

Worcester College of Technology

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

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.

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 024 7686 3000
Fax 024 7686 3100
Website www.fefc.ac.uk*

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Contents

	Paragraph
<hr/>	
Summary	
<hr/>	
Context	
The college and its mission	1
The inspection	8
<hr/>	
Curriculum areas	
Computing and information technology	11
Business	17
Hotel and catering	23
Hair and beauty	28
Art, design, media and performing arts	33
English, access to higher education and teacher training	38
Basic skills	44
<hr/>	
Cross-college provision	
Support for students	50
General resources	57
Quality assurance	63
Governance	70
Management	80
Conclusions	89
<hr/>	
College statistics	

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

Worcester College of Technology *West Midlands Region*

Inspected January 2001

Worcester College of Technology is a medium-sized general further education college based at a number of sites in Worcester city centre. The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the second to be undertaken in a format that corresponded to guidance from the FEFC. It was a comprehensive document that reflected the college's structure. All staff and governors were involved and a representative group of staff oversaw its production before its approval by the corporation. It was not externally validated.

The college provides a broad range of courses in nine of the FEFC's 10 programme areas. Provision in seven of these areas was inspected, together with aspects of cross-college provision. Much teaching is good. Students receive valuable support from their teachers and tutors. Additional learning support for literacy and numeracy is well organised and effectively helps students to achieve their potential. Students' work is often of a high standard. Many students achieve good, and sometimes outstanding, success in obtaining qualifications. In some curriculum areas, achievement rates have fluctuated over the past three years. Retention

rates overall have fallen and were low on a number of the courses inspected. The college's strategies to improve retention and achievement have had only partial effect. Weaknesses in the data produced from the college's management information system and in arrangements for monitoring attendance have impeded the analysis of the college's educational performance. These are now being addressed. The college has good arrangements for strategic planning that involve all staff and governors. The open management style and good working relationships in the college contribute to an ethos of mutual respect. There are well-established arrangements for lesson observation, staff appraisal and staff development that contribute effectively to the overall development of the college. Governors are highly committed to the college and bring an impressive range of skills to support its work. The college should improve: the reliability of information provided for managers on students' attendance, retention and achievement; the rigour and effectiveness of strategies to improve performance; the consistency with which overall college policies are implemented and monitored; the poor accommodation in a number of areas and the lack of provision for students with disabilities; and some of its governance procedures, including the arrangements for clerking.

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	2
Business	2	General resources	3
Hotel and catering	2	Quality assurance	3
Hair and beauty	2	Governance	3
Art, design, media and performing arts	3	Management	2
English, access to higher education and teacher training	3		
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Worcester College of Technology is a general further education college situated in the centre of the city of Worcester. It has a number of sites including the Deansway campus (All Saints', St Andrew's and Cathedral buildings), the Sidbury centre (business and office technology), Unicorn Chambers (commercial unit), the 'Learning Shop' and the University for Industry (Ufi) learndirect centre. The school of art and design is 2 miles away, at Barbourne, and there are further Ufi learndirect centres in Droitwich and Malvern, and an access point in Upton. The college is one of six sector colleges in the county of Worcestershire. With the exception of six schools in the city, all the high schools in the county have sixth forms. Within the city boundary there is one sixth form college, one higher education college and four independent schools. Numerous private training providers operate in the area. The college regards the whole of the county as its recruitment area, and for some of its specialist part-time and commercial provision it also recruits from the West Midlands, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire.

2 The college provides full-time programmes from entry level to higher national diploma level and part-time programmes ranging from national vocational qualification (NVQ) school link courses to degree, professional and postgraduate courses. The degree and postgraduate level programmes are offered in association with Staffordshire University, University College Worcester, the University of Central England in Birmingham and the University of Wolverhampton. Basic skills provision for full-time and part-time students is available at the main campus and at centres in the community.

3 In 1999-2000, the college enrolled a total of 2,582 full-time students and 13,568 part-time students and trainees. This included 592 students on higher national certificate and

diploma courses directly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Other higher education programmes are provided on a franchise basis. This provision of higher education programmes reflects the college's strategy of providing students with progression routes through all levels of further and higher education within the institution.

4 Worcester has a population of 90,000. Minority ethnic groups make up 2.3% of the city's population. An increasing number of residents travel to work in Birmingham. The county of Worcestershire has a population of approximately 550,000. It has a high economic activity rate and a significantly lower unemployment rate than the West Midlands or the United Kingdom as a whole. There has been a shift in employment from the manufacturing to the service sector and most of the companies in the area are small to medium sized.

5 A high proportion of 16 year olds in the county enter full-time education or government-funded training schemes. An education maintenance allowance pilot programme for 16 year olds is operating during 2000-01 and approximately 300 students in the college have benefited to date. This year the college has enrolled a significantly greater number of students aged 16 to 18 than it had planned. In response to the requirements of the new post-16 curriculum, the college now provides all full-time students with a more demanding programme that offers wider choice and includes tutorial, key skills and enrichment activities.

6 In 1999-2000, the college employed 408 full-time equivalent staff. The college executive comprises the principal and three assistant principals. The finance manager attends college executive meetings for all financial aspects. The three assistant principals hold cross-college responsibilities and are also

Context

faculty resource managers, with nine heads of department and four divisional managers reporting to them.

7 The college's mission is to 'work with its partners to provide high-quality lifelong learning'. In addition to its long-established partnerships, such as the Worcester and Martley Schools and Colleges Partnership, the college has more recently developed links with a number of new partners including Worcestershire County Council (Cultural Services), Worcester City Football Club, the Riversides School and the YMCA and YWCA in Worcester. The college acts as the lead institution on a number of projects for the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Colleges' consortium, including the establishment during 1999-2000 of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Ufi hub. These partnerships and projects have been part of the college's response to the need to widen participation, combat social exclusion and develop information technology (IT) skills in the community.

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 8 January 2001. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). This included data on students' achievements for 1998 and 1999 derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college submitted its own data on students' achievements for 2000, which inspectors checked against class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. A number of inaccuracies in the data, some incomplete registers and discrepancies between college and awarding body information meant that inspectors were not able to place complete reliance on the data for 2000. Some inaccuracies were also found in data from 1998

and 1999. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by 12 inspectors and an auditor, working for a total of 56 days. Inspectors observed 86 lessons, including some tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. They held meetings with governors, representatives of the local community, college managers, staff and students and also consulted the local training and enterprise council (TEC) about its relationships with the college.

9 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 68% were good or outstanding and 9% were less than satisfactory, compared with the national averages of 62% and 6%, respectively.

Context

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	9	0	2	0	11
GCSE	0	1	2	0	0	3
GNVQ	2	10	4	2	0	18
NVQ	4	14	6	0	0	24
Other*	4	14	8	3	1	30
Total (No.)	10	48	20	7	1	86
Total (%)	12	56	23	8	1	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

*includes basic skills

10 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 (%)
Worcester College of Technology	9.2	74
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*

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

11 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and all of the weaknesses included in the college's self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of part-time courses
- good achievement on advanced level courses
- effective course co-ordination

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- poor retention and achievement on some courses
- inadequate provision of specialist IT facilities

12 The college provides a range of full-time courses from level 2 to level 4. The part-time provision is extensive. Specialist technical courses in areas of skills shortage such as computer programming and networking are offered alongside a large number of general software applications courses.

13 All courses are managed by the head of department and co-ordinated on a day-to-day basis by the IT co-ordinator, with a named member of staff responsible for managing each course. Departmental documentation is informative and of high quality. Regular course meetings are held. The reports of course reviews are informative. There is good communication between teachers. The internal verification of full-time courses is effective. The management of some part-time courses that are

taught across a number of departments is not always effective. The use of an external on-line learning programme in the advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) IT course is an innovative and effective way of covering a difficult course module. Links with industry, particularly in vocational courses, are underdeveloped.

14 The most successful lessons are well planned. Students are fully engaged and make good progress. In these lessons, teachers make effective use of presentations, high-quality lesson notes, visual aids and appropriate practical tasks. Their feedback to students is positive and constructive. Some teaching is of poor quality. Teachers provide too few assessment opportunities or tasks during lessons to enable them to assess students' understanding. In many theory lessons, teachers rely too much on the use of textbooks and do not give the students opportunities to ask or answer questions. Practical and theory lessons are timetabled separately, often to the detriment of the quality of teaching and learning. Some teachers provide students with good-quality printed learning materials. The workbooks used on some Internet-related courses are of particularly high quality and easy to follow. Other learning materials, particularly computer-aided presentations of lesson notes, are also of good quality and form a useful resource for some students. However, this material has not been made available electronically for use by other staff and students. While teachers know how individual students are progressing and record summative assessment grades, day-to-day records of student progress are unsatisfactory. The use of information and learning technology in teaching is underdeveloped. While some use is made of the worldwide web and electronic mail, little use is made of video or other multimedia resources in teaching. This weakness was not identified by the college.

Curriculum Areas

15 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that students' achievements are high on some courses. Pass rates for the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced level and the general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and advanced supplementary (GCE AS) are consistently high. However, the GNVQ advanced IT retention rate has been below the national average for the last three years. Retention in GCE AS IT was good for 1998 but declined significantly in 1999 and 2000. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Achievement on GNVQ intermediate IT and computer literacy and information technology courses has been well below the national average for three years. Data relating to City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 and to computer literacy and information technology are unreliable and not included in the published table. The department's target-setting for improving retention and achievement lacks rigour.

16 Computers in the department are of a high specification and there is a good range of up-to-date software packages on the network. Many practical lessons take place in the college's IT centre, where the lack of basic teaching resources such as full-sized whiteboards and projection equipment was partly recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The centre's separate bays provide insufficient space for teachers to give support to individual students. Teachers are unable to give whole-class demonstrations effectively, as they do not have access to facilities such as multimedia projectors. There is little opportunity for students to exploit the multimedia facilities available. The accommodation for IT is satisfactory but there is little display of students' work. There is a large collection of computing and IT books in the library, including a valuable range of textbooks and software guides, but some are out of date.

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
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	33	38	41
		Retention (%)	88	76	95
		Achievement (%)	59	46	54
GCE AS IT	3	Number of starters	22	22	24
		Retention (%)	91	59	33
		Achievement (%)	72	83	100
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	37	46	62
		Retention (%)	59	52	55
		Achievement (%)	77	75	91
GCE A level IT	3	Number of starters	3	15	11
		Retention (%)	33	79	91
		Achievement (%)	100	*	100

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

*data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Business

Grade 2

17 Inspectors observed 10 lessons on GNVQ, GCE A/AS level business studies and NVQ courses in administration and secretarial studies. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- outstanding pass rates in GNVQ intermediate business
- well-managed courses supported by thorough documentation
- a good range of courses
- productive industrial and commercial links
- the recent commercial updating of full-time staff

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on some business administration and GNVQ provision
- a low pass rate on GNVQ advanced business
- insufficient allowance for the different learning abilities of students

18 The college offers a wide range of vocational and professional business courses from foundation to higher national level, including GNVQ business at foundation, intermediate and advanced level and GNVQ retail and distributive services at intermediate and advanced level. There are GCE A/AS level courses in accounting and business studies and a range of courses in business administration. The flexible arrangements for attendance and study enable many students to achieve

additional qualifications and progress to higher level courses.

19 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that courses are well managed. There are frequent course team meetings, at which the monitoring of students' attendance and retention is a regular agenda item. Course files are comprehensive and well maintained. Thorough schemes of work and lesson plans identify appropriate learning objectives and activities. Assessment procedures are fair and consistently applied. Students receive comprehensive course handbooks. Course induction programmes are effective and are valued by students. All students have a personal tutor and timetabled tutorials are used to monitor individual students' progress. There are good procedures for reviewing students' attendance. Teachers have established effective links with parents and employers and provide regular reports on students' progress and attendance.

20 There is much good teaching. In the best lessons, students were highly motivated and engaged in a wide range of appropriate activities. Teachers asked demanding questions to sustain students' interest and to check that they had understood what they were learning. Students of GCE A level business studies and GCE AS accounting receive intensive revision sessions where strong emphasis is placed on developing examination techniques. Students on the GNVQ business studies and retail and distributive services courses benefit from residential courses, company visits and visiting speakers. All GNVQ and business administration courses include a period of well-planned work experience. Teachers encourage students to draw on their own background knowledge and work experience in lessons. Opportunities to develop key skills are clearly identified in students' learning activities and assignment work. In some lessons, however, teachers failed to take account of the different abilities of students. Some students

Curriculum Areas

were not given opportunities to tackle more difficult work in order to achieve their full potential. In a few lessons, students did little work and teachers failed to involve them in appropriate activities. In some GNVQ lessons, students did not demonstrate the ability to make meaningful notes. In three lessons the late arrival of some students adversely affected teaching and learning.

21 On GNVQ and GCE A level courses students' written work is often of good quality. Students' portfolios on GNVQ courses are well maintained and carefully organised and show that students have acquired an appropriate range of skills. Students' work on NVQ administration programmes is of a good standard; portfolios contain substantial evidence from work experience activities. Assessed work is returned to students quickly. Teachers give students constructive feedback on the quality of their work. Spelling or grammatical errors are corrected. In 2000, the student achievement rates for GNVQ intermediate business were outstanding. Pass rates fell in GCE A level business studies and GNVQ advanced business. Between 1999 and 2000 retention rates on some business administration courses declined. Many students who complete their courses progress to higher education, to higher level courses at the college or to employment.

22 There is a planned programme of staff development that includes secondment to local employers to update teachers' commercial knowledge. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the teaching accommodation for GNVQ and business administration courses is poor. Most lessons take place in an old, poorly decorated building. However, classrooms contain good and relevant display material. Classrooms are appropriately furnished with whiteboards and overhead projectors and television and video players are available. There are good-quality IT facilities with modern business software but they are not accessible from all teaching rooms. All full-time

students are issued with appropriate textbooks. The library has an adequate stock of books, business journals and CD-ROMs. Students use the Internet effectively for research.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Text processing (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	26	73	24
		Retention (%)	100	93	88
		Achievement (%)	56	85	90
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	27	19	20
		Retention (%)	81	89	75
		Achievement (%)	95	71	100
Wordprocessing (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	24	20	24
		Retention (%)	100	95	88
		Achievement (%)	75	94	80
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	60	83	65
		Retention (%)	72	84	80
		Achievement (%)	76	81	68
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters	31	17	34
		Retention (%)	77	44	70
		Achievement (%)	69	80	75
GCE AS business	3	Number of starters	*	*	20
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	71

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hotel and Catering

Grade 2

23 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were understated and identified some further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching in both theory and practical lessons
- well-managed courses
- a broad range of provision that meets community needs
- good achievement on the NVQ level 2 two-year course
- strong and effective links with industry
- effective monitoring of students' progress and achievement

Weaknesses

- insufficient tutorial support on part-time courses
- declining retention on the NVQ level 3 course
- inadequate industrial updating of staff

24 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a broad range of provision that meets community needs. Courses range from NVQ level 1 to higher national diploma level, on a full-time and part-time basis, including NVQs in food preparation, food and beverage service, supervisory skills and AVCE. Provision has been developed for students who would not otherwise have entered further education. For example, students on a preliminary level course in catering operate a successful bistro in the centre of Worcester. Study at NVQ level 1 is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities. The catering section has a partnership with local schools to train young people towards NVQ level 1. Students make good progress. Courses are well managed. Course teams meet regularly and maintain clear records. However, the actions agreed in meetings are not systematically recorded. An effective course induction programme is used to introduce students to their studies and to college facilities. Inspectors agreed that all courses have well-presented, informative handbooks.

25 Teaching is good. Schemes of work are thorough and lessons are well planned. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods to extend students' knowledge and skills. Students worked co-operatively and enthusiastically. In a key skills lesson, students clearly enjoyed developing a fact sheet about famous chefs, using information from the Internet. Teachers ensure that students develop good technical and social skills in their practical work. Learning is carefully and effectively managed in situations where students have different ability levels and learning requirements. Students with learning difficulties receive high levels of support and encouragement. For example, a group of students prepared and produced a three-course dinner menu. In the evening they had the opportunity to serve the food and wine to customers in the restaurant. The students were inspired, proud and committed to providing a good standard of service. This opportunity to experience the whole range of tasks clearly benefited their learning. Students' academic progress is carefully monitored. All students produce individual action plans, which are regularly reviewed. Procedures for additional learning support are rigorous and include regular reviews and action plans. This strength was not included in the self-assessment report. There is a programme of tutorials but the self-assessment report did not acknowledge that there is inadequate provision of tutorial support for some part-time students. Students' work is

Curriculum Areas

of an appropriate standard. Teachers mark it conscientiously and their constructive feedback helps students to improve their learning. There is an effective work experience programme.

26 There has been consistently good achievement on the NVQ level 2 two-year programme. Achievements on the GNVQ advanced course have much improved, a strength that was not recognised in the self-assessment report. The one and two-year courses have been redesigned to ensure that students enter courses at an appropriate level. Declining retention on the NVQ level 3 course was recognised in the self-assessment report and is being addressed. Students do well in competitions and have won a European Catering award on three occasions in recent years.

27 Inspectors agreed that there are strong and effective links with industry. For example the Worcester Strategy Group, which is widely representative of the industry, provides an effective programme of visiting chefs from across the country. It continues to offer the college and students resources for practical areas and job opportunities, work experience and visits for the students. Teachers have a wide range of experience in different sectors of the hospitality and catering industry. However, the college's self-assessment report recognises that some lack recent industrial updating. The specialist accommodation and equipment are of a high quality and appropriate but some accommodation is unsuitable for theory lessons. The library has a good range of specialist books and periodicals.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hotel and catering, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ professional catering	1	Number of starters	66	63	35
		Retention (%)	88	89	74
		Achievement (%)	9	77	78
NVQ (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	52	19	85
		Retention (%)	94	63	78
		Achievement (%)	52	*	90
NVQ (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	65	146	40
		Retention (%)	65	66	83
		Achievement (%)	84	89	88
GNVQ advanced (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	18	16	14
		Retention (%)	78	93	78
		Achievement (%)	45	86	85
NVQ advanced catering	3	Number of starters	7	35	36
		Retention (%)	100	100	69
		Achievement (%)	14	51	71

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

*data inaccurate

Curriculum Areas

Hair and Beauty

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 13 lessons covering a range of courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy. They broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report but identified further strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- teaching ranging from good to outstanding
- high-quality portfolio work
- the effective integration of key skills
- above-average achievement on many programmes
- excellent facilities

Weaknesses

- poor retention on some courses
- poor attendance in hairdressing

29 The college offers a range of courses in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy at levels 1, 2 and 3. Hairdressing courses have recently been reorganised and are now validated by the same examining board as the beauty therapy courses, thus giving continuity of assessment and organisation across the section. Students have a choice of progression from level 2 courses to level 3 hair or beauty, holistic therapy or fashion and media make-up. Beauty therapy students work on a Saturday to give them realistic work experience and it is planned to offer the same opportunity in hairdressing.

30 Inspectors agreed that the teaching is of high quality and planned effectively to meet the needs of individual students. Schemes of work and lesson plans are comprehensive and shared by staff. Teachers use a wide variety of

appropriate teaching methods to encourage learning. In a beauty therapy lesson, the teacher had designed word puzzles and crosswords to help the students learn the names of the bones of the face. This led to lively discussion in small groups, with the students clearly enjoying their learning. In a number of lessons teachers effectively incorporated the key skills requirements into the tasks set for students. A group of beauty therapy students collecting evidence for their make-up unit were able to download their photographs on the computer to produce the evidence for IT key skills. In a few lessons students were not fully challenged. Teachers do not always plan work for students who do not have clients in hairdressing or in beauty therapy. Students are enthusiastic and well motivated when in lessons. There is, however, some poor attendance in hairdressing and on some part-time evening courses which was not recognised by the college in its self-assessment. All full-time students have a work placement. There are links with national firms that visit the college to give training days and careers information. Students gain employment in local salons, health farms and on cruise ships. Visits are regularly organised to hair and beauty exhibitions and competitions. Students have also visited America and visits are planned to Toronto and to a health farm. Past students are invited to talk to present students about their work experience and effective use is made of staff experience.

31 Students' practical work is good. Students work safely and competently. The quality of students' portfolio work is excellent, a strength that was not clearly recognised in the self-assessment report. Level 3 students use the Internet for research and all students use wordprocessing for presentation. As identified in the self-assessment report, there are good achievement rates on many courses. In 2000, the pass rate for beauty therapy NVQ level 2 was well above the national average.

Curriculum Areas

Aromatherapy courses have consistently high pass rates. The pass rate for NVQ level 2 hairdressing improved significantly in 2000, to well above the national average. Inspectors agreed that retention rates fluctuate and are poor on some courses. In NVQ level 1 hairdressing, the retention rate decreased from 81% in 1999 to 55% in 2000, and in beauty therapy it fell from 88% to 59%, well below the national average. The retention rate for aromatherapy was also below the national average.

32 The curriculum area is well organised and well managed. Teachers have undertaken staff development in key skills, skills updating and to

gain teaching qualifications. There are excellent links with industry. The college has a well-equipped, modern and spacious new salon complex, which includes hair, beauty and holistic salons. There is a large reception area, a spa facility and a room for teaching theory. All rooms have computers linked to an intranet. The inclusion of the spa facility will enable the students to work in realistic health farm conditions. Clients' records are kept on the computer in addition to a paper system. A technician has been appointed to supervise students working in the reception area in addition to her other duties.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hair and beauty therapy, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ hairdressing (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	*	31	29
		Retention (%)	*	81	55
		Achievement (%)	*	64	71
NVQ hairdressing (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	16	26	33
		Retention (%)	100	68	85
		Achievement (%)	25	50	96
NVQ beauty therapy (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	12	15	52
		Retention (%)	91	93	79
		Achievement (%)	100	73	97
NVQ beauty therapy (two-year course)	2	Number of starters	19	33	17
		Retention (%)	100	88	59
		Achievement (%)	100	89	100
NVQ beauty therapy (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	*	47	18
		Retention (%)	*	87	100
		Achievement (%)	*	98	94
Aromatherapy	3	Number of starters	29	29	16
		Retention (%)	69	86	75
		Achievement (%)	95	96	100

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design, Media and Performing Arts

Grade 3

33 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in art, design, media and performing arts. They agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but attached greater significance to weaknesses in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- the high standard of students' practical work
- effective use of IT and the Internet to support learning
- good facilities for media and performing arts
- good support for individual learners

Weaknesses

- poor retention on several courses
- consistently poor achievement on many courses
- shortcomings in accommodation and equipment in several areas of art and design
- shortage of library books in art and design

34 The provision includes mainly vocational and GCE A level courses in visual and performing arts. There are opportunities for part-time study in areas such as photography. Inspectors agreed that courses are generally well planned and well documented. However, the timetabling of some elements of the course involves students in travelling long distances to attend short periods of study on some days. Communications between staff are good and

course teams meet regularly. Most course reviews are thorough but some pay insufficient attention to addressing achievement and retention issues. Students' learning experience is enriched by opportunities to attend exhibitions and through international study visits. Students needing help with their key skills are well supported by a learning support tutor during their main vocational studies.

35 There is much good teaching, most of which is carried out through assignment, project and performance work. Assignments expose students to a wide range of topics and are designed to incorporate key skills. Students are encouraged to experiment and to acquire new skills. Careful attention is paid to the development of students' research, study and presentation skills. Most lessons are carefully planned and have precise assessment criteria. Performing arts students benefit from a busy performance schedule. In visual arts, appropriate attention is paid to the development of observational skills, exploratory drawing and sketchbook work. Sketchbooks and design sheets effectively reveal work in progress and the development of ideas. The teaching of practical skills is closely related to theoretical study. Good use is made of IT and the Internet to improve the quality of students' learning. In a few lessons, some students were inadequately prepared and made slow progress. Some deadlines for submitting assignments had been missed. Students' attendance was low in a few of the lessons observed.

36 Inspectors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that achievement rates are mostly above national averages. Pass rates are poor on the GCE A level courses, the GNVQ intermediate in art and design and the diploma in foundation studies. Retention rates are poor or erratic on several courses, although there were some signs of improvement in 2000. Strategies to improve retention rates have been only partly successful. Most students' practical work is of a high

Curriculum Areas

standard, and there are some particularly noteworthy examples of outstanding work in three-dimensional design, graphic design, foundation studies and performing arts courses. Students' written work is less consistently good and some students undervalue the importance of being able to write well.

37 Teachers have good opportunities to update their skills and are generally well qualified in their specialist areas. The level of technician support is unsatisfactory in a few areas. Teachers of art and design benefit from working in the same building. There are good theatre facilities in performing arts. There is a small drama studio but some disruption to learning is caused by noise from musical activities in an adjacent room. Media facilities have been particularly improved through the introduction of digital video editing. However,

in most areas of art and design there are serious shortcomings in the quality and range of accommodation and equipment, a weakness not sufficiently emphasised in the self-assessment report. A number of art and design studios and workshops are poorly equipped or have equipment that is out of date or unreliable. Some have insufficient basic tools to support students' learning. Some rooms are poorly furnished, cluttered and in need of refurbishment. There is a shortage of up-to-date library books in several specialist areas, as identified in the self-assessment report.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design, media and performing arts, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	40	25	29
		Retention (%)	80	80	79
		Achievement (%)	31	60	78
GCE A level	3	Number of starters	50	43	47
		Retention (%)	82	47	70
		Achievement (%)	73	90	76
National diploma in performing arts	3	Number of starters	16	14	22
		Retention (%)	63	67	77
		Achievement (%)	100	88	93
Diploma in foundation studies in art and design	3	Number of starters	51	56	54
		Retention (%)	88	93	92
		Achievement (%)	91	92	88
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	53	56	48
		Retention (%)	70	77	71
		Achievement (%)	89	79	97
GNVQ advanced media, communication and production	3	Number of starters	15	15	17
		Retention (%)	87	80	94
		Achievement (%)	100	100	81

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

Curriculum Areas

English, Access to Higher Education and Teacher Training

Grade 3

38 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but they considered that some of the strengths identified were not exceptional practice.

Key strengths

- mostly good teaching
- good subject support and monitoring of students' progress
- well-developed range of courses
- good achievements in GCE A level English and access to arts and social studies

Weaknesses

- low retention rates in several areas
- poor achievements in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) English language
- underdeveloped use of information and learning technology

39 Inspectors considered that the broad range of courses widens participation and gives students good opportunities to progress. English language and literature courses are offered full-time and part-time at GCSE and GCE A/AS level. Students on courses in access to higher education and the foundation year for a linked degree course at University College Worcester are taught together. This enables many subjects to be offered, including modules in arts and social studies. Students on the C&G 7307 teacher training course come from a broad range of occupational backgrounds. Successful students may join a bridging course

for the University of Wolverhampton's certificate in education, also offered at the college.

40 Course teams, as noted in the self-assessment, effectively manage the three separate areas. The English course team has responsibility for the teaching of English across the college. The access and teacher training teams draw staff from many different parts of the college. They liaise effectively with the departments that contribute to the teaching. Course teams meet regularly and address key issues concerned with students' learning and success. Targets are set for students' retention and achievements and these are regularly reviewed. Schemes of work are in place and are particularly good in teacher training. In English, schemes of work have been developed to meet the requirements of the new post-16 curriculum. Inspectors agreed that there is good subject support and careful monitoring of students' progress. Well-written and informative subject and course handbooks have been produced. There is careful attention to attendance, regular reports to parents of students under 19 and regular reviews of students' progress.

41 Most teaching is good, as the college's self-assessment report states. The most successful lessons were carefully planned, and teachers used well-devised and appropriate handouts and were effective in managing small group work. Teachers work hard to advance students' understanding of key issues in their subjects. Students are able to develop ideas and to debate among themselves. In a teacher training lesson, the teacher made very effective use of a computer-aided presentation to develop students' understanding of communication in effective teaching. Students then contributed well to further discussion, drawing upon their own experience. In less successful lessons, teachers did not involve all the students in the work, did not check that students had understood the work and did not make enough use of students' own experience to help them

Curriculum Areas

learn. Attendance was relatively low and punctuality was not always good.

42 Inspectors only partly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report on students' achievements. Pass rates in GCE A level English and in access to higher education exceed national averages. In GCSE English language, which has a large number of entries, they are below. There are some significant weaknesses in retention. On some courses retention has declined over the last three years and there are courses on which fewer than half the students who start achieve an award. The quality of students' work is satisfactory and meets the required standards. Students' portfolios on the teacher training courses are carefully assessed but not all teachers give extensive feedback on students' work in access courses. Students' work in English does not have cover sheets to make it clear how far assessment criteria have been met.

43 Most teaching rooms are well furnished and well equipped. A few are bleak and unattractive and the lack of blinds in one room significantly reduced the effectiveness of the lesson. There is some subject-related display but relatively little display of students' work. Learning resources in the library are sufficient for students' learning. Although computers are readily available to students in the learning centre, there is no provision of IT in the classrooms. Inspectors considered that the use of information and learning technology in the curriculum is underdeveloped. There are no subject intranets, although some students receive a guide to English sites on the worldwide web. Teacher training students are introduced to the use of information and learning technology.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, access to higher education and teacher training, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	189	153	124
		Retention (%)	79	76	84
		Achievement (%)	36	51	41
GCSE English literature	2	Number of starters	32	25	25
		Retention (%)	100	52	68
		Achievement (%)	69	85	94
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	102	87	84
		Retention (%)	84	74	68
		Achievement (%)	78	87	100
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	23	15	16
		Retention (%)	78	80	50
		Achievement (%)	72	100	75
Access to arts and social studies	3	Number of starters	13	24	31
		Retention (%)	54	62	45
		Achievement (%)	100	80	86
C&G 7307 stage 1	3	Number of starters	83	81	70
		Retention (%)	87	88	99
		Achievement (%)	100	62	*
C&G 7307 stage 2	3	Number of starters	65	74	52
		Retention (%)	91	80	96
		Achievement (%)	56	52	*

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

**not all achievements yet known*

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

44 Inspectors observed 12 basic skills lessons. They considered that some of the strengths in the self-assessment report were overstated and that there was inadequate evidence for some of the weaknesses identified. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a well-organised and well-equipped basic skills study centre
- clear recording of students' progress on separate specialist basic skills courses
- flexible patterns of accreditation
- vocational basic skills support clearly linked to students' main programmes

Weaknesses

- an underdeveloped basic skills strategy for the college
- inadequate co-ordination of basic skills courses
- some poor classroom and community-based accommodation
- some teaching not matched to the needs of individual learners

45 The college provides basic skills teaching through separate specialist courses, additional learning support and within vocational areas. There is also some community-based provision, including family literacy at a local primary school. Basic skills provision for mental health service users is well established. The separate specialist provision for adults takes place in a well-equipped study centre on the college's main site and at some community-based locations.

46 Teachers make effective use of the recently refurbished basic skills study centre. Learners can work independently or in small groups. Each basic skills student has a named tutor who plans and regularly reviews their progress, but all teachers work flexibly to create continuity of learning for students. Teachers offer much encouragement and support. They give clear explanations and helpful feedback. The 'study centre learning plan' is a useful document for students that includes planning for short-term and long-term learning goals, personal targets for literacy and numeracy and regular reviews of learning. Most teachers use this effectively but some use it simply to describe the work done rather than to plan and record learning. On some courses, teachers do not meet the needs of individual learners. Students are taught as a group and there is little use of individual learning plans, a weakness that was not identified in the self-assessment. Schemes of work and lesson plans are based on meeting the requirements of assessment schemes rather than learners' needs. At the end of one entry level lesson on measurement, the students had not understood the key concepts. Some lessons regularly start late and some students routinely have overlong break times that reduce their lesson time. Teachers who support students on vocational courses effectively link basic skills concepts to the main course content.

47 External accreditation of learning is offered to all basic skills students. In addition to a range of national awards, the college has made extensive use of National Open College Network (NOCN) units to provide opportunities for students' progress to be recognised and accredited. Retention and achievement rates are improving on foundation level Wordpower courses. They are slightly above the national average on other Wordpower and Numberpower awards, although there is some evidence of falling achievement. Where learning is planned and negotiated with individuals, for example, on specialist courses for adults and in some

Curriculum Areas

community provision, students consider that they are making good progress towards achieving the learning goals that they have agreed with the college.

48 The college does not yet have a strategic approach to basic skills development. Basic skills teachers have produced documents on principles and planning but these are not implemented and used consistently across the college. There is considerable variation in teachers' awareness of students' basic skills needs. Teachers meet regularly to plan and review their work but arrangements for co-ordinating basic skills provision are inadequate, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. There are a large number of part-time teachers who do not attend these planning meetings and, as a result, there are considerable variations in teaching practice. Communication between teachers and managers is sometimes ineffective. The college has established and is further developing productive links with external agencies to provide basic

skills teaching at other centres, within the city and in rural locations.

49 The basic skills study centre is well organised and equipped with a range of resources. There are seven computers with specialist software in regular use. Some paper-based resources are of poor quality and some books use inappropriate language. Physical access for wheelchair users is poor. The centre is sometimes crowded. Inspectors agreed that some classroom accommodation is shabby and unwelcoming with poor decoration, few learning resources and broken blinds. Some community centres have poor accommodation, no storage space and minimal resources. Most teachers have a teaching qualification and some have relevant postgraduate qualifications. Many are working towards a specialist basic skills teaching qualification. The library carries a small stock of fiction and non-fiction material for basic skills.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in basic skills, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G 3793 foundation level communication skills (Wordpower)	1	Number of starters	23	23	20
		Retention (%)	81	83	100
		Achievement (%)	25	*	84
C&G 3793 stage 1 communication skills	1	Number of starters	54	30	23
		Retention (%)	91	80	87
		Achievement (%)	*	65	60
C&G 3794 foundation level numeracy (Numberpower)	1	Number of starters	38	21	†
		Retention (%)	92	81	†
		Achievement (%)	55	*	†
C&G 3794 stage 1 numeracy (Numberpower)	1	Number of starters	32	25	21
		Retention (%)	87	76	90
		Achievement (%)	65	*	61

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

*data unreliable

†data unavailable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

50 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses recognised in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- effective arrangements for pre-course advice
- good student induction
- effective learning support
- a wide range of services for students needing personal support

Weaknesses

- poor recording of meetings with individual students
- some poor tutorial practice
- shortcomings in the provision of careers guidance

51 There are effective arrangements to help students choose their course of study. The college uses a good variety of activities to inform students about the range of opportunities available, including 'taster' days for local schools, careers events, presentations to school pupils and special events for adult learners. The 'learning shop' located in the centre of a main shopping area provides an easily available source of information and advice. It dealt with over 14,000 enquiries last year. Much of the promotional material is informative and interesting. There are effective arrangements for interviewing prospective students, including those who are undecided about their choice of course. Almost half of the prospective students had a general guidance interview last year.

Records of these interviews provide helpful information for the subsequent course interview, although some do not contain enough detail.

52 Policies and procedures for student enrolment and induction are well documented. There is clear guidance for staff, who receive comprehensive briefing material. Nearly all students receive some form of induction and most feel it provides a good introduction to the college and their course. A comprehensive checklist of activities is provided and students verify that they have taken place. All full-time and most part-time students have an assessment of their levels of literacy and numeracy. New arrangements for assessing key skills were used for most students this year. The college identified that it was taking too long to provide support for many students after completion of the assessment. This weakness has largely been addressed.

53 There are clear procedures to help students who need learning support. Comprehensive computerised records are used to monitor students' progress and evaluate the learning support provided. A high proportion of those receiving support achieved their main qualification last year. Curriculum areas are responsible for providing much of the support, so that it is closely linked to the students' specialist studies. There are effective arrangements to support the teachers based in the curriculum areas and they have good links with the college's learning support team. Some records of the students' assessment interviews and the subsequent action plans are insufficiently detailed. Inspectors agreed that there is good provision for a wide range of specialist learning needs. External agencies are used effectively to support students with sensory impairment and those needing speech therapy.

54 There is clear guidance for tutorial work but not all tutors implement it fully. Although most students have frequent formal meetings with their personal tutor individually and in a

Cross-college Provision

group, for others contact is irregular. Many of the records of individual tutorials are insufficiently detailed or incomplete. Departments produce their own documentation and some of the forms in use are poorly designed and not comprehensive. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment but the college is now developing standard arrangements for tutorials. A 'lead tutor' group recently established to oversee the development has made good progress. Students value highly the informal help they receive. Departments are responsible for offering activities to enrich studies and most full-time vocational students have the opportunity to take part in a range of activities related to their area of study. The cross-college co-ordination of enrichment activities is underdeveloped. There is a good range of sporting activities for students.

55 Although the college has good links with the careers service, the college's self-assessment identified the need to improve the availability and quality of careers guidance and information following a reduction in the level of careers service provision. The weaknesses in careers information have largely been addressed. There is a good range of IT-based information and the careers centre resources have been updated. The centre is now staffed by a full-time co-ordinator. Some weaknesses remain in the provision of careers guidance. In many curriculum areas, the advice given to some students last term was inadequate and not timely.

56 There is a wide range of services to help students needing personal support. A full-time trained counsellor provides advice on accommodation, health and personal issues. Information and advice are also available from a student finance officer. Effective arrangements for subsidised childcare have been expanded to meet an increase in demand. The college is piloting the educational maintenance allowance for students. This initiative is well documented,

with clear briefing notes for staff and students. A review has been carried out and a number of improvements implemented. Early indications are that the educational maintenance allowance has improved attendance and retention. The college has introduced separate arrangements for monitoring the attendance of students in receipt of the allowance, as its existing arrangements for monitoring attendance were not sufficiently reliable. Action is being taken to address this weakness. Some accommodation for student support work is small and poorly located.

General Resources

Grade 3

57 The self-assessment report included some judgements not related to general resources. Inspectors agreed with most of the relevant strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The college understated some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much well-maintained and attractive accommodation
- highly efficient space utilisation
- good provision of up-to-date and accessible computers

Weaknesses

- insufficient library provision
- inadequate social and recreational facilities
- lack of access to many areas for those with restricted mobility

58 The main college campus is located in the centre of the city next to the River Severn. Other campuses are located within a 2-mile radius. The college accommodation is a mixture

Cross-college Provision

of building types, dating from different periods of the twentieth century. Most teaching areas are of an appropriate standard. Most classrooms are well furnished and well equipped. Some accommodation is of a very high standard, including the new hair and beauty area, the IT academy, the language and international studies centre and parts of the sixth form centre. The college has some poor accommodation at the Sidbury and Barbourne campuses and parts of other campuses are in need of redecoration and refurbishment. The college is generally well maintained. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that most staff rooms are too small, although they contain sufficient telephones and many have computers. As the college's self-assessment report states, it makes efficient use of its space and has one of the highest space utilisation rates in the sector.

59 The college does not have adequate social and recreational facilities. It owns no sports fields but rents facilities from various partners. Students' communal areas are inadequate. They are small for the number of students who use them and in need of renovation. The student refectories are small and the one in the All Saints' building needs to be upgraded and made more welcoming. There are no catering facilities for students in the Cathedral building. Car parking is insufficient at most college campuses and there is no car parking for students, other than at the Barbourne campus.

60 Many parts of the college are not accessible to those with restricted mobility. Lifts are not suitably designed for wheelchair users and there is no lift to the upper storeys of the St Andrew's building. Most of the ramps at the All Saints' building are too steep for wheelchair users. There are very few toilets adapted for use by disabled students. These weaknesses were partially recognised in the self-assessment.

61 The two college libraries are located at the Deansway and Barbourne campuses. Both libraries are too small for the number of

students and need refurbishing. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that there are insufficient private study places for students. Library staff are well qualified and there are sufficient staff to provide appropriate opening hours. The facilities are well used by students. Liaison between library staff and teachers in most subject areas is good. There is a useful selection of journals and other publications but there are not enough books and audiovisual tapes and the library budget is low. Library staff rooms have very restricted storage and working areas. The library management system is inadequate.

62 Inspectors agreed that staff and students have good access to IT facilities, which have improved significantly since the last inspection. The college has invested regularly in purchasing new computers and replacing older machines. There has been a significant investment in IT across the college over the last two years. Some computer centres provide a good working environment but others need further improvement. There is a high ratio of modern computers to students. Students consider that they have ready access to computers. Most computers are of a high specification and the software is of industrial standard with an appropriate range of applications. The college has a small range of CD-ROMs. Most computers are connected to the college's network system, which is being extended. There is an adequate number of good-quality printers. Students use the Internet regularly for research and for electronic mail. The college's intranet is in the early stages of development. Staff have good access to modern computers and many have electronic mail and Internet facilities. The development of the college's IT facilities is well managed. Evaluation of the college's IT services is carried out using carefully chosen performance indicators. The IT technicians are well qualified but there are not enough of them to ensure effective maintenance of equipment and the college network.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

63 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths noted in the self-assessment report and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a well-devised quality assurance framework
- the realistic lesson observation scheme
- thorough and supportive staff appraisal arrangements
- extensive staff development linked to strategic aims

Weaknesses

- the uneven impact of quality assurance on students' retention and achievement
- some unsatisfactory course reviews
- underdeveloped quality standards for some service areas

64 The college has a well-established and comprehensive quality assurance system. The arrangements, which aim to cover all aspects of the college's work, are clearly outlined in a framework document issued to all staff. The system was revised in 1999 in order to make the procedures simpler and more workable. Since the last inspection, the college has appointed a quality assurance officer with a brief to monitor closely areas of poor performance. However, as the college recognises, it has been slow to develop service level standards for cross-college areas. Some areas now have designated standards but most do not measure their performance against standards.

65 The self-assessment report provided for the inspection was the second to be produced in the current format. It was built up from curriculum

and cross-college self-assessment reports.

The draft version was scrutinised by a self-assessment group that included a governor. Some sections of the self-assessment report were insufficiently self-critical. However, the use of action plans to accompany each section was well developed. The self-assessment report for each curriculum area was based on course reviews. A standard approach is used to ensure that course teams compare their performance against college and course targets and appropriate national benchmarking data. In practice, a significant number of the course reviews had shortcomings. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report but the college is taking steps to improve the quality and consistency of course reviews.

66 In 1998, the college introduced a lesson observation scheme in order to improve teaching and learning and to provide evidence for its self-assessment. Each year lesson observations are undertaken in all areas and teachers receive helpful feedback. The scheme is externally moderated and comparisons are made with the grade profiles in the chief inspector's report. The overall profile of lesson grades awarded by inspectors was very similar to that resulting from the college's own lesson observations.

67 Strategies to improve student retention and achievement have had only partial success and there is no overall trend of improvement. This was not recognised by the college. In 1998, each department produced a strategy for improving retention. A review of under-performing courses in 1999 found that in many areas the retention and achievement data used by course teams were unreliable. Retention and achievement rates at the college in the individual areas inspected have often varied significantly from year to year. There are similar fluctuations in the overall performance of the college. The recently published college performance indicators show that overall achievement rates improved in 1999 by

Cross-college Provision

comparison with 1998. The in-year retention rate remained the same for full-time students and declined slightly for part-time students. However, when retention over the whole course is measured, the retention rates for students of all ages fell in 1999 at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4/5. The achievement rates for students aged 19 and above also fell at these levels. College data for 2000 show a fall in achievement for students aged 16 to 18 on courses at levels 1 and 3, while achievements improved for students aged 19 and above.

68 The college's charter clearly outlines the entitlements of students, employers and the community. It includes some measurable targets and is updated annually. Students have a good awareness of the charter but there is no group that monitors performance against the commitments in the charter. Most complaints are dealt with informally. There is a clear procedure for dealing with formal complaints. The principal reads and responds to these. There is no formal summary reporting of complaints to governors but an assistant principal analyses them to identify any emerging trends. Arrangements for obtaining students' views are not well developed. Two cross-college surveys of a sample of students concentrate on issues relating to student services. Individual departments conduct their own surveys but these vary in their effectiveness. The senior management team does not receive reports of the survey results nor are they widely disseminated to students. The college recently conducted a survey of staff satisfaction and plans to extend this to students.

69 Staff appraisal is well established. It includes all full-time staff and part-time staff who work for five hours or more each week. It takes place between January and March so that the outcomes can contribute to the strategic planning and self-assessment processes. The focus of appraisal extends beyond professional development. Job descriptions and previous goals are reviewed and new objectives are

agreed. As the college's self-assessment report identified, staff development arrangements are a significant strength. The staff development guidelines produced each year reflect corporate strategic objectives and contain a clear statement of entitlement. Staff are strongly encouraged to undertake industrial updating and to obtain teacher training qualifications. Nearly all full-time teachers hold or are working towards a teaching qualification. Most staff in vocational departments are qualified in assessment and verification. The college's Investor in People status was reconfirmed in 1999.

Governance

Grade 3

70 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some strengths had been overstated. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- governors' broad range of skills and commitment to the college
- governors' involvement in determining the strategic direction of the college
- good procedures for openness
- the constructive working relationship between governors and senior managers

Weaknesses

- the inadequate operation of the audit committee
- shortcomings in clerking arrangements
- underdeveloped monitoring of the college's educational provision
- failure to consider the three-year financial forecast and other key documents

Cross-college Provision

71 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.

72 The corporation's membership comprises four business governors, a co-opted governor, two staff governors, two local authority governors, three local community governors, a student governor and the principal. The business governors account for less than one-third of the total corporation. Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise which are used effectively to support the college. The range of governors' skills is considered when making new appointments. The search committee operates effectively in seeking candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors. As recognised in the self-assessment report, levels of attendance at corporation and committee meetings are high.

73 The corporation has an appropriate committee structure. Governors have agreed their deployment between committees to make best use of their skills. Each committee has appropriate terms of reference. The corporation and the finance, resources and employment policy committee consider the management accounts at each of their meetings. The annual budget for 2000-01 was approved before the start of the year but the information to support the budget was limited to an income and expenditure account and cashflow forecast. Governors did not consider and approve the three-year financial forecast for 2000 to 2003.

74 There are shortcomings in the clerking arrangements, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The clerk holds a full-time position as the head of personnel and is contracted to work one additional day a week as clerk. The combined roles limit the time

available to ensure that the corporation's business is properly conducted. The clerk services all committees but this could lead to a conflict of interest when clerking the finance, resources and employment policy committee. The principal has, in the past, appraised the clerk in relation to both of his roles. The chair of the corporation has arranged to appraise the clerk's role separately in future. Corporation minutes often fail to record adequately the level of discussion of corporation and committee meetings.

75 There are inadequacies in the operation of the audit committee. The committee does not produce an annual written report for the corporation on the state of the whole system of internal control within the college, nor does it assess its own performance. It has not prepared a rolling schedule to monitor the implementation of internal and external audit recommendations. Performance indicators have been established for internal and external audit but have yet to be monitored. The 1998-99 internal audit annual report and external audit management letter were not forwarded to the corporation. The corporation therefore considered the annual financial statements for the year ending 31 July 2000 without sight of these documents. The audit committee has approved the internal audit annual plan for 2000-01 but has failed to ensure that the corporation approves it before the internal auditors begin their work.

76 Arrangements for governor training have included the use of a range of national speakers at an annual residential event for governors. There are good arrangements for induction, including a mentor system for new governors. Training is sometimes given during corporation meetings but is not based on a structured programme. A training programme has been drawn up for the coming year but governors have not yet analysed their training needs.

Cross-college Provision

77 The corporation has good procedures for openness. All governors and senior postholders annually update a register of interests and declarations of interest are made at corporation and committee meetings. Governors annually review their eligibility to serve. A ‘whistleblowing’ policy has been produced and the corporation’s code of conduct includes the Nolan committee’s seven principles of public life. The corporation produces an annual report. The ready availability of agendas, papers and minutes in the library is advertised to all staff and members of the public in the college’s ‘Newslink’ publication. There are few confidential minutes and any restriction on public access is removed as quickly as possible.

78 Inspectors agreed that governors effectively determine the educational character and strategic direction of the college. Governors and senior managers meet for two weekends each year to review the college’s mission and strategic priorities and to consider and approve the annual operating statement. This process is well planned and benefits from briefings by senior managers and guest speakers. Governors ensure that they receive regular progress reports on the implementation of their decisions. They have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. There is a good working relationship between governors and managers.

79 Governors’ monitoring of the quality of the college’s educational provision is underdeveloped. The corporation established a standards and achievement committee in January 2000. The committee has made recommendations for corporation approval concerning annual targets for students’ retention and achievement. However, there is no record of its action in some other areas of its responsibility or of discussion of the committee’s reports by the full corporation.

Management

Grade 2

80 Inspectors considered that the self-assessment report provided a comprehensive review of management but identified two additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good communication throughout the college
- the clear management structure
- the well-established strategic planning process
- the college’s responsiveness to the needs of its community
- effective deployment of resources

Weaknesses

- the inadequacies of the college’s management information system
- erratic patterns of students’ retention and achievement
- insufficiently rigorous monitoring and implementation of some college policies

81 There is a well-established management structure with clear lines of accountability. The principal and three assistant principals, all senior postholders, constitute the college executive. The assistant principals are respectively responsible for: student services, marketing and equal opportunities; staffing, curriculum, quality and business development; and resources and planning. The college executive meets formally every two weeks. Minutes record decisions and responsibility for implementing agreed actions. Three senior managers, the head of funding and business development, the finance manager, and the head of personnel, attend college executive meetings when agenda items require their participation.

Cross-college Provision

The minutes of the meetings are available in the college library.

82 The assistant principals are also heads of the college's three faculties. Each faculty has a similar management structure. Heads of department lead teams of subject and course leaders. Regular meetings are well minuted and minutes are scrutinised by the principal. The college has well-established procedures for the efficient deployment of staff and the use of physical resources is closely monitored. However, it has not ensured continuous improvement in retention and achievement; retention rates are particularly erratic. The implementation and monitoring of some cross-college policies is not sufficiently rigorous. There are weaknesses in course reviews, in basic skills provision and in aspects of support for students. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The finance manager, who is a qualified accountant, heads the finance function. Comprehensive and timely management accounts are produced every month for governors and the college executive and supported by a detailed unit monitoring report. The management accounts include an income and expenditure account with a limited commentary, a balance sheet, and a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast, although they do not report against key financial ratios. Budget holders are closely involved in setting their budgets and receive detailed monthly budgetary control reports. The financial regulations have recently been revised but the procedures for dealing with fraud and irregularities are insufficient. Statistical and financial returns to the FEFC are timely.

84 Inspectors agreed that the college has a well-established strategic planning process underpinned by thorough market research. Academic departments, and administrative and

support sections undertake annual reviews of their performance against strategic objectives and operational targets. This informs the college's annual report submitted to the corporation. Each department produces costed plans that inform the development of the college's strategic objectives and the annual operating statement. They are presented to the college's academic board for discussion and acceptance. Progress in meeting objectives is regularly monitored.

85 As the self-assessment report identified, the college's work in the community is a significant strength. The college has a range of productive partnerships to meet the needs of many groups in the community. Close and productive links with secondary and special schools, and with University College Worcester promote participation and progression. Links with local community organisations are particularly well developed and are effective in encouraging greater participation of under-represented groups in further education and training. The college manages the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Ufi partnership, which has recruited more than 2000 learners to date.

86 Communication throughout the college is good. At the beginning of the academic year, the principal provides a briefing for all staff on the college's strategic priorities and annual operating statement. Regular meetings with groups of staff ensure that all have the opportunity to consult the principal on matters of concern to them. A monthly 'principal's forum' brings together all managers to discuss key issues. A newsletter is published weekly. Senior managers are accessible and responsive. While communication between staff on different sites has presented some difficulty, the recent introduction of electronic mail facilities in all main buildings has eased the problem. The college also pays for part-time staff to attend meetings.

Cross-college Provision

87 Inspectors agreed that there are weaknesses in the college's management information system. While the existing system enables the college to provide adequate data on financial performance, student numbers and funding units, the system is not completely effective in supporting managers. These weaknesses were underestimated in the self-assessment report but identified in a recent college review. The college has now started to implement a detailed action plan to remedy the weaknesses.

88 The college has an active equal opportunities committee that has done much to raise awareness throughout the college. The committee includes staff, students and representatives of the local community. Reports are provided to the college executive and a presentation is made to the corporation. Personnel policy and procedures are informed by the college's equal opportunities policy and it is included in the induction of students and new staff.

Conclusions

89 The self-assessment report prepared by the college in preparation for the inspection was the second to be produced in the current format. The report was compiled using the framework specified in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment* and 97/22, *Joint Working: Audit and inspection*. It was built up from curriculum and cross-college area reviews and involved all staff and governors. The college's self-assessment group reviewed the report before its approval by the corporation. The report was based on the college's performance in 1999-2000 but the June 2000 deadline for inspection purposes precluded the use of reliable retention and achievement data for 2000. The sections of the report reflected the departmental structure of the college rather than the FEFC's programme areas, although an attempt was made by the college to realign some

of its self-assessment grades with the areas to be inspected. The report was comprehensive. Inspectors agreed with many of the college's judgements but considered that some weaknesses had not received enough weight. They agreed with three of the grades awarded by the college for curriculum areas and one of the cross-college grades. In the other areas they considered that the college had overestimated the grade.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	21
19-24 years	17
25+ years	57
Not known	5
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	7
Level 2 (intermediate)	17
Level 3 (advanced)	18
Level 4/5 (higher)	1
Level not specified	12
Non-schedule 2	45*
Total	100

Source: college data

*includes Ufi/learndirect students

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

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	412	2,589	29*
Agriculture	0	6	0
Construction	69	453	5
Engineering	154	377	5
Business	397	1,748	20
Hotel and catering	347	240	6
Health and community care	384	491	8
Art and design	454	78	5
Humanities	345	1,218	15
Basic education	41	688	7
Total	2,603	7,888	100

Source: college data

*includes Ufi/learndirect students

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 9% 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	150	31	0	181
Supporting direct learning contact	86	1	0	87
Other support	140	0	0	140
Total	376	32	0	408

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£11,433,000	£12,362,000	£14,085,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.13	£16.20	£16.73
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	66%	64%
Achievement of funding target	105%	104%	100%
Diversity of income	30%	31%	36%
Operating surplus	£124,000	£81,000	£265,000

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 1998-99 (1998 and 99), college (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		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	502	776	626	1,308	1,745	878
	Retention (%)	82	85	83	90	95	86
	Achievement (%)	38	62	64	38	72	69
2	Number of starters	1,034	1,515	1,385	1,145	1,848	1,313
	Retention (%)	80	81	77	78	89	83
	Achievement (%)	46	73	72	44	75	69
3	Number of starters	1,204	1,351	1,206	1,009	1,401	1,146
	Retention (%)	77	80	76	82	86	81
	Achievement (%)	70	74	78	61	69	66
4 or 5	Number of starters	32	23	16	668	707	635
	Retention (%)	81	100	75	85	92	89
	Achievement (%)	73	62	88	55	57	49
Short courses	Number of starters	259	158	141	3,101	2,018	1,601
	Retention (%)	96	88	97	96	96	99
	Achievement (%)	81	64	75	77	60	82
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	1,611	1,139	1,094	1,585	2,384	2,887
	Retention (%)	81	79	78	88	87	91
	Achievement (%)	54	50	61	60	59	77

Source: ISR

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Further copies can be obtained by contacting
the communications team at:

The Further Education Funding Council
Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT

Telephone 024 7686 3265

Fax 024 7686 3025

E-mail fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk

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