

Solihull Sixth Form College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
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COUNCIL

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 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 1998-99: 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

Solihull Sixth Form College

West Midlands Region

Inspected January 2001

Solihull Sixth Form College was established in 1974. Most of its students are aged 16 to 19 and are in full-time education. The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the fifth to be produced by the college. Staff and governors were involved in the self-assessment process. The report was comprehensive and provided a good basis for the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements which the college made about the strengths and weaknesses of its provision. Some of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors found some additional weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with four of the five grades for the curriculum areas inspected and awarded a higher grade for the other area. They agreed with three of the five cross-college grades, considering one of the others to be too high and one to be too low.

The college offers courses in seven of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in four of these programme areas was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. Most of the teaching is good. The provision in history and geography is outstanding. Most students who complete their

courses are successful and many attain high grades. Students' achievements are consistently above the national average and are outstanding on some courses. Retention rates are mainly in line with the national averages for sixth form colleges. There are good arrangements for enrolment, induction and careers guidance. Accommodation is well maintained and efficiently used. Specialist resources in some curriculum areas are of very high quality. Students benefit from good IT and sports facilities. Thorough curriculum reviews and effective staff development activities form part of quality assurance arrangements that raise students' achievements. Governors use their expertise well to benefit the college and they monitor all aspects of performance carefully. The college has good links with external organisations. Managers provide effective leadership and deploy resources efficiently. The college should improve: the arrangements for the provision of tutorials, key skills and additional learning support; some poor accommodation including the amount of social space for students; the thoroughness of the process for lesson observation; the clarity of cross-college management roles; and the arrangements for setting and achieving targets for the rates of student retention.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics	2	Support for students	3
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Music, media and theatre studies	2	Quality assurance	2
Geography and history	1	Governance	1
Modern languages	2	Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Solihull Sixth Form College is one of the largest sixth form colleges in England. It opened in 1974 in purpose-built accommodation on a single site close to the town centre. A teaching block added in 1991 provided extra classrooms, chemistry laboratories, and open access facilities for information technology (IT). In 1996, the college added two modular blocks which contained more classrooms and extra social accommodation for students. In September 2000, the first phase of a building programme to provide a new learning centre and additional classrooms and staff accommodation was opened. The second phase, which is in progress, will provide improved library accommodation, and new classrooms, some of them for IT.

2 The Metropolitan Borough of Solihull, which has a population of 205,000, forms the south-eastern edge of the West Midlands conurbation. Its growing commercial and industrial base includes some large manufacturers. The economic indicators in south Solihull are stronger than those in the north of the borough. Many local residents commute to Birmingham. There are excellent communication links, including rail and motorway networks, and Birmingham International Airport is nearby.

3 In addition to the college, the borough has nine schools for the 11 to 16 age group, four schools for the 11 to 18 age group, two of which are Roman Catholic foundations, and a large further education college. There is also a large independent school for pupils aged 11 to 18 and other smaller independent institutions. Four other further education colleges are located within 7 miles of the college in south and east Birmingham. The competition for recruitment of school-leavers is strong. Since incorporation, the college has worked in partnership with 11 schools for pupils aged 11 to 16, two of which are outside the borough.

4 In January 2001, the college had 2,387 full-time students and 33 part-time adult students. Of the full-time students, 5% were on intermediate courses and the rest on advanced courses. Three-quarters of the college's students are from Solihull schools. Since 1992, the number of new students attending the college from outside Solihull has risen. As a consequence, the social and ethnic mix of the college differs from that of south Solihull, the area in which the college is located. In November 2000, 27% of students were from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 9% at the time of the last inspection.

5 Most of the students are aged 16 to 19 and study full time. The college offers 39 subjects at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) and GCE advanced subsidiary (AS), seven advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) programmes, the BTEC national diploma in sports science, and six general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate level courses.

6 Two vice-principals support the principal, one with responsibility for curriculum and student support, the other responsible for resource and personnel matters. Subject teachers, students and tutors are grouped within five faculties: business and social sciences; humanities; communications and arts; science; and mathematics and IT. The faculties were introduced in September 2000. Each has a head and a deputy head. An information and learning technology manager, who was appointed in September 2000, has responsibility for managing learning centres and for the development of information and learning technology aspects of the curriculum.

7 The college's mission states that the college 'exists to provide high-quality teaching and learning for all our students, in a structured, supportive and well-resourced environment ... to meet the individual needs of students by offering a wide range of learning opportunities and

Context

activities ... and ... act as a bridge between pre-16 education and the educational and vocational opportunities beyond’.

The Inspection

8 The college was inspected during the week beginning 29 January 2001. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college’s self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data from the FEFC’s individualised student record (ISR) for 1998 and 1999 for information on student achievement and retention rates. The college provided its own data for 2000. These were checked by inspectors against primary sources such as class registers and examining board pass lists. Most data on students’ achievements were reliable. The college was able to correct some minor

inaccuracies. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors and an auditor who worked for a total of 45 days. Inspectors observed 62 lessons and some tutorials. They looked at students’ work and college documents. They held meetings with college governors, managers, other college staff, and students. The local training and enterprise council (TEC) was consulted about its working relationship 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, 74% were judged to be good or outstanding and 5% were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with the national averages for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000 of 62% and 6%, respectively. The corresponding figures for all sixth form colleges inspected in 1999-2000 were 72% and 3%.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	14	24	8	2	0	48
GCSE/other	1	1	2	1	0	5
GNVQ	4	2	3	0	0	9
Total (No.)	19	27	13	3	0	62
Total (%)	30	44	21	5	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

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

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Context

10 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. The corresponding national averages for sixth form colleges for 1999-2000 were 12.7 and 84%.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Solihull Sixth Form College	14.2	82
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

Mathematics

Grade 2

11 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered some of the strengths overstated.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- high pass rates in GCE A level mathematics and further mathematics
- good retention rates in GCE A level mathematics
- a wide range of subject and module options for GCE A/AS level students
- effective links with schools and higher education institutions
- good rates of progression to higher education

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates in general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) mathematics
- low retention rates in GCE A level further mathematics
- low pass rates on the two-year GCE A level statistics course
- poor accommodation for lessons in numeracy and GCSE mathematics

12 Mathematics courses recruit large numbers of students. As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college offers a wide range of mathematics options at GCE A/AS level. GCSE mathematics is offered as a one-year resit course. A numeracy course has been introduced this year for students who achieved less than a grade D at GCSE but wish to continue to study mathematics. The college recognises that structures and procedures for providing cross-college numeracy support are not clear.

13 Most teaching is good. Many lessons are well planned, imaginative and effective. In some of the lessons, the activities were particularly well designed to stimulate students' interest. In a GCE AS mathematics lesson, the teacher skilfully used questions to encourage students to deduce mechanics equations from first principles. The students then applied the new concepts in their class work to consolidate their understanding. Meanwhile, the teacher provided students with individual help and appropriately detailed feedback on their homework. In another GCE AS mathematics lesson, the teacher gave an imaginative demonstration of a sort algorithm. This introduction was followed by group work to investigate sorting methods. The lesson was taught with energy and enthusiasm and benefited from the teacher's good classroom management. The students clearly enjoyed themselves and demonstrated good acquisition of new skills. In some lessons, time was less effectively used, and students spent long periods answering questions from textbooks.

14 Students benefit from the additional support that they receive in the mathematics workshop, which is open every day at specified times. Homework is set regularly. Most students' work, including GCE A level projects, is of a good standard, as confirmed by external moderators' reports and recognised in the self-assessment report. Teachers provide feedback to students on their work. In the best examples, they provide written model answers and detailed verbal feedback. In some cases, the written feedback is inadequate.

15 The pass rate on the two-year GCE A level mathematics course, which has by far the largest number of mathematics students, are significantly above the national average for sixth form colleges at both grades A to E and A to C. Retention rates are also good and consistently above the national average. Pass rates for GCE A level further mathematics are above the national average at grades A to E. In contrast,

Curriculum Areas

pass rates for GCSE mathematics are poor and declining. The pass rates on the two-year GCE A level statistics course fell below the national average in 1999-2000. While the retention rate on the two-year GCE A level further mathematics course improved in 1999-2000, it remained below the national average. The progression rate of mathematics students to higher education is good.

16 Curriculum management is effective. Teachers meet regularly and maintain thorough records. There are constructive links with a number of higher education institutions. As the self-assessment report stated, these links lead to interesting opportunities for mathematics students for extra-curricular activities, including additional learning opportunities at local universities. Students participate successfully in the United Kingdom Senior Mathematical Challenge. Strong links are maintained with

local schools. Questionnaires used to obtain students' views on their courses are considered as part of a well-developed cycle of curriculum review and evaluation. Action plans arising from reviews include targets for each course for retention, achievement and attendance.

17 Inspectors agreed that teachers work together effectively and are an enthusiastic team. The mathematics area has a good collection of specialist resources. Most classrooms contain stimulating displays. However, GCSE mathematics and numeracy lessons take place in unsuitable rooms in temporary huts and some classrooms are too small for the size of the classes that use them. Teachers are developing the use of IT in their teaching but, as the self-assessment report recognised, they currently make little use of computers in lessons.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE mathematics (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	297	285	298
		Retention (%)	77	75	74
		Achievement (%)	39	31	19
GCE A level further mathematics	3	Number of starters	23	19	25
		Retention (%)	78	53	68
		Achievement (%)	94	100	100
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	228	178	195
		Retention (%)	82	83	83
		Achievement (%)	97	95	95
GCE A level statistics	3	Number of starters	48	94	89
		Retention (%)	71	78	80
		Achievement (%)	100	85	70
GCE AS level statistics	3	Number of starters	32	25	18
		Retention (%)	97	92	89
		Achievement (%)	55	48	62

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

18 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- good pass rates
- high retention rates
- the high standard of students' work
- close monitoring of students' progress
- effective teamwork by teachers

Weaknesses

- insufficient planned use of IT in GCE A level lessons
- inadequate arrangements for checking the consistency of marking on GCE courses

19 Business studies is offered at GCE A/AS level and GNVQ at intermediate and advanced levels. An AVCE has been introduced this year.

20 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that lessons in business are well taught. Nine of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. Careful planning by teachers ensures a wide range of effective learning methods. Students are given challenging and realistic tasks. Teachers prompt and guide students working individually and in small groups. They make good use of examples of current business activity and relate these to theory where appropriate. Students in part-time employment are encouraged to use their knowledge of business practice. In one lesson, the teacher stressed the importance of customer service by relating the response of a large supermarket chain to a disruption in home deliveries. In several lessons, time planning by

teachers proved unrealistic and important parts of the lesson were cut short. In a few lessons, the work was not sufficiently demanding for the more able students. In several lessons teachers did not check that students' notes included the key learning points. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

21 Students' work is of a high standard and retention and achievement rates are consistently high. Pass rates for GNVQ intermediate level are significantly higher than the national average for sixth form colleges. In 2000, almost two-thirds of those who completed the intermediate course achieved a high grade. Inspectors agreed with the college that pass rates for GNVQ advanced level have exceeded the national average in two of the last three years. Pass rates for GCE A level have improved steadily over the last three years and since 1999 have been higher than the national average for sixth form colleges. The number of students achieving a pass at a high grade at GCE A level has also improved and in 2000 reached 83%, well above the national average for sixth form colleges. Retention rates on GNVQ intermediate and GCE A level have exceeded the national average in each of the last three years. The retention rate for GNVQ advanced has been similar to the national average in two of the last three years. In 2000, two-thirds of GCE A level students obtained places on higher education courses. Most of the students who start the GNVQ intermediate course progress to advanced courses.

22 Courses are well planned and effectively managed. There is strong teamwork amongst teachers in developing learning materials. Students receive helpful course handbooks outlining what the course and examiners require. Teachers supervise students' progress closely and regularly check that they are likely to achieve their target grade. Students appreciate their willingness to help. Teachers return written work with constructive feedback on how improvements can be achieved. There

Curriculum Areas

are clear arrangements for checking the consistency of teachers' grading on GNVQ courses but there are no formal arrangements to ensure similar consistency in the marking of students' work on the GCE A/AS level course. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

23 Teachers are appropriately qualified. Several make effective use of their recent business experience. Some have updated their commercial experience. One teacher has helped to produce an education resource pack for Birmingham International Airport. Most of the

classrooms are satisfactory. Some have business-related wall displays which enliven their appearance. Inspectors agreed that a few lessons take place in unsuitable rooms such as a lecture theatre. There is a specialist resource and working area adjacent to several teaching rooms. Students value the ready availability of modern IT facilities. IT is well integrated with GNVQ courses but students on GCE A level courses do not have sufficient opportunity to use IT in lessons. The number of useful books in the library is small but it is supplemented by books in the subject area. Students make good use of the Internet for research.

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
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	44	38	37
		Retention (%)	84	87	81
		Achievement (%)	72	91	97
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	92	68	53
		Retention (%)	75	62	75
		Achievement (%)	87	88	75
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	197	179	187
		Retention (%)	82	84	82
		Achievement (%)	88	96	99

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

Curriculum Areas

Music, Media and Theatre Studies

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- well-planned and effective teaching
- high retention rates
- good pass rates on GNVQ courses
- good specialist facilities for media studies
- well-equipped music facilities
- good standards of production, performance and written work

Weaknesses

- low pass rates for some GCE A level courses
- some deficiencies in accommodation
- the poor punctuality of some students
- insufficient attention to underperforming students

25 The college offers GCE A/AS level courses in media studies, music and theatre studies and GNVQ courses in intermediate and advanced media. A new GCE AS in music technology was introduced in 2000. Courses are planned and managed thoroughly and schemes of work incorporate assignments and assessment criteria. All three self-assessment reports included judgements about the quality of teaching and learning and a careful analysis of students' achievements. Subject teams meet regularly. Regular theatre visits enhance students' critical skills and their experience of live theatre. There are insufficient opportunities for work experience for students. Course handbooks are available to students on the college intranet.

26 Most teaching is effective and learning activities are suitably varied. In the most successful lessons teachers consolidate earlier work and make good use of students' contributions, as identified in the self-assessment report. Assignments are defined precisely and divided into phased tasks. Teachers mark completed coursework thoroughly. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that students understand and can use specialist terminology to support their theoretical study. The teaching of theory is closely linked to practical work. Teachers check students' understanding through the use of well-phrased questions. Good use is made of task sheets in media to help guide students' written responses to textual analysis. For example, in one lesson the teacher used videos on the music industry made by former students to develop present students' observational and analytical skills. Constructive criticism is given to students on ways to improve their work. For example, drama students were given clear guidance on how to develop individual monologues by careful analysis of vocal style, accent, pace and the use of props. In a few lessons, learning objectives are not made sufficiently clear to students. Teachers do not always take sufficient account of students with differing levels of ability. Some students have yet to acquire an appropriate work discipline, are insufficiently prepared for lessons and miss deadlines for completing coursework. Teachers do not check the quality of students' note-taking sufficiently thoroughly. Students' late arrival disrupts some lessons.

27 Retention rates are consistently high in most courses. On the GNVQ intermediate in media, the retention rate was 25% above the national average for sixth form colleges in 2000. Pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced media were between 15% and 25% above national averages in two of the last three years. Pass rates are good for the GCE A level music course but were low on the GCE A level media studies and theatre studies in 1999 and

Curriculum Areas

2000. There were particularly low numbers of higher grade passes on these courses. Progression rates to higher education are satisfactory. Most students achieve good standards of production and performance work. Media students develop appropriate video and radio production skills using specialist IT software. Good IT skills are used to improve the presentation of work in portfolios. Composition work by music students shows creative flair. Video documentary work shows good levels of technical proficiency and some creativity. Most students work well in groups. Students' written work often demonstrates good research skills.

28 There are good specialist facilities for media studies and music. Video and sound editing facilities are of industrial standard. Music students benefit from the availability of a

wide range of musical instruments and scores. The recording studio has been refurbished to a good standard. The drama studio is well equipped but there are not enough facilities for students to develop lighting, props and set design skills, as identified in the self-assessment report. There is a shortage of rehearsal space and storage space for sets. Music practice rooms are of poor quality. Some rooms are insufficiently soundproofed. Library facilities are supplemented by good collections of set texts, videos and other paper-based learning materials. Students have good access to computers. Teachers are suitably qualified. A learning assistant in media produces informative guides on how to operate complex IT programmes. There is insufficient regular technical support in music and theatre studies.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in music, media and theatre studies, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate media	2	Number of starters	18	23	21
		Retention (%)	94	78	100
		Achievement (%)	88	94	100
GNVQ advanced media	3	Number of starters	40	41	38
		Retention (%)	75	68	76
		Achievement (%)	83	96	97
GCE A level communication/ media	3	Number of starters	103	119	180
		Retention (%)	79	86	78
		Achievement (%)	98	88	93
GCE A level theatre and dramatic arts	3	Number of starters	37	39	50
		Retention (%)	86	82	86
		Achievement (%)	100	81	88
GCE A level music performance	3	Number of starters	33	30	25
		Retention (%)	79	87	64
		Achievement (%)	96	92	100

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

Curriculum Areas

Geography and History

Grade 1

29 Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment reports for these subject areas. The reports were thorough, and placed strong emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- excellent teaching
- good rates of student retention
- very good achievements by students
- outstanding display
- the use of information and learning technology in geography
- effective teamwork and planning
- good learning resources

Weaknesses

- students' late arrival at some lessons

30 Geography is offered alongside geology and environmental studies, although the latter two subjects were not inspected. A particular feature of the study of history is that three different courses, for medieval history, sixteenth-century history and late modern history, are offered. Most students choose modern history.

31 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the standard of teaching and learning is excellent. In all lessons, teachers pay good attention to helping students to learn effectively and to ensuring that students concentrate on the task in hand. A striking feature of geography lessons is the appropriate use of audiovisual aids and worksheets which help students to develop their understanding. In a lesson on coastal erosion, the teacher blended the use of video, overhead projector transparencies and worksheets to ensure that students understood the impact of a range of

erosion forces and could use the correct geographical terms for them. Well judged teaching successfully held students' attention and their learning was effectively monitored. A distinctive feature in geography is the use of the learning centre. In one lesson, students used a programme on the college intranet to help them complete investigative surveys. A teacher responded helpfully to individual enquiries. A particular strength of the history lessons was the very widespread and effective use of small group work. Students divided into groups to focus on key questions, referred to books or other source materials, and then made presentations to the rest of the class. Students' arguments were tested and extended by the teacher to ensure clear understanding of the topic. Both subjects meet the needs of students of differing abilities through the use of worksheets, by placing students with good and weak oral skills in the same group and by matching tasks to students' individual ability levels. Less satisfactory features of lessons included students' lateness to lessons, although overall the level of attendance was high.

32 Geography students take part in fieldwork. For example, they measure river flows or take samples in urban areas to test for key features associated with environmental management. They also go on day visits to the Wyre Forest. The number of students who can attend residential field courses has been adversely affected by the introduction of the new GCE AS courses.

33 Students perform well in examinations. In both subjects, students' retention rates have been above the average for sixth form colleges for the last three years, as have pass rates at grades A to E and A to C. The use of value-added measurement shows that students have achieved grades above those predicted from their GCSE scores at entry. Most students' written work is of a good standard. Some teachers write very extensive comments on the work, whilst others write relatively little.

Curriculum Areas

Assessment criteria are fully shared with students but there are no coversheets to show students how well they have met the criteria. External moderators have commented favourably on the standard of internal moderation.

34 Inspectors agreed with the college that both subjects are well managed. Careful attention has been paid to the introduction of the new GCE AS courses, including provision of the necessary resources to accompany the well-developed schemes of work. Students' progress is thoroughly monitored. Course team minutes show that systematic attention is paid to course planning and to students' performance. There are reviews of students who are experiencing

difficulty. Each year there is a very thorough analysis of the examination results.

35 As the self-assessment report identified, teachers are well qualified and some have relevant experience as examiners. There is a good range of specialist learning resources and the library also holds an extensive stock of books and journals. Teaching rooms are well furnished. The use of the lecture theatre for lessons is not always appropriate. The quality of display is outstanding. In history, there is much evidence of the display of students' work and geography has many attractive photographic displays. A technician assists with the upkeep of geography fieldwork equipment and its issue to students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCE A level geography	3	Number of starters	198	146	157
		Retention (%)	85	91	91
		Achievement (%)	96	98	99
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	193	127	172
		Retention (%)	83	85	88
		Achievement (%)	94	98	95

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

Curriculum Areas

Modern Languages

Grade 2

36 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered some strengths overstated and others understated. They identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- exceptionally good resources
- a wide range of opportunities for enrichment
- high retention and achievement rates in Spanish

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to the needs of weaker students
- reluctance of students to speak spontaneously in foreign languages
- poor retention rates in German and Italian

37 The college offers five modern languages at GCE A/AS level. Italian and Russian are offered in addition to the more widely taught French, German and Spanish. Courses have been carefully updated to meet the requirements of the new post-16 curriculum.

38 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that teachers make extensive and fluent use of foreign languages in their lessons. They often use a lively mixture of activities to encourage the development of speaking and listening as well as reading and writing skills. In the more effective lessons, teachers make good use of resources such as foreign language films and television programmes, as well as good taped and written material. Study packs prepared by teachers provide useful back-up material for the topics covered in lessons. Every week, as part of their

private study, students watch topical news programmes from abroad. They summarise the key points of the news story which they have chosen and then explore it further by visiting foreign language websites. The results of their research are discussed in lessons. Students also benefit from regular conversation lessons in small groups and the opportunity to take part in exchanges to France, Germany and Italy. Some students have undertaken work experience abroad. These strengths were recognised but understated in the self-assessment report. However, as the self-assessment report acknowledged, students are often reluctant to use the foreign language spontaneously in lessons. Some students find it difficult to keep up with the work and teachers sometimes fail to check that all students have fully understood a topic before moving on to fresh work. Overall attendance rates are high but there is a tendency for a few students to arrive late for lessons.

39 As the self-assessment report identified, some retention rates are low. Students who began the study of a language as a potential fourth GCE A level have sometimes found the workload too great. In German and Italian, retention rates are considerably below the national average for sixth form colleges. However, pass rates are good and at grades A to C are often considerably higher than the national average for sixth form colleges. In Spanish, retention and pass rates at grades A to E and at higher grades are well above national averages and students obtain higher grades than those predicted on the basis of their GCSE grades. In other subjects, students perform in line with predictions. The self-assessment report overestimated the strength of students' achievements in 2000, as some of the data used were subsequently revised following the data check by inspectors.

40 Modern language teachers work well together. Many teach two languages and schemes of work and resources are developed

Curriculum Areas

collaboratively. There has been close liaison with examination boards and much staff development in preparation for the new advanced level courses. Teachers have carefully considered how to address the weaknesses identified in their self-assessment report and have implemented changes to the structure of the courses. For example, more supplementary materials have been developed to support students during their first few weeks of GCE AS study. Measures designed to improve examination pass rates in French have resulted in a steady and significant improvement. Students' work is assessed thoroughly. In addition to providing constructive comments, teachers append the examining board's marking criteria to the work and show how these have been used to allocate a grade. Students are

clear about how they are being assessed and what they need to do to improve.

41 The curriculum area has an exceptionally good range of resources. Modern language students have use of a well-resourced multimedia laboratory with access to the Internet. Recordings of foreign broadcasts are made through a satellite link and are edited by a teaching assistant. There is good provision of foreign language assistants who help students to practise their conversation skills. Most lessons take place in classrooms of appropriate size and layout, although there is not enough space for some of the larger classes. Rooms have attractive displays of posters and students' work, as well as a range of learning resources and equipment.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCE A level French	3	Number of starters	82	47	46
		Retention (%)	76	69	87
		Achievement (%)	84	88	90
GCE A level German	3	Number of starters	56	27	44
		Retention (%)	79	68	66
		Achievement (%)	86	100	93
GCE A level Spanish	3	Number of starters	14	15	11
		Retention (%)	86	87	82
		Achievement (%)	92	92	89
GCE A level Italian	3	Number of starters	18	6	11
		Retention (%)	94	50	55
		Achievement (%)	100	100	83

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

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Support for Students

Grade 3

42 Arrangements for supporting students have been revised considerably since the production of the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- thorough arrangements for pre-entry guidance
- effective enrolment and induction procedures
- effective provision of careers guidance

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped and poorly co-ordinated arrangements for learning support
- some unsatisfactory aspects of tutoring
- ineffective provision for key skills

43 Inspectors agreed that there are effective arrangements for prospective students to gain information about the college. Helpful documentation for students and their parents clearly describes subject choices and entry requirements for the new post-16 curriculum. Open days and information evenings are well attended. Teachers receive useful training and guidance which enable them to interview prospective students effectively. An interviewers' pack contains clear and detailed information about the college, including subject guides in a common format. A system of named staff contacts simplifies communication with local schools and their pupils.

44 Induction and enrolment arrangements are well managed. A 'Welcome to College' event gives new students opportunities to meet their teachers and current students. Most students comment positively on their introduction to the college. Students receive subject handbooks which, though uneven in quality, offer useful

introductory information. Some information leaflets for students are unattractively presented. In 2000, a large number of new students wished to alter their original course choices. There are clear procedures for such course changes which were handled smoothly and efficiently.

45 Since the completion of the self-assessment report, the college has made significant changes to its arrangements for supporting students. Pastoral support and guidance, which were previously co-ordinated and managed by a team of senior tutors, are now managed within faculties. Tutors have an enhanced pastoral role. From September 2000, in order to meet the requirements of the new post-16 curriculum, tutors are also responsible for work on key skills and enrichment through a general studies programme. The new model is clearly described in a suitably detailed guide. Despite a substantial and evolving programme of support and development for staff, the new system is not yet operating satisfactorily. Many tutors lack the skills or knowledge to teach key skills effectively, particularly application of number and IT. First-year students express dissatisfaction with their tutorials and feel that their time is not being well used. There was some unsatisfactory tutorial practice; tutorials often lacked direction and purpose. Second-year students, for whom previous tutorial arrangements are still in place, are positive about their tutoring.

46 Regular reviews of students' progress relate current progress to previously agreed targets and standards of performance. Inspectors agreed with the college that arrangements to support students at risk of leaving their course early have improved since the previous inspection. The college has introduced more efficient methods of monitoring students' attendance and tutors receive monthly reports. Where students' attendance falls below 80%, parents are informed and tutors initiate further investigation. Standards fund money is being used to fund a project designed to identify ways of improving student retention rates.

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47 The college lacks a clear strategy for identifying and meeting the additional learning support needs of students, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. There are a number of procedures for learning support, but they are insufficiently co-ordinated. All full-time students are screened for literacy, using tests devised by the college, but students are not routinely screened for numeracy. Individual learning plans are simply broad descriptions of work to be done. They lack clear targets that have been agreed with students, and there is no systematic reviewing of progress. Communication between the learning support team and the faculties is often ineffective. Teachers are sometimes unaware that their students are receiving support. Learning support staff lack sufficient detailed knowledge of students' course requirements, particularly in relation to the new post-16 curriculum. The additional learning support provided within lessons, as in some GNVQ courses, is much more effective. Support for students with physical disabilities is underdeveloped.

48 Inspectors agreed that there are effective arrangements for careers advice and education. The college employs a full-time careers adviser. Additional advice is provided by the external careers service. The careers adviser liaises closely with tutors at meetings and training events. All students are offered the opportunity of individual careers interviews. The college has designed a programme of support aimed specifically at students seeking direct entry into employment. There is a small but relevant collection of careers literature. The college intranet has a number of useful pages giving further information about careers, but it is not regularly updated and its use is not monitored. Applications for higher education have been efficiently processed in 2000-01, an improvement on a weakness identified in the self-assessment report.

49 Students receive effective specialist support for personal issues from a nurse, a chaplain and

a counsellor. These services are valued by students. The chaplain has supported students of several faiths. Students in receipt of access funds have a retention rate of 98%, significantly above college and national averages. Information leaflets advertising student support services are not available in minority ethnic languages, in large print formats, Braille or on audiotape.

General Resources

Grade 2

50 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- attractive and well-maintained accommodation
- very efficient use of space
- a comprehensive accommodation strategy
- good library and IT resources
- extensive sports facilities

Weaknesses

- some poor classroom accommodation
- inadequate social facilities for students

51 The college is situated on a large, attractive and well-maintained site. Although the site is subject to stringent planning restrictions, the accommodation has been significantly expanded and improved since the last inspection. The first phase of a new development contains a learning centre with 106 study places, a further 35 private study spaces and seven classrooms.

52 The college makes very efficient use of its space. Inspectors agreed that the college has a comprehensive accommodation strategy. Much importance is placed on the continuous

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improvement of facilities for students and staff. There is a carefully planned maintenance programme. Recent improvements have included refurbishment of the college's attractive reception area and clear signposting of the different buildings on the site. Maintenance and security staff are effectively deployed. The standard of external signs has improved since the last inspection. There is only one narrow access road for cars, which is shared with a local primary school. It is a potentially hazardous route at busy times of the day. Almost all areas of the college are accessible to people with restricted mobility but the sloping site makes some paths linking the buildings uncomfortably steep for wheelchair users. The college has conducted surveys of the issues surrounding access for people with restricted mobility which have resulted in a number of improvements.

53 Most classrooms are well furnished and well equipped with appropriate teaching aids. All subjects have designated teaching areas, although some are dispersed across several parts of the site. There are some poor classrooms in temporary buildings and other rooms that are too small or of inappropriate layout for the classes that use them. Many classrooms and curriculum areas contain interesting displays, including the presentation of students' work. All staff have their own workspace. All staff workrooms have computers with access to the Internet, although not all staff have personal email addresses. Storage is in short supply and some workrooms and other areas are cluttered. The college's reprographics team provides valuable support for teaching and learning.

54 The college has good IT facilities that have been significantly expanded by the opening of the new learning centre. The overall ratio of computers to students is 1:7. However, this calculation includes many computers which are used by individual curriculum areas and are not available to all students. The 154 computers

based in open access areas are currently sufficient to meet students' needs but their availability is reduced at certain times by block bookings for class teaching. Almost all computers are less than three years old and run modern software. There is a shortage of some specialist software applications. Most computers are networked and have access to the Internet. There has been an increase in technicians' workload as a consequence of expansion in provision which has resulted in delays to some developments. For example, the college's intranet is at a very early stage of development and students have only recently been issued with personal log-ins. The college has commissioned consultants to help to address the issues of technicians' workload and the expansion of the computer network. A number of improvements had been implemented by the time of the inspection.

55 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a well-resourced library. It has a stock of some 24,000 book titles, as well as good provision of newspapers, periodicals, audio and video cassettes and CD-ROMs. The opening hours are appropriate and include extensive opening during college holidays. As the college's self-assessment report identified, the library is small and does not have either enough spaces for private study or room for group work. The opening of the learning centre has relieved some of the pressure on study space but the library is still very crowded at certain times of the day. Library staff have close links with curriculum areas. All students receive an induction to the library and there are useful study guides. The levels of use of the library and of users' satisfaction with the service are carefully monitored.

56 As the self-assessment report identified, there are extensive sporting facilities for students. The college has a large sports hall, squash courts and a weights room, pitches for football and rugby and four tennis courts. The report also identified weaknesses in the

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provision of social facilities for students. The canteen is too small for the number of students wishing to use it, although reorganisation of the college timetable has reduced some of the overcrowding noted at the previous inspection. The college has relocated its student services next to the underused students' common room in an attempt to improve the use of this area. This solution has been only partly successful because the common room has increasingly been needed to accommodate examinations.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

57 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. A number of weaknesses had been addressed before the inspection. Inspectors identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- a well-established culture of continuous improvement
- a consistently high level of academic performance
- a comprehensive and effective self-assessment process
- thorough reviews of curriculum areas
- good staff development arrangements

Weaknesses

- a lack of thorough procedures for lesson observation

58 The college has improved its quality assurance system since the previous inspection. Inspectors agreed that an effective framework for quality assurance and self-assessment is now well established. Quality assurance systems are well understood and supported by staff and students. The annual cycle of quality assurance activities is fully integrated with the strategic

planning process. Governors, managers and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to continuous improvement through their use of targets, performance indicators and national benchmarking data. Demanding standards are set for all areas of the college's work. Handbooks for staff make clear their responsibility for each aspect of quality assurance. Procedures are effectively applied across the college. The college has taken appropriate action to address weaknesses in the monitoring of action plans. They are thoroughly monitored by heads of faculty who ensure that weaknesses are addressed.

59 The college maintains a consistently high level of academic performance. Quality assurance procedures have contributed to improvements in students' achievements. Achievements at levels 2 and 3 for students aged 16 to 18 are consistently above national averages for sixth form colleges. Achievement rates improved in 2000. Retention rates have fluctuated but are around the national average for sixth form colleges. The college has implemented several strategies to raise the level of student retention. There are indications for the current year that the overall level of retention has improved.

60 A comprehensive system of lesson observation has been developed to monitor teaching across departments. The heads of subject and heads of faculty observe all full-time and part-time staff. Teachers welcome the opportunities to share good practice through peer observations. However, the process is not thorough. Formal arrangements for moderation and ensuring consistency in grading lessons across subjects are underdeveloped. In curriculum areas, there is a failure to make use of all the evidence available from lesson observations. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding by the college was significantly higher than the proportion that resulted from inspectors' observations. The proportion of good and outstanding grades

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awarded by inspectors, although above the average for sixth form colleges, had not improved since the last inspection.

61 Inspectors agreed with the college that arrangements for reviewing curriculum areas are thorough. A schedule containing relevant dates provides staff with information about key stages in the review process. The college has set appropriate targets to maintain or improve performance and they are monitored regularly and thoroughly. In the best reviews, student achievement and retention data are carefully analysed. Good use is made of national averages and benchmarking data published by the FEFC against which the college's performance is compared. Reasons for poor performance are sought and appropriate remedial action taken. Action plans are monitored regularly and updated. In a few reviews, insufficient use is made of the full range of evidence available.

62 Self-assessment is well established in the college. All curriculum areas, cross-college teams and governors are involved. Subject reviews contribute to the annual self-assessment. The college's fifth self-assessment report was clear and self-critical and provided a good basis for the inspection. Good use is made of value-added data. Minimum target grades, based on students' qualifications at the start of their courses, are set as individual achievement targets. Teachers use these effectively to measure students' performance against their predicted grades and to assess the extent to which subject areas have met or exceeded expectations. In the areas inspected, inspectors agreed with seven of the 10 grades awarded by the college. The inspectors upgraded the college's assessment in two areas and lowered it in one.

63 The college systematically collects and analyses the views of students through regular course and college-wide surveys and questionnaires. Inspectors agreed with the self-

assessment report that there is an over-dependence on questionnaires for gathering feedback. Student forums has now been established in some faculties. There is an active student council. The college charter clearly sets out key standards and most students are aware of these.

64 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that arrangements for staff development are good. The staff development policy places a high priority on activities that support the implementation of the strategic plan. Last year, 10 days were set aside for staff development and preparation for whole-college issues. Managers undertake a programme of management training. Teachers have received training in IT, key skills and a range of learning styles. They receive good support for their personal development. Opportunities for industrial updating are less developed. Each year all staff participate in an annual appraisal undertaken by their line manager. The appraisal process is clearly linked to improving performance and helps to identify training needs. Induction for new teachers is structured and systematic. The college gained recognition as an Investor in People in March 2000.

Governance

Grade 1

65 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. Weaknesses identified in the report had been addressed by the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- good conduct of governing body and committee business
- constructive working relationships between governors and senior managers
- the benefit to the college from governors' skills and experience

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- effective financial monitoring
- close monitoring of the college's educational performance

Weaknesses

- there are no significant weaknesses

66 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The governing body 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.

67 The governing body has a membership of 19. There are seven business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, a local authority governor, a local community governor, two student governors, two parent governors and the principal. There is a clear strategy and publicly available written procedures for the recruitment of new governors. There are currently two vacancies.

68 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors have a good understanding of the distinction between governance and management. The chair, vice-chair, principal and vice-principals meet frequently. There are good working relationships between governors and the senior management team. Senior managers attend governing body meetings and make presentations when appropriate, as well as contributing to the governors' annual 'away day'.

69 Governors have a wide range of skills and expertise. Their skills, which include business, finance, audit, personnel, construction, legal and quantity surveying, are used effectively to the benefit of the college. The search committee considers these skills before governors are re-appointed. A weakness in the self-assessment report relating to the lack of a

systematic training programme for governors had been addressed by the time of the inspection. New governors are provided with an induction pack, accompanied by appropriate briefings, and are encouraged to identify their training needs. The formal training programme incorporates the recently published training materials for governors. Governors regularly review their training needs.

70 All governors and senior staff annually update the register of interests. The governing body has comprehensive standing orders, and has established eligibility criteria and 'whistleblowing' procedures. Agendas, papers and minutes are readily available for public inspection.

71 The vice-principal for resources is clerk to the governing body, and receives administrative support from the secretary to the governing body. The chair has appraised the clerk, thereby addressing a weakness in the self-assessment report. There is a separate job description for clerking duties. As vice-principal for resources, the clerk oversees the areas of computer networks, estates and personnel. There is no mechanism to ensure that governors receive independent advice when the clerk is presenting papers or contributing to meetings as a senior college manager. The secretary to the governing body clerks the remuneration committee.

72 The conduct of the governing body and committee business is good, as noted in the self-assessment report. Agendas and supporting papers for the governing body and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making, and clearly identify when decisions are required. Minutes provide a good record of discussions and decisions. An annual calendar of governing body and committee meetings includes standard agenda items. All committees have terms of reference that clearly identify their responsibilities and relationship to the governing body. Levels of attendance at board and committee meetings are good. Governors

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assess themselves against a set of agreed performance indicators.

73 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors monitor the college's financial performance effectively. The finance and general purposes committee receives the monthly management accounts, and considers the latest accounts at each of its regular committee meetings. The accounts are comprehensive and provide governors with a good basis for making financial decisions. The governing body receives the most recent management accounts at each of its meetings, together with an oral report from the chair of the finance and general purposes committee. The strategic plan and three-year financial forecast were submitted to the FEFC well in advance of the deadline.

74 The audit committee reports annually to the governing body on the effectiveness of the system of internal control within the college. The committee annually appraises its own performance, and assesses the work of the internal and external auditors against established performance indicators. It effectively monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors, and has a rolling schedule to review the implementation of agreed audit recommendations.

75 As the self-assessment report recognised, the governors pay close attention to the educational character of the college and to the standard of education that students receive. Discussions about achievement and retention rates, and about value-added data, are thorough. Information is provided on trends over previous years and comparisons are made with other sixth form colleges. Governors are well informed about the new post-16 curriculum and have discussed its implications for the college. They give suitably detailed consideration to the approval of targets for students' rates of achievement and retention. They question senior managers and seek an explanation when targets are not met. A

number of governors have 'shadowed' staff and students at work in order to improve their knowledge of the college.

Management

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- good leadership
- efficient and effective deployment of resources
- thorough planning
- effective links with external organisations
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- a lack of clarity in some areas of cross-college management
- ineffective arrangements for the setting and achieving of retention targets

77 Senior managers provide clear direction and manage the college well. Teaching standards are good, overall achievement is high and most targets for achievement are met. Funding targets have been achieved and enrolments have grown. Most retention rates, apart from those for short courses, are close to the national averages for sixth form colleges. Some retention rates for individual courses declined in 1999-2000. The use of resources is carefully planned and regularly monitored. Staffing requirements are kept under regular review. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are detailed arrangements for monitoring health and safety.

78 The college's well-devised operational plan is linked effectively to the eight clear objectives in the strategic plan and to the self-assessment report. Senior managers monitor the plan

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regularly to ensure that objectives are achieved. The operational plan is supported by well-developed action plans for curriculum areas, rectifying a weakness found at the previous inspection. A key feature of this year's action plans is the implementation of the new post-16 curriculum. Staff contribute to action plans and are kept informed about the progress of strategic and operational plans. The college is developing the use of action plans in cross-college areas.

79 In September 2000, a new organisational structure was introduced. The aim was to provide a clearer structure and better links between the college's curriculum and pastoral arrangements. One of its key objectives was to clarify cross-college responsibilities, thus addressing a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. This objective has not yet been achieved in some areas. Not all staff are clear about the cross-college roles of faculty heads and their deputies. The job descriptions for heads of faculty do not include some of their specific cross-college responsibilities. Communications in the college are mainly effective. There is a weekly staff briefing and a briefing sheet. A programme of regular meetings provides opportunities for staff to be consulted by managers and to contribute to the development of the college.

80 Inspectors agreed with the college that it has a range of effective links with external organisations. Links with the Solihull Local Education Authority (LEA) are strong. There are close links with the college's partner secondary schools and the principal attends termly meetings of the Solihull Secondary Heads Group. The college is an active member of a local education business partnership. The principal is a member of the FEFC's regional committee and a member-designate of Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council. The TEC finds the college helpful and supportive.

81 The college's management information system provides regular reports on rates of achievement, retention, funding, applications and attendance. Unsatisfactory monitoring of students' attendance, noted as a weakness in the self-assessment report, has been rectified by the introduction of a new system in September 2000. It provides comprehensive data on attendance. The arrangements for the setting and achieving of targets for retention are ineffective. Most targets were not met in 2000. Although retention rates are reported annually, they are not distributed to curriculum areas during the year. This hinders the early recognition of possible retention issues, and the taking of appropriate action.

82 The college has an equal opportunities committee, an equal opportunities policy and a plan for implementing and monitoring the policy. It promotes respect for the cultural traditions and religious beliefs of staff and students. For example, there are links with representatives of different faiths, and informative displays are mounted at times of major religious festivals. However, surveys of students indicate that just under half consider that the college does not provide them with sufficient opportunity to consider and discuss equal opportunities. The college fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992* by providing worship of a Christian nature and also provides opportunities for those of other faiths to meet and pray.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college's financial position is strong. The director of finance is a qualified accountant and a member of the senior management team. Comprehensive management accounts are reviewed by governors and the senior management team. They contain an income and expenditure account with a detailed commentary, a balance sheet with monthly

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trends, a rolling 12-month cashflow forecast, and separate accounts for capital projects. A comprehensive range of targets has been set for monitoring the college's solvency and financial management. Performance against these targets is monitored regularly. Budget holders receive informative monthly reports, have on-line access to the financial information system, and receive suitable training. The recently revised financial regulations are comprehensive. Neither internal nor external auditors have identified any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of financial control. Statistical and financial returns to the FEFC are timely.

Conclusions

84 The college's fifth self-assessment report was clear and comprehensive. It appropriately reflected the importance of teaching and

learning and students' achievements. The report provided an effective basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses, although some strengths had been overstated. Since the self-assessment report was written, good progress has been made in addressing a number of identified weaknesses. However, inspectors identified additional weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with four of the five grades for the curriculum areas inspected and awarded a higher grade for the other area. They agreed with three of the five cross-college grades, considering one of the others to be too high and one to be too low.

85 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 (January 2001)

Age	%
Under 16	0
16-18 years	94
19-24 years	4
25+ years	2
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (January 2001)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	5
Level 3 (advanced)	95
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Level not specified	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (January 2001)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	779	15	33
Agriculture	4	0	0
Business	276	18	12
Hotel and catering	102	0	4
Health and community care	61	0	2
Art and design	401	0	17
Humanities	764	0	32
Total	2,387	33	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 16% 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 (January 2001)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	109	5	0	114
Supporting direct learning contact	18	1	1	20
Other support	49	2	0	51
Total	176	8	1	185

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£5,828,000	£6,017,000	£6,659,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.05	£16.20	£16.60
Payroll as a proportion of income	69%	64%	64%
Achievement of funding target	100%	102%	100%
Diversity of income	10%	9%	9%
Operating surplus	-£158,000	£51,000	£230,000

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 1999), 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	147	53	57	57	73	7
	Retention (%)	24	2	58	56	37	100
	Achievement (%)	97	100	97	53	71	86
2	Number of starters	822	600	1,707	33	82	25
	Retention (%)	69	77	85	48	52	88
	Achievement (%)	88	89	95	100	44	50
3	Number of starters	3,481	4,178	3,318	25	80	52
	Retention (%)	78	73	78	40	69	65
	Achievement (%)	88	89	89	60	81	65
4 or 5	Number of starters	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Short courses	Number of starters	71	343	156	63	145	258
	Retention (%)	32	40	30	52	41	90
	Achievement (%)	78	91	58	29	39	21
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	96	59	60	–	2	3
	Retention (%)	13	37	70	0	50	100
	Achievement (%)	100	100	100	–	–	100

Source: ISR

–ISR data not collected

n/a not applicable

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