

Halesowen College

**REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00**

**THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL**

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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

© FEFC 2000 You may photocopy this report and use extracts in promotional or other material provided quotes are accurate, and the findings are not misrepresented.

Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	7

Curriculum areas

Mathematics, computing and information technology	10
Business studies	16
Health and social care	21
English and communications	28
History, sociology and psychology	33
Basic skills	40

Cross-college provision

Support for students	46
General resources	53
Quality assurance	59
Governance	69
Management	79
Conclusions	90

College statistics

Grade Descriptors

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

The descriptors for the grades are:

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

Audit conclusions are expressed as good, adequate or weak.

Aggregated grades for aspects of cross-college provision and curriculum areas, for colleges inspected during 1998-99, are shown in the following table.

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

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

Student Achievements

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

- as number of starters, which is the number of enrolments on qualifications where the student was expecting to complete the qualification that college year. For example, a student on a two-year programme who began their programme in October 1995, would appear in the results for 1996-97 because this is the year in which they expected to complete their qualification
- as a retention rate, which is the percentage of qualifications which students have completed as expected or where they are continuing their studies beyond the expected end date of the qualification. For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification
- as an achievement rate, which is the number of qualifications students have fully achieved as a percentage of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Partial achievements are not included.

Summary

Halesowen College

West Midlands Region

Inspected April 2000

Summary

Halesowen College is a tertiary college in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley in the West Midlands. Most staff and governors were involved in the production of the college's self-assessment report. Its judgements were subject to moderation by the college executive, an external panel and two governors. This was the college's third self-assessment report and it was approved by the corporation. Inspectors agreed with many judgements in the college's self-assessment report but considered that some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were understated. Overall, the lesson grades the inspectors awarded were broadly similar to those given by the college through its lesson observation process. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the grades in the self-assessment report for areas of provision.

The college offers a wide range of courses in nine of the programme areas funded by the FEFC. Provision in five of these was inspected together with aspects of cross-college provision. Most teaching is good or outstanding. Student retention and achievement rates are mostly above the average for the sector. There are good support services for students. Tutorials are effective. Careers education and guidance are comprehensive. Most accommodation is modern and well maintained and it is easily accessible to students with restricted mobility. Computing equipment is of good quality. It is well managed and readily available to staff and students. Staff strive for the continuous improvement of provision. Course reviews are rigorous and there is good action-planning for the improvement of provision. Governors are committed to helping the college to succeed.

They monitor the college's finances effectively. Many aspects of management are good. Staff are well deployed. Appropriate targets are set and progress towards their achievement is monitored effectively. Reports on the college's financial performance are comprehensive. The college should stop making inappropriate payments to governors. It should also improve: the quality of advice governors receive; some aspects of strategic planning; arrangements for governors to monitor provision; the recording of students' progress; student achievement rates; social, recreational and sporting facilities; and the application of quality assurance measures in business support areas.

Summary

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Mathematics, computing and information technology	3	Support for students	2
Business studies	2	General resources	2
Health and social care	2	Quality assurance	2
English and communications	2	Governance	3
History, sociology and psychology	3	Management	2
Basic skills	3		

The College and its Mission

1 Halesowen College is located on two campuses in Halesowen, a town on the southern edge of the Black Country in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley. The town has a population of 60,000. It expanded after the Second World War as a residential area for people working in Birmingham and the surrounding area. It has no large employers although there are some medium-sized organisations. Halesowen has four secondary schools. The proportion of 16 year olds in Dudley who stay on in full-time education is 57%. The majority of full-time students are drawn from 30 schools in the boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell, and the Birmingham area. Within a 5-mile radius there are six schools with sixth forms, two sixth form colleges and three general further education colleges. The college aims to work collaboratively with other educational and training providers.

2 The college opened as a tertiary college in September 1982 in the premises of the former college of further education. It has grown steadily and now has some 5,961 students. It has become a large provider of education in the area for full-time students aged 16 to 19. In 1998-99, 22% of full-time students were from minority ethnic groups. The college employs some 303 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 183 are teachers.

3 The college offers courses in nine Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) programme areas with many opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds. It regards curriculum 2000 as a major opportunity to provide a wide and flexible range of subjects for post-16 students, including 37 general certificate of education advanced supplementary (GCE AS) subjects and 24 advanced vocational programmes.

4 The original building on the Whittingham campus was opened in 1967 and was added to by four new blocks in the 1980s. In 1997, another large building was constructed. A

conditional contract has been exchanged to sell the Walton campus which is a former girls' school built in the late 1930s. In September 2000, a new £1.7 million electronic commerce centre will open to provide an extensive range of information technology (IT) and associated training for small and medium-sized enterprises and the local community.

5 The college is a member of a Black Country Partnership for Learning through which it provides for New Deal clients. This group will be a 'learndirect' centre under which the college will operate a learning centre in September 2000. It is also an ADAPT University for Industry pilot centre for the development of learning materials. More recently, the college has played a key role in supporting the Dudley Partnership for Lifelong Learning.

6 The college's mission is to strive for excellence in delivering opportunities for education and training in Halesowen and the wider community.

The Inspection

7 The college was inspected during the week beginning 3 April 2000. The inspection team had previously studied the college's self-assessment report and information about the college held by other directorates of the FEFC. This included data on students' achievements for 1997 and 1998, which were derived from the individualised student record (ISR). The college supplied data on students' achievements for 1999. Inspectors checked these against class registers and pass lists issued by examining bodies. Twelve inspectors and an auditor carried out the inspection over 55 days. Inspectors observed 74 lessons, including tutorials, and examined students' work and documentation about the college and its courses. Meetings were held with governors, college managers, staff and students.

8 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile

Context

for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons observed, 72% were judged to be good or outstanding and 4% were less than satisfactory. This compares with profiles of 65% and 6%, respectively, for all colleges inspected in 1998-99.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GCE A/AS level	4	17	8	2	0	31
GCSE	1	3	1	1	0	6
GNVQ	2	7	1	0	0	10
NVQ	2	3	0	0	0	5
Other vocational	3	3	4	0	0	10
Other*	2	6	4	0	0	12
Total (No.)	14	39	18	3	0	74
Total (%)	19	53	24	4	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

*includes basic education

Context

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

Attendance rates in lessons observed

	Average number of students	Average attendance (%)
Halesowen College	11.1	77
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99	11.2	78

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

Curriculum Areas

Mathematics, Computing and Information Technology

Grade 3

10 Inspectors observed 16 lessons in mathematics, computing and IT. Some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were overstated. Inspectors found one strength and several weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- students' good achievement rates on general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) programmes
- students' high retention rates
- good basic IT provision
- good work experience opportunities for vocational students
- extensive and useful learning materials

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates on GCE advanced level (GCE A level) programmes
- weaknesses in curriculum management
- insufficient use of IT on mathematics courses
- insufficient feedback to students
- underdeveloped links with industry

11 There are a high number of students on full-time mathematics, computing and IT GCE A level and general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) courses and on GNVQ courses in IT at both advanced and intermediate level. The college offers a growing number and an increasing range of part-time programmes in basic IT. These are offered in a variety of locations, including local schools and specialist accommodation at both campuses. Staff in this curriculum area do not work together in a co-ordinated way to share ideas on teaching and

learning, develop the curriculum or monitor students' achievements. Action has been taken to partly rectify this problem but it is one affecting the GCE A level programmes in particular. There is little sharing of good practice between the subject areas.

12 Teaching on the part-time programmes for adults was particularly good. On these, the students produced high standards of work and demonstrated a clear understanding of what they had been taught. Teaching in practical lessons is good. In many lessons on GCE A level and GCSE courses, students spent all their time either copying work from the board or working through examples. Many students found these activities uninspiring and did not learn very much from them. Teachers failed to check whether the students understood what they copied down. In one lesson, only one student could follow the teacher's board work, yet the teacher continued with the topic.

13 As identified in the self-assessment report, student achievement rates on the GNVQ programmes are good and those on the advanced programme are significantly above the national average for the sector. In their assignment work on the GNVQ intermediate course, students display a sound knowledge of IT and its commercial application. Student pass rates on GCE A level statistics and mathematics courses are below the national average and on the GCE A level computing course they are particularly low. Student retention rates on all full-time courses are above the national average and they are high on the GCE A level mathematics and the GNVQ advanced course. Most students' work is of a good standard. In their marking of work, some teachers do not provide students with sufficiently detailed written comments on the quality of their work. In particular, students whose work falls below an appropriate standard, receive little feedback on their weaknesses and on ways of rectifying them.

Curriculum Areas

14 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that students on all GNVQ courses have valuable periods of work experience. These are for two or three weeks each year and are carefully chosen to ensure they are relevant to the programme as a whole, and to the students' assignments. Recently, second-year students have been placed in Italy and in Sweden. This successful work experience programme, however, does not lead to useful long-term links with industry. Employers are not involved in course planning or review, and do not provide work-related assignments.

15 As the self-assessment report acknowledges, students benefit from the extensive range of learning materials. IT students use study packs and learning materials on the network which enable students to work on their own or in small groups, and they only seek help from teachers when they need it. In mathematics and statistics, staff have produced a large number of learning materials. These include course materials, handouts and some well-produced examination revision packs. An appropriate range of modern hardware and software is available in computing and IT. Students have easy access to equipment at all times. The Internet connection is slow in operation. Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report, that the failure to make IT an integral part of work in mathematics and statistics constitutes a weakness. None of the classrooms used for these subjects has a computer.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE mathematics	2	Number of starters	300	262	249
		Retention (%)	86	77	83
		Achievement (%)	38	27	34
GNVQ intermediate and precursors	2	Number of starters	21	47	44
		Retention (%)	81	79	57
		Achievement (%)	80	59	75
GCE A level mathematics	3	Number of starters	59	64	80
		Retention (%)	93	86	82
		Achievement (%)	60	56	68
GCE A level statistics	3	Number of starters	24	13	20
		Retention (%)	75	92	75
		Achievement (%)	61	25	60
GCE A level computing	3	Number of starters	72	78	103
		Retention (%)	90	86	82
		Achievement (%)	46	40	33
GNVQ advanced IT and precursors	3	Number of starters	42	46	39
		Retention (%)	83	87	67
		Achievement (%)	97	90	81
IT (all courses including short and over 24 weeks)	Various	Number of starters	308	424	1,174
		Retention (%)	89	87	97
		Achievement (%)	72	45	52

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college 1999

Curriculum Areas

Business Studies

Grade 2

16 Inspectors observed 10 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report but identified a few additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- outstanding pass rates on some courses
- much good teaching
- students' good achievement rates on many courses in 1997 and 1999
- robust internal verification procedures
- good display materials in rooms with strong subject identity

Weaknesses

- many students' lack of punctuality
- underdeveloped use of IT and learning resources
- inadequate links with employers

17 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching is particularly good. Of the lessons observed, most were good or outstanding. Inspectors also agreed with the self-assessment report that teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods. They ask the students well-directed and demanding questions to sustain their interest and make sure they understand what they are learning. In all lessons, students were made aware of the learning objectives. Lessons were lively and had a sense of momentum. Teachers met individual students' learning needs. In a particularly good lesson, students on a GNVQ advanced course worked effectively in groups preparing fictitious, detailed plans for the introduction of a new motor vehicle course. The teacher summarised the plans of each group successfully through the good use of bar charts. Office technology workshops are used

effectively. Business administration students worked confidently through various IT learning packages. They demonstrated that they were able to work responsibly and effectively on their own, and at their own pace. In business studies lessons, teachers made good use of examples from the local and regional economy to illustrate topics. In some lessons, teachers did not check if students had kept a written record of what they had learnt. Sometimes, they allowed insufficient time for students to reflect before responding to questions. In a few lessons, the teacher talked too much, did not ask any questions and the students were clearly bored. These weaknesses were not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. The teaching and assessment of key skills are carried out well on GNVQ programmes. In GCE A level business studies, key skills are not an integral part of course content. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that the use of IT by students in assignments and coursework is underdeveloped.

18 As identified in the self-assessment report, courses are well planned and effectively managed. Course documentation is well organised. Thorough schemes of work and lesson plans identify appropriate objectives, activities and learning outcomes. Assessment procedures are fair and applied consistently. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are exemplary internal verification procedures. On GNVQ and business administration courses, curriculum management issues are effectively addressed through informal discussions or by regular meetings that are minuted. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there are few formal meetings of the GCE A level accounting and business studies teams in order to prepare for the implementation of curriculum 2000. On the GNVQ business and GCE A level accounting and business studies courses, links with employers are inadequate, there is no work experience programme, and guest speakers are seldom invited to address the students and give them a

Curriculum Areas

perspective on the world of work. Links with employers on the business administration course are good, and many full-time students have work experience placements.

19 In seven lessons, the late arrival of students adversely affected teaching and learning. Students' attendance on the GNVQ intermediate course has been consistently poor. These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report. Most students' written work is of a high standard. The portfolios of students on the GNVQ intermediate and advanced courses are well presented. Their contents indicate that the students have acquired an appropriate range of skills. Students' work is marked and returned quickly. Spelling and grammatical errors are corrected but some teachers' written feedback on GNVQ assignments is insufficiently detailed. In 1999, the student achievement rate on the GNVQ advanced business studies course was exceptional, at 98%. Pass rates on the GCE A level accounting course for 1999 were above the national average for the sector. In 1997, 1998 and 1999 pass rates on the diploma in medical secretarial studies were significantly above the national average. Between 1998 and 1999, retention rates on the majority of courses were at, or above, the national average for the sector.

20 The business studies teaching accommodation consists of modern and appropriately sized classrooms. Business studies staff use display material well in rooms to establish a strong curriculum area identity and a pleasant learning environment. In its self-assessment report, the college failed to acknowledge that the stock of books, journals, videos and CD-ROMs in the learning centre is insufficient. There are not enough appropriate videos for teachers and students to use in lessons. Students use the Internet for research work on assignments effectively, and in so doing, they develop their investigative skills. There are not enough relevant Internet directories for students.

Curriculum Areas

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
OCR wordprocessing	1	Number of starters	65	71	41
		Retention (%)	83	86	78
		Achievement (%)	96	66	94
OCR shorthand	1	Number of starters	21	22	19
		Retention (%)	71	55	47
		Achievement (%)	90	50	89
Association of Accounting Technicians foundation	2	Number of starters	23	36	25
		Retention (%)	65	81	72
		Achievement (%)	50	40	75
GNVQ intermediate business studies	2	Number of starters	34	38	37
		Retention (%)	88	84	76
		Achievement (%)	100	69	86
GCE A level business studies	3	Number of starters	117	153	95
		Retention (%)	88	93	74
		Achievement (%)	80	83	79
GCE A level accounting	3	Number of starters	42	49	37
		Retention (%)	86	94	81
		Achievement (%)	64	43	80
GNVQ advanced business studies	3	Number of starters	118	96	57
		Retention (%)	85	82	74
		Achievement (%)	100	91	98
Diploma in medical secretarial studies	3	Number of starters	49	40	60
		Retention (%)	92	90	90
		Achievement (%)	95	86	93

Source: ISR (1997 and 1998), college 1999

Curriculum Areas

Health and Social Care

Grade 2

21 Inspectors observed 13 lessons. They agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found several strengths and weaknesses, however, that the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- students' high achievement rates on some courses
- students' success in progressing to higher education from the GNVQ advanced course
- wide range of work experience opportunities for students
- responsiveness to the needs of adult learners

Weaknesses

- declining retention and achievement rates on the GNVQ intermediate course
- insufficient development of students' key skills
- a few poor classrooms

22 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time provision from level 1 to 3. Recruitment to childcare courses has shown a steady increase in the last three years. On the diploma for nursery nurses course, mature students are timetabled for a shortened day to help them meet domestic commitments. The introduction of a pre-school learning course meets a need for professional updating of childcare workers. The college also offers courses leading to NVQs in childcare and education at levels 2 and 3.

23 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that teaching and learning in this curriculum area constituted a strength. In the better lessons, students were

given a range of demanding and vocationally relevant activities. For example, in one lesson, mature students were presented with a number of behavioural problems involving children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they were asked to say how they would resolve them. Students worked in pairs, drawing on their knowledge of child development and their experience in work placements. Possible causes of the child's behaviour were identified and ways of dealing with it were proposed. The teacher moved around the group, checking understanding, challenging assumptions and highlighting ethical considerations. In some less effective lessons, teachers failed to check that students understood what they were being taught. In others, they failed to make sure that the learning tasks were appropriately differentiated to take account of the range of students' abilities and aptitudes.

24 Assignments and lesson plans for all courses indicate that students will develop key skills but in practice, these are not covered effectively during lessons. Well-planned vocationally relevant assignments are included in each course handbook. Students are clear about the assessment process and the appeals procedure. Assignments are fairly assessed. Teachers' written feedback gives clear guidance on how students may improve their work. There is a robust internal verification system. Student retention and achievement rates on GNVQ intermediate courses are below the national average for the sector. Student achievement rates on the national diploma childhood studies course have been significantly above the national average for the last three years, and in 1997 all students were successful. Student achievement rates on the GNVQ advanced health and social care course have been high for the last three years. The proportion of students who progressed to higher education from the GNVQ advanced health and social care course in 1999 was significantly higher than the average for the sector.

Curriculum Areas

25 Courses are managed effectively. Staff monitor the quality of provision by obtaining feedback from students, both formally and informally. Where appropriate, action is taken. For example, students felt that their assignment workload was too heavy and dates for the completion of assignments were agreed. All full-time students and those part-time students with substantial timetables, receive weekly tutorials. Work to meet the needs of industry includes the introduction of a course leading to an NVQ in care at level 2 for a group of care workers of Asian origin from the voluntary sector. The self-assessment report notes the decline in student numbers on the GNVQ intermediate health and social care course.

26 As the self-assessment acknowledges, the college has strong links with a range of employers within the education, voluntary and health sectors. A well-structured work experience programme is provided for all students. Comprehensive documentation on work experience is provided for work placement providers and students at the beginning of the year. Meetings are held each term to update work placement providers on changes to the curriculum. Students are encouraged to draw on their work experience in lessons and their assignment work, to relate theory to practice.

27 All courses have their own specialist rooms. The better rooms are large enough to enable groups of students to use a variety of appropriate equipment easily and move about freely. The equipment includes a 'hospital area' and childcare equipment reflecting the ethnicity of the local community. A few classrooms are too small. In these, the students are cramped and the range of learning activities they can carry out is narrowly restricted. For example, in one room used for craft sessions there is little space, no sink and no storage area for equipment. The self-assessment report identified as a weakness, the paucity of learning materials on counselling in childcare and the college has purchased some additional and appropriate texts.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in health and social care, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
Basic first aid	1	Number of starters	113	82	123
		Retention (%)	96	95	99
		Achievement (%)	90	88	97
Basic counselling	2	Number of starters	89	84	78
		Retention (%)	92	96	99
		Achievement (%)	69	91	81
GNVQ intermediate health and social care	2	Number of starters	36	43	34
		Retention (%)	72	79	65
		Achievement (%)	81	76	64
GNVQ advanced health and social care	3	Number of starters	40	44	51
		Retention (%)	75	77	80
		Achievement (%)	77	74	80
CACHE diploma in nursery nursing	3	Number of starters	*	32	44
		Retention (%)	*	88	80
		Achievement (%)	*	89	84
National diploma childhood studies	3	Number of starters	44	45	50
		Retention (%)	86	32	76
		Achievement (%)	100	97	97

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

**course did not run*

Curriculum Areas

English and Communications

Grade 2

28 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found one weakness the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- much good and some outstanding teaching
- provision of extra learning support for students at all levels
- students' high retention and achievement rates on all GCSE and GCE A level courses in 1999
- effective curriculum management
- good variety of extra-curricular activities
- wide range of learning resources

Weaknesses

- students' poor achievement rates in 1998
- failure to specify aims and objectives in schemes of work and lesson plans

29 The English and communication courses are well managed. Teachers work well together as a team to develop the courses and learning resources. Team meetings take place regularly. Students are involved in the thorough course review process, which has led to many improvements. Recent additions to the range of full-time and part-time courses offered have included a short course in creative writing and a GCSE English course on Saturday mornings. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities is available to English and communication students. These activities include visits to the theatre and poetry readings, talks from visiting speakers, and the production of a student magazine on the college intranet.

30 Much of the teaching is good and some is outstanding. As identified in the self-assessment

report, teachers use a variety of appropriate teaching methods to excite the students' interest and to further the students' skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, in a GCE A level English lesson, students worked in small groups on aspects of the language essay, such as plot, title, opening and character description. Each group presented its work to the rest of the class. Through the sharing of their ideas and the discussion of common problems, the students learnt a great deal about writing technique from one another. An Easter school is organised for GCE A level English students who are predicted to achieve high grades. Of those who attended in 1999, 82% achieved a high grade. Extra lessons are provided for students in danger of failing, and a 'drop-in' workshop is held every week for those students needing extra help with any aspect of their course. Schemes of work are detailed and presented in a standard format. The self-assessment report failed to acknowledge, however, that schemes of work and lesson plans fail to specify aims and objectives. Teachers mark students' work accurately and carefully, and they include constructive comments to help the students improve their performance.

31 The quality of most students' work is good. Students are punctual, attentive in lessons and contribute well to discussion. In English and communications lessons, students help one another. When working together, they respect and value each others' views. The schemes of work for GCE A level courses specify ways in which students may be assessed in the key skills of communication through their mainstream coursework. Staff are confident that many students will achieve key skills certification at level 3 during the current year. As the self-assessment report recognises, the student retention rates on GCSE and GCE A level courses are good. For the past three years, they have been close to or above the national averages for the sector. As acknowledged in the self-assessment report, student achievement

Curriculum Areas

rates on all the GCSE and GCE A level courses offered apart from the GCE A level English literature course, were significantly below the national average in 1998. In 1999, however, student achievement rates on all the GCSE and GCE A level courses were in line with, or above, the national average. For example, 86% of students on the one-year GCE A level English course passed, compared with a sector average of 66%. On the two-year GCE A level English course, 97% of the students passed compared with a sector average of 86%. The pass rate for GCE A level English literature has been consistently high at between 97% and 100% over the past three years. As the college recognised in the self-assessment report, however, the percentage of students passing with high grades was below the national average. The college has taken steps to address this weakness.

32 The college has particularly good learning resources for English and communication. These include audio and videotapes, CD-ROMs, access to the Internet, resource packs and study guides.

The college intranet includes a GCE A level English revision site. The library has a good collection of up-to-date and appropriate texts for English and communications, including an extensive fiction section. Full-time students, and in many cases part-time students, are provided with set books and other essential texts by the college.

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

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE English language	2	Number of starters	146	243	174
		Retention (%)	83	77	76
		Achievement (%)	54	24	57
GCE A level communication studies	3	Number of starters	77	89	71
		Retention (%)	87	90	76
		Achievement (%)	89	65	83
GCE A level English language and literature	3	Number of starters	209	180	203
		Retention (%)	92	82	82
		Achievement (%)	87	62	96
GCE A level English literature	3	Number of starters	40	55	40
		Retention (%)	85	89	82
		Achievement (%)	97	100	97

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

Curriculum Areas

History, Sociology and Psychology

Grade 3

33 Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- some effective course management
- stimulating and well-planned teaching
- exceptional subject support for students
- collaborative and confident group work by students
- particularly good learning materials

Weaknesses

- failure to share good practice between subjects
- decline in student achievement and retention rates on some courses
- low pass rate in GCE A level psychology
- low percentage of A to C grades at GCE A level

34 The college offers GCE A level courses in history, psychology and sociology for full-time students and a part-time evening course in GCE A level psychology. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that courses are well managed. Regular staff meetings are held. They are minuted and dates are set for the completion of actions. Targets are set. Student achievement and retention rates are monitored. Staff are self-critical. They identify action for improving provision and carry it out. Staff who teach the same subject share good practice. They do not, however, share this good practice with staff who teach other humanities subjects. Students participate in course reviews and team meetings. Their suggestions are acted upon. For

example, changes have been made to teaching and learning methods.

35 New students attend 'familiarisation days' in June. Subject induction activities include introductions to study skills and the library. Students on some courses are not given course handbooks. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is excellent support for students in their subjects. Good practice in providing support includes learning workshops, the identification of 'at risk' students, and the celebration of students' good attendance. Staff also provide individual students with good support informally.

36 The teaching is well planned and much of it is lively and imaginative. Schemes of work do not identify learning outcomes but some teachers identify those on their lesson plans. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that most teachers use a range of varied and appropriate teaching methods to excite and hold the students' interest. Teachers give students learning tasks they find stimulating, demanding and enjoyable. In a GCE A level psychology lesson, students studied lonely hearts columns to identify the characteristics of people who placed entries in them, before looking at Dunbar's study. In the best lessons, students display initiative and enterprise in the way they carry out their tasks and they organise and use their time well. A group of students prepared a handout with gaps in it which had to be completed. They showed the other students how to use it. They then made sure that the rest of the class clearly understood the entries on the completed handout. In many lessons, students are encouraged to engage in collaborative group work and they work confidently and sensitively with one another. In the less effective lessons, students were given work which was not demanding enough. Good-quality learning materials are effectively used including assignments to pilot key skills. Students make educational visits and receive talks from visiting speakers.

Curriculum Areas

37 The course team's reviews that complemented the self-assessment report identified the decline in retention rates as a weakness. Retention rates on all GCE A level courses are above the national average for the sector, but have declined consistently over three years. Retention rates on GCSE courses are below the national average. In general, the student achievement rates on GCSE and GCE A level courses are close to, or above, the national average. In the last two years, however, the pass rate on the one-year GCE A level course has fallen well below the national average. Many of the students on this course are aiming primarily to obtain a GNVQ and they are working towards GCE A level psychology as an additional qualification in one year. The course team review in history acknowledged students' poor examination results in 1999 as a weakness, but this judgement was not reflected in the college's self-assessment report. In 1998, the pass rate on the two-year GCE A level psychology course was poor. The course team took action to improve students' results and the pass rate was higher in 1999. Course teams have taken action to halt declining retention rates. They aim to improve student achievement rates by setting appropriate targets for the proportion of students gaining grade C and above in GCE A level. With the exception of students on the GCE A level sociology course, the proportions of students who obtained grade C and above in GCE A level subjects in 1998, were below the national average.

38 Students' coursework is satisfactory, and some is good. More recently, students have been using IT increasingly in the work. Students' work is marked fairly and quickly returned. Teachers usually go through the students' work in class and provide individual students with feedback on their performance. Students demonstrate high levels of competence in oral work and sensitivity to ethical issues. Most students progress to appropriate employment or to higher education.

39 Teachers are well qualified. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that most base rooms provide good facilities but that a few are small, particularly those used on psychology courses. Visual displays of students' work are lively and amusing. There are sufficient opportunities for students to use IT. Sometimes the learning centre is overcrowded and too noisy.

Curriculum Areas

A summary of retention and achievement rates in history, sociology and psychology, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GCSE psychology and sociology	2	Number of starters	19*	28	13*
		Retention (%)	58	39	54
		Achievement (%)	64	45	71
GCE A level history	3	Number of starters	76	65	60
		Retention (%)	93	89	81
		Achievement (%)	70	70	67
GCE A level psychology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	129	158	146
		Retention (%)	89	85	78
		Achievement (%)	65	56	65
GCE A level psychology (one-year course)	3	Number of starters	35	20	7
		Retention (%)	80	75	71
		Achievement (%)	61	40	20
GCE A level sociology (two-year course)	3	Number of starters	100	94	94
		Retention (%)	94	85	76
		Achievement (%)	65	82	70

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

**psychology only in 1997 and 1999*

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

40 Inspectors observed 11 lessons. They agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They considered some strengths were overestimated, however, and they found some weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- teachers' effectiveness in helping students to work on their own
- detailed records of students' learning and achievements
- responsiveness of staff to students' needs
- wide range of resources

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of basic skills provision across the college
- limited options for accreditation
- some poor practice
- some inappropriate accommodation

41 Discrete basic skills programmes are delivered at the study centre which relocated to the Whittingham Road site in 1999. This provision is part of a curriculum area also responsible for a pre-GCSE adult foundation programme, GNVQ foundation courses, and courses for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The learning support service also provides students with help in literacy and numeracy. The learning support service and the study centre are managed by two different senior managers. Most of the additional learning support is at level 2 or above. Students on some courses receive help with the key skills of communication and application of number at level 1. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that it offers little provision in basic skills. It

plans to increase this provision as part of its plans for widening participation.

42 Students who so wish may have their achievements in basic skills accredited in the study centre through National Open College Network (NOCN) units. Few do so and managers are considering other ways of recognising students' attainment in basic skills.

43 Inspectors agreed with the judgement in the self-assessment report that most basic skills teaching is good. Working purposefully by themselves, or in groups, students carry out appropriate and relevant tasks. Teachers offer help but encourage the students to learn to work on their own. Activities are carefully planned so that students can work through them a step at a time. Teachers motivate students to achieve further success by giving them justified praise when they complete work. Teachers mark students' work constructively and fairly. The students themselves say how much they have learnt. Their work files and their achievement of course units and modules are testimony to their success. Students who have not sought external accreditation are awarded college certificates if they have met the requisite standards. All the teachers of basic skills respond effectively to students' needs. On the GNVQ foundation course, care is taken to ensure that students receive help with literacy and numeracy at the right level. On the basis of their performance in initial assessment, students are placed in different sets before they begin their communication and application of number modules. These sets are smaller groups than those for other parts of the GNVQ programme. Groups needing the most support are taught by basic skills specialists from the learning support service. There are comprehensive systems for recording students' progress and achievements. Teachers who work with the students in the study centre maintain detailed records of the students' work. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, however, there is a need for basic skills provision across the college to be

Curriculum Areas

co-ordinated more effectively. Inspectors considered that an analysis of retention and achievement rates using ISR data would not give a realistic indication of students' progress in this curriculum area, and a table has not been included in this report.

44 The varied and diverse resources in the study centre meet students' needs and enable the students to use learning styles which suit them. IT facilities include basic skills software. Talking books, readers, key skills study packages, other worksheets, textbooks and reference materials are available to both students and teachers. Using a questionnaire, 'Workright' students carried out a survey effectively in the college to generate data for their mathematics tasks. Good practice in basic skills provision is not shared across curriculum areas. For example, staff in one curriculum area were uncertain how to gather evidence of students' increased self-confidence, whilst staff in another area were producing such evidence through observation of the students' work, witness testimony and videotape of the students' performance. Some learning materials are written in clear language. Others are not, however, and have unsuitable layout and inappropriate content. They also contain errors of English.

45 Most provision takes place in appropriate accommodation. A few rooms, however, are not suitable for the teaching of basic skills. The study centre is open plan in design. Individual students working on their own in the centre find it noisy when classes are taking place there. At the Walton campus, the room where learning support is provided is bleak and uninviting. These weaknesses in the accommodation for additional learning support were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

46 Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They found some additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- good pre-entry guidance for students
- effective enrolment and induction procedures
- good tutorial provision
- comprehensive facilities for careers guidance

Weaknesses

- ineffective recording of students' progress
- poor action plans for improving students' performance

47 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the college provides prospective students with good pre-course information and guidance. Potential students are informed of the range and content of courses at open days, 'taster' events, in publicity materials and at interview. Care is taken to ensure students are placed on a course at a level appropriate to their needs and abilities. The college has clear entry criteria for each course. Staff provide further guidance to potential students who do not have the necessary qualifications for a particular course. All potential students for full-time and part-time courses receive an interview. Those unsure about which courses to study are referred for a guidance interview and, if appropriate, they are advised to enrol on suitable provision elsewhere. The college uses a variety of well-established recruitment methods including a substantial programme of visits to local schools, advertising in newspapers and at the cinema and through the college website. Publicity material is attractive and informative

and takes account of curriculum 2000. The admissions procedures are good.

48 As acknowledged in the self-assessment report and the previous inspection report, the enrolment and induction process is good. Staff are provided with training in, and useful written guidance for, enrolment and induction. All full-time students, and where appropriate part-time students, have an induction programme. They are given helpful written information on college facilities and services, including the welcome pack, the student handbook and the charter. Most students find that enrolment is efficient and that induction is informative and helps them to settle into their work at college. At enrolment, the college makes further checks to ensure that students have chosen a course suitable to their requirements.

49 The standard of tutorials is good. Students find tutors helpful and supportive. All full-time and most part-time students have a personal tutor. Students on short courses may make appointments with senior tutors and request tutorial support. Students receive both individual and group tutorials. Teachers regularly receive training, briefings and guidance on tutoring. They are given tutorial materials. The college has an established system for monitoring and reviewing students' progress. The self-assessment report, however, failed to acknowledge that the written records on students' progress do not include a clear report on students' strengths, or indicate when students need further help. Action plans to improve students' performance are insufficiently specific and they are often unclear. They seldom include measurable targets or specify dates by which these must be carried out. In a few instances, the plans are not implemented.

50 The range of additional learning support services is adequate. Students receive help with communications, numeracy, study skills and IT. The college provides a range of adapted materials, equipment, IT and specialist support

Cross-college Provision

services to meet students' individual learning requirements. Students can obtain support through timetabled group sessions, individual appointments or by calling at the study centre. All full-time and most part-time students are given initial screening in literacy and numeracy. In addition, tutors can refer students, and students can refer themselves, for support. Recording of progress of the students receiving additional support is thorough but individual learning plans for students lack detail and do not have targets for the completion of work.

51 As the self-assessment report recognises, the college provides good support for students applying for higher education or employment. The careers area is well resourced. It is organised effectively with up-to-date information including software packages, books, guides, videos and university and college prospectuses. Full-time and some part-time students receive a comprehensive programme of careers education including guidance on higher education, gap years, employment and further training. Other part-time students have the opportunity of careers guidance through appointments with the college careers adviser or the local careers service. Other helpful services include a regularly updated job board giving part-time and full-time job vacancies, talks from local universities and a guide to Internet sites giving employment information. The college holds an annual careers fair which employers and higher education providers support. The college has a partnership agreement with the local careers service whose advisers provide individual guidance interviews and give careers talks. They also counsel students who have been identified at risk of leaving their course early. After the publication of examination results, the college offers guidance on courses and career options to prospective students aged 16 to 18, and their parents.

52 The college offers a number of other services to students. Qualified counsellors provide a counselling service and this is well used. Students are referred to external agencies

if appropriate. Counsellors receive supervision. The college provides childcare facilities for students who have children aged from two to five. Students who used these facilities said they met their needs. Students who are parents receive financial assistance through the access fund to engage childminders. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the college offers students a narrow range of curriculum enrichment activities.

General Resources

Grade 2

53 Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report.

Key strengths

- the development of new accommodation
- well-maintained buildings and grounds
- accessible, up-to-date computers for students and staff
- effective management of IT resources
- ease of access to accommodation for students with restricted mobility

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in the accommodation on one campus
- inadequate social, recreational and sporting facilities

54 Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made to the accommodation and learning resources. For example, two years ago a large and well-planned teaching block was completed and this contains good learning resources. Many temporary buildings were removed at the same time. There are two campuses: Whittingham Road and Walton. The campus at Whittingham Road is attractively designed. Care has been taken to match new teaching blocks with the original buildings. Use of the Walton campus has

Cross-college Provision

been regularly reviewed and account has been taken of the resources needed for teaching the subjects offered there. However, the Walton accommodation has several deficiencies and the college is in the process of selling it. A new college site is being developed at Coombs Wood. An IT learning centre offering electronic commerce facilities, six large teaching rooms, and a cyber café will be based on this site. Courses also are run at 14 centres away from the college, five of which are in local schools.

55 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college is well maintained. All areas of the college are clean and tidy. The college has a comprehensive long-term maintenance programme. The accommodation is well used. The quality of the buildings varies considerably and some accommodation is poor. The accommodation on the Whittingham Road campus is modern and staff can use it flexibly for a variety of purposes. Rooms are well decorated and furnishings are good. At the Walton campus, the accommodation is less attractive but satisfactory. Heating, repair and maintenance costs are high at Walton. On both campuses, some rooms become excessively warm at times, many staff rooms are too small and they have insufficient storage space to meet teachers' requirements.

56 The learning resource and library centre at Whittingham Road is located in a newly built teaching block that provides a comprehensive range of learning resources. The centre is appropriately sized, and learning resources are well organised. Hours of opening during the week and at weekends meet students' needs. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledges that liaison between the library and curriculum areas needs to be improved. Some action has been taken to improve it, but it is too early to judge whether this will be effective. Spending on library resources is adequate. The centre is often noisy. At times, students use it inappropriately for socialising rather than studying.

57 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that staff and students have good access to IT facilities. The college has invested regularly in purchasing new computers and replacing older machines. It has built up a large provision of modern up-to-date computers, and appropriate software. The college has over 500 computers and a well-developed, recently enhanced computer network. The library and learning resources centre at Whittingham has 80 open access computers and there are more at the Walton campus. Staff have good access to computers. A high proportion of staff have electronic mail facilities and access to the Internet. The IT and network support teams deal quickly with calls for help and ensure that the computer network operates effectively. The development of the college's IT facilities is effectively managed. Using carefully chosen performance indicators, the college reviews the effectiveness of its IT services. The college has a comprehensive strategy for promoting the use of IT in all aspects of its work.

58 The self-assessment report acknowledges that students do not have access to adequate sports and recreational facilities. There are no indoor sports or fitness facilities at the college and alternative community facilities are some distance from the campuses. There is little provision in the curriculum for students in the areas of sports and leisure. Social areas are well kept but they are bare, lacking in comfort and contain few recreational facilities. Refectory provision has been improved. The refectories on both campuses are overcrowded at peak times. The nursery is located in well-designed and modern accommodation. It is highly valued by parents. Students with disabilities can gain access to almost all areas of the college. Chair lifts, dropped pavement kerbs and ramps are provided where necessary. All social areas and learning facilities are accessible but small parts of two teaching areas at Walton are not easily accessible to persons in wheelchairs.

Cross-college Provision

Quality Assurance

Grade 2

59 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report but considered that some had been overstated.

Key strengths

- culture of continuous improvement
- well-developed system for target-setting and performance monitoring
- rigorous course reviews
- effective lesson observation programme
- thorough process for auditing the quality of provision

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed use of value-added analysis
- inadequate arrangements for obtaining and using feedback from employers and students
- underdeveloped arrangements for the quality assurance of business support areas

60 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the college is continuously seeking to improve its quality assurance systems. The college has a strategic aim to improve students' achievements every year. It sets itself demanding standards and targets and carefully monitors its progress towards reaching these. The annual quality assurance and self-assessment process is well understood by staff. Within the last year, four curriculum quality managers have been appointed to co-ordinate improvement of the quality of provision. During the last four years, student achievement rates on all courses, except short courses, have been above the national average for the sector. In 1997-98, some

achievement rates fell. Action was taken to improve students' achievements and some achievement rates have improved. The self-assessment report acknowledges that quality assurance processes in business support areas are less well developed.

61 Using national benchmarking data, the academic board standards committee initially sets targets for student retention and achievement rates. Following consultation with course teams, the targets may be modified but they are set at levels above that of the college's current performance. The curriculum quality managers regularly monitor student retention and achievement rates on each course. The college executive reviews performance on a monthly basis and it requires curriculum quality managers to present action plans to rectify weaknesses.

62 As the self-assessment report stated, the effectiveness of the course review process is a strength of the college's quality assurance process. Course teams use clear guidelines consistently when reviewing courses. The computerised information service is used to good effect. Data are carefully analysed and action plans for the improvement of provision are drawn up. The curriculum quality managers closely monitor progress in implementing these plans. Action resulting from course reviews has led to a number of improvements. In its self-assessment report, the college acknowledged that there had been little systematic comparison of the final achievements of students on vocational courses with qualifications the students held on entry, in order to calculate the value-added to their attainments. In practice, however, there is little value-added analysis of the achievements of students on any course, including GCE A level.

63 The work of the quality audit group is effective. The group investigates a different course or service each term and reports to the academic board. The group is used to ensure

Cross-college Provision

that courses or services are thoroughly audited and appropriate action is taken to improve them. Internal verification arrangements at course level are robust. An internal audit has led to the identification of good practice and the recommendation that this is implemented across the college. Managers monitor reports from external verifiers carefully.

64 Views on the quality of provision are sought from a representative sample of students three times a year. Some curriculum areas carry out their own surveys of students' opinions. The reports on the views of the students are not centrally analysed and there is little evidence of them leading to improvements. The business support areas seldom seek the views of those who use their services. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that the views of employers are not sought sufficiently as a part of the quality assurance process.

65 The college has a well-structured and adequately resourced lesson observation programme. Findings from lesson observations are taken into account in self-assessment and in identifying ways of improving teaching. If a teacher's performance is found to be unsatisfactory, an action plan to improve it, involving training is agreed with the teacher, the observer and the line manager. The teacher is then subject to subsequent observation, sometimes by other observers, until his or her teaching is judged to be at least satisfactory. The self-assessment did not recognise this effective lesson observation process as a strength.

66 All staff who teach for more than 100 hours each year take part in the staff development, training and appraisal scheme. Staff who teach fewer hours can undertake a self-appraisal through which they identify their training needs. The scheme operates on a two-year cycle. Findings from the lesson observation process are taken into account in the appraisal process and are used to identify the training

needs of staff. The support staff appraisal scheme operates on a one-year cycle and it contains a clearer focus upon performance targets than the teachers' scheme.

67 The college has recently retained its Charter Mark award. The college charter is included in the student handbook. A version for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been produced. The charter is not produced in any of the languages of the local minority ethnic groups. There are no versions of the charter for employers or parents of students under the age of 18. Three times a year, the college monitors the extent to which it is meeting the targets and standards to which it is committed by its charter. Having met these for three successive years, the college has raised some of the standards. The college has not, however, yet carried out any overall review of the effectiveness and impact of its charter. Complaints are monitored to identify trends and to ensure that action is taken. Students understand the complaints procedures to be followed. They are confident that action will be taken on their complaints.

68 External consultants, governors, the academic board, senior staff, and course teams were all involved in the production of the self-assessment report. In determining gradings, guidelines were used, national benchmarking data were studied and consideration was given to the extent to which the college had met its targets. In particular, inspectors agreed with judgements in the self-assessment reports at course level. They were unable, however, to agree with some of the findings in the self-assessment reports for programme areas.

Cross-college Provision

Governance

Grade 3

69 Inspectors and auditors agreed with some of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They considered that other strengths were overstated. They found some weaknesses that the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- governors' range of skills, experience and commitment to the college
- appropriate committee structure and membership
- effective monitoring of financial activities

Weaknesses

- inappropriate scheme of payments to governors
- failure to provide adequate advice on payments to governors
- some deficiencies in corporation and committee business
- underdeveloped monitoring of the quality of provision

70 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its assessment, the governance of the college is weak. The board does not conduct its business in accordance with the instrument and articles of government. It does not fulfil its responsibilities under the financial memorandum with the FEFC. Governors have historically received payments for their role on the corporation. Following detailed discussions, governors adopted an inappropriate scheme of payments based on excessive mileage rates and subsistence allowances. Governors were not advised against this practice. In approving a college budget allowing for these payments the corporation authorised an inappropriate use of public funds.

These weaknesses were not identified in the self-assessment report.

71 Inspectors agreed that collectively, governors have a broad range of skills and experience and strong links with the community. Governors bring legal, personnel, financial, and educational skills to the corporation. Governors take a close interest in the college. Corporation and committee meetings are well attended.

72 A recent development has been the linking of some governors with curriculum and cross-college areas. For example, one governor has been linked to the basic skills area. Governors have been involved in strategic planning through the strategic development committee and have considered the college's future development at a residential conference. They agreed the key aims for the new strategic plan. They have supported the development of the college's provision beyond the main sites to widen participation. Senior managers now report regularly to those corporation committees where their expertise is appropriate.

73 Information on student recruitment, retention and achievement rates, and destinations is regularly reported to the corporation. There is little evidence from corporation minutes of very extensive discussion of issues related to the quality of provision but governors have received presentations from curriculum managers of areas with good practice. On occasions, the corporation has asked for some explanation of poor results as it did, for example, in the autumn of 1998. Recently, the curriculum and marketing committee has been reorganised with the aim of enabling it to make closer scrutiny of quality assurance issues before these are considered by the full corporation, but it is too early to judge its effectiveness. A governor attends meetings of the academic board as an observer. Governors have also given detailed consideration to the further development of catering and engineering education in the college.

Cross-college Provision

74 Governors have established nomination and appointment procedures and recently used public advertising to attract new governors. Newly appointed governors receive a comprehensive range of induction materials. The college has yet to establish a formal process to identify the further training needs of governors.

75 The dates of board and committee meetings are fixed one year in advance. As the self-assessment report states, the particular skills and expertise of individual governors are taken into account when making up the membership of each committee. Some committees' terms of reference are not sufficiently detailed and, on occasions, committees have acted beyond their approved remit. The minutes of committee meetings are presented to the corporation. They are not, however, always accompanied by copies of key documents the committee have discussed, and about which the corporation has to make decisions. There have been occasions when the corporation's business has not been conducted in an appropriate order. These weaknesses were not recognised in the self-assessment report.

76 The corporation has adopted sound policies for openness and accountability. The corporation regularly reviews a good range of policy documents that include standing orders, the code of conduct, and a 'whistleblowing' policy. Governors annually update a register of interests and have established a register of gifts and hospitality received. Agendas, papers and minutes, except confidential items, are available for public inspection. Governors systematically evaluate their performance each year and monitor their attendance, taking appropriate action where necessary.

77 Governors are appreciative of the clerking arrangements. Agendas and supporting papers are generally well prepared and circulated in good time. The clerk serves all committees and receives good administrative support. Minuting is clear but is sometimes not detailed enough.

78 As stated in the self-assessment report, inspectors agreed that governors are well informed about the college's finances. The corporation has approved the college's financial strategy and key performance indicators. All governors receive monthly management accounts. The finance and general purposes committee formally considers the college's comprehensive financial information, including company activities. When making decisions, the corporation gives careful consideration to their financial implications.

Management

Grade 2

79 Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and some of the weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice and they found some weaknesses the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- effective communications
- good management information
- thorough attention to targets
- effective promotion of health and safety
- careful monitoring of staff resources
- prompt and comprehensive financial reporting

Weaknesses

- variable effectiveness of the new curriculum management structure
- aspects of strategic planning

80 College management has been successful in achieving most of the targets set for the college. In general, student achievement and retention rates have been above the average for the sector. The college recruits well and has been

Cross-college Provision

successful in achieving its funding targets. The diversity of income has increased. Since the last inspection, part-time work and work at centres away from the college has grown. Health and beauty courses have been introduced. These developments have helped to widen participation.

81 The college's current strategic plan has useful key objectives but contains little risk assessment. The plan is updated through annual operating statements. Many of these are issued but they lack clear priorities. Managers do not check whether they are all implemented effectively. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, the strategic planning process does not involve all staff. Managers take the findings of market research into account in strategic planning but not in the course approval process.

82 The college has useful links with local organisations, including the Dudley Lifelong Learning Partnership, institutions of higher education and community organisations. Some courses for industry have been developed. Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) has commented favourably upon the college's responsiveness to local needs with initiatives such as Saturday provision and the 'over 50s' club. The college has been successful in securing funding from the European Union for other initiatives, such as a new centre to meet the 'e-commerce' needs of local business.

83 The executive team consists of five directors and the principal. There is a clear annual cycle of management meetings with well-planned agendas. The well-prepared minutes and papers for the executive team meetings concentrate on key issues. Changes in the management of the curriculum have been implemented, with the aim of giving greater priority to monitoring the quality of provision and the performance of students. Curriculum coordinators are responsible for the deployment of staff and they serve as line managers for subject

and course leaders. Curriculum 'quality managers' are responsible for monitoring aspects of performance such as student achievement and retention rates. Course leaders report to their managers on budgetary and quality matters. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, these new arrangements for managing the curriculum have not yet been fully established. In some curriculum areas they work well, but in others there is some confusion over where management responsibilities lie. A working group has carried out effective planning for curriculum 2000 but not all staff are fully aware of its implications.

84 The deployment and use of staff are monitored carefully. The contact hours of full-time staff are checked regularly and the budget for part-time teachers is carefully managed. Where there is overstaffing, staff are retrained for work in other areas. A staff skills audit has recently been completed. Where it has been difficult to recruit staff with particular expertise, for example in IT, the college has trained staff to fill the posts in question. Personnel issues are handled well. A joint negotiating committee meets regularly to ensure effective dialogue between governors, managers and staff.

85 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that communications are a strength and that dialogue between the senior and middle management and staff has improved. The principal regularly meets all staff. Senior managers attend team meetings and report back to the executive team on issues raised with them. This ensures that key information is widely disseminated. Staff value the regularly produced and informative college bulletin. Electronic mail is widely used.

86 Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that management information is a strength, noted also in the previous inspection. Many regular reports are produced, such as those on the attendance of individual students at lessons. About 400

Cross-college Provision

non-standard reports have been produced recently to meet requests. On-line access to management information is restricted to managers but most staff are able to obtain the information they want quickly. The accuracy and helpfulness of reports have improved. Staff have access to college policies, standard forms and documents such as the staff handbook, on the college intranet.

87 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is adequate. The corporation was not appropriately advised and it adopted a policy which was incompatible with the financial memorandum. In implementing this policy, the college failed to secure the efficient use of public funds. On being told of this, the college took immediate corrective action. The college accountant is appropriately qualified and experienced. She is not a member of the college executive team but regularly attends when financial issues are discussed. The finance team is appropriately resourced and skilled. Budget setting procedures are clearly specified and involve college managers. Budget holders receive detailed monthly reports. Comprehensive monthly management accounts are prepared in good time and are regularly considered by the executive team and governors. The college has established a good range of financial performance indicators. The financial system meets the college's needs.

88 The effective promotion of health and safety is a strength, not identified in the self-assessment report. There are comprehensive and recently updated policies for the monitoring of health and safety. The principal chairs the health and safety committee which is also attended by two governors. Managers are regularly briefed on health and safety issues and annual reports are made to the corporation's personnel and site committees. All new staff receive an induction session on, and part-time staff receive a summary of, key health and safety procedures. A programme of training in

risk assessment has been initiated. The number of accidents has fallen.

89 The college has clear policies on equal opportunities and procedures for dealing with complaints. As the college acknowledged in its self-assessment report, procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of these have not been fully established. An innovative arrangement involves members of the equal opportunities committee and subject and course leaders working together to ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity. Other initiatives include the recruitment of staff from minority ethnic groups and management training in relation to harassment.

Conclusions

90 The self-assessment report provided a useful basis for the inspection. Its production involved staff, governors and external consultants. A detailed handbook on self-assessment with guidelines on grading was provided for staff in curriculum areas. The self-assessment report contained detailed information and clear action plans. Inspectors agreed with most judgements in the self-assessment report although they considered some strengths had been overstated. They found some weaknesses the college had not identified. With the exception of one grade for an area of cross-college provision, inspectors agreed with all the grades given in the self-assessment report. Overall, the grades inspectors awarded for lessons were broadly similar to those the college awarded through its lesson observation process.

91 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 (March 2000)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	7
16-18 years	28
19-24 years	7
25+ years	35
Not known	23
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (March 2000)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	10
Level 2 (intermediate)	16
Level 3 (advanced)	34
Level 4/5 (higher)	2
Non-schedule 2	38
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Science	476	417	15
Agriculture	44	14	1
Engineering	72	145	4
Business	346	1,584	32
Hotel and catering	193	195	7
Health and community care	294	392	12
Art and design	246	194	7
Humanities	592	609	20
Basic education	9	139	2
\Total	2,272	3,689	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 25% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (March 2000)

	<i>Perm- anent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	110	25	1	136
Supporting direct learning contact	42	4	1	47
Other support	107	12	1	120
Total	259	41	3	303

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£8,472,000	£8,785,000	£9,137,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.85	£17.55	£17.10
Payroll as a proportion of income	68%	68%	68%
Achievement of funding target	105%	100%	*
Diversity of income	19%	22%	23%
Operating surplus	£93,000	£24,000	£42,000

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

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

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

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

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

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

*data unavailable

Students' achievements data

Level	Retention and pass	Students aged 16 to 18			Students aged 19 or over		
		1996	1997	1998	1996	1997	1998
1	Number of starters	56	158	121	797	803	840
	Retention (%)	66	79	75	73	85	76
	Achievement (%)	92	89	73	89	81	66
2	Number of starters	845	652	896	447	474	514
	Retention (%)	80	82	75	72	82	78
	Achievement (%)	67	66	73	83	82	71
3	Number of starters	1,724	2,320	2,337	465	514	605
	Retention (%)	85	89	86	81	85	79
	Achievement (%)	81	80	75	74	68	79
4 or 5	Number of starters	1	6	4	101	92	57
	Retention (%)	0	50	100	100	89	95
	Achievement (%)	–	100	100	90	98	98
Short courses	Number of starters	247	117	279	2,074	2,368	2,447
	Retention (%)	97	94	56	95	94	91
	Achievement (%)	94	67	81	78	57	48
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	109	31	777	345	310	243
	Retention (%)	79	84	94	80	83	77
	Achievement (%)	95	83	73	55	83	88

Source: ISR

-ISR data not collected

FEFC Inspection Report 89/00

**Published by the
Further Education Funding Council
Website www.fefc.ac.uk
© FEFC June 2000**