

South Nottingham College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1998-99**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

*Cheylesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry CV1 2WT
Telephone 01203 863000
Fax 01203 863100
Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>*

© FEFC 1999 You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	5

Curriculum areas

Science	9
Management, professional and trade union studies	15
Hair and beauty	21
Health and social care (collaborative provision)	26
Multimedia	31
Art and design	37
Modern foreign languages	42

Cross-college provision

Support for students	46
General resources	53
Quality assurance	61
Governance	69
Management	77
Conclusions	88

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1997-98, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	60	29	2	-
Cross-college provision	18	54	24	4	-

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 108 college inspections

Student Achievements

Where data on student achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in three ways:

- as expected completions, which is the number of initial enrolments on qualifications where the student expected to complete the qualification in a given year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). 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 shown.

Summary

South Nottingham College

East Midlands Region

Inspected November 1998

South Nottingham College is a general further education college situated on the outskirts of the City of Nottingham south of the River Trent. The college serves the range of communities within Rushcliffe and outlying areas. The process of self-assessment was well planned, systematic and built on earlier practice. The self-assessment report, and the team and programme reports which contributed to it, were helpful to inspectors in carrying out the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements but considered some strengths were overstated. Some weaknesses were omitted or their significance was underestimated.

The college offers significant provision in nine of the 10 FEFC programme areas. Five of these areas were inspected leading to six curriculum grades and a grade for one curriculum area of the off-site collaborative provision. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. The college's accommodation is of a high standard and there are good learning resources available to students. Students are well supported academically and personally and have access to an extensive range of outstanding specialist learner and learning support services. Standards of teaching are generally high.

The curriculum provision in art and design and in multimedia including print is outstanding. Levels of achievement are variable across the college and good in some areas. The quality assurance system addresses all aspects of college life in respect of direct provision.

Vigorous action has been taken in quality improvement. Quality assurance procedures for collaborative provision, however, are not sufficiently well developed. Governors are actively involved in the compilation of the comprehensive strategic plan which is informed by extensive needs analysis. However, they have yet to introduce the systematic use of performance indicators and targets. There is a productive working relationship between governors and senior staff. The college is managed in an open, accessible style.

Communications within the college are excellent. The structure and operation of some management teams need reviewing and the absence of systematic monitoring of performance against targets needs to be addressed. The college should also address: the unreliability of its data on students; the take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy; the inconsistent use and analysis of data on achievement, retention and attendance; and low utilisation of space.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Science	3	Support for students	1
Management, professional and trade union studies	2	General resources	2
Hair and beauty	2	Quality assurance	2
Health and social care (collaborative provision)	2	Governance	2
Multimedia	1	Management	3
Art and design	1		
Modern foreign languages	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 South Nottingham College is the main provider of further education south of the River Trent in Nottinghamshire and serves the range of communities within Rushcliffe and outlying areas. It operates on four sites; two in West Bridgford, one in Clifton and one in the city centre. The college competes with a number of other post-16 providers in the area. The Nottingham conurbation is served by four other further education colleges and two sixth form colleges. In the Rushcliffe borough there are six schools, all of which have sixth forms. The college currently recruits from 80 different schools. The college's mission states that 'the college is dedicated to satisfying the present and future education and training needs of individuals as well as the whole community'.

2 The population of the Greater Nottingham area is expected to reach 1.07 million by 2001, with significant growth in Rushcliffe. At the time of the 1991 census, minority ethnic groups formed 1.6% of the population of Nottinghamshire. In the city of Nottingham some 10.8% of inhabitants are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Greater Nottingham accounts for nearly 66% of employment and over 50% of businesses in the county. A large proportion of employers in the city of Nottingham work in service industries. However, the city is ranked as the most disadvantaged area in the East Midlands and has a high concentration of long-term unemployment. Unemployment has declined in recent years and is continuing to decline, with 5.5% unemployment in Nottinghamshire and 11.4% in Nottingham at the end of 1997. In 1997, participation in full-time education post-16 in Nottinghamshire was 64% compared with a national average of 70%.

3 The college provides courses leading to general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level), general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), a range of specialist first and national diplomas and certificates, as well

as an ever increasing portfolio of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and open college network accredited courses. The college management team comprises the principal and the three assistant principals who have respective cross-college responsibility for academic planning, human resources, and physical resources and finance. College courses are organised into nine curriculum areas: multimedia; humanities; art and design; professional studies; service industries; business and computing; essential skills; science and care; and adult and community education. The college is increasing its provision of higher education courses through franchise arrangements with universities. Full-time education and training for the New Deal focuses on areas of specialism. As part of the move towards creating a more inclusive college, there has been a considerable increase over the past three years in support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities within general provision, as well as through discrete provision.

4 In 1997-98, the college enrolled 1,381 full-time students and 21,142 part-time students. Since 1994-95, there has been a rapid growth in collaborative provision. The aim is now to reduce the overall proportion of collaborative provision in relation to direct provision to 20% or below by the year 2000. The college employs 372 full-time equivalent staff.

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected during the week beginning 23 November 1998. The inspection team studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other divisions of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The college's individualised student record (ISR) data on students' achievements for the two academic years ending 1996 and 1997 were found to be unreliable. They could not be used as a basis for making judgements on student retention and

Context

achievement for the purpose of inspection. Internal college data on students' achievements over the past three years were validated against class registers and the results issued by examining bodies. These data were used as the basis for inspectors' judgements on students' achievements in each of the curriculum areas.

6 The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors. Forty-three days were spent on the main inspection and 13 days on the inspection of collaborative provision. Auditors worked for seven days. Inspectors observed 81 lessons, examined students' work and a variety of college documents, and held meetings with governors, managers, staff and students. The college has a significant amount of collaborative provision. Inspectors, therefore, conducted a separate inspection of collaborative work in the

curriculum area of health and social care. Judgements about the cross-college aspects of this provision were incorporated into the team's findings during the main inspection. It had been intended that collaborative provision in business studies would also be inspected but when inspectors began to undertake observations it was found that insufficient classes were available to observe and the inspection was terminated.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Of the lessons inspected, 85% were graded good or outstanding and 4% less than satisfactory compared with national averages for 1997-98 of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	1	5	4	1	0	11
GCSE	1	2	1	0	0	4
GNVQ	3	1	0	0	0	4
NVQ	11	8	1	1	0	21
Other vocational	15	14	2	1	0	32
Other	4	4	1	0	0	9
Total (No.)	35	34	9	3	0	81
Total (%)	43	42	11	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98 (%)	19	46	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Context

8 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1997-98. Attendance varied from 88% on collaborative provision and 88% on multimedia to 77% on science courses.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
South Nottingham College	10.2	83
National average, all inspected colleges 1997-98	10.4	77

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1997-98: Chief inspector's annual report*

Curriculum Areas

Science

Grade 3

9 The inspection covered general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and GCE A level courses in biology, chemistry, physics and GCE A level environmental science. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional key strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- extensive use of practical work and teacher demonstrations
- well-planned assignments and thorough assessment of students' work
- good GCSE pass rates
- the high level of technician support

Weaknesses

- few teaching strategies to cater for the wide range of ability in many classes
- the failure to exploit fully the opportunities for development of key skills
- insufficient use of information technology (IT) in lessons
- the underachievement of some students
- insufficient sharing of good practice

10 The college provides a broad range of subjects at GCSE and GCE A level. The self-assessment report recognised as a weakness the absence of vocational courses. Courses are well managed and supported by good documentation.

11 Teaching and learning activities are planned to provide good coverage of the syllabus. There are detailed schemes of work and individual lesson plans. Teachers make extensive and effective use of students' practical

work and demonstrations to reinforce learning, which is a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Students adopt appropriate safety procedures, wear protective clothing and behave sensibly. Examples of good practice include a biology lesson in which an imaginative simulation of urine analysis consolidated students' understanding of kidney function. Chemistry students worked well in pairs to compare the products obtained by oxidising alcohols under different conditions. In physics, a range of demonstrations on diffraction of light, and using an electron diffraction tube, were effectively used to illustrate the behaviour of the electron and to support teaching about the ability of electrons to behave as waves or particles. Residential field courses enhance curriculum provision at GCE A level in biological subjects and environmental science.

12 Teachers recognise the wide range of ability in many classes but they often fail to adopt appropriate teaching methods or to vary learning activities to cater for this range. This was not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. The college acknowledges that the needs of some students who lack motivation, or who are less able, are not being met. However, nothing is being done to disseminate the good practice which is evident in some lessons. In poorer lessons, the follow-up to practical work was not managed well. After an acid-base titration there was no strategy to help students of differing ability to carry out the necessary calculations. Teachers failed to offer support to students who were confused about decimal places and significant figures. A teacher's presentation on how to do calculations on friction, work, energy and power went on for far too long. Students copied notes from the board and were not given an opportunity to think for themselves. There were no checks on individual students' understanding. Additional workshop support to address the subject-specific needs of individuals is limited to pre-examination revision periods. Opportunities for developing key skills are not

Curriculum Areas

exploited. Each laboratory has a computer linked to the college network but, as recognised in the self-assessment report, there is very little use of IT in lessons. Assignments are well planned and teachers conduct thorough assessments of students' work. Mark schemes show awareness of examination board requirements. Teachers' comments on students' work are detailed and supportive and help the students to progress.

13 The refurbished laboratories are well equipped. Technicians are experienced and provide a high level of support. There are clear guidelines for health and safety in laboratories, including hazard cards, which have been produced in college, and an effective system for filing risk assessments. There is no formal mechanism for enabling teachers and technicians to share good practice. With the exception of environmental science resources, which are good, the range of science CD-ROMs and periodicals in the library is inadequate.

14 The department has identified that attendance on some GCSE courses is poor and acknowledges that lateness is a problem. The standard of most students' work is appropriate, though some students continue to underachieve. Students' achievements in GCSE science subjects are generally above national averages. Of the students who completed the physics course in 1998, 67% gained grades C or above and in 1997, 88% of students gained a pass in chemistry. Retention on GCSE courses in 1998 was 70%. Results at GCE A level have fluctuated over the last three years. In 1998, achievements in all GCE A level subjects were low when compared with candidates' GCSE grades on entry. All students have achieved a pass in environmental science over the last two years and, in 1998, 88% of students passed GCE A level chemistry. In 1998, the pass rate of 54% in human biology was below the national average but one student was in the top five of those entered for the subject nationally.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in science, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
GCSE science subjects	2	Expected completions	*	*	60
		Retention (%)	*	*	70
		Achievement (%)	*	*	55
GCE A level biological science	3	Expected completions	*	*	64
		Retention (%)	*	*	80
		Achievement (%)	*	*	51
GCE A level chemistry	3	Expected completions	*	*	29
		Retention (%)	*	*	66
		Achievement (%)	*	*	88
GCE A level environmental science	3	Expected completions	*	*	11
		Retention (%)	*	*	100
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level physics	3	Expected completions	*	*	13
		Retention (%)	*	*	85
		Achievement (%)	*	*	27

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Management, Professional and Trade Union Studies

Grade 2

15 Inspection covered management, professional business and trade union studies courses run mainly for adult students. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but not all the judgements on teaching and learning could be supported, as they related to specific areas of work.

Key strengths

- good, varied methods of teaching and learning
- high-quality learning resources on most courses
- flexible delivery of courses
- high pass rates on most courses
- high-quality assessment and support for NVQ portfolio building
- good, well-organised, portfolio and project work
- effective systems for monitoring students' progress

Weaknesses

- some teaching which lacks variety and relevance to business practice
- poor pass rates on some professional business courses
- students' slow progress in achieving NVQ qualifications
- no formal development of certain basic skills

16 Inspectors agreed with the college that courses are delivered flexibly and in a variety of ways. There is provision on site, off site and in the workplace. A seven-day week is operated. There is an excellent range of highly regarded

courses in trade union studies. NVQ assessment is carried out in the college and the workplace. Short courses are delivered on employers' premises or at convenient off-site locations. Management and business professional courses are offered on a day and evening part-time basis. Action has been taken to reduce the range of professional courses offered and to improve the quality of a more select range.

17 In most areas of work, teachers employ a wide range of appropriate and effective methods of teaching and learning to address the needs of adult learners. These methods include role-play, group work, student presentations, the use of guest speakers, one-to-one portfolio work and team teaching. In many of the lessons, changes of activity help to maintain students' interest and encourage all to make a contribution to the lesson. Students' confidence and interpersonal skills are developed. Teachers make imaginative use of students' work situations and draw constructively on their own extensive work experience. As recognised in the self-assessment report, most lessons are well planned and there is good supporting documentation. In a minority of lessons, the teaching lacks interest and variety. Sometimes, for example, there is too much concentration on theoretical models and not enough attention to business practice.

18 The college acknowledges the need to address the development of basic skills for students where necessary, particularly in trade union studies. It also recognises the sensitivity of this question in relation to adult students and the need to develop appropriate staff skills. At the time of the inspection, implementation of proposals to address basic skills development was at an early stage of development.

19 Professionally produced handouts, overhead slides and learning packs are produced for the majority of courses. The trade union studies centre has an extensive range of resources of a high quality and has developed distance learning packages with internet

Curriculum Areas

support. The majority of courses are housed at the Hygate centre, a former primary school. The self-contained site is popular with staff and students but does not provide ideal accommodation. Students have access to specialist IT resources, with a range of software and internet facilities. Inspectors agreed with the college that most staff are well qualified and highly motivated and that students benefit from their recent or current work experience. More full-time staff have been appointed to address the serious levels of under staffing identified in the self-assessment report.

20 All candidates completing trade union courses and National Examining Board for Supervision and Management (NEBSM) certificates in 1997-98 were successful and there have been pass rates above national

averages on some papers for the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply. However, inspectors did not agree with the college's judgement that there are outstanding achievements in all areas. There have been some poor pass rates on other professional business courses and on a few individual Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply papers. There is excellent practice in identifying and assessing evidence for NVQ portfolios. Nevertheless, inspectors confirmed that many students were making slow progress in achieving NVQ qualifications. An improved tracking system has been devised and a target set for raising levels of achievement on NVQs. Strategies to encourage students to complete units at a faster rate are being piloted.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in management, professional and trade union studies, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Trade union studies short courses	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	515
		Retention (%)	*	*	91
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
NEBSM certificates in supervisory management	3	Expected completions	*	*	86
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
NVQ supervisory management	3	Expected completions	*	*	136*
		Retention (%)	*	*	96
		Achievement (%)	*	*	10
NVQ management	4	Expected completions	*	*	125*
		Retention (%)	*	*	92
		Achievement (%)	*	*	10
Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply professional stage graduate diploma**	4	Expected completions	*	*	10
		Retention (%)	*	*	60
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*students registered for awards since 1995 and achievement to date

**students normally take two years or more to complete all examinations for this award; only two completions

Curriculum Areas

Hair and Beauty

Grade 2

21 The inspection covered all aspects of hairdressing and beauty therapy provision. Eleven lessons were observed. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements identified in the self-assessment report, but found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- creative planning, standardised schemes of work and flexible lesson plans
- a highly effective teaching team with recent industrial experience
- IT an integral part of full-time programmes
- the development of excellent practical skills
- excellent, well-resourced facilities

Weaknesses

- the poor retention rate for part-time students
- a failure to ensure that students are interested and fully involved in their work throughout the lesson

22 Hairdressing and beauty therapy provision was first introduced in 1997 and much has been achieved since then. Courses meet the needs of a wide range of students. Flexible timetabling makes it easy for mature students to attend lessons. Courses are offered at levels 1 and 2 in hairdressing and levels 2 and 3 in beauty therapy including reflexology and aromatherapy. There is provision for part-time and full-time students. Courses are effectively managed by an enthusiastic and cohesive team.

23 Inspectors agreed that staff employ creative and innovative teaching methods and that they are highly skilled and motivated. Teaching

programmes are well planned. Work schemes are well structured, but allow for flexibility in patterns of study. Varied methods of teaching and learning ensure that individual needs are met. Students are well supported but they are also encouraged to take some responsibility for their own learning. They are fully aware of what is expected of them. In one successful hairdressing lesson, knowledge of cutting and colouring techniques was developed by provoking discussion about photographs of fashion styles and allowing students to decide how to achieve the cut and colour. All students participated fully in what turned out to be a lively discussion. Practical work is of a high standard. Clients offered praise for their treatments and commented on the friendly and caring atmosphere. In a level 2 practical lesson for mature evening class students, the teacher, having identified the need to enable students' confidence to be developed in the salon situation, took appropriate action in changing the work scheme to take account of this. Subsequently, the students carried out cutting and blow-drying on clients, including young children. They worked to a professional standard while paying particular attention to customer care. In a beauty therapy anatomy class, students initially showed less than a full interest in proceedings. However, when they were encouraged to use each other as teaching aids, to point out and name the bones of the face, they rapidly became more animated. This activity was continued in a practical face massage lesson to assess and reinforce learning. On several occasions, teachers failed in their planning to take account of the need to motivate all students and to sustain their interest throughout. In an NVQ level 3 beauty therapy lesson, students were introduced to body heat treatments. The class was split into two groups. In the 'wet' area there was a clear introduction from the teacher and students set to work on appropriate tasks. However, the other students were not involved in suitably demanding activities and spent time chatting amongst themselves.

Curriculum Areas

24 Inspectors confirmed that the college has excellent facilities which afford students a realistic and stimulating working environment. The reception area is comfortable for clients and has a computer system for booking, charging for treatments and retail products. Students have the opportunity to develop relevant reception skills and to be assessed in a realistic work environment. Salon facilities match industrial and commercial standards. The presence of students' belongings, however, somewhat detracts from the professional atmosphere of the salons. The 'wet' area in the beauty salon is fully equipped with sauna, steam cabinet and airbath. There are over 800 clients on the salon's books providing students with a good base for practical work.

25 Students are gaining excellent practical skills. Portfolios and other written assignments are well presented and there is appropriate evidence of competence. The newness of the provision means that it is not possible, as yet,

to look at trends in students' achievements. Students are meeting the targets set for NVQ achievement. Some students are completing their NVQ in hairdressing ahead of target. In 1997-98, the NVQ level 2 in beauty therapy was the first course to be completed. The pass rate of 77% is above the national average of 68%. The retention rate of 37.5% after the first year of the part-time course, however was considerably below the national average. None of the hairdressing courses had been completed by the time of the inspection. After the first year, retention on the full-time NVQ level 2 hairdressing course was 80%. Attendance on all courses is high. Realistic targets have been set for retention and achievement. Students are encouraged to gain IT and Royal Institute of Public Health and Hygiene qualifications in addition to their main qualifications. An hour each week has been allocated to the development of IT skills.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in hair and beauty, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Expected completions	#	#	16
		Retention (%)	#	#	75
		Achievement (%)	#	#	77

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)
#course not offered

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care (Collaborative Provision)

Grade 2

26 The inspection of collaborative provision covered first aid, NVQs in care and access to further education care courses. Inspectors observed 10 lessons on various sites. They confirmed most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report and identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-planned and managed courses
- effective links with partner organisations
- purposeful teaching
- good use of students' experience to develop learning
- good achievements, and outstanding levels of retention on foundation provision

Weaknesses

- inconsistencies between centres in the guided learning hours allocated to students on first-aid courses
- poor levels of achievement and retention on NVQ courses
- inadequate development of key skills

27 Courses are well planned and managed to meet the needs of students. Inspectors agreed with the college that there is generally effective communication between the college and its partner organisations. A planned schedule of meetings ensures that courses are regularly reviewed. Students' opinions of courses and observations of lessons by college staff are considered as part of the course review process. Issues for concern raised at meetings are acted upon and the impact of the actions taken is monitored. Partner organisations value the staff

development on equal opportunities and assessor training which the college has provided. The college has recently reviewed and revised its collaborative NVQ provision with one partner in order to tackle more effectively the poor levels of retention and achievement. An access to further education care course has been introduced. On the first-aid at work courses, inspectors found that the number of hours for guided learning varied from centre to centre. This weakness was not recognised by the college.

28 Teaching is of a high standard and there are examples of outstanding practice. Learning objectives are clearly identified and shared with students. Teachers relate theory to current workplace situations where appropriate. Good use is made of students' own experiences. Teachers build on their contributions in lessons to reinforce and extend learning. In a lesson on burns and scalds and corrosive injuries, the teacher used students' contributions to discuss, reinforce and develop learning; for example, when a student commented on the fact that superficial burns were more painful than serious burns, this intervention was used to discuss and identify the reason. Lesson activities were suitably varied. In the NVQ direct care workshop, students took part in a board game where realistic confidential dilemmas had to be confronted on each square. Before moving on, students had to identify how the situation could be dealt with. These activities enabled them to demonstrate their skills in communicating with relatives, friends and clients. Students are provided with good opportunities to develop and demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and practical skills at appropriate levels, as stated in the self-assessment report. In some of the outstanding lessons, for example, students had the chance to apply their knowledge and skills in simulated vocational contexts. As an introduction to the task of controlling bleeding, first-aid students were presented with a 'casualty' who had been 'shot' and asked to identify the possible physiological damage.

Cross-college Provision

Having identified the likely extent of injuries they were then challenged to work out what emergency aid should be given. The students responded well and demonstrated effective skills in controlling the bleeding. Assessment activities are planned carefully and students understand the assessment process. Teachers do not make full use of the opportunities naturally occurring in lessons to develop key skills, a weakness not identified in self-assessment report. Students speak highly of the support they are given by tutors and trainers. The college acknowledges that procedures for identifying learning support are inconsistent.

29 Students' achievements on first-aid courses are in line with national averages and retention rates are outstanding. On NVQ courses, retention rates and achievement rates are well below national averages. A substantial number of students require extensive support to complete their units. NVQ portfolios are well organised and evidence contained in them is appropriate and constructive. Teachers' written feedback on their work enables students to identify where additional evidence is required, the nature of the evidence and the next stage of learning. Planning for assessments is thorough but the assessment of candidates' practical competence has been adversely affected by staff changes in the workplace.

30 Accommodation is good and there is appropriate specialist equipment to support learning objectives.

Cross-college Provision

Multimedia

Grade 1

31 The inspection covered photography, media and printing. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified through self-assessment. The majority of the weaknesses had been addressed effectively by the time the inspection occurred.

Key strengths

- rigorous programme management, including targets for curriculum improvement
- curriculum planning designed to motivate students and ensure learning
- clear and flexible briefs for projects and assignments
- imaginative and developmental projects
- innovative, formative assessment which stimulates students
- high retention and achievement rates on most courses
- excellent resources, supporting all aspects of provision

Weaknesses

- a few classes in which students are not fully involved in their work and fail to learn
- poor levels of achievements on the GNVQ media programme

32 Inspectors agreed with the college that rigorous programme area management underpins progress towards the targets set for curriculum improvement. There are good opportunities for students to progress to further studies on completion of their courses. Health and safety and music technology are available to students as additional studies to enrich their main study programmes. Students also benefit

from experience in related disciplines. For example, photography students gain presentation skills from a short course in bookbinding. Programmes developed in association with high technology partners are succeeding in attracting students from a wider cross-section of the community.

33 Curriculum plans are well structured. They are designed to motivate students and to ensure that learning takes place. Lessons benefit from teachers' industrial experience. Teachers make sure that they possess the skills relevant to current industrial practice, as the college states. Many complex operations, such as digital manipulation of images and print preparation are taught by highly skilled demonstration. In a few instances some students were not sufficiently involved in their work. The majority of students, however, are well motivated and eager to apply what they have learned creatively. Students' enthusiasm is raised by carefully sequenced projects which make learning an integral part of the creation of products of professional quality. Flexible and clear briefs bring together different aspects of the subject to meet individual students' needs. For example, students studying for a national diploma in printing design produce a colour calendar and each student digitally develops and modifies a photograph taken on a visit to a country park for one of its illustrations. A full schedule of activities provides students with experience in media industries. Students benefit from a programme of visits to locations in England and abroad. These help to develop students' cultural awareness and to broaden their experience. Projects are linked to these visits.

34 Innovative assessments stimulate students and help them to learn. Inspectors confirmed the wide and appropriate range of methods. Informal checks on learning are made interesting for students. For example, one group is planning a Christmas party at which there will be prizes for a quiz which is part of

Curriculum Areas

the assessment for the course, and members of a video team were tested while applying their new skills during an outside broadcast. Students' evaluative skills are effectively developed during sessions which focus on critical appreciation. Self-assessment and peer assessment are regularly used by staff when grading students' work. Students receive comprehensive and effective feedback on their work during critical appreciation sessions. There is systematic and rigorous internal verification.

35 Retention of students is above average and levels of achievement are well above national averages. High grades are attained by a majority of students. There are pass rates of 90% or over on all full-time courses with the exception of the GNVQ intermediate media course. The college acknowledges the low achievement at GNVQ intermediate level and is taking appropriate corrective action. New staff with recent, relevant industrial experience work

with students on exciting live projects, such as those which make use of the unit's own broadcast radio station. These projects motivate and stretch students. Participation in the production of a video to be shown nationally is raising levels of student performance. The college in its self-assessment celebrates an impressive record. Many professional awards and prizes have been won. The creativity and quality of photographic work in particular is emphasised by three recent awards of top GCE A level photographer of the year. A high proportion of leavers progress to suitable employment or to higher levels of study.

36 Resources to support all aspects of provision are excellent. Inspectors agreed with the college that students benefit from using a fine range of equipment in printing, IT and photography. New accommodation is providing the most up-to-date workshops for multimedia production. Staff development is extensive and meets the needs of all staff.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in multimedia, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G 5260 graphic communication	2	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	96
		Achievement (%)	*	*	95
Intermediate vocational (GNVQ and first diploma)	2	Expected completions	*	*	37
		Retention (%)	*	*	81
		Achievement (%)	*	*	77
GCE A level and national diploma	3	Expected completions	*	*	146
		Retention (%)	*	*	79
		Achievement (%)	*	*	96

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Art and Design

Grade 1

37 Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report which identified the outstanding quality of teaching, learning and students' achievements. Fourteen lessons were observed.

Key strengths

- a well-managed and united staff team
- a broad and challenging curriculum
- much outstanding teaching
- thorough and regular assessment
- the very high standard of students' work
- high examination and retention rates on full-time vocational courses
- high levels of progression to higher education
- the high standard of specialist facilities

Weaknesses

- low levels of achievement on part-time craft and GCE A level courses
- insufficient use of computer graphics and lens-based media

38 Inspectors agreed with the college about the wide range of full-time courses which gives students the opportunity to progress from intermediate level to higher education. In addition, there is a comprehensive range of part-time day and evening craft courses.

39 A broad and demanding curriculum is delivered by a united, well-organised staff team. Practical work for students involves developing a range of often sophisticated concepts. Studio work is supported by a well-designed programme of critical appreciation linked closely to the practical work. This integration ensures that students' work is informed by a wide range of historical and contemporary influences.

Extensive use is made of visits to galleries and trips to Europe and there is a programme of theatre visits and film studies. Teaching is consistently sound, and is often outstanding. Detailed briefs for assignments develop individual students' skills in a clear and sequential way. Teachers prepare lessons and assignments well. They use a wide variety of approaches to stimulate students and help them to learn. Thorough attention is given to basic drawing skills. There is extensive use of media and of different processes such as textile design and model making. In one lesson there was a well-organised demonstration of model-making skills and clear standards were set for the finish required in the final piece. Students had recorded buildings in the centre of Nottingham and were required to make scale models of each section. They were well motivated and produced work of high quality. In another lesson, students enthusiastically developed a textile brief in response to images they had researched from the history of art. All were involved and many developed sophisticated ideas. Each student produced a silk-screen image. A three-dimensional project designed to introduce students to structure and process in clay work involved them in working from drawings and using precise measurement to create complex forms with interlocking pieces. Teachers set students high standards and manage their classes well. Students respond with a professional and disciplined attitude. In comparison with the high standards achieved on other courses, the final work produced by graphic design students lacks rigour. The needs of individual students are generally met. A profoundly deaf student working with a communicator in the drawing studio was benefiting from an individualised programme of work. All work is regularly assessed and students are kept well informed about their progress. There is an effective programme of internal verification to ensure that teachers apply consistent standards.

Curriculum Areas

40 Most students achieve work of a very high standard. The quality and scale of drawing and the range of work on the GNVQ intermediate course is exceptional. In all full-time courses there is good, appropriate observation drawing and good use of scale with large drawings and structures. Students develop supporting sketch books which are full of vitality and experiment. Part-time students on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses, such as the embroidery and soft furnishing course, are producing work of considerable skill and creativity, often above the level required for the qualification. Consequently, many of these students take longer than necessary to achieve their learning goal. Students on full-time vocational courses achieve high pass rates and attendance and retention rates are good. The part-time GCE A level programme, which had been traditionally

part of a recreational programme, has been less successful. In recent years, only a small number of students have taken the examination and pass rates have been poor. The programme has now been relocated and reorganised. Progression to higher education is excellent.

41 There are spacious well-managed and maintained studio and workshop facilities. Full-time students benefit from access to individual workstations displaying an exciting range of current work and its references. There are well-equipped facilities for ceramics, fine art print-making, three-dimensional construction and textiles. Art and design students access the specialist computer suites and the extensive photography facilities managed by the multimedia programme. However, there is insufficient use of computer graphics and lens-based media.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in art and design, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
C&G and CENTRA craft courses	1, 2 and 3	Expected completions	*	*	233
		Retention (%)	*	*	77
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ Intermediate	2	Expected completions	*	*	20
		Retention (%)	*	*	90
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GNVQ advanced and precursors	3	Expected completions	*	*	61
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
BTEC foundation diploma	3	Expected completions	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	94
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCE A level art and design (part time)	3	Expected completions	*	*	36
		Retention (%)	*	*	72
		Achievement (%)	*	*	43

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Curriculum Areas

Modern Foreign Languages

Grade 2

42 The inspection covered courses in modern foreign languages at a number of levels, including open college network levels 1 and 2, GCE A level and GCSE. Eleven classes were observed. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- students who communicate confidently, frequently with good accents
- consistently good results in GCE A level, GCSE and open college network examinations
- sound advice to students on progress
- well-established progression routes
- substantial provision of open college network courses
- successful initiatives to increase participation
- effective management of the curriculum area
- a well-equipped specialist room

Weaknesses

- inconsistent use of the language being studied
- little dissemination of good practice
- poor retention on GCSE courses which is linked to poor initial guidance
- a steady decline in recruitment at GCE A level
- dispersed rooms and the lack of a language centre for students to study on their own

43 The majority of lessons are well planned. Inspectors confirmed that learning activities are varied and constructive and that there is an appropriate range of teaching methods. However, there is inconsistency in the extent to

which the target language is used, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment. There is variable use of the target language ranging from excellent practice to insufficient use in relation to the students' ability and the level of the course. In particular, too much use is made of English for conveying simple instructions. A Spanish evening class working at open college network level 3 had the benefit of a fluent, enthusiastic native speaker using well-prepared material on her own background which students found stimulating and interesting. The class responded well to a lesson conducted in Spanish. Good use was made of the board in reinforcing vocabulary and idiom. It was a demanding lesson. An open college network level 1 lesson taught by a Spanish national was also well planned and contained interesting material based on students' personal experiences. However, English was used as the language of communication throughout and important opportunities to extend learning were, therefore, lost. Observation by fellow teachers has identified the use of the target language as an issue but there has yet to be dissemination of the good practice which exists. The supportive atmosphere in lessons encourages students to communicate and express themselves and this they do confidently, frequently with good accents. There is a discernable correlation between poor accents and underuse of the target language by the tutor. In a minority of lessons the teacher spoke for too long and when students finally had the opportunity to make comments their responses were poor.

44 Inspectors confirmed the college's judgement that examination results are consistently good. They are generally above national average in GCE A level and GCSE and over 95% of students who complete open college network language courses are successful. Retention is about the national average for these courses, at 66%. Many students who enrol on modern languages courses do not have the acquisition of a qualification as their main aim.

Curriculum Areas

There is excellent tracking of students' progress on open college network courses. Progression routes are well established and good advice ensures that many students return to the college to undertake a higher level course.

Unsatisfactory retention rates on some courses are an issue which was identified but understated in the self-assessment report. On GCSE courses, retention was below 80% in most groups and in some groups it was below 60%. Some students bypass the initial guidance system and enrol on courses which are too demanding. This has an adverse effect on retention. At GCE A level, only a minority of groups have retention rates of less than 80%. However, there has been a steady decline in recruitment at GCE A level. There are now no first-year students in French or German. Languages are no longer offered as additional qualifications for students on vocational courses. There have been successful initiatives to

increase participation in two areas: languages on the enrichment programme for staff and full-time students at no cost, and languages for trade unionists and county council employees.

45 The curriculum area is enthusiastically and effectively managed. There is a good proportion of native speakers on the teaching staff. The majority of teaching staff have, or are undertaking, teaching qualifications. The section benefits from a good specialist room equipped as a 20-position language laboratory with additional video and computer facilities. Nevertheless, the college lacks a centre with a focus on languages. The other rooms are satisfactory and have good acoustics but they are dispersed around the college. This inhibits interaction between staff and the development of an effective team. Lack of immediate access to video machines is a disincentive to their use. There is no formal support for students wishing to work on their own to improve their skills.

A summary of achievement and retention rates in modern foreign languages, 1996 to 1998

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1996	1997	1998
Open college network languages	1	Expected completions	*	*	177
		Retention (%)	*	*	64
		Achievement (%)	*	*	100
GCSE	2	Expected completions	*	*	23
		Retention (%)	*	*	52
		Achievement (%)	*	*	91
GCE A level	3	Expected completions	*	*	9
		Retention (%)	*	*	83
		Achievement (%)	*	*	78

Source: ISR (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

*ISR data not reliable

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 1

46 Inspectors agreed with the main strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good arrangements for pre-entry guidance, enrolment and induction
- access to an extensive range of outstanding specialist learner and learning support services
- effective tutorial support for full-time students
- good support for students applying to higher education
- well-managed, rigorous, and well-documented student support systems
- support and encouragement for traditionally under-represented groups to enrol on courses

Weaknesses

- low take-up of additional support for literacy and numeracy

47 Student support systems are well managed, rigorous and well documented. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report that there are effective arrangements to provide appropriate guidance on applications. Attractively designed prospectuses and course booklets provide clear information. The accessibility of the college is promoted by helpful information about bus routes serving the college, including the college's free transport service. College staff participate in the Nottingham Opportunities Fair and a number of school careers evenings. Open evenings and 'taster' days provide opportunities for prospective students to visit the college. There are established links with local schools.

An innovative scheme has been developed in conjunction with local schools to provide access to the college curriculum for pre-16 students. Students are helped to settle into their studies quickly. There is a substantial induction programme based on a standard format which is flexible in meeting differing curriculum needs. A student guide provides a valuable reference document for general information on college procedures and student services. There are also useful, comprehensive course handbooks.

48 Inspectors agreed with the strength in the self-assessment report that the college provides outstanding one-to-one support for a substantial number of students with a wide variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities including many who are following mainstream college courses. There is access to a range of specialists including a nurse and physiotherapist. There are also very effective links with external agencies. On entry, there is detailed diagnosis of the additional needs of each student. Teaching staff and support workers are carefully briefed on individual students' needs. Appropriate staff development has been provided for subject and vocational tutors. There is regular, systematic monitoring and review of each student's progress. Significant and increasing numbers of students who have not traditionally been well represented in further education have been able to enrol on courses in all areas and at all levels and to achieve success.

49 Inspectors confirmed the college's view that tutorial support for full-time students is effective and that students' progress is carefully monitored and reviewed and their achievements recorded. A tutorial policy containing clear statements on tutorial standards is actively implemented. There is a comprehensive handbook which provides tutors with clear guidance. It specifies their roles and responsibilities and provides an annual calendar of tasks to be carried out. Documentation on student records, tutorial schemes of work,

Cross-college Provision

progress reviews and action plans are standardised. A tutor pack containing information published by programme areas provides complementary course-specific materials. Compliance with the tutorial policy is monitored. There are good links with parents. In a small minority of cases, inspectors found that tutors received inadequate information from subject teachers to inform reviews of students' progress and subsequent action-planning. Part-time students express satisfaction with the support they receive. Nevertheless, the college has established a pilot project to extend such support. Some innovative schemes to provide support for part-time students are being developed. Guidance and advice on careers and careers education are well established as integral elements of the tutorial programmes. There is helpful support for students applying to university. Tutors also provide effective personal and pastoral support which is actively supplemented by a strong team of specialists providing counselling and financial and welfare advice.

50 Take-up and attendance of additional support for literacy and numeracy is poor. All full-time students are required to undertake a Basic Skills Agency screening test to identify additional learning support needs in literacy and numeracy. The principal mechanism for delivering support has been scheduled attendance at workshops. Inspectors confirmed that take-up of such support has been low. The college has addressed this issue by linking support more closely with students' vocational and academic subjects. Since making these changes, participation rates have risen significantly.

51 In the majority of cases, the provision of support for students in off-site collaborative provision is good. Inspectors agreed with the college that in one area there were significant gaps and these weaknesses, along with those in adult and community education provision, are being addressed.

52 An enrichment curriculum is offered to all students. Currently, it is largely confined to sporting and leisure activities. The student union organises a programme of social events and visits and is supported by the full-time youth worker. There is childcare provision on both main sites. At West Bridgford, this has been extended to include an after-school care club and holiday play schemes.

General Resources

Grade 2

53 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment. They found other strengths and a significant weakness not fully recognised in the report.

Key strengths

- high-quality accommodation
- good access for disabled students
- well-managed changes in the use of accommodation
- grouping of accommodation to match curriculum areas
- good learning resources

Weaknesses

- low utilisation of space
- the lack of recreational areas for students and the limited refectory facilities
- teachers' lack of access to IT

54 College accommodation is of good quality. There are two main sites at West Bridgford and Charnwood. Substantial refurbishment includes the recently completed development at Charnwood where art and design and multimedia studies are now located. The college's city centre premises, the City Learning Centre, provides introductory IT courses for

Cross-college Provision

mature students. Some management courses and trade unions studies are at Hygate, a small centre close to the West Bridgford site.

55 Changes in the use of accommodation have been well managed. They have taken full account of the need to support teaching and learning effectively. Accommodation has been converted to meet new curriculum demands. The policy of grouping together most of the teaching and office accommodation for each curriculum area works well. Some staff rooms are small. Space utilisation on all college sites is low. Inspectors considered that this was a more widespread weakness than is indicated by the limited use of specialist rooms noted in the self-assessment. The college is currently considering the future of the Hygate site. It is used predominantly by part-time students in the evenings and at weekends and consequently space utilisation is very low. Owing to its small size and location it does not have full caretaker cover. Students working there do not have direct access to major college facilities.

56 The college is generally clean and well maintained internally and externally. Rooms are well decorated. Many have new good-quality furniture. The college has a well-devised maintenance programme with clear priorities. A college standard requires minor problems to be resolved within two weeks or an explanation given. The refurbished reception areas at both West Bridgford and Charnwood offer a welcome to the college. The students' enquiry centre at West Bridgford is a particularly attractive and spacious feature. A few less attractive areas include the temporary accommodation at both main campuses. There is little display of students' work or other material except in specific curriculum areas. Consequently, some corridors appear bleak.

57 Inspectors agreed with the college that access for students with physical disabilities is very good. Buildings are equipped with ramps, automatic doors and lifts and there is easy access to the college's curriculum support and

social areas. The small tower block at West Bridgford is difficult for access but the purchase of a stair crawler permits wheelchair access to all floors. Other small areas remain inaccessible. The City Learning Centre does not have access for the disabled.

58 There are five sports fields and a training grid at Charnwood. There is also a fitness suite at West Bridgford which is available to students. New changing facilities, including those for the disabled, have been provided at both sites. Students also have access to range of sports and leisure facilities outside the college. There is no designated student recreational area. The opening hours of refectories are very limited. There is vehicle access to all sites except the City Learning Centre. Car parking spaces have been substantially increased and are well lit. Approaches to the main campuses are well signposted. The signposting of buildings is generally adequate.

59 Learning resources are maintained at a high level. The librarian is responsible for college libraries and the central provision of audiovisual aids and is a member of the academic board. There is a strong emphasis on good liaison with curriculum areas. Except for science there are sufficient books to meet curriculum requirements. There are sufficient study spaces to meet students' needs. The library has many CD-ROMS, some of which are networked. Library opening hours at West Bridgford are adequate but at Charnwood the library is open only two evenings a week, when most students attend.

60 The college has substantial IT provision. Computers are of industry standard. There are networked major computer suites at West Bridgford and Charnwood. About one-third of the computers are available to students on open access. The remainder are used for taught classes but students can sometimes join the class and use a computer, by agreement with the staff. Some GNVQ intermediate and interior design students have found it difficult to gain

Cross-college Provision

access to computers. Students and staff undertake a substantial induction to IT. The system is well maintained and suffers few breakdowns. There is extensive supervised access to the internet at West Bridgford and Hygate but network problems at Charnwood have prevented access since the recent construction work began. There is a wide and appropriate range of software packages, including some for students with disabilities. The number of computers in staff rooms with access to the academic network is small. Six portable pentiums are available for staff use. The self-assessment report for IT recognised that this is an area for improvement.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

61 Inspectors broadly agreed with the overall judgements in the self-assessment report, although the individual strengths were generally overstated.

Key strengths

- comprehensive coverage of all aspects of college life
- vigorous action to improve quality
- inclusive and rigorous self-assessment processes
- well-established use of student feedback data
- a focus on students' learning and achievement for quality improvement initiatives

Weaknesses

- the failure to make the charters an integral part of quality assurance
- inconsistent use and analysis of data on achievement, retention and attendance

- insufficient integration of quality assurance procedures in respect of collaborative provision
- an underdeveloped system of staff review

62 A strong commitment to improving quality is set out in the quality policy. There is clear evidence of development in the rigour, completeness and accuracy of successive self-assessment reports. Implementation of procedures has been underpinned by staff development. Inclusive and rigorous processes now support the management of self-assessment. A steering group including the chair of governors and an external representative directed the developments. Quality procedures are linked to strategic planning. All team and programme area self-assessment reports are scrutinised rigorously by a validation panel and written feedback is provided to managers. Classroom observation of all full-time and the majority of part-time teaching staff involved in the college's direct provision excluding its off-site collaborative provision, has been undertaken. Teachers are observed in turn by their fellow colleagues. The observations provide useful feedback on teaching and learning in the classroom. However, the grading is overgenerous and this limits the value of the process in presenting an accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning. A development project to set up a second type of observation of teaching and to establish a pool of expertise to support classroom observation has been established. The college has not yet determined how the two observation processes will be brought together.

63 Inspectors confirmed that quality assurance procedures have produced some excellent examples of rigorous analysis, and vigorous action leading to demonstrable improvement in students' experience. A range of different course teams analysed their achievement data

Cross-college Provision

and student feedback information and made improvements in initial guidance and course organisation. These teams monitored improving enrolment, retention and achievement outcomes systematically. Detailed analysis of retention in different client groups has led to the development of a range of practical steps which have begun to produce measurable improvements in community education outcomes. The college's self-assessment review group has now taken on the appropriate role of co-ordinating quality improvement initiatives which reflects this drive towards continuous improvement.

64 Analysis of data from perception surveys is well established and used extensively. Responses are analysed on a five-point scale. A trigger point score is used to initiate an action plan from any team falling below it. Implementation is monitored by college managers. There is some over reliance on questionnaire evidence. The college now recognises the need for better quantitative evidence. Achievement data, which involve a comparison of pass rates with entries, are supplied by the quality section. The data are analysed, and compared with previous years' data and national benchmarks. Retention data are generally poorly used; the absence of cohort analysis and inconsistency in the start date definition are common weaknesses. The absence of accurate data derived from a central system limits the ability of managers to assess retention effectively. Analysis of data on students' destination is inconsistent.

65 The college charters do not form an integral part of the quality assurance processes. The charter used by collaborative partners is a single sheet and its content is limited. The college does not rigorously assess its performance against the commitments made in the main charter. Service standards do not systematically reflect quality standards. Biennial reviews of the charter do not include monitoring information but are solely concerned with presentation and coverage. The college has not

identified this as a weakness in its self-assessment report.

66 The college's self-assessment procedures address provision in all support areas. Improvements made in these areas reflect the commitment of support staff to the process. Service standards have been developed, though the college acknowledges that there is some unevenness in the effectiveness with which they are used. The self-assessment report of the library services is exemplary; judgements are based upon a substantial body of objective and quantitative evidence, and on comparison with national benchmarks and trends over time.

67 Collaborative provision partners receive guidelines which clearly set out the college's expectations for quality assurance. The quality assurance processes relating to collaborative provision are not sufficiently integrated with the college's own processes. Providers have completed self-assessments to a common format required by the college but these have not been compiled as thoroughly as the programme reports. They were not submitted to the validation panel. Quality control of collaborative provision has been strengthened but inspectors found isolated examples of shortfalls in compliance with contract. College analyses of students' achievement do not include the achievements of students on collaborative provision. Not all providers submit external verifiers' reports routinely to the college so that actions arising from reports can be monitored. The college has not checked the rigour of providers' internal verification processes. College staff have observed lessons on 15% of the courses run under collaborative arrangements. However, the planned process for systematic classroom observation to support self-assessment in collaborative work has not been fully implemented.

68 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that staff development is a strength. There is an appropriate focus on students' learning and achievement. However, a

Cross-college Provision

significant weakness which the college has also recognised is that the system of personal appraisal is not yet fully developed. All middle managers undergo personal review and action points are agreed with line managers. Other staff do not have access to a systematic appraisal process. A procedure to address this issue has been drafted.

Governance

Grade 2

69 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements given in the college's self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses not mentioned.

Key strengths

- governors' strong commitment to the college
- strong procedures for appointing new governors
- balance of work between committees, corporation and working groups
- effective clerking arrangements
- active involvement in strategic planning
- constructive working relationship between governors and senior staff

Weaknesses

- the lack of a systematic review of governors' training requirements
- undeveloped appraisal procedure for senior staff
- limited consideration of educational issues
- lack of systematic use of performance indicators and target-setting

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The corporation substantially conducts its business

in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. The corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

71 The corporation has a membership of 17 including business, community, local authority, staff and student representatives. There is one vacancy. Five governors are women; three are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Inspectors agreed that the range of governor business and community expertise is a strength. Each governor is identified with either a curriculum area or a particular theme such as disability. Governors are very committed to the college. Attendance at meetings is generally high. The governance committee has been active in securing an appropriate membership and balance of skills. A skills audit of the corporation has been undertaken and new appointments are made to complement the skills profile of existing governors. To fill recent vacancies, advertising in local newspapers and direct approaches to organisations have been successful. The governance committee is also responsible for succession planning and a number of potential governors have been identified. These strong procedures for the appointment of governors were not recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

72 Inspectors confirmed that there is a comprehensive induction programme which gives new governors a good overview of legal, and governance matters, management, curriculum and student achievement. There have been formal training events for existing governors such as a review of models of corporate governance. Governors have attended external seminars but there is no systematic review of governors' training requirements.

73 The corporation has six committees which have appropriate terms of reference. Inspectors agreed with the college that clarity of the committee structure is a strength. Much of the recent work of the corporation has concentrated on college finances, collaborative provision, and

Cross-college Provision

a major capital project. The corporation receives regular briefings on the work of curriculum areas and an annual report on students' achievements. The corporation has recognised the need to concentrate more on educational issues. An academic committee has been established to receive quality reports from the academic board, to monitor the achievement of academic targets, and to oversee the production of the college self-assessment report. Inspectors confirmed that there is a suitable balance of detailed work undertaken by the committees with reports submitted to the corporation for final discussion and approval. A cycle of meetings is planned annually. There is no formally planned cycle of work to be undertaken by the corporation and its committees. Working groups have been set up for particular issues such as the capital project.

74 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is a clear understanding of the relationship between the work of the senior management and that of the corporation. A constructive working relationship has been developed between them. As the self-assessment noted the appraisal procedure for senior staff is being developed and the remuneration committee is reviewing a number of schemes.

75 Clerking arrangements are effective. Corporation and committee agendas and papers are prepared to a high standard. The recently appointed clerk has the necessary skills, knowledge and independence for the role. An appropriate level of clerical support is provided. Inspectors confirmed that the corporation is generally open in the conduct of its business. The corporation has not, however, established formal criteria for confidentiality of its business although in practice there is little use of items noted as confidential. Draft procedures have been developed covering procedures such as 'whistleblowing' and a code of ethics. Disclosures in the college's register of interests are comprehensive and extend to senior postholders.

76 The corporation has been actively involved in the strategic planning process. The college management team and the governors agreed two key documents which underpinned the development of the current strategic plan. These were the 'South Nottingham College into the 21st Century' and 'Value Statements and Long Term Objectives'. An annual review of the strategic plan and updating weekend is held each year attended by corporation members and college senior staff. The college acknowledges that the use of performance indicators and the setting of targets is underdeveloped. The finance committee has identified financial performance indicators and the employment, policy and personnel committee has identified staffing performance indicators. Targets are set in other aspects of the work of the corporation, such as in the strategic plan, but systematic setting, collating and reporting on targets and performance indicators have yet to be developed.

Management

Grade 3

77 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but identified some additional weaknesses. The college underestimated the importance of some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- an open, accessible, consultative management style
- excellent communications within the college
- effective procedures for achieving value for money
- staff efficiently deployed
- a comprehensive strategic plan informed by extensive needs analysis
- effective marketing a priority

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- the uneven distribution of responsibilities and unclear accountability of some management teams
- the reliability and use of non-financial data
- the absence of systematic monitoring of performance against targets
- lack of continuity of staffing in the finance function

78 The principal took up post in October 1996. The college management team comprises the principal and three assistant principals. Academic work is organised into nine programmes areas. The structure is well understood by staff. There is an open, accessible and consultative management style. The management team provides clear leadership. The self-assessment report did not identify the uneven distribution of responsibilities amongst managers. Some have too wide a span of control. There is a blurring in the lines of accountability of some management teams. Restructuring proposals to address these issues have not been implemented.

79 Communications within the college are excellent. College management team agendas and minutes are available to staff. An annual calendar of meetings sets out issues to be addressed throughout the year. Managers ensure information is disseminated to all staff. The principal holds open forum sessions termly and issues bulletins on strategic issues.

80 Staff are efficiently deployed. There are good examples where lecturers and technicians have been effectively redeployed. The proportion of sessional lecturers employed by the college is high in some areas. The college is a member of a national benchmarking project on deployment of staff which provides efficiency comparators with other colleges.

81 There is a comprehensive strategic plan based on programme area plans and informed by an extensive needs analysis. The plan sets out strategic objectives which form the basis of the college operational plan. Staff participate in its production. However, the targets in the operational plan are neither quantitative nor prioritised. The college management team does not systematically monitor performance towards quantified targets at programme area level.

82 Student data provided by the college's management information system are unreliable. This serious weakness was given insufficient weight in self-assessment. The ISR data do not accurately reflect students' achievements and retention. Inspectors were unable to use the college's ISR data for 1996 and 1997 to make judgements on the college's self-assessment report. Staff lack confidence in the reliability of centrally held student data. Non-financial management reports based on ISR student data, such as those to the college management team and programme area managers, are not accompanied by an analytical commentary. The flaws in the data are not highlighted. These management reports are not used effectively by all managers.

83 Marketing is given a high priority and is effective. Staff from the college's marketing team have a clear understanding of their role in developing and promoting the college's activities. The marketing strategy is supported by a comprehensive marketing plan. As a result of successful marketing, full-time student numbers increased substantially between 1996-97 and 1997-98.

84 The college has good links with the city, county and district councils and with local schools and community groups. The relationship with Greater Nottingham TEC has become more productive. The college has improved the level of employers' involvement and the identification of local employers' training needs since the last inspection. There are now extensive and well-established links

Cross-college Provision

with industrial and public sector bodies. Successful franchising arrangements with Nottingham Trent University and the University of Central England are in place.

85 Inspectors agreed with the college that equal opportunities are effectively promoted. There is a comprehensive equal opportunity policy. Staff have a clear understanding of the implications of the policy. A working group meets termly and produces an annual report and action plan. However, there are no formal structures to ensure action plans are implemented and the policy reviewed.

86 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. Control over the college's finances has been exercised for the past year by the principal and the finance officer. This was necessitated by absence, retirement and other turnover of staff in the finance team. A qualified director of finance has been recruited as soon as practicable and will shortly be in post. The lack of continuity of staffing has meant that some improvements to the operation of the finance function have been postponed. It has not, however, prevented the production of monthly management accounts for the active consideration of both governors and managers. The management accounts are produced generally in good time. There are some limited omissions to their content.

87 As recognised in the self-assessment report, the college has operated effective procedures for achieving value for money; for example, staff utilisation surveys and the exercise of close control over costs and delivery of the major capital project. The college's finances are beginning to show the benefits of these strategies. At the time of inspection, the college and FEFC were reviewing the eligibility of some past collaborative provision. The possible financial effect of the outcome of this review is unknown. The college's internal and external auditors have not reported any significant weaknesses in internal control.

Conclusions

88 The college has built on earlier practice to develop its current self-assessment process. The inspection team found the self-assessment report a useful basis for planning the inspection. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements made in the report. However, some strengths were expressed too descriptively and some were over estimated. There was insufficient citing of evidence, particularly quantitative evidence resulting from systematic analysis. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified by inspectors, a few of which were significant. Where the overall judgements of inspectors differed from the college's they were mostly lower. One curriculum area grade awarded by inspectors was higher than the self-assessment grade as demonstrable progress had been made since the compilation of the self-assessment report. Two other curriculum area grades awarded by inspectors were lower. The cross-college grades awarded by the college in its self-assessment report were all validated by inspectors except for one which was awarded a grade lower.

89 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 1998)

Age	%
Under 16	1
16-18 years	12
19-24 years	16
25+ years	70
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1998)

Level of study	%
Foundation	62
Intermediate	18
Advanced	12
Higher education	1
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	7
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1998)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	192	1,547	8
Agriculture	5	3	0
Construction	0	291	1
Engineering	46	149	1
Business	196	2,194	11
Hotel and catering	70	346	2
Health and community care	188	7,737	35
Art and design	362	1,312	7
Humanities	254	7,239	33
Basic education	68	324	2
Total	1,381	21,142	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 17% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (September 1998)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	131	1	1	133
Supporting direct learning contact	56	25	4	85
Other support	123	21	10	154
Total	310	47	15	372

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1996	1997	1998
Income	£9,796,000	£9,193,000	£9,895,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1997; funded 1998	£15.45	£16.18	£15.95
Payroll as a proportion of income	60%	65%	59%
Achievement of funding target	108%	92%	99%
Diversity of income	15%	15%	14%
Operating surplus	£129,000	-£409,000	£552,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998)

Payroll – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1996-97 (1996 and 1997), college (1998)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 97/35 (1996), 98/43 (1997), college (1998)

FEFC Inspection Report 31/99

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council**

Website <http://www.fefc.ac.uk>

© FEFC March 1999