

# Milton Keynes College

REPORT FROM  
THE INSPECTORATE  
**2000-01**

THE  
FURTHER  
EDUCATION  
FUNDING  
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION  
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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*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](http://www.fefc.ac.uk)*

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## Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

## Milton Keynes College

### *South East Region*

#### **Inspected October 2000**

Milton Keynes College is a general further education college in Buckinghamshire. The college has produced a self-assessment report each year since the last inspection in 1997. The May 2000 report, together with an October 2000 update, were used by inspectors. All sections of the college, including the corporation, were involved in the production of the self-assessment report. The report was comprehensive, but some sections were insufficiently evaluative. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college, but they considered that some weaknesses had been underestimated. They also identified additional weaknesses and strengths. Inspectors awarded lower grades than those in the self-assessment report for four curriculum areas and two aspects of cross-college provision.

The college provides courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Five programme areas together with basic skills and aspects of cross-college provision were inspected. In addition to its work with young people, the college enrolls a large number of adult students. It has extensive partnerships with the local

community. Teaching and learning have not improved since the last inspection. The percentage of lessons judged to be good or outstanding was below the national average. There have been some improvements in achievement rates and at levels 2 and 3 these are above national averages. Overall retention has improved slightly, but is below average levels. The college continues to offer good levels of support to an increasingly diverse range of students, but take-up of additional learning support is low. The college has significantly improved its IT resources. Most teaching accommodation is good. Quality assurance policies have engendered a strong commitment to raising standards, although not all performance targets are being met. Staff development is good. Governors provide strong strategic direction. They give careful consideration to finances. A period of considerable change for the college has been well managed. Strong leadership, effective consultation with staff and the rigorous use of management targets are key strengths. The college should improve: teaching and learning; students' achievements and retention; the rigour of self-assessment; students' take up of learning support; the range of enrichment activities; room utilisation; internal verification; the procedural deficiencies in compliance with statutory requirements for governance; and the management information system.

<b>Curriculum area</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cross-college provision</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Business studies	3	Support for students	2
Professional and management studies	3	General resources	3
Leisure, tourism and sport	3	Quality assurance	3
Health and care	3	Governance	2
Art, design and media	3	Management	3
English, communications, and government and politics	3		
Basic skills	3		

# Context

## The College and its Mission

1 Milton Keynes College was formed in 1982, through the merger of two further education colleges at Bletchley and Wolverton. The college serves Milton Keynes and the surrounding area, operating from two main centres in Milton Keynes, at Bletchley and Chaffron Way. Milton Keynes Manpower Forum Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary company of the college based at Wolverton and Kiln Farm, runs government-funded training schemes on behalf of the college. At the time of the inspection, a merger between the college and the privately owned Milton Keynes Training was in process. The partners plan to build on their joint expertise to develop a centre of engineering excellence at Bletchley Park. The college has two outreach centres, in central Milton Keynes and Wolverton, providing information technology (IT) training. It also provides an education service to three prisons; HMP Woodhill, HMP Bullingdon and HMP The Mount. The college is an associate college of De Montfort University and has links with Oxford Brookes and Luton universities.

2 The college offers over 400 full-time and part-time courses in vocational and academic subjects, ranging from basic skills to degree level. It attracts approximately 8,000 students during the course of the academic year, of whom some 1,900 are full-time students. More students aged 16 to 19 study at the college than in the local school sixth forms. They account for around 30% of college students; the remainder are adults. Of the college's students, 75% come from Milton Keynes and north Buckinghamshire. Within this area, there are 10 comprehensive schools, eight of which have sixth forms, a grammar school and secondary modern school. The college is the only further education institution in the area, but there are four providers of higher education. The nearest college of further education is in Bedford, 15 miles away.

3 The borough of Milton Keynes has one of the fastest population growth rates in the United Kingdom. It is a semi-rural community with a population of approximately 222,000, 25% of whom are under the age of 16, compared with the national average of 21%. The minority ethnic population, of 5.8%, is slightly higher than in the rest of the south east. This percentage is increasing as asylum seekers and Hong Kong Chinese move into the area.

4 Of the 7,091 companies in Milton Keynes, 55% employ fewer than 20 people. Foreign companies constitute 7% of the total. Most jobs are in the service sector, which accounts for 76% of employees. Around 19% are in manufacturing. Employment is buoyant. In late 2000, the unemployment rate in Milton Keynes was only 1.8%, compared with 4% nationally. There are often many unfilled job vacancies. The number of young people in Milton Keynes achieving national learning targets is well below the national average. In 1998-99, 40.5% achieved five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) subjects at grade C or above, compared with 46.3% nationally.

5 The college, in its mission statement, aims to provide a service of high quality and to create opportunities for people to achieve their personal, educational and employment goals. There is a commitment to personal growth and to opportunities for all those involved to learn to their full potential. The college is a member of Milton Keynes Lifelong Learning Partnership. It works with employer groups, community groups and adult education to support the high proportion of disadvantaged 16 to 19 year olds and adults who live in some areas of Milton Keynes. The college is committed to developing an inclusive learning organisation which enables all members of the community to have full access to a wide range of education and training opportunities.

# Context

## The Inspection

6 The college was inspected in October and November 2000. Inspectors had previously analysed the college's self-assessment report and information provided by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements taken from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The college submitted its own data, in the same format, on students' achievements for 2000, using FEFC-approved computer software. The data were checked against college registers and awarding body pass lists and found to be largely accurate.

7 The inspection was carried out by 11 inspectors and an auditor working for a total of 50 days. Inspectors observed 81 lessons and tutorials, inspected students' work and evaluated a range of college documentary evidence. Meetings were held with students, governors, managers, teachers and support staff. In the same week as the FEFC inspection, seven inspectors from the Training Standards

Council (TSC), inspecting for 27 days, worked with the inspection team. The TSC inspectors concentrated on work-based training supported by the college in construction (electrical installation), engineering (motor vehicle), business administration, including IT and accounts, hospitality and catering and hairdressing and beauty. They interviewed 67 trainees and 21 employers, and visited 22 placements. They observed 16 instruction sessions. Where it was appropriate to the FEFC inspection framework, evidence gathered by TSC inspectors was taken into account when grading college provision.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons inspected, 56% were rated good or outstanding and 9% were less than satisfactory. These figures are poorer than the national averages recorded for colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

### Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	2	7	3	0	0	12
GCSE	0	1	1	1	0	3
GNVQ	2	6	11	1	0	20
NVQ	3	6	6	2	0	17
Other vocational	2	11	6	2	0	21
Other	1	4	2	1	0	8
Total (No)	10	35	29	7	0	81
Total (%)	12	43	36	9	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 ranged from 66% in basic skills to 83% in humanities.

## Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Milton Keynes College	12.8	76
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

## Business Studies

### *Grade 3*

**10 Inspectors observed 12 lessons covering general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), general certificate of education advanced level and advanced subsidiary (GCE A level and GCE AS), GCSE and book-keeping courses. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses. The report paid insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and learning.**

#### **Key strengths**

- wide-range of provision
- good use of students' own experiences
- good achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate and book-keeping courses
- good progression within the college and to higher education

#### **Weaknesses**

- teachers' insufficiently high expectations of students
- some uninspiring teaching
- poor retention and achievement rates on several courses
- insufficient specialist IT applications

11 There is a wide range of courses providing good progression opportunities for students. The business and management curriculum area has been recently reorganised. As mentioned in the self-assessment report, some new systems and procedures have yet to be fully tested. Teachers meet regularly and their discussions about courses are minuted. Plans for improving teaching and learning and for identifying and sharing good practice are not well developed. Course documentation is clear. There is a new common format for schemes of

work and lesson plans. Some of the completed schemes and plans are insufficiently detailed. Some are simply lists of topics to be covered. This weakness is not included in the self-assessment report.

12 Half the lessons observed were good, but none were outstanding. In the better lessons, teachers checked regularly that students had understood the topic by directing questions at specific students and ensuring that everyone joined in discussions. They made good use of handouts on which students were expected to note additional explanation and examples. Some teachers guided students through complex concepts a step at a time. There are some clear and effective learning materials, though these are not always shared amongst teachers. Good use is made of students' own experiences. For example, in a lesson on recruitment selection techniques, the teacher drew on students' experiences of applying for jobs and attending interviews. Students were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. Well-focused questions from the teacher helped students to consider the implications of these. However, in other lessons, questions were not well directed. Students spent too much time copying notes from the board, failing to note helpful comments by teachers, who spoke while students copied. Some unsuitable materials were used in classes which contained students with mixed abilities. Some teachers have insufficiently high expectations of students. Some lessons moved along too slowly. More could have been achieved in the time available. Group work was insufficiently disciplined; students were not given time limits to complete tasks. Students' work is marked regularly and returned promptly. However, punctuation and spelling deficiencies in students' written work are not always corrected. Poor punctuality is not always effectively dealt with. The only teaching aid observed in use was the overhead projector. Neither the strengths nor

# Curriculum Areas

weaknesses of teaching were included in the self-assessment report.

13 Students' achievement rates on the book-keeping and accounts course are good; well above national averages for the last three years. Those for the GNVQ intermediate exceeded national averages in 1999 and 2000. Because the college sometimes used inappropriate benchmarking data for judging performance, this strength was not appropriately recognised in the self-assessment report. Pass rates at grade C or above for the GCSE business studies were well above the national average in 2000. At grades A to G, they were above average for the last three years, being 100% in 2000. Achievement rates are poorer on the GNVQ advanced level course; in 1998 and 1999 they were just below national averages. Data for this course in 2000 are unreliable; more than 33% of students have no known outcomes. Data for the GCE A/AS level economics and business course are confusing and unreliable, though pass rates appear to be good. Retention

rates on the GCSE course are well above average in 1999 and 2000. For most other courses, over the last three years, they have been at or below national averages. Some of the weaknesses in retention and achievement rates are mentioned in the self-assessment report.

14 There are sufficient computers, although few have Internet access and there are no electronic mail facilities. This weakness is not mentioned in the self-assessment report. The learning centres are adequately stocked with books. As identified in the self-assessment report, liaison between the business teachers and staff in the learning centres needs to be strengthened. A few classrooms are too small for the groups using them. Teachers are appropriately qualified, although few have recent business or industrial experience. Implementation of a plan to update their experience is slow.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Book-keeping and accounts	1	Number of starters	88	92	131
		Retention (%)	84	79	79
		Achievement (%)	93	92	99
GNVQ foundation business	1	Number of starters	18	17	13
		Retention (%)	53	71	77
		Achievement (%)	78	58	60
Book-keeping and accounts	2	Number of starters	51	66	66
		Retention (%)	78	56	56
		Achievement (%)	42	97	97
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	39	40	32
		Retention (%)	79	83	78
		Achievement (%)	59	85	84
GCSE business studies	2	Number of starters	20	17	18
		Retention (%)	53	76	83
		Achievement (%)	30	15	64

# Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business studies, 1998 to 2000 (continued)

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	95	66	72
		Retention (%)	76	71	*
		Achievement (%)	71	64	*

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Professional and Management Studies

### Grade 3

**15 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in accountancy, marketing, logistics, purchasing and supply and credit management. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified other strengths and some important weaknesses in teaching and learning. Inspectors from the TSC observed the college's training in accountancy for work-based students.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of professional and management programmes
- effective use of students' experience
- high achievement rates on some professional courses
- effective tutorial support
- valuable contributions from visiting lecturers

#### Weaknesses

- poor teaching
- inappropriate learning activities
- insufficient assessed work on some courses
- inadequate written feedback on students' work on some courses
- lack of recent industrial or commercial experience of many permanent teachers

16 The college offers a comprehensive range of professional and management programmes at levels 2, 3 and 4. Some do not attract sufficient students to be run every year. Many programmes provide clear vocational progression routes within the college. Students are attracted by the good reputation of the specialist provision and

many travel a considerable distance to attend. The majority of programmes lead to awards validated by professional bodies and are taken primarily by part-time adult students. Students are often able to choose from several patterns of attendance, including work-based study for competence-based qualifications. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that it has responded to employers' needs, offering courses designed for local companies. However, there is no formal mechanism for collecting, collating and analysing the views of employers.

17 Only 30% of lessons were good or outstanding. This compares with 61% for all business studies lessons observed in 1999-2000. Many teachers provide too few opportunities for students to engage in discussion or to ask questions. In some lessons, teachers do not provide suitable activities to stretch the more able, whilst at the same time providing help for those who need it. In one lesson, adult students spent far too long simply copying notes from an overhead projector transparency. A minority of lessons are more effective. In these, teachers organise effective group work to develop students' communication skills. Teachers also make good use of students' work experiences. One teacher used a financial credit report provided by a student as the basis for a successful lesson, which developed students' skills in financial analysis. Teachers set too little assessed work for students to complete. In three of the courses observed, no assessed work had been set since the beginning of the course. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the lack of standardised internal verification practice is a weakness. At the time of the inspection, the newly introduced internal verification policy had not yet been implemented by course teams.

18 The quality of students' course work is generally good. Teachers worked hard to ensure that inspectors were provided with accurate achievement data in a form that made trend analysis and comparisons with national

# Curriculum Areas

benchmarks possible. Achievement rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) accounting programmes at levels 2 to 4 have improved over recent years and were significantly above the national average at level 4 in 2000. This is also true of the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply professional stage. For 1998 and 2000, the achievement rate for the Certificate in Logistics was 100%. Achievement rates for the Chartered Institute of Marketing examinations are around the national averages, which are themselves low. Retention rates are generally satisfactory.

19 Students appreciate the tutorial support provided on part-time courses. The tutorials are effectively co-ordinated and delivered. This

strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Part-time visiting lecturers make a valuable contribution to the work in this programme area, both through their own vocational work experiences, and in the wider contacts with industry which they bring to the college. The college had identified its recruitment and induction processes for these teachers as a weakness, but has now set minimum standards for their recruitment and induction. The majority of permanent teachers have not had recent relevant vocational work experience, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. The learning resource centre is appropriately stocked with vocationally specific books and other learning materials. It is open at times which are convenient to part-time students.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in professional and management studies, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	116	80	121
		Retention (%)	81	88	88
		Achievement (%)	57	61	67
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	65	75	73
		Retention (%)	86	91	80
		Achievement (%)	43	65	76
Chartered Institute of Marketing certificate (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	31	42	26
		Retention (%)	90	90	73
		Achievement (%)	29	42	*
Certificate in logistics	3	Number of starters	20	10	20
		Retention (%)	75	70	50
		Achievement (%)	100	71	100
NVQ accounting (one-year course)	4	Number of starters	44	45	60
		Retention (%)	86	98	97
		Achievement (%)	42	45	68
Chartered Institute of Marketing advanced certificate (one-year course)	4	Number of starters	37	36	28
		Retention (%)	89	97	82
		Achievement (%)	45	31	*
Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply foundation (one-year course)	4	Number of starters	92	98	97
		Retention (%)	84	89	85
		Achievement (%)	23	71	60
Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply professional (two-year course)	4	Number of starters	†	69	53
		Retention (%)	†	51	90
		Achievement (%)	†	60	62

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

\* data unreliable † course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## Leisure, Tourism and Sport

### Grade 3

**20 Inspectors observed 12 lessons in leisure, travel and tourism and sports studies. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of courses
- good achievement rates on most courses
- extensive and productive links with industry

#### Weaknesses

- declining, and sometimes poor, retention rates on most full-time courses
- low achievement rate on GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism
- some poor teaching

21 The college has increased its range of courses in this programme area since the last inspection. A first diploma in science (sports studies) and a GNVQ foundation course in leisure and tourism have been introduced. The new advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) in travel and tourism began this year. Enrolments have increased on the national diploma in science (sports studies). A range of additional courses is available to students, including NVQ level 2 travel services, courses on computer reservation systems, pool lifeguard and first-aid courses, and courses leading to the English Speaking Board qualification.

22 Teachers meet regularly to monitor their performance and share good practice. Lines of responsibility are clear. Course managers have developed good practices, some of which have

been adopted college-wide. For example, in addition to cross-college questionnaires, students complete course-specific questionnaires. Some of the responses to these questionnaires have been acted on, for example the length of some teaching blocks has been reduced. However, some groups are still timetabled with the same teacher, for the whole day.

23 The quality of the teaching was overstated in the college's self-assessment. Inspectors found fewer good or outstanding lessons than the national average for this programme area. The objectives of lessons are not always clear to students, their understanding is not routinely checked and they are rarely encouraged to develop their thinking. There is little attempt to cater for the different learning needs of students within the class. For example, one class included students whose first language was not English. These students had difficulty understanding the concept of elapsed flying times but they received inadequate help. Some lessons are more effective. In a lesson on sporting venues in the United Kingdom, the teacher paired a foreign student with an English student to help locate venues on a map. A practical volleyball lesson was well structured, beginning with an outline of health and safety issues followed by a comprehensive warm up, demonstration of techniques and practice sessions in small groups. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that educational visits, students' work experience, guest speakers and teachers' own experience, are all used effectively to relate theory to practice.

24 Assignment briefs are clear, although some first-year students feel industrial terminology is not explained to them sufficiently early in their course. Students' work is returned promptly, with adequate commentary in most cases. The internal verification process is thorough. A majority of teachers hold assessor awards. The work needed to provide the new key skills qualifications is progressing slowly.

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25 Achievement rates are above national averages for most courses. The exceptions are GNVQ intermediate, which has had rates below the national average for two years, and the first diploma in science (sports studies), which has declined to the national average this year. Fewer higher grades are achieved on the GNVQ intermediate courses than the national average. No higher grades were achieved on GNVQ advanced in 2000. Retention rates declined between 1998 and 2000 on most full-time courses. In 2000 they were generally below national averages. This was not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Strategies aimed at improving retention have recently been introduced. Students' attendance and reasons for withdrawal from courses are carefully monitored. Where appropriate, parents are requested to accompany students to interviews, to help establish their commitment to the course. Entry criteria are strictly applied. The amount of practical work and vocational

content has been increased, and some courses are now taught by a larger number of full-time teachers. Early indications are that these initiatives are leading to higher retention when compared with the same time last year.

26 All teachers have appropriate qualifications and experience. Many have maintained contacts with industry. The range and quality of textbooks and periodicals is adequate. Specialist accommodation includes a small travel shop which has two computers, with access to the Internet, and a range of brochures. Holiday bookings are not possible. A small fitness gym is used by students on the sport and leisure courses but is not open to the rest of the college or the public, so that an opportunity for students to practise managing an open facility has been lost. A nearby leisure centre is used for practical sport as the college does not have its own sports hall. Some classrooms are too small for some of the groups using them.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure, tourism and sport, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ travel services	2	Number of starters	33	28	35
		Retention (%)	91	71	80
		Achievement (%)	77	95	81
GNVQ leisure and tourism	2	Number of starters	22	21	26
		Retention (%)	68	71	58
		Achievement (%)	73	67	60
GNVQ leisure and tourism	3	Number of starters	18	23	14
		Retention (%)	78	72	50
		Achievement (%)	92	85	83
BTEC national diploma in travel and tourism	3	Number of starters	30	29	44
		Retention (%)	80	66	73
		Achievement (%)	90	89	97
Galileo computer and reservations systems	2	Number of starters	35	35	37
		Retention (%)	91	77	78
		Achievement (%)	75	41	86
BTEC first diploma (sports science)	2	Number of starters	*	21	34
		Retention (%)	*	62	65
		Achievement (%)	*	92	82

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in leisure, tourism and sport, 1998 to 2000  
(continued)**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
BTEC national diploma (sports science)	3	Number of starters	22	22	39
		Retention (%)	77	82	56
		Achievement (%)	100	100	95

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

*\*course not running*

# Curriculum Areas

## Health and Care

### *Grade 3*

**27 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in childcare, health and social care and counselling. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report.**

#### **Key strengths**

- teaching which meets individual students' learning needs
- good achievement and retention rates on access and care management courses
- good achievement rates on GNVQ advanced health and social care
- effective links with external organisations

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor retention and achievement rates on certificate in childcare and education course in 2000
- low retention rate on the diploma in nursery nursing in 2000
- disruption to students' learning due to high teacher turnover
- poor course management

28 The college offers a wide range of courses for full-time and part-time students. Full-time courses include childcare courses at all levels from foundation to diploma level, a BTEC first course in care and an AVCE in health and social care. Part-time courses include an access to health course, a professional certificate in counselling, and an advanced management course for care. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the college has established a range of effective links with outside agencies. These include the local early years care and development partnership, the Sure Start project, the local chamber of commerce and the local authority. These links have been

instrumental in the development of NVQ programmes in early years, care and playwork.

29 There has been disruption to students' learning due to the high turnover of teachers exacerbated by some long-term illness. Last year, diploma in nursery nursing students had as many as five different teachers for some subjects. Students' knowledge in these subjects is now below the required level. Several other courses have been affected in this way. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Management of courses is poor. There have been no course team meetings in the last year. BTEC course teams have not met to plan assignments. Quality reviews and the action plans arising from them lack rigour.

30 Teaching is generally good. As indicated in the self-assessment report, many teachers use information on students' preferred learning styles when planning their teaching. Teachers provide students with clear aims and objectives at the beginning of lessons and check that these are being achieved. Appropriate practical activities are used to reinforce learning. In most lessons, students work purposefully. In an effective lesson on communication, students worked in small groups to solve a problem. They were provided with written materials which, unknown to them, were all slightly different. The teacher expertly facilitated the lesson as students realised they had to share information to solve the problem. The learning points associated with the group interaction were effectively reviewed. In less effective lessons, teachers did not check all students' understanding, there was a lack of targeted questioning and a small number of students answered all the questions. In some lessons, too little use was made of what students had learned on their work experience. The implementation of the new key skills requirements has been slow. Schemes of work have not identified opportunities to assess key skills. Assignment briefs do not clearly identify the key skills to be assessed. Inspectors

# Curriculum Areas

observed little vocational relevance in the materials used in key skills lessons.

31 Retention rates on the courses which have had a high turnover of teachers are poor. The greatest effect has been on the courses leading to the diploma in nursery nursing and the certificate in childcare and education. Only 25 of the original 36 students remain in the second year of the diploma in nursery nursing course. The achievement rate on the certificate in childcare and education dropped to 20% below the national average last year. Although student numbers have fallen, the achievement rate on the GNVQ advanced programme has increased dramatically in the last three years and was 100% in 2000. As identified in the self-assessment report, achievement and retention rates are above the national average on the access to health professions course and the City & Guilds of London Institute (C&G) advanced care management course. Students

written work is of an appropriate standard. Written comments from teachers provide some information on how students could improve. Internal verification systems on NVQ programmes are good. The good practice from these programmes is only just starting to be extended to other courses.

32 Teachers are well qualified and have relevant experience. New teachers are given appropriate support. The small number of specialist rooms for care courses are well equipped and provide a stimulating learning environment. They contain displays of care-related materials. Many lessons take place in general teaching rooms. Some classrooms are the wrong size for the group using them. There is a good range of relevant books, periodicals and videos in the learning resource centre. Students report some difficulty in getting the books they need from the library.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and care, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	37	39	38
		Retention (%)	78	74	66
		Achievement (%)	97	90	60
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	54	44	28
		Retention (%)	85	77	64
		Achievement (%)	71	82	93
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	21	16	12
		Retention (%)	81	67	67
		Achievement (%)	57	90	100
BTEC national diploma in childhood studies (nursery nursing)	3	Number of starters	23	22	21
		Retention (%)	87	75	76
		Achievement (%)	100	100	94
Access to health professions	3	Number of starters	39	40	45
		Retention (%)	64	63	71
		Achievement (%)	88	88	100
C&G 325, advanced management of care	3	Number of starters	11	14	17
		Retention (%)	100	93	94
		Achievement (%)	100	100	88

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

# Curriculum Areas

## Art, Design and Media

### Grade 3

**33 Eleven lessons were observed, covering a broad range of art, design and media courses. The college's self-assessment report identified as strengths some aspects of provision that are no more than normal practice, and failed to identify some significant weaknesses. It gave insufficient weight to poor levels of retention. Some of the judgements in the report were based on inappropriate benchmarking data.**

#### Key strengths

- wide range of well-structured courses
- good achievement rates
- good industry-standard equipment for graphic design and media

#### Weaknesses

- some unimaginative teaching
- insufficiently specific assessment criteria for students' assignments
- some poor retention rates

34 The college provides a good range of courses. They include full-time courses leading to GNVQs at intermediate and advanced level, a number of specialist national diplomas and a foundation course. The GNVQ foundation course is to be introduced in September 2001, and programmes have been introduced to encourage participation by adults. The curriculum is well managed. Course, curriculum and other relevant meetings are held regularly. Course documentation is good and includes effective contributions from both full-time and part-time teachers. Although the college has offered students a range of additional study options, the take-up has been low.

35 Inspectors did not agree with the college's assessment of teaching and learning. All the

lessons observed by inspectors were at least satisfactory, but the percentage of good or outstanding lessons was lower than the average for this programme area, and well below the 73% judged to be good or outstanding in the college's own observation programme. In the best lessons, students appreciated and realised their tasks with concentrated effort, stimulated by the activity and its relevance. In a lively and challenging session the teacher introduced first-year students to media production techniques and processes. The learning outcomes and technical skills required of them were clearly explained and illustrated. Students were split into small groups; roles were established and functions defined. Within a very short while, and as a result of the clarity of the teacher's exposition, students were filming, acting, directing and producing with panache. However, in some lessons teachers failed to sustain students' interest or extend their knowledge. In practical lessons, there was an over-reliance on one-to-one teaching. Opportunities to push the class as a whole were not taken and momentum was lost. During a lesson in which students reviewed their recent visit to the Tate Modern gallery, a learning opportunity was ignored when they were neither questioned nor challenged, having dismissed the building, the gallery and its contents.

36 Participation in projects for industry and commerce and in competitions is an important feature of students' programmes. Of particular note was the work that foundation students produced for the first exhibition at the new Milton Keynes gallery by the internationally renowned artists, Gilbert and George. Students on the national diploma in graphic design have undertaken a number of successful commissions for local and national companies.

37 The assessment and internal verification of students' work is thorough. Students are given regular feedback on their progress. However, most assignments lack sufficiently

# Curriculum Areas

specific assessment criteria, leaving students unable to judge what standards they need to reach. This deficiency also limits opportunities for objective peer and self-assessment and the development of students' critical skills.

38 The self-assessment report justifiably identifies the strengths of students' achievements, particularly in the national diploma in graphic design, which has had 100% pass rates for the past three years. Similarly, the national diploma in media achieved 100% pass rates in 1998 and 1999 and 96% in 2000. The majority of courses have achievement rates well above national averages. Two-year GCE A level courses are the exception. Although retention rates are often around the national averages, there is no clear pattern and there have been poor retention rates on different courses in different years. GNVQ advanced and the national diploma in design (craft) had retention rates of 48% and 38% respectively in 2000. For some two-year courses, the 'in-year' retention figures

for the 1999 intake are below national averages. Attendance monitoring and management are effective. The portfolios of students on most programmes contain good work, reaching appropriate standards and demonstrating vocational competence. This strength was not noted in the self-assessment report.

39 Specialist resources are generally satisfactory and there is an appropriate range of studios and classrooms. Equipment for graphic design and media is good. There has been a substantial recent investment of approximately £100,000 on appropriate computers, industry standard software and digital media production equipment. Accommodation is generally good, although some rooms are too small for the activities which take place in them. Teachers are all appropriately qualified. Many are practising artists and designers who bring their up-to-date knowledge and experience into the classroom.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ art and design	2	Number of starters	42	32	23
		Retention (%)	64	78	74
		Achievement (%)	74	72	59
BTEC national diploma media	3	Number of starters	28	25	33
		Retention (%)	71	63	73
		Achievement (%)	100	100	96
BTEC national diploma design (craft)	3	Number of starters	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	38
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
BTEC national diploma design (graphic design)	3	Number of starters	25	20	25
		Retention (%)	88	95	74
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
EMFEC diploma in art and design foundation studies	3	Number of starters	32	36	31
		Retention (%)	74	78	90
		Achievement (%)	91	89	100

# Curriculum Areas

**A summary of retention and achievement rates in art, design and media, 1998 to 2000 (continued)**

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ art and design	3	Number of starters	41	37	29
		Retention (%)	63	84	48
		Achievement (%)	95	96	100
GCE A levels	3	Number of starters	90	62	151
		Retention (%)	78	74	69
		Achievement (%)	84	61	72

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

\*course not running

# Curriculum Areas

## English, Communications, and Government and Politics

### Grade 3

**40 The inspection covered GCSE English and GCE A levels in English language and literature, government and politics and communication studies. Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- appropriate and interesting teaching and learning activities
- good achievement rates in GCE A level communication studies
- good course organisation
- effective support and monitoring of students' progress

#### Weaknesses

- poor and declining retention rates on GCE A level courses
- poor achievement rate in GCE A level government and politics
- poor development of students' key skills
- unsatisfactory aspects of the recruitment of part-time English students

41 About 100 students study GCSE English, although recruitment has steadily declined over the past five years. Recruitment to GCE A levels in this area is now healthy, with a 36% increase in enrolments in September 2000. The recruitment process for part-time English courses is insufficiently rigorous. Students without the necessary language skills have been enrolled, but no additional support has been provided for them. A few GCE A level students are struggling with aspects of the intensive evening course. Some teachers do not have the necessary teaching skills to take account of the

diversity of students' experiences and abilities. Achievement rates on these courses are lower than on the equivalent daytime courses. This weakness was not included in the self-assessment report.

42 Courses are well organised. Schemes of work are comprehensive and there are clear assignment schedules. A helpful information pack is provided for teachers of GCSE English by the subject co-ordinator. Introductory student handbooks are good. In GCE A level English these are augmented by a good induction to the course. Informative subject handbooks have been devised for government and politics and communication studies. Full-time students have termly reviews with teachers which help them to gauge their progress and improve their performance. These strengths were not all recorded in the self-assessment report.

43 There are few opportunities for students to develop their IT skills. Little use is made of IT for research, and not all students use computers to produce their written work. Key skills have not been mapped against course specifications, they are not included in schemes of work, and arrangements for IT and application of number lessons are not confirmed. An initial diagnostic assessment of students' key skills abilities has been completed for IT only.

44 Of the 12 lessons observed, eight were judged to be outstanding or good, which is the same as the national average for all humanities lessons observed in 1999-2000. As recognised in the self-assessment report, most teachers use appropriate teaching methods and organise appropriate learning activities. Group work is efficiently managed, and students contribute to lessons through debates, presentations and the creation of display materials. Classrooms are enlivened by students' work, such as posters depicting students' interpretations of *The Catcher in the Rye* and *A Clockwork Orange*. During effective lessons, teachers quickly

# Curriculum Areas

engaged students' interest, illustrated concepts in a variety of ways and checked students' understanding. An English class worked in small groups to analyse the language used in letters written to *The Times* newspaper about spelling. Students of communication worked collaboratively to produce audience profiles for magazines they were devising. In a politics lesson about ideologies, the teacher challenged students to support or refute controversial statements. Students participated with enthusiasm. In the few weaker lessons, teachers failed to take account of students' varying levels of ability, dominated discussion and gave students no opportunity to ask questions or clarify uncertainties.

45 Achievement rates on most courses are at or below national averages, except in GCE A level communication studies where they are outstanding. Students' work on this course reflects these high achievement rates. Coursework projects are well designed, researched and presented. For example, one student produced a high-quality puzzle book for

children with dyslexia. Two students won first prizes in a creative writing competition run by the University of North London. As recognised in the self-assessment report, retention rates on GCE A level courses have been below average for the past two years. In government and politics, the retention rate has declined steeply over the past three years. In GCSE English it has been consistently above average. There is no comprehensive strategy to improve retention in GCE A levels. Actions have been piecemeal and have not yet resulted in improvements.

46 There is a good range of learning resources. They are kept up to date through effective liaison between teachers and library specialists. There are no learning materials specifically related to the newly introduced GCE AS courses. The journal collection is particularly helpful for communications and politics students. Teachers supplement texts with their own notes and photocopied materials, although sometimes the quality of these materials is poor.

## A summary of retention and achievement rates in English, communications, and government and politics, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	181	123	100
		Retention (%)	80	79	73
		Achievement (%)	56	46	63
GCE A level English language (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	48	50	34
		Retention (%)	63	46	59
		Achievement (%)	81	74	95
GCE A level communication (two year course)	3	Number of starters	19	22	26
		Retention (%)	79	68	62
		Achievement (%)	77	100	94
GCE A level government and politics	3	Number of starters	14	23	16
		Retention (%)	*	39	31
		Achievement (%)	*	78	60

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

\*data unreliable

# Curriculum Areas

## Basic Skills

### *Grade 3*

**47 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering the range of provision in basic skills.**

**Inspectors agreed with many of the findings in the college's self-assessment report, but they identified additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- good teaching on basic skills courses
- high standard of students' work
- broad and well-planned curriculum for basic skills courses

#### **Weaknesses**

- lack of coherence in the management of basic skills teaching
- poor attendance
- insufficient use of IT in teaching and learning

48 The college provides basic skills courses for young students and additional support in basic skills on mainstream courses. It also makes some provision for adult students. The college offers extra basic skills support to all students who need it. All full-time and substantial part-time students take an initial assessment which may lead to an offer of additional support. Later in their courses students may ask for help or be referred by their teachers. In 1999-2000, 313 students received support and by October 2000 there had been approximately 150 referrals.

49 There is a lack of coherence in the management of basic skills. The development and the teaching of basic skills is the responsibility of staff in several different curriculum areas, each of which takes a different approach. Subject teachers and support teachers do not always communicate effectively. This can result in poor attendance

for support. Some teachers negotiate individual learning plans with students, but others do not. Not all teachers are clear who has responsibility for basic skills. The college recently created a new post of basic skills manager. New policies and procedures have been introduced but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness. The basic skills courses have a broad and well-balanced curriculum of study skills, basic skills, vocational content, tutorials and enrichment units. The college does not offer basic skills courses to adults because there is agreement that the local authority should provide them. Because of this restriction adults miss opportunities to progress from basic skills courses to mainstream courses.

50 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment that the quality of teaching on the basic skills courses is good. Teachers plan lessons well and choose clear and achievable objectives. They use materials related to students' interests and make activities fun. For example, in a lesson on formatting of numbers the teacher asked the students to imagine they were spies who had to invent new identities for themselves. They invented new data about themselves, such as date of birth, bank account number and mobile telephone number and had to think of how to format these numbers. On vocational courses, teachers make basic and key skills lessons interesting by relating the basic skills to the vocational subjects. However, these vocational teachers rarely teach groups which include students with different abilities effectively. Some teachers meet individual learning needs and use individual learning plans which are regularly reviewed. Others do not address students' particular needs or monitor the achievement of individual objectives. Little use is made of IT in basic skills teaching or learning. The college identified this as a weakness in its self-assessment report. On the one occasion when inspectors saw IT being used, students found the tasks too difficult.

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51 Comprehensive achievement data for basic skills are not available, as not all students complete discrete basic skills qualifications. Wordpower and Numberpower courses have overall achievement rates below the national average. However, many students take and achieve single units, selected to meet their individual needs. The standard of students' work is high. This is confirmed by internal and external verifiers' reports. Retention rates are generally satisfactory, at around the national average. Attendance in observed lessons was poor, particularly in the basic skills courses and support sessions. The college identified poor attendance as a weakness in its self-assessment report. Attendance in the inspected lessons averaged 66%. Basic skills support has been shown to have a positive impact on students' achievement of their primary learning goals.

52 As the college identified in its self-assessment report, lessons are well staffed and students receive good individual attention. Specialist basic skills teachers are well trained. However, teachers of level 1 vocational courses, on which basic skills teaching is integrated with vocational aspects of the curriculum, are not trained to teach basic skills. The college identified this weakness in its self-assessment report and training for these teachers is planned for early 2001. Study support rooms and designated basic skills classrooms have good paper-based resources for teaching basic skills. However, they do not have computers or suitable software.

## 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
Wordpower foundation	Entry	Number of starters	43	40	36
		Retention (%)	77	88	89
		Achievement (%)	45	49	44
Numberpower foundation	Entry	Number of starters	43	31	51
		Retention (%)	93	84	88
		Achievement (%)	33	42	16
Wordpower stage 1	1	Number of starters	*	19	12
		Retention (%)	*	84	75
		Achievement (%)	*	38	33
Numberpower stage 1	1	Number of starters	*	*	16
		Retention (%)	*	*	88
		Achievement (%)	*	*	50

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

Note: data exclude single unit achievements

\*course not running

# Cross-college Provision

## Support for Students

### *Grade 2*

**53 Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements about the quality of support for students, but identified additional weaknesses.**

#### **Key strengths**

- well-managed pre-entry guidance and admissions
- well-developed and effective induction
- strong personal tutorial system
- good provision of additional support for literacy, numeracy and study skills
- effective support for individual students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- good careers, welfare, and personal counselling services

#### **Weaknesses**

- low take-up of learning support
- few enrichment activities

54 The threshold services unit manages the admissions process effectively and efficiently. Prospectuses and accompanying publications are informative and well designed. A comprehensive guidance and assessment service serves all prospective students. Where appropriate, staff suggest alternative provision outside the college. Applicants are usually interviewed promptly. Parents of those aged under 18 are encouraged to accompany prospective students, to hear at first-hand about courses and commitments. Detailed interview guidelines and procedures are used. Students generally find interview arrangements friendly and informative. Most students are invited to attend a 'taster' day before their course starts. Once GCSE examination results are known, college staff contact by telephone all those offered conditional places. Confirmation

and congratulations are offered to successful applicants. Alternatives are discussed with those who have not met entrance requirements. Some students, for example those who have to make childcare arrangements, have found it difficult to obtain timetables before courses start. In some cases attendance times are changed. The college recognises this weakness. Students receive a well-structured induction. They are made aware of support services, and receive a useful and informative student handbook and diary, and a copy of the college charter. Students said they found the induction programme enjoyable and interesting.

55 Inspectors agreed with the college that the personal tutorial system is effective. All full-time and a substantial proportion of part-time students attend weekly group tutorials of at least one hour, and are entitled to a minimum of three individual tutorials a year. For other part-time students, subject teachers act as personal tutors. Considerable effort is made to ensure that students are aware of the central support services. Tutors of full-time students follow a tutorial scheme of work which includes study skills and careers, personal, social and health education. Reviews of progress and action-planning take place three times a year. Unauthorised student absence is quickly followed up by tutors, usually by telephone. A group of tutor co-ordinators meets regularly with the recently appointed tutorial and enrichment manager. They work to develop the tutorial system and to ensure consistency.

56 There is good additional support in literacy and numeracy. All students studying more than six hours a week are assessed and offered appropriate support. Assessment is mainly through the Basic Skills Agency test, although this is unsuitable for identifying the needs of most students on advanced programmes. Support is given to individual students or to small groups. Students may also attend 'drop-in' workshops where they are given help with study skills. In most cases

# Cross-college Provision

support is arranged quickly. In 1999-2000, 313 students received support. However, this was only 54% of those identified as needing support. Analysis by the college shows that 60% of those receiving support achieved positive examination outcomes, compared with 32% for those not receiving support. As identified in the self-assessment report, support is good for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college offers individual assessment and support for dyslexia and arranges examination concessions for students. Applicants with learning difficulties and/or disabilities visit the college before their interview, so that their needs may be assessed and early arrangements made for support. Specific needs are met through extra staffing and specialist equipment. Students who are visually impaired have access to an extensive range of aids.

57 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that careers education and guidance are effective. The college works in close partnership with Buckingham Careers Service. The careers co-ordinator is a joint appointment. Students book individual careers interviews and there are presentations at group tutorials. There is a comprehensive range of careers materials in the learning resources centres. There are well-publicised and effective services for personal support, including counselling, welfare and childcare. A team of one full-time and two part-time qualified counsellors provide a confidential personal counselling service, including a 'drop-in' facility on most days. The welfare officer manages the college's access fund and provides advice and help on matters such as finance and accommodation. The college has a 20 place crèche at the Chaffron Way campus, and provides financial assistance to students needing to make other arrangements. Students speak very highly of these services for personal support.

58 There are few enrichment activities for students. The college intends to develop a

range of these, which are presently limited to some at course or curriculum area level, such as visits or fund-raising events. The college has tried to encourage the development of an effective students' union. A student council is being set up to support the development of enrichment activities, as the existing students' union has little impact or visibility amongst students. Sporting opportunities are limited to football, although the college has made arrangements for reduced price entry for students at the nearby leisure centres.

## General Resources

### *Grade 3*

**59 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report, although some strengths were overstated and a number of weaknesses were not identified.**

#### **Key strengths**

- effective accommodation strategy
- well-managed learning resource centres
- responsive repair and maintenance programme
- good teaching accommodation
- recent investment in computers

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor external fabric of the Bletchley campus buildings
- slow development of IT as a learning resource
- unsatisfactory space utilisation
- insufficient student recreational and common room facilities
- some areas not accessible to students with physical disabilities

# Cross-college Provision

60 The college has two main campuses, at Chaffron Way and at Bletchley. A third, at Wolverton, was recently disposed of. The college leases other premises. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that college buildings are generally well maintained. The accommodation strategy is clearly written and reflects the college's strategic aims. A detailed maintenance programme is properly costed and adhered to. The college has significantly reduced the size of its estates, but still has excess space. Teaching room utilisation is 26%, which, although improved from 19%, remains below the national average. The college intends to introduce computerised timetabling to improve utilisation. Some classrooms are too small for the groups using them. Classrooms are furnished to a common high standard. Many have stimulating wall displays. Availability of car parking spaces is good. All signage is clear and appropriately placed. Campuses are accessible by good road links and public transport. A shuttle bus service, connecting the two main campuses and Milton Keynes, is well used.

61 Chaffron Way has imposing modern buildings, fronted by a striking three-dimensional artwork. Inside, there is a sense of space, with wide corridors and walkways. The entrance area is welcoming and houses a coffee bar and the reception and guidance services. The campus canteen and common room is shared with an adjacent school. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that these communal areas do not meet students' needs. Facilities for students' recreational activities are poor. Students are encouraged to use nearby leisure centres. There are sufficient, well-resourced administration and staff work areas.

62 The previous inspection indicated that the Bletchley campus needed extensive repairs and renovation. As part of the college's accommodation strategy, accommodation at Bletchley will be entirely rebuilt, at an

approximate cost of £14.5 million. The current buildings include an old school and some huts. The extensive site includes some grassed areas and a football field. The external fabric of the main building is poor. The accommodation includes some well-decorated classrooms and offices. However, some facilities are inadequate, including some toilets. Some staff work rooms are crowded. Student recreational facilities are poor. The students' canteen, which also acts as the common room, becomes overcrowded at peak times. Contracted caterers provide an adequate range of food at reasonable prices. The Bletchley Park buildings have been successfully improved and provide good accommodation for engineering teaching. The specialist equipment there is of a high standard. The IT learning centre at Wolverton is in a shopping precinct and is well equipped, but lacks air conditioning.

63 The college has been slow to introduce an effective information and learning technologies strategy. However, in the last two years, over £1 million has been spent on new IT equipment. Most computers are of a good specification. The ratio of students to computers, at 8:1, is adequate. Some classrooms have an insufficient number of printers. Specialist computer networks and software are good. Classroom computers share the same network as those in the learning resource centres and this makes it easier for students to work on their own. However, only the computers in the learning resource centres have Internet access and electronic mail facilities. The range of general software available on the computer network is good. Teachers have good access to computers, and electronic mail. There is no effective college intranet, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. A detailed plan to develop on-line learning materials and the use of information and learning technology is being implemented.

# Cross-college Provision

64 The learning resource centres, embracing library facilities, are well managed. On both main campuses there is a good stock of books, careers materials, CD-ROMs and videos. The working environment in the centres is good. There is no quiet study area at Chaffron Way. The £48,000 annual budget for library resources is adequate. The newly introduced cataloguing system is good. Students make considerable use of the centres, although their use of the centre at Chaffron Way is not effectively monitored. Staff in the learning resource centres are encouraged to develop their professional skills. To improve standardisation and team working, staff work across campuses and liaise with teachers. Opening hours are being extended at Bletchley to enable evening students to use the IT facilities.

65 Students with physical disabilities can get to most areas of the college. At Chaffron Way, all rooms and levels are easy to reach by people in wheelchairs. Extensive work at the Bletchley campus to provide ramps to ground-floor rooms means that most rooms can be accessed by wheelchair users. The IT centre at Wolverton cannot accommodate students with physical disabilities, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report.

## Quality Assurance

### *Grade 3*

**66 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment of its quality assurance arrangements. They identified some additional weaknesses and strengths.**

#### **Key strengths**

- strong commitment to raising standards
- well-documented, comprehensive quality assurance procedures, with clearly defined responsibilities

- clear links between strategic planning and the quality assurance cycle
- well-developed lesson observation scheme
- comprehensive staff development programme

#### **Weaknesses**

- failure to achieve college targets for retention and achievement
- failure to improve teaching and learning
- overgenerous self-assessment
- some inadequate internal verification procedures
- slow implementation of service standards

67 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that there is a strong collective commitment to raising standards. Management restructuring has given a higher profile to quality and standards. There is a well-developed and clear quality assurance policy. Procedures are laid down in a comprehensive but clear manual. Responsibilities for implementing the policy are clear. Service standards for some support areas are well established. Others were introduced recently. Overall, their implementation has been slow. Improvements to quality assurance procedures introduced since the last inspection include a revised quality cycle and calendar, clearly linked to strategic and operational planning. The college communicates changes to staff through a training programme and a quarterly newsletter.

68 There is a well-conceived system of internal lesson observations. Twice-yearly, trained observers inspect lessons in a selection of curriculum areas. Observations are carried out by teachers from within the curriculum areas. Where observations indicate poor performance, action-planning leads to professional development. Despite these arrangements, the percentage of good or

# Cross-college Provision

outstanding lessons observed by inspectors has increased by only one percentage point, to 56%, since the last inspection, and remains significantly below the national average.

69 The self-assessment process is led and managed by a self-assessment review group, which reports to the quality and development board. The group oversees validation of the self-assessment report. The board of governors held a special meeting to approve the report. Course teams receive written feedback on their contributions and managers monitor self-assessment activities closely. In the self-assessment report, some judgements are not supported by evidence and some are based on inaccurate or inappropriate achievement and retention data. There are insufficient evaluative comments on teaching and learning, and on achievement and retention rates. Most course teams have detailed action plans, which are reviewed regularly by middle managers, and most make good use of feedback from students.

70 Inspectors agreed with the college that not all course teams have rigorous internal verification procedures. The college is devising a college-wide policy which will include minimum standards and guidelines. Senior managers monitor external verifiers' reports and ensure that any action called for is carried out. At the time of the inspection, two college IT outreach centres had been operating for six months but the recently formulated procedures for internal verification at the centres had not been implemented. The college charter is revised every year. It is widely distributed and is well received by students. It sets down, in plain English, standards that students can expect from the college. The college measures its performance against the charter standards. Students are fully aware of the procedures for making complaints. Complaints are monitored and analysed on an annual basis.

71 Curriculum managers receive regular paper-based reports from the management

information system. These track performance in a number of key areas and are comprehensive and easy to understand. However, data in an electronic format are not easily accessible, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report. Many course teams have begun to monitor retention and achievement rates. Some have used these data as the basis for improvement plans. Other teams do not monitor or analyse the data adequately and do not take timely action to improve performance.

72 Course teams propose targets for retention and achievement. These are subsequently discussed and agreed at a formal meeting with the senior manager for quality assurance. Some targets are over-ambitious and progress towards them is inadequately monitored by course teams. Up to 1999 achievement rates have been mainly below national averages. College data suggest that there have been some improvements in 2000. Retention rates on most courses were around national averages in 1999. The college has recently introduced a strategy to improve retention but targets have not been met.

73 The college has a good continuous professional development programme, which includes annual individual target-setting, training, teaching observation and review. Staff development is linked to operational and strategic objectives and to individual needs. The scheme fully embraces part-time teachers. At the time of the inspection, the majority of full-time and some part-time staff had undergone a review in the previous 12 months. Teachers new to the profession are invited to join a mentoring scheme. The college has achieved Investors in People accreditation for the second time.

# Cross-college Provision

## Governance

### Grade 2

**74 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. A number of the strengths and weaknesses were overstated and inspectors and auditors identified additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- governors well qualified to support the college's mission
- strong strategic direction
- effective partnership with senior managers
- careful monitoring of college finances
- efficient administration of corporation and committee business

#### Weaknesses

- procedural deficiencies in compliance with statutory requirements
- insufficient attention to the development of the IT outreach centres

75 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors have a good range of skills and experience and are well placed to support the college's mission. Many are closely involved with local economic and community agencies. Governors have an effective working relationship with senior managers, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. They understand the distinction between governance and management. The corporation has a strong strategic focus and appropriately guides and monitors the direction of the college. Presentations by managers on their work are a regular feature of governors' meetings. Although governors have no systematic links with staff in the curriculum areas, they are exploring suitable ways to become more closely involved in curriculum matters.

76 The corporation agreed a determined membership of 17 at its first meeting after 1 August 1999, in line with the first modification order to the instrument of government, and adopted the associated revised articles of government. On the advice of the search committee, it has made a rapid transition to its new composition. The board now has six business members, three co-opted members, two local authority and two local community members, two staff governors and the principal. There is a vacancy for a student governor. However, some of the recent appointments were not made in accordance with the requirements of the instrument and articles of government. The corporation has not yet adopted the provisions of the second modification order to the articles of government, issued in October 1999.

77 New governors receive the college's useful governors' handbook, and attend an induction with the principal and the clerk to the corporation. Governor 'away days' focus on current issues in the further education sector. Although the search committee considers skills deficits when filling vacancies, no overall view is taken of governors' training needs. Targets for the corporation's performance are set and monitored. A small group of governors makes a yearly assessment of the corporation's strengths and weaknesses and presents it to the board for approval. Governors moderate the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

78 The corporation's committees include search, audit, finance and general purposes, human resources, learning and development, and remuneration. These committees have clear terms of reference, generally adhered to in practice. Task groups are set up to carry out projects on specific issues. As part of its remit, the learning and development committee monitors student enrolment, retention and achievement. It considers a wide range of data on students' achievements and retention and has been proactive in requesting more detailed reports and analysis from senior managers.

# Cross-college Provision

79 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, 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. The budget and three-year financial forecast are approved annually by the corporation, on the advice of the finance and general purposes committee. The committee and the corporation consider the monthly management accounts, and call for action when shortfalls in the college's financial performance are reported. However, governors' effectiveness in monitoring finances has been impaired by problems with the validity of some of the college's FEFC funding unit claims. The audit committee operates appropriately, advising the corporation on the effectiveness of the college's system of internal control. Governors pay close attention to the college's Bletchley redevelopment project. The corporation was not adequately involved in the development of the new IT outreach centres. Governors did not ensure they received a business plan or a report on the financial implications of developing these centres.

80 There is an independent clerk to the corporation who provides good support to the governors. The annual cycle of corporation and committee meetings is administered efficiently. Agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings normally provide a good basis for decision-making. Minutes clearly record decisions made, as well as evidence of governors' consideration of issues. There is a good level of attendance at corporation meetings by most governors. The corporation has a comprehensive set of standing orders to guide the conduct of business.

81 The corporation has a positive approach to openness and accountability. The college's website includes information on governance, and details of how to obtain further information. There is a clear policy on

confidentiality, with few confidential papers and minutes. The register of interests covers both governors and senior managers, and is updated at least annually. Governors are reminded at each meeting to declare any relevant interests. The corporation has approved a simple 'whistleblowing' code of practice for staff.

82 The principal and the clerk to the corporation are appraised annually by the chair of the corporation against a set of performance objectives. Other senior postholders are similarly appraised by the principal. The outcomes are taken into account during the deliberations of the remuneration committee on senior postholders' pay.

## Management

### *Grade 3*

**83 Inspectors and auditors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. One weakness identified through self-assessment had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors considered some strengths and weaknesses to be overstated and identified additional weaknesses.**

#### Key strengths

- strong strategic leadership
- successful management of change
- good planning and monitoring of management targets
- wide consultation with staff
- comprehensive, well-integrated marketing

#### Weaknesses

- too few improvements in students' retention
- inadequate management information system
- adverse financial results in the last two years

# Cross-college Provision

84 The college was restructured in 1997. Change has been well managed and problems are being tackled. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the changes have led to a better balance of roles and responsibilities. The principal now leads a directorate of seven. Five curriculum areas are managed by the vice-principal curriculum and organisational change. Section managers and team leaders are responsible for subjects and courses. The college's management team comprises the directorate and a further 12 managers.

85 Communications within the college are good. The directorate meets weekly and the management team fortnightly. Both discuss operational and strategic matters as appropriate. There are additional meetings to address specific aspects of strategy. Curriculum managers and managers for key skills, enrichment and tutorials meet regularly in task-related groups. Twice-termly newsletters and fortnightly management team briefings, made available to all staff, contribute to effective communication. Staff are regularly consulted on a range of issues. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that this consultation is effective.

86 The college's strategic plan draws on a needs analysis and appropriate market research. College staff have been consulted during its preparation. Corporate objectives form the basis for operational objectives. Clear targets are set. Managers' work plans stem from these targets and progress towards them is checked regularly. The operational plan is monitored twice a year and the outcomes reported to governors. The college has set itself the objective of improving achievement rates, but in 1999 (the last year for which benchmarking data are available) these rose above the mean only for 16 to 18 year old students at level 2 and adults on short courses. Methods of improving retention rates are indicated in the operating plan. Nevertheless, retention rates have not matched national

average levels. College figures for 1999-2000 indicate an improvement in achievement, and retention rates, but inspectors considered that these aggregate figures were not reliable.

87 Printed management information is readily available, but there is little online access to data for the purposes of analysis and planning. ISR data were resubmitted prior to inspection, and adjustments made. Some achievement and retention data produced for inspectors during the inspection week, and relied upon by curriculum managers, were incorrect. At the time of the inspection, college plans to replace its existing management information system were well advanced. Staff utilisation and class size are regularly monitored and action taken to correct anomalies. Health and safety and equal opportunities policies are in place and implemented.

88 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the financial management of the college is adequate. There is an extensive scheme of budget delegation to curriculum and administrative areas. Curriculum managers have budgets for both income and expenditure, on staffing and education materials. Significant variances from budget are discussed monthly with the finance team, and remedial action agreed. The finance team produces a detailed set of monthly management accounts for governors and senior managers. These include an overall financial commentary, and an analysis of significant variances from planned performance, as well as an analysis of enrolments, student numbers and units of activity. The college is implementing a new financial system, since the existing system does not meet the college's budget management needs. There is no comprehensive course costing system or any systematic benchmarking of costs. The college's financial regulations, last updated in 1998, are not comprehensive. A new director of finance and resources is working to address the deficiencies in the college's financial management systems.

# Cross-college Provision

89 The college is now in reasonable financial health, with cash reserves of £1.4 million at 31 July 2000, but its financial results have been unsatisfactory in the last two years. The college did not meet its FEFC funding target in 1998-99, resulting in an operating deficit of £376,000. In autumn 1999 the college identified, and brought to the attention of the external auditors, an error in the college's calculation for additional support units. This significantly reduced the college's income for 1998-99, and adversely affected the financial forecast for 1999-2000. A revised budget was produced and action was taken to control expenditure and generate additional income. Despite this, the latest financial forecast shows the college with an estimated operating deficit of £308,000 for 1999-2000.

90 The college has good links and partnerships with local economic and community organisations. It receives European funding to provide training for the long-term unemployed and refresher training for the employed. However, systematic bidding for external funds is underdeveloped. There are productive relations with the school sharing the Chaffron Way campus, but those with other schools are less effective. The college conducts extensive market research. Milton Keynes Training, an independent local company, and Milton Keynes Manpower Forum Limited, the college company, are being integrated with the college as part of a new work-based training unit. The college company's financial performance has been unsatisfactory, with annual deficits, and the college's internal auditors have not reviewed its systems. These issues are being addressed as part of the integration process.

## Conclusions

91 The inspection team found that the college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. However, some sections were insufficiently detailed or rigorous. An update to the report and action plan was provided to facilitate the work of inspectors. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, although they judged that some strengths had been overstated and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded lower grades than those in the self-assessment report in four curriculum areas and two cross-college areas.

92 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	1
16–18 years	22
19–24 years	15
25+ years	58
Not known	4
Total	100

Source: college data

## Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	25
Level 2 (intermediate)	23
Level 3 (advanced)	26
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Level not specified	4
Non-schedule 2	20
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	270	1,438	26
Agriculture	8	1	0
Construction	10	75	1
Engineering	99	392	7
Business	279	1,206	22
Hotel and catering	138	391	8
Health and community care	255	459	11
Art and design	213	166	6
Humanities	141	1,013	17
Basic education	52	108	2
Total	1,465	5,249	100

Source: college data

## Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 7% 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 (August 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	116	0	76	192
Supporting direct learning contact	87	0	0	87
Other support	84	1	8	93
Total	287	1	84	372

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

# College Statistics

## Three-year Trends

### Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£10,238,000	£11,475,00	£12,776,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.18	£16.20*	£16.63
Payroll as a proportion of income	66%	62%	67%
Achievement of funding target	97%	94%	96%
Diversity of income	34%	42%	43%
Operating surplus	£14,000	-£427,000	-£628,000

Sources: Income – Council Circular 01/10 (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)

\*provisional data

### 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	508	898	952	697	1,205	1,031
	Retention (%)	74	80	72	80	86	81
	Achievement (%)	67	42	51	58	63	53
2	Number of starters	1,014	1,287	1,175	863	1,380	929
	Retention (%)	71	76	74	79	80	83
	Achievement (%)	71	69	70	74	59	60
3	Number of starters	865	933	936	1,273	1,253	1,073
	Retention (%)	73	75	66	82	82	78
	Achievement (%)	70	72	73	58	55	60
4 or 5	Number of starters	–	3	3	301	329	392
	Retention (%)	–	67	67	93	90	82
	Achievement (%)	–	100	0	54	58	57
Short courses	Number of starters	216	126	210	1,362	3,161	3,462
	Retention (%)	89	92	92	88	96	93
	Achievement (%)	92	83	77	78	86	86
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	596	619	737	603	487	501
	Retention (%)	87	85	85	90	87	93
	Achievement (%)	85	55	47	92	67	73

Source: ISR

– ISR data not collected







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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](mailto:fehcpubs@fefc.ac.uk)

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