularly monitored. Inspectors found the self-assessment report to be accurate and agreed with the majority of the college's grades.

Governance

Grade 2

66 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective use of governors' experience

- active involvement in setting the college's strategic direction

- regular monitoring of key aspects of the college's performance

- open conduct of corporation business

Weaknesses

- low participation in training

- insufficiently detailed monitoring of quality and standards

- slow progress in assessing the corporation's performance

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

68   Governors are actively involved in setting the college's strategic direction. They are committed to social inclusion, widening participation and improving regional competitiveness. At a strategic planning day in April 2000, governors worked with groups of staff to draw up recommendations for the new three-year plan. At each corporation meeting they monitor the college's performance using an agreed set of performance indicators.

69   Governors are effective in promoting the college's interests in the community. They make good use of their wide range of contacts with employers, community groups, and strategic partners. As noted in the self-assessment report, members have a range of appropriate expertise which has been well used for the benefit of the college. For example, governors have conducted staff surveys and provided advice on tenders.

70   The corporation has a determined membership of 17. Except for vacancies for two co-opted governors, the transition to the revised determination of membership is complete. It includes only two women. The corporation did not formally modify its articles of government after 1 August 1999, nor has it determined the arrangements by which nominations are made to certain categories of governor. Turnover of governors has been high and the corporation has recently agreed formalised procedures for the appointment of new governors, including detailed selection criteria. Newly appointed governors receive an information pack about the college and the sector, but there are no formal induction arrangements. Three training events were held last year on topics such as curriculum 2000 and the self-assessment process. However, attendance was low. There is no structured training programme nor an assessment of individual training needs.

71   The corporation has met five times in the last year. There are comprehensive standing orders for the conduct of corporation and committee meetings, and a calendar of main agenda items. In 1999-2000, average attendance was 78% against a target of 80%. Letters are sent to governors with poor attendance. The clerk to the corporation is also the assistant principal (support services). As head of the college's finance and personnel functions, his independence could be perceived as being compromised. However, governors have debated this issue and are content with the arrangement. The board arranges the appraisal

of senior postholders. The assistant principal has a separate job description, but no appraisal for his role as clerk.

72   Financial monitoring is undertaken by the finance and general purposes committee at its termly meetings. Committee members also receive monthly management accounts between meetings. The accounts are also presented at each corporation meeting. Inspectors judged that the committee was not complying with its terms of reference regarding employment matters. The audit committee monitors the implementation of agreed internal and external audit recommendations, but has yet to determine performance criteria for the internal and external auditors. Its terms of reference do not fully accord with the model terms of reference in Council Circular 98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. All committees prepare an annual report of their activities for the corporation. The board has allocated a lead governor to each curriculum area, resulting in some useful contacts with staff. However, the high turnover of governors has adversely affected these arrangements. Between meetings, governors keep in touch with the college through the weekly staff bulletin. Each governor is expected to visit the college at least three times a year, but these visits are not monitored.

73   Governors played an active part in the college's self-assessment process. Overall, however, their monitoring of quality and standards is insufficiently detailed. The corporation has decided not to establish a standards committee, relying instead on the lead governors' monitoring of their areas. Governors receive annual information about retention and achievements by course, including a report on underperforming courses. However, the report is in a form which does not enable them to make national comparisons or to see trends. Governors do not receive summary reports on complaints, charter performance or surveys of students' views.

74   The governance of the college is conducted openly. The agendas of corporation meetings are published in the staff bulletin, and staff regularly take up the invitation to attend. Minutes and papers are readily available in learning centres. There were no confidential items last year. Declarations of interest are completed and annually updated by governors and staff with significant financial responsibilities. The corporation has approved a code of practice on 'whistleblowing'. The code of conduct requires updating to bring it into line with the Nolan recommendations.

75   As the self-assessment report acknowledged, governors' monitoring of their own performance is underdeveloped. October 2000 was the first time that governors completed questionnaires to assess their own performance and that of the governing body. Performance indicators for governance have been proposed but not yet used.

Management
Grade 2

76   Inspectors and auditors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- strong links between strategic and operational planning

- effective strategies to widen participation

- extensive range of productive external partnerships

- open and effective communication

- marked improvements in students' achievements over the last three years

Weaknesses

- some aspects of the management structure

- not yet fully effective strategies to improve retention

77   Since the previous inspection, the college has improved students' achievements, strengthened its external links, broadened its sources of funding, diversified its activities and developed more flexible teaching methods, against a background of financial stringency.

78   Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has an effective strategic planning and review process that involves managers, staff and governors. The mission, strategic and operational plan are understood and supported by staff and managers, who use them to inform their own operational plans and objectives. The strategic plan includes an extensive set of performance indicators by which the achievement of strategic objectives is regularly measured. There are clear links between the strategic plan, the operational plans and the self-assessment report.

79   The college is committed to widening participation and has successfully increased the number of students from previously under-represented groups. Of full-time students, 30% are from minority ethnic groups, and 41% of students are from the inner city. Effective strategies include courses to encourage women to join technology courses. The college carries out extensive work with local schools, using funding from the European Social Fund to employ a team of school and community workers.

80   There are strong and effective partnerships with a diverse range of local and regional organisations. In response to employer demand, the college has developed specialist centres and services in print media, engineering, automobile electronics and computer networking services. Nearly 800

employers now use college services. The college is a major supplier of modern apprentice and national trainee programmes. The college has received substantial investment from major companies, resulting in its use as an industry training centre in new technologies. Key partners speak highly of the active and responsive attitude of the college. Close links with other post-16 providers and city-wide partnerships include the development of a University for Industry hub.

81   Communication is effective across all centres of the college. Methods of communication include a weekly staff bulletin, briefings, letters, and the publication of minutes of meetings on the college intranet. Staff are invited to attend principal's lunches and corporation meetings. There are many committees which have some overlap of membership and agenda items. The academic board has four subcommittees and has responsibility for finalising the self-assessment report and strategic curriculum decisions. There is frequently poor attendance at board and subcommittee meetings. Managers speak positively about the increasing accuracy and availability of management information. It is widely used for planning and monitoring. Inspectors found that the data provided for the inspection were reliable.

82   The college has successfully improved student achievement rates in line with its targets. However, retention rates have failed to meet targets, and have steadily declined from a high rate to one which is around the national average for colleges with a high number of students from disadvantaged areas. Strategies to reverse this decline have yet to take effect. For example, as the self-assessment report acknowledges, the monitoring of students' attendance has been hampered by difficulties with electronic registers. The college has been slow to introduce improvements to the tutorial system and provide more appropriate foundation level courses.

83   The management structure of the college is kept under regular review. As the college recognises, some aspects require further modification. For example, the management of work-based training lacks co-ordination. The previous inspection report identified a lack of clarity about the role of curriculum leaders, which has still not been satisfactorily resolved. As a response to a staff survey, managers have taken actions to improve their contacts with staff. These include the rotation of management meetings between centres, wider representation on committees, and a 'back to the floor' initiative where senior managers took on other roles. Staff value the response made by managers, although some low morale remains.

84   The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has met its funding target in each of the last five years and reduced its average level of funding from £22.08 in 1995-96 to £18.25 in 1999-2000. The college has reduced its dependence on FEFC income. The move towards convergence has been carefully managed, although this has resulted in a number of planned historical cost deficits, reducing the balance on the college's income and expenditure reserve account to £407,000 at 31 July 2000. Managers are aware that action is required to prevent the elimination of this balance over the next three years, and to arrest declining solvency. The senior management team closely monitors the financial performance of the college through review of comprehensive monthly management accounts, which focus on year-end out-turn. However, whilst a limited number of financial targets have been set, these are currently unrealistic and performance against them is not monitored. The college's financial regulations require some updating to bring them into line with good practice. The annual internal audit report for 1999-2000 concludes that the college has sound systems of internal control.

Conclusions

85   The college's self-assessment report is clear and comprehensive. Inspectors agreed that the self-assessment process involved all staff in the college and the governing body. The report provided a sound basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the report, although they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with all of the college grades for curriculum areas except one, which was graded lower by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with all of the grades in the report for cross-college provision.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	27
19-24 years	20
25+ years	50
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	28
Level 2 (intermediate)	25
Level 3 (advanced)	25
Level 4/5 (higher)	6
Level not specified	16
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	402	1,161	26
Construction	88	343	7
Engineering	293	1,667	32
Business	102	161	4
Health and community care	57	296	6
Art and design	202	564	13
Humanities	78	574	11
Basic education	60	18	1
Total	1,282	4,784	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 34% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm-anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	118	4	23	145
Supporting direct learning contact	41	3	0	44
Other support	78	0	0	78
Total	237	7	23	267

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£7,133,000	£7,352,000	£8,266,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.94	£18.70	£18.25
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	68%	67%
Achievement of funding target	100%	102%	100%
Diversity of income	22%	30%	37%
Operating surplus	-£340,000	-£347,000	-£402,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)
Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)
Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000
1	Number of starters	1,305	1,339	1,599	742	985	1,174
	Retention (%)	87	81	75	76	77	72
	Achievement (%)	36	55	66	42	53	63
2	Number of starters	1,396	1,323	1,198	788	1,166	1,017
	Retention (%)	80	76	72	75	78	69
	Achievement (%)	39	45	64	62	58	78
3	Number of starters	1,371	1,342	1,395	866	965	1,042
	Retention (%)	84	79	76	81	80	75
	Achievement (%)	25	31	62	45	40	70
4 or 5	Number of starters	13	14	22	102	78	84
	Retention (%)	85	86	64	74	87	73
	Achievement (%)	60	60	77	90	68	90
Short courses	Number of starters	308	421	785	3,087	1,629	1,630
	Retention (%)	98	93	91	98	92	85
	Achievement (%)	72	66	75	87	79	79
Unknown/ unclassified	Number of starters	202	166	373	199	247	275
	Retention (%)	86	78	78	77	80	76
	Achievement (%)	9	26	62	60	64	76

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)

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