

Cannock Chase Technical College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1997-98**

**THE
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FUNDING
COUNCIL**

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FUNDING COUNCIL***

The Further Education Funding Council 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 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.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision, curriculum areas and lesson observations, for colleges inspected during 1996-97, are shown in the following table.

	Grade				
	1	2	3	4	5
	%	%	%	%	%
Curriculum areas	9	59	30	2	–
Cross-college provision	18	51	27	4	–
Lesson observations	19	42	31	7	1

Source: *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report.* Grades were awarded using the guidelines in Council Circular 93/28, *Assessing Achievement*.
Sample size: 122 college inspections

Retention and Pass Rates

Where data on students' achievements appear in tables, levels of achievement are shown in two ways:

- as a retention rate, which is the proportion of students who completed a course in relation to the number enrolled on 1 November in the first year of the course
- as a pass rate, which is the proportion of students which passed examinations in relation to the number entered. Pass rates for GCE A level are quoted for grades A to E unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for GCSE courses are quoted for grade C or above unless otherwise specified. Pass rates for vocational and professional awards are for successful completion of the full award.

Summary

Cannock Chase Technical College

West Midlands Region

Inspected May 1998

Cannock Chase Technical College is a general further education college that was established in 1891. In recent years there has been a large increase in student enrolments, following substantial shortfalls in recruitment in 1993 and 1994. A major staff restructuring in 1995-96 led to redundancies. The college has a history of low funding. Many staff and governors were involved in the production of the self-assessment report. Inspectors found the report a reliable guide to the quality of curriculum provision but less reliable for cross-college areas. In these areas some strengths were overestimated and the significance of some weaknesses was not recognised. The evidence for some judgements was insufficient. For example, lesson observations undertaken by the college were not used effectively as part of the self-assessment to determine the quality of teaching and learning.

The college offers a wide range of courses in nine of the 10 programme areas funded by the FEFC. Most courses are provided at foundation, intermediate and advanced level and a few at higher level. Work amounting to almost 50 per cent of the college's provision was inspected.

This was in three programme areas, including courses offered by collaborative partners. The college benefits from governors with a wide range of skills and experience. College managers undertake thorough strategic planning and monitoring, and deploy resources carefully. Most teaching is of a high standard. Most examination pass rates are at or above the averages for general further education colleges. Students' assignments in nursery nursing are exceptionally good. Students receive appropriate support before they commence their courses and during their studies. Surveys of students' perception are effectively monitored and result in improvements. The college has strong links with a wide range of external organisations. The college provides a good standard of IT equipment which is well used by staff and students. There are effective links between appraisal, staff development and the college's strategic objectives. The college should address: the form, monitoring and distribution of financial and non-financial reports to governors; the lack of formal business plans for curriculum areas; the need for clear reporting and appropriate use of performance indicators in institutional reviews; the lack of coherent management and staffing in student services; some poor teaching accommodation; and the restricted access for wheelchair users.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Engineering	2	Support for students	3
Health and community care	2	General resources	3
Basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	2	Quality assurance	3
		Governance	3
		Management	2

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Cannock Chase Technical College is a general further education college which was originally established in 1891 as a mining college. It is situated on two sites: one in the centre of the town of Cannock; the other close by in Bridgetown. The college uses various other local centres and schools for outreach purposes, and delivers some courses on employers' premises. In July 1997, the college had over 8,250 students, of whom 1,142 were full time. Eighty-two per cent of students were aged 19 years or over. Seventy-three per cent of students live within the immediate area of the college.

2 Cannock Chase district has a population of about 90,800, of whom 65,300 live in Cannock. Staffordshire has a mixed rural and industrial environment. Compared with national figures, the industrial sector in the county has a higher than average dependence on manufacturing. Employment opportunities have been particularly influenced by the decline in its coal, steel and ceramics industries, which has left a legacy of joblessness, weak investment, low incomes, outdated infrastructure and urban dereliction. In the area which the college serves, decline in male-dominated employment in the manufacturing and mining industries is a significant feature of social and economic life. All the mines in the area have closed. Business is now dominated by small to medium-sized enterprises; 75 per cent of businesses employ fewer than 10 employees. Weekly incomes are low. Only 56 per cent of 16 to 19 year olds in Staffordshire remain in full-time education, compared with a national average of 61 per cent. A high number of pupils leave school with no qualifications.

3 The college operates in a competitive environment, especially for recruiting students aged 16 to 18. There are a number of private training providers in addition to eight schools maintained by the local education authority

(LEA), four grant-maintained 11 to 18 schools, three special schools, and one private school. There are five other further education colleges within a 15-mile radius. The college has a commitment to working in partnership with the local schools.

4 In July 1997, the college employed 144 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 61 full-time equivalent were support staff. The curriculum is delivered from five curriculum areas, divided into 12 curriculum sections that closely match the programme areas of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The courses are predominantly at foundation through to advanced level, with a few courses at higher level. The college's mission states that the college's aim is: 'to promote the development and prosperity of both the local and wider community by providing quality education and training in a caring and supportive environment'.

Context

The Inspection

5 The college was inspected in May 1998. The inspection team studied the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other divisions of the FEFC. The college submitted data on students' achievements for the three years 1995 to 1997. Inspectors evaluated the data against primary sources such as class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Approximately two months before the inspection, inspectors notified the college of the provision to be inspected. The inspection was carried out by nine inspectors working for 30 days and an auditor working for four days. The inspection team observed 39 lessons, and examined students' work and a range of college documents. Inspectors met representatives of the local community, schools, and employers. They also held meetings with students, staff, managers and governors.

6 Of the lessons inspected, 69 per cent were rated good or outstanding and 8 per cent were less than satisfactory. This profile is better than the average profile for all colleges inspected

during 1996-97, according to *Quality and Standards in Further Education in England 1996-97: Chief inspector's annual report*. The average level of attendance in the lessons inspected was at 75 per cent, slightly below the average for the sector according to the same report. The highest attendance was in basic education at 77 per cent, and the lowest in health and community care at 73 per cent. The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
Basic education	3	7	3	2	0	15
GNVQ and NVQ	0	5	4	1	0	10
Other vocational	5	7	2	0	0	14
Total	8	19	9	3	0	39

Curriculum Areas

Engineering

Grade 2

7 Inspectors observed 13 lessons in engineering, including motor vehicle courses. Separate self-assessment reports were produced by the two engineering sections. These, plus a third report from the computer technology department, combined to form a technology studies self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with a number of strengths identified by the college but considered that some had been overstated. Inspectors also identified further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a wide range of courses appropriate to the needs of students and employers
- well-structured teaching and learning
- high retention rates
- high pass rates on two-year courses

Weaknesses

- low pass rates on one-year courses
- the lack of some assessment criteria
- the lack of constructive feedback to some students

8 The wide range of engineering and motor vehicle courses meets the needs of students and local industry, as is recognised in the college's self-assessment report. The courses offer progression from foundation to advanced level. Some courses, which are run mainly in the evening, allow students in employment to upgrade their skills and to obtain nationally recognised qualifications. An electronics servicing course has been developed for students who are unemployed. Motor vehicle teachers have close links with a national training provider. Students taking similar courses that have topics in common are taught those topics jointly to maximise the use of resources.

9 Teaching is well structured. Most lessons contain an appropriate mixture of theory and a relevant practical activity, for example, the building of an electronic circuit or a drawing exercise. Schemes of work are limited to a list of topics. Comprehensive course notes have been developed for mathematics and science; they include exercises which reinforce students' understanding. In most lessons there is an appropriate combination of well-produced handouts and student note-taking. Workshops and practical exercises are structured to allow individual students to progress at a pace which suits them as they develop their understanding of the subject. Assignment briefs are detailed and explain clearly the purpose of the exercise. They often require students to undertake activities that are related to industry, for example, programming a computer-controlled machine tool to produce a component. In some cases the criteria for successful completion of the assignment, or for obtaining a higher grade, are not stated. Teachers' comments on students' work are sometimes brief and offer little help to students to improve their understanding and correct mistakes. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment.

10 Inspectors agreed that students work safely in workshops and demonstrate an appropriate range of hand and machining skills. Students make good use of information technology (IT), for example, to present graphical data, and are competent in handling computer-aided drawing software. The standard of students' written and practical work is appropriate. Occasionally, the quality of written English is poor. Teachers rarely correct spelling mistakes.

11 Most of the engineering and motor vehicle accommodation is located in the main workshop block at the Progress Centre. Three smaller buildings house motor body repair facilities. The workshops are of industrial standard, but classrooms do not have displays of trade posters or students' work. The workshops and

Curriculum Areas

laboratories are suitably resourced with a wide range of engineering equipment. Most mechanical engineering equipment is dated but is still suitable for teaching basic craft skills. Some useful recent investments have included a motor vehicle repair jig and high specification computers to run the computer-aided drawing software. The library bookstock is adequate to support learning. Up-to-date editions, including sufficient copies of commonly used textbooks, have recently been purchased.

12 There are high retention rates on most courses and high pass rates on two-year courses. These strengths were identified in the self-assessment report. The pass rates on one-year courses are below the average for further education colleges. This weakness was not identified. The pass rates and retention rates on the higher national certificate course have been consistently high, and in most cases stand at 100 per cent. The pass and retention rates on the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) advanced in engineering have fluctuated; high retention rates have been associated with lower pass rates in some years and the reverse in other years. In 1997, the two rates were more evenly matched. There are a number of courses on which many students do not seek to gain a full award. For example, they include welding courses that are taken to develop a specific skill.

Examples of students' achievements in engineering, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Two-year courses	Retention (%)	86	83	84
	Pass rate (%)	77	92	88
One-year courses	Retention (%)	72	77	78
	Pass rate (%)	51	59	51
Other, mainly evening classes	Retention (%)	84	80	86
	Pass rate (%)	59	65	58

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Health and Community Care

Grade 2

13 Inspectors observed 12 lessons which covered the range of courses in health, early childhood care and first aid. The self-assessment report did not clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses in this area. Inspectors agreed with some of the college's judgements. In addition they identified some additional strengths and weaknesses which were not mentioned in the self-assessment. The findings from lesson observation had not been used to assist the process of self-assessment.

Key strengths

- well-managed courses
- strong links with employers
- good teaching and learning
- the high standard of students' assignment work
- good achievement rates
- some highly-developed student skills in IT
- comprehensive feedback to students

Weaknesses

- some poor retention
- overextended timescale for the achievement of national vocational qualifications (NVQs)
- most staff without qualifications and experience in childhood education

14 The curriculum area that includes courses in health, care and early years offers: a BTEC national diploma in childhood studies; GNVQs in health and social care at intermediate and advanced levels; and the health option of a BTEC national diploma in science. Part-time courses include a BTEC first certificate in care, and the award in counselling from the Northern

Council for Further Education. There are strong links with employers and many students take the NVQ in care under a contract with three National Health Service trusts. The many first aid courses are delivered mainly through outward collaborative provision.

15 Inspectors agreed that programmes are well organised and well managed. There are regular meetings of course and quality improvement teams at which action plans are discussed. Team reviews are evaluated by managers who provide useful written feedback. Close attention is paid to targets and key performance indicators, for example, retention and achievement rates. Course records are well organised. Students receive comprehensive course handbooks during their induction period.

16 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teaching is effective. Teachers use an appropriate range of learning activities in their lessons. For example, practical lessons gave students opportunities to work with materials that they could use in nursery teaching. Good use was made of a video recording on community care to illustrate a variety of caring roles. Most teaching is well planned and well structured. Teachers write lesson plans and follow schemes of work, although many schemes of work are not sufficiently detailed and some lesson plans lack clear learning objectives. Teachers regularly visit students on placement and keep careful records of their progress. In some lessons, classroom organisation was poor. Teachers do not always use their time effectively. Occasionally, inadequate arrangements for the projection of overhead transparencies made it difficult for students to read them. Students' assignments are carefully marked. Feedback on students' written work is constructive. Teachers make helpful and extensive comments on assignments, indicating what the student has done well and how work could have been improved.

Curriculum Areas

17 The inspection confirmed there are outstanding achievement rates on some courses. In 1997, all students who completed the health option on the BTEC national diploma were successful. On the basic counselling course and many of the first aid courses, 100 per cent of the students who completed the courses achieved the award. On the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies, 96 per cent of those completing the course were eventually awarded the qualification. At intermediate level results have been well above the national pass rate. Some students' written work is outstanding. The community assignments of nursery nursing students were exceptionally good. The best were clearly written, creatively and attractively designed and presented, and exceptional in the level of research and analytical skills that they displayed. On the NVQ course in 1997, a student achieved the bronze medal award of the City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G). On the national diploma in childhood studies, students' IT skills are particularly well developed and are used effectively to show statistical analysis. Retention rates on some courses are low; for example, on the NVQ in care numerous students leave because of a change in their employment. Many NVQ students on courses provided at the health trusts have taken an unusually long time to complete their course of study. The college is taking appropriate action to reduce the length of the

study period. Retention rates on two advanced diploma courses have declined to a low level. The college is taking action to rectify this shortcoming.

18 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, accommodation is well maintained but there is often insufficient display of students' work in classrooms. Teachers have developed a good collection of relevant information on health and care for students to use. Most staff are well qualified, but only a few have qualifications and experience in child education.

Examples of students' achievements in health and community care, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Advanced vocational (national diplomas)	Retention (%)	70	86	62
	Pass rate (%)	92	92	98
Intermediate vocational	Retention (%)	100	51	75
	Pass rate (%)	81	74	67

Source: college data

Curriculum Areas

Basic Education and Provision for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities

Grade 2

19 The inspection covered: courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities; and basic skills provision in literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with most of the findings in the college's self-assessment report. They found that strengths in teaching had been overestimated and they identified some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching
- thorough recording of students' progress
- the steady and confident progress of most students
- the good achievements of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- well-managed provision
- strong links with other agencies

Weaknesses

- failure to meet the individual learning needs of some students
- lack of accreditation for some pre-vocational provision
- inadequate data on retention and achievements in basic skills
- some poor learning materials

20 Inspectors confirmed that most teaching is good. Teachers plan their lessons well and use methods that match students' different abilities and interests. Many teachers design activities for individual students to develop their literacy skills, for example, creative writing exercises

and a project on the millennium dome. In courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, teachers focus on increasing students' independence by helping them to develop skills in: practical living; communication; and numeracy. In some lessons, teachers fail to make sufficient demands on students or, conversely, set tasks that are too difficult for some them. These weaknesses were not included in the self-assessment report. Teachers frequently review students' progress with them and keep detailed records of their achievements. Students understand how their work is assessed. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit significantly from well-managed work placements in a range of vocational areas.

21 Students make steady progress and develop a range of skills and knowledge. Students' broader achievements, for example their skills in abseiling and pot-holing developed during a residential trip, and their increased social confidence, are recognised and valued. Although most students achieve well, inspectors found that a few make little progress in developing literacy skills. The college's judgement that retention and achievement rates are good for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well founded. During the last three years, the overall retention rate has been high, at 94 per cent. Of the students who completed the independent living skills or pre-vocational course, 99 per cent achieved their primary learning goal. Pass rates on courses leading to accredited awards are good. During the last three years, 84 per cent of the students who completed courses in independent living skills achieved the award. In the last two years, 95 per cent of the students who completed the vocational access course gained the certificate from the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. An increasing number of students, for example, over 75 per cent of those on pre-vocational courses in 1996-97, gain extra qualifications in numeracy, literacy,

Curriculum Areas

communications or road safety. In 1996-97, 66 per cent of students on courses that focused on independent living skills progressed to more advanced courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Ninety-three per cent of the students on pre-vocational courses moved on to further education or directly into employment. Provision for basic skills is delivered in a variety of modes. The recording of data on retention rates and students' achievements in this area of work is inadequate. It prevents both analysis of the data and judgements on the outcomes. The college acknowledges these shortcomings.

22 Most provision is well managed. Course teams and managers meet regularly and communications between them are good. Courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are carefully planned to provide opportunities for progression. For example, the college offers vocational courses at foundation and level 1 in several relevant areas; in a few vocational areas there are no courses below level 2. Staff systematically review the quality of provision and compare their performance with standards that apply in the other curriculum areas of the college.

Improvements and the development of new courses are informed by the findings of these reviews and by the priorities in the college's strategic plan. The college recognises that accreditation for some pre-vocational courses is needed and that arrangements for accreditation in the family literacy courses that have recently been developed are not effective. The college has extensive and beneficial links with relevant agencies, including the local authority and voluntary organisations.

23 Students benefit from the additional support given by classroom and welfare assistants and trained volunteers. Many teachers make good use of realistic learning materials and equipment. In the pre-vocational courses, vocational teachers effectively use the college's specialist workshops and equipment. Occasionally, teachers use poorly-produced learning materials or inappropriately childish materials, for example, toys or picture books. Little use is made of IT in the teaching of literacy. A mobile classroom set up as a realistic home is sometimes inappropriately used for general class teaching. These weaknesses were not identified in the college's self-assessment.

Examples of students' achievements in basic education and provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, 1995 to 1997

Course grouping		1995	1996	1997
Independent living skills	Retention (%)	100	100	100
	Pass rate (%)	*	93	80
Accredited vocational access courses	Retention (%)	100	88	88
	Pass rate (%)	+	100	90

Source: college data

*small number of students so percentages inappropriate

+course not accredited

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 3

24 Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They found some weaknesses that did not appear in the report. Before the inspection, the college had taken measures to rectify some of the weaknesses that it had identified.

Key strengths

- accurate and objective information available to students before and on entry to college
- well-established induction programmes
- appropriate individual learning support, especially for full-time students
- effective careers advice and guidance
- relevant support available on personal issues

Weaknesses

- lack of coherent management of the area
- inconsistencies in the level of support for part-time students
- inadequate staffing of information room
- low awareness of college charter among students

25 As the self-assessment report identifies, students receive clear and accurate information before and on entry to the college to enable them to choose an appropriate course. Prospectuses and course leaflets are well presented and informative. Open days and other promotional events are held regularly throughout the year. The information room at the main college site provides a welcoming and open environment in which objective and supportive advice is often available on a range of relevant issues. The college responds promptly to requests for information. The system for handling applications and interviews

is efficient and provides applicants with an early reply. Enquiries about full-time programmes are carefully monitored, although the process for monitoring enquiries about part-time programmes is less effective.

26 Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment of the shortcomings in the way work is organised in the information room. Inadequate staffing levels when set against the range of tasks to be undertaken reduced effectiveness; for example there were occasionally delays in seeing students and dealing with administration work. Measures are currently in hand to address these issues and improve the effective flow of information.

27 All full-time students follow an induction programme during the first week of their course. Inspectors confirmed the judgement contained in the self-assessment report that this programme helps students to settle quickly into the college. During induction all full-time students receive an informative student handbook, tour the college's sites, become members of the study centre and meet key personnel including the principal. Induction programmes are determined by each curriculum area and vary in length from between two to five days. This variability makes it difficult to co-ordinate cross-college induction activities. Students are able to transfer easily from one course to another during the induction period and changes are efficiently monitored. Students' views on the induction programme are gathered through a students' perception questionnaire. Its effectiveness is limited as it is not completed until the third term of an academic year.

28 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that effective learning support is available for students with additional learning needs. All full-time students are assessed during the first week of their course, and, where appropriate, additional support is provided in numeracy and literacy. Support for students with dyslexia is less well developed. Learning support for students with learning difficulties

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and/or disabilities is appropriate to their needs. Part-time students are not formally assessed but learning support is available if required.

29 The college has a well-established tutorial policy. Each student has a support tutor who provides information on personal issues. The tutor may refer a student to another member of staff or to one of the many external support agencies with which the college has excellent relations. The college's tutorial policy states that each course should have one hour's timetabled tutorial each week but this arrangement is not implemented in a minority of cases. Part-time courses do not include a timetabled tutorial but tutorial support is available when needed. The college provides a small hardship fund for students with financial problems, complemented by a policy offering remission of fees to disadvantaged students.

30 There is no overall manager for the student support services; the responsibilities are shared by several senior managers. Although staff in some areas of student support conduct annual reviews, there is no single cross-college assessment of the quality of the provision. There is insufficient use of service standards or performance indicators and there is a lack of criteria against which progress can be assessed. The self-assessment report did not identify that good practice is not effectively disseminated throughout the institution or that some college policies are inconsistently applied.

31 The college charter is included in the handbook for full-time students and is readily available at centrally located information points that include college and course leaflets. There is little awareness among students of the contents of the charter or its implications for their course of study. There is a complaints procedure which is well publicised and carefully monitored.

32 Effective careers education and guidance is provided at the study centres on both sites of the college. Members of Staffordshire Careers contribute to the college's induction programme

and are available for regular consultation. The college also has constructive links with employers who provide advice on job opportunities in the area. As the self-assessment report states, relevant support is available to students on personal issues. The information room provides advice on a wide range of issues including finance, transport and nursery provision.

General Resources

Grade 3

33 The college has made improvements to its resources and accommodation since the last inspection. The listed status of some accommodation limits the college's freedom to make more radical improvements. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses identified by the college were being rectified at the time of the inspection.

Key strengths

- improvement of some accommodation since the last inspection
- effective learning technology centres
- high standard of IT equipment and network
- extensive computer-based resources and learning materials for staff and students

Weaknesses

- some poor teaching accommodation
- the high cost of maintenance and refurbishment of accommodation
- inadequate provision of workrooms and storage facilities for staff
- restricted access for wheelchair users

34 The college occupies two sites: the Green, situated in the centre of the town; and the Progress Centre, previously an office block and

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maintenance unit for an electricity company, a mile to the south of the centre. As identified in the self-assessment report, each site has a significant number of unsuitable temporary buildings. In addition, the Green has two grade II listed buildings, one of which is unused and is totally unsuitable for teaching or administration. The accommodation at the Green has been occupied since 1929 and the college has made significant efforts at considerable cost to use it effectively. Parts of the Progress Centre have been modified for teaching purposes but other areas are unsuitable for teaching. There is some effective use of accommodation, although space utilisation at both sites is low. The college has carried through extensive investigations of the possibilities for rationalisation of the accommodation.

35 Most areas are well maintained and well decorated. Since the last inspection, the IT and study areas have been relocated to improve the facilities offered to students. The refectory at the Green has been refurbished, partly in response to students' recommendations. Administrative areas and some curriculum areas are being relocated in order to dispose of some of the temporary buildings and to reduce the amount of unsuitable teaching accommodation. There are few social and recreational areas at either site. Inspectors agreed that the accommodation used by teaching and support staff, including the facilities for staff to use IT, and for storing coursework, is of uneven quality.

36 Access for wheelchair users is variable. There is good wheelchair access to significant parts of the main buildings on the two sites. There is no access to the older buildings and access within the study centre at the Progress Centre is difficult. There is no access for wheelchair users at the main entrance to the Green, nor are there any signs to direct users to the rear entrance which has an access ramp. The college has no sporting facilities for curriculum and leisure use, apart from a small

exercise gym. It hires the nearby leisure centre and sports facilities.

37 Inspectors agreed that the study centres at each of the sites provide appropriate learning resources and that staff give good learning support. Each centre has adequate learning materials and IT equipment. Students and staff can use an electronic book catalogue which allows them to obtain information from either site. The library bookstock meets students' needs, old books which are no longer of use have recently been removed. There is a good supply of video cassettes and CD-ROMs, as well as information about universities and career opportunities. The Green study centre has sufficient separate quiet areas for individual and for group working. The small study centre at the Progress Centre is in heavy demand because of increased student numbers. The college is responding to these pressures by extending the opening times of the study centres.

38 Since the last inspection the ratio of full-time equivalent students to computers has improved; it now stands at 8:1. Availability of computers for student use is good. Most of the computers have been purchased within the last three years and they are of industrial standard. The equipment is well distributed across both college sites and most machines are networked. There is no specific IT replacement budget but the college's three-year replacement programme ensures that the high standard of equipment is maintained. For two years, a well-used internet service, through the provision of 54 open access machines, has been available to staff and students on both sites. Most staff and many students have internet electronic mail accounts which they use regularly. Many staff use IT to extend the range of their teaching. Course and study materials are helpfully shared by staff and students using a common file store on the network. A college-wide intranet is being established. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in IT identified by the college in its self-assessment. As part of a 'widening

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participation' initiative, the college has become involved in the Staffordshire Learning Net, which is a consortium of schools and colleges using the internet to share materials and use video communications technology. Courses in IT are also being provided by the college in local primary and secondary schools using this technology.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

39 The college's self-assessment report recognises that its quality assurance has both strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors concluded, however, that the judgements in the report do not fully evaluate the current stage of development of quality assurance in the college and that the report overstates some strengths and does not recognise some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- a clear handbook for quality assurance
- improved procedures for the review of quality assurance
- some good analysis of data
- effective monitoring of perception surveys
- the effective links between appraisal, staff development and strategic objectives

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of the quality steering group
- inconsistencies in the use of performance indicators in curriculum areas
- underdeveloped charter standards
- the lack of clear reporting in review and self-assessment
- the inadequate range of standards in some support areas

- ineffective use of lesson observation in the assessment of teaching and learning

40 A system of annual review was interrupted by the college's management restructuring; no institutional review was held in 1996. Senior managers have introduced an improved system for quality assurance. A revised handbook provides a clear and comprehensive framework for the system. In May 1997, the corporation established a quality steering group to take responsibility for the direction of the college's policy on quality issues and for the framework. The group includes a governor, an external member and an employer. The college's self-assessment did not identify the fact that this group has not yet held enough meetings for its effectiveness to be evaluated.

41 A revised system of review based on self-assessment was introduced in 1997. It builds on the existing use of improvement teams to ensure greater consistency in the review process. Staff involvement in quality assurance is promoted through their membership of improvement teams that are directly related to their teaching responsibilities. Targets for enrolment and retention are determined through a detailed planning process. This process clearly links programme area targets to the college strategic plan at the start of each academic year. Managers of curriculum and business support areas report to a working group of the quality steering committee and have responsibility for the maintenance of quality assurance within their areas. The lines of communication often work well. There are exemplars of good performance and data analysis against clear targets by curriculum area managers, particularly from caring, creative, health and business and professional courses.

42 Improvement teams use standard forms to conduct reviews. They apply the performance indicators that have been agreed for use across the college. This process is a significant advance on the college's previous system of

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review. Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the improved procedures are a strength. However, there are inconsistencies in the development of performance indicators. There are few service standards across the wider range of technical support areas. Some areas, including marketing and reprographics, lack clear statements of the standards that are to be met. Most business support areas have undertaken self-assessment, including the teams responsible for finance and management information systems.

43 The college charter is brief; the college recognises that it needs to be reviewed and extended. There are no procedures in place for monitoring the effectiveness of policies or assessing whether there is a need to update key documents.

44 The self-assessment reports of the curriculum and business support areas were presented for review to a group of senior managers. Area managers and curriculum leaders valued this meeting as an opportunity to discuss and evaluate their work. However, the minutes of the review meetings do not adequately record the outcomes. Inspectors noted that the information gained from lesson observations was not often of any benefit to the self-assessment process. The action plans for each area were not drawn together to form a college overview. The college's self-assessment report did not contain grades for curriculum areas or list the overall strengths and weaknesses of each curriculum area.

45 The college makes good use of surveys of students' perceptions; they are monitored and analysed at both curriculum and college level and have been revised this year. The college has made useful changes to courses and significantly refurbished the refectory in response to students' views. Methods for obtaining employers' views are less well structured but several of the college's improvement teams include employer members.

46 There is a clear staff appraisal policy. Most academic and business support staff have been appraised over a two-year cycle. A lesson observation record forms part of the appraisal for academic staff. The appraisal system is linked to staff development and is clearly documented.

47 Staff development is well managed and activities are carefully recorded. An annual programme of staff training is clearly linked to the college's strategic objectives. An annual report provides a clear review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme and the level of staff satisfaction. In 1996-97, curriculum priorities were met through in-house training that accounted for approximately half the staff development expenditure. The budget for 1997-98 is 0.7 per cent of the college's total expenditure and was increased by 40 per cent over the previous year. The college's application for the status of an Investor in People was postponed in 1997 because of the college's restructuring in 1995 to 1996. The process has been resumed with the intention of acquiring Investor in People accredited status in 1999.

Governance

Grade 3

48 The self-assessment of governance does not deal fully with some significant strengths and weaknesses that were identified by inspectors. The self-assessment report does not adequately support the college's judgement of its governance. Some areas identified as strengths were found to have significant weaknesses and other weaknesses were not recognised.

Key strengths

- a thorough self-evaluation of the corporation's performance
- the governors' involvement in the development and monitoring of strategic plans

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- the arrangements for the appraisal of senior staff
- the governors' detailed scrutiny of students' achievements

Weaknesses

- lack of openness in the appointment of governors
- the establishment of standing orders
- the oversight by governors of the college's financial performance
- the reporting of non-financial management information to governors

49 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is adequate. The corporation substantially conducts its business in accordance with the instrument of government but the whole corporation is not sufficiently involved to demonstrate that it fulfils requirements under the articles of government. The corporation substantially fulfils its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC.

50 Monthly financial management reports are sent to all governors. They are reviewed by the policy and resources committee at least once each term but are not considered by the full corporation at sufficiently frequent intervals. They do not include essential financial management information, for example, periodic and cumulative budgetary comparisons, periodic balance sheets and rolling cashflow forecasts. They are not accompanied by appropriately detailed written commentaries. This limited financial information is insufficient for governors to fulfil their responsibility for oversight of the college's financial performance.

51 Governors come from a wide range of professional and business backgrounds. The search committee advises on the appointment and reappointment of governors, taking into account the need to maintain a balanced

membership. However, procedures for the appointment of governors are not clearly documented. New governors are nominated by existing members. A number of governors have recently been appointed and induction arrangements for these new governors are effective. Some training for governors is provided. Governors have recently undertaken a thorough evaluation of their effectiveness. They clearly understand the distinction between governance and management and work well with senior managers. The chairman and principal meet frequently. Effective arrangements have been established for the appointment, appraisal and development of senior staff.

52 As the self-assessment acknowledges, the clerk is a senior manager with substantial operational responsibilities within the college; these responsibilities compete with the time available for clerking. The clerk is responsible for supporting all corporation and committee meetings. These meetings are well planned and effectively chaired but, as the self-assessment report recognises, governors do not always receive papers a full week before meetings. Meetings are well minuted and corporation papers are frequently available for public inspection.

53 Early in its existence the corporation adopted a code of conduct for its members which now requires updating. The clerk to the corporation maintains a register of the financial and personal interests of governors. The self-assessment identifies the register as a strength, but inspectors found that the interests which it discloses are not comprehensive and that not all governors have completed a declaration of interests. The register does not include senior staff with financial responsibilities and is not revised annually. Standing orders have not been established to guide the conduct of the corporation and committees.

54 Inspectors agreed that, as indicated in the self-assessment, governors are fully involved in

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developing the college's strategic plans. Governors have recently considered a revised accommodation strategy, and they receive regular written reports on strategic issues. The strategic plan includes a review of progress towards the objectives set in the previous strategic plan, and details the college's key objectives for the next three years. It includes an operating statement summarising targets and timescales for those aspects of the plan the college intends to implement in 1997-98. Governors receive written reports that outline progress in meeting short-term objectives but do not receive sufficiently detailed information on: student enrolments; retention rates; withdrawal of students from courses; achievement of unit targets; staff utilisation and premises.

55 Governors receive an annual report that provides a detailed analysis of students' achievements and, where relevant, action plans for improvement. Their scrutiny of this information is thorough and well informed. They have identified in their self-assessment a need to receive more information about the college's performance in the curriculum areas. To meet this need, a member of the corporation has recently joined the college's steering group on quality issues.

56 The corporation has established an appropriate committee structure. Governors have formally agreed their deployment between committees in order to make best use of their expertise. Each committee has terms of reference, approved by the corporation, which clearly define their role and responsibilities. The audit committee monitors the implementation of audit recommendations effectively and regularly reviews progress on the achievement of audit plans. Internal audit resources were significantly reduced by the audit committee, but the basis for this reduction, and its impact on internal audit work were not clearly identified. Formal reports of committees' business are regularly received by the corporation.

Management

Grade 2

57 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses indicated in the college's self-assessment of its management. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective systems for strategic planning and monitoring
- a revised management structure clearly understood by staff
- an open, consultative management style
- careful deployment of resources
- productive links with a wide range of external organisations
- well-based market research

Weaknesses

- over-involvement of senior managers in operational details
- lack of formal business plans for curriculum areas
- weak co-ordination of some aspects of cross-college policy and provision
- inadequacies in reports on financial management

58 The inspection confirmed that effective strategic planning has enabled the college to meet most of its targets and to overcome problems resulting from significant shortfalls in the recruitment of students in 1993 and 1994. The curriculum has been expanded to meet the needs of the community and there has been a substantial increase in enrolments. The college's strategic planning process is well developed. All staff contribute to the plan at an annual strategic planning day. Teaching staff are also involved in the detailed process of programme and course planning. Progress in

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achieving the objectives of the plan is regularly and thoroughly monitored by senior management. However, there are no formal business plans for curriculum areas. Links between the strategic plan and the various curriculum area programme and action plans are not clearly established and the resources needed to deliver programmes are not planned at curriculum area level. The very limited financial delegation within the college does not extend to curriculum areas, a weakness identified in the last inspection which the college plans to address.

59 Inspectors agreed with the college that the new management structure is flexible and that lines of communication and accountability are clearly understood by staff. A revised management structure was introduced in September 1996, following the appointment of the former vice-principal to the post of principal. The senior management team of six includes the principal, two assistant principals and three directors with responsibility for curriculum, academic resources, and finance and management information. At the time of the inspection the post of one assistant principal was temporarily vacant. The college's middle management consists of five curriculum area managers and an estates manager. The structure is still evolving. Senior managers undertake a wide range of tasks, spending considerable time on routine matters. The role of the curriculum area managers has not yet been fully developed. Responsibility for co-ordinating and developing cross-college policies and provision is placed on the curriculum area managers and their teams. In practice there is weak cross-college co-ordination in a number of areas.

60 Internal communications are good. The open, consultative management style established in the past two years is much valued by staff. There are weekly meetings of the senior management team and of the curriculum and resource team which includes curriculum area

managers. A monthly staff bulletin and memoranda from the principal help to inform all staff about important issues. In its self-assessment report, the college identified a need to improve the level of communication and integration between its two main sites. There are no senior managers based permanently at the Progress Centre but there are plans to address this situation in the near future.

61 Resources are carefully deployed. The college has a history of low funding. Its average level of funding for 1997-98 is £14.48 per unit, well below the median for general further education colleges of £16.72 per unit. In response to the problems caused by past shortfalls in recruitment, the college has undertaken a major staff restructuring. There has been a substantial reduction in the number of full-time staff and a significant increase in staff workloads. College managers are sensitive to this increase and are keeping workloads under review.

62 Within the scope of its review, the FEFC's audit service considers that the financial management of the college is adequate. The college has maintained a sound financial position since incorporation. The finance team has an appropriate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff. The self-assessment report includes key aspects of the college's financial management but these are mostly listed as strengths. Weaknesses in the form and content of financial management reports are not recognised. The reports are not produced directly from the college's accounting system, and do not include information on solvency or an appropriately detailed commentary. The monthly reports are not prepared on an accruals basis and do not include all known liabilities and commitments information. The senior management team does not receive sufficiently detailed information on financial management. The college's financial regulations have recently been revised but are not comprehensive.

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63 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, there are both strengths and weaknesses in the college's computerised management information systems. Essential data for funding purposes are returned speedily to the FEFC. A range of information is produced, including data on students' enrolments, withdrawals and achievements. Reports are issued regularly to senior managers and can be obtained on request by other staff. Staff find them generally helpful and accurate. However, the college is in the process of developing management information needs for staff and upgrading to a more useful system, but does not yet have a management information strategy to guide the development of this work.

64 There is a clear, well-publicised policy on equal opportunities. Some careful monitoring of equal opportunities takes place, but more systematic use could be made of this information. The college acknowledges the need to develop a more effective strategy for implementing its policy.

65 The college has productive links with a wide range of external organisations, a strength highlighted in the self-assessment report and confirmed by inspectors following their meetings with representatives of the local community, employers and schools. There are regular contacts and many joint initiatives are undertaken with external organisations. Recent appointments of staff with specific responsibility for developing work in the local community and with employers have helped to enhance existing links and to strengthen the college's effective market research.

Conclusions

66 Inspectors agreed that the college made generally realistic judgements about its curriculum provision and most of its cross-college areas, although in several of these areas the inspection team identified weaknesses that were not recognised in the college's report.

Inspectors agreed with four of the five cross-college grades. Where there was disagreement, inspectors concluded that significant weaknesses had been underestimated or not recognised by the college. The format of the college's self-assessment report made it difficult for inspectors to understand how the college had determined grades. The report contained no profile of strengths and weaknesses nor grades for individual curriculum areas. In each section of the report a few issues were identified as areas for further development or as aims for the longer term. These issues for further development were assumed by inspectors to be weaknesses. However, inspectors were helped by the separate self-assessment reviews for the curriculum sections and for the business support areas which contributed to the college's report. The assessment process was undertaken thoroughly in both of these areas and inspectors found that some of the college's new review procedures were working well.

67 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 1997)

Age	%
Under 16	2
16-18 years	15
19-24 years	11
25+ years	71
Not known	1
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (July 1997)

Level of study	%
Foundation	32
Intermediate	40
Advanced	23
Higher education	2
Leisure/recreation (non-schedule 2)	3
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by mode of attendance and curriculum area (July 1997)

Programme area	Full time	Part time	Total provision %
Science	301	884	14
Construction	0	39	1
Engineering	141	386	6
Business	102	657	9
Hotel and catering	105	193	4
Health and community care	339	2,733	37
Art and design	32	536	7
Humanities	75	1,224	16
Basic education	47	464	6
Total	1,142	7,116	100

Source: college data

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (July 1997)

	Perman-ent	Fixed term	Casual	Total
Direct learning contact	60	23	0	83
Supporting direct learning contact	20	1	0	21
Other support	40	0	0	40
Total	120	24	0	144

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Income	£4,442,000	£4,058,000	£4,542,000
Average level of funding (ALF)			
Out-turn to 1995-96; funded 1996-97	£17.30	£14.58	£15.98
Payroll as a proportion of income	74%	73%	*
Achievement of funding target	89%	111%	*
Diversity of income	21%	13%	*
Operating surplus	£130,000	-£117,000	£36,000

Sources: Income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

ALF – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96), Funding Allocations 1996-97 (1996-97)

Payroll – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Achievement of funding target – Performance Indicators 1995-96 (1994-95 and 1995-96)

Diversity of income – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96)

Operating surplus – Council Circulars 96/29 (1994-95), 97/35 (1995-96), college (1996-97)

*data not available

Performance data for students aged 16 to 18

Qualifications		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
GCE A level	Number of candidates	3	14	29
	Average point score per entry	2.8	3.2	3.0
	Position in tables	bottom third	middle third	bottom third
Advanced vocational	Number in final year	80	60	83
	Percentage achieving qualification	84%	62%	63%
	Position in tables	top third	bottom third	bottom third
Intermediate vocational	Number in final year	*	28	60
	Percentage achieving qualification	*	79%	55%
	Position in tables	*	top third	bottom third

Source: DfEE

Note: the majority of the college's students are 19 years of age or older

The achievements of these students are not covered in published DfEE performance tables

*1994-95 intermediate vocational results not available

College Statistics

Three-year Trends *continued*

Students' achievements

		1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Advanced academic	Pass (%)	78	74	75
	Retention (%)	70	70	63
Intermediate academic	Pass (%)	59	58	56
	Retention (%)	72	65	63
Advanced vocational	Pass (%)	72	73	63
	Retention (%)	62	61	67
Intermediate vocational	Pass (%)	69	74	67
	Retention (%)	100	51	73

Source: college data

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