

Burton College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1999-2000, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	6	44	44	7	0
Cross-college provision	9	45	38	8	0

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

Sample size: 112 college inspections

Note: percentages subject to rounding

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1996, would appear in the results for 1997-98 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Burton College

West Midlands Region

Inspected December 2000

Burton College is a medium-sized general further education college located on two main sites, one in the centre of Burton upon Trent, the other in a village 5 miles to the north. All staff contributed to the self-assessment process and the report which provided a sound basis for planning and undertaking the inspection. Action plans accompanied the report. The college is making progress in addressing identified weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report, but considered some other strengths to be normal practice. They found additional weaknesses in most areas. In two of the seven curriculum areas inspected and in one of the five cross-college areas, inspectors awarded grades which were one grade below those given by the college.

The college offers courses in all programme areas funded by the FEFC. Overall, the standard of teaching observed matches the average for the sector. There are effective

arrangements for enrolment and induction and for a wide range of services that support students. Accommodation and resources for learning are good. Substantial investment has been made in IT resources for the benefit of students working away from the college at home or at work. There are comprehensive and effective quality assurance arrangements and a strong commitment throughout the college of continuous improvement. The governors bring a broad range of skills and experience to the board. They have developed comprehensive policies and procedures to ensure openness and accountability. The college is well managed. There is good financial management and effective strategic and operational planning which involves all staff. The college should improve: the take up of additional learning support in some curriculum areas; facilities in the library; access for students with restricted mobility; the thoroughness of some course reviews; the corporation's monitoring of the academic performance of the college; the shortcomings in management information; and the use of IT for teaching.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Engineering	2	General resources	3
Business studies, administration and professional	2	Quality assurance	2
Health, social and childcare	2	Governance	2
Art, design, media and performing arts	2	Management	2
English and access to higher education	3		
Basic skills	2		

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Burton College, the largest provider of further education in East Staffordshire, offers a range of post-16 qualifications for school-leavers and adults. It serves Burton upon Trent and East Staffordshire and also draws a substantial number of students from South Derbyshire, South East Staffordshire, north Staffordshire and north west Leicestershire. The college is currently situated on two sites, one in the centre of Burton upon Trent and the other at Rolleston-on-Dove, 5 miles to the north. The college offers courses which range from basic skills and entry level to higher education. The curriculum is organised into eight schools of study: art and design; business and professional studies; community care; construction; information technology (IT) and computing; leisure and hospitality; science and engineering; and sixth form and continuing education. There is a section which provides supported learning. The college has franchise agreements with training providers, which account for 3% of its total provision. In 1999-2000, 315 students wishing to study at home or at work enrolled for courses within the college's open learning provision and received tutorial and learning support. In addition, 291 students undertook programmes in the small business centre. As part of its strategy to widen participation in education and training, the college has developed and extended its community education provision in Burton and South Derbyshire. Since September 2000, the college has taken over responsibility from Staffordshire Local Education Authority (LEA) for adult education in East Staffordshire.

2 Unemployment in the Burton upon Trent travel-to-work area has fallen steadily to 3%. However, unemployment rates in the five central wards in Burton range from 6.1% to 9.8%. Manufacturing and construction industries employ approximately 36% of the East Staffordshire workforce and service industries employ 64%. The food and drink sector is of great importance to the East Staffordshire economy.

3 The college is one of five further education colleges drawing students from South Derbyshire, East Staffordshire and north west Leicestershire. There is a significant number of local private training providers. All of the secondary schools in Burton provide education for 11 to 18 year olds. The secondary schools offer: a range of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) at levels 2 and 3; the new advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE); and programmes for the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level). In 1999, 43.7% of year 11 students in Burton schools gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above compared with a national average of 48.1%. Of the full-time students entering the college only 24.3% had five GCSE at grades C or above.

4 In July 2000, the college enrolled 2,312 full-time and 6,749 part-time students on courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Of these students, 5.7% identified themselves as belonging to ethnic minorities and 4.7% did not give their ethnic origin on enrolment. The overall percentage of people from ethnic minorities in East Staffordshire is 4.2%, although in some wards in Burton up to 22% of residents are from ethnic backgrounds. In 1999-2000, 57% of students were female. Over a four-year period to 2000, FEFC-funded full-time students have increased by 6.4% and part-time students by 30%. After taking into account the release from the revaluation reserve, the college made an historic cost surplus of £476,000 in the year 2000. Cumulative reserves at 31 July 2000 totalled £2,386,000 of which £1,454,000 was available to finance working capital and to support the capital development programme. In 1999-2000, the college employed 205 full-time equivalent teaching staff. In addition, there were 162 full-time and 35 full-time equivalent staff.

5 The college is a member of the consortium of Staffordshire colleges which has secured both European-funded programmes and a contract to

Context

deliver the New Deal across the county. It is a member of the Staffordshire University Regional Federation. The college has responsibility for the management of the University for Industry (Ufi) and overall accountability for its funding throughout the county. The college is a member of the Burton Community Partnership for the delivery of programmes to regenerate the inner wards of Burton through Single Regeneration Budget funding.

6 The college's mission states that, 'Burton College will continue to provide a diverse and flexible range of high-quality education and training programmes to meet the needs of individuals, companies and the wider community'.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during December 2000. Inspectors had previously evaluated the college's self-assessment report and considered information about the college provided 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 1998 and 1999. The college's own data on students' achievements for 2000 were checked by inspectors against primary sources, such as class registers and pass lists issued by the examining bodies. They found some data to be unreliable. For example, there was some under-reporting of achievement. The inspection was carried out by 13 inspectors working for a total of 50 days and an auditor working for five days. Inspectors observed 82 lessons, scrutinised students' work and examined college documents. Meetings were held with governors, managers, teachers, other college staff, students and external partners.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the lessons observed, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 8% were less than satisfactory. This profile compares with 62% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programmes	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level and GCSE	2	2	9	3	0	16
GNVQ	1	6	5	0	0	12
NVQ	1	4	2	0	0	7
Other vocational	4	18	8	2	0	32
Other*	4	4	2	2	0	12
Total (No.)	13	36	26	7	0	82
Total (%)	16	44	32	8	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000 (%)	17	45	31	6	0	100

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

Note: percentages subject to rounding

*includes basic skills and access to higher education

Context

9 The following table shows the attendance rates in the lessons observed and the national average for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000.

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Burton College	8.7	76
National average, all inspected colleges 1999-2000	10.3	76

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

Curriculum Areas

Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report and all but one of the weaknesses. Some of the strengths were overstated. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the wide range of courses
- good progression rates
- the high standard of learning materials on computer literacy and information technology courses

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching
- the inadequate provision of specialist IT resources
- underdeveloped use of IT in teaching

11 The college offers a wide range of courses from foundation to level 4 in computing and IT. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Course literature is good and reflects the effective management of courses. Meetings at course and school level are held regularly, actions to be taken are recorded and progress is monitored. Courses are reviewed regularly. Target-setting is effectively aligned with college priorities and performance indicators. Teachers communicate well with each other. Internal verification procedures are regularly applied. Unsatisfactory timetables for students on some courses have resulted from a shortage of well-qualified, full-time teachers of computing and IT, the long-term illness of one member of staff and an increase in the number of students. Some classes have had to be combined and some students have insufficient

breaks between lessons. Theory and practical lessons are taught separately.

12 The standard of teaching and learning in computing and IT is below the average for the sector. Some teaching is dull and students are not challenged by the tasks which they are set. Students who are given effective guidance in the use of presentation software make good use of the Internet to produce well-designed automated slide shows. There is insufficient use of IT in teaching. Inadequate access to IT reduces the potential for effective learning in some lessons. For example, teachers are unable to provide practical tasks at the appropriate time to illustrate difficult concepts in areas such as low-level programming and database design. Many teachers provide students with well-structured learning materials. Excellent software guides are used on the courses in computer literacy and information technology. Students receive good verbal feedback. Schemes of work are repetitive and often fail to indicate links with the requirements of examination syllabuses. An intranet is being developed but contains few resources for students. Staff data files of materials for assignments are stored in a shared area of the network but there are no interactive learning materials. Specialist learning support for students is inadequate.

13 Student retention rates for the national diploma courses in IT and in computing have improved since 1998. Students' achievements on these courses are excellent. There were poor achievement rates for 1998 and 1999 on the GCE A level computing course and the retention rate has declined significantly since 1998. Retention on GNVQ intermediate IT has been below the national average for the last three years and achievement has declined during that period. Retention on the European Computer Driving Licence course is good. Retention on the computer literacy and information technology course has been above the national average for three years and achievements in 1998 and 1999 exceeded national averages. Progression rates to

Curriculum Areas

further and higher education are good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The school maintains appropriately detailed records of student destinations.

14 Teaching rooms are able to accommodate the large computing and IT classes satisfactorily but the college has only one specialist computer room. It is well equipped and provides access to a wide range of up-to-date software on an independent network. This arrangement, however, prevents students from accessing the Internet and college intranet and any files stored in their own network area. The room is also used as a network workshop which reduces its effectiveness. Although most practical classes are taught in the resource centre, it is inappropriate

for teaching many of the specialist computing and IT lessons. For example, students are unable to work in groups whilst engaged on practical tasks and there is insufficient opportunity for them to use multimedia facilities. The lack of large display facilities reduces the effectiveness of whole-class and group demonstrations. Students enrolled on the college's open learning provision, who study mostly on their own at home or at work on such courses as computer literacy and information technology and on the European Computer Driving Licence course, make effective use of the resource centre. They are able to work at a pace which suits them and use good 'self-study' materials. Provision of up-to-date software guides and text books in the library is good.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in computing and information technology, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Computer literacy and information technology	1	Number of starters	578	524	583
		Retention (%)	88	91	94
		Achievement (%)	82	59	**
European Computer Driving Licence	2	Number of starters	*	29	42
		Retention (%)	*	84	90
		Achievement (%)	*	32	100
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	24	52	19
		Retention (%)	71	60	75
		Achievement (%)	100	93	79
National diploma in IT	3	Number of starters	16	16	26
		Retention (%)	56	75	77
		Achievement (%)	89	100	100
National diploma in computer studies	3	Number of starters	15	21	24
		Retention (%)	67	86	79
		Achievement (%)	80	100	100
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	34	29	15
		Retention (%)	65	52	39
		Achievement (%)	64	55	75

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

*course not running

**data unavailable

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

15 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the strengths and one of the weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching in practical lessons
- a high achievement rate on most courses
- well-developed links with industry
- a broad range of courses
- well-managed courses

Weaknesses

- a poor student retention rate on some courses
- some drab accommodation
- poor attendance on a few courses

16 The school of science and engineering provides a broad range of craft, technician and higher technician courses in polymer technology, electrical installation, welding and fabrication, mechanical, electrical and electronic and motor vehicle engineering. This strength was identified in the college's self-assessment report. The school offers a degree programme jointly with Coventry University in polymer technology during which students attend the college for the first year. It provides good progression opportunities to employment for students. Inspectors agreed with the college that there are well-developed links with local industry. These include a range of day-release courses and the provision of short courses organised in the company's premises or in college. Advisory boards are well established and meet twice each year. There are good links with schools. Students from local schools study motor vehicle national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 1 on two days a week in college. Courses are well

managed and most course files are comprehensive, as was recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff meetings are held regularly. Students' progress is analysed at programme meetings and appropriate action is taken in weekly tutorials to help both full-time and part-time students. Diagnostic screening is undertaken for all full-time students and learning support is offered but the take up is low.

17 There is much good teaching in practical lessons as identified by the college in the self-assessment. In one lesson the students carried out a practical investigation of an electronic filter circuit. Working to a well-structured task sheet, they measured the output voltage whilst increasing the frequency of the input and then accurately plotted a graph of the results. The teacher questioned the students expertly helping them to identify the type of filter correctly. An IT lesson demonstrated the relevance of spreadsheets to motor vehicle studies. The students created a spreadsheet from new car sales data. They then produced bar charts and graphs which gave a visual representation of the number of sales over a period of months. Some classroom-based work was dull, although most classes had a sound balance of teacher and student activity. There was poor attendance in some lessons.

18 Inspectors agreed with the college that there is high achievement on most courses. For example, the pass rate for intermediate technician courses in 2000 was 93% compared with the average for the sector of 71%. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that there is a poor student retention rate on some courses. For example, the rate on NVQ level 2 programmes in 1999 was 72% compared with the sector average of 79%. Where retention rates have been poor for some years, there has been an improvement between 1998 and 2000. Students are industrious, particularly in practical sessions. Assignment briefs are well structured but the grading criteria are insufficiently specific. In

Curriculum Areas

some cases, written feedback lacked appropriate detail. The standard of presentation of students' assignment work varies. Some are handwritten and untidy but some wordprocessed reports contain excellent diagrams.

19 Mechanical engineering and electrical installation workshops are situated on the Burton site. The electrical installation workshop and adjoining classroom are well equipped. The mechanical workshop and fitting area are well organised and contain appropriate machine tools. In an adjacent workshop there are computer numerically controlled machine tools. A dual-purpose classroom/workshop contains a satisfactory quantity of pneumatic and associated maintenance equipment. The computer-aided design suite is an unsatisfactory working environment which receives no natural light. The software does not conform to current industry standards. Some corridor walls are

dirty and there is no display of students' work. The motor vehicle workshop is situated in a separate building close to the main site. This workshop is overcrowded on occasions. A small computer suite has no natural light and the students' workroom is in a poor state of decoration. The college's self-assessment report did not mention these examples of drab accommodation which will not help to motivate students. The motor vehicle facility contains a good range of service equipment and current diagnostic test equipment. Recent acquisitions include two heavy goods vehicles and two cars donated by a manufacturer. The body shop houses a modern spray booth. A mechanical science laboratory, several classrooms and electronics laboratories are spacious and well equipped. Staff have appropriate qualifications for the courses which they teach and are assisted by several resource managers.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G level 1	1	Number of starters	71	85	87
		Retention (%)	77	81	90
		Achievement (%)	77	76	78
C&G level 2	2	Number of starters	115	138	83
		Retention (%)	91	96	88
		Achievement (%)	45	57	59
NVQ	2	Number of starters	34	89	31
		Retention (%)	71	72	84
		Achievement (%)	95	80	94
Intermediate technician	2	Number of starters	80	94	86
		Retention (%)	85	94	81
		Achievement (%)	83	74	93
Advanced technician	3	Number of starters	93	111	102
		Retention (%)	70	68	82
		Achievement (%)	68	90	95
NVQ	3	Number of starters	18	12	36
		Retention (%)	67	58	100
		Achievement (%)	83	75	90

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

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies, Administration and Professional

Grade 2

20 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that the report omitted a number of weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- well-managed courses
- good pass rates at GNVQ advanced level
- a wide range of courses
- effective links with industry and commerce
- effective commercial updating of full-time staff

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on GCE A level business studies and the certificate in marketing
- insufficient recognition of the different learning abilities of students
- underdeveloped use of IT

21 The college offers a wide range of business and professional courses including: GNVQs; GCSE; GCE advanced subsidiary (AS) and GCE A level business studies; Edexcel Foundation and Chartered Institute of Marketing certificates; Association of Accounting Technicians qualifications; and supervisory and management qualifications offered by the Institute of Management and the National Examining Board for Supervisory Management. Students on GNVQ advanced courses can take a range of additional GCE AS subjects. There are progression opportunities to higher level courses.

22 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that courses are effectively planned and well managed. Course documentation is well organised. However, not all full-time students receive course handbooks. Thorough schemes of work and lesson plans identify appropriate activities and learning objectives. Assessment procedures are fair and effectively applied. Teachers' comments on written work are helpful and constructive. Course induction programmes are comprehensive and valued by students. The personal tutorial system works well. All full-time students have timetabled tutorials during which their individual progress is monitored. There are clear procedures for reviewing students' attendance. Where appropriate, teachers have effective links with parents, and provide regular reports to them on students' progress and attendance. Students' opinions are regularly surveyed and contribute to reviews of courses.

23 There is much good teaching. In the most effective lessons clear planning, specified learning objectives and the appropriate use of resources help students to learn effectively. Students in these lessons are motivated and engage in an appropriate range of activities. Many teachers make good use of their current knowledge of business and economic developments to enliven their teaching. Industrial and commercial links are explored to add realism to assignments. Students have benefited from visits and a programme of visiting speakers all of which have vocational relevance to their courses. In less satisfactory lessons, the teaching and class activities take insufficient account of the differing needs of students. A lack of learning materials that were suitably graded in terms of difficulty meant some students were not given opportunities to tackle sufficiently demanding work and work to their full potential. In a few lessons, some students were wholly unresponsive. Occasionally students spent too much time on

Curriculum Areas

tasks such as copying information from projected slides. In some GNVQ intermediate and GCE A level lessons, students did not have appropriate skills in making notes. Students were not always encouraged to use the IT facilities available to them. Their use of IT in assignments and course work is underdeveloped. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Low numbers on some courses restricted opportunities for discussion.

24 Students written work is often good. Teachers provide appropriately detailed and constructive written feedback to students on work submitted for assessment. Attendance rates are good on most programmes. Achievement rates on most courses are at or above the average for the sector. On the GNVQ advanced business course, for example, achievement rates between 1998 and 2000 were significantly above the average. Pass rates on the Association of Accounting Technicians level

3 course were above the average for the sector. The college acknowledges that there are poor pass rates on the courses for the certificate in marketing and GCE A level business studies. There are good rates of retention on most courses.

25 All teachers are well qualified and have appropriate commercial experience. Many have recently undertaken work placements in business. The teaching accommodation for business studies courses located in a well-decorated modern building is good. Classrooms are appropriately furnished with whiteboards and overhead projectors and there is effective access to television and video players. However, few rooms have IT facilities. Teachers make effective use of well-resourced base rooms. There is a good range of up-to-date library books and periodicals. Students develop their investigative skills through the use of the Internet, although insufficient relevant Internet links are provided.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate	2	Number of starters	13	14	*
		Retention (%)	38	50	*
		Achievement (%)	80	100	*
NVQ in administration	2	Number of starters	24	20	9
		Retention (%)	88	75	89
		Achievement (%)	35	46	75
GCE A level business (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	†	†	35
		Retention (%)	†	†	70
		Achievement (%)	†	†	55
GNVQ advanced business	3	Number of starters	44	36	25
		Retention (%)	70	78	60
		Achievement (%)	84	89	93
National certificate in business	3	Number of starters	40	19	25
		Retention (%)	80	72	88
		Achievement (%)	97	83	94

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Certificate in marketing	3	Number of starters	7	11	18
		Retention (%)	57	73	94
		Achievement (%)	**	**	28
NVQ accounting (Association of Accounting Technicians)	3	Number of starters	12	24	34
		Retention (%)	75	75	85
		Achievement (%)	44	79	68

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

**course not running*

***data unavailable*

†low numbers

Curriculum Areas

Health, Social and Childcare

Grade 2

26 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- outstanding pass rates on several courses
- good teaching
- effective tutorial support for students
- good progression opportunities to higher level courses

Weaknesses

- low retention rates on many courses in 1999
- inadequate use of IT
- shortcomings in accommodation

27 The college offers a good range of courses in health and social care. Courses in care at level 4 offer students good opportunities for progression. An NVQ assessment centre provides assessments of students' skills, and helps to promote effective contacts with work-based assessors and care establishments. Course team meetings are held regularly and students' rates of attendance and retention are reviewed. Communications across the school are not always effective. School meetings, target-setting and self-assessment processes require further development to ensure all staff take a full part in them. Course files are well maintained. Students receive comprehensive course handbooks. All students are assigned to a personal tutor and have timetabled tutorials. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that tutors provide good support for students. Tutorials are used effectively to review progress and to agree action plans in order to improve students' performance. In one well-organised group

tutorial, students were encouraged to consider the way they were relating to each other; they agreed a common action plan for improvement. The responsibilities which some staff carry as personal tutors is excessive. The take-up by students of additional support is good on one course, unsatisfactory on another.

28 There is much good teaching. Teachers pay careful attention to setting clear learning objectives for most of their lessons. Teaching is well organised. In the best lessons, the teaching was imaginative and lively. A wide and appropriate range of activities sustains students' interest and includes: pair work; small group work; presentations to the whole class; role-play; and class exercises which are led by the teacher. Particularly frequent and good use is made of group work. Teachers ask students well-directed questions and make effective use of their responses. All childcare courses include a period of carefully supervised work experience which is highly valued by students. In subsequent reflection and discussion, students are encouraged to draw on their own background knowledge and work experience. In less satisfactory lessons, the start or the finish to the lesson was rushed. As a consequence learning objectives were either omitted at the beginning of lessons or not reviewed at the end. In a few lessons there was insufficient progress in covering aspects of the syllabus. Attendance is good and students arrive promptly for the start of lessons.

29 Students' plan their written work well. They often undertake assignments that require extensive efforts to collect sufficient data. Some assignments provide good opportunities for students to conduct their own well-designed surveys. When marking work, teachers give appropriate guidance through written comments; they grade work accurately. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that students' assignments are not appropriately spaced through the year. In 2000, pass rates on the GNVQ intermediate

Curriculum Areas

and advanced courses and on the national diploma in childhood studies were outstanding. For the diploma in nursery nursing, rates of student retention and achievement were very high. In the childcare certificate, achievement rates were below the national average for the sector. In 1998-99, retention rates on several courses were below the national average. There was a considerable degree of improvement in 1999-2000.

30 Teachers are appropriately qualified. There has been a significant degree of staff turnover. Accommodation has shortcomings. The self-assessment report recognised that some classrooms were too small to accommodate the activities taking place in them and this reduced the quality of teaching and learning. Inspectors

agreed with this judgement. At the time of the inspection, the accommodation was being improved and some teaching was being moved to a newly refurbished building which provides good classrooms. There is inadequate access to appropriate IT facilities in staff work rooms and classrooms. The absence of computers in classrooms restricts the opportunities for childcare students to learn how to design for young children activities that involve computers. In sports therapy, the use of IT in the curriculum has been more effectively developed than in childcare. The library has a good stock of books. Students use the Internet for their work on assignments but many are unaware of the existence of the college's intranet.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health, social and childcare, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	25	29	32
		Retention (%)	76	72	77
		Achievement (%)	79	42	68
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	17	14	20
		Retention (%)	82	100	90
		Achievement (%)	93	100	100
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	22	33	21
		Retention (%)	77	70	96
		Achievement (%)	87	100	100
Diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	52	30	26
		Retention (%)	69	63	96
		Achievement (%)	94	83	95
National diploma in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	*	31	22
		Retention (%)	*	77	86
		Achievement (%)	*	41	100
National certificate in childhood studies	3	Number of starters	*	22	17
		Retention (%)	*	68	88
		Achievement (%)	*	86	80

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

*course not running

Curriculum Areas

Art, Design, Media and Performing Arts

Grade 2

31 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths but identified additional weaknesses in students' achievements.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- many high retention rates
- well-managed programmes
- some good specialist facilities
- good opportunities for the development of specialist skills
- effective monitoring of students' progress and assessment

Weaknesses

- poor pass rates on some courses
- insufficient access to the Internet and use of IT
- deficiencies in accommodation and equipment in a few areas

32 The range of courses at all levels in art, design, media and performing arts offers students good opportunities for progression within the college and to higher education as identified in the self-assessment report. The programme area has recruited well, particularly to media and performing arts courses. There are 10 part-time courses including City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) programmes and several non vocational classes. Course literature is good. Courses are well managed and taught by cohesive teams. The school has well-established procedures to ensure safe working practices. There is thorough monitoring and tracking of students' progress. Tutorials are well used to monitor students'

records of attendance and punctuality and to review their progress in their studies. Students are set individual targets for each new assignment every three weeks. Course team meetings and the arts advisory committee contribute to course reviews. Annual course reviews are evaluative and most lead to well-defined plans for subsequent action. Careful phasing and timetabling of courses provide learners with a broad range of opportunities to develop specialist skills. The analysis of students' achievements is insufficiently thorough and the use of management information is underdeveloped.

33 There is much good teaching, most of which is expressed through carefully considered and constructed assignments and projects. For example, access students were required to produce a collection of beachwear on the theme of spots and stripes. After research into pattern and decorative processes they launched their collection through a presentation to their peers. Informative handouts are used to consolidate students' learning. Most lessons are planned in appropriate detail, have suitably demanding objectives and appropriate assessment criteria. Teachers encourage students to work on a variety of creative activities and to develop their personal styles. Most students respond well to the purposeful atmosphere in lessons. In a few lessons students were late but generally attendance is satisfactory. Key skills training has been carefully planned and is delivered separately from the teaching of courses that lead to qualifications. Elements of key skills training are integrated with students' core studies. For example, a numeracy questionnaire was issued to photography students to test their understanding of how cameras and enlargers work. Teachers combine formal teaching with less structured activities in which students experiment with a variety of formal techniques. In a few of the less effective lessons teachers did not ensure that students had understood the work. There were too few opportunities for

Curriculum Areas

students to ask questions or contribute to discussion, and some students were slow to settle to their tasks. Some group work was not well managed. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

34 Student retention rates are good for most courses and have been above national averages for the sector for several years. For many courses there has been a steady improvement in the retention rate since 1998. There has also been an improvement in pass rates on several courses in 2000. However, pass rates have been consistently poor on GCE A level courses and they are below national averages on national diploma courses. There are few courses where both pass and retention rates are good.

Weaknesses in students' achievements were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Students' practical work is usually of a good standard. Appropriate attention is paid to basic drawing skills. Students make good use of notebooks to record their ideas and work that is in progress. They develop good technical skills

in a variety of media, and learn design skills using industry-based software. Performing arts students demonstrate production skills through public performances at local theatres. There are good rates of progression for full-time students to higher education.

35 Most accommodation is appropriate. Each specialisation has a suitable base room equipped with specialist machinery and materials. A significant amount of the work of current students is displayed. The work of past students is used to convey to current students the standards which can be achieved. There are good storage facilities. Students have insufficient access to the Internet for their research. Some rooms are too cramped to support the number of students in classes. Library resources for most subject areas are adequate although students do not have electronic access to materials in the main college library. There are not enough video cameras. There is poor access to some areas for students with restricted mobility.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	17	12	10
		Retention (%)	65	83	100
		Achievement (%)	100	90	90
First diploma in performing arts	2	Number of starters	6	19	21
		Retention (%)	67	58	67
		Achievement (%)	50	71	100
National diploma (lens media, graphic design, performing arts)	3	Number of starters	38	56	68
		Retention (%)	76	80	81
		Achievement (%)	90	89	86
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	44	36	14
		Retention (%)	45	56	79
		Achievement (%)	100	88	91
Access certificate to higher education art and design	3	Number of starters	8	22	21
		Retention (%)	63	73	76
		Achievement (%)	80	92	100

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Pre-degree diploma in foundation studies	3	Number of starters	28	34	22
		Retention (%)	93	91	95
		Achievement (%)	88	91	100
GCE A levels	3	Number of starters	104	132	125
		Retention (%)	74	64	73
		Achievement (%)	66	66	72

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

Curriculum Areas

English and Access to Higher Education

Grade 3

36 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report, although they found that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice. They found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good achievements in GCSE English and access to higher education
- effective monitoring of students' progress
- good opportunities for students within the broad curriculum
- effective course management

Weaknesses

- some significant weaknesses in teaching and learning
- some poor rates of achievement at GCE A level
- insufficient development of IT in the curriculum

37 Inspectors agreed with the college that the broad curriculum gives good opportunities for students to progress. A course that prepares students for subsequently taking the English GCSE course is provided. An English language and literature course is offered at GCSE and at GCE A level. The modular access to higher education course is offered both full time and part time and a pre-access course has helped students progress to and remain on the access course. The access course is linked to a degree course of the University of Derby, enabling students to begin their degree studies at the college. Course management is effective, as noted in the college's self-assessment report. Course teams ensure that the English and access

courses are developed to meet changing needs and requirements, for example the introduction of curriculum 2000. They meet regularly and pay close attention to matters such as the improvement of standards and the monitoring of progress. Targets are set and reviewed for rates of attendance, retention and achievements. There are schemes of work although their standard is uneven. Some are no more than topic headings but others outline in appropriate detail how teachers will seek to develop students' skills and understanding.

38 There are some significant weaknesses in teaching. Inspectors did not agree with the judgements in the college's self-assessment report on the standard of teaching. There were, however, some examples of good practice. The more effective lessons were carefully prepared. Teachers made good use of well-chosen handouts and well-designed task sheets. Inspectors saw some examples of the effective use of small group work in which students analysed texts for meaning or literary style. Attendance at lessons was good. Punctuality was less satisfactory, although students who were late were always challenged by the teacher. In the less effective lessons, learning objectives were not fully reached. Teachers sometimes ran out of time. Students did not fully grasp the task set and their concentration sometimes lapsed. It was often difficult for teachers to meet the needs of students of differing abilities and achievements adequately.

39 Inspectors agreed with judgements in the college's self-assessment report on students' achievements. There are good achievements which have steadily improved over recent years in GCSE English and in access to higher education; the achievements significantly exceed national averages for the sector. However, student' achievements in GCE A level communications are low and those in GCE A level English language and literature not only fluctuate but stay below national averages. Student retention rates are close to the national

Curriculum Areas

average, although declining in access to higher education course. The standard of students' work varies from good to weak. Some of the autobiographical work was good. Students reflected on sensitive aspects of their own lives with courage and frankness and wrote about them with candour. Poor work from students was characterised by insufficient analysis and errors both of spelling and syntax. Most teachers mark accurately but the quality of feedback is uneven. Some provide well-developed coversheets which explain how the mark was reached and how students might improve their performance. Others make far fewer comments and do not use coversheets. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students' progress is carefully monitored. Monitoring includes: careful attention to patterns of attendance; regular reports to parents of students aged under 19

years; and the identification of additional learning support needs. Students make extensive use of the English workshop. Subject queries are dealt with during timetabled sessions for subject support when staff are available for consultation.

40 Staff are well qualified. The teaching rooms are well furnished and equipped. There are some displays which are subject-related but relatively little students' work is included. Resources in the library and the school are sufficient to support students' learning. Although students have ready access to computers in the resource centre there is insufficient provision in the classrooms. Work in the school on the development of subject intranets and IT for study skills has not yet had an impact on most of the subjects taught in the school. The use of IT in the curriculum is underdeveloped.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in English and access to higher education, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GCSE English language and literature	2	Number of starters	295	220	196
		Retention (%)	75	81	74
		Achievement (%)	42	62	75
GCE A level communication studies	3	Number of starters	22	17	20
		Retention (%)	73	65	50
		Achievement (%)	63	40	66
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	97	82	104
		Retention (%)	72	62	75
		Achievement (%)	73	53	78
Access to higher education	3	Number of starters	67	98	77
		Retention (%)	83	76	66
		Achievement (%)	55	81	94

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

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 2

41 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report but found additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching of 16 to 19 year old students
- effective negotiation of individual learning plans with all basic skills students
- some imaginative learning programmes
- good rates of retention and achievement
- significant increase in recruitment through vocational entry programme

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped provision of basic education for adults
- insufficient resources for IT

42 All full-time students are screened to assess their support needs for basic skills. The decision on take-up is then largely the students' responsibility. Extra tuition in literacy and numeracy is available. Some students achieve basic skills accreditation directly through their main course of study, such as the 'highways' programme for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The introduction of the Edexcel vocational entry programme has contributed significantly to the widening of participation among students aged 14 to 19. Progression is satisfactory from vocational courses and from 'highways' provision. Basic skills are also taught in adult basic education classes at the main college site. A few classes are held at three community venues, two of which are youth and community centres about 2 miles from the college and the third is a public library in Uttoxeter about 20 miles from the college.

43 Teaching of most 16 to 19 year old students is good. Teachers have a good rapport with their students. Lessons are well planned and well taught. An individual learning plan is negotiated with every student and regularly reviewed. The effectiveness of this process was identified in the self-assessment report. Most students value highly the support which they receive. In the teaching there is a well-judged mix of group and one-to-one work. Paper-based handouts are generally imaginative and designed to engage and hold students' interest. Volunteer tutors worked effectively in most classes. In two classes the volunteers were not adequately supervised by the tutors and as a consequence gave students' a narrow choice of resources, and used inappropriate and unimaginative teaching methods. IT is not used for teaching in lessons in the college or at centres in the community, where the atmosphere is not always likely to encourage study.

44 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that students' work is marked thoroughly and is of a good standard. Most students are achieving their personal learning goals, gaining reading, writing and number skills and developing confidence. For those students who enter for external awards, rates of retention and achievements are improving and at the time of the inspection were above the national average for the sector. Rates of attendance are sometimes poor, but the college's self-assessment report does not identify this weakness. Tutorial provision for vocational students is excellent. Good use is made of a proforma for monitoring behaviour. Staff identify problems and inform the personal tutor who is then able to intervene appropriately.

45 Most teachers either hold teaching qualifications in basic skills or are working towards gaining them. While opportunities for regular meetings for all staff, including part-time staff, are limited to once a term, opportunities to undertake staff development are more readily

Curriculum Areas

available. Additional support sessions in the well-equipped resource centre are popular with students who welcome the informal atmosphere. However, the noise generated by students engaged in other activities can disrupt learning. Most accommodation for vocational students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is spacious. Effective use is made of designated base rooms where there are informative and attractive wall displays of students' work.

46 The college took over the management of some community-based basic skills provision from the local authority at the start of the academic year 2000-01. The college immediately produced clear plans to improve this provision. A number of the weaknesses have now been addressed. The college acknowledges that the

adult curriculum on offer is narrow and mostly involves gaining qualifications through external examination, which is an unsuitable route for some adult students. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to have their coursework externally assessed. Most adult students do not progress to more advanced courses. Many have attended the basic course for many years with scant evidence of achievement. The very small class size in adult basic education courses means that many learners derive little benefit from group work or whole-class activity from contact and discussion with others. In the adult basic education classes most learning materials are only available to the teacher. Some accommodation is cramped and inappropriate and offers no privacy for conducting one-to-one work.

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Support for Students

Grade 2

47 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. They found further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good impartial pre-course information and guidance
- effective enrolment and induction arrangements
- comprehensive careers provision
- the wide and effective range of services to support students

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory take-up of additional learning support
- poor individual plans for the improvement of students' performance

48 The college provides clear impartial pre-course advice and information to prospective students, a strength recorded in the self-assessment report. The college employs an effective range of recruitment methods. The attractive and informative publicity material takes account of the changes for curriculum 2000. Students are informed of the range and content of courses at information and 'taster' events, in publicity materials and at interview. Admissions procedures are organised effectively. Each course has set entry criteria. Staff seek to ensure that students are placed on the appropriate level of course and, for students aged 16 to 18, that they understand the changes associated with curriculum 2000. Those unsure about which courses to study are referred for a general guidance interview and, where appropriate, other education and training providers are suggested.

49 As at the previous inspection, and as the college's self-assessment report recognises, arrangements for the enrolment and induction of students are effective. All full-time and, where appropriate, part-time students take part in an induction programme. Staff are provided with clear written guidance, checklists and suggestions for useful activities for the induction period. This approach is supported by helpful literature on college facilities and services. Most students find that enrolment is conducted efficiently and that induction is informative and helps them settle into their studies well.

50 Most tutorials are good or outstanding. The remainder, however, are unsatisfactory in their organisation and delivery. Students are appreciative of the help and support that tutors provide. Tutors are offered regular training, appropriately detailed guides and supporting materials for tutoring. Tutorials include both group sessions and an individual review of a student's progress. Written tutorial records do not provide clear reports on students' strengths or areas in which they would benefit from further help. Individual plans to improve student performance are insufficiently detailed, often unclear, not measurable, make minimal use of target dates and occasionally are incomplete. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

51 The range of services to support students who have additional learning requirements is appropriate and includes help with communications, numeracy, and IT. The college provides a range of modified materials, equipment and specialist services to meet students' individual support needs. Students are offered help through timetabled group sessions and individual appointments for their programme of study or have the option of attending the learning support workshops. College managers are provided with reports on the impact of learning support on the achievement of students. All students on full-time and substantial part-time courses are

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assessed for the training to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The take up of the support in most of curriculum areas is low, a weakness the college's self-assessment report did not identify.

52 As the self-assessment report indicates the college provides good support for students moving to higher education, further training and employment. The main careers area is resourced appropriately and organised efficiently. Full-time students receive a comprehensive careers programme including guidance on higher education, employment and further training. Part-time students have the opportunity of careers guidance through appointments with the college careers adviser or the local careers service. Other helpful services include job boards, visits to careers and higher education fairs and a guide to websites that give information on employment opportunities. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive specialist careers advice. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service whose advisers provide guidance interviews, career talks and support to students who have been identified as at risk of leaving their course early. After the publication of examination results the college offers guidance on courses and career options to students and their parents and to learners from other institutions or organisations.

53 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the friendly, responsive and supportive staff in student services offer a comprehensive range of services. These include: guidance and assistance on issues concerning student finance; accommodation; benefits and welfare issues; advocacy both within the college and with external agencies; transport; and health promotion. The college ran a successful drugs awareness week, which included participation in the events by public figures, the police service and local support agencies. A personal counselling service is staffed by qualified counsellors. Students are

referred to external agencies for help where appropriate. The college provides childcare facilities for children aged up to five years and support through its access fund for students to use childminders. The range of services available at the Rolleston site is less comprehensive than those available in Burton.

54 For 2000-01 the college has extended its enrichment activities. These include non-accredited and accredited programmes, which can broaden students' primary area of study or help them to develop an interest in a particular topic. The many activities include a film club, Duke of Edinburgh awards, driving test theory and first aid. The sports programme includes rugby union, soccer for both female and male students and mixed hockey.

General Resources

Grade 3

55 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, some strengths identified did not reflect good or outstanding practice and some were overemphasised. Inspectors identified an additional weakness and considered one strength to be a weakness.

Key strengths

- welcoming and attractive reception and student services areas at Burton
- a good modern resource centre
- an extensive range of up-to-date IT equipment
- well-maintained and tidy accommodation

Weaknesses

- poor accommodation at Rolleston
- under-utilised classrooms and workshops
- some poor access for students with restricted mobility
- insufficient library provision

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56 The college has some outstanding and attractive accommodation. This includes the well-located and welcoming reception and student services areas at Burton, where most general teaching rooms are well furnished and appropriately equipped with teaching aids. Inspectors agreed that the accommodation at Burton is well cared for and that most areas are well maintained and suitably decorated. There is a planned maintenance programme which is particularly effective at Burton. The college's annual running costs are low, and the budget for maintenance is appropriate. Accommodation at Rolleston, however, is poor and in need of extensive refurbishment to bring it to an appropriate standard. The college recognises the poor buildings at this site. Plans to dispose of the site and to relocate all provision in new or existing accommodation at Burton are well advanced. The college's maintenance policy reflects this proposed action.

57 Most staff rooms and administration offices are of an adequate size, built to an appropriate standard and clean and tidy. They are located near to teaching areas and contain sufficient telephones and computers. A few staff rooms are cramped and in need of refurbishment. Storage facilities are inadequate in some areas of the college. A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is the significant underuse of classrooms, specialist workshops and laboratory space. The room utilisation at Burton and Rolleston is only 23% and 26%, respectively.

58 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the college's self-assessment report that the well-built resource centre is a strength. It contains the library on the ground floor and IT facilities on two upper floors. The centre is generally well managed and very popular with students. Much of the site at Burton is readily accessible to people with restricted mobility but access to the Riverside building is inadequate. Access at Rolleston is very poor. There is an adequate number of appropriate toilets for

people with restricted mobility. Some toilet facilities in the college are poor and in need of refurbishment.

59 The student refectory at Burton is well appointed but is overcrowded at peak meal times. Some students prefer to use nearby cafes and shops in Burton. The student refectory at Rolleston is satisfactory. There are extensive sports fields and football pitches and a swimming pool at Rolleston. At Burton the college hires a nearby modern sports facility for outdoor sports and uses a leisure centre for indoor sports.

60 Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment report that library provision is a strength. The library at Burton is well located and welcoming, the smaller one at Rolleston less so. The total library space is appropriate for the student population. There are sufficient well qualified library staff on each site. There are insufficient private study places for students. Staff rooms, workspaces and storage areas are inadequate. There is no low shelving for reference stock. Library opening hours are restricted. Overall the bookstock is low for the size and diversity of the college. Provision of CD-ROMs is insufficient. In recent years there has been a high number of book losses which is associated with failures in security arrangements. The library management systems are satisfactory, but there are some operational difficulties due to computer breakdowns. There is no direct electronic catalogue link between the two sites. The number of information guides is minimal. There is effective co-operation between library staff and teachers in most subject areas. There is sufficient good audiovisual equipment.

61 As a result of significant investment in recent years the college has a high standard of IT resources as identified in the self-assessment report. There are 454 up-to-date networked computers available for students' use which provides a ratio of computers to full-time

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equivalent students of around 1:6. Students have useful opportunities to access computers outside timetabled classes. Most computers are available in the resource centre, which provides a modern IT environment and up-to-date software and applications. There are few computers in classrooms and other student work areas. The availability of computers for teachers is adequate. College records show that electronic mail facilities and the worldwide web are well used by staff and students for communication and research. The college intranet is in the early stages of development and includes some learning materials. Access to multimedia facilities is inadequate. There is an adequate number of good printers, most of which are networked. Technicians are well qualified to support IT in the college.

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

62 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report. They identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a strong emphasis in policy and practice on continuous improvement
- comprehensive and effective arrangements for quality assurance
- effective impact of performance indicators on raising standards
- careful attention to monitoring of action plans
- good staff development opportunities

Weaknesses

- some insufficiently thorough course reviews
- inaccurate assessment of teaching
- no clear ordering of priorities for key strengths and weaknesses

63 The college's strong commitment to continuous improvement is reflected in its strategic objectives. Staff understand the improvement strategy. They are clear about their responsibilities in helping to raise the standard of students' performance. Since the previous inspection, the college has further developed its quality assurance framework. There are comprehensive and effective procedures. These strengths are identified in the self-assessment report. The procedures are clearly documented in a set of quality assurance manuals that cover all aspects of the college's work. The manuals are reviewed regularly and updated following extensive staff consultation. Links between self-assessment and the strategic planning process are clear. Members of the quality audit team work together on their tasks effectively. They verify self-assessment reports from schools of study and service areas, carry out internal inspections and scrutinise reports and action plans for courses with poor performance. Individual members of the team share good practice with the schools of study and service areas.

64 As the college's self-assessment report notes, there are effective arrangements for performance indicators in all areas of the college. Their use leads to measurable improvements. Target-setting is well established and effectively used in course reviews and school annual quality assurance reports. Realistic targets are set at course and at whole-college level which take into account previous performance and benchmarking data. Courses where student rates of achievement, retention, attendance or progression fall below either national averages for the sector or college standards, which are set annually, are subject to a more detailed triennial evaluation. Actions resulting from these evaluations have led to measurable improvements in students' achievements on some courses. Other courses have been withdrawn or replaced by more suitable programmes. Action plans arising from

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quality assurance reports and self-assessment are thorough. Progress in implementing the plans is monitored thoroughly through the mid-year review processes and by the quality audit team.

65 There is a thorough and supportive lesson observation scheme for teachers which follows clearly documented and regularly reviewed procedures. The observations carried out by heads of school and members of the quality audit team provide evidence for course reviews and school self-assessment. The college is overgenerous in its grading of observations. The proportion of lessons judged to be good or outstanding by inspectors was lower than college observations. Internal verification processes are effective and there is a helpful checklist to help to identify best practice. Issues raised in external verifier reports are dealt with promptly. The college's internal inspections identified a lack of thoroughness in some course reviews and inspectors agreed with this judgement. A few reviews pay insufficient attention to teaching and learning. Reviews on community education and franchised provision contain too much description, too little evaluation.

66 The views of students and employers are surveyed regularly. The college-wide student perception surveys are supplemented by specific questionnaires for short courses and for students following programmes in community venues. The annual employers' survey evokes a good response rate and the results are disseminated widely. These arrangements provide helpful information on how users see the college. However, some of the questions asked are too general to identify specific causes of concern. Findings are reported in quality assurance reviews and lead to action plans to address relevant concerns. In 2000, the college conducted its first staff survey in response to a weakness identified in the college's self-assessment report. The college charter has recently been incorporated into the student

handbook. It is also available in Braille and large print formats and is currently being translated into Urdu. The commitments in the charter are monitored systematically. Some statements are too broad to give a measurable indication of the nature of students' entitlements. Subsequently, there has been slow progress in completing a few of the specified actions. For example, the production of the charter in electronic format identified in action plans for the last two years has not yet been achieved. There is a thorough system for recording and dealing with complaints. They are analysed annually and reported to joint management meetings. The number of complaints is one of the college's key performance indicators.

67 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is a comprehensive programme of well-managed staff development activities. Funding is directed to priority areas identified in the college's strategic aims and objectives. Training needs are identified through appraisal or through lesson observation. The extensive range of activities includes: a management development programme; updating of teachers' industrial experience; curriculum development projects, such as the production of computer-based learning materials. Staff attend college courses free of charge. A local agreement allows staff to attend courses at Staffordshire University free of charge. The college's status as Investor in People was reconfirmed in April 2000.

68 Managers and staff at the college were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The college report and its update were approved by the academic board and by the governors. There was extensive validation by the quality audit team and by external advisers. The report is evaluative and judgements are well supported by evidence. There is an appropriately detailed and relevant action plan. Inspectors were in broad agreement with its findings. However, in the report many of the strengths are merely

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descriptions of tasks accomplished or they do not represent good or outstanding practice. Neither key strengths nor weaknesses are established in an order of priority. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses in many areas.

Governance

Grade 2

69 Inspectors and auditors broadly agreed with the strengths identified in the college's self-assessment report. They considered that a number of weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed and that some were not, in fact, weaknesses. One additional weakness was identified.

Key strengths

- the broad range of skills and experience among governors
- good procedures for the appointment and induction of governors
- comprehensive policies and procedures for openness and accountability
- an efficient cycle of corporation and committee business
- the effective involvement of the board in strategic planning
- frequent and regular monitoring of college finances

Weaknesses

- underdeveloped procedures for monitoring the college's academic performance

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is good. The board substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It also substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

71 Inspectors and auditors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that the corporation has a broad range of skills and experience amongst its members. Governors bring a wide range of professional and personal expertise to meetings of the corporation. Three of the 15 governors are women. Governors attend an annual development weekend and a range of training events and pre-meeting briefings. Some of the FEFC's materials for governor training have also been used by the board's committees. External trainers have contributed to the training of committee members. However, the college has yet to establish a formal process for identifying the training and development needs for individual governors.

72 The board has appropriate nomination and appointment procedures. The formation of the search committee's recommendations have been helped by a skills audit of members. The committee also reviews contributions and levels of attendance before recommending re-appointments. Newly appointed governors receive excellent induction materials. The self-assessment report recognised that the governing body reviews its own performance thoroughly. A quality assurance manual guides this process.

73 Inspectors agreed that the governing body has an appropriate range of committees. The cycle of corporation and committee meetings is effectively planned and a calendar of meetings is set for a year in advance. Committees operate in accordance with appropriate terms of reference. Committee minutes are presented to the corporation for its consideration. Key recommendations of committees are considered as separate agenda items by the full governing body and are supported by well-drafted papers. The remuneration committee advises the full corporation on pay awards to the senior management team. Its recommendations have been influenced by sight of comparative data and the result of appraisal processes and linked to clear criteria against which managers'

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performance is assessed. The audit committee membership has been strengthened by the co-option of a qualified accountant. The committee has adopted a useful register of audit recommendations to aid its review of managers. Governors have also established an accommodation committee to oversee the college's capital programme.

74 Arrangements for monitoring the academic performance of the college are underdeveloped. This weakness was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. The corporation considered establishing a standards committee in 1999 but decided not to proceed immediately. A committee was established later in the year and it met for the first time in February 2000. It has since met on two further occasions. The committee includes the student governor but there is no member with a professional background in education. The college has plans to remedy this omission. The role of the committee in relation to the responsibilities of the corporation and the college's quality audit team lacks clarity. The committee has not made significant progress in recommending actions to governors. There are established arrangements for governors to gain an understanding of the work of the college. Each governor is paired with either a school of study or a service. Heads of school value this contact but awareness of these arrangements amongst staff varies considerably. Staff are made aware of issues considered by governors through regular newsletters.

75 Inspectors agreed that the governing body has adopted sound policies and procedures for openness and accountability. These include standing orders, the code of conduct, and the 'whistleblowing' policy. Policies and procedures are contained within a comprehensive governors' handbook. Policies have been reviewed and appropriately amended. Governors regularly update a comprehensive register of interests which has been extended to include relatives and senior postholders.

Agendas, papers and minutes, with the exception of confidential items, are readily available for public inspection.

76 Clerking arrangements are provided by the college's manager of business support. Governors are supportive of these arrangements and have established good appraisal processes. The clerk services all committees. This means that some committees are clerked by a college manager who has direct involvement in the business of the committee. For example, the business support manager is responsible for the estates function and also clerks the accommodation committee. The college is currently considering deputy clerking arrangements to mitigate potential conflicts of interest. Agendas and supporting papers are well organised and circulated in good time. Governors' discussions and decisions are clearly minuted.

77 As recognised in the college's self-assessment report, governors are effectively involved in the strategic planning process. Governors attend an annual development weekend which concentrates on strategic issues and contributes to the formulation of the college's strategic plan. The mission statement is reviewed each year and governors have established clear strategic objectives and key performance indicators. Governors closely monitor the achievement of the objectives through termly updates and a full strategy review at the end of the year.

78 Inspectors agreed that governors are well informed about the college's finances. The governing body has approved the college's financial strategic objectives and adopted a range of key performance indicators which are monitored regularly. These include key financial ratios, student enrolments and funding unit delivery. Governors also receive termly updates on franchised provision and the college's joint venture activities.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 2

79 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths in the college's self-assessment report. Actions have been taken to address some of the weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a well-managed college
- effective arrangements for strategic and operational planning
- productive external links
- good market analysis
- good financial management

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in management information

80 The college is well managed. There are clear line management arrangements and procedures for accountability. A new management structure established following the previous inspection places a greater emphasis on curriculum development. The senior management team comprises: the principal; the deputy principal; and senior managers with responsibility for finance and strategic planning, business support, business development, student services and learning services. The deputy principal chairs meetings of the middle management team, which comprises eight heads of school, two cross-college managers and curriculum support managers. The college provides a wide range of well-managed courses. Staff resources are efficiently deployed.

81 Internal communications vary in their effectiveness. Agendas, papers and minutes of formal meetings are of a high standard. The minutes of the meetings of the senior and middle managers are available in the library and on the intranet and there are regular team briefings. An external assessment showed that

some staff feel that they do not receive sufficient information about college activities. The college undertook a staff survey earlier this year which showed that there was a need to improve communications. As a result the college newsletter has been improved and staff have better access to the intranet.

82 The strategic planning process is thorough. Staff are appropriately involved in strategic planning, as identified in the self-assessment report. Each school of study or service has an annual day set aside for a meeting at a location away from college so that staff can contribute to the three-year strategic plan and annual operating statement for their area. These documents contain clear performance indicators and targets. These are systematically reviewed. Information concerning key operating targets is disseminated widely.

83 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The college has good levels of reserves and solvency and has set strategic objectives to maintain its strong financial standing. The manager of finance and strategic planning is a member of the college's senior management team and is appropriately qualified and experienced. The finance team is appropriately resourced and skilled, and staff are encouraged to undertake professional training. Budget-setting procedures are clearly documented within a structured and timely strategic planning framework. Budget holders have on-line access to the financial system for monitoring their budgets. Comprehensive monthly management accounts are prepared in good time and are regularly considered by the college management team. As stated in the self-assessment report, the college has established a good range of financial performance indicators and these are monitored regularly. The college has participated in various benchmarking activities and established good arrangements for securing value for money. Comprehensive financial regulations have been established and

Cross-college Provision

are regularly reviewed. College auditors have raised few control concerns.

84 As noted during the previous inspection, and recognised within the current self-assessment report, the management information system has shortcomings. The college has made improvements, for example in monitoring student attendance, but recognises the need to modernise the system. Tenders have been invited for a new system. Staff have access to an inadequate range of reports and data through the college intranet. Inspectors found difficulty in reconciling some of the statistics on student rates of retention and achievements with course records. Not all departments are using computerised timetabling. There are no computerised personnel records. The record of late returns of the ISR to the FEFC had been much improved by the time of the inspection.

85 Inspectors agreed that the college has a wide range of effective external links with organisations involved in education and training. There are strong links with industry. Relationships with local schools have improved significantly since the time of the previous inspection. There are good working relationships with the Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The college is a key member of a local partnership involved in regeneration and lifelong learning. Close collaboration with Staffordshire University is helping to widen participation in higher education. The college took a leading role in the establishment of the Staffordshire Ufi learning hub. Market intelligence systematically contributes to the planning of developments in the college. An active group of advisory committees considers the results of employer perception surveys. Demographic, enrolment and employment service data are also used effectively to produce a clear marketing strategy. As a consequence new programmes relating to food manufacturing and polymer technology have been developed.

86 The college has appropriate health and safety policies and procedures that are applied and monitored carefully. Managerial responsibilities are clearly allocated and understood. The college promotes and monitors equality of opportunity. Recent reviews of policy have led to a more thorough and coherent approach. A committee drawn from the local community advises the corporation on its equal opportunities policy.

Conclusions

87 The college's self-assessment report provided an effective basis for planning and conducting the inspection. It was developed through a comprehensive process involving all staff. The self-assessment process is an integral part of the college's quality assurance system. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses, but some strengths did not represent good or outstanding practice. Additional weaknesses were found in most areas. Inspectors awarded a grade that was one below those given by the college in two of the seven curriculum areas and in one of the five cross-college areas inspected.

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

College Statistics

Student numbers by age (July 2000)

Age	%
Under 16	3
16-18 years	24
19-24 years	15
25+ years	58
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 2000)

Level of study	%
Level 1 (foundation) and entry level	18
Level 2 (intermediate)	27
Level 3 (advanced)	28
Level 4/5 (higher)	4
Level not specified	23
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Students numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 2000)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision (%)
Science	332	1,440	19
Agriculture	0	34	0
Construction	133	358	5
Engineering	268	696	11
Business	261	1,111	15
Hotel and catering	158	1,071	14
Health and community care	336	836	13
Art and design	249	211	5
Humanities	377	863	14
Basic education	198	129	4
Total	2,312	6,749	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 12% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 2000)

	Perm- anent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	132	73	0	205
Supporting direct learning contact	37	5	0	42
Other support	125	18	12	155
Total	294	96	12	402

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	£9,637,000	£10,059,000	£10,826,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£16.95	£16.70	£16.96
Payroll as a proportion of income	64%	66%	65%
Achievement of funding target	102%	102%	98%
Diversity of income	24%	26%	28%
Operating surplus	£338,000	£104,000	£212,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

ALF – Funding Allocations 1997-98 (1998), Funding Allocations 1998-99 (1999), college (2000)

Payroll – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1997-98 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – Council Circular 00/10 (1998), college (1999 and 2000)

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	683	704	1,002	1,072	1,389	1,603
	Retention (%)	84	81	86	79	86	88
	Achievement (%)	73	74	68	58	79	73
2	Number of starters	1,509	1,569	1,609	956	1,021	1,325
	Retention (%)	78	77	77	82	81	82
	Achievement (%)	72	67	70	62	72	68
3	Number of starters	1,201	1,520	1,357	1,011	953	986
	Retention (%)	74	74	71	78	79	79
	Achievement (%)	65	60	69	71	68	73
4 or 5	Number of starters	27	35	23	227	205	202
	Retention (%)	78	89	96	79	83	74
	Achievement (%)	90	73	95	74	75	66
Short courses	Number of starters	386	480	493	2,074	2,408	1,732
	Retention (%)	99	96	95	99	98	96
	Achievement (%)	81	91	85	85	85	71
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	895	826	195	838	855	552
	Retention (%)	89	84	79	85	77	88
	Achievement (%)	62	67	67	74	69	64

Source: ISR

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