

Bilborough College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

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.

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

Curriculum areas

General science	10
Business and accounting	16
English and communications	21

Cross-college provision

Support for students	26
General resources	36
Quality assurance	43
Governance	52
Management	61
Conclusions	70

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 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	10	53	30	7	–
Cross-college provision	14	54	23	7	2

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*
Sample size: 104 college inspections

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 expected to complete the qualification that college 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 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

Bilborough College

East Midlands Region

Inspected March 2000

Bilborough College is a sixth form college located on the north west boundary of Nottingham. The college produced its fifth self-assessment report in preparation for inspection. The report is comprehensive and thorough. It has sections covering FEFC programme areas which are subdivided into self-assessments for individual courses. Each course has been graded. It was prepared using the headings in Council Circular 97/12, *Validating Self-assessment*. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses in both cross-college and curriculum areas.

The college offers courses in five FEFC programme areas. Work in three programme areas was inspected. Aspects of cross-college provision were also inspected. The college's primary focus is on GCE A level students aged 16 to 19. Full-time student enrolments have increased by 45% since 1996. Staff give students strong support. Teaching is effectively planned and effectively managed. There is a consistently good standard of teaching and learning. Of the lessons observed, 87% were good or outstanding. Students' attendance and progress are monitored closely. There is consistently high achievement on GCE A level programmes. There are good links with

parents. A strong commitment to quality assurance, rigorous self-assessment and thorough assessment of the quality of teaching have led to improvement. From 1997 to 1999, the GCE A level pass rate improved significantly from 85% to 94% and there was a 14% increase in the A to C pass rate. Progress has been made in remodelling the accommodation. Changes in the organisation of the college have been well managed and there has been effective communication and consultation. Links and liaison with other educational institutions is strong. Governance of the college is good. Governors have a clear vision of the future direction of the college. They monitor students' achievements rigorously. The college should improve: ways of promoting and extending individual learning; target-setting and action-planning for individual students; the inadequate analysis of value-added data; low achievement on some GCSE programmes; governors' procedures for monitoring the achievement of all strategic objectives; the underdeveloped links with the local community and with local industry; and some inadequate social areas and classrooms.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
General science	2	Support for students	2
Business and accounting	2	General resources	3
English and communications	2	Quality assurance	2
		Governance	2
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Bilborough College is a sixth form college located on the north west boundary of Nottingham, 3 miles from the city centre, 1 mile from the M1 and close to the Derbyshire border. The college is situated on a large open and spacious campus shared with a primary school and an 11 to 16 comprehensive school. The site of 24 acres includes extensive sports fields. The college opened in 1957 as a county grammar school and became a sixth form college as part of a reorganisation of secondary education in 1975.

2 Within the city of Nottingham and in the surrounding county areas there is intense competition between providers of post-16 education and training to recruit students aged 16 to 19. In Nottingham there are, in addition to the college, two general further education colleges and a tertiary college. Also in the city there are three denominational schools, two independent high schools and a city technology college, all of which have sixth forms. In the county area there are two sixth form centres and several 11 to 18 schools near Bilborough College. Within the city the participation rate at 16 and the level of educational achievement are low. The raising of both these issues has given education a very high profile in both the newly established unitary authority in Nottingham and the newly created Greater Nottingham Lifelong Learning Partnership. In the city the participation rate in further education at 16 is 62% compared with 71.4% in the county, and the achievement rate of five general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades A to C is even lower at 28.7% compared with a county figure of 43.4%, and a national average for England of 47.9%.

3 The college recruits from a wide area which includes the city of Nottingham, the county of Nottinghamshire and the south east region of Derbyshire. Students are enrolled from over 45 local schools. Student numbers

have increased by 45% over the last four years, with an enrolment of 906 full-time students in November 1999. Since the last inspection report, the enrolment profile has altered. Now almost all students, currently 97%, follow two-year advanced level programmes of study. The one-year course remains but it is a small element of the college offer, providing a foundation course for general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) rather than, as previously, a vocational/GCSE programme. Numbers on this course have reduced accordingly to 25 full-time equivalent students in 1999-2000. Approximately 12% of students come from minority ethnic groups, mostly from Asian communities. This represents a slight fall on the 1995-96 figure of 15%, but is still well above the Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) figure for Nottingham of 5.9%. The college operates a strategic partnership with Broxtowe College, Nottingham, a local college of further education. This partnership provides a growing programme of evening and weekend provision. In addition to the rise in student numbers, staff numbers and the balance between teaching and support staff have also changed. The teaching staff establishment has reduced from 50 full-time equivalents in 1995-96 to 44 full-time equivalents in November 1999. For support staff there has been an increase from 11.4 full-time equivalents to 22 full-time equivalents during the same period.

4 The college senior management team comprises the principal, two vice-principals, three directors, three heads of division and the staff development officer. The college is organised on the basis of three curriculum divisions and a range of cross-college posts of responsibility.

5 The college lays great stress on its size, its caring values and its sense of community. It also puts a special emphasis on its European programme and enjoys close relationships with colleges in France, Germany and Sweden.

Context

Of the college's students, 79% progressed to higher education in 1999, 58% of these students achieved their first choice university. The number of offers of places gained by students at Oxford and Cambridge doubled between 1998 and 1999.

6 The college mission states that it is to be 'a sixth form college dedicated to offering academic excellence in a supportive environment to serious and committed students.'

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 20 March 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns for 1997 and 1998. The college

submitted its own data on students' achievements for 1999. These data were checked against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Data on students' achievements were found to be reliable except for a few accounts courses. The inspection was carried out by seven inspectors working for a total of 30 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 31 lessons, examined students' work and evaluated college documentation. Meetings were held with governors, managers, other college staff and students.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 87% were judged to be good or outstanding which is substantially above the 71% for all lessons observed in sixth form colleges during 1998-99; 3% were less than satisfactory which is the same profile as for all lessons observed in sixth form colleges in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	14	11	3	0	0	28
GCSE	1	1	0	1	0	3
Total (No)	15	12	3	1	0	31
Total (%)	48	39	10	3	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

Source for national average: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report*

Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Bilborough College	14.8	86
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

Source for national average: Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1998-99: Chief inspector's annual report

Curriculum Areas

General Science

Grade 2

10 The college produced separate, comprehensive self-assessment reports for biology, chemistry, physics and GCSE science. Inspectors agreed with most of the college's judgements in the reports.

Key strengths

- effective planning and management of teaching and learning
- consistently high standard of teaching
- high achievement on GCE A level programmes
- systematic monitoring of students' progress

Weaknesses

- low achievement on GCSE programmes
- low retention for GCE A level chemistry
- inadequate resources to support independent learning

11 The college offers modular GCE A levels and advanced supplementary (AS) in biology, chemistry and physics and GCSE in science. Enrolments in GCE A level sciences have increased by over 50% over the last three years. The modular courses offer students some flexibility and choice in the level and timing of their study of science modules. Courses are well organised and well planned. They are systematically reviewed against achievements. For example, GCSE science has been restructured to address poor achievement.

12 Teaching and learning is of a consistently high standard as identified in the self-assessment report. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. Students are committed to their studies and complimentary about the quality of teaching and the support which teachers provide. Attendance at lessons is good and students are punctual.

Lessons are well planned and include an appropriate variety of approaches to learning. Students are clear about the content of each lesson. Targeted questions are used effectively by teachers and students respond well. Students carry out practical work competently and observe safe working practices. In a biology lesson on food webs students worked in small groups to identify organisms in pond water. The results from the group work together with other information about feeding habits were then used to construct food webs. All students were involved and there was lively discussion. In a physics lesson students were encouraged to use computer simulations to model the predicted outcomes of waveform analysis. However, in most lessons the computers available in the classroom were not used to promote students' learning. Some students' files were poorly organised. Students' work is set and marked regularly.

13 Twice weekly informal support sessions for subjects are well used by students when module examinations are imminent. At other times attendance at these individual support sessions is low. Additional language support lessons for English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language are available for the few students who require such help. However, there is no specific support available for them in science lessons which prevents them taking full advantage of the provision. Students make visits to industry and higher education institutions. A small number of students have undertaken work experience. A student considering progression to a medical degree undertook workshadowing in a hospital. Individual students' target minimum grades are used systematically to review their final-year GCE A level progress. Progress of first-year GCE A level and GCSE students is also monitored carefully.

14 Laboratories are well maintained. They contain interesting and relevant subject displays which stimulate students' learning. The

Curriculum Areas

laboratories have been modified to provide accommodation suitable for theory lessons and group work. However, inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that further improvement is required. Most handouts and course materials are of high quality. All students are provided with textbooks. The bookstock and small range of audiovisual resources in the library are inadequate to effectively support student learning. The college acknowledges the need to further develop independent learning strategies.

15 Inspectors agreed with the college that pass rates for GCE A level biology, chemistry and physics exceed national benchmarks and students consistently achieve above sector averages for sixth form colleges for A to C grades. However, the retention rate on GCE A level chemistry has fallen to below the average for sixth form colleges. This weakness

was not identified in the self-assessment report. There is a college policy of entering students for GCE AS accreditation if at the end of their modular GCE A level programme they have not gained a full GCE A level. This helps some students to achieve a qualification and gain GCE A level points. However, in college records, such students are not shown as retained, thus reducing GCE A level retention statistics. The number of students entered for GCE AS qualifications is low. Pass rates on GCE AS programmes in 1999 are generally below sector averages for sixth form colleges. Reliable data are not available for GCE AS achievements and retention for 1997 and 1998. Pass rates on GCSE programmes over the past three years are low and the college has taken appropriate action to address this weakness. Students' assessed work is of an appropriate standard. There is good progression to higher education.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in general science, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE sciences (single, double and biology, grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	57	53	44
		Retention (%)	79	85	89
		Achievement (%)	44	34	46
GCE A level biology	3	Number of starters	54	80	101
		Retention (%)	80	73	78
		Achievement (%)	88	95	93
GCE A level chemistry	3	Number of starters	45	56	64
		Retention (%)	84	79	63
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
GCE A level physics	3	Number of starters	29	50	42
		Retention (%)	83	78	76
		Achievement (%)	100	74	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Curriculum Areas

Business and Accounting

Grade 2

16 Inspection covered GCSE and GCE A level courses in business studies and accounts. Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report but found one strength had been understated. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the consistently good standard of teaching and learning
- a good range of effective learning experiences
- outstanding pass rates on GCE A/AS level business studies
- good support for individual students
- good subject display materials in classrooms

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates for GCSE business studies
- insufficient learning resources
- poor links with business organisations

17 Inspectors agreed with the college assessment that there is a consistently good standard of teaching and learning. Teachers use a wide range of effective learning strategies. Teachers and students work very well together. There is a good-humoured, friendly atmosphere in lessons. Students are encouraged to develop and express their views and contribute to formulating arguments in discussions. In some instances, teachers allowed insufficient time for students to reflect before responding to questions. In a minority of lessons some students were unresponsive. Group work is well managed. Students are given clearly specified tasks and effective use is made of the ideas which they put forward. In one GCE A level business studies lesson, groups of

students were asked to discuss the stage reached by a list of products in the marketing product life cycle. The ideas put forward were used effectively by the teacher to link theory to practice. Most lessons are conducted at an appropriate pace. They are effectively planned to meet the learning needs of individual students. Teachers make good use of examples from the local and regional economy to illustrate topics. Overhead projectors are often used effectively. However, in some lessons students had insufficient time allocated to complete the tasks set and teachers did not check on the quality of students' notes. These weaknesses were not identified by self-assessment.

18 Courses are well planned and effectively managed, as was noted by the college. There is strong teamwork amongst teachers. Students receive helpful course handbooks clearly outlining what the courses require of them. Teachers give sound support to individual students through effective reviews of their progress and by their willingness to offer advice whenever it is required. On the GCE AS accounts course, a weekly lunchtime 'drop-in' support lesson is well attended by students. Students appreciate the help they receive. Their work is marked carefully as indicated in the self-assessment report. Constructive written comments assist students to improve their understanding. The use of value-added data for setting individual grade targets for students for their assignments and examinations is underdeveloped. Links with businesses are poor. There is only one planned visit to a business organisation for students during the GCE A level business studies course, and no visiting speaker programme to enliven and supplement teaching. Business studies students are not routinely involved in the Young Enterprise scheme.

19 Teachers are appropriately qualified and undertake staff development regularly. Display material is used well in the three pleasant

Curriculum Areas

temporary classrooms to establish a strong curriculum area identity and to stimulate learning. All students are issued with appropriate textbooks. The self-assessment report acknowledges that the use of information technology (IT) on the GCE AS accounts course is underdeveloped. Accounting software is not used. The library has an inadequate stock of books, journals, videos and CD-ROMs and there are insufficient learning resources. There are insufficient videos for use in lessons. Although students use the Internet to develop research skills and gather material for assignments, there are few relevant Internet directories available to assist students. These weaknesses in resources were not identified by the college.

20 Students are interested in and enjoy the subjects they study. They put considerable effort into their written work. GCE A level business studies students progressively develop

good skills in problem-solving and essay and report writing. These strengths were understated in the self-assessment report. Student achievement rates on most courses are at or above national averages for sixth form colleges. On the GCE A level business course, achievement for 1997, 1998 and 1999 is outstanding at 100%. The pass rate on the GCE A level accounts for 1999 was above the national average. In 1998 and 1999 pass rates on the GCE AS business course improved to significantly above the national average. The college acknowledges that pass rates on GCSE business studies are poor. Insufficient attention is paid to national benchmarks in the setting of achievement targets. Most students studying at advanced level hope to progress to university. In 1999 over 80% of students were successful in obtaining places to study on business-related courses.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in business and accounting, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE business (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	27	30	28
		Retention (%)	78	80	93
		Achievement (%)	52	42	30
GCE AS accounts	3	Number of starters	+	19	19
		Retention (%)	+	79	89
		Achievement (%)	+	60	65
GCE AS business	3	Number of starters	12	11	16
		Retention (%)	100	82	63
		Achievement (%)	91	89	100
GCE A level accounts	3	Number of starters	*	*	18
		Retention (%)	*	*	78
		Achievement (%)	*	*	93
GCE A level business	3	Number of starters	116	123	98
		Retention (%)	83	69	79
		Achievement (%)	91	100	100

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

*data unreliable

+course did not run

Curriculum Areas

English and Communications

Grade 2

21 Inspection covered GCE A level and GCSE courses. Inspectors endorsed the strengths and weaknesses which were identified in the self-assessment report but in some cases gave them a different emphasis.

Key strengths

- excellent course management and teamwork
- students clear about the plans, objectives and expectations for courses
- varied, purposeful and effective teaching
- high standards of students' work in lessons
- good rates of attendance, retention and achievement
- well-managed and effectively standardised assessments

Weaknesses

- insufficient promotion and development of individual learning
- uneven practice in giving feedback on written work

22 GCE A level courses are provided in English literature, English language and communication studies. There is a one-year GCSE English language course. Enrolment on GCE A level courses is good. There is excellent course management and teamwork. Comprehensive schemes of work, which are reviewed and updated regularly, include full syllabus and assessment requirements, handbooks, resource references and suggestions for teaching the courses. Teachers have developed an array of helpful resource booklets and study guides. Students are set an agreed 'target minimum grade' early in the course. At regular intervals their progress is evaluated and targets reviewed. One course uses an electronic

student record which brings together an overview of targets, performance information and review summaries on a single printout. The system is popular with students. Curriculum teams monitor rates of retention and achievement closely. They set appropriate targets for courses and take effective action when required, a strength recognised by self-assessment. Students' perceptions and suggestions are valued and acted upon. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report which noted the need for more systematic value-added analysis to increase the rigour of the arrangements for course review.

23 A partnership between student and teacher begins at induction with a letter of introduction from student to teacher and continues throughout the course. Students are aware of course plans, objectives and requirements. Lesson objectives and expectations are routinely shared. Students benefit from appropriately varied, purposeful and effective teaching as was identified in the self-assessment report. Lessons combine appropriate levels of challenge and support. In a second-year communication studies group the teacher enabled students to tackle a difficult topic by dividing it into manageable sections. Small groups were given clear guidance and each prepared and reported on one section. All students were fully engaged in the task. They acquired a good understanding of the topic and made confident, articulate oral summaries. Students learn to pay close attention to texts. They benefit from the knowledge and enthusiasm of teachers who give clear explanations. Teachers offer support both formally and informally within and outside lessons. However, the development of independent learning skills receives insufficient attention during lessons; teachers provide too few ways of promoting and extending individual learning skills when students are working on their own. Insufficient attention is given to ensuring the quality of students' understanding. Tasks are generally prescriptive and there are insufficient opportunities for students to respond

Curriculum Areas

at different levels according to their ability. Students' records of what they are learning are often untidy and incomplete. Students give close attention to formal coursework and projects and their work is frequently of a high standard. The use of IT as an integral part of learning and teaching is steadily developing; the self-assessment report recognises the need to extend its use. Students' learning is enhanced through study days and a good range of opportunities to experience film, theatre and poetry.

24 Teachers make effective use of the accommodation. All rooms are equipped with video and overhead projector facilities. Good wall displays stimulate and support learning. However, some rooms are cramped and inhibit the use of certain teaching methods. Inspectors found that the strength claimed in the self-assessment for the quality of course booklets and study guides had been overstated. Library bookstock is adequate. The identification and use of suitable CD-ROM and web-based resources is developing.

25 There are good rates of attendance, retention and achievement. The standard of

students' work in lessons is high. Students are well motivated, work well together, and enjoy their studies even when the work is difficult or unfamiliar. Students' oral work is generally good and often outstanding, frequently demonstrating the articulate expression of analytical, critical and speculative thought. These qualities are often reflected in formal coursework, but are less evident in routine written work. There is a policy for marking and giving feedback on written work in a constructive and helpful manner but it is implemented unevenly. Written feedback generally lacks sufficient clarity to help students to improve. At GCSE level there is a high rate of retention and students achieve good examination results. Both rates of retention and achievement are well above national benchmarks. In GCE A level communication studies pass rates and the attainment of high grades significantly exceed national averages for sixth form colleges. In GCE A level literature retention is very good and the pass rate is consistently above benchmarks. Pass rates in GCE A level English language have declined to around the national average.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and communications, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language (grade C or above)	2	Number of starters	99	57	54
		Retention (%)	84	98	96
		Achievement (%)	49	60	71
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	111	109	137
		Retention (%)	82	83	93
		Achievement (%)	98	94	96
GCE A level English language	3	Number of starters	51	61	62
		Retention (%)	86	75	82
		Achievement (%)	95	89	88
GCE A level communication studies	3	Number of starters	65	86	62
		Retention (%)	86	71	84
		Achievement (%)	81	92	93

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

26 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- strong support for students from staff
- thorough initial guidance and induction
- close monitoring and follow up of students' attendance and progress
- well-managed and effective higher education progression
- good links with parents

Weaknesses

- inconsistent approach to individual student target-setting and action-planning
- underdeveloped personal support systems
- inadequate numeracy support

27 Inspectors agreed with the college that all aspects of college life are permeated by the supportive and caring attitudes of staff. There is a purposeful and happy atmosphere throughout the college. Students and parents speak emphatically and consistently about the extent and quality of support. Both teaching and support staff know the students well.

28 There are well-documented, effective procedures for pre-entry guidance. Liaison with local schools is well established and open days and evenings are well attended. Of students interviewed, 98% are offered places subject to the minimum entry requirement of five GCSEs at grade C. In late June, during the first part of their comprehensive induction, students meet their personal tutor, discuss their programme of study and attend 'taster classes' in their chosen subjects. Students find the transition from school to college smooth and non-threatening.

There are effective systems in place to enable transfer between subjects.

29 The attendance rate is above the sixth form college benchmark and improving. Registers are reviewed monthly and tutors notified of any concerns about student absences. Students understand the clear procedures for following up these concerns. Daily registration provides opportunities for attendance checks and sharing information.

30 Much of the monitoring of students' progress is undertaken informally. Personal tutors formally review progress twice a year in preparation for reports to parents. Subject reports contribute to the reviews. Target-setting takes place within subject areas. Personal tutors are not informed of these targets. There are differing practices across the college in the timing, setting and recording of targets. This uneven approach to individual student target-setting and action-planning was identified by the college.

31 Learning support for students has improved since the last inspection. All students take an initial diagnostic assessment. Specialist staff arrange appropriate additional support where it is found to be necessary. Students who have been professionally assessed as being dyslexic receive weekly one-to-one support from a qualified and experienced tutor. English language support sessions are provided for students for whom English is their second language. However, there is little specialist support in lessons for this group of students. This means that those with an insufficient command of English are at a disadvantage in lessons. They do not understand all of the work but teachers are not always sure what has been missed. Numeracy support is inadequate. The initial diagnostic assessment does not highlight inadequate levels of numeracy and no general numeracy support is provided. This weakness was not identified. Weekly informal support sessions in all subjects enable good one-to-one and small group support to be provided for

Cross-college Provision

students at all ability levels. Students appreciate these opportunities. Individual support for students with learning disabilities is provided according to need. The effectiveness of learning support is not monitored systematically.

32 Progression to higher education is well managed. Students follow a comprehensive programme which prepares them for making an application. Each application is tracked carefully. Students are able to monitor the progress of their application through weekly published progress reports. The college has compacts with five regional universities. In 1999, 79% of leavers entered higher education courses. The increasing number of applicants for Oxford and Cambridge are identified early and receive additional wide-ranging support. Careers education and guidance for advanced level students who are not applying to university is not structured as effectively. Strong links with the careers service result in good support for students on GCSE programmes.

33 Links between home and the college are extensive. Parents are pleased with the level of communication. A meeting with the personal tutor is arranged early in the first term and followed by regular progress reports and invitations to specific events. Subsidised home to college transport is provided.

34 Welfare and counselling support are not promoted sufficiently. Many students are unaware of the financial support available and do not know that a nurse visits the college regularly to give advice. Students are unaware of how to use the professional counselling services. Tutor guidelines state that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in cases of bullying, disability or severe depression. There is no suitable accommodation for discreet and sensitive tutor/student discussions. These underdeveloped student support systems were not identified as a weakness by self-assessment. The tutorial programme is run during the first year by key skills tutors. There is no second-

year tutorial programme outside individual personal tutorials.

35 Students participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities including sports activities, theatrical, musical and social events. An active students' executive committee organises charity fund-raising events regularly and co-ordinates many social and other activities. Students are represented on the corporation. Popular short courses, for example Italian, stage lighting and counselling skills, enrich the curriculum. Student exchange visits with France, Germany and Sweden are well established as part of the extensive European programme.

General Resources

Grade 3

36 Inspectors agreed with many strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- considerable progress in remodelling the accommodation
- a well-managed and cost-effective maintenance programme
- a well-used library
- an effective health and safety strategy

Weaknesses

- some inadequate social areas of some poor classrooms
- insufficient library books to meet some curriculum needs
- inadequate use of space utilisation data in accommodation planning
- poor access for students with restricted mobility

Cross-college Provision

37 Since the last inspection considerable progress has been made with the remodelling and refurbishment of some accommodation. This work has been effectively managed within tight financial constraints as was identified in the self-assessment. Work completed includes: extensively refurbished IT accommodation; improvements to arts, science, photography and music rooms; and improvements to the canteen and social areas. Good temporary classrooms have replaced some unsuitable classrooms. More use of appropriately qualified site managers has improved the efficiency of the maintenance programme. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. However, the college recognises that the design of its existing buildings, especially in the context of increasing student numbers, still leaves accommodation difficulties. These include: the size of some teaching rooms; inadequate student social areas; the crowded canteen; and some cramped offices. In spite of work already undertaken, access for students with restricted mobility remains poor, as identified in the self-assessment report.

38 Accommodation for teaching is generally well organised within the constraints of the buildings. Classrooms, staff offices and most specialist facilities are grouped together and a subject identity is created through displays of students' work. Corridors also have attractive displays. All general teaching rooms are well equipped with appropriate, well-maintained audio and visual teaching aids. The college sports facilities are used for a range of college activities and by the local community. Other facilities are used off-campus to meet teaching and activities requirements.

39 As is noted in the self-assessment report the college accommodation strategy clearly specifies key developments that are required to address the major accommodation issues. The strategy also takes account of local community needs. The space utilisation of the college has not been fully analysed since 1997. Utilisation

data have not been used in drawing up the accommodation strategy, including the latest update. The recent curriculum 2000 review has not used current data on space utilisation. These weaknesses in planning were not identified in the self-assessment report. However, by the time of the inspection utilisation data were available and being used in planning new campus facilities. Good progress is being made on this task.

40 The library has been redeveloped and extended. It now contains better access to IT facilities, including the Internet, and an electronic library with a library catalogue available across the network. Students using the electronic facilities are helped by a member of the library staff. The college has joined an education loan service and has on loan from a central library some 400 books that can be exchanged at any time. These improved facilities for research and private study have attracted an increased number of students to the library. Students find library staff helpful. These many strengths in library provision were not specifically identified by self-assessment. There is a small collection of 32 CD-ROMs available but no central list of videos and no facilities for individual students to view them except in classrooms. While there is an acceptable level of textbooks in the college, the provision of library books in some subjects is inadequate.

41 Computing facilities are satisfactory. The general IT facilities have benefited from a significant annual investment over the last three years. The network carrying the college intranet now reaches most areas of the college. This intranet is at an early stage of development as a learning facility. All computers used by students are available during normal college hours when they are not being used in lessons. Workstations have appropriate modern software and the number available to students for individual study is generally sufficient to meet demand. Internet access, currently available on 25

Cross-college Provision

machines, is shortly to be extended to the whole-college network.

42 Health and safety is given a high priority and is monitored by the corporation. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. A consultant carries out an annual audit. All priority items are dealt with promptly. A health and safety committee drawn from staff across the college meets regularly and is effective. An annual programme of safety checks is carried out efficiently by college technicians and the site manager. A risk assessment is completed annually by course teams. Building evacuation procedures are practised regularly and the results evaluated. Many staff have first-aid qualifications and are on call in the college according to a duty roster.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

43 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but concluded that some strengths had been understated. By the time of the inspection, progress had been made in overcoming some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a strong commitment to quality assurance
- rigorous arrangements for self-assessment leading to improvement
- thorough assessment of the standard of teaching
- effective processes for gaining and analysing students' views
- well-planned and effective staff development

Weaknesses

- insufficiently comprehensive and effective analysis of value-added data

- underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements in some cross-college services
- shortcomings in the college charter

44 Since the last inspection the college has made significant progress in establishing coherent and effective quality assurance procedures. A strong commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in the strategic plan. The quality assurance steering group, led by a senior manager, has played a key role in developing and implementing appropriate arrangements. The membership both of this group and a quality assurance committee linked to it ensures the involvement of curriculum and support staff. The corporation's role in reviewing college performance has been strengthened by the replacement of the academic board by the corporation standards committee. Inspectors agreed that there is an uneven implementation of quality arrangements across the non-teaching areas of the college. Performance indicators and service standards have been introduced in some areas. There has been little monitoring of performance against these standards.

45 Inspectors agreed that the college has established a thorough and effective system for quality assurance. There is a coherent annual cycle and checklist of quality assurance activities which include curriculum reviews three times during the year and reports on recruitment and students' examination performance against college targets. The mid-year and end-of-year curriculum reviews monitor progress against self-assessment action plans.

46 Good use is made of performance indicators and targets to assess college performance as has been identified by the college. Targets for rates of retention and achievement at subject level have been used to review performance since 1998. Curriculum areas use national benchmarking data

Cross-college Provision

effectively for making comparisons with their own performance. Achievement rates are consistently high in most subjects. In the period 1996 to 1999, the GCE A level pass rate improved significantly from 85% to 94%. In the same period there was a 14% increase in the achievement of the higher grades of A to C.

47 Self-assessment identified the need for a comprehensive and effective system for measuring the value added to students' achievements. Inspectors agreed with this weakness. The use of college internal data has enabled some comparisons to be made between students' grades in GCE A level examinations and grades predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. Similar comparisons have not been consistently made in the context of subject or whole-college performance.

48 Staff at all levels were involved in the production of the fifth annual self-assessment report. It is comprehensive and thorough. Strengths and weaknesses are stated clearly and most are well supported by relevant evidence. Some self-assessment reports of cross-college and support services contain insufficient evidence to support judgements. Extensive use has been made of external consultants in developing self-assessment procedures and in assessing their validity. The quality assurance steering group scrutinised the self-assessment report carefully. Inspectors found much evidence of effective action resulting from self-assessment. A sound and well-documented programme of lesson observations contributes to inform self-assessment and professional review. All teachers have been trained in classroom observation. The college's profile of lesson observations was similar to that of the inspection team. The college judged 90% of lessons, and inspectors 87%, as good or outstanding.

49 There are effective procedures for obtaining and analysing students' views. Students' perception surveys are conducted

three times each year and cover standards of teaching and learning and of the college services. Good use is made of focus groups to obtain further feedback from students and parents. A research and development officer analyses the responses and produces detailed reports. Improvements have been made in response to students' and parents' comments. Inspectors considered that the college had underestimated this strength.

50 The previous inspection report identified that commitments in the college charter were not sufficiently challenging. The current charter is clearly written and widely publicised but contains few measurable standards of service; no targets for improvement have been set. The college has recognised these deficiencies and is taking steps to identify appropriate charter standards and performance indicators. There are clear procedures for considering complaints. These are contained in the student handbook. The few complaints received are dealt with thoroughly. However, there is no annual report to the corporation on complaints that have been received.

51 Staff development is well planned and effective. Clear priorities for staff development are linked to strategic objectives. Arrangements for professional review are well used to identify targets and the training requirements for staff. Targets are monitored and contribute to strategic planning. There have been delays in extending the professional review system to non-teaching staff although their training needs have been identified through discussion with line managers. Staff development activity is regularly reported to the quality assurance committee and to the corporation. The college has recognised the need for a more effective evaluation of staff development activity. There are clear and appropriate arrangements for the induction of new staff.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 2

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

Key strengths

- the rigorous monitoring of students' achievements
- the effective clerking arrangements
- the comprehensive arrangements for induction and training
- the clear vision of governors of the future direction of the college

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped procedures for monitoring achievement of all strategic objectives
- under-representation of governors from some areas

53 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. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

54 Governors have a clear vision of the future direction of the college, as was identified in the self-assessment report. Governors have been closely involved in considering a number of options for the future of the college. The strategic partnership with Broxtowe College, Nottingham has enabled the college to maintain an independent existence and to play a wider role in the community. Governors have a good understanding of further education matters and issues specific to the local community.

Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment that the procedures to monitor the college's

achievement of strategic objectives, particularly for academic areas, are underdeveloped. There is no annual operating plan against which strategic objectives can be monitored. Targets are set and reviewed regularly only for some strategic objectives. Attendance at both corporation and committee meetings is satisfactory. No attendance targets have been set for governors but attendance levels are reported annually to the corporation.

55 The corporation has taken appropriate steps to implement the recent amendments to the instrument and articles of government. The membership of the corporation has been increased to 17 and includes two staff governors, two student governors and a parent governor. The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure through which to conduct much of its business. Terms of reference, which include membership, quoracy, clerking and reporting arrangements, have been approved for each committee. The corporation has retained the responsibilities that are required by the instrument and articles of government.

56 Governors have established a business group to examine: the cycle of governance; clerking arrangements; governor training; and the relationship between governance and management. The search committee has actively sought nominations for governor appointments from local community groups and public bodies. Advertising has also been used. The college intends to recruit a governor from the minority ethnic community and also to appoint a governor with estates experience. The search committee has not produced a skills matrix so that it can compare the profile of existing skills against an ideal profile. The employment policy and finance committee membership does not include an accountant but does have members with some financial experience.

57 Inspectors agreed with the college that clerking arrangements are good, as identified in

Cross-college Provision

the self-assessment report. The clerk's duties are appropriately detailed. The clerk is independent of the college and gives the corporation sound advice on matters of compliance with the instrument and articles of government. Agenda items for corporation meetings are grouped under the board's statutory responsibilities. The experience and knowledge of the clerk are highly valued by governors. Governors monitor the financial position of the college at meetings of the employment, policy and finance committee and in full corporation meetings. Until recently, financial reports to governors have not been prepared on a full accruals basis and did not include a forecast year-end income and expenditure out-turn. A range of accounting ratios that are compared with a target performance have recently been included in the reports. They do not include a projected cashflow for the next 12 months.

58 The corporation rigorously monitors the academic performance of students, a strength identified by the college. Governors receive regular reports from the principal and other senior staff on academic matters. These include reports on rates of student attendance, retention, and achievement together with an accompanying analysis. A standards committee has recently been established by the board to monitor academic standards. It undertakes strategic planning. Where necessary, external auditors for academic performance are employed in a manner similar to financial auditors.

59 The college has developed an induction process for new governors which covers issues such as statutory powers, finance and openness. New members receive a governor handbook and a documentation pack and their training needs are identified for inclusion in a training plan for governors which is developed by the search committee. Training events take place for the whole corporation three times a year. An action plan is established after each training event.

The clerk regularly attends relevant training events.

60 Appropriate arrangements are in place for the openness of governance. There is a register of interests for governors and senior staff. Governors make annual declarations about their eligibility for the position of governor. The corporation has approved policies on access to information and on 'whistleblowing'. A code of conduct and code of ethics have been adopted and recently updated. The minutes of corporation and committee meetings are available to the public on request being made to the clerk but are not made available in the college library.

Management

Grade 2

61 Inspectors generally agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college.

Key strengths

- well-managed changes in the organisation of the college
- effective communication and consultation
- strong solvency indicators
- efficient management of the curriculum
- strong links and liaison with other educational institutions
- the promotion of equal opportunities through staff development and classroom observation

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped links with the local community and industry
- some unsatisfactory aspects of financial reporting

Cross-college Provision

62 The management structure has been improved since the last inspection. The changes have been well managed. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and the mission of the college. The senior management team is a key committee. It provides a focus for information and exchange of views between senior management and staff.

63 The 1997 to 2000 strategic plan contains a mission statement and a vision statement. The mission statement focuses on the college as sixth form college with an emphasis on academic excellence. The vision statement envisages a wider role in providing courses for the local community and for employers, and a significant upgrading and remodelling of the campus. The college management has focused on establishing the policies, systems and procedures to make the college a centre of academic excellence. As the self-assessment notes, targets have been developed and actively promoted to improve the academic, operational, and financial performance of the college. Some other aspects of the vision statement have been achieved. For example, a strategic partnership agreement has resulted in Broxtowe College, Nottingham using Bilborough College's premises to provide some courses for the local community in the evenings and on Saturdays. The college remains highly dependent on FEFC income.

64 There are good levels of communication within the college, as noted in the self-assessment. Staff are well informed on issues facing the college and feel that their views are considered. Regular bulletins and staff meetings allow a range of issues to be presented to staff. Daily briefings keep staff in touch with relevant and topical news items. Senior staff attend division meetings to ensure that staff are informed of issues and to help to maintain good standards of communication. A comprehensive calendar identifies the range of tasks to be undertaken throughout the academic year.

65 Inspectors agreed with the college that efficient use is made of curriculum resources.

Enrolments have increased by 45% since 1996. Staff teach to the required number of hours. Planning to achieve efficient sizes for teaching groups commences well ahead of the start of the next academic year. Staff have been retrained to meet changing curriculum needs. A system of staff cover ensures that staff absences are covered effectively on a daily basis. Course planning is thorough. The introduction of curriculum 2000 is supported by detailed financial and curriculum modelling. A comprehensive range of management information reports aids the effective management of students and resources.

66 There are strong links with local schools. Specific activities undertaken with schools include providing extra GCSE teaching for pupils from a school in an education action zone. The college has 'compact' arrangements with five local universities. The college is part of a European consortium with colleges in France, Germany and Sweden. Principals and senior staff meet annually to plan the European programme. There are links with a local community committee and with employers but, as the college recognises, links with the community and local industry need to be strengthened further in order to match the vision statement. Market research includes regular updates and analyses of recruitment from local schools. Information on rates of student achievement and progression is provided by the careers service.

67 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The college has achieved a strong financial position based on the level of reserves and cash days in hand. This financial position is predicted to continue in the latest three-year financial forecast. Budgetary control procedures are documented in financial regulations and procedures. Pay budgets are controlled centrally. An appropriately qualified vice-principal for finance and resources is now in post following a period

Cross-college Provision

of 18 months without a substantive appointment of head of finance. During this period part-time cover was obtained for the post. The college acknowledges that the financial information provided for managers and governors did not comply with some generally accepted accounting principles. The annual estimates for 1999-2000 contained accounting errors that provided an inaccurate forecast for the financial year. The head of finance has revised the forecast and provided a more realistic budget. Improvements have also been made to the management accounts but there remains scope for further improvement to accord with generally accepted practice.

68 The college policy on equality of opportunity is incorporated into a number of key college documents but is not detailed in the prospectus. Equal opportunities are actively promoted through staff development and lesson observation, as noted in the self-assessment. A steering group and committee systematically monitor and review the implementation of the policy and report to the senior management team. Effective action has been taken in cases of complaint or following incidents linked to equal opportunities.

69 The college broadly fulfils the requirements of sections 44 and 45 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*. Christian prayers are organised twice weekly and Muslim prayers daily.

Conclusions

70 The college produced its fifth self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection. The report was comprehensive, detailed and thorough. It covered all curriculum areas course by course, awarding separate grades to each. The inspection team found that the self-assessment report was a useful basis for planning and carrying out the inspection. There was close correlation between the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college and those

identified by inspectors. While there were some variations between course gradings and inspectorate gradings for programme area groupings, there was a close match in overall judgements. Inspectors agreed with all the cross-college grades awarded by the college.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (November 1999)

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

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation)	0
Level 2 (intermediate)	3
Level 3 (advanced)	97
Level 4/5 (higher)	0
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (November 1999)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	335	2	37
Business	147	1	16
Hotel and catering	20	1	2
Art and design	76	0	8
Humanities	328	3	37
Total	906	7	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 24% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	42	2	0	44
Supporting direct learning contact	6	1	0	7
Other support	13	2	0	15
Total	61	5	0	66

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£2,291,000	£2,287,000	£2,541,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£21.05	£18.78	£17.92
Payroll as a proportion of income	71%	72%	67%
Achievement of funding target	114%	110%	101%
Diversity of income	5%	7%	5%
Operating surplus	-£10,000	-£118,000	£12,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999)

Payroll – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1997 and 1998), college (1999)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 98/43 (1997), 00/10 (1998), college (1999)

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	179	379	474	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	95	97	97	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	96	0	22	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Number of starters	655	563	328	9	7	n/a
	Retention (%)	85	83	84	89	86	n/a
	Achievement (%)	88	95	92	50	100	n/a
3	Number of starters	1,398	1,570	1,463	36	20	5
	Retention (%)	76	73	81	53	75	100
	Achievement (%)	87	91	93	69	75	75
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	177	209	129	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	100	100	100	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	94	95	100	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	366	217	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Retention (%)	91	90	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Achievement (%)	88	52	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: college
n/a not applicable

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