

Bolton College

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

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.

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

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

Bolton College

North West Region

Inspected April 2000

Bolton College is a medium-sized FE college in the borough of Bolton, Greater Manchester, from which it recruits most of its students. It provides courses, mainly in hospitality and catering, at centres throughout England. The self-assessment report was the college's third. The self-assessment process involved staff at all levels. It drew on the outcomes of a well-established programme of lesson observations. Although they agreed with many of the judgements in the report, inspectors considered the significance of weaknesses in student achievements had been underestimated and the quality of teaching and learning overestimated. Inspectors agreed with four of the curriculum grades awarded by the college but considered the remaining five curriculum grades and all the cross-college grades to be overgenerous.

In the six months before inspection, the college experienced a period of instability. The principal went on long-term sick leave, there had been a number of redundancies, the SMT team had been restructured and the college had identified severe financial difficulties. An acting principal was seconded from another college in December 1999. Several improvements have recently been made

but these have not yet affected the quality of courses. The college offers courses in all 10 of the FEFC's programme areas. Provision was inspected in seven of these and in cross-college basic skills. A broad range of courses provides good opportunities for progression in most areas and most are well planned. There is good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The college has significantly increased the computers available to students. Communications have improved lately. There are beneficial links with external partners. Accommodation has improved, but the college remains highly inefficient in its use of space. Declining and poor retention rates are widespread and pass rates on most courses are significantly lower than the national average. The college has consistently failed to meet its recruitment targets. The college should: improve the quality of teaching and learning; raise retention and achievement rates; provide appropriate tutorial support for all students and basic skills support for those who need it; improve the effectiveness of quality assurance and the rigour of self-assessment; redress the extensive weaknesses in governance; improve financial management and controls; and develop the use of management information to inform planning and review.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics, computing and IT	3	Support for students	4
Engineering	3	General resources	3
Business studies	4	Quality assurance	4
Business administration	3	Governance	5
Hospitality and catering	4	Management	4
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	4		
English and social sciences	3		
Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2		
Basic skills	4		

The College and its Mission

1 Bolton College is located on two sites, the main campus at Manchester Road in the centre of Bolton and the smaller Horwich campus, about 6 miles outside the town. The vocational character of Bolton College was established in April 1990 when the local education authority (LEA) withdrew community education from the college's range of provision to form a separate community education service. Since then Bolton College has been the only general further education college in the borough. Other elements of the post-16 education provision in the borough include Bolton Sixth Form College and sixth forms in six local schools. In addition, there are three large general further education colleges and five sixth form colleges in adjacent boroughs.

2 Although unemployment is 4.5% compared with the national average of 4.8%, average earnings in Bolton are below both the United Kingdom and the regional average. The highest proportions of jobs are in hospitality and catering (26.0%) and manufacturing and distribution (23.5%). In 1999, participation rates for school-leavers in full-time education were below the national average at 67.9%. Achievements for school-leavers at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grade C or above averaged 43.2% compared with the national average of 47.9%. The proportion leaving without any formal qualifications was higher than the national figure. Achievement of the national learning targets in the borough is disappointing, particularly at level 1 where Bolton's actual rate is 35% compared with the current national rate of 45% and the target of 50%.

3 The college offers provision in all 10 of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas. In 1998-99, the college franchised provision for the first time and enrolled 8,018 students on this provision. The number of students enrolled on direct provision

was 8,303. Of these, 1,504 were full-time students and 6,799 part-time students. The proportion of students of minority ethnic origin was the same as that of residents of Bolton at 8%. Some 33% of students were recruited from deprived areas of the borough.

4 Bolton College has extensive links with industry, both locally and nationally. It has its own managing agency which works closely with the Bolton Bury Chamber Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The college has been successful over the last three years in seeking opportunities to work collaboratively with other local further education institutions to assist it in achieving its mission. It is a member of the Crescent Partnership, a collaborative group of colleges in the north of Greater Manchester. It has entered into a partnership with Wigan and Leigh College to provide an equipment support service for students with disabilities.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in April 2000. The inspection team had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and had studied information held by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements drawn from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted data on students' achievements for 1999. Inspectors checked these against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies and found them accurate. The college was notified approximately two months before the inspection of the sample of its provision to be inspected. Fourteen inspectors and an auditor carried out the inspection over a total of 67 days. Inspection team members scrutinised a wide range of documents and held meetings with college governors, managers, staff and students.

They consulted a number of representatives from local bodies including the TEC, the careers service, business and community groups, schools and the LEA.

6 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons observed and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 59% were judged to be good or outstanding and 10% were judged to be less than satisfactory. These proportions compare unfavourably with the national averages for all colleges inspected in 1998-99, of 65% and 6% respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCSE and GCE A/AS level	2	6	1	3	0	12
Access to further and higher education	2	1	0	0	0	3
GNVQ	2	6	7	0	0	15
NVQ	5	18	12	4	0	39
Other vocational	6	16	13	4	0	39
Other*	1	5	3	1	0	10
Total (No.)	18	52	36	12	0	118
Total (%)	15	44	31	10	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

*includes tutorials

Context

7 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 (%)
Bolton College	8.7	72
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

Mathematics, Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

8 The inspection covered information technology (IT) courses at general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) levels 1 to 3, GCSE and access to higher education, and mathematics courses at GCSE and at general certificate of education advanced/advanced supplementary level (GCE A/AS level). Inspectors broadly agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Some weaknesses had been addressed before the inspection.

Key strengths

- well-planned courses
- effective subject support for IT students
- well-designed IT assignments
- good progression opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor retention on GCSE and GCE A/AS level courses
- poor pass rates on most courses
- inappropriate accommodation for some computing classes
- little co-ordination of mathematics across the college

9 The college offers courses in IT that provide opportunities for students to progress from foundation to higher levels. Mathematics courses range from basic numeracy to advanced level. GCSE mathematics and numeracy are taught together during the day to enable students on the numeracy course to achieve, if possible, a GCSE qualification. Students can follow basic IT courses in taught or as flexible 'drop-in' programmes. These strengths were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

Courses are well planned. Course teams hold regular meetings. They monitor performance indicators during regular quality reviews, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. In recent years, changes in the staffing of courses have caused significant disruption. In mathematics, there are few links between staff teaching different courses across the college. There is no overall verification of students' achievements in the application of number. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

10 Inspectors judged that eight of the 13 lessons they observed were good or outstanding. This is similar to the national average for this programme area in 1998-99. Handouts are of a good standard but few other learning resources are produced. In most lessons, students worked enthusiastically with friendly and effective support from teachers. Signers supported hearing-impaired students. Students appreciated the themes used to relate mathematics to the real world. Inspectors agreed that assignments for IT courses are well designed and cover work in interesting and relevant contexts. They include the development of key skills and often have clear links to work experience. Assignment front sheets are standardised, tasks are well explained and usually the criteria for grading are clear. Assignment schedules are not shared with the students. Students' work is of a good standard and marking is accurate. The feedback given to students on their work by some teachers is not sufficiently detailed. Full-time students in IT had a well-planned programme of support related to their course. Inspectors did not agree that links with industry are a strength and consider that they need improving.

11 Students' achievements in this area are poor, a weakness understated in the self-assessment report. Though retention rates on GNVQ foundation and intermediate courses in IT have improved to above the national average, those on GNVQ advanced courses declined in

Curriculum Areas

1999 to below. On GCSE courses, retention rates are poor. On GCE A/AS level mathematics courses, both retention and pass rates are significantly below the national average. GCSE mathematics pass rates are slightly above the national average but those on GCSE IT courses declined sharply between 1998 to 1999 and are now significantly below. While pass rates on GNVQ IT foundation and intermediate courses are around the national average, those on the GNVQ advanced course are poor. Recruitment on the access course dropped steeply in 1999, though both retention and pass rates improved.

12 Students have good access to computers. Rooms are well equipped with appropriate hardware and software for the courses. Teachers have developed their own logic circuit software. There are insufficient resources for networking and for the assembly and repair of computers. This limits the students' experience

and the range of specialist computing courses on offer. The number of computing workshops is sufficient but theory classes often take place in them. IT students have assignments and course materials available on the college network. However, they experience problems both with access to the network and the stability of the Internet connection. These weaknesses were acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Mathematics resources include a range of software and the use of these is increasing. The college does not possess class sets of graphical calculators. Visually-impaired students studying mathematics benefit from a range of specialist resources. The mathematics and IT section in the library is inadequate. There is a shortage of internal verifiers in IT.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics, computing and information technology , 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	21	25	18
		Retention (%)	90	64	89
		Achievement (%)	100	62	75
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	30	35	27
		Retention (%)	77	71	89
		Achievement (%)	48	84	75
GCSE mathematics and IT	2	Number of starters	230	191	148
		Retention (%)	65	68	65
		Achievement (%)	34	41	35
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	*	6	20
		Retention (%)	*	100	75
		Achievement (%)	*	33	67
GCE A/AS level mathematics	3	Number of starters	*	36	24
		Retention (%)	*	69	46
		Achievement (%)	*	25	18
Access certificate in IT	3	Number of starters	16	54	12
		Retention (%)	56	65	92
		Achievement (%)	100	34	82

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 3

13 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the college but considered some of them to be overstated. Inspectors placed a greater significance on the weaknesses in students' achievements than the college did.

Key strengths

- extensive links with external organisations
- well-planned teaching
- the high-quality specialist motor vehicle facilities at Horwich

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on most courses
- poor pass rates on most courses
- underdeveloped curriculum management procedures

14 The college offers appropriate courses in motor vehicle mechanics, body repair, welding and fabrication, electronic engineering, communications engineering, and electrical installations. Courses in mechanical engineering have been transferred recently to another local college. The self-assessment report recognises the extensive links with external organisations as a strength. Modern apprenticeship training is provided for major local companies. National training schemes have been developed for a number of organisations. Some craft and technician courses are provided through open learning. A foundation GNVQ course is run in conjunction with a local school for pupils aged 14 to 16. Other school pupils attend motor vehicle courses. Outdoor activities are organised for students during their initial induction to help develop teamwork. Most full-time students undertake a short period of work experience. Inspectors did not agree that the

management and quality assurance processes within the programme area are strengths. Procedures to aid curriculum planning, teaching and accountability and associated quality assurance procedures are underdeveloped.

15 The quality of teaching is good as noted in the self-assessment report. Eight of the 11 lessons observed were judged to be good or outstanding. Most teachers used a variety of appropriate activities to maintain students' interest. They provided comprehensive support notes, ensured that all students were engaged in the lesson, and regularly reinforced and checked students' understanding of key points. In one lesson, a teacher demonstrated how to test the condition of a car battery. The main safety points were covered. Students were carefully questioned to ensure that they understood the main points. A suitable handout reinforced students' understanding of the required procedures. Teachers make good use of commercial teaching materials. In a lesson on fault-finding in engine management systems, the teacher used a software-based presentation to illustrate the principles of a range of devices to monitor airflow and other engine parameters. Students were able to practise fault-finding on a modern engine management system. Substantial technical notes were available to reinforce the key points. In a few lessons, the work did not engage students' interest fully. Students' learning was not always checked. Students are generally confident and competent when undertaking work in laboratories and workshops.

16 Retention and pass rates on most engineering courses are below national averages. The self-assessment report partially recognised these weaknesses but understated their significance. Retention rates on City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) courses were below the national average in 1997 and 1998 but improved considerably in 1999. Retention rates on national vocational qualification (NVQ) courses at all levels have been consistently

Curriculum Areas

below the national average, though there was a slight improvement at level 2 in 1999. The pass rates on C&G level 3 courses have been above or close to the national average, though they declined in 1999. Conversely, pass rates on C&G courses at levels 1 and 2 have been consistently poor. The pass rates on NVQ courses have fluctuated with a sharp decline at level 3 in 1999. Pass rates on the technician level 3 courses have been poor for the last two years.

17 As the self-assessment recognises, some of the motor vehicle workshops at Horwich are of a high quality. They include a demonstration room with teaching rigs sponsored by a major motor vehicle manufacturer. Other workshops for motor vehicle mechanics, body repair, and welding are not to the same high standard but

are suitable for their purpose. A major manufacturer also provides a range of modern motor vehicles to support the motor vehicle work. The engineering accommodation at Manchester Road is in good decorative order. Modern engineering software is available in the new computer suite. The digital satellite communications laboratory has the latest equipment. Some other equipment is becoming dated but all is suitable for its purpose. Teachers and technicians are suitable qualified. Motor vehicle teachers and technicians are able to attend the specialist manufacturers' courses run on the Horwich site to update their skills and knowledge.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in mathematics, computing and information technology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ	1	Number of starters	36	49	32
		Retention (%)	50	60	59
		Achievement (%)	67	22	33
C&G	1	Number of starters	105	94	98
		Retention (%)	69	60	80
		Achievement (%)	31	53	54
NVQ	2	Number of starters	87	121	162
		Retention (%)	20	51	59
		Achievement (%)	63	28	54
C&G	2	Number of starters	115	131	141
		Retention (%)	63	67	85
		Achievement (%)	45	41	49
NVQ	3	Number of starters	121	57	66
		Retention (%)	48	47	39
		Achievement (%)	26	78	25
C&G	3	Number of starters	53	43	21
		Retention (%)	83	74	95
		Achievement (%)	64	68	47

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 4

18 The inspection included GNVQ courses at intermediate and advanced levels, the GCE A level course in business and accounting and national certificate and NVQ courses in accounting at levels 2, 3 and 4. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements made in the self-assessment report, but considered that some strengths were overstated and weaknesses in students' achievements were given insufficient emphasis.

Key strengths

- the wide range of provision
- well-planned lessons

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on most courses
- poor retention rates on most courses
- small range of learning resources
- insufficient integration of IT with class work and coursework
- inadequate briefings for GNVQ assignments

19 Inspectors agreed that there is a wide range of full-time and part-time courses from intermediate to higher level that provide good opportunities for students to progress. Course management and organisation are generally good. Teachers work well as a team and have coped well with the challenges of substantial staff changes. An effective staff mentoring scheme has aided team coherence and contributed to greater consistency in course documentation.

20 Inspectors recognised that there have been improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection but the self-assessment report overstates the improvement. Inspectors graded seven of the 14 lessons observed as good or

outstanding, well below the average of 64% for the programme area as a whole in 1998-99. No lessons seen were less than satisfactory. Lesson plans and schemes of work were thorough and reflected recent development work in this area. In the best lessons, teachers introduced lessons clearly and linked the topic to previous learning. Students on part-time courses were encouraged to draw upon their experience of the workplace. Some lessons were less successful. Teachers set appropriate tasks involving a wide variety of activities but had not briefed students adequately or allocated sufficient time for them to complete the tasks. In some lessons on the GNVQ advanced and BTEC national certificate courses, students were unclear of the necessary preparation or research needed to carry out the tasks they were given.

21 Inspectors agreed that there is effective use of learning support facilitators to support individual students. In one lesson, the learning support facilitator worked closely with the tutor to enable students with identified learning needs to participate well. Monitoring of students' progress is thorough. On an intermediate course in accounting, short support 'clinics' enabled students to review their progress. On full-time courses, student portfolios are generally well organised but show weaknesses in basic numeracy and literacy. Full-time students have good opportunities to acquire additional IT skills and gain accreditation. However, these skills are insufficiently integrated with class work and coursework

22 The self-assessment report acknowledges, but understates, weaknesses in retention and pass rates. With the exception of the GNVQ business course at advanced level, pass rates on all courses are significantly below national averages. The pass rate on the GNVQ intermediate course fell to 40% in 1998-99, well below the most recent national average of 75%. Pass rates on NVQ courses in accounting are consistently poor. Retention rates on most courses have declined to levels well below

Curriculum Areas

national averages. Though retention rates on the NVQ courses at level 2 consistently improved to above the national average in 1999, those on all GNVQ and the GCE A level courses have consistently declined to poor levels in 1999. Only five of the 17 students who started the GNVQ advanced course completed it in 1999. The sector has adopted measures to analyse retention and attendance and to take action to remedy it where it is poor. These include tighter arrangements for monitoring attendance and reporting absences to parents. Registers show that attendance rates are improving this year. The average attendance at lessons observed was 81%. This compares well with the national average of 78% for all lessons observed in 1998-99.

23 Teachers are appropriately qualified. A high proportion of full-time teachers has undertaken recent, relevant commercial updating. Some part-time teachers have good

current commercial experience that they use effectively in vocational aspects. Whilst there have been improvements to the provision of textbooks, videos and CD-ROMs, the sector still lacks sufficient learning materials and computer software to support the very wide range of provision on offer.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate business	2	Number of starters	14	10	12
		Retention (%)	100	30	45
		Achievement (%)	71	100	40
NVQ accounting	2	Number of starters	33	30	14
		Retention (%)	55	85	86
		Achievement (%)	50	41	44
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	15	23	17
		Retention (%)	71	56	29
		Achievement (%)	78	69	80
GCE A level business and accounting	3	Number of starters	17	46	22
		Retention (%)	94	63	27
		Achievement (%)	25	24	66
NVQ accounting	3 and 4	Number of starters	68	80	70
		Retention (%)	76	77	71
		Achievement (%)	25	23	24

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Administration

Grade 3

24 Inspectors agreed with the main judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- effective curriculum planning and management
- good pass rates on advanced level courses

Weaknesses

- poor retention rates on NVQ courses
- low attendance rates and small class sizes on many courses
- poor pass rates on intermediate and foundation level courses

25 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a wide range of business administration courses at levels 1, 2 and 3. As the self-assessment report recognises, courses are effectively planned and managed. The comprehensive programme manuals are kept up to date. Detailed schemes of work and lesson plans clearly indicate aims and objectives, assessment methods and resources. Course teams work together effectively. They share common schemes of work, meet regularly and quickly circulate the clear minutes of meetings. All sector staff are part of a mentoring and staff planning group. The group leader conducts a self-assessment of teaching and learning and the group discuss the outcomes.

26 Inspectors agreed that the well-documented student tracking system and internal verification procedures are a strength. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of students' progress. Assessments are standardised and meet external quality requirements. External verifier reports are positive.

27 Much of the teaching is good. Inspectors judged eight of the 12 lessons they observed to be good or outstanding. No lessons were less than satisfactory. The best lessons were well planned. Teachers communicated aims and objectives clearly to the students and used a range of appropriate teaching methods. They drew on the work experience of students to ensure that theoretical aspects were illustrated in a vocational context. In one lesson, students discussed job applications and techniques in groups. They then watched a video on recruitment. They used the criteria they had drawn up in groups to select the most appropriate candidate. In another lesson, the teacher made good use of the overhead projector, whiteboard and high-quality handouts to present a topic. After a class discussion on the topic, students completed a handout to consolidate their learning. In a minority of lessons, the pace and content of the work were not demanding enough for the ability of the students involved. The average attendance rate of 75% masks uneven attendance in the lessons observed. There were instances of poor punctuality.

28 Students have regular progress reviews, draw up action plans and set targets. Assessments are set at the appropriate levels and are marked to meet awarding body requirements. Most students' work is of a high standard. Portfolios are well presented and enhanced by the use of IT, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. All full-time students on NVQ and medical secretaries diploma courses undertake work experience. They are encouraged to produce evidence of competence from their work placement. In addition, they spend two weeks in the college business centre and this provides them with opportunities to achieve accredited qualifications in a realistic working environment. Students on NVQ level 3 courses supervise NVQ level 2 students when in the business centre. Key skills are not yet integrated with NVQ courses.

Curriculum Areas

29 Pass rates on most advanced level courses are good. Those on NVQ level 3 courses have been above the national average for the past three years. At intermediate level, the picture is mixed. Students on NVQ level 2 courses achieved pass rates below the national average in 1998 and 1999. Only 50% of students on the Association of Medical Secretaries, Practice Managers, Administrators and Receptionists medical secretarial diploma achieved the award in 1998 and 1999, against a national average of 66%. The self-assessment report acknowledges that retention is low on some courses. Retention rates on NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 are all below the national average. Conversely, retention rates on other courses at levels 2 and 3 have remained consistently high.

30 Teachers are appropriately qualified and all have a teaching qualification. Many have acquired appropriate training and development

lead body qualifications. Students on administration courses have good access to modern computers with new industrial standard software. Most classrooms have whiteboards, overhead projectors and screens. In a minority of rooms the whiteboards are badly marked and this makes them difficult to read. Some rooms are not suitable in size for the activities being undertaken.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Vocational*	1	Number of starters	138	239	143
		Retention (%)	72	77	78
		Achievement (%)	47	68	71
Vocational*	2	Number of starters	118	359	259
		Retention (%)	81	82	85
		Achievement (%)	40	84	78
NVQ administration	2	Number of starters	47	49	58
		Retention (%)	64	71	71
		Achievement (%)	60	51	54
Vocational**	3	Number of starters	72	118	101
		Retention (%)	88	95	87
		Achievement (%)	35	89	88
NVQ administration	3	Number of starters	41	47	39
		Retention (%)	73	73	74
		Achievement (%)	70	79	86

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

*includes typewriting and wordprocessing courses

**includes secretarial courses

Curriculum Areas

Hospitality and Catering

Grade 4

31 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found that the college had omitted significant weaknesses in teaching and learning, students' achievements and course management.

Key strengths

- high standard of students' work in realistic working environments
- the development of appropriate technical skills
- industrial experience of teachers

Weaknesses

- inadequate management and control of work provided at a distance from the college
- poor attendance, retention and pass rates
- unsatisfactory teaching in theory lessons
- inadequate development of key skills
- unsatisfactory procedures for planning and recording students' assessments
- insufficient support for part-time teachers

32 The food and hospitality sector offers a wide range of courses, including full-time and part-time NVQ programmes in food preparation and cooking, food service and bar work. Bakery courses no longer run owing to insufficient demand. The college provides a range of 23 different NVQ programmes in hospitality and catering subjects, mainly at level 2, for employees of a large hotel group. The hotels are located throughout England. Courses provided on the hotel premises are exclusive to hotel employees and are not available to members of the general public. Employees enrolled on these courses are unclear about their rights and responsibilities as students of

Bolton College. They do not receive pre-enrolment impartial advice and guidance on the range of opportunities available to them.

33 Inspectors did not agree with the judgement in the self-assessment report that the provision of courses in hotels away from the college is effectively managed. Arrangements for assessment, the recording of students' progress and internal verification of their work were all unsatisfactory. Lessons observed were poorly structured and prevented students from making progress. Students' punctuality and attendance at lessons is poor. There are no references in the self-assessment report to the poor pass rates for courses provided at a distance from the college.

34 The college has developed realistic working environments in restaurants and production kitchens on its main campus. These provide good opportunities for student assessment. Catering production lessons include students at different levels of the course. This gives level 3 students frequent opportunities to assume a supervisory role. Students work well in practical sessions and demonstrate good technical skills. They develop good teamwork and social skills in restaurants and kitchens that prepare them well for employment.

35 Of the 12 lessons observed four were judged to be good and five were less than satisfactory. This level of quality is significantly lower than the national average for this programme area. Punctuality was poor. The average attendance for the lessons observed was 66%, significantly lower than the average in this programme area for 1998-99 of 79%. In most theory lessons, there was insufficient opportunity for students to share ideas and draw on relevant experience. Teachers spent much of the lesson giving information and made few checks on students' understanding. In one lesson, the teacher talked for one hour about the different classifications of fish, methods of preparation and nutritional values. There was

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no attempt to draw on the experience of the students or to give them time for reflection or questioning. Few learning activities adequately addressed the wide range of students' ability. In one lesson, the teacher sent half of the students to work in the learning centre to complete sections of their workbooks. The students were not provided with any guidance and were left unsupervised for the whole duration of the lesson. Two students decided to spend their time in the college canteen. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

36 Some students' portfolios demonstrate poor literacy and numeracy skills. Errors in spelling and grammar are not regularly corrected. The process for verifying students' achievements lacks adequate planning. Procedures for scheduling and recording assessments and giving students feedback on their work require further development. A recent external verifier report identified these issues but the self-assessment report did not mention them.

37 Retention and pass rates are below national averages on most courses. The pass rate on NVQ level 2 programmes in 1999 was 36%. The self-assessment report acknowledges but gives insufficient emphasis to these weaknesses. Key skills are not included or assessed on NVQ courses. This is recognised as

a weakness and area for development in the self-assessment report.

38 The well-qualified full-time teachers meet regularly. Part-time teachers with substantial teaching commitments are not regularly invited to attend course team meetings and, as a consequence, are poorly informed of students' progress and curriculum development issues. Students do not have access to the range of IT equipment commonly found in the hotel and catering industry. The library section has an adequate range of books and journals. These are supplemented by a small number of books held in the catering section. However, students are rarely encouraged to use these. College-devised workbooks are considered to be the primary source of information. Several books in the library from a range of contemporary cookery books were last booked out on loan over two years ago.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hospitality and catering, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ hospitality and catering	2	Number of starters	60	202	260
		Retention (%)	82	47	69
		Achievement (%)	43	24	36
NVQ food preparation and cooking	3	Number of starters	13	14	31
		Retention (%)	10	93	68
		Achievement (%)	46	0	72

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

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Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 4

39 Inspectors observed lessons in hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapies. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but considered that insufficient emphasis had been given to poor retention and achievement rates.

Key strengths

- good pass rates on hairdressing courses at level 2 in 1999
- broad range of courses and flexible arrangements for attendance

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on most courses
- poor pass rates on most courses
- insufficient clients in practical lessons
- late scheduling of assessments on beauty therapy courses

40 Inspectors agreed that the college offers a broad range of hairdressing, beauty therapy and holistic therapy courses. Flexible timetabling enables adult students to manage their other commitments. Accreditation of students' prior learning enables some students to shorten the time they take to complete their course. All full-time students undertake a five-day, well-supervised work experience placement. Students are encouraged to widen their hairdressing and beauty experience by participating in competitions and external events. A hairdressing student recently won a gold medal at a regional hairdressing competition. Lately, course teams have begun to monitor carefully students' attendance and to contact absent students quickly, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The

average attendance rate for the lessons observed was 85%, well above the national average of 78% in 1998-99.

41 Of the 13 lessons observed, eight were judged to be good or outstanding, well below the average for this programme area in 1998-99. None of the lessons observed was less than satisfactory. The better lessons were well planned. Lesson objectives were shared with students. Teachers used effectively an interesting variety of teaching methods. In one practical lesson, the tutor left notes on view to remind students of their learning objectives. The outcomes of the lesson were clearly summarised on a flipchart. In weaker lessons, teachers did not start on time, failed to take opportunities to share good practice, and did not state objectives at the outset or summarise outcomes at the end. Some practical sessions were dull and the lack of clients prevented the provision of a realistic working environment for students. In one three-hour practical session, only half of the students had a client. Of these clients only one was having a treatment that would occupy the student for the full three hours. Students without clients worked on blocks. Weaknesses in teaching and learning were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report.

42 Students organise their portfolios well. Some contain work of a high standard. Many are well presented. Students make good use of computers in the production of IT assignments during the first year but little use of them thereafter. Hairdressing students are able to make good progress towards completing their assessments. However, students on the advanced beauty therapy course find that completing assessments is a daunting challenge because assessments for this one-year course are not scheduled until the spring term. The bunching of assessments in this way places a heavy demand on the availability of appropriate clients. The college did not identify these weaknesses.

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43 Retention rates on most courses are poor. Retention on the NVQ level 2 hairdressing course has declined from 91% in 1997 to 56% in 1999, significantly below the national average. Retention rates on both hairdressing and beauty therapy courses at level 3 have recently declined to below the national average. The pass rate on the NVQ level 2 hairdressing course has consistently improved over three years and is now above the national average. However, pass rates on other courses are poor and, in 1999, were significantly below the latest national averages. In 1997 and 1998 no student who completed the NVQ level 3 course in hairdressing achieved the qualification. In 1999, only 33% of those completing the course achieved the award compared with the national average of 74%. Pass rates on the NVQ level 2 course in beauty therapy fell from 94% in 1997 to 35% in 1999. On the NVQ level 3 course in beauty therapy, pass rates declined from 100%

in 1997 to 30% in 1999, well below the national average. These poor results were not identified in the self-assessment report.

44 Specialist resources are adequate. Students develop their reception skills in a small reception area. They are not always supervised when on reception duty. The reception area does not have a computer. Materials such as colours are not always available for practical assessments. Theory lessons and tutorials are conducted in classrooms. Each has one computer and appropriate teaching aids. Occasionally, theory sessions take place in practical rooms.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
NVQ hairdressing	2	Number of starters	22	83	64
		Retention (%)	91	29	56
		Achievement (%)	40	44	81
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	19	133	41
		Retention (%)	95	57	88
		Achievement (%)	94	24	35
NVQ hairdressing	3	Number of starters	4	13	16
		Retention (%)	50	77	75
		Achievement (%)	0	0	33
NVQ beauty therapy	3	Number of starters	7	13	18
		Retention (%)	86	85	61
		Achievement (%)	100	64	30
Other vocational*	3	Number of starters	173	88	175
		Retention (%)	83	91	78
		Achievement (%)	73	77	65

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

* includes courses in aromatherapy, holistic therapies, reflexology and epilation

Curriculum Areas

English and Social Sciences

Grade 3

45 The inspection covered English and social sciences at GCSE and GCE A level and access courses. Inspectors generally agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, but considered that weaknesses in retention and achievement had been insufficiently emphasised.

Key strengths

- well-planned lessons
- improving and good pass rates in GCSE English
- high standards of marking of students' work in English
- good displays in all subject rooms

Weaknesses

- many declining and poor retention rates
- poor pass rates on GCE A level courses
- unsuccessful combination of one-year and two-year courses
- inadequate access to books for students

46 Inspectors agreed that the standard of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection. Of the 11 lessons observed, eight were judged to be good or outstanding, a proportion higher than the national average. Students are enthusiastic and enjoy their studies. They participate well in activities. For example, in a lesson on the access course, students were studying political speeches and made perceptive comments about the way that the era in which the speeches were made affected their style and content. Teachers planned lessons well and made good use of a range of carefully timed and managed learning activities. In a lesson about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, students worked in pairs and then groups to analyse the text and make notes of important aspects. Teachers share the aims of

lessons with students and usually give them clear information about the tasks they are to undertake to achieve those aims. In one lesson, overhead transparencies were well used to set out the way the tasks were to be organised. In two lessons observed there was good support for students with visual impairments. Handouts are of a good standard and they stimulate debate and interest. In the weaker lessons, students were often engaged in dull and repetitive tasks. IT is often well used to enhance learning. However, in one instance, the technical difficulties students experienced in gaining access to the college network badly affected their progress during the lesson.

47 English and social science courses have been relocated within the college management structure three times during the past three years. As teachers have left they have not been replaced. Staff consider that these changes have had a detrimental effect on the provision. Attendance at lessons was good, but the average class size was small. The college has combined one-year and two-year courses in one group. The self-assessment report recognises that this grouping has not been successful. Second-year students often dominate discussion and first-year students do not always fully understand topics because they lack background information.

48 Much of the students' written work is well produced and well presented. Most of it is wordprocessed, although students have to produce at least one handwritten piece so that teachers can check their understanding of spelling and grammar. In one English lesson, all students were given an opportunity to discuss spelling and grammar with the teacher. Students' work is well marked, especially in English. Teachers make clear comments on the progress made and give detailed advice on how students can improve their work.

49 There are declining and poor retention rates on most courses. They are particularly poor on GCE A level social science courses. Less

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than half of the students who started a GCE A level course in 1997 or 1998 completed it in 1999. Pass rates on all GCE A level courses are significantly below the national average. Pass rates on the GCSE English course are improving and are now above the national average. Pass rates on other GCSE courses are poor. Although both retention and pass rates on access courses remain at, or just below, national averages, both have declined sharply recently. The self-assessment report did not give enough emphasis to these weaknesses.

alleviate those in extreme need but this does not help all students. The library stock in this area is sparse and insufficient to support all subjects, a weakness not mentioned in the self-assessment report.

50 Classrooms are well furnished and equipped. Good displays of students' work give a strong subject identity to the rooms. A small computer suite adjacent to one of the classrooms is well used by students in all subjects. Students have to buy their own textbooks and complain about the expense. The college has funds to

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English	2	Number of starters	161	100	85
		Retention (%)	83	73	68
		Achievement (%)	39	48	60
GCSE psychology and sociology	2	Number of starters	65	80	58
		Retention (%)	75	64	52
		Achievement (%)	*	61	37
GCE A level English	3	Number of starters	34	52	27
		Retention (%)	85	48	48
		Achievement (%)	72	52	67
GCE A level psychology	3	Number of starters	26	24	7
		Retention (%)	79	51	39
		Achievement (%)	42	39	42
GCE A level sociology	3	Number of starters	10	20	11
		Retention (%)	67	63	42
		Achievement (%)	44	35	45
Access certificate	3	Number of starters	19	38	15
		Retention (%)	100	74	63
		Achievement (%)	68	68	60

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

*data not available

Curriculum Areas

Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

51 The inspection covered full-time and part-time provision. Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- outstanding provision for students with sensory impairments
- well-planned and effective teaching
- good achievements
- strong and effective links with specialist external agencies

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped curriculum framework and individual learning plans
- inadequate range of pre-vocational options

52 Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are based within the community care sector. Specially designed courses at three levels enable 36 students with moderate or severe learning difficulties to develop the skills they need to progress successfully to more advanced level courses or to employment. About 20 students are following an access to further education course for deaf students designed to enable them to develop basic skills such as communication, English and mathematics and to sample a range of vocational subjects. On completion of the course after one or two years, students often progress to vocational courses where they receive specialist support, as necessary. Students with visual impairments can undertake a range of programmes within a specialist unit or can

study other courses across the college with specialist support.

53 Inspectors judged eight of the 12 lessons they observed to be good or outstanding. Teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to promote effective learning, as the self-assessment report recognises. In a pre-vocational business administration lesson for students with learning difficulties, the students were allocated individual 'in-tray' exercises to complete over two days. The lesson took place in the training office and the tasks were typical of the type they would encounter as office juniors. The teacher carefully matched the tasks to each student's ability. Students responded well to the challenges set for them and made good progress with their tasks. Many students benefit from opportunities to undertake work experience placements within the college and in external organisations.

54 Some elements of the specially designed programmes for students with learning difficulties are not meeting their needs. The content of the programmes is not always relevant to their lives. There is no curriculum framework that provides a clear rationale for the subjects to be studied and describes the teaching and learning methods to be used. The requirement to produce written evidence for national awards results in students with poor literacy skills wasting time on exercises that are of little value to them. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Students' individual learning programmes specify appropriate objectives but some of these are too general and difficult to monitor. Not all teachers are skilled in creating opportunities to address students' learning objectives within their lessons.

55 Teachers of deaf students plan their lessons well. They have a good understanding of the students' strengths and needs, communicate effectively with them and explain difficult concepts carefully, strengths identified in the self-assessment report. During a lesson on

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action-planning, the teacher helped students to identify their strengths and needs as part of their plans for progressing to more advanced level programmes. The teacher checked students' understanding regularly and carefully.

56 The visual impairment unit provides a range of specially designed courses for students who are blind or have visual impairments. Good-quality support is also provided for a small number of students who are deaf and blind. Students value the specialist assessment of their support needs and the training they receive in the use of specialist equipment. Many students travel considerable distances in order to benefit from the services provided by the unit. Once students have developed skills and confidence, they progress to more advanced level programmes across the college and continue to receive specialist support from unit staff. Staff in the unit have helped many students, who have developed visual impairments in later life, to retrain for new jobs.

57 As the self-assessment report states, most students are making good progress in their studies. They are attentive in class, contribute willingly to discussions and are developing confidence and self-esteem through their successes at college. Most students attend regularly and achieve well on their courses. Many progress to more advanced level programmes in the college or into open or sheltered employment. Students with learning difficulties have won several prizes in local and regional competitions.

58 The college has strong and effective links with a range of external agencies, a strength understated in the self-assessment report. These agencies include the careers service, social services, the health authority and a supported employment scheme. The transition team from social services and the health authority provide valuable support by helping students to learn how to travel independently on public transport. Other links are particularly

effective in helping students to find work experience placements and employment.

59 As the self-assessment report states, most staff are well qualified, though not all of them fully understand how to help the students to learn effectively. 'Allsorts', the college shop, provides good opportunities for students with learning difficulties to practise their retail skills but it is small and not well located to attract customers. Students with learning difficulties have insufficient access to specialist vocational accommodation and resources across the college. Attractive visual displays, including students' work, make classrooms and corridors attractive and interesting.

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Basic Skills

Grade 4

60 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but they considered that some strengths were overstated and they identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective teaching of basic skills support for vocational courses
- the flexible structure of primary basic skills courses

Weaknesses

- inadequate learning plans and reviews of progress for students on primary basic skills courses
- poor college-wide management and monitoring of basic skills support
- poor achievements on accredited courses
- poor attendance on separate specialist courses

61 The inspection covered basic skills provided through separate specialist courses, support within vocational areas and individual support sessions. At the time of the inspection, 91 students were enrolled on part-time primary basic skills courses and 29 on a full-time programme for school-leavers that incorporates basic skills and vocational options. In addition, 88 students on vocational courses were receiving basic skills support through the learning support provision.

62 Of the 10 lessons they observed, inspectors judged five to be good and one less than satisfactory. Teaching of basic skills support on vocational courses is good. Lessons had clear plans and took into account the needs of the learner. Learning activities were set firmly in the context of the vocational requirements of the course. In one lesson, students were developing

numerical skills through activities related to the cost of building a barbecue. Inspectors agreed that team teaching has promoted the sharing of good practice between basic skills tutors and vocational teachers. They planned lessons jointly and activities were relevant and stimulating. Support tutors kept detailed records of attendance, work completed, assessments and reviews of progress.

63 The flexible structure of primary basic skills courses enables enrolled students to attend any of a number of daytime, evening and Saturday sessions. Students on these courses have access to a wide range of nationally recognised qualifications. Students are aware of the accreditation options, although they are not under pressure to take them. Students attending these courses are assessed prior to entry. The assessment forms the basis of each student's individual learning action plan. Inspectors did not agree that these action plans are a strength. Although all students have a learning plan, the learning goals set are not specific. The plans contain no evidence of review or evaluation of progress. There are no records of reviews leading to re-negotiation of learning plans and learning goals. Though attendance at one-to-one sessions was good, average attendance at separate specialist lessons, excluding the flexible attendance on primary basic skills courses, was 55%, well below the national average of 74% for this programme area.

64 There is no effective assessment or recording of achievements that are not qualification based. For example, there are no college-wide records of students' rate and level of progress on non-accredited provision, or information on destinations of students completing the separate specialist courses. On courses leading to qualifications, pass rates are generally poor. Those on the C&G 3750 numeracy course and the C&G 3794 Numberpower course are consistently below the national average. Students perform no better

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on long courses leading to achievement tests in numeracy at entry level. In 1999, 45% on these courses achieved the award, significantly below the national average. However, pass rates on the entry level long course leading to achievement tests in literacy were close to the national average in 1998 and 1999. Retention rates on C&G courses are generally good, though those on achievement tests in literacy and numeracy declined to below the national average in 1999.

65 College-wide basic skills support is inadequate. The number of students receiving literacy and numeracy support is small for a college with 69% of its students enrolled on foundation or intermediate level courses. The support provided is poorly managed and poorly monitored at college level. Despite the detailed records kept by individual support tutors, little central information is gathered on numbers of students screened, the results of screening, the numbers receiving support or the impact of support on retention and achievement.

66 As the self-assessment report recognises, separate specialist courses in basic skills take place in a well-equipped base room. Students make good use of the five computers linked to the Internet and the wide range of literacy and numeracy paper-based resources. These paper-based resources are available in the college learning centre but are not well used there because they are not designed to enable students to check their own work. The college is participating in a family learning course in collaboration with a local secondary school. Attendance on this course is good. It has a long waiting list.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 4

67 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered that several strengths had been overstated and significant weaknesses overlooked.

Key strengths

- productive links with local high schools
- good publicity materials and processes
- good careers education for full-time students

Weaknesses

- slow progress in implementing the college framework for student support
- inequity in the scope and quality of tutorial support
- unsatisfactory arrangements for learning support
- shortcomings in progress reviewing and action-planning

68 Inspectors found that, though some improvements have been made to arrangements for student support since the last inspection, great inconsistencies remain. These particularly affect the extent to which students have access to the support entitlement stated in the charter and the quality of the support they receive. Meetings with students indicated that their access to support is largely dependent on the college sector to which they belong. Monitoring systems are not in place to ensure that the elements of the common framework for student support are implemented consistently across all sectors. Some students receive a much higher quality of support than do others.

69 The college has established productive links with local 11 to 16 high schools. It provides level 1 vocational units for year 11

pupils. The schools are appreciative of the quality and flexibility of the provision and the contribution the college has made in helping them to develop a vocational curriculum at key stage 4. In addition, the college provides 'taster' courses and participates in schools' careers events. Publicity is well aimed at a variety of groups and distributed through a range of methods. The college increased its recruitment of 16 year olds by 40% in September 1999. The admissions unit provides a speedy response to applications. The call centre workers use a prepared script that supports the principle of impartial guidance. However, students who are unsure of their choice do not always receive an impartial guidance interview, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report. No systematic activity is carried out at the pre-entry stage to identify students whose attendance or achievement profile suggests they are at risk of leaving early.

70 Inspectors did not agree that learning support systems are effective in ensuring that individuals receive appropriate support. There are serious weaknesses in the initial assessment process. The diagnostic tool used is not suitable for the whole range of college students. Delays occur in the marking of tests and in providing support. Many students who had taken screening tests were never informed of the outcome. Though all full-time students are entitled to testing, no tests were administered for students on humanities courses. The take-up of learning support by those students with identified needs is poor.

71 The quality of tutorial support received by students varies widely, despite some improvements in arrangements. The frequency and quality of the progress reviewing and action-planning processes is uneven. Some students have weekly reviews, others six weekly reviews and some have none at all. No specific quality standards have been set for the reviewing process. Review forms vary from sector to sector. In the care sector no action is

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recorded or targets set at the end of progress reviews. Where action is recorded, this is often too vague to be helpful to the student. Part-time students' entitlement to tutorial support was formalised in September 1999. All have a named tutor and those on courses of more than six hours a week are entitled to tutorials. Though these students are generally content with their support, some sectors, for example hospitality and catering, make no formal arrangements for tutoring part-time students.

72 A small student services team offers welfare, health and financial advice, support on personal issues and a confidential counselling service on both campuses. There are no signs at Horwich indicating where the student services centre is located. Students at the main campus have only a vague understanding of what is available. The work of the student services team is impeded by the lack of a common college approach to providing student support. The counsellor and health adviser are dependent on being invited by tutors to make a contribution to the tutorial programme. The great majority of students do not receive this contribution. Students value the arrangements for providing financial assistance. Bolton is a pilot area for Educational Maintenance Awards and these are administered through the finance office.

73 Careers education and guidance is provided by two full-time college staff working in partnership with four advisers from Lifetime Careers. They enjoy good working relationships. No one monitors the implementation of the service level agreement. As a step towards developing a whole college approach, 26 tutor groups across all college sectors are successfully piloting the use of GNVQ units in career development. The college careers staff have provided group sessions to 91 of the 99 full-time tutor groups. Advisers are dependent on tutors encouraging their students to attend one-to-one guidance interviews and not all do so. The careers centre on each

campus is spacious and well resourced. Though Internet access is available on the main site, students are not given careers website addresses.

General Resources

Grade 3

74 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but found that some weaknesses were given insufficient weight.

Key strengths

- extensive improvements to the Horwich site
- significant investment in computers
- clean, bright, suitably equipped classrooms

Weaknesses

- much excess accommodation
- poor maintenance of parts of the main building
- the under-resourced library

75 Inspectors agreed that the college has made some progress in improving its buildings and reducing its excess space. It has now reduced its sites from seven to two. As the college acknowledges in its self-assessment report, it is highly inefficient in its use of space. A recent survey demonstrated that just over a third of classroom space is used during the college week. Timetabling is not carried out centrally. Some rooms are used inappropriately. Efforts to increase average class size remain unsuccessful. The learning centres and library are underused at an average occupancy of around 14% over a week. The leisure centre, run in conjunction with the local authority, is also severely underused.

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76 Inspectors agreed that extensive improvements have been made to the Horwich site. Internal refurbishment has significantly improved student facilities. The joint library and learning centre provides an appropriate quiet study and learning area. The refectory provides a fast food service with seating capacity for 136 students. The café is spacious, light and airy. Students use the large hall for sports activity during the lunch break.

77 As the self-assessment report identifies, general classroom accommodation has been upgraded to provide a pleasant learning environment. Most classrooms and other learning areas used by students are clean, in reasonable decorative order and appropriately furnished. Many are carpeted, have modern furniture and are equipped with whiteboards and overhead projectors. Common areas such as lifts, corridors and the reception area are well maintained. The refectory is bright, spacious and modern. Hot and cold food is available all day. The college provides a quiet room for prayer. Some rooms are less attractive. The ground floor workshops suffer from poor maintenance and patched repairs to leaking roofs. The science laboratories are cluttered and equipment is old and in need of replacement, weaknesses identified at the last inspection. Heating systems are inefficient. The central control system does not allow room temperatures to be individually varied. Some rooms undergo extremes of temperature and are poorly ventilated.

78 Site supervisors are responsible for college security. The college has responded to instances of vandalism and theft by making certain areas secure. Students are supposed to carry identification but most do not. Car parking arrangements are inadequate at the main site. The car park has 40 spaces and eight spaces for visitors. Students and some staff have to park on rough ground at the rear of the building. There is often overcrowding and inappropriate parking in the designated areas.

79 The college's self-assessment report notes the improvement in the number of computers since the last inspection. There are 365 modern computers, and an improved ratio of computers to full-time equivalent students of 1:6. The college has developed an IT policy to promote IT across the curriculum, though it has not, as yet, been fully implemented. The college provides designated open access IT rooms for students. Most computers are networked and are linked to the Internet. Computers at the Horwich site are not linked to the Internet.

80 Inspectors did not agree with the college assessment that additional resources have improved library stock. Expenditure on books is low for the size of the college, a weakness identified at the previous inspection. In a recent library user survey, students complained about the inadequate provision of books and periodicals. Students have limited access to the learning centres. That at Manchester Road is closed to students at weekends and during the summer months the space is used for commercial exhibitions and computer fairs. At Horwich, the learning centre is closed at weekends.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 4

81 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths recognised in the self-assessment report. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- well-developed self-assessment procedures
- well-conceived arrangements for lesson observations

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates
- underdeveloped arrangements for quality assurance in business support areas
- inadequate quality assurance of some off-site provision
- lack of rigour in action-planning and setting standards
- gaps in arrangements to ensure college-wide dissemination of good practice

82 The college arrangements for quality assurance are well documented through the college quality assurance handbook. Central to quality assurance are the self-assessment procedures that have been developed over the last three years. Staff teams produce an interim self-assessment review in the autumn term and a final one at the end of the academic year. Some teams also choose to undertake a mid-term review. Teams draw on evidence from course reviews, from surveys of students' opinions and from other sources. Their judgements are subjected to a validation process. Progress is reviewed against the action plan drawn up at the previous review. Many of the actions identified are responses to issues raised rather than a result of a process of setting demanding quality standards. Not all courses analyse student feedback sufficiently in order to identify areas

where improvement is required, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. There is little central monitoring to assess if quality assurance processes are consistently applied.

83 The college provides training to employees of a large hotel group. Arrangements to ensure the quality of this provision are inadequate. Some staff responsible for assessing students do not hold appropriate qualifications. Important records are not completed properly. Students are often not aware of their entitlements as students of Bolton College. Arrangements for monitoring student progress are generally unsatisfactory. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

84 Inspectors agreed that lesson observations are well established. All teachers are observed either by their appraiser or by a member of the cross-college self-assessment team. The process has involved staff from another college. Detailed records are kept of lessons observed, teachers are given feedback and managers summarise the issues identified from the observations undertaken in their areas. The profile of grades awarded for lessons observed by the college and used to inform judgements in the self-assessment report was markedly more generous than that awarded by inspectors. Between the production of the report and the inspection, the college undertook additional observations. The proportion of good or outstanding grades awarded was lower but remained well above that awarded by inspectors.

85 Arrangements for sharing good practice across the college are inadequate as the self-assessment report recognises. Procedures for the internal verification of courses are well documented but there is little evidence of attempts to ensure that the good practice that exists in areas such as construction and business administration applies across the college. College-wide information on reasons why students leave their courses early is not routinely analysed to identify and share trends or lessons to be learned.

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86 The college identifies as a weakness the underdeveloped use of performance indicators in the business support areas. The college is taking steps to develop appropriate, measurable criteria, though, to date, service areas have been required to review their performance against criteria more applicable to curriculum teams. As a result, there has been only rudimentary quality assurance in these areas.

87 The self-assessment report recognises, though underemphasises, poor student achievement and retention rates as weaknesses. Although there has been some improvement in retention, performance remains below national averages. There are poor rates of retention and achievement on courses at all levels. The college has not given this poor performance the attention it deserves. There is little systematic analysis of the reasons for poor performance or of the strategies needed to address it. There are no arrangements to ensure that any action taken is monitored or good practice disseminated.

88 Inspectors did not entirely agree that the college seeks the opinions of its customers in a coherent manner. A successful termly student forum, which is attended by student course representatives, staff and governors, supplements surveys of students' opinions. Issues are subsequently drawn to the attention of relevant managers who are invited to respond. Not all courses have student representatives. Students do not receive systematic feedback on the issues they have raised in questionnaires or student forums. Only recently has the college sought the opinions of parents of students. There is no college-wide approach to obtain feedback from employers. The college charter is widely disseminated to students. There is inadequate monitoring of college charter commitments, a weakness recognised in the self-assessment report.

89 The self-assessment process is central to the college quality assurance process. Inspectors judged that the self-assessment report had overestimated many strengths and

failed to identify important weaknesses. They agreed with four of the grades the college awarded itself, all in curriculum areas. Of the remaining five curriculum grades awarded by inspectors, four were one grade worse and one was two grades worse than grades awarded by the college. Inspectors did not agree with any of the cross-college grades the college awarded itself. Inspectors' grades were worse, one by two grades, the others by one grade.

Governance

Grade 5

90 Inspectors and auditors were unable to agree with the college's self-assessment of governance. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were not supported by evidence. Many important weaknesses were not identified.

Key strengths

- there are no key strengths

Weaknesses

- failure to ensure the solvency of the college
- failure to ensure an adequate system of internal control
- failure to set the educational character and long-term direction of the college
- inadequate monitoring of the strategic plan and standards of performance
- ineffective working of committees not adhering to their terms of reference
- inadequate clerking arrangements
- little induction or training for corporation members

91 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The corporation does not conduct all its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of

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government. It also does not fulfil all its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

92 The corporation has failed to carry out several of its statutory responsibilities. It has not ensured the solvency of the college and the safeguarding of its assets, nor has it secured the efficient, economical and effective management of all of the college's resources and expenditure. Oversight of the implementation of capital projects and monitoring of capital expenditure has been poor. The financial position of the college is weak. There has been a history of approving inadequate financial forecasts and budgets resulting in operating losses. The college's company has not been subject to appropriate monitoring and control. The reports of the internal auditors show the college's internal control system has been inadequate for three consecutive years.

93 The corporation currently has 16 members, 10 independent, two staff, two co-opted, one student member and the principal. There are four vacancies that the corporation has not attempted to fill. Governors have adopted the modified instrument of government, but have not re-determined corporation membership. The corporation meets four times a year. The overall attendance at corporation and committee meetings of 64% is significantly below the target of 75%. Apart from the attendance target, the corporation has not established indicators for properly assessing its performance. Governors are not supported by a formal induction or training programme. The results of a skills audit undertaken in March 1999 have not been used to identify training needs.

94 The corporation's committees, finance and estates, audit, search, remuneration, personnel and student services and strategic planning, do not work effectively and do not adhere to their terms of reference. The audit committee is not aware of the requirements of Council Circular

98/15, *Audit Code of Practice*. It has not advised the corporation on the effectiveness of the internal control system or adequately monitored the implementation of recommendations from the internal or external auditors or the FEFC's audit service. The finance and estates committee has not adequately monitored the college's worsening financial position, its franchising or the work of the college company. The personnel and student services committee has failed to monitor equal opportunities issues. The strategic planning committee has not monitored achievement and retention effectively. Early in 2000, the governors introduced a monthly cycle of committee meetings.

95 Governors do not receive sufficiently detailed reports of the work of the committees. Committee minutes are noted at corporation meetings. They do not contain discussion of key issues and are not accompanied by important papers from those committee meetings. Some committee chairs do not generally attend corporation meetings. The chairs of the audit and strategic planning committees did not attend any full corporation meetings during the 1998-99 academic year.

96 The corporation has not effectively determined the educational character and strategic direction of the college, a weakness not recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The mission was established prior to incorporation and has not been reviewed since. Important changes to the strategic plan have been made by the management team without governors' approval. In July 1998, a decision to begin substantial franchised provision throughout the country was not authorised by the corporation. The corporation has not received regular reports on the strategic plan, which would enable it to assess progress. It has not properly approved the developmental objectives for 1999-2000 that are now being implemented.

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97 The corporation has not set rigorous standards for the college's activities or monitored the college's performance. It has not specified its requirements for information on retention or achievement or identified the poor retention and pass rates on most college courses. Targets for retention and achievement for 1999-2000 were agreed by the corporation without proper scrutiny or discussion.

Governors have only recently considered the availability of national benchmarking data produced by the FEFC and their use to assess the college's performance. A report to the corporation on the establishment of a standards committee was noted without decision. No such committee has been established. There is little formal contact between governors and curriculum areas to enable governors to develop an understanding of the work and performance of the college. Governors have, however, attended college functions and presentations, and met students at a regular student forum.

98 Clerking arrangements are inadequate. The college has allocated too little time to the performance of the clerking role. The clerk has received insufficient training to enable him to discharge his responsibilities effectively. The corporation has not been provided with essential advice on its duties. The clerk has not been appraised and there are no arrangements for his appraisal. The corporation does not have a process for ensuring the continuing eligibility of members. There is a register of interests, but not all of the entries are complete. A code of conduct has been adopted and has been updated. The corporation has approved a 'whistleblowing' policy. The principal had not been formally appraised until recently, despite this being identified as a weakness in the last inspection report.

Management

Grade 4

99 Inspectors agreed with the majority of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered some strengths were overstated and identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the open and effective management style
- good communications
- extensive external partnerships

Weaknesses

- failure to meet targets
- poor financial controls and financial management
- poor accounting and management practices in the college company
- ineffective operational planning and implementation
- ineffective use of management information

100 At the time of the inspection, the college was experiencing a period of instability. The principal was absent on long-term sick leave and the college was under the temporary direction of an acting principal recently seconded from another college. Thirty-two staff left in autumn 1999 under voluntary or compulsory redundancy. The managing director of the college company was dismissed in the week before the inspection. Recruitment targets had been consistently missed by significant margins in previous years resulting in large overpayments in recurrent funding. The college had been required by the FEFC to submit a recovery plan at the end of March 2000. In this plan, the college has forecast significantly reduced student numbers. Senior management responsibilities had been reorganised twice in

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the two months before the inspection. Until recently, senior management has failed to keep students' retention and achievement under review and take appropriate action.

101 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is weak. Its financial position is poor. Significant operating losses have been made in recent years including £3.3 million in 1998-99. At 31 July 1999, the college had net current liabilities of £3.8 million and negative reserves of £6.8 million. The college's auditors have stated that the college did not have a satisfactory framework of control in 1998-99, and this was the third successive negative overall conclusion received. In the management accounts, cashflow is only forecast in detail to the year-end. Over a long period, the college has failed to submit financial and student data returns to the FEFC in accordance with specified deadlines. The financial statements for 1998-99, due by December 1999, have yet to be finalised by the college. Recent improvements to the management information system enabled the college, for the first time in February 2000, to return the ISR on the due date.

102 As the self-assessment report recognises, there are serious deficiencies in the college company accounts. Investigations to identify the full extent of these problems are continuing. Several other aspects of the college company's operations have not adhered to college practices. The company and its activities are to be relocated within the main organisation. The college's off-site provision is not managed effectively.

103 Since the acting principal was appointed in December 1999, much progress has been made on management issues. For example, he has adopted an open and energetic management style and made several improvements in communications. Staff value the recent measures to keep them well informed about the issues facing the college and the actions being taken. The acting principal holds monthly

meetings for all staff and a surgery three times a month. Senior and college management teams meet weekly. Representatives from the professional associations are invited to the college management team meetings. Clear decisions are being taken on the future direction of the college. Most sector and course teams have regular, minuted meetings. Teams set annual targets for enrolment, retention and achievement, but generally these are not yet being supported by strategies for improvement.

104 Some individual managers at sector level and below are initiating good practices. However, much of this work is having little impact owing to the lack of continuity in staffing. Reorganisations and staff changes over the last two years have been a disrupting influence on the curriculum, a weakness not included in the self-assessment report. Sector management responsibility for social sciences and humanities has changed repeatedly. History and modern foreign language courses have been discontinued following the loss of specialist teachers.

105 Inspectors did not agree that strategic planning is a strength and considered it a weakness. In 1998-99, the college did not achieve many of its annual objectives and they had to be carried forward. Operational plans do not contain milestone dates for monitoring progress and the actions are rarely directly reflected in curriculum plans. Progress towards targets is poorly monitored. Generally, college policies are not managed coherently. There is little central direction and co-ordination of either the implementation or monitoring of some important college policies such as equal opportunities. By contrast, the college has a well-developed and effectively monitored health and safety policy.

106 Inspectors agreed that much work has been done recently to improve the accuracy of the centrally held student records. Steps are being taken to develop the capability of the central computerised information system to

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provide appropriate reports to college managers. While some progress has been made, many managers lack confidence in the reliability and usefulness of the system. They have little confidence in central data and remain cynical about using them. Reports are available on request from the central unit but managers are not using these to inform curriculum planning and review. The college has recently purchased a different software system that is designed to support managers' direct access to information.

107 As stated in the self-assessment report, the college has established beneficial links with a wide range of external organisations. It is an active member of a partnership of nine colleges. Senior managers have regular productive meetings with their counterparts in the local TEC and the college is involved in a number of ongoing initiatives with the TEC as a partner. Some representatives of external organisations consider that their links with the college depend on the enthusiasm of individual staff rather than the commitment of senior managers or the corporation.

Conclusions

108 Although the self-assessment report was 130 pages long, the inspection team found it to be a useful basis for planning the inspection. Each section included an action plan. An updated report provided shortly before the inspection contained evidence of progress in some areas. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the report but identified several additional important weaknesses and a few additional strengths. The well-developed procedures for self-assessment did not appear to have been applied rigorously or consistently. Lesson observation grades awarded by inspectors, in almost all areas inspected, were significantly worse than those the college awarded internally. Inspectors agreed with only four of the curriculum grades the college awarded itself. It awarded worse grades in the

other five curriculum areas inspected and in all cross-college aspects. Most of these were one grade worse than the college-awarded grades, but two were two grades worse.

109 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 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	3
16-18 years	16
19-24 years	19
25+ years	62
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	26
Level 2 (intermediate)	43
Level 3 (advanced)	15
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	14
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	154	838	6
Agriculture	4	16	0
Construction	222	1,074	8
Engineering	130	1,050	7
Business	138	1,376	9
Hotel and catering	132	4,398	28
Health and community care	303	4,193	28
Art and design	49	15	1
Humanities	221	1,467	10
Basic education	151	390	3
Total	1,504	14,817	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 39% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1999)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	136	25	20	181
Supporting direct learning contact	81	1	7	89
Other support	78	2	0	80
Total	295	28	27	350

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£11,961,000	£11,176,000	£12,495,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£19.63	£18.66	£17.84*
Payroll as a proportion of income	80%	82%	68%
Achievement of funding target	91%	85%	88%
Diversity of income	33%	30%	42%
Operating surplus	-£3,646,000	-£2,448,000	-£3,550,000

Sources: Income – college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

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

Payroll – college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

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

Diversity of income – college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

Operating surplus – college (1997, 1998 and 1999)

*provisional data

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1997	1998	1999	1997	1998	1999
1	Number of starters	444	813	745	659	1,082	739
	Retention (%)	77	77	80	72	73	73
	Achievement (%)	47	54	42	62	54	53
2	Number of starters	1,091	1,591	1,365	1,206	1,505	1,206
	Retention (%)	74	66	70	71	68	69
	Achievement (%)	61	54	52	65	64	62
3	Number of starters	728	735	685	1,031	1,631	1,683
	Retention (%)	60	67	62	71	76	75
	Achievement (%)	53	56	51	61	62	67
4 or 5	Number of starters	13	21	24	285	261	246
	Retention (%)	69	76	58	75	69	69
	Achievement (%)	78	81	71	60	63	72
Short courses	Number of starters	150	82	964	1,351	1,461	8,843
	Retention (%)	79	83	96	86	94	98
	Achievement (%)	38	31	77	68	76	84
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	427	374	137	1,979	1,159	552
	Retention (%)	74	73	85	75	76	74
	Achievement (%)	36	36	47	57	66	60

Source: ISR

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