

City College Birmingham

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
2000-01

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

**THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL**

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

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

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Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 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 1999-2000: 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

City College, Birmingham

West Midlands Region

Inspected November 2000

City College, Birmingham is the largest general further education college in the West Midlands. It recruits a high percentage of its students from disadvantaged areas. The college provided a clearly structured self-assessment report that covered all aspects of the college's work. The preparation of the report involved governors as well as all staff. External consultants assisted with its production and moderation. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements for curriculum areas in the self-assessment report, although there were insufficient references to the quality of teaching and learning. They agreed with a number of the strengths and weaknesses for aspects of cross-college provision but their grades for two of these areas were one grade lower than those given by the college.

The college offers a wide range of vocational and general education courses in nine of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. Inspectors awarded nine grades in six programme areas, as well as grading aspects of cross-college provision. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. In computing and IT it is unsatisfactory. The college's curriculum

provision is responsive and culturally sensitive to the educational requirements of the many communities living in Birmingham. Overall, student achievement and retention rates are around the average for the sector. The quality of pre-course advice and guidance is good. The location and range of accommodation is based clearly on the needs of communities. The extensive programme of staff development is linked effectively to college priorities. Governors have a wide range of expertise and are well informed. The college has widened participation successfully and strongly promotes equality of opportunity. Managers provide good leadership. The college should improve: the quality of teaching and learning, and student achievement and retention rates, particularly in computing and IT; students' punctuality at lessons; the evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support; the provision of social and recreational facilities for students; the monitoring of quality and standards by the management teams; and the achievement of its key operating targets for funding units, students' achievements and finance.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Computing and information technology	4	Support for students	2
Automotive engineering	3	General resources	3
Business studies	3	Quality assurance	3
Childcare	2	Governance	2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	2	Management	3
Languages and cultural studies	2		
Access to higher education	3		
ESOL	3		
Basic skills	2		

The College and its Mission

1 City College, Birmingham is one of the largest colleges in England. It was created in 1998 by the merger of Handsworth and East Birmingham Colleges. In Birmingham, there are six other general further education colleges, and three sixth form colleges. One of the city's three universities and the local education authority (LEA) have substantial Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funded provision. Birmingham has a number of secondary schools with sixth forms. The college recruits 82% of its students from the city and the neighbouring metropolitan boroughs of Sandwell and Solihull, and most of the remainder from the West Midlands.

2 The college has three main sites at Handsworth, East Birmingham and the technical college in Tyseley. Among its other sites are The Women's Academy, serving a predominantly Muslim community, and St George's Sixth Form College, located in an area of economic and social disadvantage. Most of the smaller sites are also in areas of disadvantage. The six high street information technology (IT) centres are located in city centre and suburban shopping streets. The college also provides education at some 50 other sites in the community.

3 The college offers provision in all FEFC programme areas except agriculture. The four largest are science, mostly IT; basic education, mainly English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and supported learning; health and care; and humanities, especially access and Asian languages. Provision is at all levels, from basic skills to higher education, with a significant proportion below level 2. A small proportion of work is franchised. The college has substantial engineering and construction provision that is not funded by the FEFC.

4 The college provides education on seven days a week throughout the year, including weekend college and summer programmes. In 1999-2000, the college enrolled 33,422 students.

During 1999-2000, over 50% were from minority ethnic communities, the largest groups being Pakistani, African Caribbean and Indian. Of the college's students, 12% were under 19 years old and 55% were female; 16% were on full-time courses and the majority of the rest were on substantial part-time programmes.

5 The college has a long tradition of widening participation and recruits many students from disadvantaged areas. Government poverty indicators show that six of the college's sites are located in some of the most disadvantaged areas nationally. A small but significant group of students are asylum seekers and refugees.

6 Employment trends for Birmingham show a continuing growth in jobs. The strongest increase is in professional services and computing. Expansion in retailing and the continuing regeneration of the city will provide further opportunities for employment. The unemployment rate for Birmingham is 9%. However, unemployment rates throughout the main recruitment areas for the college are between 15% and 25%. A key aim of the college is to improve the skills of local people to help them take advantage of new job opportunities.

7 City College, Birmingham is the lead college in the Birmingham and Solihull Widening Participation Partnership and the Birmingham and Solihull learndirect hub. It is a major partner in two local education action zones. It works in partnership with local community groups and neighbouring schools to provide learning opportunities for parents, staff and children. Links with local industry include a longstanding association with the motor industry and with many small automotive engineering companies. It works with local universities, especially Aston, on widening participation in higher education.

8 The college's mission is focused on Birmingham. It emphasises:

Context

- assisting people from disadvantaged communities in reaching their potential
- promoting inclusion and diversity
- educating young people for a good start in life
- a belief in strong vocational education towards a vibrant local economy
- working in partnership to create a city and region of lifelong learning
- embracing the opportunities of new technology and global developments.

The Inspection

9 The college was inspected during November 2000. The inspection team analysed the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information about the college provided by other directorates of the FEFC. Inspectors used data on students' achievements from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1998 and 1999. The

college submitted data on students' achievements for 2000, which inspectors checked against primary sources, for example, class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. Eighteen inspectors and two auditors working for a total of 103 days carried out the inspection. Inspectors observed 150 lessons and examined students' work and a range of college documents. They held meetings with governors, managers, college staff, students and representatives of external agencies. They also consulted the Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) about its relationships with the college.

10 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1999-2000. Of the 150 lessons observed, 60% were judged to be good or outstanding and 10% were less than satisfactory. This compares with the averages of 62% and 6%, respectively, for lessons observed in colleges inspected during 1999-2000.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	0	0	2	1	0	3
GNVQ	1	2	7	4	0	14
NVQ	6	17	6	1	0	30
Other vocational	5	23	13	6	0	47
Other*	10	25	17	4	0	56
Total (No.)	22	67	45	16	0	150
Total (%)	15	45	30	10	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 education and access to higher education*

Context

11 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 (%)
City College, Birmingham	11.0	75
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 4

12 Inspectors observed 24 lessons. They considered that the self-assessment report overemphasised strengths and underestimated weaknesses. Inspectors identified some additional weaknesses in the quality of teaching.

Key strengths

- the wide range of computing and IT courses
- effective strategies to widen participation
- good organisation and management of the high street IT centres

Weaknesses

- low retention and achievement rates
- some poor teaching
- underdeveloped use of information learning technologies in teaching
- inadequate specialist resources
- some under-qualified IT teachers
- students' lack of punctuality on many courses

13 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college offers a wide range of computing and IT courses from foundation level to level 4 across the city. The location of the high street IT centres and of a number of college sites within local communities attracts a broad range of students and helps to widen participation. The high street IT centres are well managed. They offer flexible provision, that can be booked in advance from Monday to Saturday, including most evenings throughout the year. The organisation and management of specialist IT provision across the college is less

effective. Some of the schemes of work and assessment policies are inadequate and the provision of tutorial and specialist support for students is poor in some cases.

14 Inspectors identified weaknesses in the quality of IT teaching in the college that were not recorded in the self-assessment report. Teachers provide students with good-quality printed learning materials and maintain an effective balance between computing and IT theory and practical tasks. Some teaching, however, is uninspiring. Teachers do not make regular and effective use of information learning technologies. Practical work in IT lessons is impeded by the lack of specialist resources and students are set tasks that are too easy for them. In some lessons, teachers give complex instructions using a single standard size display screen for whole-class demonstrations, which adversely affects the quality of students' learning. When staff used one of the small number of multimedia projectors available they were able to demonstrate software much more effectively and students were able to follow the instructions whilst at their individual workstations. A significant number of students arrived late for lessons. Inspectors observed teachers who left classes unattended in order to retrieve students from other parts of the college to attend lessons. Students who arrived punctually were often kept waiting by teachers who delayed the start of lessons.

15 As the self-assessment report acknowledged, in the last three years the overall achievement rate for IT was well below that for general further education colleges. Pass rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced programmes have both been well below the national average for 1998 and 1999, although they improved in 2000. Pass rates in general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) computing were poor in 1998 and 1999. It was replaced by GCE A level IT in 2000 and in that year the pass rate was around the national

Curriculum Areas

average. Achievements in computer literacy and information technology were significantly below the national average in 1998 and 1999, as were those for the City & Guilds of London Institute (C&G) 7261 IT certificate in 1999. No achievement information was available for these courses for 2000 due to difficulties in obtaining accurate data. There were good achievements on some courses. The pass rate for the European Computer Driving Licence course was well above the national average and the pass rate for GNVQ IT at foundation level has been above the national average in two of the last three years. The retention rates for full-time provision were around, or above, the national average, but retention on the C&G 7261 IT certificate course, which constitutes a significant percentage of the part-time provision, was poor in 2000.

16 While some of the large number of computing and IT teachers are very well qualified and experienced, a significant number lack appropriate professional qualifications. The range and quantity of specialist IT resources across the college is insufficient. Most computers are of a high standard and are connected to the Internet. Printing facilities are insufficient, as are levels of technical support at community sites. There is insufficient specialist software for computing and IT students on the curriculum networks. Access to programming languages, high-level webpage design tools and multimedia software is good at some college sites but poor at others. Few computers are available for use by computing and IT students outside timetabled lessons. The stock of specialist IT CD-ROMs, videos and books across all sites is inadequate for the numbers of students enrolled. Accommodation for computing and IT is satisfactory but many computer rooms lack effective ventilation.

Curriculum Areas

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 stage 1	1	Number of starters	757	1,708	2,272
		Retention (%)	79	88	80
		Achievement (%)	29	29	*
C&G 7261 IT, certificate in computer application	1	Number of starters	†	†	4,289
		Retention (%)	†	†	47
		Achievement (%)	†	†	*
C&G 7261 IT certificate	1	Number of starters	†	476	1,046
		Retention (%)	†	43	36
		Achievement (%)	†	62	*
GNVQ foundation IT	1	Number of starters	13	15	16
		Retention (%)	92	100	88
		Achievement (%)	83	40	93
European Computer Driving Licence	2	Number of starters	†	36	80
		Retention (%)	†	92	60
		Achievement (%)	†	100	69
GNVQ intermediate IT	2	Number of starters	50	62	84
		Retention (%)	80	79	74
		Achievement (%)	58	54	66
GNVQ advanced IT	3	Number of starters	10	44	53
		Retention (%)	100	75	87
		Achievement (%)	30	45	71
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	9	33	†
		Retention (%)	78	85	†
		Achievement (%)	17	45	†

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

*data unreliable

†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Automotive Engineering

Grade 3

17 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They broadly agreed with the college's self-assessment report. However, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory in some areas and this was not reflected in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching of workshop-based practical work
- good vocationally based additional support
- a wide range of provision
- strong links with local industry

Weaknesses

- some dull and uninspiring teaching
- insufficient learning resources at one of the sites
- absence of work experience for full-time students

18 The college has three sites offering motor vehicle provision across the city. A wide range of courses is offered from level 1 to higher technician level in motor vehicle repair, bodywork and paint refinishing and in automotive electrical and electronics technology. Many part-time students are on modern apprenticeship training schemes. A range of specialist courses is provided for major vehicle manufacturers. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision is responsive to the needs of the community. There are good links with the industry and a wide range of qualifications are offered. One site operates as a learning centre and training workshop for two days a week and for the remaining three days as a commercial garage

serving the local community. The college and a local community partnership jointly manage the site. Many students who attend are from areas of disadvantage and some are ex-offenders. Students carry out supervised work in garages in the community to gain evidence for their qualifications. This partnership is very effective in widening participation and in strengthening the college's relationships with the communities in Birmingham. Courses are well managed. Regular course team meetings take place at which students' progress is monitored.

19 Some classroom teaching is dull and uninspiring. In some poor lessons teachers did not use a range of effective teaching methods and failed to engage students' interest. Some teachers give incorrect engineering definitions, inadequate demonstrations of practical techniques and do not correct students' poor practical work. Lateness in some instances is accepted as normal for evening students. In some better lessons, teachers varied activities appropriately and the students were fully involved. Practical teaching in motor vehicle workshops is good. Although all lecturers complete schemes of work on a standard form, these are often simply a list of topics with no indication of teaching methods or learning outcomes. Lesson plans are detailed and generally good. Teachers mark students' theory work thoroughly and provide extensive written feedback. Imaginative assignments, which integrate mathematics with mechanical science within a motor vehicle context, are set for technician students. Work has now begun to develop the IT skills of students. The Internet is used to search for information and data associated with motor vehicle technology. At one site, students use a computer package to obtain data for servicing motor vehicles. Curriculum 2000 key skills and enrichment opportunities for full-time students have yet to be clearly identified. The entry level students and a number of the level 1 students require additional learning support. This is very

Curriculum Areas

effectively provided within a vocational context, as stated in the self-assessment report.

20 Retention for most automotive engineering students in 2000 showed an improvement on the previous year, although there were some low retention rates, particularly in 1999 for automotive crafts at level 1. Most pass rates between 1998 and 2000 improved. Some were outstanding; the short craft course at level 1 in 2000 had a pass rate of 98%. A few other results were poor. In 1998, the pass rate for automotive craft level 1 was only 35% and in 1999 short craft level 2 was 45%. The quality of students' written work is good.

21 The resources at one site are excellent. It has a large well-equipped workshop for training in repair and maintenance of light and heavy vehicles which reflects a modern garage environment. There is also a good automotive

electrical/electronics laboratory. The motor body repair students share a new welding facility with engineering students. There is a modern spray booth for use with the water-based painting system. A new learning centre has recently opened. There are two large classrooms set out for information and learning technology with suites of 20 networked computers in each. The college has made a major investment in simulated automotive systems for teaching the latest vehicle technologies, for example, air conditioning, fuel injection, anti-lock brakes and in-car audio. All rooms are clean and well decorated. At one of the other automotive engineering sites there is a large workshop floor area and a good stock of training vehicles. The teaching rooms, however, are poor and there is no learning centre.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Automotive craft	1	Number of starters	245	249	217
		Retention (%)	74	55	73
		Achievement (%)	35	81	*
Craft (short course)	1	Number of starters	135	207	282
		Retention (%)	99	98	94
		Achievement (%)	60	87	98
Automotive craft	2	Number of starters	73	146	210
		Retention (%)	77	78	87
		Achievement (%)	54	59	*
Craft (short course)	2	Number of starters	94	166	59
		Retention (%)	93	96	97
		Achievement (%)	59	45	*
Automotive craft and technician	3	Number of starters	71	126	54
		Retention (%)	85	65	91
		Achievement (%)	60	85	*
Craft (short course)	3	Number of starters	15	21	37
		Retention (%)	100	100	92
		Achievement (%)	71	90	*

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

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 3

22 Inspectors observed 21 lessons across a wide range of business administration courses. They agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report but considered that others which had been identified were in no way exceptional practice. Some strengths had not been identified and insufficient weight was given to weaknesses in retention and achievement.

Key strengths

- effective provision of courses to widen participation
- much well-planned and effective teaching
- good support to develop students' confidence
- the positive and inclusive lead provided by teachers

Weaknesses

- declining retention rates on advanced courses
- poor achievement rates on some GNVQ courses
- too few opportunities for students' experience and understanding of the workplace
- insufficiently demanding work for students in some lessons

23 The college offers a broad range of full-time and part-time courses in business administration at the Handsworth and the East Birmingham sites and full-time courses at a sixth form centre. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college successfully widens participation by offering courses at other locations in the community. For example, there are GNVQ advanced and national vocational qualification (NVQ) business administration courses run in centres for

women, mostly from the Asian community. Teachers enjoy the respect and confidence of their students.

24 Most teaching and learning is well planned. Teachers make effective use of handouts and visual aids and devise a range of useful activities for students, strengths not recorded in the self-assessment report. The quality of subject support and guidance has improved during the current teaching year, although on some courses there is no individual action-planning. Students' understanding is checked through frequent questioning. However, the questions asked and tasks set are insufficiently demanding and do not extend the abilities of most students. Teachers reinforce students' confidence by emphasising the positive aspects of their responses. Students undertake a wide range of learning activities in lessons and work effectively together in groups. For example, in one lesson students worked in groups to produce organisation charts and to analyse job roles based on a recent visit to the Royal Mail. During the short presentations given by each group, the students displayed good communications skills and the teacher effectively drew out key learning points. The students were asked to investigate further the organisational structure of the Royal Mail by using the Internet before the next lesson. Most teachers' written comments on students' work are thorough and helpful. However, on some GNVQ courses, the quality of assessment feedback is poor. Business administration students undertake work placements within the various departments of the college as well as with outside organisations. No work placements are arranged for a significant number of students on GNVQ business courses and little is done to link their learning to current practice in local businesses.

25 As the self-assessment report partially acknowledged, retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses have declined and were below national averages for the last three years. The GNVQ courses have been successfully replaced at one

Curriculum Areas

site with national certificate courses designed to meet the needs of the local community. There have been improvements in both retention and achievement on these courses in 2000 and enrolments are rising. The number of students on the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and GCE A level programmes is small and enrolments in some subjects are falling. The number of students obtaining high grades in GCSE business studies is significantly above the national average. Retention rates for GCE A level in business studies have fallen but the pass rate in 2000 improved from a very low point in the previous year. Retention on NVQ business administration courses at levels 1 and 2 is falling below the national average, whereas pass rates for courses are rising and are either

in line with, or above, the national average. Students are well motivated and the quality of their written work is of an appropriate standard.

26 The high level of professional commitment of teachers, many of whom are from local minority communities, provides a positive role model for students. Teachers are appropriately qualified and have a good command of their subject. They do not update their knowledge of current commercial practice sufficiently. There is not enough sharing of good classroom practice between colleagues. The access to and availability of resources on some sites are inadequate.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
GNVQ foundation (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	28	22	10
		Retention (%)	75	64	80
		Achievement (%)	38	29	100
NVQ administration (one-year course)	1	Number of starters	8	62	97
		Retention (%)	88	76	70
		Achievement (%)	0	40	65
GCSE business studies (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	†	19	24
		Retention (%)	†	68	62
		Achievement (%)	†	77	73
GNVQ intermediate business (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	22	49	43
		Retention (%)	50	73	71
		Achievement (%)	55	58	43
NVQ business administration (one-year course)	2	Number of starters	13	73	69
		Retention (%)	100	88	67
		Achievement (%)	17	52	80
GCE A level business studies (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	6	39	30
		Retention (%)	100	87	70
		Achievement (%)	33	27	48
GNVQ advanced business (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	32	41	82
		Retention (%)	69	63	35
		Achievement (%)	9	58	48

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Childcare

Grade 2

27 Inspectors observed 21 lessons. They broadly agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified an additional strength and two further weaknesses.

Key strengths

- flexible and responsive range of provision
- good, well-planned teaching methods
- effective use of work experience
- high achievement rate on Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) diploma in nursery nursing

Weaknesses

- insufficient development of key skills in lessons
- inadequate IT provision at many sites
- poor retention on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies

28 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the provision of childcare is flexible and responsive to the needs of local communities, and widens participation. The college offers courses from level 1 to level 4 at sites across Birmingham, including local religious and neighbourhood centres. Students are enthusiastic about the innovative and creative opportunities the college provides for them to learn within their own communities. Most courses are well managed. There are systematic and well-documented formal internal verification arrangements. One centre has a well-structured system to effectively co-ordinate and monitor all students' work experience. Good practice is not routinely shared between teachers at the two main sites. However, teams are beginning to work more closely together to

ensure parity of provision. For example, the same awarding body is now used for NVQ candidates and national diploma students. Surveys of employers' views are used to review and evaluate the provision. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, the college has strong links with employers.

29 Teaching and learning is of a good standard; most lessons were good or outstanding. In the outstanding lessons, clear aims and objectives were shared with the students. Schemes of work and lesson plans are well developed. Teachers use students' own experiences of life and work effectively. In a lesson to identify the social and emotional effects of child abuse, a group of mature students from a range of cultural groups were sensitively led through a number of case studies. Students worked in small groups to review cultural differences in terms of socially acceptable behaviour. The teacher enabled all students to recognise and value differences while collectively producing a clear set of guidelines for childcare practitioners. Good-quality student handbooks include a detailed timetable for assignments to aid planning. Assignments are vocationally relevant and set at an appropriate level for the course and year of study. The teaching teams review all assignment briefs before giving them to students. Assignments are fairly assessed and have clearly written comments by teachers which enable students to improve their work. A well-structured work experience programme effectively helps students to relate lessons to the world of work. Individual subject tutorials are supportive, clearly documented and students find them very helpful. Individual progress is well monitored and students are given clear targets to achieve. No opportunities to develop key skills in vocational lessons were seen during the inspection. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. There is very little use of IT in students' assessed work.

Curriculum Areas

30 Pass rates on the CACHE diploma of nursery nursing have been above the national average for the last two years, whereas pass rates on BTEC national diploma in childhood studies were below the national average. Retention on most courses was around the national average. Retention on the BTEC national diploma in childhood studies was significantly below the national average for 1999-2000. Progression to employment in childcare and education is good. A few students move to higher education. Progression between qualification levels across childcare is good. Students are well motivated. Displays of students' work are exciting and of a high standard. They reflect a clear understanding of the developmental needs of young children. A display during Islamic awareness week used brilliantly coloured posters with three-dimensional effects to depict ceremonies,

and short written explanations. Artefacts, including jewellery, musical instruments and household equipment, were provided for the children to touch.

31 Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Most hold a teaching qualification and training and development lead body assessor awards. Good-quality handouts supplement the low number of books. A wide range of CD-ROMs, videos, journals and articles are available in the libraries at the larger sites. Most base rooms are suitable for a variety of activities. However, the size of rooms at some sites in the community is too small for group work. There is an appropriate range of practical childcare equipment. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that access to IT is inadequate at many sites.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
CACHE certificate in childcare and education	2	Number of starters	35	132	106
		Retention (%)	74	86	74
		Achievement (%)	69	70	86
NVQ in childcare and education (work in support of others)	2	Number of starters	†	†	87
		Retention (%)	†	†	74
		Achievement (%)	†	†	73
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	†	67	76
		Retention (%)	†	90	99
		Achievement (%)	†	92	96
Edexcel childhood studies national diploma in caring services (nursery nursing)	3	Number of starters	32	67	56
		Retention (%)	59	82	57
		Achievement (%)	67	67	59
NVQ in childcare and education (group care and education)	3	Number of starters	6	12	69
		Retention (%)	100	58	83
		Achievement (%)	83	75	93

Source: ISR (1998 and 1999), college (2000)
†course not running

Curriculum Areas

Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy

Grade 2

32 The inspection covered all courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Eleven lessons were inspected. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- good teaching and learning
- good achievement rates at NVQ levels 1 and 3
- strong international links
- wide range of provision for community needs
- good management of the provision

Weaknesses

- lack of IT key skills development
- poor retention and achievement in NVQ level 2 hairdressing
- insufficient accommodation for the development of new courses

33 The good range of full-time and part-time courses takes account of the requirements of the different communities in Birmingham. Specialist courses have been developed at NVQ level 1 in Asian hairdressing and beauty therapy and short courses in Asian and African Caribbean beauty therapy. An interesting feature of the college is its links with colleges in Europe and Pakistan. A 'Leonardo' project has been developed over the last three years, providing links between students from the college and those from colleges in Finland, Holland and Portugal. The theme of these projects is to develop and understand European

and African Caribbean hair styling and make-up. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there is effective communication and sharing of good practice between the teams at the Handsworth and East Birmingham sites. Joint development of courses is taking place. Most course teams meet regularly. Targets are set for attendance, retention and students' achievements. National averages are used to measure the effectiveness of the provision.

34 Most teaching is of a high standard. This was not identified in the college's self-assessment report. Lessons are well planned and well structured. In practical lessons, teachers use a range of effective teaching and learning methods. Expert demonstrations of hairdressing and beauty therapy techniques effectively develop students' awareness of the standards required by the industry. In practical lessons students are shown realistic working practices. In one practical hairdressing lesson, the teacher encouraged the students to develop skills at a higher level than would be expected after only eight weeks' tuition. Aims and objectives are shared with students at the beginning of theory lessons and key points are regularly emphasised. Teachers make good use of questions to check students' understanding. Students have good subject support. In a beauty therapy class for 'mendhi henna' skin decoration, the teacher gave clear guidance and reassurance to build the confidence of the students. Standards of health and safety are good and teachers highlight its importance regularly. In some lessons, students work in groups or with each other to review and evaluate their practical work and share good practice. Students have the opportunity to gain additional training provided by external companies in the hair and beauty industry. There has been little development of key skills in IT. Few students have access to IT resources. Specialist teachers integrate communications

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and numeracy key skills well with vocational studies. Students dislike these skills being taught in separate lessons.

35 Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that pass rates at NVQ levels 1 and 3 have been good for the last three years. The college also acknowledges that achievement rates in hairdressing at NVQ level 2 were poor in 1998 and 1999. Retention rates were above the national average on many courses. Students' practical skills are of a high quality and are at the level found in commercial salons. Some first-year students' practical skills are well above the standard required at this stage of their course. Students studying Asian and African Caribbean hairdressing are already able to carry out complex tasks of straightening and dressing hair into fashion styles. Those studying European styles are working effectively with temporary and semi-permanent colouring.

Many students broaden their studies further by visits to shows, exhibitions, competitions and other colleges.

36 Hairdressing and beauty therapy are provided at both the East Birmingham and Handsworth sites. East Birmingham has one modern hairdressing salon, which contains equipment of industrial standard. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that the beauty therapy salon is very small and can only accommodate six beds. This prevents the further development of beauty therapy courses and prevents the use of large electrical equipment for level 3 lessons at East Birmingham. Handsworth has two hairdressing salons; one has recently been refurbished and fitted with modern industrial standard equipment. There are two beauty therapy salons, both in good repair and adequately equipped.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in hairdressing and beauty therapy, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NVQ hairdressing	1	Number of starters	15	64	77
		Retention (%)	60	79	69
		Achievement (%)	100	65	92
NVQ hairdressing	2	Number of starters	72	89	78
		Retention (%)	65	62	54
		Achievement (%)	57	51	92
NVQ beauty therapy	2	Number of starters	47	114	72
		Retention (%)	79	64	64
		Achievement (%)	94	77	93
NVQ beauty therapy (short course)	3	Number of starters	77	182	178
		Retention (%)	75	82	74
		Achievement (%)	67	85	85
NVQ beauty therapy	3	Number of starters	351	105	67
		Retention (%)	69	81	75
		Achievement (%)	56	85	96

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

Curriculum Areas

Languages and Cultural Studies

Grade 2

37 Inspectors observed 13 lessons across a wide range of languages and cultural studies both on college main sites and in community venues. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and one additional weakness.

Key strengths

- good, well-planned teaching and learning
- good pass rates on courses in GCE A level Punjabi and Urdu
- responsive curriculum that meets community, cultural and linguistic needs
- supportive women-only courses
- provision in community venues that encourages and widens participation
- well-qualified teaching team

Weaknesses

- inadequate recording and monitoring of students' progress
- lack of resources in community provision
- insufficient support for a widely dispersed team of part-time teachers

38 The college offers part-time day, evening and weekend courses in languages and cultural studies at the college's main sites and in community venues. The languages offered include both European and Asian languages. Courses are available from basic level through to GCSE, and GCE A level and advanced subsidiary (AS). All students have the opportunity for accreditation. Islamic studies and Sikh studies courses effectively encourage and widen participation by members of the local ethnic

groups of all ages. In some women-only classes, which were taught by women teachers, there is good support for students and a concern to respond sympathetically to communities' cultural sensitivities. The provision is well managed. However, as noted in the self-assessment report, the college recognises the need to strengthen curriculum co-ordination across the college, in particular for the community venues. Curriculum team leaders have difficulty in supporting a large team of part-time teachers and maintaining quality across the whole area.

39 Much teaching is good or outstanding and is well planned. Teachers have schemes of work and detailed lesson plans. These strengths were not recorded in the self-assessment report. In the best lessons, teachers use a wide variety of visual aids including authentic materials, videos and cassette recordings. For instance, in a language conversation lesson, the teacher set up a dinner table, complete with a beautiful tablecloth, food, plates and cutlery to teach vocabulary on the topic of food and ordering a meal. In a religious studies GCE A/AS level lesson, the teacher used a film to encourage and elicit a critical response from the students. In a basic Arabic lesson, the teacher used gesture, signs and large posters to teach and illustrate the letter shapes and word formation. In some less successful lessons, teachers relied too heavily on printed material. In most lessons, teachers used the language being studied to enable and consolidate effective language learning. Group tutorials and additional support on the GCE A level course help to reinforce language learning for the students who need it. Initial assessment using diagnostic assessment has helped to ensure that students join appropriate courses, and this has also helped to improve retention.

40 Most students are highly motivated. They gain in confidence and achieve their learning goals. Achievement rates on many courses are high. Inspectors agreed with the college's

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judgement that the achievement rates for Punjabi and Urdu GCE A level were especially high. On the Punjabi GCE A level and the Urdu GCE AS courses all students passed in 2000. For Urdu GCE A level pass rates have been above the national average for the last three years. In Punjabi GCE A level and GCE A level Urdu retention was above national average in 1999 but declined in 2000. For Bengali GCE A level the retention rate rose to above the national average in the last two years. Over the last three years a large cohort of students who completed their National Open College Network (NOCN) course in Sikh studies achieved a 100% pass rate. The quality of students' written work is good. Teachers give constructive feedback, especially on courses at the higher levels. There is, however, inadequate monitoring and recording of students' progress on some courses. The college did not identify this weakness.

41 Teachers are highly qualified and committed to their work with students. All have a teaching qualification. Most have the specialist Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) diploma in community languages. As the self-assessment report acknowledged, teaching resources and aids are few in the community provision. Access to IT is only available at the large sites. Half of the sites are not accessible for wheelchair users. Some teaching rooms are small and crowded and this contrasts sharply with other large airy rooms with good furniture and teaching aids. All students expressed satisfaction with the convenient location of provision and the supportive environment.

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A summary of retention and achievement rates in languages and cultural studies, 1998 to 2000

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
NOCN Sikh studies	Entry	Number of starters	399	757	119
		Retention (%)	95	99	90
		Achievement (%)	100	100	100
Foreign languages for industry and commerce (preliminary)	1	Number of starters	104	122	32
		Retention (%)	89	76	*
		Achievement (%)	86	82	*
NOCN basic Arabic	1	Number of starters	†	15	32
		Retention (%)	†	67	72
		Achievement (%)	†	80	74
GCE A/AS level religious studies	3	Number of starters	50	69	29
		Retention (%)	89	94	64
		Achievement (%)	15	31	53
GCE AS Urdu	3	Number of starters	†	†	15
		Retention (%)	†	†	100
		Achievement (%)	†	†	100
GCE A level Urdu	3	Number of starters	28	77	66
		Retention (%)	63	87	59
		Achievement (%)	94	78	92
GCE A level Punjabi	3	Number of starters	48	20	21
		Retention (%)	96	90	68
		Achievement (%)	43	89	100
GCE A level Bengali	3	Number of starters	16	13	25
		Retention (%)	81	100	92
		Achievement (%)	62	33	61

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

†course not running

*data unreliable

Curriculum Areas

Access to Higher Education

Grade 3

42 The inspection covered a range of access to higher education courses. Inspectors observed 14 lessons. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report, but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good teaching in most lessons
- the wide range of provision
- the flexible course offer
- effective marking of students' work
- effective course management

Weaknesses

- some low retention rates
- some uninspiring teaching
- the poor punctuality of students on some courses
- insufficient availability of IT
- some underdeveloped schemes of work and lesson plans

43 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that access to higher education courses are offered on a flexible basis which provides opportunities for students to progress according to their own requirements. Courses are offered on a one-year full-time basis or over two years part-time, in the day or evening. Students are drawn from a wide range of ages, and social and ethnic backgrounds. All students are assessed when they enter the college to ensure that they are placed on appropriate courses. Additional support is provided for students who require help, particularly in English, study skills and mathematics. The provision is mainly offered at the two main sites, Handsworth and

East Birmingham. Provision is also offered at local community venues, which broadens the availability of courses for members of local minority communities. Courses are well managed. There are course management teams at East Birmingham and Handsworth. Both meet regularly to discuss curriculum issues but the sharing of good practice is not yet developed. More meetings are planned to enable a joint resubmission of the course to the awarding body.

44 Most teaching and learning is satisfactory or better. As the self-assessment report indicated, students experience a wide range of teaching and learning methods. In the most successful lessons, teachers make their lesson objectives clear and students are keen and motivated. Lessons are conducted at a lively pace and teachers provide good opportunities for students to use their own experiences in relating theory to practice. Teachers frequently ask questions to check students' understanding. In an English and study skills lesson, where there was a lively discussion on languages of the world, the teacher introduced a task that required students to work in teams. They were required to pick out from a list words that originated from other languages, Hindi, Greek, French and Dutch. This task enabled students whose mother tongue was not English to use their experiences to help their team members in assigning the words to the appropriate language groups. Students' work is carefully marked. Teachers provide detailed comments and constructive criticism. Assessment is well organised and fair. Students are advised of the assessment criteria for all the units and are given advice on how to improve their grade. Most of the comments written on students' work gave an accurate evaluation of the quality of the work. Students have regular tutorials with their personal tutor. In these sessions coursework, as well as personal issues, is discussed and individual targets are set. In some lessons, students spent long periods working through

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exercises which were so similar that they did not extend students' learning. A few lessons are not sufficiently demanding and some schemes of work and lesson plans are underdeveloped.

45 Achievement rates on some courses have declined but others have improved. A number were similar to national averages. Retention rates on some courses were unsatisfactory, a weakness not recognised in the self-assessment report. Students' written work is satisfactory. The college acknowledges that students' punctuality and attendance are poor. In some lessons the very late arrival of students had a disruptive effect on the teaching and learning of other students. The strategies which have been put into place this year to improve attendance and punctuality have not yet proved effective.

46 Most teachers are well qualified and many have extensive experience as external examiners and moderators. Most classrooms at the Handsworth site are adequate. Some provide a bare and unwelcoming environment. Classrooms at the East Birmingham site are better furnished and resourced with appropriate displays of students' work. Students are often provided with well-designed handouts and materials. Library resources are adequate. Evening class students have difficulty in using the library because it is closed when their lessons finish. Inspectors agreed with the college's self-assessment report that there are not enough IT facilities for some students.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
Access to higher education (modular)	3	Number of starters	54	80	135
		Retention (%)	70	62	64
		Achievement (%)	97	78	61
Access to higher education (one-year and two-year courses)	3	Number of starters	174	208	301
		Retention (%)	65	63	73
		Achievement (%)	40	45	68
Access to higher education (teaching)	3	Number of starters	7	34	11
		Retention (%)	86	67	73
		Achievement (%)	83	63	*

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

*data unreliable

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ESOL

Grade 3

47 Inspectors observed 21 lessons on college premises and in community locations. They agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but also identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- provision responsive to community needs
- good opportunities for students to gain awards
- effective diagnostic assessment
- good use of the bilingual skills of teachers in teaching

Weaknesses

- some unsatisfactory schemes of work and lesson plans
- inadequate use of IT
- some poor retention
- insufficient provision of links to vocational or academic courses

48 The range of ESOL provision is wide and includes both full-time and part-time courses. Courses are available from entry level to level 2 of the new national ESOL curriculum. Provision is offered across a number of sites in Birmingham. It is well managed through three complementary teams. There are strong links with the local community through 13 partnerships, which make it possible for the college to respond to changing local needs. Student numbers grew by 50% in 1999-2000, mainly in response to demand from recently arrived asylum seekers. The courses offered are sensitive to cultural differences. They include men-only and women-only classes, weekend

provision, and extensive use of community venues. The college now provides bus passes for the large numbers of asylum seekers. The self-assessment report did not acknowledge that the lack of any analysis of students' progression and destinations has an adverse impact on curriculum planning. Progression routes through the ESOL provision have not been clearly established and there is no bridging provision into academic or vocational college courses.

49 An effective assessment procedure enables teachers to place students on appropriate courses. This was developed by local providers through the support of the Birmingham and Solihull TEC. Diagnostic assessment enables tutors to identify students' learning needs and forms a basis for individual action-planning which is linked to NOCN accreditation or college certification. Reviews of students' progress take place at six-weekly intervals. These new systems have been introduced to address a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Students have well-planned opportunities to gain full or partial awards through a mix of suitable accreditation. There is little opportunity for students to develop IT skills or to use IT in their learning of English. In one good arrangement the same teacher taught both IT and ESOL, enabling basic level students to wordprocess their handwritten drafts of personal writing.

50 Some teaching is effective and well managed. Where teaching is good, lesson plans have clear links to schemes of work and assessment criteria. Teachers are responsive to the needs and abilities of individual students and make effective use of their bilingual skills to promote learning. They are also sensitive to issues relating to cultural differences. Where teaching is less successful, lesson plans lack specific aims and objectives and do not indicate how the lesson fits within a cycle of learning. There is too much reliance on language practice. The worksheets used are unrelated to students'

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experience and insufficient use is made of local or topical content to engage students' interest. Schemes of work are underdeveloped, and lack a consistent format across and within the teaching teams. There is insufficient planning of homework and the development of basic study skills. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

51 Students achieve good standards in their assessed work. Some teachers give clear and helpful feedback, using the ESOL team marking policy. The college acknowledges that retention for full-time courses in 1999-2000 was unsatisfactory, at 50%. It has recently introduced measures to improve retention, including structured tutorial arrangements and a system to record students' progress. Students are highly motivated and appreciate the tutorial support they receive. Achievements of external awards are satisfactory. In one centre, 78% of

those on a four-week course gained an award. A table of student achievement and retention rates has not been included in the report because reliable disaggregated data are not available.

52 Most teachers are qualified and experienced. Community-based teachers are encouraged and supported to undertake the specialist teacher training which is available through the college. The ESOL curriculum area employs a large number of part-time staff. They are very well supported. There are, however, some pressures on full-time staff to maintain this level of support. Learning materials are satisfactory. On many sites storage and resource facilities are insufficient. Some community accommodation is poor, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. IT facilities are inadequate.

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Basic Skills

Grade 2

53 The inspection covered basic skills courses across the range of provision at the college. Twelve lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with some strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report but identified additional significant strengths and some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- high-quality teaching on most courses
- effective management
- very good retention and achievement
- well-designed multicultural teaching materials
- innovative provision of basic skills in the workplace

Weaknesses

- little integration of individual learning plans with schemes of work and lesson plans
- insufficient use of information and learning technology
- some overlarge teaching groups

54 The college provides a good range of basic skills awards, including courses in the workplace, women-only groups and vocational training in the community. All basic skills courses offer opportunities for students to gain accreditation. Students are encouraged to progress to other courses. Basic skills provision is a key strand of the college's strategy for widening participation. The college works closely with the Core Skills Development Partnership and plays a major role in implementing the basic skills plan for Birmingham. The basic skills policy has clear objectives and targets for participation, retention

and achievement. The provision is effectively managed and co-ordinated, a strength not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Quality assurance procedures for improvement are comprehensive.

55 Teaching is good and in some instances outstanding, a strength noted in the self-assessment report. In a numeracy workshop each student had a personal scheme of work with material matched to his or her learning requirements. A teacher created an effective learning environment, which enabled a group of lively students who had been excluded from school to succeed. Teachers make good use of humour. Teaching materials create a lively and stimulating learning experience for the students. Students are given demanding and relevant tasks, which engage their concentration. The quality of course documentation is good. There are thorough records of students' learning, progress and achievements. Since enrolling on a work-based literacy course one student has succeeded in passing his driving theory test and can now look forward to driving a car. In the majority of lessons students are developing skills and confidence. A group of students has sufficient confidence to act as mentors to pupils in a local primary school. All work is marked to a common marking plan, which enables the students to understand the marking system when they progress to another course. All students have an individual learning plan with competence-based targets. These are not integrated with schemes of work and lesson plans on discrete courses, as indicated in the self-assessment report. The college did not identify the weakness that some groups are very large for the level of need within the group.

56 Most students work towards NOCN credits at level 1. As the self-assessment report stated, achievements over the past three years have been very good. For both literacy and numeracy the pass rates were well above the national average. An increasing percentage of basic

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skills students are achieving their learning goals. Strategies to improve retention are effective. The retention rate on most courses was significantly above the national average. Adult students report that their improved skills have helped them with seeking employment or helping with their children's homework. At one community site the completion of a basic skills qualification by students enabled them to gain qualifications in motor vehicle maintenance. Students, including ex-offenders, are successfully motivated to learn. A number of students have progressed to more advanced courses.

57 Teachers are well qualified and many have additional specialist qualifications in basic skills. Although there are insufficient resources for courses at entry level, the staff produce high-quality teaching materials. Multicultural role models are used as a basis for reading. For example, a speech of Martin Luther King has been used to improve students' comprehension. Word searches about the languages of Africa and famous black women have been devised to help students learn. All accommodation is appropriate, with interesting wall displays in some rooms. Courses are allocated time in a computer teaching room but there is a lack of computers for use as a teaching and learning resource in classrooms.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1998	1999	2000
C&G 3794 numeracy (Numberpower) foundation	Entry	Number of starters	29	29	†
		Retention (%)	90	97	†
		Achievement (%)	100	100	†
Achievement tests literacy levels 1, 2 and 3	1	Number of starters	63	50	176
		Retention (%)	87	94	87
		Achievement (%)	100	100	82
C&G 3750 numeracy stage 1	1	Number of starters	249	76	69
		Retention (%)	99	84	80
		Achievement (%)	77	67	98
NOCN access to further education	1	Number of starters	†	1,369	514
		Retention (%)	†	84	92
		Achievement (%)	†	83	93
NOCN literacy	Mixed	Number of starters	†	720	939
		Retention (%)	†	83	80
		Achievement (%)	†	86	98

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

†course not running

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Support for Students

Grade 2

58 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective school and community links
- good pre-course advice and guidance
- comprehensive arrangements for supporting students
- effective provision of careers guidance
- good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities
- supportive arrangements for asylum seekers

Weaknesses

- insufficient evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support
- delays in implementing literacy and numeracy support for students
- weak tutorial practice on some courses
- inadequate accommodation for student services

59 Support arrangements for students are well managed. The teams that provide student services, welfare and careers guidance work well together. The college has a strong commitment to help its students to reach their full potential. There is increasing success across the college in planning learning so that students who have support needs can choose their individual programmes of work from a wide range of courses. Student services provide a range of well-advertised services for students. These include careers, finance, welfare services, transport, and personal counselling. The college

provides extensive childcare support, which includes four nurseries. There are not enough rooms for confidential interviews with students. On some sites, the location of student services and information points is not clearly identified.

60 Schools liaison is well organised. Open days and other events are organised throughout the year for school-leavers and adults. Course leaflets are informative. Student services provide good initial guidance for prospective students. There is a programme of vocational courses for pupils excluded from school. A team of multilingual guidance staff has established good links and provides effective advice to members of local communities. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the system for informing all staff about the college's curriculum offer and how to respond to initial enquiries is underdeveloped. All full-time and part-time students receive well-structured induction programmes, which help them settle into college life quickly. Students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities. An informative student handbook contains the charter and details of the college's services and facilities. Arrangements for students who change course are effective. All full-time and substantive part-time students complete a diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy at induction. At the time of the inspection, students on some courses had not received the results from these assessments. Analysis of the numbers of students identified as requiring learning support, or attending learning support classes is inadequate and there is little evaluation of the effect of learning support on the achievements of students.

61 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that careers guidance is comprehensive. Staff from the local careers service support the college's careers advisers. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have access to interviews with a specialist careers adviser. There is a good range of careers literature. The college holds annual events on

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how to apply for higher education and to seek employment. The events include talks by employers, and former students who have progressed to higher education, and are designed to help students to plan their future. Job vacancy boards are updated weekly.

62 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with high-quality support, a strength recorded in the self-assessment report. The college has effective links with a number of special schools.

Teachers are informed of the likely support needs of students. Students with sensory impairment and other disabilities receive excellent support in lessons. Learning support assistants work effectively with teachers and individual students to enable them to gain the maximum benefit from their studies. Specialist equipment such as special computer screens is available to help students with their work. There is specialist support for dyslexic students.

63 The recently revised tutorial framework is central to the strategy for improving retention and raising students' achievements. Each course team is responsible for organising its own tutorial programme by adapting the college model to suit the needs of its students and courses. Teachers receive training on tutoring. All full-time, and where appropriate part-time students, have a personal tutor. Most group tutorials are good. All full-time students are entitled to a weekly tutorial and an individual review of their work at least once a term. Students' progress is monitored closely. Individual action plans address any weaknesses. However, some tutorials are not effective. Not all students receive an individual tutorial, and action plans do not always include measurable targets or specify dates by which these must be achieved.

64 The college provides a counselling service and has one full-time qualified counsellor. To supplement the work of the counsellor, other staff, some of whom have a personal counselling

qualification, provide a listening service for students with personal issues. Where appropriate, students are referred to external agencies. The staff do not meet to disseminate good practice, and the service is not widely advertised. The self-assessment report did not record this weakness. There is good support for over 300 asylum seekers. This includes provision for travel and effective advice on benefits, accommodation and referral to external agencies.

General Resources

Grade 3

65 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report but attached greater significance to weaknesses in IT.

Key strengths

- significant improvements in the quality of accommodation since the last inspection
- good facilities for students with restricted mobility
- well-established accommodation and facilities to widen participation
- secure, clean and well-maintained accommodation
- good use of the internal IT network for providing learning materials

Weaknesses

- insufficient study spaces in some learning centres
- shortcomings in access to IT facilities on several sites
- lack of social and recreational facilities for students
- poor standard of work areas for staff on a few sites
- insufficient books for some courses

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66 The college uses a range of buildings ranging in age from Victorian to contemporary. The college has three main sites, owns four other sites, has partnership arrangements in five community buildings, and leases a further 13 premises. In addition, six centres are leased for IT provision in the high street. As the self-assessment report recognises, the extensive use of neighbourhood sites enables the college to adapt its provision effectively to the needs of local communities, sometimes in areas where transport links to other parts of the city are poor. Specialist facilities include a motor vehicle workshop predominantly for African Caribbean men, a cluster of premises owned by the local mosque and a centre for Arabic-speaking communities and asylum seekers. A particular strength is the provision of classes on several sites where women can feel secure and welcomed. These have been established following careful consultation with local communities. There are four well-furnished nurseries.

67 Most of the college's buildings are clean and in reasonable or good condition. An established long-term maintenance programme is informed by surveys on the condition of buildings and health and safety risk assessments. Since the last inspection, the college has made a number of improvements to its accommodation, clearly linked to the college's strategic priorities. The general classroom accommodation on the main sites is satisfactory but a few rooms are shabby. The standard of teaching accommodation in some community venues is unsatisfactory. Some classrooms lack displays which indicate the subject being taught and stimulate students' interest. Significant improvement in the overall rates of room utilisation has taken place since the merger. Car parking facilities are restricted at the Handsworth and East Birmingham main sites. There are insufficient social and common room facilities for students at several of the college's sites. The college has recognised the

shortcomings in staff accommodation and has started to improve the quality of desks, shelving and storage space. There is a shortage of space for teachers to work in quiet surroundings.

68 The college has made significant progress in improving access to its facilities for students with restricted mobility. Lifts, stair-lifts, ramps and self-opening doors on main sites are some of the good features that improve arrangements for wheelchair users. Improvements at the Soho Road site include the relocation of the library and a new entrance and reception area. A detailed checklist is used to audit the quality of access. Access is poor in some community venues.

69 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's IT facilities do not fully support teaching and learning nor meet students' needs for independent study. The ratio of modern computers to students is above 1:10. On main sites there is good access to the Internet. There are insufficient computers available on an open-access basis to students and some problems with the reliability of equipment and the network connection. Several community venues have no IT for use by students. Teachers have insufficient access to computers in some staff workrooms. The college makes good use of the internal network for making on-line resources available for students. Several specialist databases are available on the college's website. The college has produced a CD-ROM to help train staff wanting to write their own webpages. A broad range of multimedia materials has been developed.

70 The library and learning centre at the East Birmingham site is spacious and includes a multimedia suite, video-conferencing facilities and a recently developed enclosed area for private study. The college has eight staffed learning centres and small collections of paper-based resources at several community sites. Although the total number of books

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throughout the college is adequate, inspectors identified a shortage of books at several sites and in a number of curriculum areas. There are too few spaces for private study at some sites and, where they exist, several are not used appropriately and are often noisy. These weaknesses were identified in the self-assessment report.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

71 Inspectors agreed with several of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the strengths were not exceptional practice and they identified a few additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- the well-considered development of quality assurance and improvement arrangements
- effective use of external quality kitemarks to promote quality assurance
- extensive programme of staff development well linked to college priorities

Weaknesses

- unsatisfactory use of evidence in course reviews and the self-assessment report
- some insufficiently rigorous monitoring of quality and standards by management teams
- inadequate use and follow-up of data collected on students' perceptions
- failure to complete staff development reviews for some staff

72 Since the merger, much attention has been paid to the review and improvement of the college's quality assurance arrangements.

A number of well-written papers have identified how quality assurance should be developed. A handbook provides a comprehensive summary of all quality assurance arrangements. College managers have successfully extended the scope of several quality awards, including Investors in People, gained by the former constituent colleges and the ISO 9002 system. This has helped to harmonise the college's quality assurance arrangements. A Charter Mark has been gained for the whole of the college.

73 Staff throughout the college are required to set targets for their work. The self-assessment report acknowledged that in 1998-99, over-ambitious college targets were set for students' retention and achievements. Recently, a staff development day was held on target-setting. The report also acknowledged that there has been insufficient development of performance indicators for business support teams. Some progress has been made since the report was completed.

74 Not all the monitoring of the quality of provision is sufficiently rigorous. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Courses are reviewed regularly. For each course there is a documented end-of-course review. The review covers a range of standard items, including students' achievements. The forms completed during the reviews do not provide a comprehensive analysis of students' achievements and retention and findings from lesson observations are poorly used. There is insufficient analytical use of data from surveys of students' perceptions in the reviews. Staff in business support areas monitor the quality of their work through a variety of means which include questionnaires and surveys.

75 The self-assessment process is central to the assurance of quality in the college. Staff involvement has been widespread. Most sections of the college's self-assessment report made use of appropriate contributory reports.

Cross-college Provision

Several of the failings of course reviews were repeated in the self-assessment reports, in particular the inadequate use of the findings from lesson observations. Inspectors agreed with the acknowledgement in the self-assessment report that the processes for critical review and final validation of the self-assessment report need to be strengthened further.

76 Quality and standards are not monitored sufficiently rigorously in the quality and standards team and management meetings. There is little recorded discussion of the levels of quality and standards that are actually achieved across the college. An academic board has been created recently. It is too early to judge its effectiveness. The college's quality and standards team and other management groups have concentrated on discussing their quality assurance processes rather than on analysing performance in relation to targets and standards. For instance, insufficient attention is given to considering the results of surveys of students' views and to giving students feedback.

77 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college's 'MOT' (meeting our targets) system is a useful review process. This entails a review of course outcomes for all courses offered. Course recovery plans are required for some courses in order for them to meet minimum standards. It is too early to judge the full impact of 'MOT' systems, although some unsatisfactory courses have been terminated and a variety of changes in the curriculum have been made. Recently, the college has agreed a strategy to improve students' retention and achievements.

78 Opportunities for staff development are good; a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. There is an extensive programme of staff development events and courses, which are internally organised. Development days for the whole college have been devoted to setting targets and operating other aspects of quality assurance. Requests for

staff development funds to pay for external events are linked to the college's strategic objectives. Staff development activities are linked to Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) standards. Staff development is planned and evaluated on a yearly basis. The performance of senior managers is evaluated during staff reviews. For staff at other levels in the college, there are opportunities for individual development reviews. However, there are many staff this year who have not had such a review.

79 Recently, the college charter has been revised; it contains a clear set of service standards and indicates contact points for those wishing to make a suggestion or complaint. Thorough reports are produced showing the number of complaints made and how satisfactorily they were handled. There are appropriate systems for monitoring the quality of franchised provision. Regular visits are made to inspect franchised courses and staff with specialist expertise carry out class observations. Course outcomes are reported to the college.

Governance

Grade 2

80 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the college's self-assessment report. Some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the inspection. They identified an additional weakness.

Key strengths

- governors' effective oversight of the college's merger and strategic direction
- well-informed governors with a wide range of expertise
- high-quality clerking and operation of the corporation and its committees

Cross-college Provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient information to the full corporation about the academic performance of the college

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

82 The corporation has a membership of 19, which includes seven business governors, three co-opted governors, two staff governors, two local authority governors, three local community governors, one student governor, and the chief executive. When making new appointments the search committee considers the range of governors' skills. The committee operates effectively in seeking candidates and advising the corporation on the appointment of governors. There are established procedures for nominations for staff, student, local authority and community governors. Vacancies are publicly advertised. Inspectors agreed that governors have a wide range of skills, expertise and experience. Governors are well informed about the college and committed to the development of the communities that it serves.

83 New governors are provided with an induction pack and programme, and are encouraged to identify their training needs. Governors attend two formal training events each year, and a detailed training plan for the year has been developed.

84 Governors have a clear understanding of the distinction between governance and management. All governors and senior managers annually update the register of interests. The corporation's code of conduct includes the Nolan committee's seven principles

of public life, and there is a 'whistleblowing' policy. Corporation papers are available in the library for public inspection. All college staff are welcome at corporation meetings, other than for confidential items. The corporation has not prepared a formal policy for the treatment of confidential issues that arise at committee meetings.

85 As the self-assessment report stated, clerking is of a high standard and gives good support to the corporation and individual governors. The clerk is an independent employee and has the support of a deputy clerk. The clerk services all committees and has direct access to external legal advice. The agendas and supporting papers for corporation and committee meetings provide a good basis for decision-making. They are well presented and corporation agendas clearly show when papers are for discussion and decision. Minutes are detailed and provide a robust record of discussions.

86 There is an annual calendar of corporation and committee meetings, and schedules of standard agenda items. The corporation has appropriate committees and committee membership makes good use of the governors' available skills.

87 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors effectively oversee the college's strategic direction, including the college's merger. The college's mission is reviewed on an annual basis and is supported by six widely published strategic objectives that underpin all college activities. Governors are actively involved in strategic planning. Progress in meeting the objectives in the strategic plan has been carefully and regularly monitored. Governors have a clear understanding of the position of the college and the communities it serves.

88 Governors have recognised the deteriorating financial health of the college and have overseen the development of plans to

Cross-college Provision

address the situation. The production of management accounts for governors was often delayed but they are provided with up-to-date commentaries on the financial situation.

89 The audit committee reports annually to the corporation on the effectiveness of the system of internal control in the college. The committee annually appraises its own performance and assesses the work of the internal and external auditors against established performance indicators. It effectively monitors the plans and reports of the internal and external auditors and reviews agreed audit recommendations in order to monitor their implementation. The committee occasionally considers issues that would be more appropriate for other committees, for example, updates to the financial regulations.

90 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors give good support to quality assurance initiatives in the college but considered that it was too early to judge the effectiveness of the quality and standards committee, established in May 1999. The committee has met regularly to monitor the college's academic performance. Reports from the college's student achievement team are beginning to help members to understand and monitor the college's overall academic performance. The committee has not yet decided upon the format of the data and level of detail that it wishes to receive on students' retention and achievements. Insufficient information reaches the full corporation to allow all members to obtain a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the quality of education provided by the college. The committee oversees the college's self-assessment process, including the self-assessment of governance.

Management

Grade 3

91 Inspectors agreed with a number of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the strengths listed were not exceptional practice. They identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good leadership
- exemplary practice in widening participation
- productive links with other organisations
- responsiveness to, and the celebration of, cultural diversity

Weaknesses

- failure to achieve some key operating targets
- lack of co-ordination in some areas of management
- no formally documented operating targets for the current year
- lack of staff access to, and use of, management information

92 College managers have led the college effectively through a period of major change. A significant amount of distanced franchising has ceased and has been replaced by local provision. Two colleges with distinctly different traditions have been merged. Managers are working to harmonise procedures across the whole college. The original vision of a federated system of largely separate colleges has been replaced by the decision to provide a single unified system in order to meet external requirements and to ensure that provision for students across the various college sites is of the same quality. There is still some inconsistent

Cross-college Provision

practice across the college, for example, in the co-ordination of curriculum areas and in systems for monitoring budgets and students' attendance.

93 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has a long-established and successful commitment to widening participation. It provides opportunities for a wide range of students in some areas of exceptionally high deprivation. The provision is flexible and responsive to local needs. Student retention rates are improving and above the national average for general further education colleges which have high numbers of students from areas of disadvantage. Overall, achievement rates are at the national average for further education colleges and above the average for colleges with significant numbers of students from areas of disadvantage. As the college acknowledged in its self-assessment report, there are some areas of low achievement, in particular at level 3, and at level 2 for students aged 19 and above.

94 Arrangements for the production of the strategic plan are comprehensive. All staff have an opportunity to contribute to the plan. A two-day strategic planning conference involves staff, students, governors and representatives of schools and employers and the local community. All staff receive a copy of the plan and are committed to the achievement of the mission. The six strategic objectives in the plan form the basis of college activities. The operating plan for 1999-2000 contained a number of quantifiable targets that were carefully monitored. This has not yet happened for the current year. A number of key targets in the last operating plan were not met, including targets for funding units, students' achievements and finance. The college is addressing a significant shortfall in meeting its unit targets, and the serious financial implications that this entails.

95 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the college's

financial management is adequate. The college has a well-qualified and experienced finance team. The college has plans to address its current poor financial health. Despite deficits in the two years since merger, the college has maintained positive financial reserves. Comprehensive management accounts are produced for senior management and governors each month. The college has recognised that these accounts need to be produced more promptly. Budget managers at one of the main sites are not provided with adequate routine management information to enable them to monitor their budgetary allocations. The introduction of a common student record system last year was associated with some late returns on student numbers to the FEFC. The college made a significant loss in establishing and subsequently disposing of a commercial venture. The sale of this venture was not informed by an independent valuation.

96 As the self-assessment report identified, there is inadequate access for staff to the college's management information system. The student record system produces a range of reports that are available on the college network. However, not all managers, including some programme team leaders, have adequate access to the network and hard copies of information are produced to complement the computerised version. The college has not conducted a systematic analysis of the information needs of managers and there is no cross-college management information users' group. Some systems used to produce key information are not integrated. These include finance, student record and personnel systems. There are some significant differences in the procedures used to collect and monitor data. The college has recently appointed a cross-college director of information systems and is using an external consultant to help it plan for the introduction of integrated systems and procedures.

Cross-college Provision

97 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college has productive links with a wide range of partner organisations. A key feature of these links is the college's commitment to inner-city regeneration and the development of skills within the communities it serves. The college works with local schools to develop family literacy and to train teachers and classroom assistants. It collaborates with other colleges, the local authority and the TEC on joint projects. It actively researches the needs of the community through its links with community groups and voluntary organisations. It has enabled 130 community teachers to obtain teaching qualifications. The college has close links with higher education. It also has many international links.

98 The college pays close attention to equal opportunities and the cultural diversity of its students and staff. It respects the cultural traditions and religious beliefs of staff and students. Equal opportunities policies and strategies are comprehensively implemented throughout the college. Courses offered in a wide variety of subjects take account of the many educational needs of the different communities in Birmingham and are provided at a range of locations in order to increase participation. Inspectors identified many examples of the successful application of equal opportunities in curriculum and cross-college areas.

Conclusions

99 The college's self-assessment report covered all areas of the college's work. It provided a useful basis to plan the inspection. Most judgements were clear. There were few references to the quality of teaching and learning. Some of the evidence to support the judgements was insufficient. Action points contained little appropriate detail. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report for curriculum areas but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. One curriculum grade awarded by inspectors was higher than the college's grade and one was below. They agreed with a number of the judgements for aspects of the cross-college provision but their grades for two of these areas were one grade lower than those given by the college.

100 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	1
16-18 years	11
19-24 years	18
25+ years	70
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	35
Level 2 (intermediate)	17
Level 3 (advanced)	8
Level 4/5 (higher)	3
Level not specified	37
Non-schedule 2	0
Total	100

Source: college data

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

Programme area	Full-time	Part-time	Total provision (%)
Science	451	10,665	33
Construction	274	326	2
Engineering	520	1,563	6
Business	512	1,746	7
Hotel and catering	200	1,635	5
Health and community care	862	2,232	9
Art and design	522	1,145	5
Humanities	394	5,513	18
Basic education	1,737	3,125	15
Total	5,472	27,950	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1998-99 ISR data, the college recruited 56% 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	316	2	0	318
Supporting direct learning contact	247	6	11	264
Other support	195	17	7	219
Total	758	25	18	801

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1998	1999	2000
Income	*	£29,528,000	£27,839,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	*	£16.20	£16.65
Payroll as a proportion of income	*	54%	60%
Achievement of funding target	*	99%	80%
Diversity of income	*	21%	24%
Operating surplus	*	-£1,130,000	-£1,226,000

Sources: Income – college (1999 and 2000)

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

Payroll – college (1999 and 2000)

Achievement of funding target – college (1999 and 2000)

Diversity of income – college (1999 and 2000)

Operating surplus – college (1999 and 2000)

**data not available due to college merger*

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	749	749	1,083	3,607	3,398	3,927
	Retention (%)	77	84	80	81	80	77
	Achievement (%)	69	45	54	73	51	51
2	Number of starters	1,151	936	1,669	3,496	1,902	2,954
	Retention (%)	84	80	83	87	84	80
	Achievement (%)	41	60	62	72	37	50
3	Number of starters	481	451	1,101	1,666	1,833	2,641
	Retention (%)	68	85	82	73	78	76
	Achievement (%)	58	39	48	72	36	46
4 or 5	Number of starters	4	7	20	250	157	483
	Retention (%)	50	86	90	64	85	80
	Achievement (%)	100	67	56	91	49	68
Short courses	Number of starters	1,965	2,238	2,260	16,351	14,846	17,678
	Retention (%)	98	98	97	98	99	97
	Achievement (%)	92	84	81	95	83	79
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	422	285	1,184	3,292	3,360	6,290
	Retention (%)	81	82	85	82	85	85
	Achievement (%)	67	66	69	79	79	79

Source: ISR

FEFC Inspection Report 24/01

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
© FEFC 2001**

January 2001

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Reference INSREP/1165/01