

Herefordshire College of Art and Design

REPORT FROM
THE INSPECTORATE
1999-00

THE
FURTHER
EDUCATION
FUNDING
COUNCIL

***THE FURTHER EDUCATION
FUNDING COUNCIL***

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

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

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Contents

Paragraph

Summary

Context

The college and its mission	1
The inspection	6

Curriculum areas

Graphic design and photography	9
General art and design	14
Media and performing arts	19
Basic skills	24

Cross-college provision

Support for students	29
General resources	36
Quality assurance	41
Governance	51
Management	63
Conclusions	73

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

Herefordshire College of Art and Design

West Midlands Region

Inspected January 2000

Herefordshire College of Art and Design is a small specialist college in the city of Hereford. The self-assessment report prepared for the inspection was the first the college had produced. The process that was followed, involved all staff and governors. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements for the curriculum areas. They agreed with three of the college's grades for cross-college areas but the grades they awarded for the two other areas were one grade lower.

The college recruits students aged 16 to 18 and adults to its full-time and part-time courses. It offers courses in three programme areas funded by the FEFC. Its main provision is in art and design, media and performing arts. The college also offers a number of higher education courses in art and design. The inspection covered provision in graphic design and photography, general art and design, performing arts and media, and basic skills. Most teaching is good. Student achievement and retention rates are close to the average for art and design colleges. Some rates are outstanding, but a few are unsatisfactory. Students are well supported by staff. There are extensive opportunities for potential students to experience the college's curriculum. Access for those with restricted mobility is good. There are impressive displays

of students' work throughout the college. The college has a strong commitment to improving quality and to the professional updating of staff. Governors bring a wide knowledge of the arts to the college. The monitoring of the college's financial health and performance has improved substantially since the last inspection, when it was a major weakness. The college has useful external links. Leadership is open and responsive and the management structure is clear. Internal communications are good. The college should: improve some teaching, and some student achievement and retention rates; increase the amount of numeracy support; improve the IT and library facilities and the dining, recreational and communal areas for students; deal with some overcrowded and noisy teaching accommodation; strengthen the use of classroom observations; introduce governor training; improve the monitoring of students' achievements and strategic objectives by managers and governors; establish clear operational plans; and extend the use of target-setting and benchmarking data.

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

Curriculum area	Grade	Cross-college provision	Grade
Graphic design and photography	2	Support for students	2
General art and design	2	General resources	3
Media and performing arts	2	Quality assurance	3
Basic skills	3	Governance	3
		Management	3

Context

The College and its Mission

1 Herefordshire College of Art and Design, established in 1851, is the only specialist college for art, design and performing arts in the West Midlands. It is situated in the city of Hereford. The college shares a campus with Hereford Sixth Form College and the Herefordshire College of Technology. There are effective working relationships between these three colleges, and with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Holme Lacy College, the local agriculture college, a member of The Pershore Group of Colleges. The college is a member of the Herefordshire Lifelong Learning Partnership. Students are recruited locally, regionally from the West Midlands, and nationally. Public transport in the rural areas is difficult and the college provides a bus service to the campus in partnership with the two colleges on the campus.

2 Herefordshire is a rural and sparsely populated county with a population of 165,000. Approximately 55,000 people live in the city of Hereford, which is a significant cultural and artistic centre for the Marches region. The city has some large employers and has seen a move from manufacturing to service sector employment. The unemployment rate in the area is 3.4%, lower than the regional and national averages. An important feature of the local economy in Herefordshire is the craft industry. There are over 200 professional craft businesses in the county. The college contributes to the craft development plan for Herefordshire.

3 In November 1999, there were 852 students enrolled at the college, 497 of whom were on full-time programmes. Of the college's students, 65% are over 19, and 42% over the age of 25; 20% are on higher education courses. The college employs 59 full-time equivalent staff, of whom 53 are on permanent contracts. The senior management team comprises the principal, the head of academic affairs and the head of finance and administration.

4 The college offers a range of full-time and part-time provision from levels 1 to 5, including national vocational qualifications (NVQs), national and higher national diplomas, degrees and other awards. General national vocational qualification (GNVQ) courses are offered in three subjects at intermediate and advanced levels. Growth in higher education is an important aim for the college so that it can continue to attract students and cater for those who wish to continue their studies locally. The college also provides training opportunities under the New Deal.

5 The college's mission states:

- 'Herefordshire College of Art and Design is dedicated to providing accessible education and training of the highest quality in further, higher and continuing education. The learning environment is exclusively focused upon the study of art and design, responding to the needs of students and practitioners within the local, regional and national communities that it serves'
- 'the college aims to maintain a distinctive profile as a centre of excellence and to collaborate where appropriate with other specialist partners'
- 'teaching and learning is informed by a creative, enquiring and analytical spirit, where process and product are seen as equally significant and within which the individual is supported in a culture of equal and open interchange of ideas and practice'
- 'we continue to employ staff of the highest calibre and to invest in their professional development in order to enhance our contribution to lifelong learning through art and design.'

Context

The Inspection

6 The college was inspected during the week beginning 24 January 2000. The inspection team considered the college's self-assessment report and reviewed information from the college provided by other directorates of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). Inspectors used data on students' achievements from the college's individualised student record (ISR) returns to the FEFC for 1997 and 1998. The college submitted its own achievement data for 1999. These data were checked by inspectors against primary sources, for example, class registers and pass lists issued by awarding bodies. No table has been included for basic skills provision. This is because, in this area of the college, students do not work towards an external award or qualification. Nine inspectors and an auditor carried out the inspection, working for a total of 38 days. Inspectors observed 40 lessons, examined students' work and scrutinised a range of college documents. They held meetings with students, staff, managers and governors. Inspectors also consulted the Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise, about its links with the college.

7 The following table shows the grades given to the lessons inspected and the national profile for all colleges inspected in 1998-99. Of the lessons inspected, 60% were judged good or outstanding and 10% less than satisfactory, compared with national averages for 1998-99 of 65% and 6%, respectively.

Lessons: inspection grades by programme of study

Programme	Grade					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
GNVQ	2	6	6	0	0	14
Other vocational	2	10	4	1	0	17
Other*	0	4	2	3	0	9
Total (No.)	4	20	12	4	0	40
Total (%)	10	50	30	10	0	100
National average, all inspected colleges 1998-99 (%)	20	45	29	6	0	100

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

*includes basic education and GCE A/AS level

Curriculum Areas

8 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 (%)
Herefordshire College of Art and Design	14.5	78
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

Graphic Design and Photography

Grade 2

9 Inspectors observed 11 lessons covering courses in graphic design and photography. They agreed with most judgements made in the self-assessment report but considered that the college had overstated some strengths relating to teaching and learning.

Key strengths

- comprehensive, well-planned assignment briefs
- good support for individual students
- high pass rates on national diploma courses
- good rate of progression to higher education
- high level of technical support
- productive work for employers and national competitions

Weaknesses

- some examples of ineffective teaching
- insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning
- some inappropriate accommodation in graphic design
- poor attendance and punctuality

10 The college offers well-established full-time national diploma courses in graphic design and photography. It also offers a part-time course leading to a City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) certificate in photography, and an NVQ course with a focus on computer-aided graphic design. In order to support the development of students' literacy and communication skills, the college has introduced study skills for first-year students. This is helping students to develop a visual language and a specialist design

vocabulary. As the self-assessment report recognises, the curriculum is well managed. Roles and responsibilities are clear and understood by staff. The curriculum managers responsible for national diploma courses meet weekly. Records of these meetings lack detail and there is no evidence that teaching and learning are monitored. Course documentation, providing information on course content, methods of teaching and learning, and assessment, is good. Teachers' understanding and use of targets and benchmarking data are underdeveloped.

11 Students spoke highly of the strong support they receive from their teachers. Inspectors agreed with the college's assessment that teachers produce well-planned assignment briefs. The briefs contain clear aims and objectives, assessment criteria and deadlines for completion. The teaching of photography is a particular strength. Lessons are well prepared and supported by good lesson plans. In one outstanding lesson, students were introduced to the work of Russian photographers. The teacher's knowledge of their work and the environment in which they worked captured the students' interest. The teachers used slides to demonstrate features of the photographers' work, and to explain the influences affecting their work. In a lesson in graphic design, the teacher gave students a realistic and detailed introduction to magazine design, making sure that the students understood the practicalities of production. However, inspectors considered that the self-assessment report overstated strengths in teaching and learning. In some lessons, the content was insufficiently demanding and students lost interest in the subject. Attendance in the lessons observed was low and a number of students arrived late.

12 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that, in 1999, students' achievements were high for the national diploma courses in graphic design and photography. Pass rates on both diplomas were 94%. However, the pass

Curriculum Areas

rate on the part-time C&G course in photography was low, at 51%. Retention rates for most courses are good. Information on students' destinations is comprehensive and shows that many students progress to higher education, and that most obtain a place at their first choice of college or university. Students' work is generally good and there are some examples of outstanding photography and design. Sometimes, students' exploratory work lacks sufficient rigour and ideas are not fully developed. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that links with employers, involvement in commercial projects and the submitting of work for national competitions helps teachers and students to keep up to date with new developments.

13 Accommodation is mainly satisfactory and good use is made of displays of staff and students' work. In photography, specialist accommodation is effectively and efficiently used. Staff make skilful use of the limited accommodation to enable a wide variety of specialist activities to take place. A weakness not fully recognised in the self-assessment report was that inappropriate accommodation impaired the quality of teaching and learning in

some graphic design lessons. This was also a weakness at the previous inspection. In these lessons, noise made by students in adjoining spaces made it impossible for students to concentrate fully. Teachers are well qualified in their specialisms, with most staff having a first degree and some a postgraduate qualification. However, few have a teaching qualification. The college uses technical demonstrators, and they are highly effective in supporting students and teachers. The self-assessment report recognises that, despite some improvements, there are not enough computers available for students.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in graphic design and photography, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
C&G in photography (part time)	2 and 3	Number of starters	27	31	28
		Retention (%)	85	100	96
		Achievement (%)	39	90	51
National diploma in photography	3	Number of starters	31	25	25
		Retention (%)	68	60	84
		Achievement (%)	86	53	94
National diploma in graphic design	3	Number of starters	21	10	18
		Retention (%)	76	88	89
		Achievement (%)	94	88	94

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

Curriculum Areas

General Art and Design

Grade 2

14 Fourteen lessons were observed. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report, although they considered that it overstated some strengths and did not identify some weaknesses.

Key strengths

- effective support for individual students
- good teaching on most courses
- strong emphasis on students' research skills
- good pass rates
- range of well-equipped specialist workshops
- significant numbers of students progressing to higher education

Weaknesses

- some poor classroom management
- inadequate systems for monitoring students' attendance
- insufficient recording of part-time students' achievements
- crowded working conditions in some studios

15 The portfolio of full-time and part-time courses caters well for the needs of both school-leavers and adults. Full-time provision includes GNVQ intermediate and advanced programmes and a pre-degree foundation course involving over 200 students. Related higher education courses provide good opportunities for students to progress. Evening provision enables approximately 100 students to follow courses leading to C&G, general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A level) qualifications, and courses

accredited by the National Open College Network (NOCN). The range of part-time day provision includes ceramics, embroidery, interior design, jewellery, painting, patchwork and quilting.

16 Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods and demonstrate sound knowledge of their subject. Most lessons are well organised. Assignments are carefully prepared. Students' work is marked thoroughly. Teachers give good support to individual students to help them make progress. In workshop sessions, staff provide effective demonstrations and take care to ensure that students learn to use equipment competently and safely. Teaching is most effective where students are encouraged to play an active part and express their own opinions when discussing both their own work and that of others. Strong emphasis is placed on the importance of preparatory studies based on personal research. Students are encouraged to explore and experiment with a variety of concepts and media. Teachers provide students with opportunities to apply their ideas in a practical context. GNVQ intermediate students designed and made a range of unusual but wearable garments using recycled materials for a one-day performance event staged by performing arts students. The self-assessment report did not identify some weaknesses in classroom management. For example, teachers make little or no comment on students' poor attendance and punctuality. Some records of students' attendance are inadequate.

17 Most students develop proficiency in basic art, design and craft skills. Students on the pre-degree foundation course are particularly thorough in their research work. Progression to higher education is good. In one lesson, second-year GNVQ advanced students who had been interviewed for higher education enthusiastically presented their work to the first-year students and gave their views on their interview experience. Pass rates on most

Curriculum Areas

courses are satisfactory or better. The results on the foundation course have been consistently good. The GNVQ intermediate course in 1997 and 1999 achieved a pass rate of 100%.

However, pass rates on the GNVQ advanced course declined from 90% in 1997 to 77% in 1999, which is below the national average. Much of the practical work done by part-time students is good. Students are encouraged to undertake 'live' projects from clients. For example, students re-designed an interior for a local health centre. The recording of part-time students' achievements was underdeveloped and those data were unreliable. The self-assessment report did not identify this as a weakness. Staff do not monitor part-time students' performance and identify trends.

18 Specialist workshops are well equipped and include resources for ceramics, metalwork, woodwork, plastics, printmaking, printed and constructed textiles, photography, animation and information technology (IT). Students benefit from sharing specialist facilities with higher education students. Technician support is good. Together, teachers and technicians provide a broad range of expertise to high levels. Part-time teachers draw on their current professional practice to bring valuable

experience to lessons. Although students are encouraged to use the open access IT facilities, they are deterred by the limited number of computers available. Many rooms are too small for the number of students being taught, a weakness found at the last inspection. This restricts the scale and scope of the activities that can be undertaken. Critiques of coursework take place in corridors where people passing are a constant interruption. The college acknowledged these problems in its self-assessment report and has made arrangements to create more spaces by moving GNVQ provision into an adjacent building.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in general art and design, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
GNVQ intermediate art and design	2	Number of starters	25	24	17
		Retention (%)	80	75	88
		Achievement (%)	100	72	100
GNVQ advanced art and design	3	Number of starters	61	73	47
		Retention (%)	72	79	74
		Achievement (%)	90	82	77
National diploma foundation studies art and design	3	Number of starters	60	64	45
		Retention (%)	88	84	89
		Achievement (%)	100	98	90

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

Curriculum Areas

Media and Performing Arts

Grade 2

19 Inspectors observed 10 lessons, covering provision in media and performing arts. They agreed with many of the strengths in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much good teaching
- high standards of practical, production and performance work by students
- well-planned assignments and projects
- effective teaching of theory and research methods
- high pass rates in most years
- good attendance rates

Weaknesses

- poor pass and retention rates on the GNVQ performing arts course in 1999
- deficiencies in accommodation and equipment
- unsatisfactory aspects of course management

20 The college's limited provision of advanced courses in media and performing arts has been extended by the introduction of a GNVQ intermediate course in performing arts. There are no part-time courses. As the self-assessment report recognises, the courses offered have a strong vocational focus and students are encouraged to work alongside others studying different disciplines. For example, students of performing arts and media studies work together to develop performance, video and production skills. The self-assessment report did not recognise that there are some shortcomings in course management. There is not enough rigour in the tracking of students' achievements and retention. Ineffective

timetabling sometimes results in lessons taught in unsuitable areas. Course team leaders meet regularly but have only recently established formal systems to record their decisions. Action plans take account of comments from external verifiers as well as the college's internal academic audits.

21 Inspectors agreed with the college's judgement that the quality of teaching is good. Most lessons are well planned. Teachers make good use of students' contributions and extend their creative abilities. They encourage students to develop an appropriate work discipline but some students have yet to acquire this. The curriculum provides opportunities to explore equal opportunities issues. At the time of the inspection, performing arts students were working with students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities on a production about time travel. Considerable emphasis is placed on developing students' theoretical knowledge and extending their grasp of research methods. Students value highly the support provided by teachers. A strength found at both this and the last inspection was the quality of teachers' oral and written comments on students' work, which ensures that students are well informed about their progress. Key skills are a successful part of GNVQ programmes. Teachers and technicians give students a thorough grounding in practical skills, and students achieve good standards in production and performance work. The range of industrial visits is appropriate. Staff teams work collaboratively, drawing on individual specialist expertise. Assignment briefs reflect teachers' practical knowledge of the industry. Assignments are appropriately documented and students have a good understanding of assessment criteria. Too much leniency is shown to students who fail to meet deadlines for completed work.

22 Pass rates are generally high. Pass rates for the media course were high in 1998 and 1999 and for performing arts in 1997. However, pass and retention rates were poor on

Curriculum Areas

the GNVQ advanced performing arts course in 1999. The college actively encourages students who do not attain the full award to return and many subsequently successfully complete the course. Retention rates on most courses are at about the national average. Progression rates from media courses to higher education are good. Attendance is significantly above the national average. Students benefit from opportunities to show their skills to the public in both small and large-scale productions and events. For example, at the time of the inspection, performing arts students were working on a 'theatre in education' project to be performed in secondary schools.

23 Most teachers are current practitioners, and some hold a teaching qualification. The performing arts theatre is well equipped and the college rents additional space in a local theatre that allows students to use professional facilities. There is a shortage of rehearsal space and the college plans to provide another performance space shortly when some art and design provision is moved. Video editing facilities are of industry standard, but there is no television

studio and a shortage of video cameras and tripods. Sound and music facilities are limited. Workrooms are overcrowded and students do not have appropriate facilities for quiet and written work. In several lessons, noise from adjacent rooms disrupts learning.

A summary of retention and achievement rates in media and performing arts, 1997 to 1999

Type of qualification	Level	Numbers and outcome	Completion year		
			1997	1998	1999
National diploma in performing arts	3	Number of starters	17	*	*
		Retention (%)	71	*	*
		Achievement (%)	100	*	*
GNVQ performing arts and entertainment industries	3	Number of starters	*	16	19
		Retention (%)	*	94	58
		Achievement (%)	*	+	45
GNVQ advanced media	3	Number of starters	*	9	14
		Retention (%)	*	77	71
		Achievement (%)	*	100	90

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

*course did not run

+data not valid

Curriculum Areas

Basic Skills

Grade 3

24 Inspectors observed 10 lessons in literacy and numeracy. Five were group lessons and five were individual tuition. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but they considered that strengths were overstated and that some weaknesses had been omitted.

Key strengths

- flexible and accessible provision
- good individual learning plans
- effective informal liaison between basic skills staff and course teams

Weaknesses

- inadequate implementation and review of the basic skills policy
- unsatisfactory accommodation in learning support base room
- erratic student punctuality and attendance
- some poorly planned and organised teaching

25 Basic skills in literacy and numeracy are offered mainly through the learning support team. Team members provide individual support designed to help students on their main programme of study. Some basic skills work is included as part of the courses provided for adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are no discrete basic skills courses. Students do not work towards any awards or qualifications in basic literacy and numeracy. The management of learning support lacks strategic planning and monitoring, and there is no clear operational plan for basic skills. A basic skills policy was devised in 1995, but it has still to be fully implemented. Much of the development of basic skills results from the initiative of individual members of staff. There

is no job description for the learning support co-ordinator and no time allocated for the work. The learning support team has only recently begun to hold regular meetings. Reports on learning support activities are presented at course reviews, but they do not lead to agreed actions. There is little discussion of basic skills at management and review meetings.

26 The basic skills teaching provided by the learning support team is flexible and easily accessible to students. Learning support staff have good relationships with their students and are keen to respond to their individual needs. As well as offering support during lessons and support for individual students, learning support staff also visit studios and workshops, and contribute to the production of assignment briefs. The documentation for planning individual programmes of work on basic skills includes useful checklists of possible skills and topics. Students' punctuality and attendance at support lessons are often erratic. The systems for following up absence from support lessons are good, but students are not sufficiently taken to task for not turning up for agreed appointments. Some learning support staff are very effective at encouraging students to develop good learning skills and habits, for example, the regular use of dictionaries. Some learning support is poorly planned and organised. This was not recognised in the self-assessment report. Opportunities to reinforce key learning points, for example spelling and vocabulary, are sometimes missed. In one lesson, the teacher gave students a glossary that did not include the key words used in the lesson.

27 Clear documentation is available to record individual progress. Learning support staff and course team members supplement this by regular review meetings. Students have detailed individual progress reviews on a termly or twice-yearly basis. There is good informal liaison between learning support staff and course tutors to monitor the performance of individual students. Tutors and students value

Curriculum Areas

the contribution that learning support makes to students' achievements. Students' notes from learning support sessions are of varying usefulness. Some clearly record important learning points but others are poorly organised and of limited use in reinforcing learning. Students with learning difficulties produce portfolios showing a range of achievements. Written work arising from different activities and personal experiences is supported by photographs and souvenirs.

28 Only one of the learning support staff has a basic skills teaching qualification. The learning support base room is overcrowded and cluttered, as recognised in the self-assessment report. As well as serving as the workroom for four staff, it is also used for learning support tutorials, so that sometimes several students are working with different tutors at the same time. Issues of confidentiality or personal sensitivity cannot easily be accommodated. There is not enough space for storing resources and students' files. The room also has a computer with some basic skills software but it is not easily available to students. The base room for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is attractive and has a good range of readily available resources. There are no basic skills resources in the college library.

Cross-college Provision

Support for Students

Grade 2

29 Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but found some additional ones.

Key strengths

- well-supported students
- extensive opportunities for school pupils to experience the college's curriculum
- well-planned and effective induction
- good preparation for students progressing to higher education

Weaknesses

- inconsistent tutorial practice
- inadequate numeracy support

30 The college publicises its courses with well-designed prospectuses that make good use of students' own art and design work. Links with local schools are good and provide a variety of opportunities to brief pupils about courses and careers in art and design. A summer school attracts some 130 year 10 pupils annually for a three-week art and design programme at the college. Many pupils benefit from a week's experience on the college's courses. The value of these links was understated in the college's self-assessment report. Promotional activities are supported by well-attended information evenings, open days and exhibitions. Clear information and guidance is provided for prospective students. All applicants for full-time and part-time courses are interviewed. The arrangements for interview and enrolment are effective. Students who have been accepted on full-time courses receive two useful packs of information before joining the college. These include a holiday task related to their forthcoming programme of study. For example, graphic design students are asked to design a cover for a compact disk.

31 Induction is well planned and effective. There are clear guidelines for staff to ensure that they cover all relevant information. This was also considered a strength at the last inspection. Induction includes a variety of activities for students, including discussion of the holiday task. This helps students settle into their work well. Course handbooks are comprehensive and provide clear information for students about each course and its requirements. The handbooks are supplemented by further information provided by staff. A student guide gives a range of information about the college's facilities and informs students of their rights and responsibilities.

32 All full-time students are screened to identify whether they require additional support for literacy and numeracy. Just over a quarter of students are identified as needing literacy support and four-fifths of these take up the support offered. The college acknowledges that it makes inadequate provision for numeracy support. Of those identified as needing help, only 10% are provided with individual support. Arrangements are in place to identify and meet students' needs for other forms of learning support, for example, help for students with dyslexia or sensory impairments.

33 Students are well supported by their tutors and value the help they receive. Every student has a personal tutor and formal tutorials are held on a one-to-one basis about twice a term. Occasionally the interval between tutorials is too long. The effectiveness of some tutorials is reduced by noisy and inappropriate accommodation. As the self-assessment report recognises, there is no consistent college-wide approach to tutorials. There are no guidance documents or checklists to support the development of tutorial provision. Tutors are kept informed about their students by the college's clear and effective system for recording progress and achievements and, in some instances, by students' own assessment of their progress. Plans are drawn up to improve

Cross-college Provision

students' performance. While some are detailed and specific, others are too general and offer little guidance on key areas for improvement.

34 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that students applying to higher education are well supported. The range of support materials is extensive, and it is supplemented by effective help with application procedures, portfolio preparation and interview skills. Former students who have progressed to higher education return to give current students advice based on their experiences. Progression rates to higher education are high. Careers education and guidance is effective. It is provided through the college's tutorial programme and by staff from the Hereford and Worcester Careers Service. Careers education is enhanced by visits from or to artists, designers and craftspeople and by work experience.

35 A range of other services is available to students. These include access to a nurse, a chaplain, accommodation advice and counselling. Several of these are provided in collaboration with Herefordshire College of Technology. Welfare advice and further counselling services are also available from other agencies. The college does not have its own childcare facilities. Alternative arrangements are made for those who need help. Subsidised bus routes to the college from outlying towns and villages are provided in co-operation with other local colleges. An active student association runs a number of social events and represents the interests of students in discussion with college managers.

General Resources

Grade 3

36 Inspectors agreed with most strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. A few additional strengths and weaknesses were identified. At the time of the inspection, the college was in the process of remedying some of its weaknesses.

Key strengths

- much high-quality accommodation for teaching and learning
- good access for students with restricted mobility
- impressive displays of students' work

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in dining, recreational and student communal areas
- inadequate library provision
- insufficient IT to support learning

37 The college is located on an attractive site on a campus shared with two other further education colleges. Its buildings were purpose-built for art and design in three phases starting in the late 1960s. The landscaping around the college is attractive and well tended. Students from the college and Holme Lacy College planted the trees and shrubs. Most teaching and workshop areas are of a high standard. Amongst the best accommodation is the well-designed Folly Arts Theatre, which provides a stimulating performance area for students. Throughout the college, there is an impressive range of students' work on display, including paintings, photographs, and sculptures. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the dining, recreational and student communal areas are too small to meet demand.

Cross-college Provision

38 The college has a high rate of room utilisation, and this creates some problems. For example, a number of lessons are taught in inappropriate areas. In recognition of this, the college has leased a local youth centre to provide more teaching space. The buildings are well maintained, clean and tidy, with the exception of some teaching areas. Some staff rooms and administration areas provide a good working environment but others are overcrowded. Some toilet facilities are in need of refurbishment. As the self-assessment report indicates, access to most areas of the college for students with restricted mobility is good. Car parking space is satisfactory. There are not enough signs, either to the college or internally.

39 The library provision is inadequate. The library is located next to the college's main buildings in shared accommodation owned by Herefordshire College of Technology. There are only two librarians. Both are well qualified and experienced, and they have a good working relationship with staff and students. The opening times are convenient for students. Inspectors agreed with the college that the library budget is inadequate. There are not enough books and periodicals. There is a small number of good-quality CD-ROMs but no videotapes. There are only two computers in the library for student use; they are linked to the Internet and are well used. A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is that the art and design library is significantly undersized. It does not have enough study spaces. The furniture is worn and shabby. The storage and workspace for library staff to use is inadequate.

40 The college's IT facilities are insufficient to support teaching and learning, and to meet students' needs, a weakness identified at the last inspection. The ratio of computers to students is poor. All computers are of industrial standard but only a few are connected to the Internet. Students do not have easy access to the computer room, as it is regularly used for

teaching IT. The standard of IT software is uneven and some needs replacing. Students do not have sufficient access to database and spreadsheet applications. There are enough good-quality printers to meet current demand. The college has a website but has not developed its own intranet. Staff have good access to electronic mail but students' access is restricted. There are not enough technicians to support and maintain the IT facilities.

Quality Assurance

Grade 3

41 Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. A number of strengths were overstated or represented normal practice, and some of the weaknesses identified were not significant. Inspectors identified some additional strengths and weaknesses.

Key strengths

- clear commitment to quality improvement
- wide involvement of staff and governors in the self-assessment process
- effective staff appraisal system linked to professional development
- the high levels of professional updating and industrial experience

Weaknesses

- no use of classroom observations in the self-assessment process
- underdeveloped use of benchmarking data
- the absence of formal arrangements for reviewing progress of action plans
- little use of quality assurance arrangements for support services

Cross-college Provision

42 Inspectors agreed with the college that it is strongly committed to quality improvement. The long-standing and detailed arrangements for quality assurance have recently been revised. Self-assessment is a key element in the college's strategic planning and quality improvement cycle. The governing body has demonstrated its commitment to quality through the creation of a standards committee. The college's Investor in People status was reconfirmed in 1998.

43 The college produced its first self-assessment report in preparation for this inspection. The process was carefully designed; it involved all staff and governors, and incorporated the views of students and other clients. The college provided managers with training in self-assessment, briefed other staff and governors and developed materials illustrating good practice. Governors commissioned an external review of governance to assist their self-assessment. The full report was approved by governors and has been made widely available. This inclusive approach to self-assessment was a strength not identified by the college.

44 The self-assessment of curriculum areas builds on an established system of monitoring and evaluation. Some course self-assessments lack rigour in assessing the quality of teaching and learning. Classroom observation was not used as part of self-assessment, and the college did not identify this as a weakness. An observation scheme based on peer review has been introduced recently. Most teaching staff have taken part in this scheme.

45 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that there is insufficient use of national benchmarks to help evaluate students' achievements and to inform target-setting. Too much reliance has been placed on external verification reports as measures of quality. Since the writing of the self-assessment report, target-setting and the use of national benchmarks have become stronger features of course reviews. Targets are now set for recruitment, retention and achievement.

46 A quality assurance operating plan covers most aspects of the college's work. Its implementation has not been monitored effectively. As the self-assessment report recognises, quality assurance arrangements do not include some areas of the college's support services.

47 Students' views on courses, services and facilities are obtained in a variety of ways. Students attend course meetings and reviews, and they serve on college committees and working groups. There are regular meetings between the student association and the senior management team. Surveys of students' views are conducted at course and college levels. Students value this consultation and consider that their views are taken into account.

48 There is insufficient rigour in action-planning and the monitoring of progress. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness. Many action plans do not contain timescales or allocate responsibility. Progress on actions agreed in termly course meetings is not recorded at the next meeting. There is little evidence of action taken following analysis of student surveys. This contrasts with the better practice in action-planning shown in the college's self-assessment report, which clearly sets out actions, dates and responsibilities.

49 Inspectors did not agree with the college that its charter is a strength. It is written for students, employers and other users. While it contains much that is useful, it has few measurable standards. The content of the charter is reviewed annually in consultation with staff.

50 As the college recognises in its self-assessment, its appraisal and staff development scheme is effective. All permanent and substantial part-time staff are appraised annually by line managers. The college is committed to professional development for all staff. A quarter of teaching and technical staff were working towards additional qualifications at the time of inspection. There is a good tradition of in-house staff training.

Cross-college Provision

Self-assessment was the main priority in 1998-99. However, little attention has been given to training on target-setting and the use of national benchmarks, or to teacher training. Induction for new staff is effective. A strength identified by inspectors and recognised in the self-assessment report is the substantial number of staff actively involved in the creative and performing arts outside the college.

Governance

Grade 3

51 Inspectors and auditors agreed with a number of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the college's self-assessment report. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

Key strengths

- broad range of skills represented on the corporation
- good relationship between governors and managers
- strong commitment to openness
- specialist knowledge and experience of governors
- close monitoring of the college's finances

Weaknesses

- lack of a training and development programme for governors
- unsatisfactory timing of corporation business
- failure to approve some key documents
- insufficient monitoring of strategic objectives
- lack of systematic monitoring of students' achievements

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

53 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that the corporation has a wide range of skills. A search committee assesses governors' skills against the corporation's needs. A person specification and job description for governors has been developed. The college uses public advertising to identify potential new governors. Before recommending reappointment, the search committee considers the contribution governors have made. Governors' attendance is reported annually to the corporation. Attendance by a few governors is low.

54 The self-assessment report recognises that there is no formal programme of governor training and development. On appointment, governors receive an induction pack, attend a series of introductory meetings and have a college tour. Although some training has taken place, there is no procedure for identifying individual governors' training needs.

55 Governors have constructive working relationships with managers and staff. The principal and chair meet frequently. There are no formal links between governors and curriculum areas, but the governors are actively involved in the life of the college. The college did not include this strength in its self-assessment report. For example, governors help promote students' work nationally, judge students' work in competitions at college and attend social functions at the college.

56 Governors have a commitment to openness, a strength not clearly identified in the self-assessment report. The principal regularly briefs staff on issues the corporation is considering. There is a code of conduct for

Cross-college Provision

governors and a register of interests is updated at least annually. Governors make annual declarations on their eligibility to serve. All corporation minutes and papers are available in the college library for public inspection. All members of staff receive a written summary of the financial performance of the college annually.

57 Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report that governors are well informed about national developments in further education. They have a strong presence in external networks in the field of art and design. Governors make good use of their understanding of the arts in discussions of the college's strategic direction and curriculum, and in their contacts with staff and students.

58 The cycle of corporation business has been inappropriate. Until recently, finance and general purpose committee and sometimes audit committee meetings immediately preceded corporation meetings. Committee reporting to the corporation took the form of oral reports by the appropriate committee chair. This meant that the corporation had insufficient time to understand the business conducted by the committees and consider their conclusions. As the self-assessment report identifies, no formal written record of committee business was provided for corporation members to help them to make judgements and approve decisions.

59 A weakness not identified in the self-assessment report is that the corporation has not given its formal approval to certain important documents such as some strategic plan updates, internal audit annual reports and external audit management letters. Where a committee has previously considered key documents, the committee's recommendation to the corporation is not always recorded.

60 Governors closely monitor the financial health of the college, a strength not recorded in the self-assessment report. All governors receive the monthly management accounts,

which provide good information on the financial activities of the college, including a wide range of financial performance indicators. The latest management accounts are reviewed at each meeting of the finance and general purposes committee and the corporation.

61 Governors are involved in the development of the strategic plan. They receive termly updates on the strategic plan and financial forecasts. The summer term updates do not comprise an operational plan for the coming year. A weakness partially acknowledged in the self-assessment report is that the governors do not effectively monitor the achievement of the strategic plan. For example, consideration of performance against corporate objectives in the strategic plan is limited to financial matters.

62 Governors do not systematically monitor students' achievements and retention. The corporation minutes do not record the targets set for retention and achievement. The strategic plan includes an overall target for student attendance and an imprecise target for retention. However, the corporation regularly receives reports on students' performance in exhibitions and on the employment that they have obtained. Detailed retention and achievement data were presented to the corporation only once during 1999. There was no commentary to analyse or summarise the results for governors. The finance and general purposes committee regularly receives data on enrolments but again with no commentary.

Cross-college Provision

Management

Grade 3

63 Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the college's self-assessment report. They found additional strengths and weaknesses that the college had not identified.

Key strengths

- extensive external links
- open and responsive leadership
- effective internal communications
- a clear management structure
- good standard of financial management

Weaknesses

- inadequate analysis of students' achievements
- the absence of rigorous reports of progress on the strategic plan
- lack of clear operational plans for curriculum and business support areas
- an underdeveloped approach to target-setting
- no monitoring reports on equal opportunities

64 The college is making progress towards meeting its targets. The mission states that it is the college's aim to provide education and training of the highest quality. In 1997-98, it did not fully meet this aim, as overall achievement and retention rates were around the national averages for qualifications at levels 1 to 3. It has not been possible to identify accurate overall achievement and retention rates for the college in 1998-99. In the last two years, the college has met its FEFC funding unit targets and a financial deficit has been turned into an operating surplus.

65 The FEFC's audit service concludes that, within the scope of its review, the college's financial management is good. The head of finance is a qualified accountant and a member of the senior management team. Budgetary control arrangements are documented in the financial regulations. The monthly management accounts are produced promptly and include financial performance indicators derived from the strategic plan. The senior management team reviews the management accounts every month. The college has made good financial progress by clearing an accumulated deficit and maintaining solvency. The college's internal and external auditors have not reported any significant weaknesses in the college's systems of internal control. Financial and data returns are submitted to the FEFC on time.

66 Objectives included in recent updates to the college's strategic plan are not clearly specified or measurable. There is no overall operational plan, no separate business plans for key areas of the college, and no monitoring of progress on the objectives in the strategic plan. The college has recognised the importance of market research and the need to identify changing demands for provision. A new marketing co-ordinator has been appointed. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these improvements. Target-setting for retention and achievement has not yet been established on a timely and sufficiently well-informed basis. The self-assessment report acknowledged that insufficient use has been made of benchmarking data.

67 The college has a clear management structure. A new principal and a new management team have been appointed in the last two years. The head of academic affairs has responsibility for academic provision, and the head of finance and administration has responsibility for all the business support areas of the college. Reporting lines are clearly defined and managers understand their responsibilities. Recently, new management

Cross-college Provision

posts have been added to strengthen areas such as personnel. Minutes of senior management meetings do not always provide a good record of the discussion and action points arising.

68 The leadership of the college is responsive. The openness of senior management on the issues that face the college, their availability and their consultative approach has helped to create good relationships that are strongly valued by staff. There are open meetings where staff can raise any matter they wish. Internal communications are good. There is much direct communication between the principal, senior managers and business support and teaching staff. The principal provides a weekly briefing on current issues. Staff are well informed about developments within the college. All members of staff receive an annual single sheet summary of the financial performance of the college.

69 The deployment of staff and other resources is adequately managed. The staff budget is closely monitored and monthly reports show the percentage of the college's income that is expended on staffing. Course costings are calculated and reported to governors. Workloads are discussed during annual appraisal interviews.

70 Inspectors agreed with the strength in the self-assessment report that the college has well-established, useful and extensive external links at local, regional and national level. There is successful liaison with local schools and community arts groups. The college has played a significant part in the Herefordshire Lifelong Learning Partnership. It is represented on several national organisations for the arts. There are good links with higher education institutions. The college is seeking to expand its higher education provision and is co-operating with other higher education providers.

71 Inspectors did not agree with the college's self-assessment that management information is a strength. Neither the senior management team nor the academic board receives adequate

reports on students' achievements that enable them to monitor the educational performance of the college effectively. The reports have no aggregated data or written commentaries to show how the college performs in relation to its own targets or national averages. The academic standards committee monitors students' achievements during course reviews but its minutes do not make clear the action the committee expects course teams to take to improve retention or achievement. Data on students' achievements held by curriculum areas do not always correspond to those held centrally. College returns to the FEFC are completed on time.

72 The college's policy on equal opportunities has been regularly updated but it has not been monitored adequately. The college holds some statistical data on staff and students that would assist in monitoring equal opportunities, but there have been no reports produced to show how well the college has implemented its policy.

Conclusions

73 The college's self-assessment report provided a useful basis for planning the inspection. The document was comprehensive and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the report. They considered that some strengths were overstated or understated, and that some weaknesses were more significant than indicated in the report. Inspectors found a number of additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with most judgements and grades for the curriculum areas and agreed with three of the grades for cross-college aspects, but the grades they awarded for the other two aspects were one grade lower than those given by the college.

74 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 (November 1999)

<i>Age</i>	<i>%</i>
Under 16	0
16-18 years	35
19-24 years	23
25+ years	42
Not known	0
Total	100

Source: college data

Student numbers by level of study (November 1999)

<i>Level of study</i>	<i>%</i>
Level 1 (foundation)	3
Level 2 (intermediate)	31
Level 3 (advanced)	39
Level 4/5 (higher)	20
Non-schedule 2	7
Total	100

Source: college data

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

<i>Programme area</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>	<i>Total provision %</i>
Art and design	486	318	94
Humanities	0	24	3
Basic education	11	13	3
Total	497	355	100

Source: college data

Widening participation

Based on a postcode analysis of 1995-96 ISR data, the college recruited 2% of students from disadvantaged areas defined in relation to the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions.

Staff expressed as full-time equivalents (November 1999)

	<i>Per- manent</i>	<i>Fixed term</i>	<i>Casual</i>	<i>Total</i>
Direct learning contact	26	6	0	32
Supporting direct learning contact	11	0	0	11
Other support	16	0	0	16
Total	53	6	0	59

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

College Statistics

Three-year Trends

Financial data

	1997	1998	1999
Income	£1,892,000	£1,933,000	£1,963,000
Average level of funding (ALF)	£18.36	£17.37	£16.98
Payroll as a proportion of income	67%	64%	66%
Achievement of funding target	108%	99%	97%
Diversity of income	34%	34%	37%
Operating surplus	£21,000	£77,000	£37,000

Sources: Income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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

Payroll - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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

Diversity of income - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

Operating surplus - Council Circular 98/43 (1997), college audited accounts (1998), college (1999)

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	5	9	3	62	139	89
	Retention (%)	40	11	67	79	64	79
	Achievement (%)	0	-	0	33	100	42
2	Number of starters	37	34	66	64	67	29
	Retention (%)	89	85	80	83	55	83
	Achievement (%)	52	77	60	14	80	33
3	Number of starters	159	172	184	78	76	95
	Retention (%)	80	76	83	78	54	75
	Achievement (%)	88	98	85	81	89	95
4 or 5	Number of starters	-	-	-	-	-	21
	Retention (%)	-	-	-	-	-	81
	Achievement (%)	-	-	-	-	-	100
Short courses	Number of starters	12	29	14	8	11	6
	Retention (%)	100	93	100	100	100	67
	Achievement (%)	75	35	71	25	25	75
Unknown/unclassified	Number of starters	82	155	79	70	254	70
	Retention (%)	96	80	91	93	69	79
	Achievement (%)	66	94	76	5	91	17

Source: ISR

-ISR data not collected

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